

# Haunted Houses and Floods

Why a viral video on Twitter reminds me of a New Orleans ghost story

Austen Travis 3-01-21



**Dr. Chesya Burke**  
@ChesyaBurkePhD



If you move a haunted house, does the ghost go with the house or stay on the land? 🤔



**Austin Elliott** @TTremblingEarth · Feb 21

Ok, watching a 140-year-old full-on Victorian mansion cruising through the city streets is hands-down one of the top wildest things I've ever witnessed. The Englander house moving from Franklin St to Fulton St this morning in SF

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Via @TTremblingEarth on Twitter

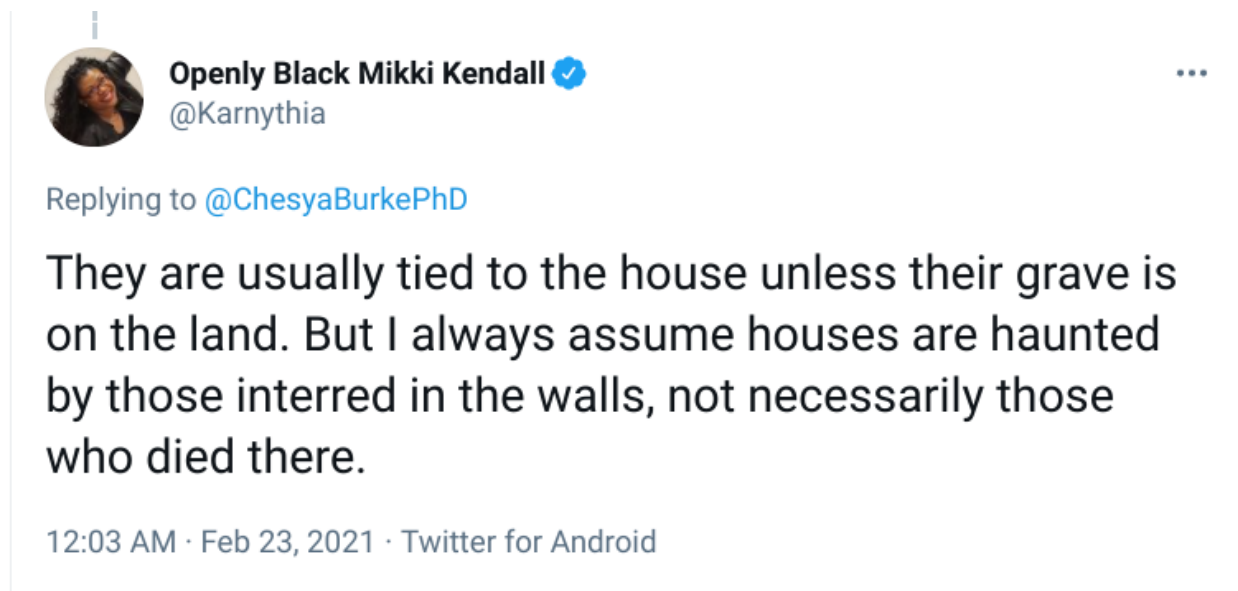
The viral video of a 140-year old Victorian mansion drifting down the street in San Francisco the other day bobbed to the surface of my Twitter timeline in a surreal fashion, as if emerging from water. It almost didn't make sense initially.

I saw Dr. Cheysa Burke (@ChesyaBurkePhD) post it, and what struck me next was her caption: “If you move a haunted house, does the ghost go with the house or stay on the land?”

Though she obviously isn’t implying the house is haunted, Dr. Burke raises an interesting question and one I have pondered frequently— What *does* happen to the spirits inhabiting a haunted house when it moves or is destroyed? [Do spirits follow the house](#) they haunt or remain on the original land? What about a house that is torn down like the supposed “[Demon House](#)” in [Gary, Indiana](#)? Do spirits haunt the dispersed lumber and the fixtures, or only the rooms as they existed?

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I follow Dr. Burke’s writing on the horror genre, so I commented on the post along with several others. A few of us discussed the possibility that a spirit’s memory can be tied to a specific house or plot of land and therefore they haunt the place they were most connected to. Even author Mikki Kendall commented:



There also seems to be a near-ubiquitous idea that spirits can’t cross running water and that they are confounded or agitated by bodies of water, as well. This idea appeared briefly in the comment section, just as it appears periodically throughout popular culture. Dracula, for example, can’t cross running water [unless at low or high tide](#).

I’ve also heard a number of paranormal investigators say that sources of running water can agitate spiritual energy. Having lived briefly in a haunted house in Pennsylvania near a small

stream I can say this validates my experience. Perhaps water does agitate, disperse, or even confound spiritual energy. But what about a house that washes away in a flood?

Dr. Burke's question instantly reminded me of a conversation I had with a coworker in New Orleans in 2006, whose name I will change to Jennell. Aspects of this conversation still linger in my mind.

While Jennell and I stood working in a cold, wet room without windows, cutting pineapples in the back of a grocery store in Uptown New Orleans we speculated about what had become of the spirits in the haunted Lower Ninth Ward apartment she had recently moved out of, and which had been completely destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. She wondered if the floodwaters had washed the spirits away, too.



The sun setting in a residential neighborhood in New Orleans, Louisiana. Photo by [Jp Valery](#) on [Unsplash](#).

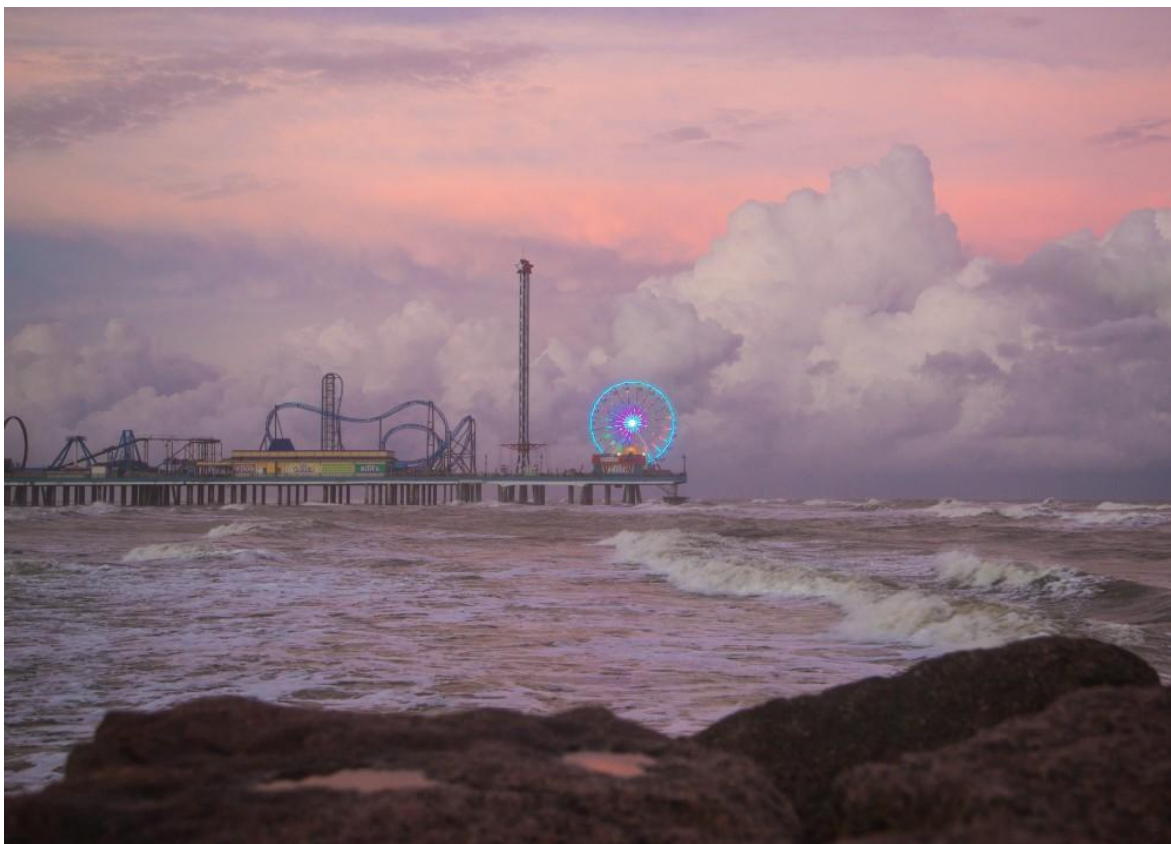
She recalled two specific instances when disembodied voices, doors slamming, and erratic televisions were enough to drive her running out of the house and into the balmy New Orleans night. Eventually, she got used to the consistent sounds emanating from her living room as she lay awake in bed. The haunting was so bad that she moved out in 2004, one year before Hurricane Katrina. Jennell wasn't one to be easily shaken, but it's clear she was, and her stories shook me. I still think about those stories. I wonder if anything was built over the foundation. I

wonder if the flood washed the spirits away when it washed away the house. The simultaneously creepy, tragic, and unresolved nature of it all still haunts me.

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I would argue that New Orleans has a more [dense concentration of haunted houses](#) than any other city in the United States. Some of those haunted houses were badly damaged during Katrina, as well as during Hurricane Betsy before that in 1965. In some cases, houses were completely washed away. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita destroyed hundreds of thousands of homes throughout the Gulf South in 2005, outside New Orleans, as well. It stuns me to consider the number of potentially haunted houses that have been completely destroyed by floods throughout the Gulf South over the years. Were all those spirits over the years washed away with their homes?

Trennell imagined the flood washed the spirits of her former apartment away, but I wonder if flood waters also take lives, who then go on to haunt other buildings? Like New Orleans, Galveston, Texas also has a history that supports this grim theory. Galveston is also cited as one of the most haunted cities in America because the Great Hurricane of 1900 is estimated to have killed [8,000 people and destroyed 3,636 homes](#). Are the floodwater victims of the last century now haunting new buildings?



Pleasure Pier, Galveston Texas. Photo by [Van Williams](#) on [Unsplash](#).

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While awareness of this San Francisco itself home it will likely disappear outside of the immediate neighborhood just as suddenly as it appeared on our social media timelines, and just as suddenly as my mind moved on to my own haunted house experiences prompted by Dr. Burke's question-comment, the fate of spirits in flooded homes will likely continue to bob hauntingly to the surface of my mind.