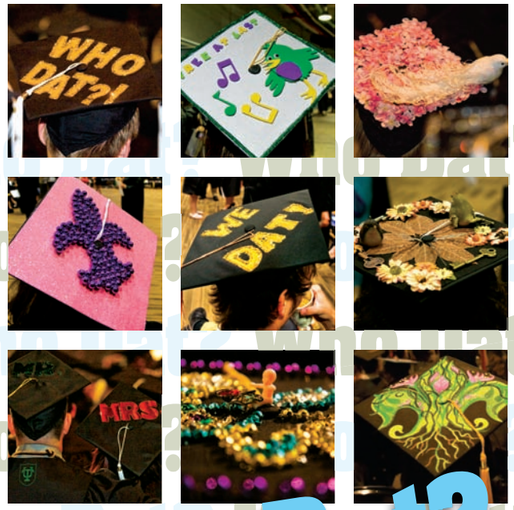


Who Dat? They Dat!

During a ceremony punctuated by comical one-liners, offerings of gratitude and even a Saints football highlight reel, perhaps the most succinct summation of this year's commencement on May 15 in the Louisiana Superdome found its expression emblazoned atop the mortarboard of one graduate: We Dat!

A riff on the now familiar chant of New Orleans Saints fans, the mortarboard's message seemed a fitting pronouncement from graduates who were being honored for choosing to come to Tulane even as New Orleans was in the throes of recovering from Hurricane Katrina.

"Four years ago, the future of this institution hung in the balance," said Tulane President Scott Cowen during his address. "I had great faith that you would arrive in significant numbers to populate the class of 2010 … but not the certainty."

CNN anchor and author Anderson Cooper echoed Cowen in his keynote address. "You came here anyway. You helped this city rebuild, renew and restart."

As the first cohort of students to complete the university's public-service graduation requirement instituted after Katrina, members of the class of 2010 took an active role in the recovery of the city.

Cooper, who poked fun at the academic regalia worn by all the participants in the graduation ("Does anyone else feel like they are at a Harry Potter convention?") as well as young people who aspire to be anchors and politicians ("I think you should become a real person before you become a fake one"), turned serious when talking about the graduates' relationship with New Orleans, a city that was home to his father for nearly 20 years.

"Remember what you have learned on the streets of this city," Cooper told the 2,150 graduates. "Remember the triumph and tragedy, the richness and poverty, and remember how you made it better."

The spotlight briefly shifted from the graduates during a video of highlights from the NFC Championship played between the New Orleans Saints and Minnesota Vikings on the same Superdome floor only four months earlier. Following the video, Cowen presented the Tulane president's medal to Saints co-owner Rita Benson-LeBlanc, defensive coordinator Gregg Williams and linebacker Jonathan Vilma, who received the award on behalf of the team. Cooper also received a medal.

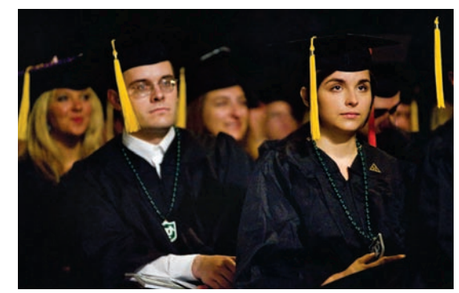
"The Saints represent the drive, the perseverance and the faith through which our university and our city continue to recover and renew," said Cowen.

Taking the lectern, Benson-LeBlanc said, "I want to commend all of you—the 2010 world champion Tulane graduates."

The commencement ceremony, which included all of the university's schools and colleges, featured musical performances by Dr. Michael White's Original Liberty Jazz Band.

Honorary degrees were awarded to Dr. Regina Benjamin, surgeon general of the U.S. Public Health Service and alumna of the A. B. Freeman School of Business at Tulane; Geoffrey Canada, president and CEO of Harlem Children's Zone; and John Ruffin, director of the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities.

—Nick Marinello



Commencement 2010 ***Clockwise, from top left:*** *A sea of caps sets the stage. • Nisrine Omri, BFA graduate, sings national anthem. • A gaggle of friends celebrate. • School of Liberal Arts professors Mike Kuczynski, Trent Holliday and Chris Rodning take in the pomp. • Dr. Regina Benjamin, B '91, is presented an honorary degree. • Anderson Cooper praises graduates for "restarting" New Orleans. • Michael White, on clarinet, leads the band. • Graduates get serious. • Super Bowl champions Jonathan Vilma and Gregg Williams represent the Saints in being honored. •* ***Center:*** *Class speaker Tim Clinton, BA recipient, applauds his fellow graduates.*