

Segregation 'Stunting' Douglass Grads Told

By BILL BARNETT
T-N Night City Editor

Twenty-five graduating seniors of Douglass High School were told Tuesday night that they "did not receive a decent high school education" because they attended a segregated Negro school.

The commencement speaker, NAACP attorney Avon Williams, drew a laugh from the audience when he followed up that statement by saying:

"This may be the oddest commencement address you ever heard."

Of the students, Williams said, segregated schools "stunt their very lives . . . stunt their futures."

He also deplored segregated housing as it still exists in Kingsport. Of the Riverview section in which Douglass School is situated, a community of neat, modern homes and well-trimmed lawns, he said:

"You have a right pretty ghetto here in town . . . but it's still a ghetto."

Speaking on the subject "Excelling for a Better Society," the Nashville lawyer said first of

all "It has been an imperfect society." As an example he cited the billions spent for foreign aid before this country began a relatively smaller program to fight poverty here at home.

But, "I would like to point out that this is a changing society," he said. It was here that he reviewed the slow transformation from a segregated to integrated schools and recognition of Negro rights as citizens.

"Finally," he said, "this is a competitive society." The Negro must compete with better-prepared white men for a liv-

ing. "They will say to you, even though you had your hand tied behind you, you not only have to be good, you have to be better" to get ahead.

"That is why you can not receive a good education here," he said. "Because competition requires exposure to the whole gamut of experience." The Negro can not learn to compete with whites in an all-Negro school.

"If you want a better society, you must strive for perfection in all you do," the speaker said. "Become a part of dynamic and



AVON WILLIAMS

moving society . . . the political part of it . . . the economic part of it."

He urged his hearers to prepare for the age of automation. "And don't wind up as janitors and maids," he admonished. "Let the white folks be the janitors and maids for a while."

There was thunderous applause as he concluded: "Be satisfied with nothing other than perfection."

City School Supt. Dr. Dana F. Swick, who handed out the diplomas to the 25 graduates, sought to assure them they had not wasted their 12 years in school. Pointing out that about a third of those who started out had left school before graduating, he said of the ones who had completed their senior year:

"You have done something worthwhile by completing 12 years of school. I congratulate you."

First of the seniors to receive her diploma was Melrose Dobbins, daughter of Douglass Principal V. O. Dobbins.

Miss Dobbins was one of three seniors who were awarded \$600 tuition scholarships to continue their education in college. The others were Linda Kaye Miller and Donald Perry. In addition, Sheridan Robinette received a \$600 grant-in-aid and Jewell Anne Davis, the \$600 Elks Nursing Scholarship.

David Devoy Releford, an outstanding Douglass athlete who died during his senior year, was awarded the American Legion Award posthumously.

Other awards and their recipients were:

Dansforth Foundation "I Dare You" leadership awards, Melrose Dobbins and Donald Perry; Daughters of American Revolution Award (presented by Mrs. D. F. Ridings), Jewell Anne Davis; Kiwanis Award for high ranking senior, Sheridan Robinette; Rotary Award for high ranking junior, Donald Hickman; Civitan Citizenship Award, Melrose Dobbins; Voguette's Award for best all-around girl in business education, Pamela Rutledge; and Tri-City Scholarship Award, Patricia Bristol.



DOUGLASS HIGH SCHOOL graduates sing Alma Mater. By 1966, Negro students will have a choice of attending Douglass or the new integrated Dobbins-Bennett school. (Times-News Photos — Battle Vaughn)

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