

Critical Excess

Watch the Throne and the New Gilded Age
Tracking Pop Series

Jay-Z and Kanye West's 2011 *Watch the Throne* is a self-avowed "luxury rap" album centered on Eurocentric conceptions of nobility, artistry, and haute couture. *Critical Excess* performs a close reading of the sonic and social commentary on this album, examining how the album alternately imagines and critiques the mutually reinforcing ideas of Europe, nobility, old money, art, and their standard bearer, whiteness. Reading the album alongside Black critical theory and work on the prophetic nature of music, Rollefson argues that through their performance of black excellence, opulence, and decadence, Jay-Z and Kanye West poured gas on the white resentment of the Obama presidency—a resentment that would ultimately spill over into public life, make audible the dog whistling of the Far Right, and embolden white supremacists to come out from under their rocks. Ultimately, Rollefson argues, Jay-Z and Kanye West's performance of what Rollefson calls "critical excess" on this album exceeds the limits of conspicuous consumption and heralds the final stage of late capitalism—"the New Gilded Age."

J. Griffith Rollefson is professor of music at University College Cork, National University of Ireland. Rollefson is author of *Flip the Script: European Hip Hop and the Politics of Postcoloniality* and founding co-editor of the journal *Global Hip Hop Studies*.

"J. Griffith Rollefson delivers a fresh and necessary revisit to *Watch the Throne* in time for the pivotal album's 10th anniversary. Rollefson's analysis is wide-ranging and deep-probing, offering an intersectional framework for understanding *Watch the Throne* as a significant case study of engaging hip hop's tethering to globalization, commercialism, and racial performance." - Regina N. Bradley, Assistant Professor of English and African Diaspora Studies at Kennesaw State University

"Critical Excess offers a much-awaited and outstanding meditation on hip-hop's drive to imagine the end(s) of racial capitalism. From Fanon to Black gospel, from Magilla Gorilla to Afrodiasporas, Rollefson tracks the iconoclasm of Jay-Z and Kanye West's *Watch the Throne*, detailing how the record not only anticipated the explosive national and international racial politics of the late 2010s but came to be deeply implicated in their emergence. It is electrifying to see W.E.B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, and Achille Mbembe sit in the company of Jay, Ye, and Mos Def—and wince not. I simply cannot wait to teach with this book." - Dan-el Padilla Peralta, Associate Professor of Classics at Princeton University

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and the NEW GILDED AGE**



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