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Artist Statement

Not everyone fits in the area where they live, but they have the right to create their own community and spend their life in whatever way they would like to. I named this collection of photographs ‘A place where we belong to’. This series captures the community in Hannibal Square, where a conflicting sense of identity, inaccessibility and isolation is expressed, while also highlighting the sense of community that original residents create for themselves, relieving the resistance they face.

Hannibal Square is an historically African-American community. In recent years, developers have taken advantage of lower property values on the west side, taking control of significant portions of the community, which pushed many of the original residents out. These actions have resulted in many original residents being isolated and unable to engage in the newcoming leisure activities such as high-end restaurants and salons that serve the leisure class, rather than the working class.

My series includes photographs of people as well as particular locations and objects. Exterior images of the newly constructed retail spaces in the business district are constructed to make viewers aware of the isolation original residents feel in the face of many of these newcoming businesses. ‘A place where we belong to’ also includes images of community members gathering in historically African-American owned business, to show that they still have a small space that belongs to themselves. The series is arranged in an order that brings viewers in and out of both of these spaces, which first depicts the inaccessibility of the orginal residents to the new businesses, and then offers images showing members of the neighborhood coming together as a community within long-standing neighborhood gathering spaces, such as barber and beauty shops.

The isolation suggested within the images of the exterior spaces may seem severe, and unethical to many original residents. However, seeing the community that original residents create for themselves softens the issue. This collection of photographs is meant to emphasize that all throughout the neighborhood of Hannibal Square, the original community persists. Long-term residents persevere in the face of the potential isolation brought on by new business and development, still having their own life and finding enjoyment in their community.