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.¹ In 2000, Bruce Springstein released the song American Skin to draw attention to subject of police brutality.² 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. As new issues arise and new generations of performers take on the music scene, the social issues called upon by artists change, and the music style used to present an issue vary. 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.³ 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 social issues in the city of Chicago.

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 his music video accentuate the beauty and the issues that occur through Chicago as he saw it. Douglas Powell, an associate professor at Columbia College Chicago, 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. Like Powell in his definition of critical regionalism, Chance uses the lyrics and visual devices in the music video of his song *Everybody’s Something* to create a definition of his region of Chicago from his own point of view.

In the lyrics of *Everybody’s Something*, Chance the rapper communicates his love and disdain for Chicago. As an artist known for his musical diversity, creating beats from jazz to gospel, he calls attention to the types of music developed in the city. He states in his song,

“"I got the Chicago Blues
We invented rock before the Stones got through”"\(^4\)

Evidently, he understands the music culture that preceded him and he takes full advantage of their style in his own music; however, in the lines immediately after, he talks about the violence he encountered.

“"We just aiming back cause the cops shot you
Buck buck bang bang, yelling "Fuck Fox News!"
Booyaka buckle up, mothafuck ops too
Ain’t no knuckling up em young cause it just not cool”"\(^5\)

Integral to understanding the first line, The Blues developed from work songs and spirituals of African American slaves that developed into a genre that often speaks of oppression, love, and sadness. The line

“I got the Chicago Blues” displays his emotion about his city. Through that line, he sets the tone for the few lines after. Powell argues that telling his own story about Chicago helps sustain the identity of the place and that different interpretations of a single region can coexist.\(^6\) Even though he is well-endowed in the music culture of the city, the violence in the city overshadows the beauty of the culture. The violence that Chance speaks about in 2012 when released the album still exists in 2016. During a seven day period between August 5\(^{\text{th}}\) and August 11\(^{\text{th}}\) of 2016, 99 people were shot and 24 of them fatally wounded; moreover, among the wounded was a 10-year-old boy.\(^7\) Although Chance does lyrics after were not meant to be solely lyrically creative or nonsensical, they were placed there to catch the attention of the listener. From Chance the Rapper’s viewpoint, gun violence and police brutality plague the city.

If the lyrics of *Everybody’s Something* were not compelling enough to exhibit Chance’s view of his growth and view of Chicago, the creative devices Chance uses throughout the music video buttress the viewpoints in his lyrics. 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.\(^8\) 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.”\(^9\) 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


\(^9\) Reichert, 14
pictures of money and business men shaking hands.\textsuperscript{10} 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 \textit{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 CEO of Mondelez/ Nabisco has made 20 million dollars a year for the last nine years.\textsuperscript{11}

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; followed by an image of two men shaking hands; then an image of a young boy dead on the street.\textsuperscript{12} 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.\textsuperscript{13} 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”.¹⁴ 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.”¹⁵ 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.

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¹⁵ Reichert, 5
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 also 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 encourages his listeners to break boundaries and stereotypes and aim towards the goal of becoming something. Another historian named Keith 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.”¹⁶ 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.

Bibliography


