

Ms. Sharon Lavigne lives in the epicenter of the oil, gas, and petrochemical industry, and she is fighting them all. One year ago she founded RISE St. James, a faith-based environmental and social justice organization dedicated to protecting St. James Parish from toxic industry. Her work is a matter of life or death--the 20 acres of land that Ms. Lavigne inherited from her grandfather is smack dab in the middle of Cancer Alley, and though she is already surrounded by industry, more pipelines and petrochemical plants are being ushered into her district.

The 4th and 5th Districts of St. James are majority African American, and they were the only districts to be recently and secretly rezoned from residential to "residential/future industrial." Though the environmental racism could not be more pronounced, Ms. Lavigne is fighting to protect the health of all residents along Cancer Alley, including New Orleans and Baton Rouge. Industry and elected officials are trying to wipe these historic communities along the Mississippi off the map, but St. James is rising up with the leadership of Ms. Lavigne protect their health, their homes, and their future.