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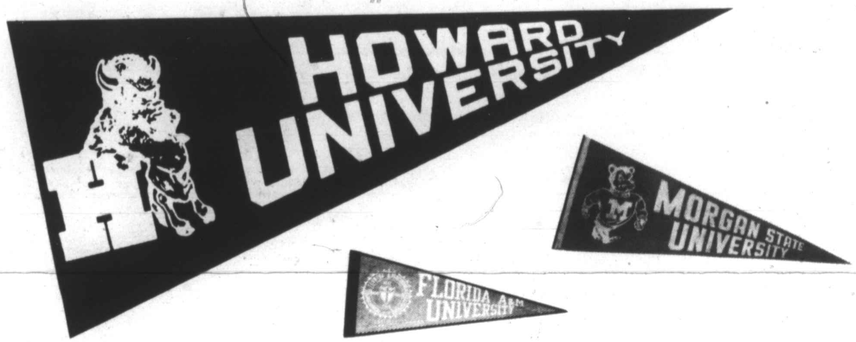
How Black Colleges Will Survive

By P.A. TATUM



Members of New York writer Nancy Anita Williams' family have been attending Howard University since the 1870's. The school is important to her. Ms. Williams said she works hard to insure its survival, even though it has been 16 years since she graduated with a fine arts degree.

In 1949, Los Angeles businessman and pharmacist Val. G. Tatum was a freshman at Texas Southern University's School of Pharmacy in Houston. Thirty-nine years have passed and instead of a waning interest in the school, Mr. Tatum established a scholarship fund for the pharmacy department.

Ms. Williams and Mr. Tatum are among thousands of alumni of the nation's 116 historically black colleges and universities (HBC's) whose support and commitment to their schools did not end with graduation.

Established primarily in the years following the end of the Civil War in 1865 most HBC's will survive this century intact. However, as little as 10 years ago, their futures were very much in doubt.

The danger came in the form of abolition or merger with historically white colleges, more than 3,000 in the country today. According to a 1983 article by syndicated newspaper columnist and public television talk show host Tony Brown, the danger specifically was aimed "at public, state-supported schools ... to declare all black-controlled institutions of higher learning - including those 58 that are privately endowed ... illegal monuments to segregation."

Following an interview with Jack Greenberg, head of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), Brown said he learned that in 1970, the LDF filed the Adams litigation suit to force the then Health, Education and Welfare Department to comply with the Title VI section of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The Act stated that public colleges practicing racial segregation and discrimination would no longer be given federal assistance.

The LDF, separate from the NAACP, a civil rights organization, was ultimately successful in its suit and was given a supervisory role in the adoption of desegregation plans for colleges. The plans were submitted to the Department of Education for approval.

Some of the attitudes of people behind the plans' implementation concerned Brown, who wrote about "professional white civil rights lawyers and blacks who subscribe to the social theory that accuses blacks and black colleges of hindering desegregation, (and who) promote desegregation plans that patronizingly 'accept blacks in white-dominated institutions, but demand the extinction of black cultural values."

A coalition was formed to include Brown, black college presidents and others to fight the threat. Men such as Dr. Andrew Billingsley, then president of Morgan State University in Baltimore and Dr. Samuel D. Cook of New Orleans' Dillard University proclaimed

(Continued on page 14)