

# Welcome to Chicago

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## Abstract

Mic One's 1998 version of Graham Nash's 1971 hit has been much imitated by other rap artists, including Gangsta Nation and Beanie Sigel. This essay explores the politics of appropriation and sampling, arguing that musical borrowings work both ways. The outpouring of grief that attended Mic One's death in Norridge contrasts with the CNN special entitled *Chicagoland*. Rap music's local knowledge, as shown by graffiti, murals, and rap music offers a counter narrative to more widely disseminated news reports such as "*Chicagoland*" that purport to represent the windy city.

*Keywords:* white rap, "Welcome to Chicago," *Chicagoland*, CNN, Arts Education, 1969.

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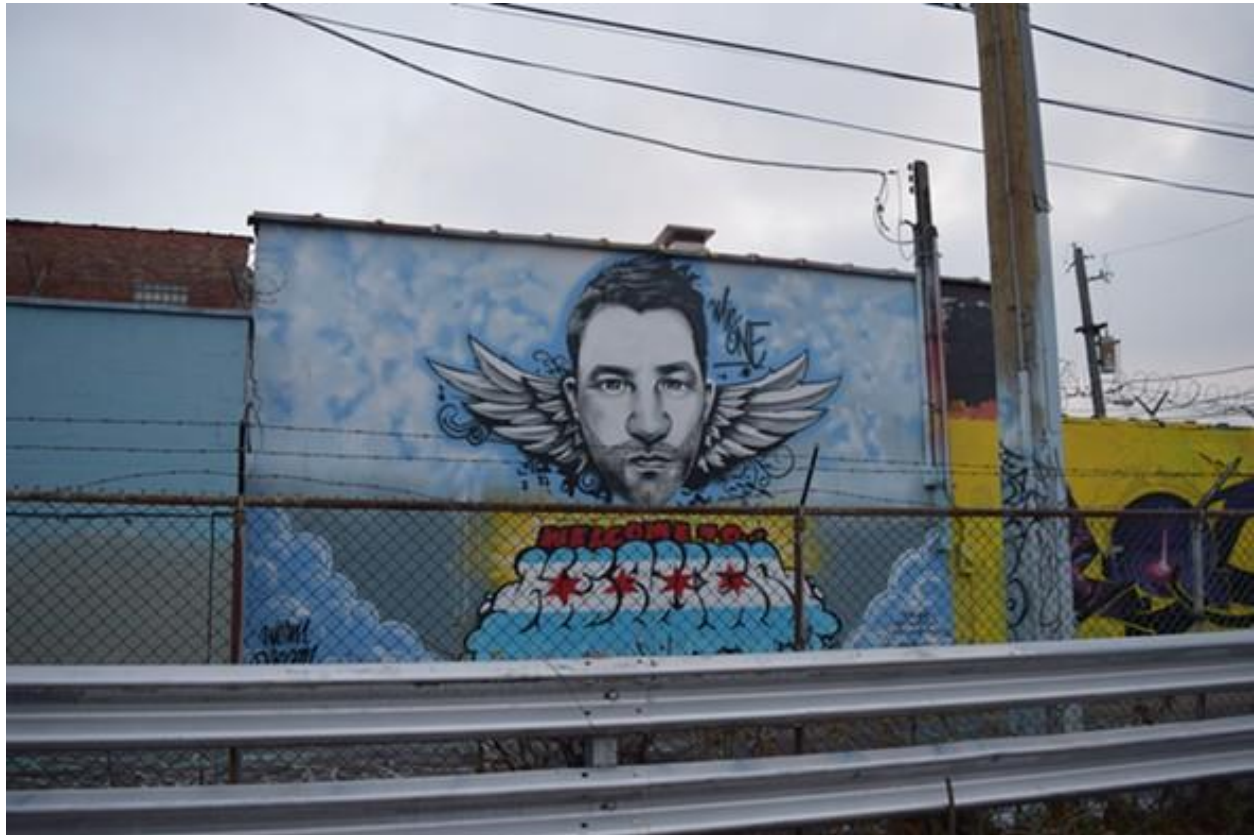


Fig. 1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbCTgwZeDZc>

This essay explores the career of rapper Mic One, placing his suicide in the context of a white underground rap movement in Chicago.<sup>1</sup> Offering a close reading of Jacob Parson's mural commemorating Mic One's death, I argue that Mic One and the DJ with whom he worked, Chad Sorenson (also known as Risky Bizness), utilized the history of Chicago, particularly Graham Nash's 1971 hit single, "Welcome to Chicago," to repurpose Nash's lyrics for Mic One's 1998 album, "Who's the Illest?" (Nelson). In contrast to Nash's melioristic paean to political protest, Mic One situates his song in "Ira's," a local establishment where Mic One's father and other policemen drink off the stress of their job, one that would have been unknown to the Salford-born Nash. I then treat *Chicagoland*, a CNN documentary highlighting the mayoral candidacy of Rahm Emanuel and his police lieutenant Gerry McCarthy. Robert Redford's CNN docu-drama, *Chicagoland*, is a Mary Poppins style narrative of redemption, focusing only on the gang-related violence challenging students at Christian Fenger Academy, a public high school in the Roseland neighborhood of Chicago's far South Side. Mic One's repurposing of Nash's hit, shows how Mic One's rap adds depth to Graham's rock and roll song, even as Mic One's suburban origins in Portage Park complicate the picture of authenticity and insider knowledge the song so triumphantly claims (Hamilton 2016). Despite his mural, Mic One has become an invisible man, a Facebook phenomenon, or hologram (micone, Facebook). Of the 15 samples of Nash's hit, Mic One's is not even mentioned. Groups that are mentioned include: "Gangsta Nation," by Westside Connection (Ft. Nate Dogg) (2009); "The Truth," by Beanie Sigel (2000); "Where You At," by The Rascals (Ft. KRS-One); "Fick Nicht Mit Uns," by Kool Savas, Die John Bello Story 2 (2011); "Giovane e pazzo" by Cubb Dogo; "Prison Break" (Arkham Escapology), by Kaos One; and "Went die Gutenbruhsterben!?" by Fler (Whosampled). Since it aired in 1998, Mic One's rap has gained worldwide significance, transforming a song about "Chicagoland" politics into a meditation on learning to live in a gritty and demanding urban space.

## I

### **Taking the Blue Line**

A commuter on the blue line in November 2017 might have seen a mural by graffiti artist Jacob Parsons in Chicago, honoring the death of Mike Malinowski. From 1998 to 2008, Mike lit up the night club scene as "Mic One." He was a member of Noise Pollution in the 1990s and a

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Prof. Blackhawk Hancock of the Department of Sociology at DePaul University, who shared his extensive knowledge of hip hop culture and introduced me to Chad Sorenson. This article would not have been possible without him. Gaucheries and errors are mine alone. A URC and AIC grant from DePaul University assisted in the research undertaken for this article. My thanks to the Provost's office, in particular Provost Marten L. denBoer, Associate Provost Lawrence Hamer, and Douglas Petcher, for their timely support, and to Prof. Tatiani Rapatzikou for inviting me to participate in her well-organized conference "The Politics of Space and the Humanities" Conference, in December 2017, at Aristotle University, which led to the drafting of this essay; thanks also to Prof. Smatie Yemenedzi-Malathouni for her helpful editing.

frequent performer at the now shuttered Abbey Pub on Elston Avenue. His funeral attracted over 4,000 people.

The mural is blue and white, the colors of heaven, but also, oddly enough, those of the Chicago Police department. Mike's father was a policeman. The mural depicts Mike's decapitated head with wings. Underneath it are the words, "Welcome to Heaven."

The *Chicago Reader* explains that Jacob Parsons, a Chicago visual artist and hip hop musician who goes by Dream (he styles it "Dr3am"), came up with the design for the mural shortly after Malinowski died. "We went to high school together back in '92, '93," Parsons says. "We came up in the same circles; we're both hip hop artists. I had the pleasure of recording with him many years ago. His first concert was my first concert. Parsons wanted to get a mural up as soon as possible, but graffiti artist Flash ABC, who maintains the permission wall on behalf of the Artistic Bombing Crew, suggested holding off until November, when the piece could stay up for longer" (Galil).

Yet, "reading" the *Chicago Reader* is enough to remind us that we are in a post-graffiti world. Now murals are all the rage. Permission is given to graffiti (or graf) artists. They have their say, but not always in the place or time frame they desire. Mic One died in July, for example, but his mural went up in November 2017. "The mural will greet Blue Line riders through March—if you take the train to O'Hare during the holidays, you'll be able to see Mic One's face flanked by angel wings against a sky-blue background" (Galil). The phrase is exemplary: "will greet." One can almost hear the intonations of "Boss" Daley's boosterism. Suicide mural as Christmas shopping decoration. Midwest nice meets American gothic. Still, the city soldiers on celebrating one of its own. Intramural and extramural intentions meet as a private epitaph in graffiti inhabits public space.

### **Chicago Anagrams and Genealogies**

Mike was the son of Juanita, née Flocca, and Robert F. Malinowski, C.P.D. C.P.D. stands for Chicago Police Department, but this information, provided by the Chicago Tribune's obituary, is not enough to explain his peculiar fate. And so, I sought out Chad Sorenson, who led me on a tour of Chicago graf. We began in Pilsen and ended in Logan Square, with the mural honoring Mike. Invariably, the best graf in most cities can be found near auto-mechanic yards. This is perhaps because, by some irrefutable logic, mechanics fix cars while graf artists fix souls. Or, maybe, it is just because the real estate is so cheap.

Nothing illustrates the politics of space more eloquently. Graf is a protest against the cutting of after-school arts programs, the defunding of public schools, and the rise of charter schools, named after the sometimes crooked business owners who sponsor them. Captains of industry and charter schools profit off of the educational system's alleged failures. Those alleged CPS (Chicago Public Schools) failures produced Chance the Rapper and an ethos of style and personality that suburbanites and the advertising industry emulate. Sorenson, Mic One's DJ also known as Risky, explained this. It was perhaps fitting that we ended our tour in a garbage-strewn alley, staring at a wall.

MCs are shamans. They raise spirits, control flow. They bleed away memories of the day. “Risky,” Chad’s tag or given name, explained that Mike Malinowski’s success stemmed from his generosity. It is not hard to discern it even in Chad himself, who lovingly and warmly details the life of his close friend without snarky asides. Is it too naïve to say one finds such warmth more often in a graf artist than in Ivy League graduates? The souls of the former have not been crushed, or at least not crushed in the same ways; they are not “excellent sheep,” to use William Deresiewicz’s prescient phrase, taught to hew a particular line. These Americans have not jumped through others’ hoops. One discerns such things from Risky’s slant of the head. Call it a sensibility, how two humans interact. As Todd Boyd put it, “to me, hip-hop is about community. People talk about my hood, my projects, my niggaz, my crew, my fam, my peeps. You get these communal references throughout hip hop . . . maybe it functions differently than it did in the ‘60s and ‘70s, but that’s to be expected, because we’re dealing with a new generation of individuals” (qtd. in Neal and Forman 436). It was in just such a way that I learned the origins of Mic One, his close musical partner and collaborator in concerts at the Abbey Pub, a short block away from the house where I once lived on 3812 Whipple Street.

### **Welcome to Chicago: Graham Nash in 1971 versus Mic One in 1998**

Mic One’s version of “Welcome to Chicago” begins with a few strains of Johann Sebastian Bach:

Though your brother’s bound and gagged  
 And they’ve chained him to a chair  
 Won’t you please come to Chicago just to sing?  
 In a land that’s known as freedom  
 How can such a thing be fair?  
 Won’t you please come to Chicago?  
 For the help that we can bring

The words are hard to make out. They are a rough draft of a telephone conversation with Stephen Stills and Neil Young. Graham Nash wanted them to join him to protest the trial of the Chicago 8, beaten by police protestors for inciting a riot during the Democratic National Convention (Nash, *Wild Tales* 198). The “eight” included Rennie Davis, David Dellinger, John Froines, Tom Hayden, Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, Bobby Seale, and Lee Weiner. Judy Collins, Norman Mailer, Noam Chomsky, and other prominent figures supported the defendants. Nash’s job was to raise money to defend them in court. The lawyers were William Kunstler, Leonard Weinglass, Julius Hoffman (Judge), Tom Foran, and Richard Schultz (Nash, *Wild Tales*, 198).

The song includes a reference to Bobby Seale, bound and gagged by Judge Julius Hoffman during the court proceedings, a founding member of the Black Panther Party, in 1966, with Huey P. Newton. Shaman Mic One summons these voices. One can hear the swell of the prelude, an epic invocation, until the shade of Mic One speaks, like a voice from Dante’s *Inferno*:

Welcome to the city that made me,  
 Place I grew up in, city that's crazy  
 Where gun shots are busted,  
 Place I'm in love with  
 Place that's corrupted  
 Place that gave birth to the mc not to fuck with

Place of city lights, sun in one shines  
 Place that isn't right, we're accustomed to crime  
 Where Daley went crazy, back in '69  
 And Pops was just a rookie standing on the front line

It's the land that inspires me, land to call home  
 Land with the basement, Dr. Wax and Gramophone  
 With fake duds and hustlers, and o.gs. roam  
 The land that's well known as the throne of Al Capone  
 It's the land of lake shores, where the wind blows steady  
 And the snow falls heavy, and the heat kills many  
 Town like none, place that I know  
 This is the windy city  
 Welcome to Chicago

The deadness of Mic One's tone deliberately undermines the plea: "Please come to Chicago / For the help that we can bring." "For the help that we can bring" to whom? To Mic One? He is already there, luxuriating in a "land that inspires me." To Bobby Seale? He's long gone, now a millionaire on the lecture circuit. Perhaps Mic One sings to nobody at all, or the ghost of Graham Nash, as Natalie Cole once sung to Nat King Cole, sampling her father's voice: "Unforgettable, that's what you are..." In any case, "Welcome to Chicago" is dedicated to those who no longer sing or speak for themselves. The tension between words like "who," "that," and "whom" will become relevant as the song progresses, like a weary grammar lesson reasserting its importance.

There are at least two voices in this song, as in the Natalie Cole recording of "Unforgettable". Mic One samples Graham Nash only to undermine him or honor his legacy. Against such "hippocracy," to adapt Kurt Cobain's clever pun (2003), Mic One delivers a contrapuntal, percussive, gangsta rap version of what life is really like in Chicago. But here is the catch. Against all logic, of liberalism and leftist feeling, Mic One offers his rap song from the cop's perspective! At the song's climactic point, an anvil chorus bangs away:

But things can get ugly, city streets are no joke  
 Cause the city's held down by the people that votes

It's a place of attitude, we thinking we're safe  
 From heralds to the palace this is each and every day  
 The real cops went to Ira's to drink the pain away

How did we get to this moment, where one cannot think between the pain of the alcohol and the pain on the street? More importantly, whose pain are we being asked to experience? What happened to the humanity of the people, "the people that votes," who err in their choices, even as they mangle the grammar of a democracy informed by an educated public. "Who" has become "that"; an individual humanist doing his job as a policeman has become transformed into a political constituency, the very bread and butter of Chicago ward politics.

The deliberate remixing of "Welcome to Chicago," Mic One's anachronistic scratching on vinyl, recalls the Jamaican DJ Kool Herc, who first extended breaks before starting a song, but the politics of Mic One are far different from Kool Herc's. Mic One directs our sympathies to the cops in the bars, his own father. The song strives for an affirmation worthy of Frank Sinatra's "My Kind of Town"; one that reclaims Chicago (small town, not city) from foreigners, who welcome you to Chicago without really residing there. Sinatra's is the voice of the New Jersey tourist, the rat packer passing through. So too, for Nash, Young, and Crosby to take them in reverse order. Chicago is a place to "come to." A place to visit, but not to stay. Chicago's "dying / to get better." It just might with a little help from its British and Canadian friends. Rock 'n roll as Methodist revival meeting.

When Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, and others arrived in Chicago with their entourage of lawyers, including William Kunstler and poet Alan Ginsberg, however, they were not met with gentle people with flowers in their hair. They found themselves charged with three years of jail time for crossing state lines with intention to incite a riot. They may have won their appeal, but Jerry Rubin wrote "Do It: Scenarios of the Revolution" (1970) in the Cook County jail. Boss Daley had his way.

### **Chicago's Kiss of Death: Dante's Beatrice as Femme Fatale**

In "Welcome to Chicago," the relentless beat abruptly stops. For a minute the song dissolves into a phantom image of the city kissing Mic One. The kiss might be his girlfriend's kiss of death, for all we know, shortly before sending Mic One's spirit aloft. Perhaps, it is Mic One's muse, the city itself, a Beatrice for this Dantesque rust-belt: "She licked the lips, and kissed me with the breeze / So as we proceed, I hope you people follow / You know the motto, welcome to Chicago."

In the three years prior to Mic One's staged, Werther-like suicide, several film heroes suddenly sprouted wings: Black Swan; Bird Man, Lady Bird. Tattoos on the tail-bone of Chicago women often depict angel wings. "You know the motto, welcome to Chicago." There is, in the hip hop community, a desire to find a gentler space, one far from Gangsta rap, anger, and mocked up extroversion that Mic One summoned for his gigs. This is hip hop as group therapy.

Criminalized on walls, graffiti has moved to the tattoo parlor. Tattoos are the new graf. These are the wings that sprout around Mic One's head in the mural in Logan Park that honored him.

What we really have here, perhaps, is a remixing of Nash through the lens of a depressed and anxious MC; one whose understanding of politics is filtered through the experiences of his father, who served as a rookie cop under Boss Daley. "And pops was just a rookie standing on the front line." It's always a dangerous thing to write under the sign of the father. For this reason, few rappers do. When Mic One does, the effect is preternatural. It is as if Mic One were there with his father when Graham Nash welcomed all liberals to Chicago. He missed the witticisms of Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin and Lee Weiner, who served as sociologist Harold Becker's research assistant at Northwestern; the snide antics of the Vietnam protestors; and the stale professionalism of the judge who condemned them to jail. But that is about all he missed. What he gained was a community for which he served as a Chicago shaman, a person struggling to levitate not the Pentagon, as Allen Ginsberg goofily tried to do, but the law enforcement officials who surveyed Boss Daley's realm, where, as a child, Daley had belonged to the Hamburg Athletic club, which made a point of beating up such young wanderers as Langston Hughes, when Hughes had the temerity to cross Wentworth Avenue and enter Daley's native Bridgeport (Cohen and Taylor 29-30, 189). Was Chicago worth defending? Mic One's Chicago certainly was not Graham Nash's. Though he was from Portage Park, Mic One knew the city well. It was a city of frail shoulders, no longer able, without a little help from his friends, to sustain the grim, gray middle class values of Chicago's north side, or Mic One, for that matter.

A simple mural dedicated to a DJ who committed suicide tells us more about the politics of space in Chicago than public media can do. "It's dying / to get better," Graham Nash says of Chicago ("We Can Change the World"). But is it? And who will do this missionary work? Perhaps we need to count Chicago out of the high profile "We are the World" klieg lights, from Bono, U2, and Bob Geldof, noble as their efforts may be. Perhaps one has to live in Chicago to understand it, as KRS-One once said of the culture of rap (Forman 258). Forman notes how, by 1987, "rap acts such as KRS-1, Eazy-E, and Ice" were part of "the privileging of localized experience" (258). No instant expertise or fly over acts by commercial rock stars—the present essay included. When Mic One rapped back to Graham Nash, he did so with the "flow" of a person who grew up in and around Daley's Chicago (his upbringing in Portage Park is crucial here, undermining the essentialism of the all-knowing resident). His was a love poem, but also a hate poem. It is a welcome that is also an exit. His film noir riff on Graham's "Welcome to Chicago" is similarly double-voiced, overlooked, and shot through with contradictions, like most works of beautiful pessimism. "Welcome to Heaven" counters that fate. Viewed from one perspective, the mural is a piece of saccharine "niceness"; viewed from another, the mural courageously challenges the Christian proscription against suicides entering heaven. "Abandon all hope ye who enter here," would be more appropriate.

Four thousand people showed up for his funeral, all the way out in the suburb of Norridge, yet the lyrics of Mike's song have not been included in any magazine that I know. Nor was his conservative, realistic, and film noir riff on Graham's "Welcome to Chicago" noted by other

recording artists. The perspective of a Chicagoan, honored in his own city by a public wall, is thus welcome and more than welcome. For the larger world has been blind to Mic One's artistic achievement. If Mic One was trying to get to heaven, he ended up being lifted up there by his friends, all 4,000 of them, two of whom painted his moment of fame on an alley wall, a kind of fallen Icarus; or perhaps, a fallen Catherine of Wuthering Heights, who found that heaven was not good enough for him, and he ended up smack dab in the middle of Logan Square. If a Chicago alley is heaven however, then God preserve us. Even my boosterism does not go that far.

### **The Poetry of Hip Hop**

The mural honoring Mic One teaches us the beautiful terror of hip hop, its oxymoronic ugliness of worship and disdain. Hip hop is not simply repetition, sampling, and copying. It is not a degraded art form, as some imagine, but a new realism, a neo-realism. The poetry of Mic One should be remembered, like the mural that honors him, for its poignant description of what Chicago means to him. Other artists pay their homage to his original re-purposing of Nash's song by rap songs he directly inspired, such as Beanie Sigel's "The Truth," David Gilmour's homage to internet Gary McKinnon (with Chrissie Hynde), and Ice Cube's "Gangsta Nation." Though it may not deserve such artists as Mic One, Chicago is the better for having had them. Mic One's soulful rap was produced through the hard crucible of Chicago's no-nonsense, and often racist ways. In taking an art form derived from gangsta rap and giving voice to the beleaguered police department that hangs out at Ira's, Mic One explored the truth of both sides of the thin blue line that holds together the United States of America.

## II

My previous discussion of the suicide of Mic One begs the larger question of white rap. To what extent can Caucasian artists appropriate a form of art made popular by African-Americans? In the second half of this essay, I interrogate such questions by examining, albeit briefly, Public Enemy, and the CNN documentary *Chicagoland*.

### **The Black CNN**

Chuck D has called rap music the black CNN. As a member of Public Enemy in the 1980s, Chuck D was an articulate progenitor of a form of music often derided for its misogyny, a view brilliantly contextualized by Tricia Rose, Imani Perry, and historian Robyn Kelley (1997). The ghettoization of African-American music in the United States, with its race records and "Black Swan" label dating back to the careers of Ethel Waters and Bessie Smith in the 1920s, helps explain initial attitudes towards ragtime, jazz, and other art forms; a trajectory of what Eric Lott has termed *Love and Theft* (1993). Who speaks for the Negro? Or, to put it in James Baldwin's latest terms, "I am not your Negro" (Peck) (Raoul Peck's documentary, *I Am Not Your Negro*, is based on an unfinished manuscript by James Baldwin, "Remember this House." It is narrated by



actor Samuel L. Jackson). The question has been broached by Edward Said's *Orientalism* and post-colonial studies, and reframed by Gayatra Spivak (Sharp 2008). It is also central to the question raised by Chuck D and the same question raised and answered by Said in his epigraph to *Orientalism*: "they do not represent, they must be represented," a quotation from Marx's *Eighteenth of Brumaire*.

Yet, representation is a hotly contested topic in the United States at a time of rising essentialism. Stevie Wonder has memorably defended Bruno Mars against the charge of cultural appropriation, by saying that artists do not need to apologize for being influenced by, and acknowledging, their predecessors. "God created music for all of us to enjoy. We cannot limit ourselves by people's fears and insecurities," Wonder noted (qtd. in Moye). "Mars, whose mother is Filipino and his father Puerto Rican and Jewish, has made a career with songs based on musical forms that are historically and traditionally African-American, according to CNN" (Moye). In a different, but parallel manner, Eminem has addressed the question of rap, authenticity, and race in memorable ways:

I'm so sick and tired / of being admired / that I wish that I / would just die or get fired / and dropped from my label / let's stop with the fables / I'm not gonna be able / to top on "My name is" and pigeonhole into some poppy sensation to cop me rotation to rock and roll stations / and I just do not got the patience / to deal with these cocky Caucasians / who think I'm some bigger who just tries to be black / 'cause I talk with an ac / cent and grab on my balls / so they al / ways keep asking the same fuckin' questions. / What school did I go to? / What 'hood I grew up in? / The why, the who, what, when, the where and the how till I'm grabbing my hair and I'm tearing it out. (Rodman 189)

The future of white rap, of course, is central to any assessment of Mic One's representation of Bobby Seale, bound and gagged to a chair in the Chicago courtroom. Shocking as this image is, and it is hard to erase Seale as a synecdoche for Chicago's racial politics, my focus here is on Chuck D's statement about black art.

What one sees in the repackaging of black art forms, as Imani Perry points out in *Prophets of the Hood*, is a transformation of black self-expression. In *Prophets of the Hood*, Perry argues that rap is a black art form. "Hip hop music is black American music," Perry notes. "Even with its hybridity: the consistent contributions from nonblack artists, and the borrowings from cultural forms of other communities, it is nevertheless black American music" (10). She contrasts her point of view with that of Paul Gilroy (2005; 1993). Tricia Rose memorably called rap *Black Noise* (1994; 2008). The censorship of the Two Live Crew, as Houston Baker pointed out (2005), missed, through a process of instant expertise, any sensitive reading of the lyrics of black rap such as Perry has provided, any willingness to suspend disbelief and consider the message of this black version of CNN. KRS-One has similarly noted that critics need to understand the culture of hip hop in order to provide informed opinions.

There are differences, after all, discernible even within a pre-conceived category as easily dismissed as “rap.” More recent voices on the rap scene, such as Chance the Rapper, for example, run as far from the direction provided by Public Enemy as possible, while maintaining a desire to improve society and address social injustice. As Chance the Rapper put it, “where are Katie Couric and Matt Lauer when you need them?” It is a hurricane down here, he says of the Chicago hood. “I can’t necessarily save everybody that’s my age,” Chance says, “because people gotta make their own choices. I can’t worry about what my contemporaries are doing. I have to worry about the future of Chicago.” Recently, Chance the Rapper gave 1.5 million dollars to the Chicago Public Schools and an additional, substantial donation to improve mental health treatment in the city (Best). He has also raised 20 million dollars to support CPS. As one newspaper reported, “Chicago native and Grammy winner Chance the Rapper announced on Friday that his non-profit organization Social Works has raised \$2.2 million that will be given to 20 CPS schools for arts education programs” (“Chance the Rapper”).

### **Sleepwalking through American History**

Chance the Rapper’s effort to “unite” America is as old as the Civil War itself. It recalls the French-Indian Wars, or, perhaps, Charles Brockden Brown’s novel of memory and forgetting, *Edgar Huntly, or Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* (1988). In Brockden Brown’s novel, an Irish immigrant, named Edgar Huntly, weeps as he buries a corpse, unable to acknowledge the ritual murder that has led to the founding of his country. He does so under an Elm Tree, which recalls William Penn’s betrayed treaty with American Indians. Read metaphorically, the novel explores the repressed voices of “Old Deb,” a metaphor for the Indigenous people repressed, exploited, and converted by Christian missionaries. Brown’s sleepwalking hero becomes an allegory for America’s founding. Like Logan’s lament, famously recorded by Thomas Jefferson in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, the voice of the subaltern—Indigenous people, African-Americans, women—is always represented, silenced, talked over and talked about, like Phyllis Wheatley, America’s “first” African-American poet, interviewed by a number of white colonists, including Thomas Hutchinson, to see if she is capable of writing the poems that bear her name (Gates). Gates asserts, “On October 8, 1772, a small, delicate African woman, about eighteen years of age, walks into a room, perhaps in Boston’s Town Hall, the Old Colony House, to be interviewed by eighteen gentlemen so august that they could later allow themselves to be identified publicly ‘as the most respectable characters in Boston.’” Jefferson had his doubts about Wheatley, even as he fathered children, in secret, by Sally Hemings (Gordon-Reed 2009). The American racial experiment, covered over by Mic One’s “rap,” is precisely this act of love and theft that Eric Lott so insightfully describes in his history of minstrelsy in America.

### **The White CNN**

To get some purchase on these acts of misrepresenting the African-American experience in the United States, one has only to watch *Chicagoland*. Executive produced by Robert Redford and Laura Michalchshyn of Sundance Productions, and award-winning filmmakers Marc Levin

and Mark Benjamin of BCTV, each episode in the series aired on “eight successive Thursdays, beginning March 6, 2014, at 10:00 p.m. ET and PT” (“CHICAGOLAND Roars”). This eight-part CNN mini-series featured one young principal’s efforts to transform Christian Fenger High School, from a poor-performing violence-ridden high school on the South Side into a flagship school. The school had become notorious. In 2012, an innocent honors student was beaten to death on live television because he walked between rival gangs. With help from Rahm Emanuel and Billy Dec, the charismatic principal, Liz Dozier, raises the consciousness of her TV audience about what public education needs to look like to make Chicago a less divided city. Dozier describes herself as the child of a black father and white, Catholic mother—Christian missionaries themselves—who stayed on the South Side, looked at the problem of public education squarely, and did everything but encourage arts education. One of her charming, if benighted, ideas for school spirit is “Pajama Day,” with her own vice-principal courageously refusing to dress up in such a manner, even for school pride. It is only after watching Robert Redford’s production that one can begin to understand what led Chuck D to call rap music the Black CNN.

The documentary treats the mayor and police chief, as well as the local police lieutenant in Fenger’s district as saviors charged with reversing a century of failed policies. The boom and bust cycles of urban renewal begun under Lyndon Johnson’s administration, culminating in the rise of Cabrini Green had the unforeseen, but all too predictable effect of creating, through poverty, one of the richest (and most misogynist) art forms that America has ever seen. The violence blacks perpetrate on blacks is, rather, the sop thrown to the viewer, the reward for taking an interest in what is happening on the South Side of Chicago. For, to be sure, it is a passing interest: most money has been funneled off to Charter Schools, the “voucher” program that has disenfranchised public education. The audience of *Chicagoland*, like the producers who created it, is a liberal one, in all the multifarious meanings of that word. The intention is to create sympathy, perhaps even pity, for the poor children who are just trying to get an education. At the same time, the CNN series was widely criticized for staging supposedly dramatic encounters between Rahm Emanuel and his police department as they attempt to control a spiraling crime wave; others noted “feel good” moments in which the mayor adopts a talented youth and brings him to work at city hall, as if *Chicagoland* had morphed into a Frank Capra film (Hayden 2014).

If money is what unites the eight episodes of *Chicagoland*, the sound most often heard on this show are gunshots and police sirens. The police chief is inevitably “on the go,” surveying his sad domain with a relentlessly cheerful sense of purpose. Like some campy version of *Fireman Sam’s Busy Day* (1994), *Chicagoland* is a fable for grownups, a Stan Lee cartoon. The producers of the show, the mayor—all of them are so very busy, with so little purpose. Emanuel’s signature move, for example, was to close 49 public schools (Epton and Courtney 2018; Davey 2015; Davey and Bosman 2015), making the insidious walk of the little victims towards their elementary schools Bleake, an instance of the old sacrificing the young. The children receive a police patrol, for which they are grateful, but more Americans died of street violence in the years of the CNN documentary (2014) than they did in the imperialist wars in Iraq.

Spike Lee offered an even grimmer portrait of the South Side when he produced *Chi-raq*, a story line based on Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, a classical Greek comedy play in which women withhold sex from their husbands as punishment for fighting in the Peloponnesian War. Local hip hop artists were more skeptical of these apocalyptic, self-serving narratives that smack of limousine liberalism. Chance the Rapper dismissed the film *Chi-raq* as an insult to women. Journalism missed the street verities that artists like Chance the Rapper and Mic One understood. From its lofty perch in a distant state on the East Coast, for example, the *New York Times* magisterially endorsed Rahm Emanuel as a visionary mayor, only to backtrack when Karen Lewis of the Chicago Teacher's Union exposed his ham-fisted, corporate approach to public education's failures as untenable.

These doomsday reporters all strive to out-do each other in painting a portrait for which the sitter, Chicago, did not sit long enough. *Chicagoland* is perhaps best summed up by the high dudgeon, modest proposal of one white journalist, "I mean, if they are killing each other, doesn't that kind of solve the problem?" she asks hopefully. "No, I'm not even going to answer that question," the police commissioner, Garry McCarthy, says, but what is the purpose of policing an area that has become so hopelessly disenfranchised? One can gain insight into this confrontation between journalist and police commissioner by considering a contemporary film. In a dystopic fantasy film entitled *The Purge*, the President of the United States permits 12 hours of killings on Staten Island to lessen the tax burden. Has killing become a form of entertainment? *The Purge* encourages its viewers to wonder. Is such under-reported killing on the South Side of Chicago what Chuck D had in mind when he referred to the white CNN?

As an example of what I am calling under-reporting, I offer the following. Reportedly, the crime rate in Chicago, during the filming of CNN's *Chicagoland*, dropped under McCarthy's tenure, from 525 in 2011, to 505 in 2012, and 415 in 2013. In fact, police commissioners reported aggravated assaults by the number of incidents, not the number of people involved, journalists contend. In addition, the police re-categorized homicides as undetermined and then classified them with the previous year's statistics (Gorner). A 2012 audit by the Chicago Inspector General determined that the Chicago Police Department had under-counted aggravated assault and aggravated battery victims by 25 percent. McCarthy attributed the error to the prior police superintendent, Jody Weiss, but the practice, exposed in 2012, continued through 2014 as reported by the *Chicago Tribune*. Mayor Rahm Emanuel fired McCarthy following the fall-out from the shooting of Laquan McDonald, but was himself responsible for silencing the media regarding the payout to McDonald's family. Most recently, Emanuel ended his bid for a third term as Chicago's mayor, weeks before the McDonald vs. Van Dyke verdict on this police shooting ("City Hall Empties"). So controversial was the trial that DePaul University shut down its campus at 1:30 p.m. on the Friday the verdict was announced (Bryan and Mihalopoulos 2018).

Fenger High School does not exist in a vacuum, but is part of a larger culture of disaffection and mismanagement of admittedly intractable problems. Lee McCullum III was one of Liz Dozier's most beloved students. He appears in 2014, on CNN's *Chicagoland* series, as a Fenger

High School prom king, as a former “street kid” turned student leader. A year later, he is back on television, walking with a cane. It turns out that McCullom III had been shot in the leg like his father, McCullom II, a victim of gang warfare that predates the high school student’s birth. CNN portrays Dozier as a woman with a big heart who cares about McCullum, her success story, but the triumphalist narrative comes too soon. In 2016, McCullum was found shot to death, just two years after the show aired (Eltagouri et al. 2016).

### **Black Panthers, Then and Now**

McCullum’s death seems almost pre-ordained, passed down, from one generation to another. So too are the songs “Welcome to Chicago,” as sung by Graham Nash and Mic One, linked, fused, sampled, and combined. In 1971, Bobby Seale was bound and gagged during the trial of the Chicago 8. The number “8” was unceremoniously changed to “7”; hence the famous moniker “Chicago 7,” because Bobby Seale was tried separately, quietly removed from his white brothers of Chicago. In 1971 and 1998, Seale is the central metaphor that both Graham Nash and Mic One treat. “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented,” as Edward Said put it. Seale and McCullum are the true legacy of the Black Panthers, not the feel-good narrative of African neo-futurism, however artfully conceived. In Richard J. Daley’s Chicago, Seale cannot speak. “Black Panther,” by contrast, is nothing but a Disneyland movie, like *Chicagoland*, a redemptive comic strip.

Let me explain. Stan Lee and Jack Kirby “created the character of Black Panther in 1966, a year after America’s escalation in Vietnam and several months before the radical political group of the same name. He was the first black superhero in mainstream comics. Other heroes of color had existed, but none of them had super powers like Black Panther did (Weiss). There was a commercial pay off for this Disneyland film that pits ghetto youth against African innocence. “While it may seem like just another superhero movie,” one newspaper reports,

“Black Panther” is a culturally important reflection on race, culture, and Afro-futurism. There have certainly been black heroes before (e.g. “Spawn,” “Blade”), but Ryan Coogler’s third feature film feels so fresh and relevant and with the backing of Marvel Studios, this cinematic phenomenon will reach the maximum amount of people. In fact, it has already shattered a number of box office records, making over \$240 million in just four days.

However, it is a mistake to confuse commercial success, like that of Nash or “Black Panther”, with legitimate political critique.

Mic One wisely avoided the arrant commercialism. He was not a black panther, but a white one.

### **Cinderella in Chicago**

The term “white panther” might seem deliberately tendentious, but my purpose is to provoke an understanding of Mic One’s destiny by considering ex/centric narratives as told through film, television, and song.

Principal Liz Dozier is neither white nor black. Like Barack Obama, she is mixed-race. In the first episode of *Chicagoland*, we see her with a broken heel, holding an umbrella. It is a scene worthy of Mary Poppins. “Principal down,” she says, self-mockingly. Casting herself as a heroine in a war zone, she alludes with a kind of indifferent humor to *Blackhawk Down*, about Mogidushu and the American air-raid against an Islamic fundamentalist militia. She hops along the South Side Street with a broken heel, at once helpless and overpaid. As principal, she received a multi-million dollar grant to turn Fenger into a high-performing high school. If she failed, the CNN special suggests, Fenger would close. Dozier is the Mary Poppins/Wonderwoman of this school. She cares for the kids. Good for her! Who could argue with such a dedication to “the chillen,” in a city so devoted to them, at least when building parks, theatres, and tax break portfolios? More exploitatively, even pederastically, the CNN docudrama shows her exhibiting the smoldering eroticism of a repressed nun as she inquires into the personal lives of her (mostly male) young charges. The show profiles not a single talented teacher. Mugging for the camera, she is the undisputed star. Coquettish with Billy Dec, as she fundraises on his yacht in a bathing suit, she flatters Rahm Emanuel, as if he were Dick Van Dyke or “Big Daddy” in “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.” The CNN special manages to be at once feminist, sexist, and pious—a hat-trick to be sure. Dozier is even depicted doing yoga to complete the hagiographic picture, to relieve her stress no doubt, and boost the ratings. In *Mary Poppins*, the governess’s young children are returned by their governess to their banker father, who learns to give up his patriarchal fantasy of life in an Edwardian home, in order to spend more time with his children. “Let’s go fly a kite” became a mantra of the 1960s, with Julie Andrews (like Dozier) in the title role. But *Chicagoland* has no such happy ending.

### **Graham Nash and the 1960s: Hippie-ocracy and the Roots of Mic One’s Rage**

I invoke *Mary Poppins* not only because of its Graham Nash “teach your children well” narrative, but because transatlantic lessons are cacophonous, signifying in different ways. Rock ’n roll “stars” exhibit nauseating contradictions when they assume a prophetic, sermonizing voice. Joni Mitchell dated Graham Nash long enough to wonder about Nash’s profiting off of American concert tours, while airing his political grievances. Not long after he launched Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young at Chicago’s Auditorium theatre, in August 16, 1969, Mitchell had had enough. She poured a bowl of corn flakes over his head. In response, he spanked her, as he explained in his autobiography *Wild Tales* (Nash 189). Years later, he swore himself in as a naturalized American citizen. As Nash put it, “So if I was going to mention how great the people are in the States, while continuing to criticize the government from the stage—as I did with ‘Chicago’ and ‘Immigration Man,’ and as Crosby did with ‘Long Time Gone’—it seemed only just and honorable that I did it as a citizen . . . it was time to put my mouth where my money was. I consider myself very lucky to be in a country where I can speak my mind as freely as I

do.” Graham hardly silenced himself after his conversion, however, hewing to the well-worn path of liberal discontent:

What an incredible country this is! But I have to admit that the America I live in today is not the country I set out to join, it’s not the country that I fell in love with, and that’s a shocking thing for me to say. I fear America has become a police state, with a military that uses heat weapons against suspected enemies, a police force that pepper-sprays protesters exercising their inalienable rights (I told you I did my homework!), and a justice system that fails to treat its prisoners humanely. (256-57).

Nash’s contrast between the America of the Vietnam era and the “America I live in today” shows how much youthful nostalgia informs his political critique: as a transplanted American, he exhibits the same kind of cultural amnesia as Charles Brockden Brown’s Irish immigrant and Mic One, who grew up in the suburb of Portage Park. Authenticity, it would seem, is hard to come by. Sometimes it is not a mere matter of geography

### **Chance the Rapper, Mic One, and Christian Fenger High school**

Nash was a talented singer and songwriter, but he did not do much to help Chicago. As for the Principal of Fenger, Liz Dozier went on to start her own after school-program, “Chicago Beyond,” leaving the principalship of Fenger to the less self-promoting, but more effective, Richard Smith. Under Smith, to take only one slice of the equation, Fenger has consistently competed successfully in Poetry Slams like “Louder than a Bomb.” Two recent stars are Jeremy Waldron (now with the U.S. Navy), who has been featured in *New York* magazine, and Steven Wells, whose verse is equally powerful, sensitive, and dramatic (Watson). The Fenger “Titans” continue to produce a first-rate literary magazine. Elizabeth Elie and Charles Miles are among many unsung heroes who have led Fenger students to express themselves with eloquence and passion, building a corps of talented poets through arts integration in the Chicago Public schools. They deserve their own television program, if only positive news would get the same ratings as negative, if only hard-working “followers” received as much attention as over-hyped “leaders.” When I visited Fenger over a three-month period in the fall of 2017, I was struck by these hard-working teachers, the immaculate facilities, and the kindness, joy, and creativity of their students taught by DePaul’s MA in English student, Jake Spangler. Lizzie G, a female rapper, worked with Fenger students to apply for over \$15,000 worth of scholarships sponsored by Walgreens.

What one realizes, in looking at the larger picture of Fenger and the mural in Logan Square, is that Mic One’s mural is the rap version of CNN; quietly dignified, like Chance the Rapper, and sustained by the positive values of hip hop, as documented by Jeffrey Chang, Imani Perry, Tricia Rose, and R.D.G. Kelley. They suggest that civic funding of arts programs in the Chicago Public schools is a wiser investment in Chicago’s future than closing or policing them. True civic philanthropy should come in the form of equitably-distributed tax dollars for public schools, not police-led patrols of elementary school children in some ghoulish version of William Blake’s

“Holy Thursday’s” “wise guardians of the poor.” These talented teachers and Principal Richard Smith have shown that the future of civic-mindedness lies with proper cultivation of the written and spoken word, of ex-centric narratives, whether Blake’s or Mic One’s; nuanced visions that can see both sides of the thin blue line.

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