

Vanessa Williams Becomes First Black To Win Miss America Crown

By Ed Brown

Atlantic City, N.J. — Miss New York, Vanessa Williams, crossed one of the nation's last remaining color lines Saturday night, becoming the first black woman in the 63-year history of the contest to capture the coveted Miss America crown.

The 20-year-old Syracuse University junior, who won both the swimsuit and talent events, broke into a smile as pageant host Gary Collins announced her name. Much of the attention at this year's pageant was riveted on Miss Williams, after her victories in the preliminaries earlier. The 5-foot-6, 110-pound green-eyed brunette caught the eye of the eight pageant judges in an ivory white swimsuit.

She then calmly walked to center stage, where Miss America 1983, Debra Sue Maffet of California, placed the rhinestone-studded crown on her head and handed her a rose-draped scepter.

Miss America 1984, the daughter of two public school music teachers from Millwood, N.Y., then stepped off on the traditional victory stroll down the 140-foot Convention Hall runway as a sellout crowd of 22,600 people stood and cheered and Collins crowned the "Look at Her" theme song. She plans to become a

Broadway stage performer and the Miss America title could be a major boost to her ambition.

Miss Williams won \$25,000 in scholarships and a chance to earn more than \$100,000 during her year-long reign.

Miss New Jersey, Suzette Charles, one of the other three black contestants, was named first runner-up, winning a \$15,000 scholarship.

The new Miss America rolled out of bed Sunday after two hours sleep and plunged headlong into a hectic schedule in which she will travel 20,000 miles during the next year.

After an early-morning photo session on the beach, she sat down to breakfast with reporters and quickly made it clear she does not see herself as a "beauty queen."

"I've never felt like a beauty queen and I don't think I ever will, because that's a stereotype I don't agree with," said Miss Williams. She wasted little time in setting herself apart from previous pageant winners, who usually ducked controversial issues.

She told reporters she is a political "independent" who opposes legalization of marijuana, backs the Equal Rights Amendment and thinks women should be permitted to choose abortion.

"I think it's (abortion) a right that women should have," she said. "It should be there for women to use, but I don't think everyone should use it."

Most of the questions focused on her race, an issue that bothers her.

"At times I get annoyed because it seems the people and press aren't focusing on my accomplishments," said America's new sweetheart. "I've made some waves and I'm ready to handle that. People aren't used to dealing with changes, but it just had to happen."

Only a dozen blacks have competed since a "whites only" rule was lifted in the late 1950s.

Miss Williams said she will not use her title as a platform for pronouncements on black issues.

"Just because I'm black doesn't mean I'm going to favor every black position," said the singer. "I'm my own person with my own opinions."

"If I don't have the regular bookings, I will have other ones which don't normally book Miss America," she said confidently. "Like the Urban League."

Vanessa Williams said she is prepared for her "grueling" reign, although it means a lengthy separation from her family and a "very supportive" boyfriend.

due to his newspaper by BMI ... Jack The Rapper's annual Family Affair was a gas. It attracted all the hot wax figures to Atlanta and gave Jack the write to sing a happy song all the way to the bank.

THE ULTIMATE END. Life's only promise, death, has come to two of my most respected friends, Chester Washington and Buddy Young. Chester and I worked together for many years on the fighting Pittsburgh Courier.

His talent and his easy affable manner endeared him to those around him. His achievements are many and I am happy to write that he lived the full measure of his life and gave it more than he took from it. I came to know Buddy in the days of his greatness and he gave me pride in my heritage.

STAY LOOSE ... If a child lives with fairness he learns justice. Dorothy Law Nolte ... Billy Rowe is a syndicated columnist.

Letter To The Editor

Dear Editor:

You know Saturday night, September 17, 1983 made history around the world. My grandfather said, whenever the country has a Miss Black America, it won't be long before we will have a Black President. Look up, all you little Black girls and Black boys. You have a chance now. All it takes now is more hard work. **YOU CAN BE SOMEBODY.** The world is yours. We are making history every day. One Black man from America out in space — one Miss Black America.

We did not do it by ourselves. We had help from our white brothers and white sisters. Now I am asking our white brothers and sisters to open Chase Manhattan Bank. We don't want welfare. We want borrowing power like the third world.

Wake up, R.J. (Las Vegas REVIEW-JOURNAL). The newspaper is power. Times have changed. If you want my dollar, you will have to show me *no more printing of me on the back page when we do good.* **WE WANT THE FRONT PAGE WHEN WE EXCEL.** When we commit crime, we are on your front page. I hope you will change your format.

We have made history with both hands tied. Untie our hands and we will make the sea roll back.

Willie A. Neal

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ROWE

from page 18

only retired as public info specialist, Bureau of the Census, but has nixed DeeCee and Maryland for Arizona. Some of his small creditors would love to have an address ... Kenneth Drew, ch'man New York Voice, has instructed his counsel, former Judge William Booth, to take legal action against Ben Wright to collect an alleged 14G's