

# Festival Rites: The Underside



*"Your wooden arm you hold outstretched to shake with passers-by."*

**A**N INNOCENT PLEASURE of Commencement Week is cap-watching. You stroll along the line of seniors in parade formation in the Yard ready to slope into Memorial Church for their Baccalaureate service—the minister's last chance to drive the devil from them—or, on the day itself, you inspect the marchers queuing for the procession into Tercentenary Theatre—to read what witticisms they have written with tape on the tops of their mortarboards: "Thanks Mom and Dad" and "Need a Job" are perennial favorites.

Now there appears in Primus's inbox a flyer from a commercial outfit that aims to rob seniors of this form of self-expression, squelch their creativity, and make money from them while doing so.

"There's finally a way to *professionally* decorate the bland graduation cap....," the pitch goes. "There's no limit to the Tassel Toppers design-your-own feature. Upload photos, fraternity and sorority greek letters, school logos, mascots and custom messages to Tassel Toppers and your custom topper is uniquely yours....Parents can also purchase a stand to display [it] at the graduation party." To buy one of these mortarboards is "another way for the Class of 2014 to show they're ready to face the world on their own terms and in style."

While you are convulsing over "Free at Last" and other hilarities on

the tops of toppers, be advised that a friend of this magazine has recently come across game-changing information about what can go on *under and inside* mortarboards. Christopher S. Johnson '64 of Cambridge, a contributing editor, was in his student days an expert on Henry Fielding and is now expert on many other things as well, among them trash-picking. He found in a Harvard recycling bin the discarded mortarboard below.

During the formal Commencement exercises each dean is directed to center stage, where he or she presents groups of students on whom the president will confer degrees. The deans remove their caps before addressing the president and other dignitaries, and now we know why. Prudently, they have typed what they are supposed to say and pasted their lines inside their hats. (It is presumably by this method that the chaplain of the day is able smoothly to deliver lengthy and complex advisories.)

The hat below belonged to a dean of the Faculty of Education, whose job was to say: "Mr. President, Fellows of Harvard College, Madam President and Members of the Board of Overseers: As Dean of the Faculty of Education, I have the honor to present to you

these women and men who in partnership with us have prepared themselves to serve as educators."

The Sherlocks among you will deduce that at the time these words were intoned, the president of the University was a man and the president of the Board of Overseers a woman. The dean of education, willing to trash this hat, was evidently no sentimentalist.



**HARVARD NEWS:** Next issue, this magazine will publish its annual report on the oldest male and female matriculants present at Commencement and a list of the 10 oldest living alumni according to Harvard records. Sometimes these accounts seem flawed, which is why Clarence M. Agress '33, M.D., of Santa Barbara, wrote to the editors as follows: "Last year a '36 Harvardian complained that he had been omitted from your list of oldest graduates. I recently attended my eightieth reunion, and I also was omitted.

"You request news from alumni, but there was none from the 1930s in a recent issue. If you are interested, you can find out all about me from my website. In medical circles, I am best known for starting thrombolysis, 'clot busting,' where an enzyme is given intravenously in the first three hours after a developing heart attack, saving the heart muscles and the patient's life. I also developed the first chemical test for a heart attack, and NASA commissioned me to devise the heart monitor for Neil Armstrong's moon visit.

"In March I will be 102 years old, physically active, painting, writing novels, wood sculpting.

"Please forgive my self-promotion. I always wanted to be Harvard news."

~PRIMUS V

