

= The College Dropout =

The College Dropout is the debut studio album by American hip hop artist Kanye West , released February 10 , 2004 , by Roc A Fella Records . It was recorded over a period of four years , beginning in 1999 . Prior to the album 's release , West had received praise for his production work for artists such as Jay Z and Talib Kweli , but faced difficulty being accepted as a rapper in his own right by figures in the music industry . Nonetheless intent on pursuing a solo career , it was several years before West finally received a record deal from Roc A Fella Records .

The album 's production was handled by West and developed his " chipmunk soul " production style , which made use of sped up , pitch shifted vocal samples from soul and R & B records , in addition to West 's own drum programming , string accompaniment , and gospel choirs . It features vocal contributions from Jay Z , Mos Def , Jamie Foxx , Syleena Johnson , and Ludacris among many other artists . Diverging from the then dominant gangster persona in hip hop , West 's lyrics concern themes of family , self consciousness , materialism , religion , racism , and higher education . The album was promoted by singles including " Through the Wire " and " Jesus Walks " , both of which received critical acclaim . " All Falls Down " and " Slow Jamz " both charted within the top 10 on the Billboard Hot 100 , with the latter charting at number one .

Upon its release , The College Dropout debuted at number two on the US Billboard 200 chart , selling 441 ,000 copies during its first week . It was a massive commercial success , producing five singles that achieved chart success , and it received universal acclaim from music critics , earning West several accolades that included a Grammy Award for Best Rap Album at the 47th Grammy Awards . It is West 's best selling album in the United States , with domestic sales of 3 .4 million copies and worldwide sales of over 4 million copies . It is often listed among the greatest debut albums of all time and has been named by Time and Rolling Stone as one of the greatest albums of all time .

= Background =

Although he had attained success as a producer , Kanye West aspired to be a rapper , but had struggled to attain a record deal . Record companies ignored him because he did not portray the gangsta image prominent in mainstream hip hop at the time . After a series of meetings with Capitol Records , West was ultimately denied an artist deal . According to Capitol Record 's A & R , Joe Weinberger , he was approached by West and almost signed a deal with him , but another person in the company convinced Capitol 's president not to . Desperate to keep West from defecting to another label , then label head Damon Dash reluctantly signed West to Roc A Fella Records . Jay Z , West 's colleague , later admitted that Roc A Fella was initially reluctant to support West as a rapper , claiming that many saw him as a producer first and foremost , and that his background contrasted with that of his labelmates .

West 's breakthrough came a year later on October 23 , 2002 , when , while driving home from a California recording studio after working late , he fell asleep at the wheel and was involved in a near fatal car crash . The crash left him with a shattered jaw , which had to be wired shut in reconstructive surgery . The accident inspired West ; two weeks after being admitted to a hospital , he recorded a song at the Record Plant Studios with his jaw still wired shut . The composition , " Through The Wire " , expressed West 's experience after the accident , and helped lay the foundation for his debut album , as according to West " all the better artists have expressed what they were going through " . West added that " the album was my medicine " , as working on the record distracted him from the pain . " Through The Wire " was first available on West 's Get Well Soon ... mixtape , released December 2002 . At the same time , West announced that he was working on an album called The College Dropout , whose overall theme was to " make your own decisions . Don 't let society tell you , ' This is what you have to do . ' "

= Recording =

The College Dropout was recorded at The Record Plant in Los Angeles , California , but the production featured on the record were formed elsewhere over the course of several years . According to John Monopoly , West 's friend , manager and business partner , the album " ... [didn 't have] a particular start date . He 's been gathering beats for years . He was always producing with the intention of being a rapper . There 's beats on the album he 's been literally saving for himself for years . " At one point , West hovered between making a portion of the production in the studio and the majority within his own apartment in Newark , New Jersey . Because it was a two @-@ bedroom apartment , West was able to set up a home studio in one of the rooms and his bedroom in the other .

Carrying a Louis Vuitton backpack filled with old disks and demos to the studio and back , West crafted his production in less than fifteen minutes at a time . He recorded the remainder of the album in Los Angeles while recovering from the car accident . Once he had completed the album , it was leaked months before its release date . However , West decided to use the opportunity to review the album , and The College Dropout was significantly remixed , remastered , and revised before being released . As a result , certain tracks originally destined for the album were subsequently retracted , among them " Keep the Receipt " with Ol ' Dirty Bastard and " The Good , the Bad , and the Ugly " with Consequence . West meticulously refined the production , adding string arrangements , gospel choirs , improved drum programming and new verses . West 's perfectionism led The College Dropout to have its release postponed three times from its initial date in August 2003 . First it got delayed to October , then to January 2004 , finally hitting stores February 10 .

= = Composition = =

The College Dropout diverged from the then @-@ dominant gangster persona in hip hop in favor of more diverse , topical subjects for the lyrics . Throughout the album , West touches on a number of different issues drawn from his own experiences and observations , including organized religion , family , sexuality , excessive materialism , self @-@ consciousness , minimum @-@ wage labor , institutional prejudice , and personal struggles . Music journalist Kelefa Sanneh wrote , " Throughout the album Mr. West taunts everyone who didn 't believe in him : teachers , record executives , police officers , even his former boss at the Gap " . West explained , " My persona is that I 'm the regular person . Just think about whatever you 've been through in the past week , and I have a song about that on my album . " The album was musically notable for West 's unique development of his " chipmunk soul " production style , in which R & B and soul music samples were sped up and pitch shifted .

The album begins with a skit featuring a high school teacher asking West to deliver a graduation speech . The skit is followed by " We Don 't Care " featuring West comically celebrating drug life with lines like " We wasn 't supposed to make it past 25 , joke 's on you , we still alive " and then criticizing its influence amongst children . His lyrics contain various popular culture references such as allusions to rappers Really Doe and Tupac Shakur and song " 21 Questions " by 50 Cent and Nate Dogg . The next track , " Graduation Day " , features Miri Ben @-@ Ari on violin , and vocals by John Legend .

On " All Falls Down " , West wages an attack on consumerism . The song features singer Syleena Johnson and contains an interpolation of Lauryn Hill 's " Mystery of Iniquity " . West called upon Johnson to re @-@ sing a vocal portion of " Mystery of Iniquity " , which ended up in the final mix . Gospel hymn with doo @-@ wop elements " I 'll Fly Away " precedes " Spaceship " , a track with a relaxed beat containing a soulful Marvin Gaye sample . The lyrics are mostly critical of the working world , where West muses about flying away in a spaceship to leave his boring job , and guest rappers GLC and Consequence add comparisons to modern day retail environment with slavery .

On " Jesus Walks " West professes his belief in Jesus , while also discussing how religion is used by various people and how the media seems to avoid songs that address matters of faith while embracing compositions on violence , sex , and drugs . " Jesus Walks " is built around a sample of " Walk With Me " as performed by the ARC Choir . Garry Mulholland of The Observer described it as

a "towering inferno of martial beats , fathoms @-@ deep chain gang backing chants , a defiant children 's choir , gospel wails , and sizzling orchestral breaks . " The first verse of the song is told through the eyes of a drug dealer seeking help from God , and it reportedly took over six months for West to draw inspiration for the second verse .

" Never Let Me Down " is influenced by West 's near @-@ death car crash . The song features Jay @-@ Z who rhymes about maintaining status and power given his chart success , with West commenting about racism and poverty . The song features verses by spoken word performer J. Ivy who offers comments of upliftment . " Never Let Me Down " reuses a Jay @-@ Z verse first heard in the remix of his song " Hovi Baby " . " Get Em High " is a collaboration by West with two socially conscious rappers , Talib Kweli and Common . " The New Workout Plan " is a mostly comical song and is centered around the premise of an aerobics routine . " Slow Jamz " features Twista and Jamie Foxx and serves as a tribute to classic smooth soul artists and slow jam songs . The song also appeared on Twista 's album Kamikaze . On the song " School Spirit " , West relates the experience of dropping out of school and contains references to well @-@ known fraternities , sororities , singer Norah Jones , and record label Roc @-@ A @-@ Fella Records . " Two Words " features commentary on social issues and features Mos Def , Freeway , and the Harlem Boys Choir .

" Through the Wire " features a high @-@ pitched vocal sample of Chaka Khan and relates West 's real life experience with being in a car accident . The song provides a mostly comedic account of his difficult recovery , and features West rapping with his jaw still wired shut from the accident . The chorus and instrumentals sample a pitched up version of Chaka Khan 's 1985 single " Through the Fire " . " Family Business " is a soulful tribute to the godbrother of Tarrey Torae , one of the many collaborators in the album . The song " Last Call " is about Kanye 's story from being a producer to a rapper , The album ends with a nearly nine @-@ minute autobiographical monologue that follows the song " Last Call " , but it 's not a separate track .

= = Packaging = =

Eric Duvauchelle , who was then part of Roc @-@ A @-@ Fella 's in @-@ house brand design team , then Design Director at Nike , Inc. and now independent Creative Director (supermorebetter.com) , was assigned for the artwork of The College Dropout . West had already taken pictures dressed as the Dropout Bear - which would reappear in his later work - and Duvauchelle picked the image of him sitting on a set of bleachers , as he got attracted to the loneliness of what was supposed to be " the most popular representation of a school " . The image is framed inside gold ornaments , which Duvauchelle found in a book of illustrations from the 16th @-@ century and West wanted to use to " bring a sense of elegance and style to what was typically a gangster @-@ led image of rap artists " . The inside cover follows a college yearbook , with photos of the featured artists of the albums from their youth .

= = Singles = =

West 's debut single , " Through the Wire " , entered the Billboard Hot 100 chart at number ninety @-@ four and peaked at number fifteen on February 3 , 2004 , for five weeks . It remained on the chart for twenty @-@ one weeks . It performed better on the urban contemporary charts , reaching number eight on the Hot R & B / Hip @-@ Hop Singles & Tracks and number four on the Hot Rap Tracks . In the United Kingdom , it debuted at number nine on the UK Singles Chart , where it peaked for two weeks , and exited the chart after nine weeks . The track charted lower in other European countries , reaching the top thirty in Ireland , Sweden , and the Netherlands ; the top fifty in Belgium and Switzerland ; and number sixty @-@ one in Germany . Its maximum peak time in those countries lasted one week . The single entered the New Zealand Singles Chart at number twenty @-@ four and peaked at number sixteen .

The second single , " Slow Jamz " , peaked at number one in the United States , becoming Twista 's , West 's , and Foxx 's first number one hit . " All Falls Down " was released as the third single ,

and it entered the UK Singles Chart at number ten and peaked at number seven on the U.S. Hot 100 . Fourth single , " Jesus Walks " earned widespread commercial success , peaking at number eleven in the United States and becoming West 's fourth top twenty hit , while peaking at number sixteen in the UK .

The fifth and final single , " The New Workout Plan " , peaked at number fifty @-@ nine on the U.S. Hot R & B / Hip @-@ Hop Singles & Tracks chart . The song 's official remix was produced by Lil Jon and features guest appearances from Twista , Luke , and Fonzworth Bentley . The remix was later included on The College Dropout Video Anthology .

The planned sixth single was " Spaceship " , featuring rappers GLC and Consequence . This was confirmed in 2009 when GLC reported that a music video had been made for the song , but never released ; the label decided to move on from the album to begin promoting West 's second album , Late Registration . On June 3 , 2009 , West uploaded the video on his official blog . At one time , " Two Words " (featuring Mos Def and Freeway) was also intended to be released as a single , and a video for the song was filmed , and later uploaded by West online in May 2009 .

= = Commercial performance = =

The album debuted at number two on the U.S. Billboard 200 chart , behind Norah Jones ' Feels Like Home , selling 441 @,@ 000 copies in its first week . It remained on the second spot under Feels Like Home for two more weeks , with 196 @,@ 000 units sold in the second week and 132 @,@ 000 in the third . By April 2004 , it was certified by the Recording Industry Association of America for having shipped in excess of 1 million copies in the United States . On June 30 , 2004 , the album was certified double platinum in sales by the RIAA , following sales of 2 million copies . As of June 2014 , The College Dropout is West 's best @-@ selling album in the United States , with domestic sales of 3 @,@ 358 @,@ 000 copies . It has also sold over 4 million copies worldwide .

= = Critical reception = =

The College Dropout received widespread acclaim from critics . At Metacritic , which assigns a normalized rating out of 100 to reviews from mainstream publications , the album received an average score of 87 , based on 25 reviews . Kelefa Sanneh from The New York Times dubbed it " 2004 's first great hip @-@ hop album " . The A.V. Club 's Nathan Rabin praised its " substance , social commentary , righteous anger , ornery humanism , dark humor , and even Christianity " , calling it " one of those wonderful crossover albums that appeal to a huge audience without sacrificing a shred of integrity " . Dave Heaton of PopMatters called the album " musically engaging " , writing that " every single one of these songs comes off like a genuine extension of Kanye 's personality and experiences " . URB wrote that the album " manages to be both visceral and emotive , sprinkling the dancefloors with tears and sweat . " Mojo dubbed the album " manna for hip hop fans starved of basic but ballistic beats @-@ and @-@ breaks fare in an increasingly litigious age . "

Josh Love of Stylus Magazine wrote that West " subverts cliches from both sides of the hip @-@ hop divide " and praised him for " trying to reflect the entire spectrum of hip @-@ hop and black experience , looking for solace and salvation in the traditional safehouses of church and family " . Ethan Brown of New York commended West 's " emotional brand of hip @-@ hop " and stated " he makes autobiography universal in a way that hasn 't really been heard in hip @-@ hop since the mid @-@ nineties " . Hua Hsu of The Village Voice felt that his sped @-@ up samples " carry a humble , human air . You can still hear tiny traces of actual people inside " . The newspaper 's Robert Christgau wrote that " not only does [West] create a unique role model , that role model is dangerous ? his arguments against education are as market @-@ targeted as other rappers ' arguments for thug life " . Entertainment Weekly 's Michael Endelman elaborated on West 's avoidance of the then @-@ dominant " gangsta " persona of hip hop :

West delivers the goods with a disarming mix of confessional honesty and sarcastic humor , earnest idealism and big @-@ pimping materialism . In a scene still dominated by authenticity

battles and gangsta posturing , he 's a middle @-@ class , politically conscious , post @-@ thug , bourgeois rapper ? and that 's nothing to be ashamed of .

Although he commended West 's vulnerability and signature sound , Rolling Stone 's Jon Caramanica felt that " West isn 't quite MC enough to hold down the entire disc " . Slant Magazine 's Sal Cinquemani observed " too many guest artists , too many interludes , and just too many songs period " , but stated , " As chest @-@ beatingly self @-@ congratulatory as it may be , The College Dropout is at once laugh @-@ out @-@ loud funny (' The New Workout Plan ') , genuinely touching (' Family Business ') , and brutally honest (' All Falls Down ') " . Pitchfork Media 's Rob Mitchum called it a " flawed , overlong , hypocritical , egotistical , and altogether terrific album " . AllMusic editor Andy Kellman felt that it shows West as a " remarkably versatile lyricist and a valuable MC " . Renee Graham of The Boston Globe asserted that " West has certainly raised the bar on what mainstream hip @-@ hop can and should be " . In a retrospective review , Rolling Stone called it " a demonstration that hip @-@ hop ? real , banging , commercial hip @-@ hop ? could be a vehicle for nuanced self @-@ examination and musical subtlety . "

= = = Accolades = = =

West received 10 Grammy nominations at the 2005 Grammy Awards . The College Dropout was nominated for Album of the Year , and won Best Rap Album . " Jesus Walks " won Best Rap Song , and was nominated for both Song of the Year and Grammy Award for Best Rap / Sung Collaboration .

The College Dropout was voted as the best album of the year by Rolling Stone and in The Village Voice 's Pazz & Jop , an annual poll of American critics . Spin ranked it number one on its list of 40 Best Albums of the Year . Comedian Chris Rock has attested to listening to The College Dropout while writing his material . In 2005 , Pitchfork Media named it # 50 in their best albums of 2000 ? 2004 . In 2006 , the album was named by Time as one of the 100 best albums of all time . In its retrospective 2007 issue , XXL awarded it a perfect " XXL " rating , which had previously been given to only sixteen other albums . In its July 4 , 2008 issue , Entertainment Weekly listed College Dropout as the fourth best album of the past 25 years . The magazine later listed it as the best album of the decade . Newsweek placed The College Dropout among its Best Albums of the Decade list at number 3 . Rhapsody named it the seventh best album of the decade and the fourth best hip hop album of the decade . Rolling Stone ranked it number 10 on its list of the 100 Best Albums of the Decade and stated , " Kanye expanded the musical and emotional language of hip @-@ hop ... he challenged all the rules , dancing across boundaries others were too afraid to even acknowledge " . In 2012 Complex named the album one of the classic albums of the last decade , and the 20th best hip hop debut album ever . The same year Rolling Stone ranked The College Dropout number 298 on its list of the 500 Greatest Albums of All Time , and 19th on their list of debut records . The album was also included in the book 1001 Albums You Must Hear Before You Die .

= = Track listing = =

= = = 2005 Japanese Special Edition = = =

Notes

" Intro " , " School Spirit Skit 1 " , " School Spirit Skit 2 " , " Graduation Day " , " I 'll Fly Away " , & " The Li 'l Jimmy Skit " feature vocals by DeRay Davis .

" We Don 't Care " features vocals by John Legend and Riccarda Watkins .

" Graduation Day " , " Jesus Walks " and " Never Let Me Down " feature vocals by John Legend .

" I 'll Fly Away " , " School Spirit " and " Lil Jimmy Skit " feature vocals by DeRay Davis and Tony Williams .

" Spaceship " and " Last Call " feature vocals by John Legend and Famous Tony Williams .

" Get Em High " features vocals by Sumeke Rainey .

" Workout Plan " features vocals by Brandi Kuykenvall , Candis Brown and Tiera Singleton .

" The New Workout Plan " features vocals by John Legend and Sumeke Rainey .

" Slow Jamz " features vocals by Aisha Tyler .

Sample credits

" We Don 't Care " contains samples of " I Just Wanna Stop " , written by Ross Vannelli and performed by The Jimmy Castor Bunch .

" All Falls Down " contains interpolations of " Mystery of Iniquity " , written and performed by Lauryn Hill .

" Spaceship " contains samples of " Distant Lover " , written by Marvin Gaye , Gwen Gordy Fuqua and Sandra Greene , and performed by Marvin Gaye .

" Jesus Walks " contains samples of " Walk with Me " , performed by The ARC Choir ; and samples of " (Don 't Worry) If There 's a Hell Below , We 're All Going to Go " , written and performed by Curtis Mayfield .

" Never Let Me Down " contains samples of " Maybe It 's the Power of Love " , written by Michael Bolton and Bruce Kulick , and performed by Blackjack ; and interpolations of " Hovi Baby " (remix) , written by Shawn Carter , Justin Smith and Kenneth Edmonds , and performed by Jay @-@ Z.

" Slow Jamz " contains samples of " A House Is Not a Home " , written by Burt Bacharach and Hal David , and performed by Luther Vandross .

" Breathe In Breathe Out " contains samples of " Precious Precious " , written and performed by Jackie Moore .

" School Spirit " contains samples of " Spirit in the Dark " , written and performed by Aretha Franklin .

" Two Words " contains samples of " Peace & Love (Amani Na Mapenzi) ? Movement IV (Encounter) " , written by Lou Wilson , Ric Wilson and Carlos Wilson , and performed by Mandrill ; and samples of " The Rainmaker " , written by Harry Nilsson and Bill Martin , and performed by The 5th Dimension .

" Through the Wire " contains samples of " Through the Fire " , written by * David Foster , Tom Keane and Cynthia Weil , and performed by Chaka Khan .

" Family Business " contains samples of " Fonky Thang " , written by Terry Callier and Charles Stepney , and performed by The Dells ; and interpolations of " Ambitionz az a Ridah " , written by Tupac Shakur and Delmar Arnaud , and performed by 2Pac .

" Last Call " contains samples of " Mr. Rockefeller " , written by Jerry Blatt and Bette Midler , and performed by Bette Midler ; and samples of " She 's Gone to Another " , written by Kenneth Ruffin and performed by The Whatnauts .

= = Personnel = =

Information taken from The College Dropout liner notes .

= = Charts = =

= = = Weekly charts = = =

= = = Year @-@ end charts = = =

= = Certifications = =