

PRESERVATION FORWARD



2022 Landmarks Illinois Influencer

TONIKA LEWIS JOHNSON

SOCIAL JUSTICE ARTIST

Tonika Johnson is a photographer, social justice artist and life-long resident of Chicago's south side Englewood neighborhood. Her art explores urban segregation and documents the nuance and richness of the Black community to counter media depictions of Chicago's violence. Tonika's work reveals injustices and inequities, past and present, evidenced in the built environment and enshrined in real estate and land use practices, including historic preservation. Her Folded Map Project™ visually connects residents who live at corresponding addresses on Chicago's South and North sides bringing them together in conversation about the city's racial and economic divides and the disparities between communities. The disparities extend to which historic properties in these neighborhoods receive recognition, protection and investment. The relative lack of historically designated properties on the South Side reveals inequities, and needed change, in historic preservation practice and policy. The Folded Map Project™ questions how everyone is socially impacted by racial and institutional conditions segregating the city and challenges viewers to contribute to a solution, including revising or dismantling inequitable financial and real estate regulations. Tonika was selected as the National Public Housing Museum's 2021 Artist as Instigator to expand her investigation through "Inequity for Sale," a project highlighting the living history and legacy of greater Englewood homes sold through Land Sale Contracts in the 1950s and 1960s, which led to the unscrupulous loss of people's homes and equity preventing the generational transfer and building of Black wealth. Tonika's artistic contributions have gained citywide recognition in the last five years, including being named a 2017 Chicagoan of the Year by Chicago Magazine, being exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Rootwork Gallery in Pilsen, the Chicago Cultural Center, the Harold Washington Library Center and at Loyola University's Museum of Art. She is a 2019 Field Foundation "Leader for a New Chicago" and a Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events Cultural Advisory Council member. Tonika is the co-founder of the Englewood Arts Collective and Resident Association of Greater Englewood, and she now serves as the Creative Executive Officer of the Folded Map Project™ nonprofit organization.

