

New Orleans 5 A.D. (After Disaster)

August 23, 2010 2:45 AM Fran Simon

fsimon@tulane.edu

Few of the first-year students entering Tulane this fall experienced Hurricane Katrina firsthand, but the 1,630 students do have a connection to the storm's aftermath: they each received a copy of *Zeitoun*, the harrowing story of a painting contractor who stayed in New Orleans to help rescue people and animals after the storm, and then needed rescuing himself. *Zeitoun*, a nonfiction book by Dave Eggers, is this year's Tulane Reading Project selection.



Nick Spitzer, professor of anthropology and American studies, talks with a student after his Reading Project keynote address on Sunday (Aug. 22). (Photo by Guillermo Cabrera-Rojo)

On Sunday (Aug. 22), to a full house in McAlister Auditorium, Tulane anthropology and American studies professor Nick Spitzer, who also is host of the public radio show "American Routes," gave the keynote lecture for the [Reading Project](#).

Noting that Abdulrahman Zeitoun, the subject of the Reading Project book, renovates houses, Spitzer explained the vital link between Creole tradesmen — plasterers, bricklayers, carpenters and tinsmiths — and the development of jazz.

Spitzer showed slides and played segments of interviews and music to illustrate the “cultural creolization” that has created the cultural mélange of New Orleans music and architecture.

During his talk, Spitzer also discussed the distinctiveness of African American social aid and pleasure clubs in New Orleans, which for more than a century have helped members defray healthcare costs and funeral expenses and meet other financial hardships.

He played audio clips of a jazz funeral, including the mournful strains of a brass band leading mourners to a cemetery and the joyous sounds of a second-line heralding the life of the departed, as he encouraged students to “join in the second-line” to help rebuild the city.

Spitzer also quoted legendary New Orleans musician, composer and producer Allen Toussaint, who said in an interview two weeks after the devastating storm and flooding of Katrina, “There is no waterline on the spirit, there is no waterline on the soul.”

Author Dave Eggers will give a lecture, which is free and open to the public, on Aug. 26 at 7 p.m. in McAlister Auditorium.