

“Black Lives and a River Road” (excerpt)

Njaimeh Njie, 2019

I live right above the Ohio River, off of a thoroughfare called the Ohio River Boulevard...For me, living so close to the Ohio River evokes mixed feelings. The river trail that I like to walk along near my apartment is scenic, yet long stretches of it are flanked by the railroad, warehouses and industrial sites on either side. At home, I drink water from a filtered pitcher because of years of elevated lead levels in Pittsburgh’s water, and I regularly learn about new water threats in the region. I feel a constant push and pull between the things that are good for me and the things that can harm me, but I know my perspective is just one of many.

...I've been thinking about water as a gateway to explore the deeper forces that shape the lives (and livelihoods) of Black people in this region. Black residents have traditionally lived close to the waterways — sometimes by choice, but often because of racist housing and land-use policies. Over the years, the proximity to water allowed access to transit, jobs, bathing, washing, fishing and leisure, but it also placed these communities at a disproportionate risk for flooding, pollution, disease and other issues caused by water.



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Njaimeh Njie is a multimedia producer and founder of the nonfiction storytelling company Eleven Stanley Productions. Njie was named the 2018 Emerging Artist of the Year by the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, and her work has been featured in outlets including CityLab, HuffPost Black Voices, and the Carnegie Museum of Art Storyboard blog. This piece was originally published in Belt Magazine as part of a series about the Ohio River.