

KANYE WEST



HIP-HOP  
*2<sup>nd</sup> Biographies*



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# Timeline

**1977:** Kanye West is born in Atlanta, Georgia.

**1987:** Kanye moves to China.

**1991:** Kanye gets his first keyboard, turntable, and mixer.

**1996:** Kanye drops out of college to focus on music. Sony Music interviews Kanye but does not offer him a *contract*.

**1998:** Kanye sells his first beat to Jermaine Dupri.

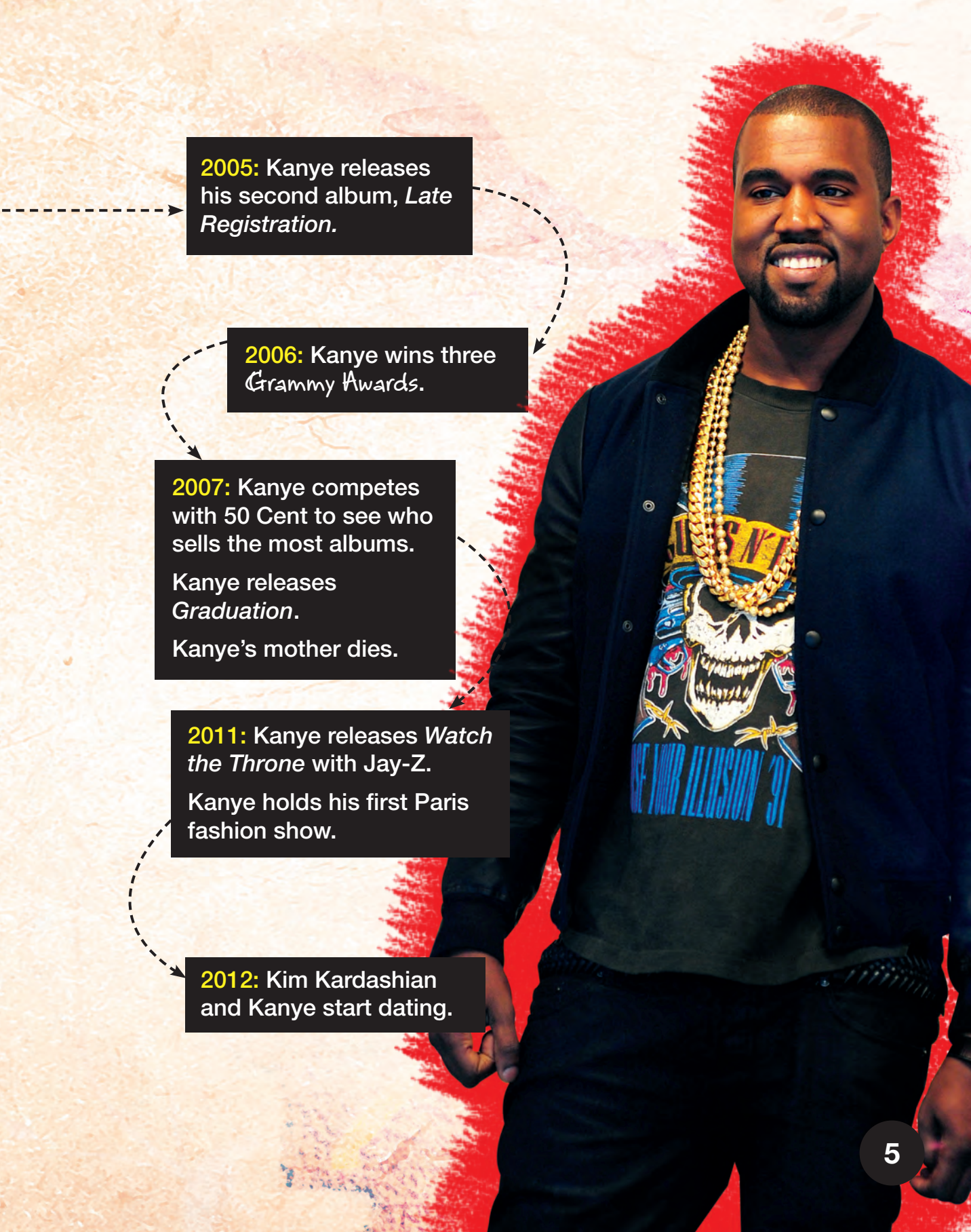
**1999:** Kanye is the *producer* for Foxy Brown, Lil Kim, and more.

**2000:** Kanye produces a track for Jay-Z.

**2002:** Kanye crashes his car and nearly dies. Roc-a-Fella signs Kanye to a recording contract.

**2004:** Kanye's *debut* album, *The College Dropout*, is released.





**2005:** Kanye releases his second album, *Late Registration*.

**2006:** Kanye wins three Grammy Awards.

**2007:** Kanye competes with 50 Cent to see who sells the most albums.  
Kanye releases *Graduation*.  
Kanye's mother dies.

**2011:** Kanye releases *Watch the Throne* with Jay-Z.  
Kanye holds his first Paris fashion show.

**2012:** Kim Kardashian and Kanye start dating.



A photograph of Kanye West performing on stage. He is wearing a white jacket with a large, colorful graphic on the front, dark sunglasses, and a microphone. The background is a bright, hazy stage setting with purple and blue lighting.

# Kanye the Icon

In the *tabloids*, Kanye West is known as an overconfident musician and fashion designer. In the music business, he is considered by many as a genius.

Kanye calls himself the voice of a generation.



He is a very successful producer and rap artist. Kanye, or Yeezy, even calls himself the voice of a generation. He said, “Someone could be a better rapper, dance better. But culturally impacting? When you look back, ... who’s the icon at the end of the day?”

Kanye is arrogant. But he is so successful that he has a right to brag. He is known as a perfectionist in terms of music. He works on his sounds until they are exactly how he thinks they should sound. The perfectionism has paid off. By 2012 he had won eighteen Grammy Awards. In the United States, he has sold over thirty million songs just over digital sellers like iTunes. (This does not count actual CDs sold in stores!) He is one of the best-selling and most-awarded musical artists of all time. And he reached this level of success before he even turned forty years old.

It may be the way Kanye experiences music that makes him so special. He has a condition called synesthesia. People with synesthesia get more information when they see, feel, hear, taste, or smell something than others do. In Kanye’s case, he sees the sounds he hears. In an interview, Kanye described what this is like for him. He said, “When I was in grammar school, I had a colored-pencil drawing of my take on synesthesia. I knew I could see sounds and shapes. I can see sound in front of me.” So Kanye writes and makes music that looks as good to him as it sounds.

Donda Williams was raised in Oklahoma. She was the youngest of four children. Her parents both worked long hours to provide for their family. The Williams family lived in the southern United States in the 1950s and 60s. This meant that they had to face *segregation*. Restrooms, drinking fountains, and seats on buses were marked as “White Only” and “Negro Only.” It was against the law for African Americans to defy segregation laws. But Donda’s mother ignored the signs. She was very confident, and people who would complain or have her arrested left her alone instead. Donda grew up with the same kind of confidence.

Donda’s parents understood that an education would give their children opportunities that they did not have. She attended college and earned a doctorate degree. She taught business classes and went to graduate school.

Ray West grew up all over the United States and in Spain. His father was in the military, so he was stationed at different military bases. Ray also grew up with segregation. When his family had to move to a new base, they often slept in their car. The West family could not find hotels that allowed African Americans to rent a room. Because many restaurants would not serve them, they would eat sandwiches in the car.

Ray went to college and became active in African American causes. He became a member of the Black Panther Party. The organization worked to gain equality for African Americans in all parts of their lives. The group was considered very radical, but it also helped African Americans gain rights that they did not have before.






Donda Williams was Kanye's mother.



Donda and Ray met when they were both working for Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. They dated for just three months before they married. For four years they lived happily, remodeling homes around Atlanta and working on their careers. In 1976 Donda became pregnant. Ray was not sure he wanted to be a father.

Donda and Kanye moved to this neighborhood in Chicago.





Kanye Omari West was born on June 8, 1977, in Atlanta. In the months after Kanye's birth, Ray spent more time at work and less time at home. Donda did not want to stay married to someone whose work was more important than his family. Donda and Ray separated before Kanye was a year old. When Kanye was three years old, Donda and Ray divorced.

Donda moved to Chicago to take a job as an English professor. When it was time for Kanye to start kindergarten, she found the Vanderpoel Magnet School. They had teachers who helped develop students' talents in art and music. Kanye was talented in both art and music, so Donda paid for private lessons in both. Kanye saw his father in the summers when school was out.

In 1987 Donda was given an amazing opportunity. Her college would exchange professors with a university in China. Donda moved to Nanjing, China. Kanye went with her and attended a local school. He was the only foreign student in class. Because he did not speak Chinese, they placed him in first grade. But he quickly learned the language and moved up to his normal grade. The children in his school would pay Kanye to break dance for them, so he always had spare change for treats in the neighborhood markets.