

Abram Hill

Sept. 8, 1939

Blanche Dunn

In an interview at Miss Blanche Dunn's apartment, 530 Manhattan ^{Ave} on Sept 7, 1939, Blanche stated that she was simply flattered by my request for an interview, but she had nothing to say and felt that the interview was absolutely unnecessary. There was nothing to write about ^{my} her life. She lives a very quiet and "sedate" life with her dog in her beautiful apartment which she is very proud of. If there was anything I cared to say about the apartment that would be all right.

Miss Dunn's apartment is deserving of some comment. The place is well furnished. The decorations show a taste for the best. She stated that her new stinnette piano is a comfort to her. Though she would not say whether or not she played. The apartment costs her about eighty-five dollars a month. Miss Dunn says she is not employed. She added that she was "physically idle, but mentally busy." This statement was not verified. The interviewer became convinced that Blanche was holding back. Blanche lives on her "income". The source of this income was not explained. The interviewer knew that this income was not the same as the average Harlem "income"---home relief!

Blanche has appeared in two unsuccessful stage plays. They were Ethel Waters' vehicles. She played a bit part. She wants to do more on the stage, but her West Indian accent has prevented her from getting the right break.

Blanche would not talk about her entertainment days with the old Cotton Club. That seemed to be a past, a past that she wanted to forget very very much. Her height as a public figure has been limited to a mentioning in the local press as a wearer of fine clothes. Ask ~~ed~~ if she was a s-tylist brought no light on the subject. Blanche only said, "You would hardly call me that."

Blanche is a very attractive woman. She is in her thirties. At ~~times~~ she looked even younger, but there was something about her that convinced me that Blanche is much older than she pretends. In fact Blanche has been around. She had a mass of long curly hair. Her skin is a rich brown. She has a good form. She is charming, in fact too charming. Blanche is a clever woman in whatever capacity she uses her talents.

She was very strong in denouncing the press. She hates publicity. The interviewer was definitely convinced that Blanche was hiding something. After all people don't have eighty-five dollar apartments and furniture that cost over five thousand dollars just off of "physical idleness and mental activity." Blanche was polite and sympathetic, but she was anxious for me to end the "interview" as quickly as possible.

In contacting Harold Jackman instead of some light being thrown on Blanche, the darkness increased. Harold enthusiastically referred all questions to Miss Dunn.

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Blanche is reputed to be a kept woman. It is further reputed that she travels in a rather closed circle of moneyed people. There are also reports that Blanche plays a dual role, in that sort of a part time woman and part time lesbian. The interviewer cannot be credited for having been able to verify neither deny this.

Nugent

On Blanche Dunn

One of the personalities of Harlem, a product of the Twenties, is also perhaps ^{one of} the best dressed women in New York City. In 1926, when she was about fifteen or sixteen years old, just a wide-eyed little girl fresh from the West Indies, Blanche Dunn made her first impress upon Harlem. Her delightful brown complexion, the regal balance of her well-shaped head upon a slender neck, and her personality made her much sought after. Among those whom she met at that time was Wilda Gunn, a girl from Cleveland, a dress designer who took Blanche under her wing. It was under this tutelage that Blanche expanded and learned the secret of perfect dress.

Soon she was being included in every gathering. Harlem was just being discovered and exploited. Carl Van Vechten was forever drawing sepia surprises from his uptown hat, with which to startle and please a naive and sensation-seeking downtown. All the Negro artists and artistes were at some time or other discovered by him to a panting public. And Blanche was offered as an example of the exotic bits of beauty with which fabulous Harlem abounded. She found it pleasant enough, and exciting, this being a brown beauty

~~wikxxx~~ among these pale sophisticates. And easily picked up enough of the characteristic chatter of this polyglot group, to be able to do a little harmless gold digging. All of the artists (and artistes) managed a 'donation' here and there; Blanche did likewise. For she was an artiste, an artist at dress and social behavior. Her wardrobe began to acquire silver foxes and exotic jewelry. She was to be seen at all Broadway first nights, dressed as well and as expensively as any of the paler ladies who gied for such honors; wearing her color as others did their well-known names, and to ~~xxx~~ the same end. It was a common thing to hear people say "Oh, everyone was there," and reel off an imposing list of names, finishing usually with "and that stunning colored girl -- you know -- the one that always goes to first nights."

She knew everyone, and when they came to Harlem they all (everyone) looked for her. A party was not a party, a place not a place without Blanche. Her popularity opened doors for her in Harlem, and being on the right side of these Harlem doors opened yet more white doors to her. The snowball of her popularity grew, as did the numbers of her admirers, the greatness of their names, the lavishness and extensiveness of their expenditures, the expensiveness/of her wardrobe, the autocracy of her charm. There was always a table reserved for her at the ~~xx~~ 'Hot Cha,' one of the more popular speak-easies in Harlem, for the Italian management soon recognized the fact that most people wanted to see her around. But Blanche was in some ways still a very naive, and very probably did not realize that she was in reality being a

'shill' for the place. She only knew that everyone was 'so nice' to her, that her drinks were free and that she could just sit at her table, sipping, and sooner or later everyone who was anyone would come in and pay their respects and pay her court.

This life, which came so easily pleasant and unfought for, became in reality her career. Her ability to accept the fact that the world was a pleasant place in which to live had never ~~was~~ diminished. And why should it. It was during the first of the depression (the 1929 depression) that she was persuaded that a shopping trip to Paris and a pleasure tour of Europe might prove amusing; and return to America after having proved to herself that such was the case. Saratoga and the races beckoned, Atlantic City, the football games, the Broadway first nights; and she answered their call. It was all a part of life to her by this time, (along with sundry trips to Europe) and still is, for Blanche is nothing if not vital and lives her life to the full quite calmly.