It is not uncommon for music artists to use their craft to call attention to pressing social issues. In 1979, Pink Floyd produced a song called *Another Brick in the Wall* to expose issues pertaining to the American education system. In 2000, Bruce Springstein released the song *American Skin* to draw attention to subject of police brutality. Whether the message in the song is hidden in the lyrics or straightforward and forthright, artists continue to use their musical talents to publicize issues that resonate with them. One artist known for calling attention to social issues while developing a drastically new style of music in the city of Chicago goes by the name of Chance the Rapper also known as Chance. Prior to Chance's rise to fame, Chicago was known for their “Chopper” style of rap music that involved “spittin bars” at an incredibly fast speed and “heavy” rhymes that captivated audiences. In addition, Kanye West’s claim to fame from the south side of Chicago was his “chipmunk soul” style of rap that he popularized and would become the staple of his own music and others in the rap game. However, Chance’s style significantly differs from the styles developed in Chicago. In 2013, when he released his second album *Acid Rap*, he created original rhymes and wordplay with instrumentals that resembled those of calm and mellow jazz, gospel, and blues beats that entranced his audience in Chicago and, with time, the rest of the country. However, in that same album, he produced a song titled *Everybody’s Something* that diverges significantly from the rest of his album in style that calls attention to pressing

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social issues in the city of Chicago. Although the title of the song hints towards the meaning of the song that everybody has a purpose in this life, the lyrics also allude to the issues in inner city Chicago from his point of view. The artistic devices used in the accompanying music video accentuate the beauty and the social issues that occur that occur through Chicago as he saw it. However, the question of whether his music and the message of accompanying music video to his song Everybody Something deviates to far from Chicago’s unique style of music and too harsh on Chicago respectively becomes an issue when one man. Writers like Keith Eggener and Douglas Powell have made arguments using the term “critical regionalism” to analyze artist and scholars who attempt to define a region through geography or culture. Like Powell in his definition of critical regionalism, Chance uses visual devices in the music video of his song Everybody’s Something to harshly define the city of Chicago through the violence and corruption, but encourages a new progressive culture that rejects the evils that plague that enquires the city’s people to become “something”.

Different writers have their own definition of critical regionalism that drive their arguments; however, the goal of critical regionalism is to make people feel at home within their own environment by creating art or scholarly text that incorporates the peculiarities of the specific region’s culture with modern culture. Keith Eggener argues that creating art with this concept in mind tends to oversimplify the regional culture or force a culture among the people in the defined space. Eggener believes that infusing modern culture with regional culture is “an extremely fine balance” and threatens tradition; moreover, in order to successfully capture the image of the region, the artist attempting to define the space must attune their self to the “state of mind” of the people. Douglas Powell, believes that once an artist understands critical regionalism he or she can understand exactly what to resist about the regional culture emulated through the art. Rather than jeopardizing cultural tradition, Powell understands critical regionalism as a vehicle for social change and progress.
Throughout the music video, Chance displays news clippings, various images and videos in the moving outline of his body. Some of the images include bags of money, guns, children; while, some of the videos include old schools blues, and gospel artists singing, and new footage of shootings. According to Powell, the fact that Chance was able to display certain aspects of his upbringing within the streets of Chicago, and how the greed and money – indicated through the pictures of money and business men shaking hands (Figure 2).  

Because the music video is designed to show the struggles that Chance had to overcome in order to become “something”, signified by the title of the song *Everybody's Something*, it is easy to assume that the images of money do not go beyond personal struggle. Money and corporate greed have beleaguered Chicago for many years, and the exponential rise in debt only exacerbates the issue. Recently the Mondelez/Nabisco food company laid off 600 workers in Chicago and moved their jobs to Mexico in an attempt to save money, which put those men and women out of work. A move of this nature can be justifiable if a company is going into bankruptcy or in desperate need, the CEO of


Mondelez/ Nabisco has made 20 million dollars a year for the last nine years.⁶ Although Eggener believes critical regionalism belittles cultural tradition, he fails to acknowledge when the attempt to modify the regional culture encourages positive social change. Chicago thrives of its working class and developed as an industrial city sometimes dubbed the city of “broad shoulders”.⁷ In situations like the one involving the 600 workers of Nabisco where the value of life due to greed and the culture is threatened, the art and music should reflect the social change even if it harshly criticizes the city and does not portray the view of all of Chicago’s citizens. Powell argues that looking critically at a story or a place provides a crucial starting place for understanding how the identity of the place is rooted in conflict and change as much as in permanence, stability, and continuity.”⁸ The key word that Powell uses in his analysis of critical regionalism is “continuity”. Although the Chance’s music video gratingly exposes the issues in Chicago, he calls upon the concerns in hopes that Chicago will move past the problems and towards a progressive culture.

With the Chance’s allusion to corporate greed and lack of wealth played a role in his upbringing and Chicago as a whole through the images shown in his outline in his music video, he also displays video clippings and pictures of children. One disconcerting series of visual aids that Chance presents through his outlines is one that shows a video clip of young female child playing (Fig. 3); followed by an image of two men shaking hands(Fig. 2); then an image of a young boy dead on the street (Fig.4).⁹

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⁷ http://www.chicagohistoryfair.org/history-fair/history-fair-topics/subject-essays/chicago-working-class-history-topics.html
⁸ Reichert, 14
The music video suggests that there lies a much deeper issue causing teens and children to die young. With the increase in gang activity and ineffective gun laws in Chicago, the amount of teens that resort to malicious activity increases steadily. In 2012, out of the 152 homicides that occurred in the city, 38 of the victims killed were teenagers. However, before Chance displays the image of the dead child, he shows an image of two men shaking hands to signify that the issue that causes teens to join gangs lies much deeper than simply the availability of guns and drugs. In Newark, New Jersey, a city that resembles Chicago in that the homicide rate remains relatively high and the availability of guns and prominence of gang activity exists in large numbers, the same concerns involving teenage death also subsists. Living in the city for sixteen years, I’ve seen guns take away the lives of friends; however, Michael K. Williams outlines the subtle issues in the city by interviewing young gang members and lawbreakers asking questions that aim to figure out what lead them to pursue a life of crime specifically carjacking in a Vice documentary called *The Black Market*. A former carjacker who goes by the nickname “E” commented on the prominence of carjacking stating, “The government took all the programs – the
little league, and all that. You leave us with nothing to do, you see what we doing here now – nothing”.11
In cities like Chicago and Newark where families have incomes that fall below the poverty line jobs are
disappearing; and the public education systems are failing, teens resorting to gang activity as a solution
to boredom and a means to make money is inevitable. The fact that the fate of a city can be determined
by “men and women in suits” who fail to recognize the issues is troubling, but a sad fact that defines the
region. Although many other factors contribute to this issue alone, the issues within the city are
conducive to Chicago’s identity as a region. Powell makes an interesting statement in his definition of
critical regionalism; he states, “When we talk about a region, we are not talking about a stable
boundaried, autonomous place but about a cultural history, the cumulative, generative effect of the
interplay among the various, competing definitions of that region.”12 Chicago’s densely populated
streets remain far from stable in terms of its abundant culture, and rampant gang activity and crime, but
these features that Chance outlines are a small portion of what he believes makes the region what it is
currently.

When analyzing the music video to Chance’s song Everybody’s Something, problems arise
because his portrayal of Chicago remains fairly negative for the majority of the song. The clips and
images shown are usually followed by images of death and violence that contribute heavily to his
definition of the region; however, the name of the song cannot be taken out of context. Although
Chance references Chicago many times throughout the song, the city only serves as a backdrop to the
message of the song. The song mentions Chance conquering his demons and the issues of the city and
becoming successful; moreover, the song encourages other to do the same. Even though, Chance
delimits Chicago through the richness of its music and culture and the widespread gun violence, he

12Reichert, 5
encourages his listeners to break boundaries and stereotypes and aim towards the goal of becoming “something”. Eggener argues that by attending more directly to these “states of mind” (referring to the mind set of those who live in the same region” by heeding the voices of those responsible for building particular cultures.”¹³ This statement proves problematic because no two people have the same “state of mind”. Every individual living in the city has their own definition of the region and the cultures role in their lives. Like Powell argues, a region is culturally complex to establish a single definition for the many characteristic that comprise the region, so it is up to each individual to contribute to the definition of the region; moreover, this definition of critical regionalism allows the culture of a region to remain in flux. Chance’s style of music, his ability to break the mold of young people in Chicago, and his encouragement for others to follow his lead suggest that he’s encouraging change in the city. Eggener’s argument suggest upholding tradition serves as the best way to define a region, but ignores the fact that culture is subject to change. However, Powell suggests a culture that respects the tradition but encourages progress; moreover, for Chance and the city of Chicago, this definition of critical regionalism provides the best way to move forward.


