

Kanye West Criticizes Harriet Tubman, Decries Abortion at First Rally Since Announcing Presidential Bid

Rapper Kanye West, in his first event since declaring himself a presidential candidate, ranted against historical figure Harriet Tubman on Sunday, saying the Underground Railroad conductor “never actually freed the slaves, she just had them work for other white people,” comments that drew shouts of opposition from some in the crowd.

West delivered a lengthy monologue, touching on topics from abortion and religion to international trade and licensing deals, before a crowd in North Charleston, South Carolina. Whether he is actually seeking the nation’s highest office remains a question.

Tubman is one of the most respected figures of 19th-century America. An African American who escaped slavery, she helped enslaved Black men and women travel north to freedom and fought for the Union during the Civil War. She later became a supporter of women’s suffrage.

On abortion, West said that while he believes it should be legal, financial incentives to help struggling mothers could be a way to discourage the practice.

“Everybody that has a baby gets a million dollars,” he said as an example.

Wearing a protective vest and with “2020” shaved into his head, the entertainer appeared on a livestream of the event. Several hundred people gathered in a venue where gospel music played before West’s appearance.

The event was reportedly for registered guests only, although a campaign website had no registration or RSVP information.

Speaking without a microphone, West became tearful at one point while talking about his mother, who died following plastic surgery complications in 2007.

West missed the deadline to qualify for the ballot in several states, and it was unclear if he was willing or able to collect enough signatures required to qualify in others. Last week, he qualified to appear on Oklahoma's presidential ballot, the first state where he met the requirements before the filing deadline.

West needed to collect 10,000 signatures by noon Monday to appear on the South Carolina ballot, according to state law. The entertainer tweeted out a list of locations around the Charleston area where petitions could be signed. Email to an address purportedly associated with the campaign was not returned Sunday afternoon.

West, who is married to reality television star Kim Kardashian West, initially announced his candidacy on July 4. {eo}

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