

'THE COLLEGE DROPOUT' TURNS 10!!!

MORIBA CUMMINGS
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR
MORIBACUMMINGS@YAHOO.COM

It serves as quite a rarity for any musician of contemporary times to release an album that not only is commemorated and remembered 10 years after its release, but is also considered a classic by hip-hop's meticulous standards. Such is the case with Kanye West's debut album "The College Dropout," which reached a decade of iconicity this month. Synopsizing the story of the underdog, the album explores West's frustration for recognition and his hunger for perseverance. Ultimately, this record not only served as an official introduction of West to the world, but also as a launching pad for his current successes.

Before he was considered a controversial time bomb, before he admitted that he "fell in love with Kim," and before he reminded Taylor Swift – and the world – that "Beyoncé had one of the best videos of all time," West was a young producer-turned-entertainer who had a lot to prove and channeled his emotional musings into a debut titled "The College Dropout." It featured by a teddy bear mascot that became unequivocally iconic as the West brand grew in stature.

"Ten years ago today we finally released what had been my life's work up to that point: The College Dropout," West tweeted on Feb. 10. "I say 'finally' because it was a long road, a constant struggle and a true labor of love to not only convince my peers and the public that I could be an artist, but to actually get that art out for the world to hear."

This conviction to prove oneself was not exclusive to West, and he made that apparent when enlisting each individual who played a part in the project's conception. All who contributed to "The College Dropout" were considered underdogs as well, trying to prove themselves to label executives, peers, their respective hometowns, and essentially, themselves.

In true honor of community, West enlisted those whom he grew up with in Chicago (Coodie, Chike, Olskool Ice-Gre, JB Marshall, etc.) to create a masterpiece that would provide them with that ticket to ultimate opportunity. They became a family of producers, rappers, vocalists, directors, and instrumentalists, to name a few, that sought the overarching goal of mainstream success on a large scale.

While West had a team of supporters and believers in his corner, he headlined the production of the project entirely himself, deviating against the imagery that was projected of mainstream rap at the time. He implemented the exuberant orchestration and rhapsodic scrutiny of consumerism ("All Falls Down"), institutional injustices ("Spaceship") and religion ("Jesus Walks").

The old school collaborative vibe that was employed by West and his team paid off in the long run as "The College Dropout" kicked off West's career with a bang, remaining the highest-selling album of his entire career thus far. Though he has won a slew of Grammys throughout his career – 21 in total – his very first were awarded for this album; the collective record won Best Rap Album and "Jesus Walks" won Best Rap Song.

Further creating his signature stamp on the music industry at large, West used this album to usher in his inaugural attempt at the artistic production value he is known for today. The LP features the soul samples, high pitched and unusually altered vocal cues, and orchestral flourishes that everyone now associates with the "Kanye sound."

What many "stans" of "The College Dropout" credit as the album's timeless factor is its air of innocence that much of West's music lacks today. While "Ye undoubtedly still makes plenty of jokes in his art (remember, "Hurry up with my damn croissants!"), he now employs a darker, and much more abstract brand of humor in his more recent releases.

There is a looseness and a tongue-in-cheek cleverness that was seamlessly implemented into this album's infrastructure. This lightness lives in tracks like "Get 'Em High" where West seems to be kicking back, sharing verses with Common and Talib Kewell, and the skit-heavy "School Spirit" that showed the rapper's more playful side. This lightness balanced out the depth and heaviness of those cuts that focused on the plights of recovery like "Through the Wire," and the monolithically powerful anthem of faith "Jesus Walks."

In essence, "The College Dropout" proved to be an artistic masterpiece that transcended all genres, and Kanye knows this ... all of it. While his delivery of this sentiment may be warped at times and awkwardly received, the underlying fact that cannot be disputed is his ability to create a magnum opus of sensory and emotionally charged cuts that is not restricted to the traditional realms of contemporary hip-hop paradigms. Here's to the next 10 years.

4 MILLION COPIES SOLD
WORLDWIDE
(BILLBOARD 2013)

BEST RAP
ALBUM
OF
THE YEAR
(GRAMMYS 2005)

ONE OF 100 BEST ALBUMS
OF ALL TIME
(TIME MAGAZINE 2006)