

## Neighborhood Ain't There No More

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The demise of a neighborhood is “incredibly sad, tragic and problematic,” says Stephen Hilger, a visiting assistant professor of photography in the Newcomb Department of Art at Tulane. He has been documenting the disappearance of structures in a 70-acre footprint in Lower Mid-City New Orleans, where new medical centers will be built.



Stephen Hilger, a visiting assistant professor of photography, teaches on the Tulane uptown campus. He photographs “things that are disappearing — neighborhoods, communities, buildings, individuals who are disintegrating, running out of time.” (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Not even a listing in the National Register of Historic Districts has prevented the march of bulldozers and swipes of backhoes there. All structures, including homes, businesses, schools, breweries, utility stations, and trees, streets and sidewalks are being dismantled and moved or wrecked and hauled off to landfills. (See related [photo gallery](#).)

After being displaced for a time by the 2005 Katrina flooding, some residents of the neighborhood returned and rebuilt. But by 2007, a building moratorium was passed

by the New Orleans City Council, and no more building permits were issued. On the site, two new [medical centers](#) will be built — a new teaching hospital for Tulane and Louisiana State universities and a new Veterans Administration facility.

Two years ago, when [Hilger](#) began photographing the neighborhood, he found life among empty spaces and vacant houses, but he says that it had a sleepy, quiet, vacant feeling. “And then all of a sudden the construction crews move in, the hustling and bustling. The earth is shaking. And that's a completely different picture.”

Hilger also has photographed displaced architecture in Los Angeles, chronicling the Ambassador Hotel, now gone. He says that there gets to be a point in chasing down the history of a disappearing neighborhood when “there's no saving it. It's almost like a cancer patient where you can try to pay attention and you can try to spend time with this person but inevitably they are going to die.”

Hilger is intrigued that [Builders of Hope](#), a nonprofit green building organization, is moving some of the houses to other neighborhoods. “That is one small element of the neighborhood that they are saving. I like to think of my pictures in a way as similarly saving aspects of the neighborhood for the sake of history.”