

FAST CHAT: DAN BAUM, AUTHOR OF 'NINE LIVES'

BY **ADAM B. KUSHNER** ON 3/6/09 AT 7:00 PM

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Dan Baum's terrific new book, "Nine Lives," traces nine New Orleanians from Hurricane Betsy in 1965 through Katrina in 2005. What emerges is a portrait of an entire city in all its quirky, backward beauty. Baum spoke with NEWSWEEK's Adam B. Kushner.

How did you persuade your subjects—the trumpet-playing city coroner, the transsexual Jesuit bar owner—to trust you?

More often, it was how to get them to *stop* telling their stories.

Are you optimistic for the city?

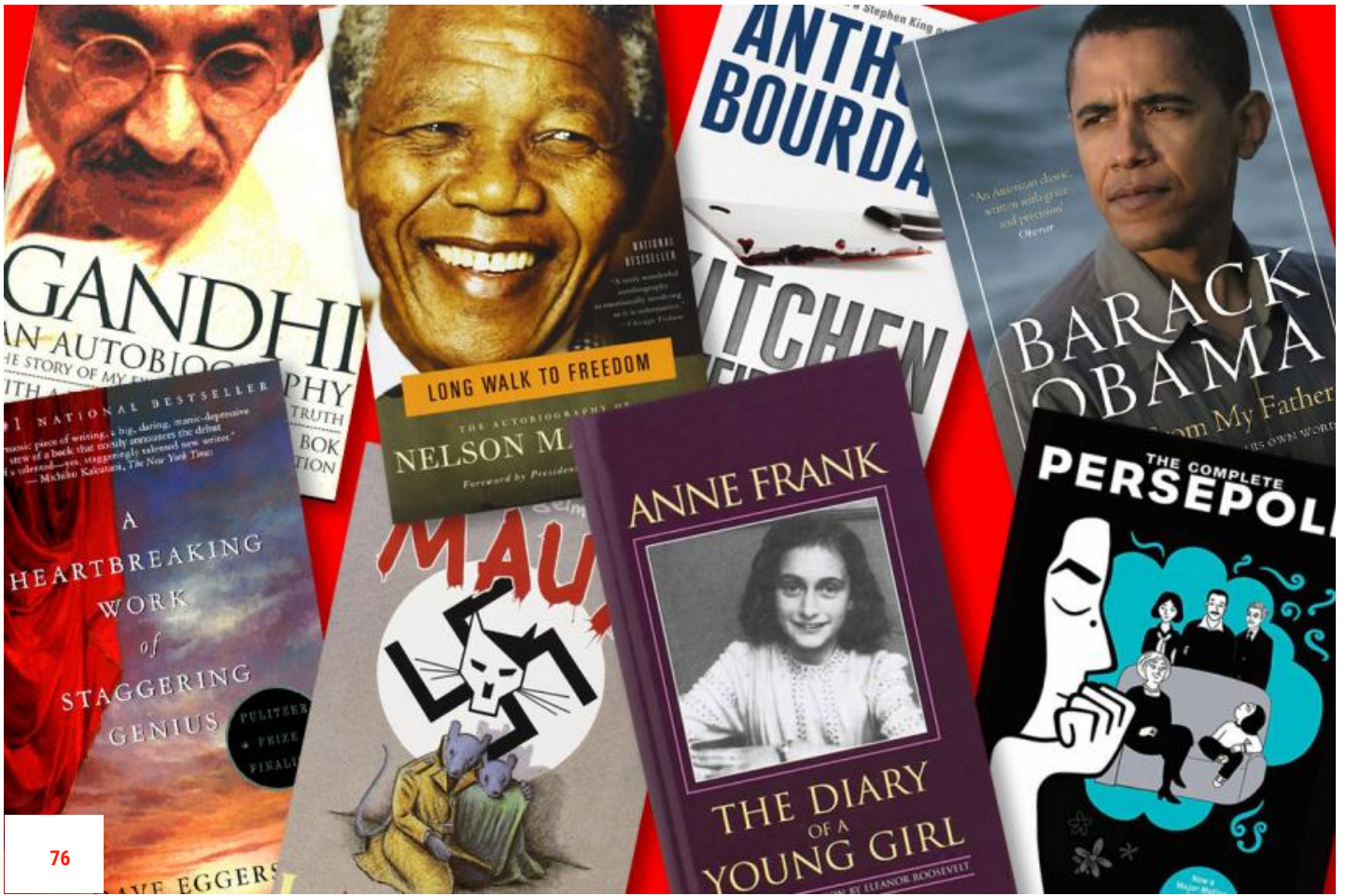
Eternally. It's been there an awfully long time.

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Will Katrina someday be as distant a memory as Betsy?

Of course. It's not as though New Orleanians have talked about nothing but Hurricane Betsy for the past 44 years.

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With one exception, all your characters are good people.

I had two principles: no villains, and all happy endings.

But that's not the story of New Orleans.

It is a story of New Orleans. When I started writing this, there were plenty of grim things to say about New Orleans. It's a rough place. F—ed up beyond belief. What I wanted to communicate was: get past all those images of the floods and the ruined houses. This is *my* telling of the New Orleans story, because I love the place.

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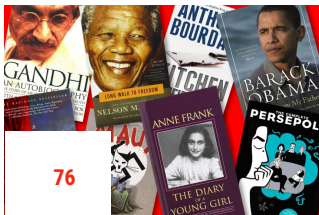
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