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Kendrick Lamar: Good Kid in a Mad City

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Growing up is hard enough. Imagine having to worry about being shot at while walking the streets of your neighborhood. It was a reality for Kendrick Lamar. Now 23 years old, he's sharing his story of keeping an upbeat attitude in an often-dark place.

Born and raised in Compton, California, a city where violence, drugs, and gang activity looms, Lamar knows what he must do to make it out. He's found his voice on the microphone as a hip-hop artist, and people are beginning to listen.

Eminem's manager, Paul Rosenberg, first took notice of Lamar late last year. Rosenberg tipped off rapper

Dr. Dre, who gave Lamar a shout-out while on a Los Angeles radio station. Now things are moving fast.

This past January Lamar had his first sold out show at the Key Club in Los Angeles. Dr. Dre has included him on his much anticipated release *Detox*. Equally impressive, Lamar has landed on the cover of one of music's most respected magazines, *XXL*. It's a sign that the industry is watching and waiting.



Lamar tells me he began singing about his city, his struggles, and his survival at the age of 13. Now years later, he has nearly 300 songs, and must narrow it down to 12 for an album release. When asked which are his favorites, song titles like "The Hard Part 2," "Cut You Off," "Average Joe," and "Faith" roll off his tongue. According to Lamar, all the songs have a message. Whether it's about the ills of negativity, or the senseless loss of his uncle to prison, Lamar sings with a raw, honest, and sometimes angered voice. Many of his lyrics come from what he's seen and experienced growing up in Compton.

His parents, who are still married, moved to Los Angeles from Chicago in the 1970's. Lamar says his dad was always there for him, and admits the tight relationship likely saved his life, and gave him security to fall back on when he pushed the edges and lost focus.

While there has been a big drop in homicides in the city of Compton in the last couple of years, (some say due to better communication between the police and residents), Lamar believes it is still not perfect; calling himself "a good kid in a mad city."

I got a chance to spend the day with the young man who is, by the way, very charming. He and I walked the streets of Compton, visiting the Social Services building where he and his family collected welfare back in the day. We drove by his family's first apartment, a building where he says he saw drug deals go down on a daily basis. We even stopped by his high school, a place he admits he "actually misses." I also wanted to see Lamar in the studio. When we arrived, we found a small dark disheveled room in the back of a small house. It has been his place to record for years, and while it is not perfect by any means, sort of like the city of Compton, Kendrick Lamar hopes to help change that with his music.

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