

# HOUSTON'S EAST END: PAST IN THE PRESENT



*By Marie-Theresa Hernández*

In spring 2021, in the middle of the COVID pandemic, students enrolled in the University of Houston World Culture and Literature photography class planned to document Houston's East End. Every time they ventured out, taking photographs through open car windows, they found something fascinating.

As one example, architecture student Golnar Makvandi encountered a Vietnam-era Cessna O-2 airplane, called an Oscar Deuce, sitting in the front yard of a home on the northwest side of East End. It could be said the Oscar Deuce represents American capitalism in how it profited from its machines of death. Hundreds of Latinx young men from East End knew about Oscar Deuce because they served in Vietnam during the sixties and seventies when many lost their lives in the fighting.

The Karankawa tribe settled the East End area

long before Stephen F. Austin brought his colonists. Many of the events surrounding Texas Independence occurred in Harrisburg, and Houston was founded on Buffalo Bayou, which travels through East End. The bayou began being dredged in the late 1870s, forming the Houston Ship Channel, which opened to deep-water vessels in 1914. A hallmark of East End, Houston now has one of the nation's busiest ports. The wealth traveling through the port is strikingly different from the poverty that is often seen in the neighborhood, though things are changing. A new, wealthier population is arriving, remodeling the old houses and building multi-story townhouses. At the moment they live side by side in stark contrast. Even so, long-term residents are concerned things will change too much. □

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***The Pink Dress.***

*The wind is blowing softly, and this quinceañera gown's airy, pink tulle, ballerina-skirt gently floats into the air as it stood on the corner of N. Cesar Chavez Boulevard and Avenue B. The breeze adds a special touch.*

Photo by Melissa DeRemer.

◀ ***Man at the Bus Stop.***

*The words "Dream Big" take me back to the main reason families migrated to the United States: for job opportunities and the American Dream. This wish is shared by many East End families and the pushing force to give their children a better life.*

Photo by Aileen Mendoza.



***Vanessa Guillén, Army Private First Class.***

*During the investigation of Vanessa Guillén's death, the neighborhood came together to support the family with rallies and murals that raised awareness. Today, these photos capture Guillén's memory and the strength of her family and community.*

Photo by Aileen Mendoza.





**Brothers Tacos With Masks.**

*Brothers Tacos is a well-liked taco restaurant at the corner of Emancipation Avenue and Leeland Street. This small business has remained strong throughout the COVID pandemic. Here, its wall mural reflects the adjustments needed during the pandemic.*

Photo by Gregorio Zavary.



**The Blue House.**

*I was drawn to this house near Lockwood Drive and Canal Street. None of the surrounding homes are painted with such a lively color.*

Photo by Golnar Makvandi.



***An Important Face.***

*Because of its location, no angle enabled me to get this man's face in the frame unobstructed. The small tree adds to the visual effect of the mural. It would be interesting to ask the artist what the goal was in painting him.* Photo by Dylan Leffert.



***Untitled.***

*Driving down Navigation Boulevard, the traveler cannot help but notice all the colorful restaurants, bars, and grocery stores that surround them. This incredible art on the side of a building has amazing detail and color.* Photo by Tayma Machkhas.





**To Be Kind.**

*This is a fragile time with protests and police brutality happening against the African American community. Being African American myself, seeing "I Swear to be Kind" painted on this fence made me feel good.*

Photo by Virnesia Haywood.



**El Gato – The Cat.**

*Some outsiders think the East End probably has a lot of crime. When I saw "El Gato," I chuckled to myself because it says in Spanish, "We Do Not Want Crime in Our Neighborhood."*

Photo by Tiana Orellana.



**Rusted Building.**

*I noticed many abandoned factories in EADO. This reminded me of the immigrant experience. Many work all their lives only to remain confined to broken and forgotten neighborhoods.*

Photo by Adetola Buraimoh.





***My Aunt's House.***

*When I look through the glass door, I get a sudden feeling of nostalgia. This is where generations of Ramos family members grew up. Although the older ones are gone, the feeling of familial comfort and love remain alongside the name plaque that decorates the front door.*

Photo by Olivia Ramos.

***The Green Plane.***

*This Vietnam-era plane, called an Oscar Deuce, has the name "Tommy Joe" painted on its nose. It is in the front yard of a private home on Navigation Boulevard. I wish Tommy Joe was still around to tell us stories about the plane in action.*

Photo by Golnar Makvandi.

