In his book *Bayou Farewell*, Mike Tidwell tells some haunting stories about the rapid disappearance of the Louisiana coast from his time with Cajun fisherman. Here's one story:

"We all pile into the crab boat and Tim tells his son to head down the bayou. A few hundred feet away . . . Time points toward a watery stretch of march grass oddly littered with bricks and concrete.

"'It's a cemetery,' he says.

"There, shockingly, along the grassy bayou bank, I can now make out a dozen or so old tombs, all in different stages of submersion, tumbling brick by brick into the bayou water. . . The bayou is swallowing the dead here."

The fact is that even before the BP Oil Spill, the Gulf Coast and the Gulf of Mexico itself were under siege from damage to wetlands, a poorly regulated oil and gas industry, rising seas, an immense marine "dead zone," invasive species, and damaged ecosystems. As a result, the fishing communities along the coast were already under siege, along with their unique histories and cultures. The BP Spill was just one more impact to this damaged ecosystem.

As I discuss in a recent paper, efforts to combat this situation face formidable political barriers. The BP Spill itself, however, does offer some opportunities for helping to build the regulatory tools and institutional infrastructure that we will need to make a serious effort at saving the Gulf Coast and its communities.

In many ways, what is happening on the Gulf Coast today is a preview of what the future will bring in many places due to climate change and rising seas. By addressing these issues in the Gulf, we can gain valuable experience for addressing these future problems.