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# Review of "Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South" by L. Brown

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Ironically, Ganz suggests at the outset that the fair's most popular attraction may have been more about sexual fantasy than any brave new future. In chapter one, she profiles dancer Sally Rand, whose sensationalized performances drew large crowds, provoked legal authorities, and helped publicize the fair. Her account deliberately evokes the "hootchy-kootchy" shows that fairgoers encountered on the Midway of the 1893 Columbian Exposition. But having made this connection, Ganz does not explain—as historians of the Exposition have done in juxtaposing the Midway and the White City—how such a sexually charged show could coexist with the fair's high-minded vision of technological progress. A similar criticism goes for her concluding chapters on how women, African Americans, and ethnic Americans were—or were not—represented at the fair. Here, and throughout the book, Ganz is more descriptive than analytic, and she stops short of providing a sustained interpretation of the fair's broader cultural significance. On this point, it is worth noting that *The 1933 World's Fair* includes very little discussion of historiography, which has the effect of insulating the book from the issues and questions that have informed other studies of world's fairs.

Nonetheless, readers interested in the history of Chicago, the relation between business and culture, and, yes, world's fairs should find *The 1933 Chicago World's Fair* a useful addition to the field.

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**Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South.** By *Leslie Brown*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. xiii + 451 pp. Illustrations, maps, bibliography, notes, index. Cloth, \$34.95; paper, \$24.95. ISBN: cloth, 978-0-807-83138-0; paper, 978-0-807-85835-6.

Reviewed by Luther Adams

In *Upbuilding Black Durham*, Leslie Brown surveys urban black community formation in the Jim Crow South. Utilizing an impressive array of archival sources, she starts the story in 1865, after Emancipation, and ends it in the 1940s. Her theme is W. E. B. Du Bois' concept of "upbuilding," defined as "the 'social and economic development' of black communities after slavery, . . . the literal and figurative construction of the structures African Americans used to climb out of slavery" (p. 4). African Americans "upbuilt" their families, political and social

institutions, and businesses in the face of "homegrown oppression and terrorism, an American apartheid sanctioned by all three branches of government" (p. 5) and symbolized by Jim Crow. Within decades, African Americans transformed Durham into the "capital of the black middle class."

Brown pays close attention to the role of gender and class in black community development. Since "upbuilding demanded that African Americans reformulate [their] identity," black institutions reflected "distinctions of gender and class as well as the commonalities of race experience and community" (p. 11). By examining the shifting formations of African American identity across two distinct generations, Brown offers a nuanced portrait of black Durham that encompasses both progress and stagnation. Her dense, detailed scholarship demonstrates how a single study can incorporate both class and gender.

In the first section, Brown loosely follows the lives of three African American representatives of the elite class: John Merrick, Charles C. Spaulding, and Aaron M. Moore. These men, who dominated the community economically, politically and socially, took a conservative approach to advancement. Black capitalism became a means of attaining sovereignty. While accommodating white supremacy, they adopted upbuilding as a "tactic of resistance" to "outwit Jim Crow" (p. 19). After Emancipation, as black communities throughout the South faced violent reprisals from local whites who thought they were advancing too far or too fast, they "traded the ballot for books," bypassing campaigns to obtain the vote, and choosing to accumulate wealth (p. 68). At the same time, hoping to change the attitudes of racist whites, "the aspiring class presented itself as the prototype of black respectability, . . . and as examples of race progress and potential to the masses" (p. 97). In the process, they replicated hierarchies of class and color within black Durham while fashioning a political economy that relegated black women's activism to the church and home.

In the second section, Brown considers the generation that came after Merrick and Moore. The leadership was assumed by a more militant group of businessmen, and women began to share in it (p. 144). Paradoxically, even as an economic boom helped to solidify black Durham's place as a middle-class capital, for the majority of the city's African Americans "the benefits of the new economy were short-lived, at best, and translated into few substantial changes." Indeed, despite middle-class gains, most blacks experienced "a stagnation if not a reversal of black progress" (pp. 253–54). In her study, Brown both challenges and supplements the growing body of work on the "Long Civil Rights Movement." She takes issue, for example, with the notion that the civil-rights movements of the 1950s evolved out of civil-rights

unionism, demonstrating that black workers in Durham were convinced that the unions, which had "historically excluded, segregated and denigrated African Americans," could not be trusted to look after their interests (p. 302). For Brown the civil-rights initiatives in Durham were an indigenous outgrowth of both the successes and the limits of upbuilding. Although she refers to Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's seminal essay, "The Long Civil Rights Movement" (*Journal of American History* [March 2005]), her emphasis on the importance of the NAACP's efforts to equalize teachers' salaries seems more in keeping with Genna Rae McNeil's classic study, *Groundwork* (1983).

At the same time, Brown's impressive history of black Durham is weakened by her intermittent attention to working-class blacks and her conflation of conservatism with accommodation to Jim Crow. While making a clear case for the importance of the black elite, she notes that "the elite and middle class together made up less than 5 percent of Durham's black population" (p. 110). While upper-class men like Merrick and Moore led Durham's upbuilding, it is not clear how the community at large perceived their actions and philosophy. During the 1920s, working-class blacks viewed the middle class as "adversaries" and opposed attempts to intervene in their lives. However, Brown does not consistently demonstrate either how working-class blacks contributed to upbuilding or how they reacted to elite perceptions that they were holding back race progress (p. 258). Brown claims that "African Americans did not challenge whites' claims to power," focusing on the "gospel of wealth," rather than pushing for political and social equality. She states, "Durham's African American leaders did not challenge segregation—in fact, they embraced it" (pp. 71, 118). Yet, upbuilding itself was resistance; it may not have been militant or directly confrontational, but by refusing to accept the notion of inferiority that was central to white supremacy and attempting to improve the lives of African Americans, black citizens showed that they did not accede to their own oppression. While many upper-class blacks adopted a cautious and conservative approach, there is a possibility, not enunciated here, that they at least partially embraced black separatism. Moreover, as Brown notes, the accumulation of wealth was in itself a dangerous enterprise (p. 114).

*Upbuilding Black Durham* offers a rare internal view of black community formation, showing how African Americans succeeded in balancing their own interests against a Jim Crow system that continually sought to erode their aspirations and undermine their drive for equality. Brown's narrative situates black Durham at a crossroads of inquiry into African American, southern, and urban history. While thoroughly researched and well written, its length and density will limit the book's accessibility to general audiences. Scholars of the subject, however, will

find much of interest in this narrative of “one of the most significant black enterprises of the twentieth century” (p. 13).

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The Liability Century: Insurance and Tort Law from the Progressive Era to 9/11. By Kenneth S. Abraham. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press 2008. ix + 274 pp. Notes, index. Cloth, \$45.00. ISBN: 978-0-674-02768-8.

Reviewed by Tom Baker

*The Liability Century* opens with a metaphor that may change tort law. The metaphor is that of the binary star. Tort law and liability insurance are distinct institutions, but they often converge, forming a twinned system.

Watching from a great distance, we may assign to such a formation the name of one component: “tort law.” But looking through Kenneth Abraham’s telescope, we see two separate bodies that form a single star. Using his map of the heavens, we see this star within several overlapping constellations—one composed of institutions that compensate injured victims; another made up of institutions that prevent injuries; and, finally, a third one, which is harder to make out, composed of institutions that define moral obligations within a civil society.

Abraham may be uniquely qualified to tell this story. A student of Guido Calabresi at Yale Law School, a participant in the liability-insurance coverage wars of the latter twentieth century, a player in the tort-law projects of the American Law Institute, and a torts and insurance professor at the University of Virginia School of Law, Abraham has forged strong connections with the people and institutions involved in much of the history that he documents.

His account of the long liability century begins in the 1880s with the invention of employers’ liability insurance, which was followed, early in the twentieth century, by the workers’ compensation movement. Further expansion came with the introduction of automobile liability insurance in the interwar years and, in the 1960s, with the growth of medical and product liability and insurance. Abraham’s chronology concludes with the extraordinary after-the-fact federal insurance provided to the victims of September 11.