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**CHATTANOOGA STUDENT TAKES STAND
IN MLK ORATORICAL CONTEST AT TENNESSEE TECH**

COOKEVILLE, Tenn. (March 21, 1996) – A powerful address on affirmative action won recognition for Chattanooga's Tonya Brown during a recent Martin Luther King Jr. Oratorical Competition at Tennessee Technological University.

Brown, a senior-level mechanical engineering student, was one of eight students who took part in the event, which challenged students to articulate their views on whether affirmative action is still necessary. The event was sponsored by the university's Black Cultural Center.

In an eight-minute address, Brown traced the introduction of slaves into the American colonies, their treatment at the hands of white masters and their long struggle for freedom and equality. With the help of Harriet Tubman, Nat Turner and other visionary leaders, "the battle of freedom was won," Brown said, "only to start a new battle of togetherness and higher learning."

It is important to realize that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the amendment one year later that included the concept of affirmative action came 346 years into the history and experiences of blacks in this nation, Brown said. "Because of the past, our people are in the worst economic status in America. We need to finish the fight, to win the prize: to be equal with other Americans." Affirmative action is a tool in that fight, she said, "because (it) is designed to minimize the actions of discrimination."

With the legal foundation affirmative action provides, blacks are positioned to use their personal determination to succeed and, when necessary, fight for the rights that the constitution guarantees them. "It is up to our generation not only to win a battle, but to win the war for equality," Brown told students at the event.

"As Maya Angelou says, 'We are the hope and the dream of a slave.' Do not forget your past for it will keep you pressing on to the future. Remember that like our ancestors, we must use the tools at our disposal to rise, to succeed and to take our rightful place in corporate America. Once we have succeeded, affirmative action will no longer be needed."

This marks the fifth year Tennessee Tech has hosted the oratorical competition, which strives to encourage students to formulate and express well-reasoned stances on issues of importance to blacks and other minorities.

(more)

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In her studies, Brown is already providing the leadership and action she calls for. Her field, mechanical engineering, remains underpopulated with women and minorities, although recent years have seen that inequality begin to change.

The daughter of Joseph C. and Olivia Brown of Chattanooga, Brown is active in a variety of campus organizations, including Alpha Kappa Alpha social sorority, the National Society of Women Engineers, the National Society of Black Engineers, Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship and the Black Student Organization. A 1991 graduate of Ooltewah High School, she plans to work in engineering following her graduation from Tennessee Tech and begin study for a doctorate in psychology.

- 30 -

[Photo enclosed: Tonya Denise Brown of Chattanooga]