

EDITED BY JULIUS BAILEY

TO HOPE CULTURAL IMPACT OF KANYE WEST



The Cultural Impact of Kanye West

Edited by
Julius Bailey

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*To all those whose complexities are misunderstood and rendered
pathological when all you ever need and want is appreciation.*

*Also to a few of the loves of my life: Heather, Sandra, Bianca,
Antoinette, and Hip-Hop*

Chapter 5

An Examination of Kanye West's Higher Education Trilogy

Heidi R. Lewis

The NBC sitcom *A Different World*, a spin-off of *The Cosby Show*, aired from 1987 to 1993. Watching that show every week undoubtedly influenced my desire to earn a college degree, but it was not the source of that desire. My dream actually began with *The Cosby Show*. Not knowing Dr. Huxtable was an OB/GYN, I wanted to be a pediatrician, because I thought they delivered and cared for babies. I will always be indebted to Bill Cosby for giving young blacks like myself a glimpse into college dormitories, cafeterias, and classrooms on *A Different World*. Because of him, I saw black professors for the first time. I believed that I could be a doctor. Since Kanye West is only four years older than I am, I can assume he also watched, or at least knew about, *The Cosby Show* and *A Different World*. The difference between the two of us, however, is that he didn't need a television to witness blacks working in higher education. His mother, the late Dr. Donda West, was a professor of English at Clark Atlanta University and Chair of the English Department at Chicago State University before retiring to serve as his manager. Especially because of his background, then, many of individuals with strong academic sensibilities may be inclined to take offense to what appears to be an anti-academic stance infusing his first three albums: *College Dropout* (2004), *Late Registration* (2005), and *Graduation* (2007), hereafter referred to as "the higher education trilogy" or "the trilogy."

For example, West travels down a familiar road by situating college and romantic relationships as mutually exclusive. We saw this assumption before in 2011 when The Champ and Panama Jackson of The Very Smart Brothas published *Your Degrees Won't Keep You Warm at Night: The Very Smart Brothas Guide to Dating, Mating,*

and *Fighting Crime* and again later that year when comedian Steve Harvey published *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man: What Men Really Think about Love, Relationships, Intimacy, and Commitment*. We've also seen this trope in several Tyler Perry stage plays, films, and television shows. These aren't the only examples, but they are certainly some of the most popular. "School Spirit Skit #1" operates within this tradition by denigrating college for ruining one's chances of developing meaningful and fulfilling romantic relationships. In the skit, the narrator sarcastically cautions graduates that they may never have sex but that their degrees will keep them satisfied. This is another reminder that many of us—in this case, those of us with college degrees (sometimes several) and healthy and fulfilling romantic relationships—are continuously being erased from conversations regarding the challenges faced by people of color in higher education. Seldom do our narratives find a home in mainstream discourse about all things blackness.

At the same time, however, a closer examination reveals that West is offering critiques of higher education discourse and practices that are especially important for those within and outside of the academy to acknowledge. Specifically, he is critical of a continually perpetuated mis-education about the purposes and benefits of college: the narrow and unrealistic ways in which we conceptualize and validate the path to economic success as inextricably linked to college, the fallacious and dangerous insider/outsider dichotomy that permeates much of our discourse on the matter, the low expectations for black males when it comes to education, success, and communal value, and finally, the sometimes mundane and arbitrary bureaucratic aspects of college. In this essay, I argue that academics must confront and begin to mitigate these critiques in order to reconcile some of the tensions, real or imagined, that exist in the relationship between the academy and various peoples and communities, especially those existing on the margins.

In his trilogy, West levels strong challenges to communities that exist both within and outside of the academy related to a lack of clarity regarding the purposes and benefits of higher education. It is especially important for these communities that often overlap, to acknowledge the ways in which he is advocating for more deliberate and intentional relationships between the families and communities that love and support college students, the students themselves, and the institutions at which these students are being educated. Such an approach seems likely to alleviate a lot of the ambivalence and frustration being expressed in the trilogy lyrics. In *College Dropout's* "All

Falls Down," for example, West raps about a young woman having no idea why she's in college and being insecure about choosing another path, one outside of higher education, out of fear of her family's reactions. West problematizes the ways in which college is often considered to be a "cure all" in one's quest to find a secure place in the world. St. John, Hu, Simmons, Carter, and Weber (2004) write, "Major choice is an important decision for African Americans because of its immediate impact on persistence. Campus leaders need to consider how academic programs link to employment opportunity if they want to increase persistence by African Americans" (227). While there is validity to this conclusion, which seems to be supported by this examination of the trilogy, I would argue that this strategy for increasing black student persistence in college must be elaborated beyond simply explaining how black students can secure jobs after college. Uncertainty and insecurity is, in fact, an especially valuable component of the college experience. Like the muse of "All Falls Down," I changed my major and ideas about my career path numerous times while I was in college. I started as a Finance and Economics major and graduated an English major. Throughout those changes, I admit my uncertainty and insecurity left me scared, because I had been brought to image that college was a relatively static and unilateral experience. It is important, then, for leaders within the academy to shape narratives about college that will leave those with little to no experience in higher education with a better understanding of the myriad paths we nurture and shape in these spaces.

In much the same way, the trilogy painstakingly reminds academics that we have failed to communicate our own values to our communities. In the "Li'l Jimmy Skit" from *College Dropout*, we learn about a child who resents his father for being more committed to his role as a learner than his role as a provider. Jimmy, the protagonist, sarcastically ruminates about being the smartest dead guy because degrees are all his father left him when he died. This is an especially important problem to consider for those of us who are committed to liberal arts teaching and learning. I grew up in Alliance, Ohio, home of the University of Mount Union (formerly Mount Union College). My high school football team played games under the Friday night lights on the Mount Union field. Even still, as hungry as I was for and as close as I was to higher education, I had no idea that Mount Union was a liberal arts college. I didn't even know what a liberal arts college was. The only differences that I knew existed between colleges were related to location, size, and demographics. Colleges were big or small and white or black. The trilogy takes that ignorance

and communicates it to mainstream America through hip-hop, and we have to pick up the ball and do the work. Alemán and Salkever (2003) writes,

Liberal education has never been a static enterprise in America. Its faculties and campus administrators often enacted change to better its societal fit [...] These examinations of the educative value of difference for the American college will seek to assess the potential for effective change, change that will revive its democratic character and equip the learner with the knowledge and skills by whose means he can come into empathetic realization, sympathetic understanding and cooperative association with individuals, occupations, and cultures different from one's own. (589)

As a liberal arts professor, I can articulate these and other characteristics of the liberal arts experience in detail. While it is no better or worse than any other form of higher education, it is significantly different – it values communal intimacy, exploration, adventure, curiosity, experimentation, creativity, difference, uncertainty, and insecurity, among other things. We must understand that it is our responsibility to communicate to our communities what it is we do, so that our children are able to make well-informed choices based on a variety of options rather than on default expectations about what they are or not expected to contribute to the world.

The trilogy appeared almost a decade ahead of the current conversations in mainstream America about the perils of student debt. Already, Kanye challenges the myth that a college education always leads to financial security and our failure to carefully communicate the financial difficulties that many students will face during and after their education. In “Skit #1” from *Late Registration*, we are introduced to a (fictional)newly founded fraternity, Broke Phi Broke, in which the members highlight their inability to buy clothes and cars. On first listen, the skit sounds like yet another example of hip-hop materialism, which is undoubtedly one of its aspects. Yet on the other hand it reveals a chasm between student expectations and student realities regarding finances during the college experience (including post-graduation), a chasm that we, as leaders in the academy, can easily work to mitigate. St. John, Hu, Simmons, Carter, and Weber (2004) found:

African Americans persisted at lower rates than Whites, and they placed greater implicit values on major that had immediate economic

returns [...] When we use Bourdieu's theory as an interpretive frame, it is not only apparent that economic forces are of more immediate concern to African Americans but that these economic considerations also influence the way African Americans value cultural capital (and educational attainment). (227)

If we examine the trilogy alongside this type of sociological study, we can begin to have more realistic and ultimately effective conversations with black students about college and finances. These conversations will ultimately add the necessary complexity to the all-too-simplistic existing model that suggests black students should go to college to earn a lot of money. Before I graduated high school, I made the choice to attend a small, private college in Pennsylvania. I won't detail the reasons I made the choice—admittedly, many of them make little to no sense to my adult self—but it's important to remember that I am from Ohio. I had no business attending a private out-of-state school. While I am extremely happy with the way my life is developing, I can't help but think someone—a guidance counselor, a college recruiter, a church member, a family member, someone—should have warned my young and naïve self that I could potentially be in debt for the rest of my life because of one ill-informed choice made as a teenager. Along these lines, the trilogy emphasizes these kinds of narratives in order to emphasize the importance of deliberate and intentional approaches to higher education.

Many academics encourage this approach to higher education within the classroom, but the trilogy begs us to consider doing our job even before students get to our classrooms and even if they never make it to us. To be fair, many academics are committed to educating people who are unwilling or unable to attend college, but some of us also fear the ways in which our respective institutions do not value this work. Most institutions require academics to excel in three areas in order to earn tenure: teaching, scholarship, and service (not necessarily in that order). Rarely ever is service to the community included in tenure requirements. April L. Few (2004) acknowledges this issue in “Balancing the Passion for Activism with the Demands of Tenure: One Professional’s Story from Three Perspectives” when she writes, “Other minority professors have told me they could not help anyone else because they were their own diversity project” (50). Further, she writes,

Service is a genuine outlet for activism that defines our selfhood and altruism and supports life-giving connections. It is the glue that

connects the university, community, and world. However, I also suspect that this is valued in most research universities about as much as the mother work women perform to maintain the household and family well-being. (56)

Along these lines, the trilogy asks academics to resist such repression by demanding that our work in our communities be valued and accepted in ways that they often are not. For example, “School Spirit Skit #1” from *College Dropout* is a cautionary tale about the myth of meritocracy. An unnamed individual graduates from college and ends up making a \$25K annual salary working as a secretary for another secretary who has less education but makes more money. This is possible because the latter secretary is the boss’s niece. One shouldn’t be, but often is, first introduced to familial affirmative action and the myth of meritocracy *after* one graduates from college. These are the kinds of things that should be taught to our children from the moment they have the ability to understand fully constructed sentences. Along these lines, Hoffman (2003) writes:

Even though underrepresented students are taking greater advantage of postsecondary options while enrolled in high school, these benefits remain unevenly distributed. Many underrepresented students are shut out of participation in such programs by the lack of rigorous curricula at the high schools they attend, lack of information about the many options for earning college credit that are currently available, and by substantial fees for participation in some states. We need to know far more systematically than we now do what the barriers are for these students, and how they can be overcome (48).

Granted, community activism is being done, particularly in areas with strong populations of people of color, such as Chicago, Philadelphia, and Oakland. For instance, the White Privilege Conference conducts the Youth Action Project (2013) in order to “provide a safe and challenging space, geared toward youth of ALL ethnic backgrounds, who are committed to understanding and dismantling white supremacy, white privilege, and other forms of oppression.” Additionally, *The Feminist Wire* is in the process of further developing the Emerging Feminisms campaign, which is committed to educating and learning from young people in order to inspire social justice at all levels. These are the kinds of community activism and social justice projects that have the potential to inspire academics to work with the people that we too often only imagine ourselves working for and/or on behalf of in order to affect change. These are the kinds of projects

that can mitigate some of the tensions that exist between those that work within and outside of the academy. Lilla Watson, in collaboration with the aboriginal activist group Queensland, once said, “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” Working with our communities is more valuable than working for and/or on behalf of them, especially because the latter approach assumes that academics exist apart from their communities and are unable to learn from the communities that they claim to serve.

Similarly, the trilogy also provides a salient critique of the insider/outsider dichotomy—real and imagined—that exists in many discussions about higher education. I especially appreciate the ways in which West is careful not to hold academics or nonacademics primarily accountable for this dichotomy. Rather, the trilogy challenges the dichotomy by requiring its listeners, regardless of academic training, to consider academic and nonacademic communities as inextricably linked. In the “Intro” to *College Dropout*, late comedian Bernie Mac lends his voice as a fictional faculty member asking West to do something (produce and/or rap on a track, most likely) for kids at graduation to sing. Here, West shows the relative ease with which those within and outside of the academy can collaborate, illustrating the existing potential to build bridges that provide effective creative opportunities for youth. On “We Don’t Dare,” also from *College Dropout*, West further draws attention to the ways that academics and nonacademics already collaborate in an effort to support students who dream of attending college. More specifically, he raps about hustlers “sittin’ in the hood like community colleges,” because the “dope money here is little Tre’s scholarship.” Similarly, on “We Major” from *Late Registration*, West relies on the oft-used hip-hop trope of his experiences tipping a college student moonlighting as a stripper to pay tuition in order to make the same point. In these cases, West demands that we come to terms with our connectedness, even when it may be uncomfortable. In their analysis of academic integration, Eimers and Pike (1997) point out the ways in which integration is especially important for minority students. They write, “For both minority and nonminority students, academic integration was at least as important as entering ability in predicting academic achievement, and for minority students, academic integration was more important than entering ability in predicting first-year achievement” (91). If students with little to no access to higher education prior to entering college conceive themselves as outsiders, their academic success is severely

compromised. Hence, acknowledging our connectedness is especially important as we continue developing ways to affect change.

The trilogy reminds us of this when Kanye travels down a familiar road by situating college and romantic relationships as mutually exclusive. We saw this assumption before in 2011 when The Champ and Panama Jackson of The Very Smart Brothas published *Your Degrees Won't Keep You Warm at Night: The Very Smart Brothas Guide to Dating, Mating, and Fighting Crime* and again later that year when comedian Steve Harvey published *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man: What Men Really Think about Love, Relationships, Intimacy, and Commitment*. We've also seen this trope in several Tyler Perry stage plays, films, and television shows. These aren't the only examples, but they are certainly some of the most popular. "School Spirit Skit #1" operates within this tradition by denigrating college for ruining one's chances of developing meaningful and fulfilling romantic relationships. In the skit, the narrator sarcastically cautions graduates that they may never have sex but that their degrees will keep them satisfied. This is another reminder that many of us—who have college degrees (sometimes several) and healthy and fulfilling romantic relationships—are continuously being erased from conversations regarding the challenges faced by people of color in higher education. Seldom do our narratives find a home in mainstream discourse about all things blackness. I've been unable to find any significant data set that proves that these limiting narratives actually deter black youth from attending college, but I do think it's important for us to challenge these fallacious portrayals by continuing to communicate with our communities about how we all face marginalization, allowing us to all work together to eradicate the oppression we face.

The trilogy also highlights the bureaucratic aspects of higher education that students often experience as frustrating and sometimes debilitating. By the time I was a junior in college, I knew that the beginning of the fall semester was always going to be especially challenging due to the red tape I would have to navigate regarding financial aid. It never failed. I would find myself checking the status of my aid online, realizing that numbers weren't adding up and/or that deposits weren't being made on time and that I was close to being dropped from all of my classes due to issues that were not my fault and that seemed to be beyond my control. Near tears the first couple of times this happened, I would trek over to the Financial Aid Office in order to resolve things with my counselor. What I realize now is that I had, and still have, a knack for doing whatever it takes to get what I want, which sometimes means going to places and talking to

people who are unfamiliar and scary. But I am aware that not every student is like me, and that none should have to be in order to get the kind of support they need to be successful in college. Yes, college is about learning to be resourceful as much as it is anything else, but we need to take into account the fact that colleges, especially the administration, are unfamiliar and scary for some students, and we may need to go the extra mile to help these kinds of students succeed in this space. Even though I grew up near Mount Union, I had never set foot on that campus. I visited my older cousin at Ohio State, but it wasn't the same. In addition to that, I started my higher education career at a small school. I can only imagine what it would have been like starting at a larger school like Purdue, where I earned my PhD, where the lines are longer and the classes are bigger, and the situation can be even more unfamiliar and terrifying.

The trilogy challenges academics to prepare students for these difficulties and help them in overcoming them if we are to be successful in helping them to succeed. In "Late" from *Late Registration*, West raps about the sometimes-arbitrary nature of choosing courses, which can ultimately result in students not being able to take classes that help them to fulfill the requirements necessary for their major(s). This indicates that leaders in the academy must better communicate the value of uncertainty, flexibility, and change. While John Bohte (2001) explores the impact of bureaucracy on student education at the K-12 level, it's important to consider the impact of bureaucratic difficulties students experience at the college level. I experienced this personally with one of my advisees who were upset that she may not be able to major in Psychology. Psychology is a popular major at my institution, and it's difficult for students to secure spots in classes that are required for that major. As an advisor, it's important that we skillfully and patiently convince our students that their goals should be flexible and that they should be open to the wonders of change, which can lead to unexpected success. The trilogy, though, is asking us, again, to go beyond doing the job we are required to do on our campuses. As mentioned above, these kinds of conversations should be happening *before* students get to college, especially when those students have not had the kind of access to the higher education environment that most of my students have. Doing so would most certainly alleviate at least some of the unfamiliarity and fear that stifles student growth.

In the trilogy, West additionally offers a critique of the narrow and unrealistic ways in which economic success is often conceptualized as inextricably linked to college. If we take some of the trilogy

lyrics at face value, we find that West received these kinds of messages from his mother. For example, on "Graduation Day" from *College Dropout*, West raps about breaking the rules (i.e., dropping out of college) but being afraid that someone would tell and subsequently anger his mother. This isn't necessarily surprising, given her position as a professor. What may be more surprising is "Get 'Em High" from *College Dropout*, where West raps about his teacher calling him a "loser" because of his desire to leave college. On the surface, both of these reactions to a student leaving college may be understandable, especially when one considers the ways in which leaders in higher education understand college to be a relatively secure path to financial stability. However, an alternative reading suggests that we would benefit from meeting students where they are and helping them to develop in healthy and productive ways regardless of their desire to attain a degree or lack thereof. Jenkins (2006) wrote:

Hip hop, as an alternative male structural system, has welcomed the rage and embraced the strongly negative critiques of the American power structure by Black men. Where black men have been silenced and severely penalized in the classroom for their modes of expression, they have been provided a microphone and immensely rewarded in the hip hop arena. This cultural structure has been one of the few spaces in which Black men can truthfully tell their own story in their own voice. (149)

On "Graduation Day," West raps about being confused about his future. Our education should prepare us to help students navigate similar kinds of confusion regardless of the outcome. Not every aspiring rapper will become a successful artist—in the mainstream or otherwise—but we can help them realize other ways they can be successful in the music industry, as a Field Promotion Coordinator, Music Director, Social Media Administrator, Journalist, Artist Manager, Promoter, Agent, Producer, and/or Art Designer, just to name a few. Admittedly, I personally do not know enough about these careers to determine whether or not any of them require a college degree, but if a student came into any one of our offices frustrated and confused about wanting to pursue music outside of college, we should be prepared to help them do the research so that they can make the most informed decisions possible regarding their futures.

The trilogy also calls our attention to the low expectations placed upon young black men, particularly regarding higher education. What is more interesting for this analysis is that West is especially critical

of intracommunal tensions along these lines. For example, on *Late Registration*, West once again calls on late comedian Bernie Mac to lend vocals for the skit "Wake Up, Mr. West." In the skit, Mac, acting as a teacher or administrator, admonishes a young Kanye, a fourth grader, for carrying a book bag, suggesting that the book bag has no value. Mac goes on to tell young Mr. West, "You ain't got nothin' else to do. You ain't doin' nothin' with your life." This fictional interaction illustrates a level of internalized racism that sometimes prevents even intellectual blacks from having the ability to interact with youth who may navigate the culture of education in ways that are often uncomfortable and/or unprecedented. While this is certainly not a new focus for academics, this examination of the trilogy should serve as a reminder that it is important for black leaders in the academy pay careful attention to the ways in which we interact with young blacks, regardless of the paths they are imagining for themselves. Otherwise, we run the risk of alienating ourselves from the communities we claim to serve. Marina Barnett (2004) contends that successful black students receive "plenty of encouragement early in their academic pursuits" and that this encouragement "was expressed in several forms: motivation and praise during childhood, having books and reading materials around the home, discussion of career choices or choosing toys and books which reflect particular career choices, choice of selective or private schools for their child to attend, and organization of college applications and options" (63). While Barnett focuses on familial support, it stands to reason that additional support from black leaders in the academy would serve as positive reinforcement. I do not mean to suggest that we are to be held primarily responsible for nurturing bonds with our communities, and neither is Kanye. I would, however, argue that we must hold ourselves accountable for these relationships and that part of that process entails engaging those members of our communities who have struggled with us in various contexts, such as Kanye West.

Interestingly, West offers a solution to this problem, suggesting collaboration between those within and those outside of the academy. This kind of collaboration, he suggests, leads to children having more access to higher education. For example, on "Champion" (*Graduation*), West raps, "Cause who the kids gon' listen to? Huh? I guess me, if it isn't you. Last week I paid a visit to the institute. They got the drop out keepin' kids in the school." Whereas some academics may be inclined to exclude an individual such as Kanye West (a college dropout) from the academy, he suggests that doing so might lead to alienating students who are more inclined to be guided by

an individual like him than by the academics. At the same time, the “if” in these lines also suggests that he recognizes that some students would be more inclined to be guided by those within the academy. The fact that he claims to have been invited to the institute to encourage students to remain in school suggests that he is not anti-college or anti-higher education. In their analysis of the ways in which college students are mentored, Crisp and Cruz (2009) argue that “mentoring theory should be expanded to include the underpinnings of critical race and feminist theories in an effort to better understand how women or minorities may perceive and experience mentoring differently” (540). An examination of popular culture, especially hip-hop, is equally critical to examining and improving the ways in which young people understand and experience college. Similarly, the ultimate concern for West, it seems, is that students be able to explore their ideas without being marginalized for making choices that do not necessarily make sense for academics. This assessment is supported by a theme he visits on “Last Call” from *College Dropout*. On this song, he raps about people in his communities expecting him to fail because of his decision to leave college. It seems, then, that West is arguing for a more nuanced approach to building and maintaining relationships between academics and those outside of the academy, one that entails a more egalitarian type of collaboration in which one path to fulfillment is not privileged over others.

What seems to be an anti-college stance seems to me more of a cry for help. West received a scholarship to attend the American Academy of Art in Chicago in 1997, when he was just 20 years old. He transferred to Chicago State University but left shortly after to pursue his music career. He produced music for Chicago rapper Gray on the latter’s 1996 album *Down to Earth*, and released his first album (as part of the rap group Go-Getters) in 1999. From the little information available, it seems that West left college altogether when he was 21 or 22 years old; *College Dropout* was released when West was just 26 years old. I consider the trilogy, then, to be the reflections of a young man about the experiences of an even younger man. In order to appreciate these albums fully, we must do some remembering and some imagining. On a personal note, I was not the child of a professor, and hence had even less experience with higher education than did West, but I do remember often feeling like I didn’t belong, as if I wasn’t good enough to be on a college campus studying anything. I thought I knew what I wanted to do with my degree, but I changed my mind so often that I was more unsure than sure at any given point. It wasn’t until I started building a closer relationship with Dr. Connie

Ruzich that my vision became clearer, and it became clearer because she helped to guide and shape my ideas. She paid attention to me during class, listened to me, and helped me decide that being a college professor was my ultimate goal. As aforementioned, I entered college planning to enter the field of Finance & Economics. In the end, I graduated with a degree in English Studies, because an older and wiser woman saw things in me that I was not yet equipped to see myself. She heard and heeded my own cries for help, and that saved my life. As difficult as that must have been for Kanye West’s mother, she was eventually able to support and help shape her son’s dreams. It is my contention, then, that we all, as leaders in the academy, should strive to be as supportive of our students who may or may not know or understand how college may or may not be the most effective strategy to help them realize their dreams.

12. Blood diamonds, or conflict diamonds, are diamonds (or other valuable minerals) that are mined and sold to finance Third World conflicts, most notably in African countries such as Liberia, Angola, and Sierra Leone. The 2006 film *Blood Diamond*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio, is set during the Sierra Leone Civil War (1991–2002) and sheds light on the violent systems behind conflict diamonds.
13. In his discussion of “Diamonds from Sierra Leone (Remix)”, Dyson (2007) asserts that it “engage[s] with the black diaspora in one of its more nefarious moments: the appropriation of African labor at the violent cost to life and limb, as African American millionaires across the waters celebrate a gaudily excessive lifestyle fueled by the suffering and death of their kin slaving in caves thousands of miles away” (p. 51).
14. Both the title of West’s fourth album and its synthetic sound are a tribute to the Roland TR-808, the programmable drum machine pioneered by Marvin Gaye’s 1982 “Sexual Healing” and later utilized by the founders of hip-hop music.
15. Both *Runaway* and *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* feature the same prologue and epilogue.
16. Hamilton (2011) discusses West’s choice to sample Scott-Heron’s 1970 “Comment No. 1,” stating, “In wielding this voice West closes at album that drives maximalism to its breaking point with the stirring statement: this is still not enough, we must be still more than this, this business is serious. It is Scott-Heron’s voice that says this, not in its words but in its pure sound, grain, its young and ferocious assuredness” (p. 113).
17. Griffin is the character played by West in *Runaway* (2011).
18. G.O.O.D. Music stands for Getting Out Our Dreams, a production company started by West in 2004 that represents artists including Malik Yusef, Mr Hudson, CyHi the Prynce, and Mos Def.
19. West premiered his short film, *Cruel Summer* (2012), in a custom-built theater featuring seven screens that surrounded the periphery of the audience at the Cannes Film Festival. The film was created using a custom-built camera rig with multiple cameras to gain different perspectives (“Kanye West debuts,” 2012).
20. In “Black Skinhead,” West writes “They see a black man with a white woman at the top floor they gon’ come to kill King Kong.” Like King Kong, West is perceived by the public as a black “monster,” stealing away the white woman from the top floor. West’s use of the words “with a white woman at the top floor” express his status as an affluent and influential individual who has taken hold of not only notions of “white” success, but also the “white” woman.

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