

...and Old New Orleans

A few cities are national treasures. New Orleans is a city that has known the arts of living for three centuries, and those arts, from gustatory to political, have produced a rich culture and a striking heritage. Visitors, lulled by the sanctity of the protected French Quarter, think that heritage is safe. They could not be more wrong. From the Quarter's narrow streets one can watch the bulldozers in the business district demolishing blocks of buildings of equal style and value. One out of every five structures that stood in this area in 1970 is gone; parking lots prevail.

The New Orleans City Council is about to act on a proposal for a temporary moratorium on all old-building demolition in the district pending completion of an official plan. Enough demolition permits have been filed for, in expectation of the hearings, to do the city in. Sitting on the sidelines are in-and-out-of-state developers with bigger-and-more-abominable skyscraper schemes. Greek Revival rows and ornate Victoriana will be replaced by lookalike marble, glass and steel.

If the city passes the moratorium, and gets on with its plan, it will be able to control the spread and pattern of development with a proper vision of its rare and irreplaceable environmental values. Other cities, and other Americans, to whom New Orleans means unique pride of place and style of life, watch with concern. A local and national heritage of urban and architectural amenity is at stake.