

Getting New Orleans

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New Orleans tends to be a polarizing topic; you either get it or you don't. If there was any lingering doubt that Dan Baum, the author of this year's [Reading Project](#) book, *Nine Lives: Mystery, Magic, Death and Life in New Orleans*, gets the city, it was put to rest during his Reading Project keynote speech on the Tulane University uptown campus on Tuesday (Oct. 2).



Dan Baum, author of this year's Reading Project selection *Nine Lives: Mystery, Magic, Death and Life in New Orleans*, addresses the audience in Freeman Auditorium on Tuesday (Oct. 2). (Photo by Sally Asher)

Baum spent the first half of his hour-long talk speaking directly to the first-year students, lauding them for their decision to come to school in a “profoundly weird” and “special” city. He urged them to break out of their comfort zones and explore the city as he did when he arrived in New Orleans just after the levees failed in 2005.

“This is a city that takes slowing down and asking questions and listening to really understand,” Baum said. “I had never been here before, and I ended up writing this book. It's not that I'm so fabulous at this; it's that New Orleanians are extremely generous with stories and they love their city.”

Baum spent the rest of his talk discussing the book and fielding questions from the audience, which was split between students and members of the community who were interested in the “hows” and “whys” of the book. He was originally in New Orleans to cover the flood and the recovery, but quickly discovered that wasn't the most interesting story.

Baum made it clear that he doesn't profess to be an expert on the city just because he wrote a book about it. It was evident from the way he spoke about the city, however, that he has a special affinity for the place and its people.

“You can try to explain it, and I have,” Baum said. “And let's be honest: It's not for everybody. But I love it and I'll leave it at that. “