

Artist Statement

"As I explored the landscape of the Flats in preparation for this project, I noticed the enormity and emptiness, in stark contrast to the stories of a close-knit neighborhood where everyone knew each other, watched each other's children, and kept their doors unlocked. In addition to the obvious injustice of displacement, this emptiness just gave me a feeling of, 'what a waste.'

"In these photographs, I tried to convey the enormity and weight of this history. I went with people to the locations of their former homes, and asked them to remember their time there, the displacement and the emotions they felt. I then reflected some of the heaviness of their experiences by highlighting the heavy structural elements; I represented the isolation of their displacement with isolated locations; I showed our efforts to see the past– to not let it fade away– by using reflections of present-day buildings.

"The natural disaster of flooding was not even the undoing of this community; it was the manmade disaster of the bulldozers, intimidation, and government misuse of power. By naming it, we have an opportunity to redress some harm, and to create a better process and future for the West Side." – *Elizabeth Leonardsmith, photographer*

Elizabeth Leonardsmith is a photographer who has worked on a range of projects from portraits to landscapes to multi-media social commentary pieces over the past two decades. Her work as an Environmental Justice Organizer at the West Side Community Organization informs her artistic practice; she approaches both organizing and photography with an eye towards speaking out for joy and justice. She lives on the West Side with her wife and three children.