

POP CULTURE



Photo © Bob Gomel

**Malcolm X takes a photograph of Cassius Clay — who was about to announce his conversion to Islam and his new name, Muhammad Ali — on Feb. 25, 1964 in Miami. Malcolm X was staying at the Hampton House Motel, where he spoke with Ali, singer Sam Cooke and football star Jim Brown. The photo was captured for Life magazine by Bob Gomel.**

# Photographer's work endures from Life magazine to 'Miami'

Bob Gomel shares the stories behind some of his most iconic shots in new film

**By Andrew Dansby**  
STAFF WRITER

**N**ear the end of the film “One Night in Miami,” Cassius Clay — hours after defeating Sonny Liston and declaring himself king of the world ... and so pretty — holds shop in a small diner at the Hampton House Motel over a bowl of ice cream.

“I want a picture with Malcolm!” he says, referring to Malcolm X, who had advocated for the boxer’s conversion to Islam, which yielded a new name: Muhammad Ali.

The film follows Malcolm X for a meditative moment. A dangerous power struggle was in place amid the Nation of Islam, and he had only one year to live. But Clay, in that moment, got his photo.

Life magazine photographer Bob Gomel — the only member of the media inside the diner — caught the champ at the counter, a look of feigned surprise with Malcolm X



**Gomel**

leaning on his shoulder seemingly enjoying the moment of celebration.

Gomel captured several enduring images from the fight and its aftermath. One included Malcolm X behind the counter taking a photo of a tuxedo-clad Ali. That iconic photo has been acquired by the Library of Congress. Both the photo and the evening have taken on significant cultural weight. The fight and the meetings that followed were caught on film by Gomel and have been written about in biographies of Ali, Malcolm X and Cooke. That one night has become almost mythical, as it saw the rise of a cultural icon in Ali, lending itself to a play that would become a film.

As for Gomel, he’d made a fleeting moment permanent, something he’d done before and would do many times later as a storied and celebrated photojournalist whose work covered presidents and presidential funerals,



Amazon Studios

**Kingsley Ben-Adir as Malcolm X, far left, takes a photo of Aldis Hodge (standing, center, in white shirt and tie) as Jim Brown, Eli Goree (in tuxedo) as Cassius Clay and Leslie Odom Jr. (raising glass) as Sam Cooke in “One Night in Miami.”**

Olympians in action and the Beatles on a beach.

“I’d suggest the challenge is to do something better than had been done before,” Gomel says, “That was something instilled in me early in my career. When I was just starting my

career, I had an editor at Life. I came back and said some event didn’t happen. And he said he didn’t ever want to hear that. After that, I never batted an eye about doing what it took to get a photograph.”

*Gomel continues on D2*

COMMUNITY

## SPARK Park gets a second wave of money from philanthropists



Tom Callins

**Art teacher Lydia Tye and her students at Horn Elementary School in Alief ISD created the artwork for the green space at the school.**

**By Diane Cowen**  
STAFF WRITER

Just as the coronavirus drives home the importance of parks and walkable green space, the SPARK Park program has gotten a new infusion of money to create community parks at 15 area schools and upgrade another 15 during the next four years.

The new money is a second phase of funding of \$2.5 million each from Houston Endowment and the Kinder Foundation, which gave the same amount in a first round of funding back in 2016 to create 25 new parks and upgrade another five at area schools. The Brown Foundation is contributing

an additional \$500,000 for this phase, and the Powell Foundation contributed the same amount for the first phase.

Thanks to the program, Franklin Elementary School in the East End now has a proper park. Rose Toro’s mosaic at Franklin includes images of blue-bonnets, pecan trees, mockingbirds, monarch butterflies, horned lizards, armadillos and prairie dogs, as well as flags from 11 countries to represent the diversity of the student body. At Horn Elementary School in Alief ISD, art teacher Lydia Tye and her students created the artwork in the school’s green space.

The SPARK Park pro-

gram was created in 1983 by then City Council member Eleanor Tinsley to improve community and school parks in Houston when studies showed the area needed an additional 5,000 acres of parkland to compare favorably to other large U.S. cities.

Houston has never placed very high in the Trust for Public Land’s annual rankings of cities and parks. In 2016, when the Houston Endowment and the Kinder Foundation began addressing “park deserts,” the city ranked 78th in parkland, earning just 41 points, and it held the same ranking in 2020 with 39.9 points.

For comparison, Minne-  
*Parks continues on D6*

## FILM REVIEW

# Timberlake seeks redemption in formulaic 'Palmer'

By Lindsey Bahr  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

There's a kitchen-sink full of Serious Drama Cliches in the new Justin Timberlake film "Palmer," about a high school football star turned convict who must help the young gender-fluid boy with the addict mom next door while also trying to regain his footing in his small Louisiana hometown. It'd be an insult to real Oscar bait to even call this Oscar bait. And yet, compelling performances make "Palmer" watchable and fairly affecting despite the fact that we've seen this kind of thing so many times before.

Timberlake plays Eddie Palmer, who has just been released from prison after 12 years and is going to live with his grandmother Vivian (June Squibb) in his old hometown. He's got the ex-con beard and hoodie and thousand-yard squint and is a bit of a mystery, although that might be giving him a little too much credit. The script takes its time teasing out what exactly landed him behind bars.

But he's essentially keeping his head down and trying to re-enter society when he gets an added complication: The heroin addict living in the trailer next door (played by Juno Temple, who somewhere along the way started getting typecast in "white trash" roles) takes off with her abusive boyfriend and leaves her 7-year-old son, Sam (Ryder Allen), without any care.

Sam is used to the unconventional routine and packs up to stay with Vivian, who is happy to care for him for however long his mom stays away. But Vivian is not



Apple TV+

Justin Timberlake, left, stars opposite Ryder Allen in "Palmer."

long for this movie, and pretty soon it's just Palmer who is left, and he isn't exactly looking to be a surrogate parent to anyone. Sam is also a bit of a target in this small Southern town. He is essentially gender nonconforming.

He likes makeup and tea parties shows and gets picked on by the boys at school for it.

Palmer's transition from subtle intolerance to full acceptance of Sam's person is very quick, which

is a little convenient for the story and doesn't do anything to reveal who Palmer is, was or is becoming. The script even has the audacity to pretend Palmer is actually going to turn Sam over to the system at one point. Not only

## 'Palmer'

**Rated R:** for language, some sexual content/nudity and brief violence

**Running time:** 110 minutes

**Where:** Apple TV+  
(out of 5)

would the movie have nowhere to go, but it would also take some kind of monster to abandon Sam, who is an angel of a child, polite, funny, curious, self-sufficient and undisturbed by any judgments.

When Palmer tries to point out that there aren't any boys in the fairy-princess show, Sam comes back with something like, "I'll be the first." Does it sound more like an adult screenwriter (Cheryl Guerriero wrote the script) than an innocent child? Yes. But Allen sells it. And he and Timberlake are pretty darn cute together, which goes a long way. There's also a romance side plot between Palmer and Sam's teacher, Maggie (Alisha Wainwright).

"Palmer" is directed straightforwardly by Fisher Stevens, who in addition to his acting career has had successes directing documentaries over the years. It's hard to say why something like this, invented whole cloth and out of a bundle of familiar tropes, is more effective than something like "Hillbilly Elegy," which was an actual true story, but here we are. And even so, you never forget that you're watching a movie.

Still, it's nice to be reminded that Timberlake has some acting chops, although it's a far cry from his "Social Network" breakthrough.

## PARKS

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apolis, where 98 percent of residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, was No. 1 in both 2016 and 2020, with 86.5 points and 85.3 points respectively.

SPARK creates brand-new parks at schools with bare or undeveloped land and does "re-SPARK" efforts at schools with playgrounds or land in need of significant help. Once they're finished, they're considered community parks that everyone can use during non-school hours.

Since 2016, the initiative, funded primarily by the Houston Endowment and Kinder Foundation, has focused on eliminating "park deserts" that exist in areas where residents are more than a half-mile or a 10-minute walk away from a public park.

In all, SPARK Park has built more than 200 public parks in 17 school districts in the Greater Houston area.

"We get feedback that people perceive the school campus as being a safe place because they send their kids there. In a neighborhood, they are comfortable sending their kids to the playground at the school and going there as a family," said Kathleen Ownby, executive director of SPARK Park. "For each one of our parks, we give each school a goal of raising at least \$5,000, and until this past year, almost every school has done that."

The Houston Endowment-Kinder Foundation donations put an infusion of cash into the SPARK program, but the schools themselves and other municipalities – cities, counties and precincts – pitch in, too. Students also help raise money.

The amount spent on each park varies with size, \$117,560 to \$386,660.

"We want – whether it's a penny drive or selling popcorn or collecting (aluminum) cans – each student to feel like they had a hand in paying for the park and feel pride in their school park," said Ownby.

Art teachers, local artists and students create public art such as murals and tile work at each site as well.

The parks vary by site, but they include playground equipment, walking trails, picnic tables, trees, outdoor classrooms and public art. Each school site also picks its own landscape architect.

Some 15 of the 30 park sites in this new round of funding have been identified. Sites marked for new parks or improvements to



Photos by Tom Callins

Angel Quesada painted the mural at the Arabic Immersion Magnet School's SPARK Park.



A bear and her cub are featured in artwork at Alief's Horn Elementary School.

existing parks have to be at least 10 years old.

A list of 50 potential projects in "park deserts" was created back in 2016, and they're choosing this new round of school park sites from that list, Ownby said. Finished parks usually have a dedication with students and community leaders, but the pandemic has changed that.

diane.cowen@chron.com



Texas landscape is the theme for Franklin Elementary School's SPARK Park. Rose Toro's mosaic for the East End school includes images of bluebonnets, pecan trees, mockingbirds, monarch butterflies, horned lizards, armadillos and prairie dogs.