

NOTE-TAKING: What to do with Kanye?


Directions:

- As you read the article, highlight
 - the MAIN IDEAS in _____ (color) and
 - the *SUPPORTING DETAILS* in _____ (color)
 - If you are unsure about a piece of evidence and think it might be important but aren't sure how to categorize it, put a ? in the margin next to the information.

Can Kanye West Find Refuge, or Money, in Music?

As corporate partners cut ties with the artist now known as Ye following weeks of antisemitic statements, many wonder if the recording catalog that was his bedrock will withstand the backlash.

In early 2016, everything was lining up for Kanye West. Already a living legend in hip-hop, having delivered 6 straight paradigm-shifting albums, West, who is now known as Ye, was cashing in his cultural capital across multiple mediums.

 By Joe Coscarelli and Ben Sisario
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With thousands [gathered at Madison Square Garden](#), and millions more watching online and in movie theaters around the world, Ye combined the reveal of his seventh solo album, “The Life of Pablo,” with the debut of his third Yeezy fashion collection for Adidas, filming it all for his family’s reality-television series “Keeping Up With the Kardashians.”



While Ye once dominated the pop world with inescapable songs like “Jesus Walks,” “Gold Digger” and “Stronger,” he has not had a major hit in years. Amy Harris/Invision, via Associated Press

This was the Kanye M.O. for more than a decade: By pairing smash hits and unscripted spectacle, the artist often got away with messy moments thanks to the clarity of his creative vision.

“Those first 5 albums are probably the best five albums of any — I’m almost going to say any artist ever, not just hip-hop,” said Charlamagne Tha God, a radio and tv host.

Now, as corporate partners like Adidas, Balenciaga, Gap and the Creative Artists Agency, along with Ye’s longtime label, Def Jam, [distance themselves from him](#) following his flaunting of a slogan associated with white supremacists and repeatedly making antisemitic statements on social media and in interviews, many are wondering whether the music catalog that was once his bedrock can withstand the backlash, or provide a path back.

“This is one of the biggest L’s that we have ever watched a human take in business and in music, and it was all self-inflicted,” Charlamagne said. “We don’t know why he decided to throw [the ‘White Lives Matter’ shirt](#) on. We don’t know why he decided to start making [antisemitic comments](#). We don’t know why he decided to defend Derek Chauvin, the officer that killed George Floyd. There’s not a song alive that can ever make me forget that. All that music,” Charlamagne added, “is just a distant memory.”

While Ye once dominated the pop world with inescapable tracks like “Jesus Walks,” “Gold Digger” and “Stronger,” he has not had a major hit in years. “The Life of Pablo” sold the equivalent of about three million copies in the United States; subsequent records like “Ye” (2018) and “Donda” (2021) have each notched only about half as much.

Projects have been plagued by repeated blown deadlines, incomplete recordings and aborted release strategies. His attention in the past few years has been far more focused on fashion. He has not toured since 2016.

While Ye's presence on the radio has faded over the last month — from an average of about 2,300 plays of his songs a week to 1,800 last week, with many stations now dropping him entirely — streaming may provide a safety net. His stockpile of hits remains steadily popular there, drawing nearly 4 billion plays so far this year in the United States alone. On Spotify, he has 51 million monthly listeners around the world, making him the 19th most popular artist on that platform.

Over the last month, Ye's streaming numbers have slipped a bit, declining by about 6% to 88 million on-demand clicks in the United States. But those totals are well within his usual range at this point in his career, and are even up slightly since the beginning of 2022. The number of user playlists on Spotify with songs by Ye has also shot up in recent weeks to nearly 1.3 million.

Those numbers suggest some combination of fan loyalty and user curiosity that may be driven by attention in the news media. "Most music consumers probably just care about whether they like the music or not, so any negative press coverage about an artist might just remind them to listen to their music," said Rutger Rosenborg, the marketing manager of Chartmetric. "And maybe Kanye is banking on that."

That phenomenon has played out numerous times in recent years. Many fans of R. Kelly [stuck with him](#) in their private listening habits, even as the singer was accused — and convicted — of racketeering and sex trafficking. Last year, after the country star Morgan Wallen was caught on video using a racial slur, radio stations removed his songs for a time, and streaming platforms temporarily took him off official playlists. But fans rallied behind him, and Wallen has ended up with the longest Top 10 streak on Billboard's album chart in nearly 60 years.

Artists like Chris Brown, XXXTentacion and [Michael Jackson](#), who have also been accused of misconduct, have held strong on streaming services. Those platforms have usually been [reluctant to remove content](#), viewing their role as neutral protectors of speech. Kelly's music, for example, remains widely available, even if it is not promoted heavily.

Daniel Ek, Spotify's chief executive, [told Reuters](#) that Ye's "awful comments" would warrant removal from the service only if they were included on a recorded song or podcast. "His music doesn't violate our policy," Ek said. "It's up to his label, if they want to take action or not." Representatives of Apple did not respond to questions about whether its streaming service would take any action over Ye's music.

Where Ye's music career goes from here is unclear. Although momentarily shunned by the major talent managers of the entertainment industry, he is also essentially a free agent — a situation he has long sought. His recording contract with Def Jam ended with his album "Donda." And his songwriting deal with Sony Music expired early this year, though the company still acts as the administrator for his catalog.

None of which rules out the possibility of a comeback in an industry that has long run on attention by any means, and often embraces redemption for its biggest, most troubled stars. Industry analyst Dan Runcie, who covers the business of streaming and hip-hop, believes "there likely is another record label out there that will probably want to partner with him in some way."

Platforms like YouTube and SoundCloud, along with the ease of digital distribution to Spotify and other major streaming services, mean that Ye may not even need a corporate partner, given the size of his personal megaphone.

"Kanye can come out with a song tomorrow and people are going to listen to it," Charlamagne said. "We love dysfunction, so sadly, Kanye West is going to always have a voice."

Whether that music can be more than another momentary sideshow may be a bigger question than simply what happens in the studio. "I feel like Kanye is moving like a human who knows he's not going to be around much longer," Charlamagne said. "I pray that's not the case. Maybe this is exactly what he needs, to reach rock-bottom professionally, before he actually goes to get some help and healing."

As is, Charlamagne added, "Not one song is good enough for this level of bigotry."

Directions: Check in with your tablemates and compare notes. As a group, fill out the main idea/supporting details section of the t-chart below. (We will complete the summary/what I think section of the chart together as a class.)

- What were the main ideas you pulled out?
 - Are there any disagreements about those main ideas? If so, discuss them as a group.
 - Are any of these supposed main ideas NOT a main idea? Are they supporting details or are they less important facts or sharings that aren't really the main point?

- What were the supporting details you identified?
 - Which of these details did everyone have? Which were ones only a few or one person identified and what does the group think? Are these supporting details? Why or why not?

MAIN IDEA:	SUPPORTING DETAILS:
SUMMARY:	
WHAT DO I THINK ABOUT THE POINTS RAISED?	

HOW WOULD THIS INFORMATION LOOK IN A CONCEPT MAP?

Sketch one out below using the model on the right side of the page ->

