

# Tonika G. Johnson

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## BIOGRAPHY

Tonika Johnson is a photographer/visual artist from Chicago's South Side neighborhood of Englewood. She received her BA in Journalism & Photography from Columbia College Chicago in 2003 and her MBA from National-Louis University in 2005. In 2010, she helped co-found Resident Association of Greater Englewood (R.A.G.E), whose mission is to "mobilize people and resources to force a change in Englewood by identifying barriers, addressing them while promoting positivity through solutionbased approaches" and now she serves as its full-time Program Manager. She was featured in Chicago Magazine as a 2017 Chicagoan of the Year for her photography of Englewood's everyday beauty, countering its pervasive media coverage of poverty and crime. Her "Everyday Englewood," images were exhibited at Loyola University's Museum of Art (LUMA) in early 2018. Her multi-media project, *Folded Map* that shows the disparities among Chicago residents while bringing them together to have a conversation was also exhibited at LUMA July 3rd to October 20, 2018.

WEBSITE: [www.tonikaj.com](http://www.tonikaj.com)

## GRANTS + FELLOWSHIPS

- 2019 - Images & Voices Of Hope (ivoh) Fellow
- 2018 - Propeller Fund Grant
- 2018 - Oppenheimer Grant
- 2018 - The Chicago Community Trust Grant
- 2017 – City Bureau Photography Fellow (Summer)
- 2016 - City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) Individual Artists Program (IAP) Grant
- 2013 - Magnum Foundation's SEE POTENTIAL Project Fellow Chicago, IL

## EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 (Summer) – *Folded Map*, Loyola University Museum of Art, Featured Artist, Chicago, IL
- 2018 (Spring) – *Everyday Englewood*, Loyola University Museum of Art, Featured Artist, Chicago, IL
- 2017 (Oct.) - *Alter Call: The Architecture of Black Sacred Space*, RootWork Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 2017 (August) - *Shoot Your Shot: Evolution of Chicago's Street Art + Culture*, RootWork Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 2017 (April – June) – *From the INside*, Harold Washington Library Featured Artist, Chicago, IL
- 2017 (Feb.) – (New Work) *Everyday Rituals*, RootWork Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 2017 (Feb-April) – *Chicago: Places, People & Possibilities*, Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, IL
- 2016 (Oct. 15) – *From the INside*, First Annual Englewood Art Fair featured artist, Chicago, IL
- 2016 - *Urban Geographic*, N'Taaya Dream Boutique at La Petite Cremerie de Paris Paris, France
- 2014 - *Urban Geographic*, featured artist at Kusanya Cafe Chicago, IL
- 2011 - *Black Pearls Exhibition*, Garfield Park Arts Center (GPAC), Indianapolis, IN
- 2011- *WBEZ 3rd Annual Winter Block Party for Chicago's Hip-Hop Art*, Chicago Urban Arts Society Chicago, IL
- 2010 - *Urban Geographic Experience (Solo Exhibition)*, The Movement Studios & Gallery Chicago, IL

## Photo-based Community Engagement

● 2020 – *We, Women* – As an invited photographer to the national "We, Women," social impact photography art project, Tonika will photograph and interview additional "Map Twins," for her *Folded Map* project and host a large-scale, public projection of the video and photographs in Englewood, her home neighborhood on Chicago's South Side. Through open dialogue, the projection will invite audiences to question how they are personally and socially impacted by their city's systemic inequity.

● 2019 (April 16) - *Ain't You Heard – What Happens to A Dream Deferred* was an evening of storytelling through performances, curated large-scale projections, and memories collected at Woods Academy, one of the 16 schools closed in Englewood since 2002. Inspired by Langston Hughes' poem, Tonika and Paola Aguirre organized the event in partnership with Resident Association of Greater Englewood, Borderless Studio, and Creative Grounds. It included curated visual projections depicting Black life during the Great Migration through historic photos of Chicago and the South; a "memory station" asking participants to share their stories related to their journey and belonging in Chicago, plus performances by Tonika and rapper

Roy Kinsey. The event was supported by the curators of Dimensions of Citizenship: Architecture and Belonging from the Body to the Cosmos, the official U.S. entry at the recently concluded 16<sup>th</sup> International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale.

● **2018 (September 14) – Englewood Pop-Up Projection Party**

On Friday, September 14, during and after Englewood's 2<sup>nd</sup> Critical Mass night bike ride, Roll N Peace DaRemix, Tonika Johnson hosted a large scale, site specific projection party in Englewood to celebrate Black culture on Chicago's South Side in partnership with Blvck Vrchives, Borderless Studio, and Exposure for Concerned Black Photographers. The video montage, curated by Tonika, included old family photographs from Englewood residents and historic images of neighboring south side communities.

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

- July 24, 2017 – Photographer for WBEZ's Every Other Hour "In Verse" photo-poetic-crime reporting series

**TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

**2014**

- Academy for Global Citizenship, Chicago Photography Teaching Artist (Dec.- March 2015)
- Pilsen Elementary Community Academy, Chicago Arts & Literacy in Action Afterschool Program Teacher (Oct.-Dec.)
- Charles Evans Hughes Elementary School, Chicago Digital Photography Teaching Artist (Jan.-June)

**2013**

- *Johnson Elementary School, Chicago Introduction to Photography Teaching Artist, (Jan.- June)*
- *Hearst Elementary School Photography Teaching Artist, (April-June)*
- *Pilsen Elementary Community Academy, Chicago Photography Teaching Artist, (Aug.-Dec.) 2012*
- *Hearst Elementary School Arts & Cultural Connections After-School Program, (Aug.-Dec.)*
- *Tilden Career Academy High School Photography Teaching Artist, (June)*
- *Gregory Elementary School Photography Teaching Artist, (Feb.-May)*

**PRESS**

**April 26, 2019 – South Side Weekly, "Ain't You Heard"**

**Feb. 26, 2019 - WBEZ's Morning Shift, "Photographer Tonika Johnson's 'Folded Map' Project Expands Westward"**

**Oct. 15, 2018 - Bad At Sports, "Tonika Johnson & Natasha Ritsma Bring Englewood to the Magnificent Mile"**

**Sept. 16, 2018 - ABC 7's Sunday Morning News, "Folded Map project puts Chicago's Inequities on Display"**

**Sept. 4, 2018 - ABC 7's Windy City Live, "Folded Map Project Capturing the Division of the City"**

**Sept. 25, 2018 - Sixty Inches From Center, "Tonika Johnson Uses Visual Activism to Combat Distorted Truth"**

**Sept. 12, 2018 - Loyola University, "Where North meets South"**

Sept. 10, 2018 - **A Beautiful Perspective, "In racially divided Chicago, 'map twins' break down barriers"**

Aug. 30, 2018 - **WBBM NewsRadio, "Newsmaker Making a difference: Tonika Johnson, Folded Map Project"**

Aug. 30, 2018 - **CITYLAB, "Map Twins' Bridge the Gap in a Segregated Chicago"**

Aug. 26, 2018 - **Chicago Magazine, "Tonika Johnson Bridges Neighborhoods to Break Down Walls of Segregation"**

Aug. 26, 2018 - **LensScratch, "Yvette Meltzer on Tonika Johnson"**

Aug. 14, 2018 - **VICE, "These Powerful Images of Chicago's South Side Are Filled With Love"**

Aug. 14, 2018 - **Next City, "Chicago Segregation Mapping Project Makes Real-Life Connections"**

Aug. 7, 2018 - **WGN Radio Cornerstore Podcast, "Tonika Johnson: Documenting Englewood"**

July 5, 2018 - **ABC 7 Eyewitness News, "Art exhibit looks at Chicago segregation in a new way"**

June 20, 2018 - **Backseat Rider, "Tonika Johnson changing Chicago one map at a time"**

June 8, 2018 - **Newsy, "Artist's Folded Map Project Aims to Break Down Cultural Barriers"**

May 26, 2018 - **U.S. News & World Report, "Chicago Photographer's Project Shows Disparities in the City"**

May 23, 2018 - **WBEZ's Morning Shift, "Folded Map Project Addresses Segregation in Chicago"**

May 22, 2018 - **The Chicago Tribune, "Bid to bridge a segregated city"**

May 21, 2018 - **Chicago Sun-Times Online, "Activist's art project analyzes Chicago's segregation in Folded Map project"**

May 12, 2018 - **WGN's Outside The Loop radio show, "The Folded Map Project"**

Mar. 1, 2018 - **National Geographic, "MFON: Women Photographers of the African Diaspora"**

Jan. 24, 2018 - **The JAM TV, "Englewood: Through An Artist's Lens"**

Jan. 4, 2018 - **CJR "Lens of an Insider: Photographer defies media portrait of Chicago Neighborhood"**

Dec. 2017 - **Chicago Magazine, "2017 Chicagoans of the Year"**

Nov. 28, 2017 - **Windy City Live, "Chicago Magazines Chicagoans of the Year 2017"**

Aug. 2017 - **Chicago Reader Arts & Culture Feature, "Englewood: Beyond the Headlines"**

July 2017 - **WTTW Chicago Tonight, 'Englewood Rising' Campaign a 'Reflection of What Already Exists'**

Mar. 2017 - **The Establishment, "The Role of Photography in Resisting Trump and Racism"**

Feb. 2017 – **Vocalo (91.1FM)**, Featured artist on Morning Amp  
Feb. 2017 – **FOX 32 Good Day Chicago**, “Tonika Johnson examines “Everyday Rituals” in Englewood  
Feb. 2017 – **FOX 32 News (8pm)**, “Chicago Artist Captures the Reality and Beauty of Englewood”  
Jan. 2017 – **South Side Weekly**, Englewood Through My Lens Photo Essay  
Dec. 2016 – **N'DIGO**, Featured Photographer Photo Essay  
Nov. 2016 – **Northwestern’s Social Justice News Network**, Englewood Through My Lens Essay & Photos  
Aug. 2011 - **Chicago Reader**, Published essay “Remembering the Wonder Years,” By: **Tonika Johnson**  
Mar. 2011 - **Chicago Tribune**, “Journalism Program a Study of Perceptions.”

## **COMMUNITY WORK**

### **2017 – Oct. 2018**

#### **Program Manager for Resident Assc. Of Greater Englewood (R.A.G.E.)**

The Resident Association of Greater Englewood (R.A.G.E.) is a grassroots organization whose guiding principle is that the key to improving Englewood is activating more residents to be involved with positive change. Today, R.A.G.E. boasts nearly 300 members however, in November 2010, R.A.G.E. was founded by a collective of 13 residents with Asiaha Butler at the helm. R.A.G.E.’s overarching mission is to convene residents, Englewood’s public officials, business owners, and other organizations to strategize, build their power, promote healing, create community solidarity and tangible solutions while actively serving as a credible source for critical information about Englewood.

### **2013 - 2017**

#### **Program Manager for Growing Home, Inc.**

**Growing Home** is an organic urban farm in Englewood that offers 25 hours per week of paid on-the-job experience and job-readiness training plus the support to conquer issues like criminal records, medical needs, child-care, and housing. Each year Growing Home, Inc. start 40+ people on the path to self-sufficiency and uses their unique model to impact neighborhoods with the greatest need. That’s why its farms are located in Englewood, a community on the South side of Chicago that has been under-served for decades and has extremely high rates of unemployment and poverty, hundreds of acres of vacant lots, and a distinct lack of healthy food choices.

### **2011 - 2012**

#### **Co-Founder & Lead Teacher**

**MEDIA-N-MOTION MNM)** is free, 8 week, youth journalism program for youth in Englewood. During two, two-hour sessions each week for two months, Media-N-Motion created and implemented a news writing & reporting curriculum for three cohorts of 15 middle to high-school students. MNM utilized a variety of effective and professional teaching techniques and methods to assist students in attaining the performance objectives of Media-N-Motion. MNM’s culminating project included a newsletter, written by the youth and a student showcase. Reporter Joel Hood wrote a feature article about Media-N-Motion in the March 02, 2011 issue of the Chicago Tribune titled “Journalism Program : A Study Of Perceptions by Joel Hood.

### **2010 - Present**

#### **Co-Founder of R.A.G.E.**

**Resident Association of Greater Englewood (R.A.G.E.)** is a resident-driven association established to build relationships with fellow residents, Englewood’s public officials, business owners and organizations. R.A.G.E. is a grassroots organization that strategizes to address community problems, creates tangible solutions and actively seeks ways to keep fellow residents informed about the latest news in Englewood, Chicago. R.A.G.E. is the voice speaking out to empower, educate, uplift and motivate fellow residents and stake holders on many of the issues that face the community. R.A.G.E.’s main focus areas are Education/Youth Development, Economic Development and Civic Engagement & Empowerment in the Greater Englewood neighborhood.