

STEVEN  
KASHER  
GALLERY

Leonard Smoke was born in the Bronx, New York in 1942. Becoming serious about photography when he started teaching High School Chemistry at Brandeis High School on the upper west side of Manhattan in 1966, he began taking the portraits of his students. Knowing that he would display these prints around the school building, his students were happy to pose. Many of the photos he took were developed in a photography club he instructed at the school. Leonard also did work in his home darkroom. In 1970, he took a darkroom course with George Tice at the New School for Social Research in NYC. During that time, Leonard was invited to exhibit a selection of these pictures in a symposium entitled Social Responsibility and the Photographer at the New School from September 16 to October 1, 1970 with eight other photographers. The pictures have not been seen since that exhibition until 2015 when two pictures were shown in the New York Public Library show Public Eye: 175 Years of Sharing Photography.

Leonard decided to do his photography book N.Y.C. High School Pics 1968-1970 mainly as a glimpse back to a time when our country was experiencing many momentous changes. The United States had just landed on the moon, the Viet Nam war was going strong, and the Civil Rights Movement was forefront. There was much turmoil throughout New York City and the rest of the country.

These photographs not only show the political buttons, dress, hairstyle and graffiti of the times, but also the intense and penetrating character and individuality of the subjects. The events had a profound impact on our consciousness and search for identity. It is a rare glimpse into an inner-city school during this time period.