



Is It Ok to Still Listen to Kanye West's Music?

Controversy after controversy, lately it appears the multi-Grammy award winning Kanye West is on a mission to publicly destroy his reputation and, in-turn, his career.

The Trump supporting musician who formally changed his name to "Ye" appears ever more right leaning after his recent string of antisemitic remarks. Amongst the chaos arises the question, can we still listen to Kanye West's music?

Can we separate art from the artist? Despite their wrongdoings, can we appreciate their creations? Whether that be a musician, an actor or a writer.

Before the Hitler controversy, I conducted two polls, one on the fan moderated 'Sub-Reddit' group, 'WestSubEver' on Reddit, a content and discussion forum, and one on Instagram posing the question: Do you still listen to Kanye West?

Overwhelmingly people voted in favour of his work, with 56% of Reddit votes still supporting Ye as a person, demonstrating how loyal a fanbase he has. 69% on Instagram said they were attempting to separate Ye from his work. Only 6% of Reddit users had completely stopped listening to the rapper's music.

Although fans may still be listening to him, commercial backers are severing ties with Ye. After tweeting that he was "going death con 3 ON JEWISH PEOPLE", Ye's Twitter account was suspended and he was dropped by many brands including Balenciaga, Vogue, and Footlocker. His long-term partnership with Adidas who carried his brand YEEZY was terminated and Peloton said they would no longer use his music during classes. Forbes reported that Ye lost \$1.5 billion as a result. However, many were not happy by how long it took major brands to publicly shun him.

"It's devastating to hear someone who you want to be an ally to all minorities - especially the minority they belong to - loudly parroting white supremacist tropes with no care for the danger and damage attached to their actions and words." The Guardian music journalist and former fan of Ye's music, Damien Morris, had been a fan of his for over 10 years until recent actions and remarks: "West's behaviour over the last few weeks in particular, has been so utterly despicable that I can't quite see how it could ever be fully redeemed or forgiven."

When discussing if we ever truly separate an artist from their work, and whether streaming services should remove their music, Morris said, "I would say this is a case-by-case decision that depends on where you draw the line. There are a number of artists who I would now feel uncomfortable appreciating or enjoying their work, knowing what they have done, because it just hangs over everything and warps your perception of it. The pleasure evaporates.

"For sure, there will be artists whose work you or I enjoy who have done unacceptable things that we don't know about.

“A song can always be just a song without any context. We can only engage with the facts as and when we discover them, then make a decision which will be as much emotional as it is rational.

“With rappers obviously so much of their power is derived from the words they say and the stories they tell, so it’s much more difficult to support a rapper whose lyrics evidence or even hint at a worldview that I find repulsive.

“I can’t see myself listening to much or any Kanye West’s music in the future. He’s brutally severed the trust that bonds artist and audience.

“So, in the end it’s just a feeling - a feeling that I don’t like what this song represents anymore, so I can’t enjoy it like I used to.”

If we stop listening to Kanye West completely, do we apply this to all others in the public eye who have tarnished reputations. Rex Orange County was charged for sexual assault, can we listen to his discography guilt-free? Do we stop listening to Michael Jackson due to allegations of paedophilia? Walt Disney included racist themes in films, so should we stop watching? Can children still read Roald Dahl despite publicly admitting he is antisemitic?

Through his career Ye has never been PG rated, with many of his lyrics being of a degrading and offensive nature, and of course he himself has many public controversies and conflicts.

His 2016 song ‘Famous’ includes the lyric: “I feel like me and Taylor might still have sex / Why? I made that bitch famous,” referencing his infamous feud with Taylor Swift after he stormed on stage while Swift was collecting her award at the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards. The lyric and its context were seen as misogynistic and offensive. Some believe this was a manufactured altercation by the rapper, that he causes public outrage intentionally to provoke a reaction and in-turn, get people talking about him.

Ye has been shocking the public since 2005, when on a live fundraising effort for victims of Hurricane Katrina declared: “George Bush doesn’t care about black people.” Many of Ye’s early works, like “Diamonds from Sierra Leone” and “All Falls Down” contained striking yet progressive messages, drawing attention to hardships the black community faces. In 2018, he overturned this advocacy by telling *TMZ* “When you hear about slavery for 400 years ... For 400 years? That sounds like a choice.” He also told *TMZ* that he feels “a freedom in doing something that everybody tells you not to do,” a premise which he appears to still carry through to today.

Within the past few months, Ye’s views have spiralled out of control. Despite being suspended from Instagram and Twitter several times, the social media platforms keep reinstating his accounts, resulting in further turmoil. Providing a podium to freely say whatever he desires validates Ye’s discourse, instead of condemning his behaviours.

TIMELINE OF YE’S 2022 CONTROVERSIES:

October 3rd – Debuted his ‘WHITE LIVES MATTER’ t-shirts at his YEEZY show during Paris Fashion Week

October 7th – Banned from Instagram after suggesting rapper Sean “Diddy” Combs was being controlled by Jewish people

October 9th -Ye’s Twitter account is suspended over death con tweet

October 10th - Uploaded a YouTube video which featured footage of him showing pornography to visibly uncomfortable Adidas executives during a business meeting

October 15th – On a since-deleted episode of *Drink Champs*, Ye falsely claimed George Floyd died of a fentanyl overdose: “They hit him with the fentanyl,” “the guy’s knee wasn’t even on his neck like that.”

October 17th - In an interview with Chris Cuomo, Ye said his “death con 3” remark referenced the “Jewish underground media mafia” and when “Black musicians signed to Jewish record labels and those Jewish record labels take ownership,” a form of “modern day slavery.”

November 2nd - Six people who had previously worked with Ye since 2018 told *NBC News* he has previously made pro-Hitler/Nazi remarks. One former employee revealed they received a settlement payment from the rapper for his antisemitism

November 20th – Ye announces his campaign for the 2024 presidential bid

December 1st – Ye goes on *InfoWars*, a website owned by far-right Alex Jones, alongside Nick Fuentes, a Holocaust denier, claiming he “likes Hitler” and even the Nazis “did good things too.” He added: “I love Jewish people, but I also love Nazis” to which host Jones replied with “Well I have to disagree with that.”

December 2nd- Ye tweets an image of a Swastika inside the Star of David, a symbol of Judaism. His Twitter account is suspended again after being reinstated by new owner Elon Musk - ‘he again violated our rule against incitement to violence.’

December 8th- The School Of The Art Institute Of Chicago revoke Ye’s honorary doctorate degree

At the end of the day, there is no indisputable yes or no answer, the decision to stop listening to Kanye West is entirely in your hands. On one hand, if we stopped consuming works created by ‘problematic’ people, many industries would collapse. But as Ye’s behaviour grows ever more unsettling and erratic, at what point do we say enough is enough? How far will the hate speech have to go before Ye scares off the remainder of fans and destroys his platform? If it now brings guilt to listen to his music, don’t. If you are able to listen to him and ignore his controversies, keep listening. It is important to acknowledge Kanye West has done wrong and hurt many people along the way.