

# Beaumont photo exhibit highlights Houston's African-American Wards

By **Andy Coughlan**  
CONTRIBUTOR

The human experience is rooted in community. There is a longing to connect with others, to find comfort in a place. In times of social or economic adversity, community offers comfort. Photographer Earlie Hudnall, Jr. is rooted in the people of Houston's African-American Wards, and through his lens we get to experience 40-years of a unique community.

"Earlie Hudnall, Jr.: Homeward" is on display at the Art Museum of Southeast Texas through March 30.

Born in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, Hudnall moved to Houston in 1968, following service as a marine in Vietnam, where he took photos on a Kodak Instamatic between combat missions, to attend Texas Southern University where he earned a degree in arts education.

Art professor John Biggers and professor of philosophy Dr. Thomas Freeman saw potential in Hudnall and encouraged him to continue with his photography. Freeman ran the debate team and employed Hudnall to take photos on school trips. Hudnall was TSU staff photographer from 1970 to 1990, before becoming university photographer in 1990, a position he held until his retirement in 2019.

Hudnall has spent four decades as a documentary photographer and said he is motivated by people and the universality of the human experience.

Hudnall said his grandmother was a storyteller and his father was an amateur photographer.

His grandmother was the community's historian, and he remembers she kept clippings of local prominent events and people. He remembers seeing a clipping about Hattiesburg native Jessie L. Brown, the first African-American pilot to complete the U.S. Navy's basic flight training pro-



Earlie Hudnall, Jr. presents "Homeward," on display at the Art Museum of Southeast Texas through March 30.

gram. Brown was the first Black officer killed in the Korean War when his plane was shot down. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Hudnall said the story made him realize the importance of documenting the history of a community's people.

"Homeward" is a play on words. Hudnall's images look homeward to capture daily life, but they are also taken in Houston's predominantly Black 3rd, 4th and 5th Wards. These tight-knit communities are built on a foundation of respect, church, and values, he said. The photos reflect the archetypes familiar from his childhood.

When Hudnall was in high school his teacher brought some negatives for the students to make contact sheets in the darkroom. Hudnall said remembers the surprise when the image began to appear. From then on, he was hooked on the process, he said.

Hudnall still shoots mainly on film and said he still looks forward to the "surprise." The darkroom process allows him to reconnect with the subject, he said. It allows him to have complete control of the image, something he enjoys. There is an energy that comes from being in the darkroom, with everything in the hands of the developer.

The photographs in "Homeward" have a time-

less quality. The scenes have a universality that transcends time and place, not just because they are in black and white.

"The Cradle" was taken in 1998, but the composition echoes Dorothea Lange's Depression-era photo of a migrant mother. In both images, the children cling to their mother in a scene that would not be out of place in a Renaissance painting.

"Flipping Boy," from 1983, features row houses, each stoop populated by assorted people while a young boy does flips in the street. There is an old-fashioned quality to the image, but it is wonderfully juxtaposed with the skyscrapers in the background. A warm community dwarfed by cold modernity.

"The Music Lesson" is a marvelous image. Young musicians playing on the front porch, the drummer squatting and playing tiles on the floor. The figure on the right stands astride sheet music on the ground, his arms a blur as he conducts this mini orchestra. One can almost hear the music. The photo was taken in 1997, but the joyous community of music is universal.

Like Henri Cartier-Bresson, Hudnall has the ability to make us feel as if we are interlopers in a private moment. He is there to bear witness to the intimacy of people's lives. In "Amanda and Dave," we see a couple lost



"The Music Lesson" by Earlie Hudnall, Jr., part of "Homeward," on display at the Art Museum of Southeast Texas.



"4th Ward, 4th of July" by Earlie Hudnall, Jr.

in a moment. Amanda is smiling brightly, her hand rested on his chest. Dave seems somewhat sheepish, embarrassed, maybe, by a compliment. It is a snapshot of a moment that asks us to speculate where the story will lead.

"4th Ward, 4th of July" and "Boy East Star, Paradise Cemetery South" show us two sides of com-

munity life. The former is a wonderful moment of celebration with family members of all ages laughing, relaxing, enjoying each other. The latter features a funeral. The image is out of focus except for the young boy who pensively stares straight out at us. His expression has a matter-of-fact quality. This is just

part of community life. Hudnall said his goal is simple — to make images that affect people, that make them stop, reflect and remember.

The faces of the people in "Homeward" form a beautiful portrait of a place.

AMSET is located at 500 Main St. in Beaumont. For more, visit [amset.org](http://amset.org).

## GARDENING

# Here's how to sprout your plants from seed this year

By **John Green**  
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GARDENER

Fellow gardeners, we have experienced our coldest temperatures of the season! Luckily, our local meteorologist provided us with numerous warnings to protect the three Ps: pets, pipes and plants from extremely cold weather. Protecting our pets is by far the easiest task—simply move our companions indoors for warmth. The other two require much more effort on our part, especially wrapping water lines, which is laborious but will prove costly if ignored or if you forget to cover one faucet (learned this the hard way last year). Sensitive plants should be relocated into climate-controlled environments, if possible, otherwise layered protection is necessary. Cover sensitive plants (leaves, limbs, trunks) with a fabric, such as burlap. Once wrapped, add another layer of water-resistant material, such as plastic sheeting or a wax-coated material, then secure with twine or tape. Remember to remove the wrapping materials once inclement weather has passed, otherwise the plant will be damaged. Always mulch plants heavily (3- to 4-inches) before a hard freeze (when temperature falls below 28 degrees) to protect the root system.

Let's discuss one of my favorite topics as we get ready for spring (as we are forced indoors due to cold temps), and



Vegetable seedlings are "hardened off," or gradually acclimated to outdoor weather conditions.

that is starting plants from seeds. Many of us enjoy germinating seeds to transplant into our spring vegetable gardens and flower beds. There is an enormous selection of seeds available through mail order catalogues with every seed type imaginable: vegetable, herb or flower.

There are numerous benefits to germinating seeds, with the primary reason being cost. Purchasing seeds is cost effective, since the cost of seeds is much less expensive than buying individual plants. A seed packet (on average) costs about \$2.00 for 20 to 30 seeds. The cost of purchasing a single

plant (to be transplanted), such as a tomato or pepper plant is nearly \$2.00 per plant. Looking to purchase 10 plants? Plan on spending around \$20.00 or so. Gardeners can sometimes get lucky and find lower plant prices or in bargain bins, but this doesn't always meet our needs. Flowering plants have similar costs when plants are small, but the cost dramatically increases with container size.

Another reason to germinate seeds is it allows gardeners a multitude of choices that are not available to us otherwise. Local garden centers, box stores and plant distributors provide us an extremely lim-

ited number of plants that they select for us. This gardener doesn't allow others to limit plant variety and selection, meaning that if I'm unable to source plants locally, my search is expanded. All seed catalogues are welcome!

Regardless of what you choose to plant, let me remove a bit of aggravation. Starting seeds can be affordable and enjoyable if you have a plan in place to assist you. Follow the steps below for guidance:

Review seed catalogues, make selections and place orders online to speed this process along. The internet is hugely beneficial when searching for specific plant varieties.

Gather seed planting materials (cost effective container types include paper egg cartons, paper cups, containers with plastic domes or make your own cups out of newspaper). Another option is to purchase seed starting kits.

Recycled/repurposed containers must be thoroughly cleaned with a bleach solution (1 part bleach to 9 parts water) then soaked in solution for 10 minutes before rinsing.

Germination (seed starting) mix is needed. It's easy to make (I make a large batch every year) by sifting sphagnum peat with vermiculite in equal parts. Mix well and moisten to the point you can make a ball and water does not drip when you squeeze it.

Determine seeds light and temperature requirements. Some seeds require darkness to

germinate. Read the seed packet for this information. Germination mats are inexpensive and will drastically increase the germination rate of many seed varieties, such as tomato, pepper and numerous flowering plants.

Sprinkle cinnamon over the top of the germination medium to mitigate damping off disease, since cinnamon kills the fungus that attacks the seedlings, causing the stem to rot at the base of the plant.

Seed planting depth is different for each plant type. If the seeds require darkness, shallow planting is necessary (width of the seed). Seeds requiring light can be lightly dusted with vermiculite, which will hold moisture close to the seed allowing in light.

ALWAYS water seedlings from the bottom and provide good air circulation with elevated humidity.

Allow 2 to 4 true leaves to form on the seedlings before transplanting into a larger container or relocating them outside if the temperature is warm enough. Plants must be "hardened off" before planting into the garden. Place them in a shady area protected from the sun and wind for a few hours per day, gradually increasing the amount of light exposure.

Let's go out and 'germinate' ourselves a greener, more sustainable world, one plant at a time! Please keep comments & questions heading in my direction: [jongreene57@gmail.com](mailto:jongreene57@gmail.com).