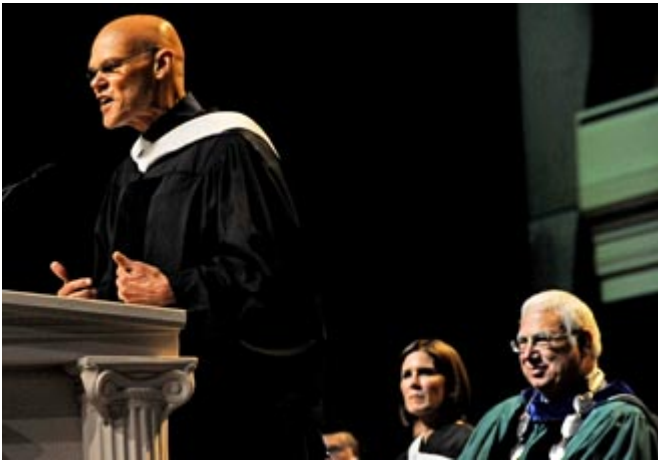


Place Matters in Commencement '08

May 18, 2008 9:15 AM Nick Marinello
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On Saturday (May 17), Tulane University's graduating class, along with families, friends and faculty from all the university's schools, gathered together under one roof for the 2008 commencement ceremony. And it was a very, very big roof.



The actions of the class of 2008 confirm that the era of cynicism is gone, says James Carville in his commencement address to graduates, as his wife and co-speaker, Mary Matalin, and President Scott Cowen listen in. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The ceremony was held in the Louisiana Superdome for the first time since Hurricane Katrina ? a symbolic reunion that inspired throughout the program an attention to the importance of place.

"It is completely and totally appropriate that this class graduate in this building," political guru, commentator and author James Carville told the more than 2,000 graduates in attendance.

Carville, who shared the role of commencement speaker with his wife, political commentator, consultant and author Mary Matalin, reminded his audience that while the images of the Superdome most vividly seared into the public's psyche are that of "the people who had no place left to go during Hurricane Katrina," the building has

had a long and distinguished history.

It has hosted prominent events including an appearance by Pope John Paul II, the Republican National Convention and six Super Bowls.

"Many great things have happened here," said Carville. "But you remember this for the rest of your life: Maybe the greatest thing that happened here is that this class came here to graduate."

The comment both referenced and put an exclamation point on a theme introduced earlier in the program by Tulane President Scott Cowen. Praising the graduates for their courage to return to the university and the city after the storm, Cowen said, "By your presence here today you have proved you are tenacious and determined. You came back to Tulane and to New Orleans against all odds. Without you, Tulane University and New Orleans would not have survived."

Cowen noted that the class of 2008 also was distinguished by the fact that it was the last class to have spent time at Tulane prior to Katrina and then dubbed it the Calm Before the Storm Class.

Matalin introduced her husband, who was raised in Louisiana, and recounted how they had recently moved with their two young daughters from Washington, D.C., to New Orleans, after Cowen and his wife, Marjorie, encouraged them to join in the rebirth of the city.



Student speaker Broderick McClinton shares stories of his own family's perseverance and challenges his classmates to overcome obstacles that they encounter. (Photo by George Long)

The fourth speaker of the morning, Broderick McClinton, who was a candidate for degrees in management and political science, also used place to set the themes of his address.

McClinton, who is an African American, told of his father, who was raised in rural Greensburg, La., "in an era where it was difficult for a person of his skin tone to attain an education.

"But he would not be denied," said McClinton, "and he found his way into a university."

His father, however, did not have the luxury of joining student organizations, said McClinton, "not because he wasn't able to, but because every day after school he had to take the hourlong bus ride back to his home and assist his family in the field just so they could make ends meet."

In a lighter moment, McClinton recalled a few of the favorite local haunts of his classmates, who cheered as he said, "I don't know how comfortable society would feel if they knew we as future professionals on occasion had more than a few drinks at 50-cent-night at the Boot, Quill's, the French Quarter."

And gently turning the university's admission slogan on its ear, McClinton joked: "Only at Tulane. Only in New Orleans."

It was the 10th anniversary of Tulane's unified commencement ceremony, which represents all of its schools and colleges and, as customary, featured musical performances by Dr. Michael White's Original Liberty Jazz Band, the Pipes and Drums of New Orleans and a performance of "Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans" by singer Wanda Rouzan.

Honorary degrees were awarded to Guy Canivet, a member of the Constitutional Counsel of France, and, in perhaps another nod to the importance of locality, Leah Chase, a local restaurateur, civil rights activist and patron of the arts.

As the ceremony ended with a colorful appearance by the Yellow Pocahontas Mardi Gras Indians, the graduate and professional students streamed out of the Superdome to a familiar location across town ? the Tulane uptown campus ? for afternoon diploma ceremonies. Bachelor's degree recipients stayed on the Superdome floor for the first diploma ceremony of Newcomb-Tulane College and all undergraduate schools.