Home in the Sharing Economy: An Ethnography in Washington D.C., San Francisco, and Boston

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Dedication

To Casi O’Neill, you were right

Abstract

Short-term rental (STR) corporations like Airbnb advertise themselves as expanding tourism accommodations while helping STR hosts afford to live in expensive cities. This framing obscures the STR property's potential to be a highly profitable form of urban displacement. Displaced city residents, non-profits, unions, corporations, and legislators responded by calling for the legislative regulation of STRs. My dissertation investigates how STRs generate competing visions of economic justice. I trace how actors on different sides of the debate for regulations navigate this new monetization of housing. I argue that their claims are intertwined with larger political-economic structures of race, gender, and class.

My dissertation unfolds in five chapters. Chapter one argues that STRs arose alongside racist urban development and the 2008 financial crash. I contextualize the rise of STRs within the shifting meaning of the "home" in my three cities. Chapter two explores how political coalitions motivated similarly situated residents to their side through appeals to different visions of economic justice. The third chapter argues that STR hosts in Boston replicated xenophobic narratives by wrongly displacing the harms of STRs solely onto foreign Asian investors. Chapter four theorizes the role of STR platforms in perpetuating colonial racial capitalism. In addition to a wider exploration of urban economies and platform profit-making, it follows how Black STR hosts push Airbnb to remove baseless racist user reviews of their stays in D.C.'s majority-Black Ward 7 and 8. The fifth chapter explores how activists resisted racialized development through community walking tours that highlighted STR buildings that evicted residents of color. The conclusion discusses the future of STR debates as STR corporations pivot to multi-month stays in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Other items

ANC: Advisory Neighborhood Commission.

DCRA: Washington D.C. Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs.

DCZC: Washington D.C. Zoning Commission.

Hosted rental: A rental where the STR provider is present.

IPO: Initial Public Offering.

Platform: A digital interface that allows users to exchange goods and services.

Platform accountability: A provision that holds platforms financially liable for illegal listings.

PVA: Postliberal vertical aggregate.

San Francisco Model: A model of regulations that includes mandatory registration system for hosts, platform accountability which made platforms legally and financially responsible for listings that violated a city's STR regulations, and platform data disclosure to city regulators

SEC: U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

SFDCCC: San Francisco Democratic County Central Committee.

SFOSTR: San Francisco Office of Short-Term Rentals.

STR: Short-term rental. Temporarily renting a space for under 30 days through an online platform like Airbnb.

Split-cap: The different number of days between hosted and unhosted rentals.

TOPA: Washington D.C.'s Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act.

Unhosted rental: A rental where the STR provider is not present.

Introduction

In 2016, Airbnb released a video profiling four Black Airbnb hosts in Washington D.C. Chekesha, Randy, Kanita, and Synta discussed how sharing their homes on Airbnb helped them thrive in an increasingly unaffordable city (Airbnb Public Policy 2016 c). Short-term rentals (STRs) gave them the additional income they needed to pay off student loans, save their houses from foreclosure, and make ends meet. At the same time as this video circulated, a commercial owner rented out the entirety of a rent-controlled apartment building to users on Airbnb and similar platforms for $65 to $155 a night. The building was intended to help working-class renters live in the gentrifying Adams Morgan neighborhood, but it was exclusively booked to hundreds of tourists and vacationers for one- and two-night stays. In this case, Airbnb prevented working-class residents — many of whom were long-term African American residents and immigrants from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Central America — from staying in the neighborhood or thriving financially (Giambrone 2016).

At the time the STR fight was brewing in D.C. I was starting my Ph.D. program at the Department of Gender, Women & Sexuality Studies at the University of Minnesota. I had quit my previous job as an online campaigner at the Working Families Party and came to graduate school with the goal of studying the corporatization of cooperatives. My thinking was that tech giants such as WeWork took principles put forward by the cooperative and co-housing movements to create a corporatized form of communal living that was only accessible to tech workers of a certain class. As I investigated the performance of these co-living spaces, I started to understand that they were short-lived real estate investment schemes and that it would be difficult to study their urban impact ethnographically. At the same time as I was looking for a new research project, the D.C. branch of the Working Families Party collaborated in a sting operation to expose a Columbia Heights rent-controlled apartment building that was doing STRs in the same vein as the Adams Morgan one mentioned above. When the Working Families Party brought together legislators and impacted communities to speak about regulating these forms of STR monetization, Airbnb quickly mobilized its users and hosts to counter-rally at the press conference. In that moment, I saw a glimpse of the very thing I sought to better understand: how do corporations and residents mobilize to shape the future of urbanization?

As I did my preliminary fieldwork in D.C. and San Francisco, I began to appreciate the full complexity of this political phenomenon. While pro-regulatory groups painted pro-STR activism as corporate astroturfing, STR hosts characterized the opposition to Airbnb as a well-heeled machine run by what they called the Hotel Lobby — a combination of a hotel industry under threat by the affordable competition from STRs, a hotel union desperate to hold onto its jobs, and duped union, tenants' rights, and neighborhood association allies who STR hosts claimed misunderstood the minimal STRs had on housing. Both sides had industry backing and both

sides claimed the mantle of grassroots activism that represented the city's best interest. The fight over STR regulations represented a fundamental conflict over the future of urban development — one that evades easy categorizations of pure and tainted actors and evil corporate overlords and righteous grassroots activists. By studying the fight over STR regulations between 2010 and 2022, this dissertation lays out a new form of political involvement in the municipal legislative landscape — one that traces the complexities and nuances between platforms, their users, various industries and trade groups, unions, activists, legislators, and residents.

While I aim to capture the complexity of this contest over the city, I cannot claim impartiality. I have spent the last fifteen years organizing around issues of bodily autonomy, displacement, housing justice, and workers' and tenants' rights. As a white transgender woman located in a radical organizing tradition that owes an unpayable debt to trans and cis people of color, poor people, immigrants, and queers of all stripes, I arrive to this work with specific commitments to destroying the property form, ending state and corporate control over our daily lives, and creating communities guided by the insights of abolitionism, anarchism, and autonomous Marxism. And, I have my dead angles: I have been lucky to be housed for my whole life, to never go hungry, to only recently experience displacement and landlord aggression. Though I work to remain close to the data and what my participants have said, I have been given the blessing of multiple participants I spoke with to speak my mind freely and forward my own analysis: "You don't have to agree with me on this, I want to hear what you have to say."

This dissertation weaves together the stories of tenants, homeowners, corporate lobbyists, union workers, landlords, legislators, property managers, and activists working around issues of labor rights, housing justice, disability justice, and houseless rights. In bringing together these stories, I take seriously the worldviews of the many people I have met during my research. At the same time, I bring a critical feminist political economic lens to the topic. This project is one of synthesis and critique: one where I aim to show what the STR debates can teach us about social movements, property relations, and the emerging platform economy that pervades our cities.

Research Questions

Guided by these commitments, my dissertation asks: How do Boston, San Francisco, and Washington D.C. residents politically mobilize to navigate STRs' particular monetization of the home and displacement? In addressing the question of political mobilization and displacement, this project also asks: how do various facets of identity and financial status shape residents' political orientation toward the STR as a new iteration of home and labor? What makes residents attached to certain claims about STRs and how do these claims become normalized or

disrupted through different spheres of activism? How might these shifting conflicts over home illuminate larger shifts in the political economy?

Building on critical ethnic studies and feminist political economy, this project shows that capitalism is never uniformly generated and must be conceptualized alongside specific spatial-temporal regimes of gender, race, indigeneity, sexuality, and kinship (Gibson-Graham 1996; Bear et al. 2015; Melamed 2015). By thinking through these configurations in Boston, San Francisco, and Washington D.C.'s STR debates, this project adds another fold to the feminist conceptualization of capitalism by thinking about how different forms of capitalism compete with others to gain a foothold in a particular space. I center competing hegemonies and governance structures to explore the ways that neoliberal capitalism is an uneven and contested structure of governance in global Western cities (Ong 2006; Leitner, Peck, and Sheppard 2006; Papadopoulos et. al 2008; Harney and Moten 2013).

This project is based in Boston, San Francisco, and Washington D.C. because they are three of the largest STR markets that were in the midst of passing and revising a particular model of regulations (e.g., the San Francisco model). As I show below, each city's regulations unfolded in turn with San Francisco's regulations inspiring those in the Boston area and Washington D.C. I focus on these three U.S.-based cities because they allowed me to see how legislative strategies, protest tactics, and coalitional alignments emerged in variegated but similar ways across all three sites. In focusing on the commonalities that arise in these three cities, I speak to the way that actors in the emerging platform capitalism recreate similar coalitions and strategies despite local socio-cultural and political differences.

I bring home forward as simultaneously a non-market and market space. STR proponents want to retain their property rights and do what they will with their homes while STR opponents contend that these personal decisions have city-wide implications. As such, this project argues that scholars need an enmeshed scalar understanding of home and how it operates within specific instances of capitalism. The home — even in the private Western imagination — cannot be removed from its impact on the market or governance structures more broadly. However, my project goes beyond just acknowledging the fact that the economy is social. I ask: at what point does an instantiation of home become a normalized, hegemonic state of affairs and when does it unravel as a contested site? How do certain instances of generating home become normalized while others are disrupted?

The Story of STR Regulations 2008-2022

Online STR websites, such as the vacation rental section on Craigslist and dedicated sites like Vacation Rentals by Owner (VRBO), have existed since at least 1995. However, STRs did not reach popular consciousness until the founding of Airbnb. Founded by three

entrepreneurs in 2008, Airbnb has become a staple of the sharing economy — an economic sector based on consumer-to-consumer platforms that provide temporary access to physical assets and services (Sundararajan 2016). In the summer of 2008, Brian Chesky and Joe Gebbia, two Rhode Island School of Design graduates who couldn't make their Bay Area rent, decided to rent out air mattresses in their apartment for a design conference. Surprisingly, their "air bed and breakfast" idea worked and the roommates were able to secure rent for the month. They hired fellow Rhode Island School of Design grad Nathan Blecharczyk to build the Airbnb website and app backend, and, after several rounds of failed start-up funding, were able to obtain venture capital and build the company out in New York City and San Francisco (Gallagher 2017).

Today, Airbnb operates in more than 100,000 cities in 220 countries and has claimed over 1 billion bookings (Airbnb a 2021). STR corporations like Airbnb provide an online platform that allows guest users to rent a dwelling from a host user. A platform is a digital interface that allows users to exchange goods and services with one another. Platforms ensure the reliability of the market through identity screening and star ratings, provide users with access to a network of guests and hosts, and process payments for hosts (Sundararajan 2016). STR corporations act as an intermediary that connects users on its platform and finances itself by taking a small cut of the rent paid by guests to hosts (Frieden 2018). The host user can rent out their whole home, a private room, or a shared space for as short as one day and as long as several months. Platforms like Airbnb ensure the reliability of the market through identity screening and star ratings, providing users with access to a network of guests and hosts, and processing payments and fees for hosts while taking a fee. At the time of writing, Airbnb and other STR platforms do not set a formal limit on how long a guest can rent a space from a host in the U.S., though hosts are limited to only one listing at a time and a set number of days in some jurisdictions.

I use the terms guest and host here to distinguish between renters and the users that rent their space. While I could use renter and STR landlord in lieu of host and guest, I choose to use the in-platform designation developed by STR corporations due to how many interviewees self-identified as hosts. Host here is a political and descriptive term — one that underscores that host users not only provide access to a rental property, but also take on the attendant labor of managing the rental, interfacing with the guests, and providing a particular type of travel experience. The primary duties required of a host include maintaining contact with their guests, cleaning up the space, and letting guests into the rental space (Airbnb h 2021). However, taking a deeper look at Airbnb's rules and guidelines reveals that hosts must negotiate federal, state, and local laws, create agreements with neighbors about the conditions of hosting, create safe home conditions for their guests, and monitor the guest to make sure they follow the rules of the property (Airbnb i 2021). Hosts may also choose to do the work of screening the guests they decide to welcome into their homes (Ladegaard 2018). Some hosts even go as far as hiring

professional cleaning services or employing "co-hosts" to manage their property. Likewise, the prevalence of long-term rental landlords and tenants in STR activism makes it analytically easier to distinguish between long-term landlords and rentals and short-term guests and hosts.

Airbnb's rise to prominence and the spread of STRs are controversial. Instances of racial discrimination and illegal housing rentals have brought the corporation to the attention of legislators and interest groups that want to regulate STRs (Levin 2016). These groups claim that Airbnb negatively impacts housing affordability and quality by promoting unregulated STRs, thereby removing massive numbers of residential properties from the housing market. Critics contend that this process drives up rent and makes cities unaffordable to low-income individuals — who are disproportionately people of color. They criticize Airbnb for not publicly providing STR data that would make measuring impacts and regulating the service possible (Cox and Haar 2020). Academics noted that while some users STRed to hold on to their homes, STRs incentivized owners to evict tenants to rent short-term for a higher profit or sell their buildings to STR investors (Cocola-Gant and Gago 2019). Moreover, the rise of STRs was accompanied by a rapid professionalization of the district by property managers, investor corporations, and professional landlords who rented units at a scale far above the "one host, one home" ideal of Airbnb (Bosma and Doorn 2022, 4). Other groups criticize Airbnb for not paying its share in taxes — claiming that Airbnb comes to cities to make a profit without helping poor city residents in any way (Slee 2015). Airbnb users have also taken to social media and used hashtags such as #AirbnbWhileBlack and #AirbnbWhileAsian to document racism against users on Airbnb (Medvedeva 2021).

These controversies set the stage for the widespread attempt to regulate STRs in U.S. cities in the 2010s. In the following section, I lay out two co-developing trends that are key to understanding the STR regulatory debate: the form regulations take as well as the kinds of activist formations that arise to implement them. The story below profiles the rise of two coalitions: The STR Coalition and the Regulatory Coalition. The former consisted of STR platforms, STR users, and their supporters. Broadly, it fought for minimal regulations of STR business. The latter consisted of tenants' rights activists, the hotel industry, hotel unions, neighborhood groups, and other ally groups. Their goal was to implement strong regulations that included a mandatory registration system for hosts, platform accountability which made platforms legally and financially responsible for listings that violated a city's STR regulations, and platform data disclosure to city regulators (Cox and Haar 2020). Notably, while the actors that made up the two coalitions were largely the same across all three cities, there was no explicit national-level coordination or campaign between these groups. In other words, the Regulatory Coalition in San Francisco didn't explicitly work with the Regulatory Coalition in Washington D.C., but their strategies and members belonged to similar groups in their respective cities. Likewise, in the case

of the STR Coalition, while there was some top-level organization through Airbnb, similar actors emerged in all three cities' coalitions.

I will discuss the specifics of coalitional actors and their strategies in detail in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4. This introduction's main takeaway for the reader is that regulations were not uniform, but rather developed through a years-long social movement, judicial, and legislative struggle across three cities. The structures that arose to fight these battles shared an organizing core that was replicated by coalitional actors. While each city had its unique history and geography, the strategy of coalitional formation as well as how conflicts played out looked similar. As I discuss in Chapter 2, this has direct implications for how we theorize the study of global capital and local specificity.

2010-2015: The STR Regulation Fight Begins in San Francisco

Though Airbnb had been around since 2008, it did not reach a significant scale until the 2010s. In 2010, as STRs gained notoriety in New York City and New Orleans for displacing tenants and hosting loud parties, Michael, a jolly white San Francisco housing activist in his 50s, was approached by a software developer who had developed STR tracking software. This developer found out that over 14,000 listings were being advertised on Airbnb and most of them were full-time, full-unit accommodations. In other words, they were exclusively rented out as STRs. Michael said, "14,000 units, that's a little less than 5% of the housing stock in the city and county of San Francisco. That's a lot of units when you're looking at a town that's going through its worst housing crisis probably since the 1906 earthquake." He reached out to affordable housing groups, tenants' rights organizations, landlord organizations, hotel industry groups, hotel workers' unions, and labor allies. Each of these groups had specific reasons to come to the table — from tenants facing STR-driven evictions to hotel workers at risk of losing their jobs due to unregulated STR competitions to advocates worried about STRs limiting housing supply and driving up housing prices. Michael explained, "We cobbled together this very eclectic coalition that started going to City Hall and saying what are you going to do about the proliferation of these STR rentals?"

The Regulatory Coalition unsuccessfully attempted to pass a city ballot measure against STRs in 2013. Their initiative effort failed to get the signatures it needed to appear on the ballot, but this action, in the activist's beliefs, prompted San Francisco's Board of Supervisors to pass an ordinance regulating STRs in 2014. It allowed users to rent their primary residence for 365 nights a year and 90 days if they weren't present if they had a business license, registered for a permit, and agreed to pay transient occupancy tax to the city. The ordinance also created the Office of Short-Term Rentals which regulates STRs in San Francisco today.

Coalition activists were dissatisfied with this ordinance for two reasons. First, the 90-day cap on unhosted STRs was unenforceable: there was no way to tell if a host was present. This could lead to hosts hosting their whole home for more than 90 days a year — an issue that the Regulatory Coalition is still fighting in San Francisco to this day. This was especially troublesome for members of the hotel industry and hotel union, which wanted to hold STRs to the same regulatory standards as hotel rentals. Second, housing activists believed that there was no accountability for the platforms if their users violated the law. A tenants' rights activist told me, "Where's the accountability for these platforms? For Airbnb? You know, you've got to get them some skin in the game. How is the city supposed to enforce this? You're not going to have enough people to go after them one at a time. That's a Sisyphean task. So, you've got to get these guys some skin in the game."

The ordinance went into effect in 2015. A Regulatory Coalition activist noted that while roughly 1200 people registered, most hosts did not. In response, the Coalition drafted a ballot measure, known as Proposition F, or City of San Francisco Initiative to Restrict Short-Term Rentals. Proposition F would hold platforms accountable for removing units listed unregistered on their platform and capped STRs to 75 nights a year total. It also allowed "interested parties" living within 100 feet of an illegal listing to sue STR platforms if their neighbors violated the city's ordinance. While other cities such as New York had passed so-called "one host, one home" regulations, Proposition F was the first to attempt to enshrine platform accountability in the law. The goal of platform accountability was to hold STR corporations financially and legally responsible for regulating its users while making it easier for the City to pick out multi-unit operators hosting illegally.

A massive ballot effort ensued with both sides spending millions to get out the vote for their issue. Airbnb spent $9 million and the Regulatory Coalition spent just over $1 million total (City & County of San Francisco Ethics Committee 2021). With over $10 million spent collectively, Proposition F failed to pass with 44.41% in favor to 55.59% against (San Francisco Department of Elections 2021). A member of the Regulatory Coalition wasn't fazed by this: "They outspent us about twenty to one. It wasn't a record for the most money spent by a single corporation against a ballot measure but it was close. It was very close. The thing that was so amazing, we only lost by ten points. Considering how badly we were outspent, that was pretty good."

2015-2016: Hosts Fight Back through Airbnb Citizen

A core part of Airbnb's success against Proposition F was the support the corporation received through independent host groups. In the early 2010s, a group of hosts in San Francisco began meeting under the banner of "home sharers." The group started because hosts were uncertain about aspects of hosting. As one member of the group explained in an interview with

me in 2018, “Not long after I started hosting I started asking myself, oh is it legal? Do I need to pay hotel tax? And Airbnb’s website gave like no resources. So, I think I saw a notice on Craigslist that said, ‘Are there any hosts out there that want to get together and share information?’” While the Home Sharers group started as four people on a living room floor, it quickly expanded to a group with dozens of members and a weekly meeting. The group prided itself on being independent of Airbnb and other STR platforms. One Home Sharers member, an older Asian man, explained that they didn’t want a conflict of interest between the voice of platforms and the voice of hosts. The group didn’t accept money or funding from STR platforms and none of their employees served on the Airbnb Board of Directors or in any leadership capacity. This group became increasingly active in the fight to push back against Proposition F — making public appearances, lobbying legislators, and getting out the message by canvassing door-to-door.

The success of the campaign against Proposition F led to Airbnb attempting to replicate its success with these STR hosts in cities nationwide and later internationally. The STR company began to politicize its users through a non-profit group called Airbnb Action. This politicization became a core partnership between users, platforms, and their allies which I call the STR Coalition. According to an Airbnb Action announcement, the San Francisco home sharing club was just one branch. Users internationally were already organizing together in similar clubs to advocate on behalf of Airbnb to their local legislatures (Airbnb Citizen a 2016). As more cities attempted to regulate STRs, Airbnb saw a need to expand this model of activism internationally. Airbnb Action created a hundred host clubs in a hundred cities to protect Airbnb’s ability to do business in cities and hosts’ rights to open their homes to Airbnb users.

The separation between Airbnb as a corporation and Airbnb Action as an organizing group was slippery from the beginning. In a report on its work, Airbnb Action stated “Our community of hosts and guests and our global policy team are winning real victories for home sharing” (ibid). The slippage between Airbnb’s global policy team, Airbnb Action, and Airbnb users quickly led to accusations of corporate-funded astroturfing (Yates 2021), charges which I show in Chapter 2 do not necessarily always have merit nor represent the full extent of user organizing within the STR Coalition.

Airbnb Action drew parallels between organizing Airbnb users and other social movements. Airbnb Action likened its Home Sharing Clubs to guilds and unions as “networks of people with shared economic and societal interests” that “have come together to leverage the power of their voices” (Airbnb Citizen a 2016). The organization compared its membership of over 4 million active users to the Sierra Club’s 2.4 million members, US teacher’s unions’ collective 2.9 million members, and the NRA’s 5 million members (ibid). Airbnb Action promised to provide Home Sharing Clubs with staff support and grassroots organizing training from former Obama

Administration officials and organizing experts. The implications were clear: Airbnb and its users were a political force to be reckoned with.

When the D.C. Council sought to regulate STRs for the first time in 2015, Airbnb Action sprang into action. Through its online user portal, Airbnb Action mass emailed its hosts asking them to take action against D.C.'s STR bill by visiting with their legislators and speaking at hearings. Hosts in D.C. were mobilized to star in commercials, participate in debates at various wards and on various local news stations, lobby legislators, and testify at D.C. Council hearings. Hosts were joined by local small business advocacy groups and certain members of D.C.'s Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, a body made up of elected representatives from different neighborhoods across the District who advised the Council. Thanks to the activism of Airbnb hosts, this first iteration of STR regulations failed to move forward.

Airbnb Action rebranded to Airbnb Citizen in November 2016. This new platform stated that its goal was about more than simply taking action to defend home sharing. It was a hub for a growing home sharing movement that helped people survive and thrive in the current economy. Airbnb Citizen (Airbnb Citizen c 2016) claimed to represent everyone from senior citizens who relied on hosting for supplemental income to working families who used Airbnb to fight off stagnant pay and mounting debt. On its About page, Airbnb Citizen underscored its collaboration with cities worldwide to provide solutions to pressing environmental, social, and economic problems. The site provided a compact data dashboard that gave city-level information about how many hosts lived in a city, how many guests came to visit them, and the amount of revenue that was generated for users by Airbnb. The site also featured a Community Compact that emphasized Airbnb's openness and transparency to working with cities and helping them economically. Airbnb committed "to work with cities to pay our fair share; to make information available to cities so they can make smart decisions; and to get to common-sense solutions that support the middle class" (ibid).

The shift from Airbnb Action to Airbnb Citizen signaled a shift from defensive measures against home sharing regulations to going on the offensive by building connections between Airbnb, its users, and city and state legislators nationwide. In the post-industrial 21st-century economy, cities have been tasked with attracting financial capital and business to promote local financial growth (Rushbrook 2002, 187). Airbnb strove to prove itself to be a useful ally in this endeavor by showing cities the monetary value cities receive by promoting responsible home sharing. The claim made was that hosts would pay taxes on the income they received from travelers and reinvest that money back into the economy. Meanwhile, travelers were projected as spending their money in cities and helping to further boost growth. Airbnb Citizen leveraged these claims and its large network of users in order to advocate for less restrictive STR regulations in cities internationally.

2016-2017: Platform Accountability and The San Francisco Model

Although the STR Coalition appeared to be on an upswing, the state of play fundamentally shifted after the November 2016 elections. The notably pro-STR Mayor of San Francisco, Ed Lee, was left politically weakened as he could only muster 54% of the electorate against relatively unknown and unfunded challengers. The electoral shift emboldened the Regulatory Coalition to take another run at the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, working to pass a stripped-down version of Proposition F. In 2016, the Board passed a comprehensive STR ordinance limiting STRs to one-unit, primary residences that were registered with the newly created Office of Short-Term Rentals. The legislation passed ten-to-nothing at the Board. Michael, the pro-STR regulatory activist, gloated, “There was no point in the Mayor vetoing it because it only takes 8 votes to overturn the veto. But he wouldn’t sign it and let it go into law without his signature because he didn’t want to embarrass Airbnb.”

A crucial section of the law required STR companies to verify that its hosts had registered with the city before being able to collect money on listings, a legislative concept STR regulation activists called “platform accountability.” As stated earlier, platform accountability made STR providers financially and legally responsible for illegal users on their platforms. The law charged STR corporations who did not verify their hosts with a $1000 per day per listing fine. The onus of enforcing STR regulations shifted from the City to the STR corporation. And it incentivized STR corporations in helping the City to pick out multi-unit operators hosting illegally.

Airbnb sued the City and claimed that the law violated Airbnb’s rights under Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act. In essence, Section 230 ensured that websites were not held liable for the content their users posted. Airbnb was joined in its filing by other STR companies as well as Internet freedom of speech organizations like the Electronic Frontier Foundation and The Center for Democracy and Technology. The San Francisco City Attorney countered that Airbnb had misunderstood Section 230 because the City was regulating business transactions and not the user’s content.

A year later in May 2017, San Francisco and Airbnb reached a settlement agreement. The STR corporation agreed to implement platform accountability as long as the nature of the ordinance was not changed by the City. Overnight, Airbnb’s listings in San Francisco shrank from over 8,000 listings to 2,100 registered with the city — putting three-fourths of Airbnb listings in San Francisco out of commission. This settlement agreement set the precedent for what STR regulators would later call “the San Francisco model” to be implemented in cities across the United States as well as decreased Airbnb’s drive to fight STR regulations. As a result, Regulation Coalition advocates felt emboldened to push through stricter regulations.

2017-2019: The San Francisco Model in the Nation's Capital

One of the first cities to take advantage of the San Francisco model was Washington D.C. While the initial bill to regulate STRs was soundly defeated by Airbnb Action and its STR Coalition allies in 2016, the Regulatory Coalition, emboldened by the San Francisco model, introduced a second bill based on the San Francisco ordinance. The bill included a registration system, platform accountability, and best practices for hosting and tax payments. This led to a concerted effort by the STR Coalition to shut down the new regulations, which they saw as overly restrictive and potentially unconstitutional.

This effort not only brought Airbnb Citizen groups to testify at the D.C. Council but also created a basis for independent host groups to form outside of Airbnb's purview. I spoke with hosts who started their own area-based group and other hosts who began a collaboration of STR multi-host unit advocates. In the majority-Black working-class Wards 7 and 8, hosts came together to advocate on behalf of their Wards which we often left off in conversations about STRs. Given that most of the hosting in the District happened outside the wards, the hosts grumbled at the added regulatory hurdles they would have to clear to host in an area bereft of major hotels. These hosts came together to share not only tips and best business practices but also to address racial discrimination against hosts in the app. When I asked an especially active host from these Wards about how she got involved, she explained, "Airbnb told me about where to go. They reached out to me and said, 'Oh, blah wants to hear from a host, would you go, would you be willing to do it.' And I'm not the only one, they might ask other hosts to go and talk to them. To hear different stories." Although these hosts formed groups outside of Airbnb's app ecosystem, they were still called on as allies by the STR corporation and folded into the STR Coalition.

Though there was an initial burst of energy around the STR regulations, STR platforms quickly stepped back after the D.C. Council voted unanimously in favor of the bill. A forty-something white woman STR advocate who hosted using multiple units told me,

> I felt like once the council had voted for it, Airbnb in my opinion just kind of stepped back. They talked about all the stuff they could do to turn it around and they never, it just went by the wayside. It was almost like, from their point of view, ok it's happening, we're not going to fight it anymore. Which is fine, we just kind of moved forward.

With a veto-proof majority, D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser (2019) acknowledged the bill's passage but refused to sign the bill, citing fears of the impacts the bill would have on tourism and homeowners as well as the potential unconstitutional nature of the bill. The Mayor's reticence towards the bill resulted in her being slow to implement the Council's regulations. The council accused the Mayor of "slow-walking" the process of approving the bill. In a public fight on Twitter, Phil Mendelson, the Chairman of the D.C. Council, posted a social media graphic with the

hashtag #DeliverOnHomesharing: the graphic accused the Mayor's office of not acting on legislation for seven months, claimed STRs were illegal in the District until the Mayor acted, and threatened to withhold approval for any future city permits if the Mayor did not take action on STR regulation (see Figure 1). The Mayor's Chief of Staff responded with an edited version of the graphic with the hashtag #SaveHomeSharing. He accused the legislation of being overly restrictive to STR business in addition to potentially unconstitutional. In addition, the offices charged with reviewing and implementing STR regulations, the DC Office of Zoning and the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, were political allies with the Mayor. The DC Office of Zoning didn't approve the bill until almost a year after its passage and the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs failed to set up any regulatory apparatus until 2021. Granted, the delay was due to the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, but the legislation had been in effect and approved for implementation well before March 2020.

The D.C. Council, through legislative and lobbying maneuvers, was eventually able to force the Mayor's hand and have the regulations enforced. These palace politics showed how the STR fight made its way into the halls of power and pushed state officials into opposing sides aligned with either the Regulatory or STR Coalition. The eventual passage and implementation of the STR regulations were partially due to STR Coalition advocates ultimately being in favor of regulations. This became apparent during the final hearing before the DC Office of Zoning approved the bill for implementation. In the hearing, the DC Council Chairman, several Airbnb hosts, Airbnb lobbyists, hotel union representatives, and hotel industry lobbyists all came out to speak in favor of the bill. Since then, there has been little legislative action on this issue in D.C.

2019-2022: A Regulatory Patchwork in the Boston metro

While San Francisco and D.C. are straightforward examples of how the San Francisco model took hold, the Boston metro area shows how these regulations took on a patchwork formation. The regulatory frameworks in the Boston area can be broken down into two eras: prior to the San Francisco Settlement and after the Settlement. Prior to the settlement in 2017, Cambridge Councilmember Craig Kelly proposed regulations that would require hosts to register with the City and limit STRing to owner-occupied units with three or fewer rooms or buildings with four or fewer units where the owner lives on the premises. The need to regulate STRs arose from the same reason as other cities —a dearth of affordable housing. Councilmember Kelly was worried about STRs cannibalizing the little housing that was available. Kelly was quickly joined by members of the American Hotel and Lodging Association, which represented local hotels and bed-and-breakfasts, as well as area unions. Surprisingly, a number of STR hosts I met in Cambridge joined the Regulatory Coalition — citing concerns over the gentrification of Airbnb. A

white heterosexual couple who hosted on Airbnb and self-identified as members of the pro-housing development Yes-In-My-Backyarder movement (YIMBYs) explained, "None of us want to see people pushed out of their homes, I mean, like but the pushing out of the homes threat actually happened because of rent control and we watched, again, our neighbors, I mean one after the other through the years, getting literally pushed out of their homes because there is no more rent control." For this couple, the earlier repeal of rent control led to displacement in their neighborhood and Airbnb was a threat of displacement akin to this repeal.

To ensure the legislation was representative, Kelly held several listening sessions with members of the STR host community. Hosts met each other at these meetings and formed an email listserv dedicated to combating regulations and fighting for more limited standards of best practice. Hosts from around the Boston area, whether single-unit or multi-unit hosts, also came to testify or listen to testimony at legislative hearings and formed a broader network of Boston-area hosts that served as the backbone of the STR Coalition.

After several hearings and listening sessions, Cambridge passed regulations without platform accountability. The City created a registration system for hosts. However, only a portion of the hosts registered, and unregistered listings were rampant. A key reason for why this was the case was the lack of enforcement: the City refused to actively enforce regulations and there was no platform accountability component in the regulations to give platforms an incentive to enforce legislation, like in San Francisco.

Hosts expressed frustration that they had followed the law while unregulated units were able to do business unabated. However, these hosts seemed satisfied with the regulations overall. Hosts in the area, regardless of their stance on regulation, complained about the City's lack of enforcement. Barb, a white woman who had spoken with me several times during my fieldwork in the area, gave me a walking tour of her neighborhood. As we passed multiple buildings, she showed me STRs that displayed the telltale signs of an illegal listing: lock boxes, keypad entrances, cars from out of state, hallway closets stuffed to the brim with towels, and confused people with one or two roller bags looking at their phones. As we turned onto a busy intersection, Barb showed me how to compare the host of a unit with the recorded property value through the Cambridge Assessing Department's online database. One host we looked up rented five properties on Airbnb but was not listed as their property owner. Barb explained that she was mad that she followed the rules, paid her taxes and fees, and underwent inspection while others flouted the law. She said she was a rule follower by nature and understood why other people didn't follow the law. It's hard to catch people illegally STRing without knowing the signs to look for. And even then, without proper municipal enforcement or platform compliance, these signs wouldn't amount to much unless you caught the person STRing red-handed. However, her frustration over the City's failure to enforce regulations was palpable.

Once the Settlement came into effect in 2017, the San Francisco regulatory model became a gold standard emulated across the U.S. In Massachusetts, the state legislature passed a set of regulations in late 2018 similar to San Francisco's ordinance to be implemented statewide by June 2019. Boston quickly implemented new San Francisco-style regulations. The Boston regulations were primarily pushed forward by Boston Mayor Marty Walsh and supported by Boston hotel unions, hotel and lodging associations, local neighborhood groups, and legislators like Boston Councilmember Michelle Wu. These regulations would create an STR regulatory agency, limit hosting to owner-occupied units and owner-adjacent units within owner-occupied two- or three-family buildings, and implement platform accountability in Boston.

Although hotels and unions played an important role in Boston's regulatory effort, the role of neighborhood associations stood out. In particular, the Alliance of Downtown Civic Organizations (ADCO) and a range of Boston Chinatown organizations spoke out in favor of regulations in Boston. Their complaints fused concerns around safety with neighborhood gentrification. As I show in Chapter 5, Chinatown residents came up to tell stories of how long-term Chinatown residents were evicted to make room for STRs and more student housing. ADCO gave a presentation on how corporations with employees would pose as individual hosts to rent out multiple units and take away housing stock in these neighborhoods.

Airbnb put out a call for hosts to testify at hearings and listening sessions and hosts quickly formed an informal Boston-area listserv. Multi-unit hosts who were disappointed by Airbnb's focus on owner-occupied single units formed groups to advocate on behalf of multi-unit hosts who did not host in their units. Similar processes happened in Somerville. Ultimately the regulations passed. In the end, Boston passed a law limiting STRs to an owner's primary residence or an owner-adjacent unit, a unit in a two- or three-family building where all units are owned by the owner. Surprisingly, the city didn't put any limits on whole-home rentals like San Francisco and D.C.

Finally, in Brookline — a middle-class majority-white township just outside of Boston — the main drive from regulation came from a combination of state injunction and concerned residents who didn't like the foot traffic of STRs and worried about party houses coming into their neighborhoods. As stated earlier, the Massachusetts state legislation pushed Brookline to make a decision on whether to allow STRs. STRs were made illegal in Brookline under a decision made by the Planning Commissioner. Given the city's small size and limited budget, there wasn't much of an effort to regulate STRs outside of the ones that were reported by residents. Hosts continued to host in Brookline largely uninterrupted.

Both anti-STR residents and hosts were dissatisfied with this arrangement and complaints from both groups led to the Brookline Planning Department beginning listening sessions with STR hosts to figure out a legal framework for STRing. When I spoke to hosts in the

area, they scoffed at the idea of having a specialized government task force responsible for enforcement and preferred a smaller-scale complaint system. A government representative I spoke to echoed these sentiments, stating that the Town didn't have a huge budget, so it could not adopt a model similar to San Francisco's — which requires housing and data specialists, funds for an STR task force, and technical knowledge. A member of the Planning Department explained that they were putting together a legislative proposal for the Brookline Town Meeting but that there was a chance that it wouldn't pass. The Town Meeting was Brookline's legislative arm and was composed of 240 elected Town Meeting Representatives from across the town. The Planning Department held listening sessions for hosts and concerned neighbors. They put out a Warrant Article ahead of the Spring 2020 Town Meeting but this article was bumped down until the Fall Town Meeting. After the Fall Meeting, the Representatives decided to create a special committee to evaluate STR legislation ahead of the 2021 Spring Town meeting. In December 2021, Brookline formalized regulations and passed them in its Town Meeting legislative body in March 2022. This set of regulations limited STR to provider-owned primary residences, but allowed tenants to STR if they didn't violate their leases or rental agreements.

The patchwork of regulation in the Boston metro underscores the importance of state capacity, platform accountability frameworks, and host compliance in ensuring effective regulations. Efforts to regulate STRs like those in Cambridge and Brookline display the limits of regulations without platform accountability and enforcement. The absence of these measures allowed STRs to continue virtually undeterred. When an approach like Boston's is taken, however, regulations are enforceable and platforms and hosts are motivated to comply.

I provide this overview of STR regulations over the last decade to highlight that STRs and regulations aren't simply entities that exist in the wild. They are competing social claims, made through coalitional politics and legislation, over the kind of property monetization, urban development, and vision of home city residents want. Though they emerge in distinct geographies, they share resonances with one another through the actors involved, the models for regulations, and the urban economies of rent and housing that undergird this conflict. This dissertation works to understand what is at stake in the STR debates and the novel forms of coalition and organization that emerged to fight for competing visions of the city.

In the next section, I situate these regulatory struggles within the literature on urban platform economies, feminist social reproduction, and the hegemony of home under racial capitalism. I show how the home is a core unit in urban platform economies that creates new political arrangements of governance, technology, and markets through STR regulations. I forward feminist discussions of social reproduction and "life's work" to showcase how the commodification of socially reproductive work through platforms is the driving site of STR regulatory fights (Mitchell et. al. 2004). Furthermore, I bring the literature on social reproduction,

racial capitalism, and hegemony together to theorize how the shape of social reproduction within the home, both paid and unpaid, is a hegemonic contest shaped by competing political actors who are motivated by the shift in the home as a foundational form of property arrangement and social relation under racial capitalism. In thinking through the shift, I underscore the importance of the STR regulatory fight in understanding how property arrangements, forms of governance, modalities of politics, positionality, and coalitional tactics spawn from a change in the home within the racial capitalist urban economy.

Literature Review

Urban Platform Economies

I situate the STR debates within a larger discussion of urban platform economies. STRing is made possible by digital platform corporations. Platforms are defined as digital infrastructures that allow two or more groups to interact, but their reach extends far beyond the creation and moderation of a mediated marketplace (Srnicek 2017, 25). Platforms not only add value by bringing groups together to interact, but also "as organizations, they can also take on a powerful institutional role, solidifying economies and cultures in their image over time" (Bratton 2016, 41). And, platforms often come with a variety of tools that "enable their users to build their own products, services, and marketplaces" (Srnicek 2017, 25). While corporate ownership isn't necessary for the existence of a platform, more often than not, the major platforms at play in the modern world are corporate-controlled (e.g., Google, Amazon, Facebook, Intel, Uber, etc.) (Caprotti and Liu 2019). Gillespie (2010, 3) explains that technology firms used the term "platform" to discursively frame the promise and work of their technology while eliding tensions at the heart of the business model: "between user-generated and commercially produced content, between cultivating community and serving up advertising, between intervening in the delivery of content and remaining neutral." Platforms are as much a digital infrastructure and marketplace as they are a community, a regulatory framing strategy, a set of online governance procedures, and a sales pitch to investors.

At the base level of their business, platforms thrive when they retain a large user community and commodify their data to drive for future user acquisition, sell the data to third parties, and create profitable services. Srnicek divides platforms into five categories: advertising platforms (e.g., Google), cloud platforms (e.g., Amazon), industrial platforms (e.g., GE), product platforms (e.g., Spotify), and lean platforms (e.g., Airbnb) (Srnicek 2017, 26). Although Srnicek makes this neat division, he admits that the topological categories can run into each other in one corporation. For example, Amazon can function as an advertising platform for online shopping, a cloud platform for Amazon Web Services, a product platform through its Prime streaming service, and an industrial platform that runs Amazon's warehouse and shipping operations.

Theorists of technology have given platforms an increased level of prominence in our current political economy. The rising importance of platforms has been called platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2017), the stack (Bratton, 2016), surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2018), and a vectoralist system of rule over information that is even worse than capitalism (Wark 2019). What these accounts agree on is that the power center of today's political economy revolves around actors that can analyze, centralize, and act upon information through technological platforms. The institutional force of platforms differs based on the theorist. In the case of STR platforms like Airbnb, Srnicek sees Airbnb as a blip that will become outmoded as users realize that they're getting the short end of the stick; a platform that does not produce data in its own right like Google or Facebook but monetizes resources that would otherwise not have been used (Srnicek 2017, 44-45). Bratton argues that we cannot foresee the organizational force of platforms as they create layered mega-structures and forms of sovereignty beyond human comprehension and design (Bratton 2016, 44).

In assessing a platform's institutional force in cities, I am aligned with scholars using the framing of platform urbanism: "a set of burgeoning ideas about how the increasing ubiquity of platform ecosystems is reshaping urban conditions, institutions and actors" (Barns 2019, 19). Housing is a key area within the platform ecosystem. Though Airbnb and other STR platforms are financed by taking a cut from their users, this source of funding is guaranteed through a rent gap (Wachsmuth and Weisler 2018, 1153-1154). The rent gap is created due to the outsized amount of rent an owner can collect from renting a unit short-term compared to long-term rentals. Investors, landlords, homeowners, and even renters can take advantage of this rent gap by embracing a flow of short-term travelers over long-term tenants — especially in "global" tourist neighborhoods in major cities. In turn, STR platforms become profitable because they can monetize on this rapid pace of rentals. The STR rent gap in Boston, D.C., and San Francisco led to adverse outcomes for city residents – including a decrease in available housing stock, disruptive STR guests, and eviction and displacement.

Doorn (2019, 1810) argues that STR platforms like Airbnb exercise an infrastructural type of power that mobilizes its data assets and users to advocate for change in cities. In the mid-2010s, social movements in favor and against regulating STRs emerged. Doorn interprets the social movements against regulating STRs, such as Airbnb Citizen, as a form of "regulatory entrepreneurship" that constitutes STR hosts as an ideal citizen that advocates for platforms because they economically empower users such as themselves, all while leading cities away from larger-scale uses of the platform. He theorizes Airbnb's role as an urban regulatory institution that 1) exercises a type of platform urbanism (sovereignty over urbanization) that interweaves private interests, governments, and user-citizens and 2) creates and attempts to govern a user-citizen under the guise of its Airbnb Citizen program (ibid, 10). He admonishes us

to "keep in mind that platforms like Airbnb are not just exploring the soft power exercised through urban policy and governance but also experiment with new and still dimly registered forms of sovereign power that secure them a lasting grip on the socio-material fabric of contemporary cities and their households" (ibid, 4).

Heeding Doorn's call to study how platforms, social movements, and governance are interlinked, I intervene into the platform literature through a sustained ethnography of urban platform activism. While there has been sustained engagement with organizing efforts by rideshare workers locally and internationally (Dubal 2021; Wells, Attoh, and Cullen 2021), there is less written about the organizing efforts STR regulations. Though there has been a take-up of the organizing efforts of Airbnb Citizen in the European context in communication and geography (Doorn 2019; Roelofsen and Minca 2018**;** Yates 2020, 2021), there is little written about the scope of regulatory activism done by users, activists, and legislators in Boston, San Francisco, and Washington D.C. In Chapter 4, I situate platforms as a force that makes the wider system of colonial racial capitalism more durable. In Chapter 5, I show how activists who were both pro- and anti-STR took part in a variety of tactics including walking tours against housing financialization, legislative lobbying, and public media appearances. In doing so, these residents show how users, operators, and city residents all worked to shape platform urbanism.

Reproducing Home and the Sharing Economy

Housing is the core unit under contest in the STR debates: whether discussions are about its availability, affordability, inhabitability, or the exclusionary rights that come with owning property. Two of the most common descriptions for what people do on STR platforms are "home sharing" and "short-term renting." Both characterizations hint at the fundamental social object under contest in the regulatory debates. "Home sharing" implies a particular image of a host giving a guest access to one of the most intimate spaces available, one's home. "Short-term renting," on the other hand, focuses on the blunt economic exchange that occurs when a guest rents a host's place for lodging. As I show in Chapter 5, the choice of terms is a strategic framing that activists use to push forward their vision of regulations and urban development. However, for the purposes of this introduction, I want to dwell on these seemingly contradictory characterizations. I argue that by holding both in tandem, we can begin to see how the objects of STR debates are the social reproduction of property relations, housing monetization, and practices of living that constitute a particular vision of the home.

Feminists have long centered the home as a complex site that houses oppression but also provides the nesting ground for resistance (hooks 1990; Mohanty 1986; Weir 2008; Young 1997). Feminist geographers have pointed to home's ability to hold a variety of meanings across scales "from homeland — the nation — to the home — the house or hearth" (McDowell 2007,

130). The concept of home then contains Lefebvre's spatial triad of representational space, spatial practice, and representations of space while also structuring those on multiple scales (Lefebvre 1991). Home demands an analytic that is enmeshed: an analytic that does not sustain the fictitious separation of social reproduction and production but treats the two categories as interlinked — a productive blurring of the boundaries between the categories that reveals their co-constitution. This enmeshed analytic puts forward a theorization of labor, work, and economy that draws together market and non-market spaces into complicated relations and tensions between different sites (Mitchell et al. 2003).

I treat the home as a complicated social product that is formed out of a multiplicity of pressures, demands, and desires. This treatment of enmeshment demands a scalar understanding in the sense that the home is a socially constructed product that is "constituted and reconstituted around relations of capitalist production, social reproduction and consumption" at various levels of geographical interrelation (Marston 2000, 223). The home is not just a refuge for the family — it is a social site and product that operates at the level of the neighborhood, nation, global market, and countless other scales. It contains a variety of quotidian practices, it is structured through a variety of plans and conceptual schemas, and it produces specific imaginations about itself as a place. As such, the home as a concept contains and is structured by the attendant categories of residence, dwelling, house, and property, and allows for a simultaneous, almost assemblage-like, theorization of them.

As I show in Chapter 1, policies of housing development, zoning, planning, and segregation all cohere together to create this assemblage-figure of the home through the process of housing and urban development (Freund 2007, 13). Homeownership and homemaking are deeply tied to property relations. Both the ownership of and lack of access to property serve as key building blocks of subject formation. Differing relationships to domesticity, precarity, and wealth create alternative subject formations. Homeownership and access to property, as Adkins et. al. (2020, 21) note, are key sites for thinking through contemporary economic inequality. They serve as assets that secure income flows and liquidity — forms of wealth building that are not available to those who rely on labor wages alone. In turn, relations to these policies instruct how the next wave of housing and social movements will develop. Brenna Bhandar (2018) argues that "property ownership and the modern racial subject are articulated and realized in conjunction with one another" (5). Critical property scholars have underscored how property relations and racialization were co-constructed in settler colonist societies, particularly the United States. Cheryl Harris (1993, 1716) argues that the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the exclusion of Black people from the category of humanity served as the foundation of a property regime based on use and improvement. This is what Bhandar (2018, 6) calls the global capitalist colonial system which "produced and relied upon the economic and juridical forms for which

property law and a racial concept of the human were central tenets.” The theft of indigenous lands, and the subsequent destruction of the relationships of labor, kinship, and use attached to that land, served as the basis for pre-Colonial property relations (Nichols 2020, 31). K-Sue Park (2021, 1) shows how this dispossession of nonwhites was followed up in subsequent decades with the degradation of “their homelands, communities, and selves'' and laws that limited “their efforts to enter public space and occupy or acquire property within the regime thereby established.” These efforts included blocking Black people from possessing property post-Emancipation, the exclusion of people of color from the post-World War II housing market, and the disinvestment and predatory lending to people of color in urban centers.

These histories of racial capitalist exploitation and the attendant racialized subject formations within them can lead to contradictory relationships to home, family, property, and land, even ones that resist white supremacist hegemonic formations. Chandan Reddy (1998, 362) argues that,

> The American ‘home’ is a social location that dynamically interacts with and is deeply embedded within modern ‘public’ culture and economy, requiring the forms of racial differentiation and social strata found in those sites for its material maintenance and reproduction; due to this condition, the home remains a contradictory apparatus for subject formation.

Reddy argues that the home is contradictory precisely because of the material heterogeneity and conditions on which it is founded. If one seeks to resolve “economic contradictions within the spheres of politics, public culture, and the ‘private’ home” through a specific type of rearing and subjectification at the site of the home, the project ultimately fails for racialized people because they are ideologically and materially constituted as outside of the national home (ibid, 363).

Reddy’s insights about the role race plays in constituting the contradictory ideal home are invaluable to my project. My project differs from Reddy’s in my theorization of the role of resistance. Reddy finds the space of resistance to the White home and the White patriarchal domination that undergirds it within what he calls “racial/ethnic domesticities” (ibid, 366). Drawing on Evelyn Nakano Glenn’s (1983) reading of how racial/ethnic women created alternative forms of home in response to racial and gendered forces of production, Reddy finds forms of counter-knowledges and political locations of resistance within such practices — a form of minority and counterhegemonic site of power. While this is an important project, I am interested in how these forms of resistance can become integral to the political economy of home rather than resistant to it. The ways that projects aimed at resistance are subordinated, even if imperfectly, to the reproduction of a capitalist apparatus of accumulation and dispossession.

In thinking through the wider reproduction of the political economy, I draw on feminist conceptions of social reproduction: the “daily and long term reproduction, both of the means of

production and the labor power to make them work" — including activities such as cooking, cleaning, taking the bus, and going to political meetings (Katz 2001; Jeffries 2017). In traditional Marxist formulations, the role of home is sequestered from the seemingly more fundamental exploitation of the waged laborer within the domain of the economy. In Marx's view, the worker offers his labor power in the market and the capitalist exploits the worker's labor by wringing out the worker's surplus value (Marx 1976, 278). However, this analysis of labor power is missing the feature of necessary labor — the labor that is necessary for the labor power of the worker to be reproduced (Vogel 1983). Feminists have called out this formulation for overlooking the role that constitutive role that seemingly non-economic sites have in reproducing the very basis of social relations — at home, in mothering, shopping, cleaning, in school, and other sites. Fortunati (1995, 13) argues that unpaid forms of reproductive wage work sustain the productive labor power of the commodity producer. This work functions on a fundamental sexual division of labor between the housewife (reproductive) and husband (productive). The naturalization of reproductive work in capitalism, Fortunati argues, masks the fundamental value-creation done at the site of housework. The home functions as a social factory where labor power becomes reproduced by the unpaid work of housewives (Dalla Costa and James 1975, 3).

Focusing on Euro-American heterosexual familial domesticity presents a limited picture of social reproduction. As Jan Padios (2021) points out,

> An analysis of labor, gender, and sexuality from various critical feminist perspectives—women of color, Black, transnational, and Indigenous—thus crosses the boundaries between paid and unpaid work, between household and workplace, between the need to make ends meet and the need for a secure place to sleep, healthy food and water, and good schools.

In these critical feminist perspectives, we see how the home is a place of employment, dispossession, and unpaid work as well as how social reproduction is about the reproduction of social relations of racialization, gender, and class as much as it is about the reproduction of individual families. The shift in the labor market post-World War II shows that reproductive labor has expanded into "areas as food preparation and service, healthcare services, child care, and recreation services" (Glenn 1992, 20). Beyond the consumer market, social reproduction theorists also contend that social reproductive labor occurs in institutions such as schools, prisons, sex work, and other sites (Ferguson 2017).

Glenn (1992) states that women's reproductive work has been stratified by a racial gender process that forces women of color into lower service "dirty jobs" roles such as domestic work, janitorial labor, and nursing labor. Meanwhile, white women continue to enjoy a relatively more privileged role in household management and front-of-house labor — socially reproducing their relationship to white male centers of power at the expense of women of color's work. For

instance, Saidiya Hartman (2016, 169) shows how tracing Black women's labor, from the hold of the slave ship to the plantation, unveils how "the work of sex and procreation was the chief motor for reproducing the material, social, and symbolic relations of slavery." And, in the afterlife of slavery, Black women's conscription into domestic labor shifted their reproductive capacity into the maintenance of white households, thereby placing Black women into a "position that is revered and reviled, essential to the endurance of black social life and, at the same time, blamed for its destruction" (ibid, 171). Likewise, in their analysis of Black Women for Wages for Housework, Capper and Austin (2018) follow how Black housework was positioned against white housewife's housework in Black and queer-led Wages for Housework movements. They show how centering Black, queer, and intersectional approaches to housework creates new projects of autonomy and communing distinct from the "wage for" and "wage against" housework model.

Using this more expansive model of social reproduction keys into how social reproduction is not only about the reproduction of individuals, but also about the reproduction of systems themselves. As Mitchell, Marston, and Katz (2004, 433) argue, "if… social reproduction is about how we as subjects live at and outside of work, then the categorical binaries of state and society, work and home, production and social reproduction cannot be maintained." Reproducing the home requires cleaning, feeding, shopping, medical care, and socializing. But it also just as much requires the maintenance, enforcement, and enactment of structural systems of property, housing development, financialization, governance, racialization, gender, and class. To theorize the social reproduction of the home is to think of the future of kinship, care, property relations, connections to land, the right to the city, and the economy. To turn the old cliche on its head, the home begins in society.

In the context of the rise of STRs and the labor done within them, we can see this contest over social reproduction play out in real time. I bring the political and social processes that create a "sharing economy" to the fore. Economic anthropologists have long critiqued the Western separation of the home and the market — drawing attention to the ways that both spheres are co-constitutive and overlapping in non-Western contexts (Dalton 1961; Mitchell 1998; Polanyi 1968; Sahlins 1994; Wilson 2004; Wolf 1982). More recently, they have shown how the Western home is no exception as it is interlinked with the market through government programs, financialization, and kinship networks (Freund 2006; Gudeman 2016; Haiven 2017; Nash 1989; Stout 2016; Yanagisako 2002). My project contributes to the literature in both economic anthropology and feminist political economy by studying how STRs create new forms of sociality that refigure the home as a shared commodity. I analyze how various facets of identity and financial status shape one's political orientation towards STRed iterations of home and labor.

I build on feminist political economy scholarship that explores how supposedly "nonpoliticized" spaces of sociality shape and are shaped by larger economic and political

concerns (Joseph 2002; Ho 2009). STRs create a shared condition of labor that brings providers together into political organizations, interest-based social groups, trade organizations that teach best practices, and online communities. These new forms of sociality include STR providers operating at all levels — from a user renting out a shared space to a commercial owner with multiple properties. Likewise, other shared conditions (displacement, disruption of community, rising rents) bring people together in other forms of collectivity (e.g., tenants' rights groups.) For example, as I discuss further in Chapter 2, hotel unions, one of the final bastions of well-paying jobs with benefits available for working-class people of color, opposed STRs because unregulated tourism rentals could charge less per room and employ non-union staff and cleaners. This impacted hotel union workers because their employment was tied to the hotel business and the lack of income made it difficult for workers to afford their housing. STRs further devalued historically exploited domestic labor and limited people of color's access to housing, thereby becoming another avenue for racialized precaritization (Cooper 2017; Davis 1981; Gilmore 1999). Furthermore, a tenants' rights organizer told me about how investors in Boston's Chinatown evicted poor Chinese immigrant residents in favor of STRs. The eviction therein was not only a disruption of these tenants' livelihood, but also upended their ability to work, care for one another, and engage in the activities of production and reproduction more generally.

Hegemony, Home, and Racial Capitalism

Social reproductive systems and the political struggles around them are core to the STR debates, but it is not enough simply to name them as such. To fully understand how these struggles operate requires the analytic of hegemony. The function of hegemony in feminist political economy is, borrowing Bear et. al.'s (2015) formulation, the "relational performance of productive powers." Bear et. al. move towards an understanding of capitalism as a formation growing out of "the relational performance of productive powers that exceed formal economic models, practices, boundaries, and market devices… social relations [that] are generated out of divergent life projects." In focusing on how capitalism is both generated and generative, Bear et. al. offer a framework that allows for robust critiques of capitalist projects while also disrupting the seeming inevitability of capitalism as an economic system. In tracing these relations, we can begin to see how some forms of economic life are fed and allowed to prosper while others are relegated to lesser roles. The home plays a central role in this interpretation precisely because it "houses" the many socio-political contests at the heart of hegemony.

Hegemony has its origins in the Ancient Greek term *hegemonia* which signified the domination of one city-state by another (Day 2005, 47). The term gained theoretical purchase in the early 1900s when socialist movements were faced with a crisis in the paradigm — one pertaining to the failure of a Marxist economism that assumed a simple relationship between the

proletariat, class coherency, and a historical destiny to overthrow bourgeois rule (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 12). In the 1900s, across Europe but especially in Germany, England, and Russia, the basic Marxist formulation of base/superstructure was beginning to fail. So-called economist Marxism gave an overdetermining role to the economy and believed that socialist revolt was a mechanical historical inevitability given the antagonisms between the bourgeois and the proletariat. Socialists saw that it was not so simple to galvanize the worker to stand against the broader system and began to appreciate the larger role of society in shaping worker consciousness for or against revolution. This “general crisis of capitalism” raised questions about “the opacity of the social, of the complexities and resistances of an increasingly organized capitalism; and the fragmentation of the different positions of social agents which, according to the classical paradigm, should have been united” (ibid, 12).

Vladimir Lenin’s conceptualization of hegemony, informed by strains of Russian Social Democracy, offered an answer to how to theorize the contradictions of the social. In his view, the fracturing of social classes was an endemic problem to imperial-era capitalism rather than something temporary. As such, a monopoly enforcement of class power was necessary to ensure that the class interests of the proletariat took advantage of the rupture at the maximal point of contradiction. For Lenin, the proletariat class subject was the ontological endpoint of this struggle. In other words, the goal of hegemony was to enforce the dominance of the proletariat over competing class elements (ibid, 55). This hegemonic role dovetailed with the party’s role to enforce hegemony in all areas of the society, not just the economic, through a dictatorship of the proletariat over all other social classes at all levels of society (Day 2005, 61):

> Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships of all classes and strata to the state and the government, the sphere of the interrelations between all classes… To bring political knowledge to the workers the Social Democrats must go among all classes of the population; they must dispatch units of their army in all directions. (Lenin 1902, 48)

Antonio Gramsci’s conceptualization of hegemony expands on Lenin’s by fundamentally refiguring the role of class, State power, and the operations of hegemony. Gramsci frames the struggle over political power as three forms of war: the war of position (i.e., fights over ideas, common sense, and institutional legitimacy), the war of maneuver (i.e., direct confrontations between classes in the form of strikes, uprisings, and power grabs), and underground warfare (i.e., outright armed struggle). Gramsci (1998, 306) conceived of the State as a combination of political institutions and what he calls civil society, defined as the "ensemble of organisms commonly called private” — or the "sum of social activities and institutions which are not directly part of the government, the judiciary, or the repressive bodies (police, armed forces)” (Fogacs

2000, 420). For Gramsci, while wars of maneuver were prevalent, they were difficult to maintain given what he calls a trench system found in the form of civil society. Gramsci argues, “The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks: more or less numerous from one State to the next” (Gramsci 1998, 238). In other words, a State can win a revolutionary struggle if it is able to maintain a certain type of civilization, habituate a certain type of collective life and social relations, and create a system of laws to maintain itself. The aforementioned system that coalesces political power and shapes social relations is what Gramsci calls hegemony. For Gramsci, hegemony is constantly under struggle and revision — with different actors, institutions, and movements fighting one another over the shape of a given era. Gramsci calls the concretization of one particular force a historical bloc. In his reading, the great success of the bourgeois class in multiple countries is that it “poses itself as an organism in continuous movement, capable of absorbing the entire society, assimilating it to its own cultural and economic level” (1998 260). In doing so, the hegemony of the bourgeois is able to secure itself a steady position that must be contested by multiple groups and classes in order for a new system of hegemony to arrive.

While Gramsci provided the template for hegemonic thought, the concept was greatly expanded through the British Cultural Studies School, particularly by Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams. Williams builds on Gramsci’s conceptualization by arguing that hegemony cannot capture the whole of human social activity (Williams 1977, 125). For Williams, hegemony is a lived process that is accompanied by alternative hegemonies and counter-hegemonies that seek to disrupt its dominance (ibid, 112-113). He argues that dominant hegemonic structures are being pushed and contested by residual and emergent forms of culture that challenge an individual’s self-identification with a given hegemonic moment. Williams argues that theorists ought to attend to the ways and ends that residual and emergent forms of culture are used by a variety of people.

Stuart Hall similarly expands hegemony by focusing on how hegemonic theorizations can help us theorize through racialization and intra-class antagonism. He writes,

> Hegemony is no longer conceptualized as a moment of simple unity, but as a process of unification (never totally achieved), founded on strategic alliances between different sectors, not on their pre-given identity. Its character is given by the founding assumption that there is no automatic identity or correspondence between economic, political and ideological practices. This begins to explain how ethnic and racial difference can be constructed as a set of economic, political or ideological antagonisms, within a class which is subject to roughly similar forms of exploitation with respect to ownership of and expropriation from the ‘means of production (Hall 1986, 25).

Hegemony then, theorized carefully alongside racialization, opens the potential for how racialization acts as a form of division among a certain class as well as a form of governance that is imposed from above.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony had one fundamental drawback — the centering of class interests as the overriding interest of a given hegemonic historical block. Hall's interpretation of class unity argues that class unity under Gramsci has a more complex invocation: "classes… are also cross-cut by conflicting interests, historically segmented and fragmented in this actual course of historical formation. Thus the 'unity' of classes is necessarily complex and has to be produced… as a result of specific economic, political and ideological practices" (Hall 1986, 14). However, the focus of a singular class unity creates a contradiction between the working class as a historical contingency and the working class as a historically central role due to its relationship to the base (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 60) — a point of attack against hegemony writ large by critical traditions such as Afropessimism (Wilderson 2010, 229). Laclau and Mouffe (2001, 77) offer a solution to the contradiction in Gramsci's vision of hegemony by accepting the fundamental unfixity and relational nature of every social identity *and* by putting forward the argument that "a variety of other points of rupture and democratic antagonism can be articulated to a socialist 'collective will' *on an equal footing* with workers' demands.".

Laclau and Mouffe keep their hegemonic formulation from falling into a postmodern void with no structuring principles by turning to the formulation of antagonisms. Under a hegemonic framework, a social position is never permanently given — it is socially determined. A hegemonic formation, then, is the relatively stable formation that arises from "the materialization of a social articulation in which different social relations react reciprocally either to provide each other with mutual conditions of existence, or at least to neutralize the potentially destructive effects of certain social relations on the reproduction of other such relations" (Mouffe 1979, 46). Given that hegemony is a never-settled process, these hegemonic formations are constantly rife with social antagonisms that must be resolved or squashed in order for the hegemonic formation to persist. A recurring series of hegemonic formations in geographically and historically specific conditions, solidified through the struggle between a range of social, economic, political, and cultural practices, becomes a framework for understanding the end of social movements, state control, and political power (Ibid, 198).

While Laclau and Mouffe offer a compelling theorization of hegemony, its spatialization and historicization remain murky. And, the question of where hegemony solidifies remains a problem — is it at the level of the State, within a given institution, or in a transnational field of competing power relations? Laclau and Mouffe (2001, 137) point out that,

> Politics as a practice of creation, reproduction, and transformation of social relations cannot be located at a determinate level of the social, as the problem of the political is the problem of the institution of the social, that is, of the definition and articulation of social relations in a field crisscrossed with antagonisms.

This widespread look at hegemony occurring in social relations is helpful in that it broadens the field of hegemony beyond the state and civil society, but it is limiting in that hegemony is at once everywhere and nowhere. If all social relations are hegemonizing, who enacts the hegemony? How does it concentrate? How is it repeatedly reproduced in structural relations of antiblackness, settler colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, and capitalism? Put bluntly, what becomes of the governance when hegemony is spread through every ventricle of the social?

Papadopoulos et. al. (2008) offer a compelling response to this question through their concept of postliberal vertical aggregates (PVA). This formulation takes Laclau and Mouffe's insights about the spread, omnipresence, and constant antagonism of hegemony and brings in the question of concentration, governance, and organization. PVAs are structures of governance that "reconnect different segments of nation states and different social actors" to "articulate, in a positive way, a not-yet-represented commonality of the actors participating in a postliberal aggregate" (Papadopoulos et. al. 2008, 28). These aggregates distinguish themselves as postliberal because their central actor is not the state or private interest or the individual subject as in neoliberalism, but rather the "organic clumping of certain segments of the state together with some private interests, certain subjectivities, parts of social classes, or segments of the public" (Papadopoulos 2018, 251, note 107). What distinguishes PVAs from neoliberal modes of governance is that the PVA breaks from the imperative to lessen state control and increase the power of private interests and place the responsibility on individual actors. Instead, the aggregate emerges as a form of organization that "moves beyond the liberal principle of the individual and beyond any form of political organization which finally sees state institutions as the guarantors of individual freedoms" (Papadopoulos et. al. 2008, 33).

The aggregate is not governed by the force of a particular nation-state, distinct social group, or a particular group or class. Rather, it is a form of governance that emerges from different segments of the population (i.e., governments, residents, corporations, non-profits, and others) coming together into an aggregate system that exudes its political force on the basis of their shared tendencies. Papadopoulos et. al. (2008, 30) argue that "[PVAs] are open to the extent that they can assimilate the actors necessary for their functioning and the retention of their power, and closed as much as is necessary to protect their existence." They compare PVAs to stem cells that can morph into any cell, but "engage in this transformation by creating 'colonies' made of different kinds of cells, colonies which close their porous boundaries, and by creating a tight division between their becoming and all that is excluded by it" (ibid, 30).

In the case of the STR debates, the PVA analytic allows us to better understand the functioning of the Regulatory and STR Coalitions. These coalitions are internally contested structures that emerge from bringing together disparate actors, ranging from government officials to non-profits to hotel industry representatives to landlords to homeowners to union organizers

and beyond. While these actors are differently located in the social field, they put forward a political force because of their shared tendencies in favor or against STRs. The unifying political tendency that arises from this structure is important to pay attention to, but the PVA analytic risks overemphasizing commonality over contestation.

The PVA is a cousin to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987, 100) concept of assemblage and shares many of its drawbacks. The assemblage is a meta-concept that seeks to understand the relationships between many actors and forces operating on many planes of power and agency to produce a range of effects — one where an abstract machine (overall purpose) combines with concrete entities to affect a change in the world (e.g., the Lenin abstract machine and the various parts that form the Bolshevik collective assemblage). In a sense, the aggregate is an assemblage linked to a particular historical moment of power and sovereignty. Much like the assemblage, Papadopoulos et. al.'s conception of PVA has great theoretical potential but suffers from its flattening of power and subjectivity. In their discussion of how the politics of difference are subsumed by PVAs, Papadopoulos et. al. (2008, 30) create a vacuum that evacuates structural power from the categories of race, gender, and sexuality:

> The crisis of multiculturalism, the difficulties of aligning queer politics with other social movements, the occupation of postfeminist positions by neo-essentialist understandings of what women are, the obsession of radical democratic approaches with the question of formal flights, all these mark a phase of stagnation of subversive politics and its absorption into the vortex of neoliberal thinking. The politics of difference fail to grasp how actors participating in vertical aggregate are detached from their original indexes. These actors do not refer to themselves as members of collective interest formations (social class, ethnicity, gender, etc.) Their self-understanding and their agency are not derived from what they are but form their positions in particular vertical aggregate.

For Papadopoulos et. al, the ideal image of the PVA is the modern-day BMW plant in Leipzig. Focusing on the horizontal relations and terrains of the plant, they argue that "there are no clearcut social institutions, social classes or associations of civil society interacting in the making of polity" (ibid, 29). Instead, there are various actors who constitute different forms of social bodies.

Fair enough but let us move from Leipzig to General Motors in St. Louis. In her account of intersectionality, Kimberly Crenshaw (2020) explains how Emma DeGraffenreid and other black women employed at the factory sued the automaker for discrimination, arguing that the company segregated its workforce by race and gender simultaneously. They did not win because the court only recognized strictly race and gender-based discrimination but not how they might impact a black woman automaker simultaneously. Is it so hard to imagine that the discrimination and differences of power witnessed on the factory floor of the 1970s persists at the BMW plant today?

The PVA demands a more robust account of power. Alexander Weheliye (2014, 49), drawing on Gayatri Spivak and Stuart Hall, criticizes Deleuze and Guattari for failing to the potential of theorizing race and instead "silencing questions of power, reinstituting an innocent version of the subject, or neglecting the deterritorializing capabilities of power, ideology, and so on." Likewise, I would argue PVAs require a robust account of how they are infused and cut through with the broader logics of settler colonial racial capitalism. This is not to reject the figure of the PVA outright, but rather to strengthen it for an expanded analytic purpose.

Refiguring the PVA requires situating it within racial capitalism. Cedric Robison argues that, since the system of global capitalism originated in Europe, it is fused by existing and emerging structures of racialism: "the legitimation and corroboration of social organization as natural by reference to the 'racial' components of its elements" (Robinson 2000, 2). As the earlier discussion of property shows, this racialized feature of capital is present in its property relations, subjectification, and formations of home. As Jodi Melamed phrases it, capitalism can only accumulate "by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups" (Melamed 2015, 77). In a settler colonial context, this racialism takes on a specific form. Glen Coulthard (2014, 57) argues that capitalist expansion is dependent on a colonial relationship where economic, gendered, and racial domination secure a set of hierarchical social relations that dispossessed Indigenous peoples of their land and self-determining authority. This colonial relationship is an ongoing structure in which indigenous people are either wiped out entirely or have their cultures and governmental structures repressed and replaced by settler ones, not an event (Wolfe 2006, 388). Moreover, as I discuss in detail in Chapter 3 and 4, the logics of elimination of Indigenous peoples from their lands are joined by logics of exploitation and murder of Black people and the alienation and exclusion of non-white migrants — all core to the property relationship that begets STRs (Day 2016, 30-32).

These racial capitalist structures are legitimated by what Jodi Melamed calls official antiracisms: State governance structures that make structural inequality on the basis of racial difference appear fair. She goes on to discuss how these official antiracisms act "by securing normative orders of difference and allowing legitimate violence to be exercised upon norm violators, the knowledge systems of official antiracisms have articulated together to a high degree of rational and biopolitical orders" (Melamed 2011, 14). These official anti-racisms are historically contingent and have changed over time. What is at stake in these historical junctures is that they have "secured the prepolitical conditions required for normal politics and the extraeconomic conditions required for continuing material relations of production" (Ibid). The home similarly secures the pre-political conditions required for politics and production and functions as a site for racialization, gendering, and subject formation in historically and geographically specific ways.

PVAs operate within this ongoing system of settler colonial racial capitalism. Drawing on Bhandar's reading of Stuart Hall (2018, 14-15), people can have disparate political allegiances even if they find themselves in the crosshairs of the same interlocking oppressions: "that there is no necessary correspondence, but also no necessary noncorrespondence, between different levels of any given social formation… opens up a space for considering how social relations do not inevitably adhere across time and space to a particular form." Property relations develop in uneven and contradictory ways across time and space and hegemonic contests over property form are necessary to understanding the functioning of these formations and political contests even if they are subject to similar structural logics of exploitation, racial supremacy, and extraction.

In the case of the STR regulatory debates, the Regulatory Coalition and STR Coalition are PVAs that work to make shared claims on the future of STR politics in the context of settler colonial racial capitalism that are then fought at the level of urban hegemony at municipal, state, and national scales. These PVAs internally contested structures where inequalities in race, class, gender, ability, and class inform how PVA members show up as well as the form and strategic approach PVAs take. The claims arise from far more than an "organic clumping." They emerge from political contestations that seek to change the direction of the PVA internally. Returning to the image of the cell, the creation of a cell with porous boundaries is an intensely political act that must be grounded in negotiations of power among actors in a PVA. It is far from natural. The future of urban hegemony and the home are informed by these PVAs and the social movement struggles within and between them.

This dissertation traces the uneven process of PVAs and their effects through the STR debates. In focusing on coalitions, I detail the process of urban hegemonic struggle around the home as a key social relation of property. In Chapter 1, I show the political economic grounds that created points of coalition and commonality for PVAs to form among their various actors. In Chapter 2, I show the various PVAs both bundled together the actors in these coalitions and how the process of negotiating urban hegemony both strengthened and deteriorated these bonds. In locating the PVA as a site of struggle, I also focus on struggles both within and between PVAs in terms of representation, spatialization, and regulation in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Stakes

The fight over STR regulations is fundamentally a contest over the kinds of urban futures residents want. The pro-regulation vision is creating regulatory agencies to limit the spread of STRs to "one host, one home" rentals and preserve affordable housing for working-class residents. The competing anti-regulation vision is preserving the ability of individual users or platform corporations to profit off their property unimpeded. For feminist theorists, my dissertation

lays out what the STR regulation debates show how the social reproduction of the home on a structural scale. The home's monetization, the type of labor done within the home, and the type of urban policy that makes this contest possible are fundamental to the feminist commitments to revolutionary visions of a just economy, home, and the city.

Although the STR regulatory debate may seem liberal on its face, the ways these fights played out are novel as well. It is not every day you see the hotel union work and progressive labor groups walk arm-in-arm with the hotel industry or the landlord association partner with the tenants' union. Nor are platform users typically seen as legitimate members of the democratic body politic. These novel ways show how the STR debates are fundamentally about the social reproduction of the home and the type of economy residents want in the future. Studying the legislative fight can help social movement activists and theorists better understand the relationship between home and the broader economy as well as the ways that shifting the hegemonic order of home opens up novel pathways of struggle.

Finally, the STR fight is perhaps one of the most prominent examples of platforms flexing their political power. These new coalitions and their organizational consistency across geographies showcase what contests around platform power and economic power look like in the present moment. For those studying platforms, their structural power, and how they take shape in the city, this dissertation offers an ethnographic account of both how platforms structure social movements as well as how they are interpellated and structured by them.

Methodology - Ethnographic Toolkit

My dissertation is informed by a year and a half of ethnographic fieldwork research in Washington D.C., San Francisco, and the Boston area between 2018 and 2020. Combining interviews, participant observation, media analysis, and archival research, I tracked how organizations, individuals, and executive and legislative governmental entities took part in the STR regulation debates and the creation of an STR regulatory framework. Altogether, I spoke with fifty-five participants: twenty-nine STR hosts, five STR property managers, sixteen regulatory activists, and five governmental representatives charged with regulating STRs at the legislative or executive level (e.g., San Francisco's Office of Short-Term Rentals). These conversations highlighted the role of different ideas of home, housing stock, and the kind of economy residents want to promote in their cities. I understand my participants to belong to the following categories:

- **Formal organizations**: Formal organizations are groups that advocate for a given position in the STR debates. The organizations I've run into during my fieldwork include hotel workers' unions, progressive nonprofits like tenants' rights groups, industry groups like the Hotel and Lodging Association, Airbnb host groups, business associations like the one for property managers in Washington D.C., and civic organizations like a

landlord's association. These groups have grassroots donors, a membership base, and a formal leadership hierarchy. When I interact with a group, it is usually at the level of the leadership and these leaders serve as the gatekeepers for interactions with members.

- **Individual actors**: Individual actors are individuals (usually STR hosts) that do not have an affiliation with a formal organization. These actors are members of three types of informal groups. The first group is the host's immediate friends and neighbors. These hosts do not seek out a formal organized community and their main interaction with hosts is a local connection to those in their immediate vicinity. The next two informal groups are online local and global groups. These groups are either Facebook groups or listservs dedicated to STR issues in a given metropolitan area or a larger group meant to connect hosts in forums or on social media across a larger geographic scale. In my experience, the local groups tend to be "private" or "closed" – meaning you need administrator permission to join. Meanwhile, global groups are open to the public. I have had luck making it into some local private groups and public groups by direct messaging the group's administrator. For others, I have sent along my research study information and the gatekeepers in charge of the group disseminated it to their membership.
- **Governmental entities**: I have spoken to individuals representing governmental bodies that are in charge of either a) creating the laws that regulate STRs or b) implementing those regulations in a given municipality. I have spoken with representatives from both groups, but regulators tend to be more open to speaking with me than legislative staff.

I conducted interviews over the phone and over video chat and recruited participants by either posting on forums myself or asking a gatekeeper in the community to share my post with the forum. Interview participants then reached out to me and I walked them through the study fact sheet over email or direct message. For phone calls, I called the participant over Google Voice on my phone and then recorded the conversation using Audacity on my PC. For video interviews, I left the video platform up to the participant. My own preferences are for Jitsi or Google Duo due to their better security and privacy protocols. Participants have expressed a desire to use Zoom and I have complied with their requests. These Zoom sessions were password protected and had a private lobby feature to prevent trolling and so-called "Zoom bombing." I recorded videos using in-platform recording tools or the video capture program, OBS. For storage, I decoupled the call audio from the video recording and deleted the video files from my device. Data is encrypted through AES Crypt and stored on my UMN Google Drive and an encrypted flash drive with a date/time title to maintain data privacy and confidentiality.

Alongside ethnographic interviews, I conducted participant observation at STR legislative hearings and as a guest at STR social events before the pandemic, and online in STR Facebook

groups and the Airbnb Host Community forums. I also attended the weekly meetings of a San Francisco organization for hosts. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I shifted my participant observation online and primarily did participant observation on three fronts: at the STR host and regulatory organizations' Zoom meetings, on Airbnb's forums, and at Airbnb virtual town halls. This research keyed me into the different values through which people approach home — whether it is a host's desire to monetize their home to the fullest extent because it is their private property or a regulator's desire to create housing policy that benefits the most city residents regardless of its impact on STRs.

I also did archival research at George Washington University and D.C. Public Library Washingtoniana Collection, as well as at the municipal legislative archives of the Boston City Council, D.C. Council, and San Francisco Board of Supervisors. These archives helped me understand the history of STR debates and contextualize them within a broader history of urban development. In addition to these library and legislative archives, media analysis was a core part of my fieldwork. I analyzed Airbnb and other STR providers' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as past media campaigns against STR regulations by these actors. The media from these actors better helped me understand the context of the STR debates as well as the ideas and images that pervaded my field site.

Beyond these official institutions, I also pursued archival material put forward by short-term rental advocacy groups and pro-regulatory groups between 2010 and the passage of regulation in a given city. In pursuing these archival materials, I also looked for news reports in local, state, and national newspapers and television stations across three cities. Many regulatory coalitions regularly highlighted the positive press attention they received so researching the portrayal of STR regulations was key for understanding the larger political context for regulations.

In triangulating this research, I pursued Michael Burawoy's extended case study method. Burawoy (1998, 5) explains that ethnography can be a reflexive science that "starts out from dialogue, virtual or real, between observer and participants, embeds such dialogue within a second dialogue between local processes and extralocal forces that in turn can only be comprehended through a third, expanding dialogue of theory with itself." In taking Burawoy's approach, I follow his insight that theory "guides intervention, it constitutes situated knowledges into social processes, and it locates processes within their wider context of determination" within and beyond the academy (Ibid, 21). While I follow grounded theory's guidance to develop conceptualization based on participants' own words and understandings, I do not isolate these insights from the broader theoretical context. Rather I conceptualize grounded theory and wider theory as two different streams feeding into one another. This extended case study approach helps me structure my ethnographic intervention both within the field and within the wider writing. In taking this approach, I mirror the very platform logics that I seek to trace: one that enables local

actors to embed within a larger network within their neighborhood, city, and ultimately in the wider platform political landscape that crosses city, state, and national boundaries. Paying attention to these co-occurring scales, as I show in the discussion of enmeshed scalar analytics above and coalitions in Chapter 2, is imperative for formulating and understanding the impact of urban platforms.

Chapter Overview

This dissertation is divided into five chapters and a conclusion. The first chapters seek to provide context for the wider STR regulatory struggle across all three cities. In “A Genealogy of Short-Term Rentals”, I situate the reemergence of rooming and boarding in the form of STRs within the context of neoliberal urban policy. I begin by tracing how rooming and boarding constituted a sizable portion of dwelling units in U.S. cities prior to the early 1900s. I then explain how a range of policies from the 1910s to the 1970s gutted the rooming and boarding facilities in cities and created a housing space dominated by apartments and single-family homes. I conclude by discussing how financialization and deregulation of the housing space since the 1980s created conditions ripe for STRs to reemerge.

I then proceed into the 2008-2020 regulatory struggles in “Whose right to which city? The political economy of coalitional politics.” Drawing on Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson. and Vassilis Tsianos’s concept of post-liberal vertical aggregates, I theorize coalitions as key sites for governance and claims-making within the STR debates. I discuss how a shared interest in promoting one economy over another (e.g., sharing economy versus traditional tourism economy) shaped these collaborations on a national and local scale. I aim to do justice to both the “bundling” done by coalitions and the “bundled” who constitute the claims-making apparatus. I first discuss two coalitions, the STR coalition and Regulatory coalition, and their respective histories in San Francisco, Washington D.C., and the Boston area. I show how these coalitions came to bundle a diverse, often antagonistic, range of actors together around a common hegemonizing project. I also show the interconnection between these coalitions on a national level. I then move on to discuss the racial, gendered, and class antagonisms at play within these coalitions.

The following three chapters hone into themes that emerged during research about ideological representation through romantic anti-capitalism, the role of discrimination and racism on platforms, and the role of non-platform grassroots activism in delimiting the space of platforms. In “The Romantic Anti-Capitalisms of Hosting”, I focus on how Airbnb hosts in the Boston metro, San Francisco, and Washington D.C. respond to legislative STR regulations. I trace how hosts justify their multiple STR practices by way of the civic good, defined here as the positive impacts of a particular practice, all while foreclosing a debate about the potential negative effects of their

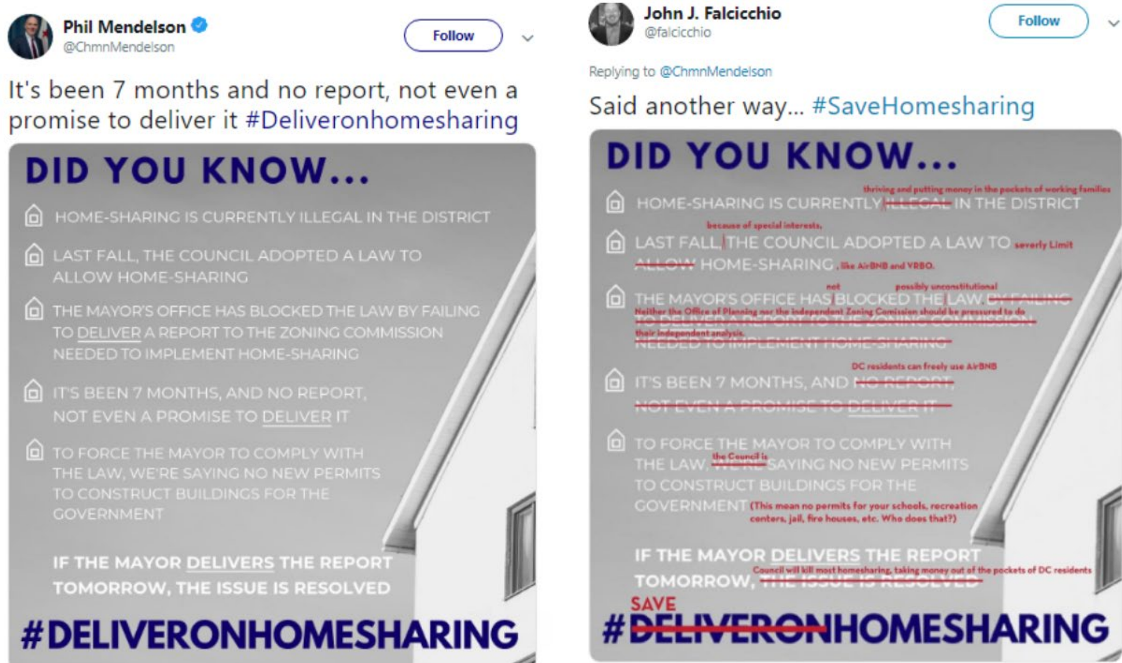
monetization. I show how hosts displace the displeasing aspects of STRs onto the abstracted category of the "investor host," a stand-in for foreign investment capital and indifferent corporations. I argue that STR owners replicate what Iyko Day calls romantic anti-capitalism, a mode of critiquing capitalism that valorizes the local and concrete uses of capital while displacing capital's destructive effects onto an abstracted and racialized other. I build on Day's account by revealing how there are multiple genres of romantic anti-capitalism that function differently based on a person's structural position within settler-colonialism.

Building on host conceptions of their STRs within settler-colonialism, I go on to theorize the role of Airbnb as a geopolitical racist actor in "The Durability of New Jim Code." I argue platforms make existing processes of colonial racial capitalism more durable and introduce the analytic of the Colonial Racial Capitalist Stack. I follow the operations of this Stack across its multiple layers. I focus on STR hosts who are members of a local hosting group in Ward 7 and Ward 8 in Washington D.C. The hosts, mostly Black users in two historically Black Wards, have experienced a range of racism from the platform and its users by way of Airbnb's Location Rating. This rating draws down their ratings based on guests' racist experiences of feeling "unsafe" in majority-Black neighborhoods. I explain how hosts push back against this effect of the platform through a range of hosting practices and explicit political action like partnering with D.C.'s Attorney general to send Airbnb a complaint letter. I then situate these hosts' experiences with racial discrimination within a broader political economy that Airbnb plays a core role in strengthening racial capitalist ties. I then critique Airbnb's diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts that try to address discrimination like that experienced by Ward 7 and 8 hosts by showing the limits of these efforts to deal with the full structural system of hierarchy platforms require to function.

The final chapter, "Contesting Platform Urbanism at Home," is my intervention into the scholarship on platform governance in two areas: 1) the way users envision their place within platforms and 2) the scale of intervention necessary to impact the development of platforms. Pushing against the impulse to theorize that platforms are only contestable on the level of finance and that users are compliant so-called "platform citizens", this chapter uses an approach called platform geographies to examine how municipal STR regulatory activism plays a crucial role in the development of platforms in their cities. I discuss how pro-regulatory activists in Boston, D.C., and San Francisco, have pushed back against campaigns that position STRs as small-scale "home sharing" to highlight the reality of real estate speculation through STRs in their cities. Drawing on three tactics — the D.C. Sting Operation, the San Francisco Occupation of Airbnb Headquarters, and Grassroots Housing Tours — I explain how STR regulatory activists forward a vision of STRs in the city and create a reason for regulation.

The dissertation concludes by tracing the development of the struggle around Airbnb after the implementation of regulations. I focus on Airbnb's Initial Public Offering, host and regulatory organizing during the pandemic, and give a recap of where we find ourselves after a decade-long struggle for regulations. Turning a critical eye to regulations and their policing functions, I explore the limits and potentialities of liberal regulatory politics in contesting platforms. I suggest areas for future research around the police power of regulators, professionalized hosting, and transnational regulatory formations.

Figure 1. Twitter disagreement between D.C. Council Chairman Phil Mendelson and Mayor Muriel Bowser cabinet member John J. Falcicchio



Chapter 1: A Genealogy of Short-Term Rentals

On a sunny summer day, I sat down to talk to Kendall, a white woman in her 60s, in her office in downtown Boston. Kendall started STR hosting after her kids moved out for college and she and her husband had extra room in their home. When I asked her how she got started with STRs, I expected her to tell me a commonly shared story about finding Airbnb in the 2010s and using it to earn extra money. Instead, she told me a story about her mother in the 1940s:

> I started in short-term rentals when I was born in New York City because my mom rented rooms in an apartment in Manhattan. She had moved into a rooming house that was an apartment, and the woman who ran it got ill and asked her to take over the apartment and the business. From probably 1945 on, I would say my mom rented rooms and was very careful to call them roomers and not boarders because she did not cook. She continued to rent rooms into her 90s I think.

Kendall situated her use of the Airbnb platform within this trajectory of rooming-house rentals and used the word STR to show their lineage. She was not the only one. Several of my senior participants traced their own STR usage to rooming houses, boarding houses, and past forms of hosting and lodging in New York City, Boston, and San Francisco.

There is a definite appeal to this comparison. The labor and use of space share some parallels. However, the forces that created the need for rooming and boarding houses are distinct from those that push forward contemporary STRs. The development of STRs reveals something more fundamental to racial capitalism: the shifting character of the home is determined by and determines the flow of urbanization and economic activity in cities.

In this chapter, I compile a genealogy of contemporary STRing in San Francisco, Washington D.C., and Boston. I situate the reemergence of rooming and boarding in the form of STRs in the context of neoliberal urban policy. I begin by laying out the political economic role of home, property relations, and urbanization. I then trace how rooming and boarding formed a sizeable form of living in cities prior to the early 1900s. I explain how a range of policies from the 1910s to the 1970s gutted urban rooming and boarding facilities and created a housing landscape dominated by apartments and single-family homes. I go on to discuss how financialization and the deregulation of housing since the 1980s created conditions ripe for platform-enabled STRs to emerge. I argue that STRs emerged at the contradictory structures of land, property, capital, disinvestment, and housing financialization.

Through this genealogy, I seek to disrupt the home as a taken-for-granted naturalized object: an eternal place of domesticity with no history and no overlap with the market. Instead, I treat the home as a shifting social object and a key engine of urban political economic processes. The home of the late 1800s and mid-1900s served a different function than the contemporary home's role as a financialized investment vehicle for homeowners, banks, hedge funds, builders,

and venture capitalists. Furthermore, I show how the platform-enabled STR's rise after the 2008 financial crash makes it distinct from earlier forms of boarding and rooming. The STR was forged in the twin fires of homeowners searching for new avenues to pay their mortgage in devastating economic conditions combined and financial institutions seeking new avenues of financialization outside of collateralized debt obligations. The STR is the first entry into this form of financialization and picks up on the precarity and devastation caused by the 2008 crash.

In theorizing the STR as a new monetization of home, I also trace the changing relationship between home, labor, and security. For example, Airbnb (2018, c, f) has pointed out that a majority of Airbnb hosts in Washington DC and Massachusetts are seniors that rely on STRs for supplemental income. While framed as a heartwarming story of helping seniors get by, the need for homeowning seniors to continue to earn even after retirement raises questions about the changing role of home in securing the ever-promised and ever-delayed rest and relaxation post-work. The confluence of property, labor, and age reveals a new formation in the ever-encroaching role of capital extraction into our life worlds.

Nobody has been as honest about the larger political implications of this shift as Jennifer, a senior Black Airbnb host in Southeast D.C. After telling me about the importance of Airbnb as supplemental income, she explained why seniors are lucky to have this source of income:

> I didn't really want to have to work because I've been working thirty-something years. A long, long time. So, who wants to do that? I had friends who are seniors and they don't own property and they have to work at a Wal-Mart or wherever. They have to work wherever someone will hire them. And it's not a pretty picture. I'm really fortunate and really blessed to maintain my lifestyle as if I was still working. We want a good quality of life, not just existing.

The pursuit of a good quality of life through the monetization of home echoes Kathi Weeks' (2011, 230) political formulation of "life against work." Weeks argues against the pursuit of work as a necessary good for Marxist feminist politics and instead urges us to develop an anti/postwork imaginary centered on the pursuit of a quality life against capital's logics. Weeks (ibid, 231) warns that the limitation of work-oriented politics is that life could be limited to the "contents we would be satisfied merely to purchase in the time left for us after work, and then enjoy the privacy of our homes, then its use would be limited indeed." Jennifer shows that even this form of post-work life is hardly guaranteed — it is something one must strive to fulfill through the home such that work doesn't take over once one is ready to retire. Working at home, properly leveraging one's property, and developing one's STR business — the work after work — become necessary for even this limited vision of life after work.

The home as a guarantor of rest and good quality of life has been cemented through the abstraction of home as a naturalized political category. Jennifer's experience is just one of many

examples presented in this dissertation of the ways that STRs change the social relations of home, work, and property. Taking a genealogical approach to the home is important as it shows how the home, as a commodity, dwelling, and financial instrument, has changed over time. It helps us ensure that we do not take the home for granted nor appeal to another form of contingent post-work life in exchange for our present one. Tracing changes in the home alongside the rise of the STR sheds light on important urban processes of home-creation and subject formation — as well as what the contours of "life against work" might look like. Understanding the limits of life against work and the home as a political commodity not only helps us see the potentials and limits of STR regulations but also opens a larger space in which to imagine a new political role for home in guaranteeing a good quality of life.

1880-1930: The Original Short-Term Rentals

To understand the shifting role of housing, governance, property, and the urban economy, I start in the 1880s: one of the earliest periods of urban STRs that my participants call back to in connecting with their won STR experiences. Looking at the housing composition and labor structure in this time period denaturalizes the image of the home that we carry with us: one of a single family living on their own in a home. Likewise, I turn to this time period to demonstrate the distinct ways that today's platform-enabled STRs were made possible by planning and policy changes that drove the old-style STRs into oblivion.

In the late 1800s, San Francisco, Boston, and Washington D.C. looked different than they do today. In addition to the difference in fashion, types of jobs, and day-to-day living, people lived in a distinct cityscape. While today we are accustomed to the single-family home and the apartment as the primary means of dwelling, cities in the late 1800s were populated with apartment hotels, boarding houses, and rooming houses in addition to single-family homes. Multi-family unit tenements with shared kitchens and washing rooms were a common form of working-class residence. And working-class Black residents created homes where they could through formations like the alley houses of Washington D.C. — closely clustered one-to-two-room dwellings built in the alleyways behind larger houses and row houses (Asch and Musgrove 2017,179-180).

The STR — as well as today's tourist and business traveler hotels — has its antecedents in these forms of housing. Hotels were more than temporary dwellings for travelers and acted as major housing providers for the city's workers, elites, and impoverished. Hotel life differed dramatically depending on one's race, class, and gender. The typology of hotels reflected this. Residential hotels, ones in which residents lived full-time, took on different forms. Paul Groth (1994, 25) delineates hotels into different ranks in San Francisco during the 1930s: palace rank (4%), mid-price rank (12%), rooming house rank (34%), and lodging house rank (50%). Palace

hotels were palatial suites for rich residents coming from the nation's wealthiest families. Mid-price hotels were intended for overnight guests and residents "who had a comfortable income and intermediate social status" (ibid, 21). These hotels included service staff, full-time kitchens, and laundering services for their patrons.

Rooming house-rank hotels were described as "plain hotels for plain people" that provided a room and place to eat (ibid, 23). These hotels catered to residents with modest means who wanted to live apart from their families or alone. This hotel rank also included boarding and lodging houses. Boarding houses were distinct from hotels and lodging houses in that they provided meals and housekeeping services to their residents (e.g., board). Boarding houses tended to be private establishments run by women out of an otherwise private home (Gamber 2007, 8). Rooming and boarding house tenants tended to be young men and women who had just arrived at the city for work as "clerks, salesmen, bookkeepers, shop girls, stenographers, dressmakers, milliners, barbers, restaurant-keepers, black railroad porters and stewards, policemen, nurses... journeymen carpenters, painters, machinists, and electricians" (Groth 1994, 103). These sites, like most others in the city, were racially segregated. Roomers and boarders were charged by the week, didn't live long in a single room, and often went to different hotels and houses within the year or tried to secure a more permanent place to live in a house or apartment.

The final rank, lodging houses, were made primarily for day laborers and houseless residents with minimal incomes and no family connections (ibid, 22). Lodging houses served the casual labor market — primarily made up of new immigrants, racial minorities, and older white laborers. Their interiors generally consisted of cordoned-off six-foot rooms, private beds in shared spaces, or just a floor to sleep on. Lodging houses were racially segregated and sequestered in certain portions of town, like San Francisco's Chinatown. Lodging houses charged by the day and weekly tenure was difficult to obtain for lodging house residents.

Domestic hotels were a major source of housing in the city and set the architectural template for the development of apartment buildings (Sandoval-Strausz 2007, 276). Beito and Beito show how, in 1850, households with borders, lodgers, or roomers made up 35% of housing stock in central cities with metropolitan areas with 50,000 or more people. This number decreased to 20.6% in the 1910s and kept steadily decreasing until these homes made up 8.5% of housing stock in the 1940s (Beito and Beito 2016, 487). Paul Groth (2004, 19)argues that while San Francisco outpaced other major metropolitan areas as a hotel city in the 1880s, places like Boston quickly joined its ranks in the 1900s. In Washington D.C. — where affordable housing for Black residents has been a consistent historical scarcity — Black Washingtonians opened their homes to Black boarders coming in from the South as white developers refused to develop new units for Black residents (Asch and Musgrove 2017, 283).

Investment differed greatly across different hotel ranks. For example, in San Francisco, hotel owners of palace rank and mid-price rank hotels purposely built hotels as a permanent and unique part of the city. With a full staff, specialized architecture, and cooking and cleaning facilities, these hotels became long-term property investments. Meanwhile, investors in inexpensive rooming and lodging hotels tended to treat the properties as temporary parts of the city. Architectural flexibility meant that if the hotel business model didn't work, rooming, lodging, and boarding house owners could convert their properties into single-family homes, apartments, or other arrangements (Groth 1994, 188). Urban planners of the time preferred palace and mid-price hotels while treating rooming and lodging hotels as marginal parts of the urban landscape. However, tenants' reliance on domestic hotels as housing close to their place of labor meant that they served as important sites of worker housing for businesses and industries even if they were not regarded as such.

While they served as a key form ofr housing, hotels were far from ideal social sites. Racial segregation meant that hotels for Black, Asian, and Latine people were overcrowded, subject to strict code enforcement, and underfunded. Many lodging houses were dilapidated and created environments rife with crime and violence. Boarding and rooming houses run by single women were often subject to finance schemes where women took on loans for boarding houses that they could not pay off once business dried up or workers shifted to other seasonal work elsewhere. Likewise, undue pressure was placed on Black boarding house owners, as housing for Black people was scarce in the District. The racial wealth inequality that pervaded the U.S. found its reflection in the composition of hotel housing stock.

While domestic hotels were a major housing source, they did not go uncontested by the city's elites and policymakers. The stigma attached to racialized sites of poverty gave way to a Progressive Era movement which attended to planning, housing, and family life for a white urban elite. The Progressives strove to apply racialized eugenic principles to a pseudo-scientific theory of family and dwelling. Housing reformers would challenge hotels as appropriate sites for housing through appeals to racialized ideologies of domesticity and white Victorian gender norms about family. The single-family home served as a paradigmatic example of white virtue — where the married woman labored at home with her children while her husband worked outside the home. In addition, the single-family home created a space that was designed to facilitate these naturalized roles while also preventing overcrowding, racial commingling, drug use, and aberrant family structures. Progressive reformers worked to eliminate domestic hotel stock to create a segregated city aligned with their ideal visions of family, domesticity, and economy.

Progressive reformers passed moral codes that sought to control "aberrant social lives by controlling the behavior itself" and banned activities like dancing, gambling, sexual solicitation, cross-dressing, and drinking (ibid, 239). The target of white virtue, the single white woman living

on her own or working at home, proved to be a breeding ground for insecurities about the role of women. Women in business, especially in boarding homes, were prone to accusations of prostitution and unbecoming conduct that marred their adherence to the white ideal norm. For women of color, the situation was much worse. In San Francisco, Asian women were considered loose women that would sell their sexual services, break up families, and infect white working patrons (Shah 2001, 170-173). Similarly, Black women were subject to police harassment, assault, and social stigma simply for existing in the public sphere (Hartman 2019, 252). Granted, there was a small degree of class protection, but this treatment was widespread towards women who lived and worked in domestic hotels.

There was also a fear of disease from the reformers. In addition to the crowding of lower classes producing the so-called “social diseases" discussed above, reformers worried about the physical diseases that would emerge from racial commingling and a breakdown of an ideal family structure. In San Francisco, there was a clear racial fear of co-mingling between Asian people and white people in San Francisco. Worries about opium dens, cross-racial relationships, and the queer mores of Chinese people polluting the character of white city residents all led to laws barring Chinese immigrants, as well as the decimation of multi-family housing and hotels seen as the site of racialized viral spread (Shah 2001, 170). San Francisco reformers pointed to the spread of smallpox within Chinese communities as justification for these measures, but the measures were notoriously disastrous for Chinese people quarantined in uninhabitable conditions, prevented from seeing their families, and left to die (ibid, 121).

In response to the threat to white womanhood, familial breakdown, racial commingling, and disease, white city leaders took action. Progressive reformers, real estate professionals, developers, and governments created a new toolbox to preserve the white middle-class family in the city: zoning and covenants. Racially exclusive zoning was used to create all-white neighborhoods as well as control where and how racialized and working-class people lived. Zoning also came with aspirations to control land-use mixture and density, banning non-elite multi-unit dwellings, and banning retail activity from housing neighborhoods (Groth 1994, 248). This tool of racialized control not only impacted where people could live but also the kinds of places that were allowed to be built — placing limitations on the number of domestic hotels that could be built in cities. It also followed with a program of destroying pre-existing multi-family dwellings and displacing people with no other place to go, such as the 1920 programs that cleared out alley houses in Washington D.C. (Asch and Musgrove 2017, 202).

Racial covenants are binding agreements that are contained within a home deed. These deeds prevented houses from being rented to people of color and Jewish people (Welsh 2018, 132-134), thereby controlling the racial makeup of an area indirectly. Racial covenants grew after the 1917 *Buchanan v. Warly* decision where the Supreme Court ruled that racially mandated

zoning was unconstitutional. They remained a fixture of the U.S. housing landscape until the Federal Fair Housing Act of 1968. Importantly for domestic hotels, covenants also prevented the subdivision of homes — which in turn limited the capacity for boarding and rooming.

While zoning was a tool under development in the late 1910s, it grew into a full-fledged form of "scientific management" in the 1920s (Freund 2007, 61). The central tools of zoning were the promotion of single-family homes above all other forms of dwelling, control over what races and classes lived where in the city through covenants and segregation, and a broader range of police powers that controlled "nuisance," a racialized description of unwanted activity, on the property. Saidiya Hartman describes vagrancy statutes through the Tenement Housing Act being used in New York tenements to target young Black women for prostitution — with those who were caught sentenced 80% of the time (Hartman 2019, 242-243). In essence, the laws targeted activities that white Victorian mores deemed unbecoming of women: idleness, refusal to work, sexual liberty, and gathering in public.

Admittedly, not all Progressive reforms were outright discriminatory. A system of building and health codes aimed at the fundamental problem of hotel safety: "firetraps, dark rooms, inadequate plumbing, and insufficient ventilation" (Groth 1994, 241). Housing codes called for a greater separation of people into different rooms. Frequent inspections caused hotel owners to raise their rents and shifted the landscape of hotel housing by pushing hotels in the rooming house rank to pursue larger buildings that conformed to codes by providing plumbing and adequate ventilation to residents (ibid, 245). As such, even if the domestic hotel was unideal, Progressive reformers worked to implement health codes to improve the quality of life at these sites. In response, hotel owners raised rents, went out of business, or rented to richer clientele — further limiting the availability of hotel housing stock.

Though domestic hotels served as a major site of housing in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the combined policy tools of Progressive reformers, urban planners, and legislators led to the limitation of available domestic hotel stock in Boston, San Francisco, and Washington D.C. This change fundamentally shifted the urban landscape as it reconfigured where the working classes and people of color could live, the structure of housing ownership and rentals, and the allowable interior of the domestic space. These shifts would have a long reach as many Progressive reformers' concerns with domestic hotels resonated with contemporary calls to limit STRs due to their moral character, occupancy, or housing structure. Most importantly, these shifts set the stage for the development of housing over the next four decades.

1930-1970: The Hegemony of the Single-Family Home

From the 1930s to roughly the 1970s, the U.S. shifted to what I called the hegemony of the family home. Hegemony refers to Antonio Gramsci's concept that societal rule isn't

established strictly through economic means or the use of force alone. It also requires institutions and social forces to prop up dominant social systems. U.S. homeownership rates jumped from hovering around 45% in the 1900s to the 1930s, up to 55% in 1950, and up to 61% in 1970 (US Census Bureau 2000). The push for the single-family home using the planning tools that decimated other forms of dwelling reflects this. In essence, white government, banking, real estate, and citizen interests pursued policies that barred people of color from buying homes, displaced people of color through construction projects meant for white people, and created a tight network of control to keep people from having a democratic say over the structure of housing and development. They also pushed against alternative sites of housing by limiting multi-unit construction and not counting domestic hotels in housing censuses or surveys until the 1970s (Groth 1994, 284).

The zoning tools of the 1920s became widespread and codified in the 1930s. Hand in hand with federal and local banks, developers, and retailers, New Deal programs like the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) were created to refinance home mortgages in default and to loan money for new home purchases. The HOLC was notoriously racist — creating racialized maps where creditworthiness was color-coded by the borrower's loan risk, a shorthand for the borrower's race. This created the practice of redlining on a federal and domestic level. Redlining was the practice of denying mortgage loans to a borrower as well as deprioritizing the development of housing in areas colored red on the HOLC map.

The HOLC's work was dovetailed by the creation of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) as a supplier of housing loans in 1934. Recent work suggests that the FHA undertook its own program of racialized redlining — independent of HOLC maps and funding distribution (Fishback et. al 2021). The FHA was explicitly racist in its lending decisions, but the racist logic had an economic justification. The Federal government assumed that a free market for property demanded segregation and defined "minority homeownership as an actuarial risk to white people" (Freund 2007, 118). Redlining gave way to practices known as blockbusting and contract selling in the 1930s and 1940s. Blockbusting was the practice where whites were incentivized to sell their properties to move out of cities by the prospect of Black neighbors moving in next to them and the ensuing fall in the value of their homes. Those same properties were resold to Black buyers at exorbitant prices (Taylor 2019, 48). Given the lack of mortgage and banking options available, these home sales came with exploitative contract plans where even one missed payment meant that the seller could repossess the whole house while keeping the other contractual payments. Importantly, this work was not strictly done by the federal government but an amalgam of federal and state officials, local and national banks, real estate professionals, and financiers.

The government and private sector's commitment to creating segregated housing continued into the post-war period. In 1944, Congress passed one of the most influential housing bills in U.S. history the GI Bill of Rights. Per the legislation, the FHA and banks co-created a set of mortgage and lending tools that made it easier for white soldiers returning from the front to buy houses. This seismic shift fundamentally changed the urban landscape, led to the creation of the suburbs, and gave people in the U.S. an unprecedented opportunity to attain private homeownership. However, the GI Bill of Rights applied unevenly across race and gender. People of color and women of all races had few mortgage options available to them — thereby creating a lopsided housing system that subsidized white heterosexual families while doing nothing to help those that fell outside its mold (Freund 2007, 181).

The shift in who could purchase homes also created a shift in who owned and rented apartments and multi-house dwellings. Federal incentives for white men created a system where real estate and homeownership in urban centers shifted to white landlords and corporations. The shift to single-family homes was accompanied by increased government involvement in public-sector housing. Importantly, Congress passed the Housing Act of 1937 and 1949 and the Emergency Price Control in 1942 program, or rent control. The Housing Acts, originally intended for all middle-class and working-class renters, were drastically limited to low-income renters to keep the government from encroaching into the private market.

The rise of single-family homes in the suburbs, legislative requirements in the Housing Acts, and white flight in the 1950s set the stage for urban renewal. Urban areas where poor people lived were considered a "blight." The function of urban renewal was to clear "slum" areas of cities and redevelop them for economic activity. These urban renewal schemes were only sweetened by laws like the Housing Act of 1954, which incentivized developers with FHA mortgage loans. This in turn cleared and destroyed a lot of living spaces that were otherwise used as places of housing and turned them strictly into real estate ventures, which became increasingly complicated through racial zoning. Single-family housing zoning excluded non-white buyers due to redlining and also limited the construction of multi-unit housing in cities — thereby limiting the places where multi-unit housing could be built and creating housing scarcity for renters. The promise of affordable housing for those displaced by the destruction of slum areas never materialized. A large amount of urban housing stock was demolished and redeveloped for strictly commercial use. The combined impact of racist mortgages and racist disinvestment created the background to our dominant housing system and the hegemony of the single-family home.

The turn to single-family homes in urban development, zoning, and mortgages — as well as urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s — serves as a final blow to the primacy of domestic hotels. Those who stayed at hotels were pushed to the edges of cities. Some hotel owners

worried that the rise of tenants' rights and rent control would stop hotels from being profitable and chose to close their businesses. The incentive to sell the property for redevelopment or pivot to catering to a traveling clientele proved too great. Owners tried to force tenants out of hotels through harassment, allowing the building to fall into disrepair, ending meal and cleaning services, loosening security, plugging room locks, spraying for roaches while tenants were in the room, serving fraudulent eviction notices, and blocking social services like Meals on Wheels (Groth 1994, 287).

While domestic hotels were dealt a major blow, not all was bleak. The 1960s and 1970s saw a rise in social movements fighting on behalf of Single Resident Occupancy (SRO) hotels nationwide. Spearheaded in San Francisco, residents, senior groups, hotel owners, pro-housing activists, and sympathetic legislators came together to protest the government policy of razing SRO hotels. One of the most notable instances was when 2,000 demonstrators protested the eviction of 2,000 Chinese and Filipino residents in San Francisco's International Hotel at the edge of Chinatown. The movement quickly spread nationwide and took root in Washington D.C., New York City, and Portland, Oregon (ibid, 288-289).

The zoning and planning tools of the mid-20th century fundamentally transformed the cityscape through apparatuses that embedded new forms of racialization, gendered labor, and social division in the space of the city as well as the dwellings therein. Urban policy across government levels and real estate industry partnerships not only exacerbated earlier racialized and gender bias against apartments, rooming, boarding, and hotel homes, but also limited the types of affordable homes available while pushing more exploitative rental and buying options to communities of color. Hotels were pushed in the direction of business and leisure travel and away from residence. The multi-unit apartment housing that was available remained segregated and underdeveloped. In sum, the short-term rental of the past was decimated and the conditions for today's contemporary home were created within this policy framework.

The relationship between life and work shifted accordingly. The wider availability of homes to middle-class white families set the template where, through wage earning and government loans, a white male worker was able to raise a family and eventually retire in the home they bought. For those unable to buy a home, the lack of available housing stock and large-scale abandonment of upkeep and property management in the face of urban renewal created new challenges for finding an affordable place to live in the city.

1970-2008: Financialized Homeownership

The rapid changes that led to the hegemony of the single-family home were followed by another major upheaval in the 1970s and 1980s through the shift to commoditized housing. Political pressures and worries about out-of-control inflation led to a joint effort by governments

and central banks to push forward a program of “regressive taxes, ‘balanced budgets (ensuring low levels of public spending), permanent vigilance with regard to (wage and price) inflation, and a strategy of benign neglect vis-a-vis asset price inflation” (Adkins et. al 2020, 40). This neoliberal turn dominated the U.S. and U.K. and quickly spread globally. In essence, the neoliberal line was that massive Keynesian spending by the government towards public programs and low unemployment created conditions for out-of-control inflation that could only be curbed by the programs described above.

The growing deregulation of the economy and the adoption of neoliberalism in government policy shifted the importance of the single-family home in the economy. The combined forces of wage stagnation and asset inflation created a scenario where Keynesian-era employment-driven economic growth was replaced with growth driven by property-based assets (ibid, 2021). The home as an asset was meant to stave off the impacts of government withdrawal from welfare and social services by acting as an investment that appreciated overtime, guaranteeing one’s ability to retire and have a place to live in the future.

This shift in the housing landscape was accompanied by the democratization of credit access and the deregulation of finance. The Fair Housing Act of 1968, the Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974, the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act of 1975, and the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 banned racial discrimination in the extension of credit and the practice of redlining (Cooper 2017, 148). Through the 1970s, lenders abandoned marital-status-based criteria for mortgage loans and began to use a more complex measure of risk based on evolving assessments of creditworthiness (ibid, 149). The new wave of deregulation allowed Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to create new mortgage-backed securities that banks could use to offload and sell their loan portfolios. Speculation on mortgage-backed securities became a key profit center for financial institutions.

In the 1990s, the Clinton administration encouraged a flow of credit to low-income and minority neighborhoods via public-private partnerships. These credit flows were paired with partnerships to "provide financial and educational assistance, support self-help homeownership programs, and create new mortgage products" (Saegart, Fields, and Libman 2009, 302). Through these programs, the federal government, philanthropic institutions, housing non-profits, and banks cultivated a subjectivity linking "homeownership to a better life for individuals and families and to the performance of responsible citizenship" (ibid, 303).

Private lenders entered the market en masse with the rising demand for mortgage-backed securities (Cooper 2017, 150). Cooper explains that “the new generation of private brokers replaced… traditional, actuarial models of risk standardization with a much more speculative strategy of risk-optimization through diversification into some of the more high-risk segments of the consumer credit market” — which disproportionately targeted Black, Latinx, and

“non-normative” households (e.g., single mothers) (Ibid, 151). Banks gave high-risk high-interest loans, called subprime mortgages, to poor and racialized communities. They then bundled and sold these mortgages to investors through special securitized investor vehicles that enabled the bank to extend further lines of credit to borrowers. Bryan, Martin, and Rafferty (2009, 465) explain, "securitization involves framing an asset or collection of assets in terms of their expected income streams, and selling rights to the income stream, but with no necessary transfer of ownership of the underlying asset itself." In other words, speculating on mortgage-backed securities and collateralized debt obligations was profitable and the more mortgages a lender could bundle and speculate on, the more profit they could earn.

In practice, this resulted in homebuyers, especially new homebuyers from racialized and poor neighborhoods, taking on riskier loans due to longstanding processes of disinvestment, racist credit systems, and de facto racist real estate practices. Even as homeownership rates grew across race, the benefits of homeownership were greatly exaggerated as many homeowners were left with distressed homes at unaffordable rates post-2008 (FRED Blog 2022). This system of housing speculation and homeownership collapsed during the 2007-2008 financial crash as the price of housing fell, securitized assets lost value, and borrowers defaulted on their loans and had their homes. As I discuss below, the rise of the asset-based economy and new wave of technology investment were key for the development of STRs.

The rise in home ownership and predatory lending underscored how the asset-based future was precarious for those who didn’t have wealth, asset or otherwise, to get into the property game. The fallout of the 2008 financial crash created increased instability for those who had come to rely on the home as their prime (if not only) asset. As millions of homes entered foreclosure, people lost their jobs in the 2008 recession, and the financial industry looked to new markets on which to speculate, technology corporations came to fill this gap.

The neoliberalization of the mortgage market and the broader real estate industry is dovetailed by another crucial development: the infrastructural technological investment during the dot-com boom era from 1990 to 2001. During the 1990s, a lagging manufacturing sector shifted the nation’s hope for economic growth to the nascent technology sector. Venture capitalist companies invested in thousands of tech companies in the hopes that they could make a huge profit from the new telecommunications and technology industry. Notably during this period, the infrastructure for the Internet was laid down — from laying fiber-optic and submarine cables that carried the Internet across valleys and oceans to the larger availability of personal computers (Srnicek 2016, 22).

As I discuss below, the rise of the asset-based economy and the new wave of technology investment were key for the development of STRs as well as major driving factors in contemporary economic inequality as wage earners and renters were effectively shut out of the

increasingly expensive housing market. The primacy of housing as a key asset would likely not have been as disastrous for renters if the U.S. had a robust socialized housing infrastructure. However, public housing — already underfunded and poorly managed — was moved into private hands through the Housing and Community Act of 1974. The Act limited federal funds for the construction of housing projects and instead moved to a program of subsidizing private-sector tenants and real estate developers who made some of their units rent-controlled (Rolnik 2019, 42). Likewise, the unavailability of SROs, alongside cuts to social programs and high unemployment, created the social conditions for homelessness and poverty — especially for newly deinstitutionalized disabled people (Durham 1989, 123). Cuts to public housing were followed up by HOPE VI, which was designed to demolish and either restore or substitute dilapidated public housing projects but in practice reduced the number of accessible housing units for poor families and permanently displaced them (Rolnik 2019, 45). In short, the program of public housing in the United States was effectively hampered through federal intervention and tenants were left with three options: become homeless, rent at a loss, or try to claw one's way into the asset class through homeownership.

The situation was exacerbated for residents by the combined forces of renewed urban development: rising cost of living, investor profiteering on an urban rent gap, and economic revival and tech clustering (Walker 2018, 158). In D.C., like in San Francisco and Boston, city governments pursued "new urbanism": a planning and development approach that sought to create a city that valued environmental sustainability and walkable communities. In practice, this planning move created a government-supported new market for developers to clear out old urban housing stock, build new expensive housing and commercial areas, and encourage the move-in of middle-class white people from the suburbs at the expense of outpriced working-class people of color. Neil Smith (1996, 57) shows gentrification is part of a generalized strategy to capitalize on the worth of a building. He argues that this process is fundamentally driven by a desire to make a profit. A landowner's base profit is called capitalized ground rent. Landlords in poor areas attempt to make as much of their capitalized ground rent as possible by neglecting services and upkeep — which leads to disinvestment in an area. The capitalized ground rent is different from the potential ground rent. Potential ground rent is how much profit one could be making if the land was used in a different way. To reach this potential ground rent, landlords and developers demolish the divested buildings, build luxury housing, or drastically increase their rent prices to push out working-class residents and attract richer tenants who consider the raised rents a relatively good deal. Atkinson and Bridge (2005, 2) show that gentrification is tied to colonialism due to the overwhelming whiteness of the professional class that gentrifies cities globally, the universalization of pro-gentrification public policy around the planet, and the displacement of the poor from their homes. For example, in D.C., budgetary problems during the Marion Barry

administration led to a federal takeover of the city through the federal Financial Control Board from 1995 to 2001. Under the Control Board's guidance, the city passed a host of economic restructuring policies that promoted cost cutting, firing workers from the D.C. government, and closing or privatizing "dysfunctional" agencies that provided social supports and other government services — disinvestment policies that largely continued under the Anthony Williams and Adrian Fenty mayoral administrations in the 2000s (Asch and Musgrove 2017, 436). These policies led to many long-time Black residents being priced out of the District and a general "whitening" of the city.

The combined forces of an asset-driven economy, the gentrification of urban cities, the rapid rise of the technology sector, and the 2008 financial crash created the perfect conditions for the rise of the short-term rental. Housing, as the chief vehicle for wealth generation, became ever more important and precarious as housing and rental prices surged while people lost their jobs. Those without access to housing had to make do with dwindling wages in an ever more expensive city. Sustaining life became increasingly difficult as even working one or multiple jobs proved to be unsustainable in urban cities with rapidly rising rents. It is here where the STR enters the picture.

2008-Present: From Sharing Economy to Platform Real Estate

The 2008 financial crash opened two key avenues for financialization that resulted in the rise of STR. The first is a new market landscape that favored high-yield investment in a time when corporations hoarded capital and high interest rates. A loose monetary policy post-dot-com boom in the 2000s, post-2008 quantitative easing policies meant to forestall total financial collapse, low interest rates, high levels of corporate savings, and mass unemployment created the perfect ecosystem for platform corporations to emerge. Srnicek argues that this monetary environment created the conditions where corporations had to turn to increasingly risky investments for high-yield profits (Srnicek 2016, 32). Technology start-ups — especially lucrative platforms — became a key site for investment.

Platforms are digital infrastructures that allow two or more users to interact (ibid, 43). Notably, the definition of users here is broad, as it can include both human and non-human actors who use the platform (e.g. a smart traffic light accessing data from the Amazon Web Service cloud) (Bratton 2016, 256). By connecting users, platforms create an infrastructural web that allows them to mediate between different groups to create new materials, share resources, and create novel connections. Platforms became the basis for the sharing economy — an economic sector based on consumer-to-consumer platform corporations that provide temporary access to other users' physical assets and services (Sundararajan 2016). The initial vision of the sharing economy was as a new form of cooperative capitalism where people reduced waste, met their

neighbors, and took part in digitally mediated communalism. Early sharing economy companies promised to replace the alienating forms capitalism with peer-to-peer non-exploitative market exchanges. However, this dream soon unraveled as corporations took advantage of platforms' ability to generate a scalable market of users and laborers. Driven by venture capital, companies like Uber, Airbnb, and Doordash quickly supplanted their sharing economy competitors and swept the nation in a matter of years.

The second trend is the financialization of rental properties. Post-2008 crash, financial actors were looking to new avenues of housing for profit and found it in the widespread availability of foreclosed homes. These financial institutions (e.g., private equity funds, hedge funds, pension funds) invested in rental housing at a large scale and now own hundreds of thousands of homes across the U.S. — even going so far as securitizing rent as an investment vehicle (Fields 2018, 10). Foreclosed homes and ones bought from homeowners with negative equity became key sites of financialized accumulation and created a new avenue for future capital growth, all the while leading to higher rental rates.

The 2008 crash resulted in an unprecedented number of foreclosures, but not all homeowners were foreclosed upon. Some homeowners and renters were desperate to find any form of work to hold onto their place of living. Enter the STR — a short-term stay that generated hundreds of dollars in just a few nights and allowed people to work on their own terms and schedules. In 2009, Airbnb was still a small start-up at the Y Combinator Startup School. Airbnb's co-founders would travel to New York City, Washington D.C., and anywhere else they had users to coach them on how to list their space on Airbnb, take photographs, and get feedback on the site design (Gallagher 2017, 28). This initial network building and platform creation quickly ballooned after Airbnb secured venture funding. By 2011, the company was valued between $7.8 million and $1.2 billion and claimed 140 million guest arrivals (ibid, 41).

Though Airbnb was initially used by renters and individual homeowners, the world of multi-unit property management and investors quickly merged. STRing to business and leisure travelers proved to be incredibly profitable. A white homeowner I spoke with in Boston told me she stopped taking on roommates because she was able to save three times as much on rent by renting out on STR platforms a couple of nights a week compared to sharing her space full-time with a tenant. Why bother renting full-time when you could make so much more renting a few days a month? From there, some homeowners even made Airbnb their full-time job — renting their own space and buying new properties for the extra income. In echoes of original rooming homes and boarding homes, some hosts rented out multiple rooms to different residents, but this was relatively uncommon relative to whole home rentals. Likewise, the rental population is fundamentally different as most guests were travelers staying for a few days or a week at most rather than city workers seeking multi-week or multi-month stays.

Though Airbnb and other STR platforms are financed by taking a cut from their users, this source of funding is guaranteed through a rent gap (Wachsmuth and Weisler 2018). The rent gap is created due to the outsized amount of rent an owner can collect from renting a unit short-term compared to long-term rentals. STR hosts can take advantage of this rent gap by embracing a flow of short-term travelers over long-term tenants — especially in "global" tourist neighborhoods in major cities. In turn, STR platforms become profitable because they can monetize on this rapid pace of rentals while shifting all labor, supply costs, and risks onto the individual STR host. The host is responsible for ensuring the quality of the stay, taking care of the tenants' needs, cleaning the room, and laundering sheets. If they choose to provide breakfast and other amenities, it is on their own dime. While hosts I spoke with explained that this labor was relatively light relative to the profit they earned, I regularly met hosts who considered it "easy work" while putting multiple hours a week into managing online listings, washing sheets, shopping for supplies, and deep-cleaning rooms.

Whether or not a host succeeds, STR platform corporations get a cut of the profit and attract investment capital by boasting about the platform's overall growth. In short, STRs can profit from the rise and fall of entrepreneurial hosts while offsetting the costs to them. The rise of single platforms also creates a network effect that ties hosts to platforms. The network effect describes the phenomena of a platform becoming more difficult to leave the more users join it. For example, if you left a social network platform like Facebook for a smaller social media platform, the competing platform would be less useful because all your contacts remained on Facebook. As platforms like Airbnb and VRBO grew to dominate the STR space, it became much more difficult for hosts to seek different financial terms with platforms or to host profitably on different providers. While many hosts I spoke to did supplement their Airbnb hosting with hosting on other sites, they told me that the bulk of their business came from Airbnb.

STRs provided an additional incentive in their unregulated and mercurial nature. STRs went on and offline at different intervals, did not have to register with the government, and there were no effective means for the government to keep track of STR profit flows. STR corporations' insistence on data privacy made it difficult for governments to get an accurate read on industry profits and housing usage. Unlike hotels, the STR space being inside a home meant that previous government regulations on lodging would not apply. In addition, the distinction between the STR and the regulated category of the bed-and-breakfast/lodging house created an ambiguity that allowed homeowners to bypass regulations meant for the hospitality industry. For example, a host who attempted to register as a bed and breakfast in Cambridge was denied by the Cambridge License Commission because they considered STRs a distinct form of monetization.

Investor capital, multi-unit landlords, and larger-scale corporations took note of the growth of STRs. STRs became another space where single-family rentals could be financialized.

The STR commodity is good for investors in that 1) it can earn above rental market prices and 2) be sold at a moment's notice for profit in hot tourism areas (Cocola-Gant and Gago 2019). The scale of STRs is difficult to measure due to the lack of accurate data prior to regulations. Understandably, STR companies were reticent to hand over their user data for open research. This resulted in researchers having to "scrape" Airbnb in order to get a picture of what STRs looked like in their cities. The scrape essentially pinged Airbnb's Application Program Interface to get a snapshot of listings in a city during a given time, how much was charged, how long listings lasted, and who hosted the listings. This ping generated a data file that researchers then converted and organized to show the impacts of STRs. STR companies and their supporters have disputed the veracity of these data in public hearings and have argued they represent a distortion of the majority of hosts renting out their own units. However, without more accurate data from this time period, these scrapes are the best tools we have for understanding Airbnb's impact on cities from a regulatory perspective.

In New York, Wachsmuth and Weisler (2018) found that while Airbnb didn't contribute to direct displacement, it did create what they call "exclusionary displacement" which gentrified an area by removing the number of long-term rental units available to working-class people. Using a custom dataset of Airbnb listings in the United States, Barron et. al. (2018) found that STR has a positive impact on housing and rental prices. These trends held true in the cities discussed in this study (Hoffman and Heisler 2020) — as well as in European cities like Athens, Lisbon, and Milan (Amore et. al. 2022; Franco and Santos 2021).

In San Francisco, ShareBetter and the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project both found the creation of full-time vacation rentals at the cost of housing. The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project found that, prior to regulations, over 57% of Airbnb's 7000 listings in San Francisco were full-time vacation rentals — with similar figures holding in other parts of the Bay (Anti-eviction Mapping Project a 2021). Share Better SF (2015) argued that a majority of these listings were unregistered and 68% of all short-term rental listings were entire homes where the host was not present — with Airbnb and VRBO accounting for 4,500 entire homes and apartments removed from the rental market. Likewise, the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project also found that Airbnb listings coincided with evictions by so-called "serial evictors" who kicked out residents and then listed their units on STR rentals at a higher profit (McElroy and Narayanan 2021, 43).

In Washington D.C., the DC Working Families Party scraped the Airbnb website in order to gain a better understanding of STRs in the DC area. What they found was that 67% were illegal entire home listings and 37% of listings were multiple listings rented through a commercial operator with multiple units. These illegal listings in twenty Northeast and Northwest D.C. neighborhoods led to rising rent prices and constituted the bulk of Airbnb's profits in the District —

as well as potentially threatened housing accessibility in these neighborhoods if left unchecked (Share Better 2017, 5).

In Boston, the Alliance of Downtown Civic Organizations, a conglomerate of nine organizations representing downtown Boston residents in Chinatown, North Bay, Southbay, and others, used data from InsideAirbnb, an investigatory Airbnb scraping website launched by Murray Cox, to show that a majority of STR rentals in downtown Boston were not by single-family homeowners but rather in large-scale buildings rented for multiple nights a week. Of those, a majority happened in their downtown neighborhoods and were run by so-called "investor" hosts that listed multiple units short-term under different identities but belonged to the same company, property management service, or investor group. This mirrored findings by Community Labor United, which showed that, in Boston, "45 percent of all revenue is earned by 12 percent of operators. The largest fifty operators earn 25 percent of all revenue" (Jimenez 2017, 7).

Likewise, it is undeniable that Airbnb was having a major impact on the hotel industry. With STRs able to offer a lower price than hotels due to the lack of uniform regulations for STRs, hotels were faced with competition that they could not keep up with. This resulted not only in profit losses, but also fewer working hours for hotel workers — one of the few unionized jobs that still paid a living wage and offered benefits to working-class people. This impact on cities, if left unrestrained, potentially threatened long-term housing for city residents. As one case in North Carolina shows, STRs quickly overtook a luxury apartment building (Morabito 2021). Even if the data above were not accurate, as STR companies and their supporters claim, the rising cost of housing, the potential for investment, and the impact on city residents created the perfect stage for the regulatory debates.

The STR emerged in the maelstrom of neoliberal deregulation, housing market collapse, technological investment, and rising economic inequality. The platform-enabled STR, rather than following a legacy of boarding homes that provided semi-permanent residential rentals to working tenants, arises from economic policy that raises rents, limits affordable housing, and incentivizes asset-based growth while making home purchasing more difficult for those who did not benefit from the pre-neoliberal governmental support. The homeowning STR host trying to maintain her housing asset, unlike the smaller-scale boarding and rooming homeowner of the past, finds herself in competition with professionalized property management corporations and large-scale investors looking to maximize profits off rent.

The relationships between work and life for the boarding house owner and the STR host are fundamentally distinct. Though they may both rent out their homes, their financial incentives, clientele, cityscape, and economic conditions vastly differ. The homeowning STR host, finding herself in the current economic conditions, uses her property to guarantee survival through the tumult of capitalist boom and bust while hoping that her extra rental income is enough to survive

after retirement. Her larger-scale compatriots take advantage of this asset to make a profit at the expense of longer-term tenants in the city.

Conclusion

This chapter sets the scene for the regulatory battles discussed below. Housing as we understand it today is a complex hegemonizing instrument that controls racialized, classed, and gendered behaviors and spatial emplacements. The reason for discussing this genealogy is to provide the exact stakes for the STR debate. The STR arose in the wake of this legacy and under the economic conditions created by a hundred years of housing policy. Simply taking the STR as a "callback" to earlier forms of boarding and rooming misunderstands the economic and social shifts that made short-term rental a scalable and profitable form of commerce. It ignores how the destruction of other "shared" and multi-unit spaces facilitated the creation of a private sharing market — one that failed to address the impacts of housing financialization outside single-family homeowners and renters who could get permission from their landlords to share. As I show in the next chapter, this legacy of housing shaped the way that STR coalitions formed and fought for their vision of the future of urban development. Rather than simply arising from a "disruption" by STRs like Airbnb, these coalitions take shape over the contradictions between work, property, and life.

Chapter 2: Whose right to which city? The political economy of coalitional politics

One Saturday, several hours apart, I sat down with two prominent activists who campaigned for and against STR regulations in Washington D.C. In a bustling coffee shop, I met Christa, a Black woman who had lived in the D.C. area for 30-some years. Christa explained how she had seen the city's Black neighborhoods change since her arrival in the 1980s:

> Once you start allowing corporations and developers to take over the city, this is what happens. Developers are going to buy up those houses, they're probably knocking on people's doors right now. Asking them if they want to sell. That's what they did all over D.C. The Georgia Avenue corridor where a lot of African American families do not live anymore, they went knocking on her grandmother's door, the realtors were. Some were realtors, some were developers. They were all over the neighborhood asking people if they wanted to sell. And it was, right around the recession and people were really struggling paying the taxes on their homes and people just signed it. 'Come get my house.' They were selling for nothing. That's going to happen again. And people always ask, 'How did this happen?' Well, you're in a city with poor or working-class people who have just struggled, and those homes were their family homes. Generational homes. That is to me one of the saddest stories ever. So, generations of families now have no home. Or it was how they were able to leverage money for emergencies or whatever and have it. Anyway, so that's happening all over the District.

Later during the day, I sat down at a table in a cramped bakery with Ximena, a Black-Filipina woman who had lived in D.C. since the 1970s. She agreed with Christa's assessment of the dispossession of D.C.'s Black residents:

> D.C. is a goldmine. D.C. is a goldmine. D.C. is a goldmine. You know what I'm saying? And people had to understand. Or I should say, they had to, but they didn't. Well, it's now coming to fruition because developers are moving here at a mad pace, and they had finally gotten the administration in place of giving them the go-ahead. Things are moving very quickly and there are a lot of people who are being displaced. There are a lot of people who are at threat of being displaced and they're looking around for ways that they can maintain some of the gains that were hard-fought. It wasn't always easy. Especially for Black people to get into civic government, government jobs.

Both women shared nuanced analyses of corporate power buying up property and displacing Black people who had worked hard to make a home in D.C. in favor of white newcomers. Both women were close in age, owned homes, and were members of the Black middle class. Where they differed was their analysis of the role of STR regulations. Christa was straightforward in her condemnation of Airbnb as "greedy dogs" that refused to pay taxes, displaced residents, and rented buildings at a high profit. Ximena agreed with this analysis for larger actors, explaining, "When I hear about the city wanting to regulate and keep off all these people who have multiple units, who are taking up all the rental stock, and all these other kinds of things. I'm good with that, you know why? Because that's my competition. And the fewer units that they're able to have, the better my business is."

Though both women supported regulating larger players, their political differences stemmed from their disagreement about STR regulations for all hosts. Ximena wanted her one-home business to remain untouched — save for a standard of conduct. Ximena relied on the STR business to help her when her disability flared up and she could not work, and she was using the STR money to save for retirement. She also didn't understand why STR regulations had to be overly restrictive against whole home stays. In the D.C. STR regulation bill, the D.C. Council limited whole-home stays to 90 days per year if the homeowner was not present — with an exemption for those that could show that their jobs or medical situations with family members took them out of the District for over 90 days a year. Christa, on the other hand, was fine with smaller players renting their downstairs basements, but wanted to ensure that there was enough housing stock for long-term residents. She saw whole home rentals as a gateway for corporate actors to buy up housing and illegally rent them short-term for the entire year. This split between promoting small STR businesses and wanting to keep the STR businesses in check created a conflict over the extent to which governments should regulate hosts.

The disagreement between these two women illustrates how regulating STRs became a hot-button issue because of the ways it pulled together many layers of the urban polity into

debates about housing, financialization, business regulations, investment, and the role of government. As I showed in the previous chapter, the history of urban development that led to the rise of STRs had uneven impacts on city residents. Some were able to afford their homes for the first time. STRs helped them hold onto their property while other homeowners were forced into foreclosure. Some residents could no longer afford to live in the city because of skyrocketing home prices and saw STRs as exacerbating the problem. Others saw an avenue for profit while others still tried to buttress their retirement accounts. Historic urbanization had uneven impacts across a range of social positions — creating a housing landscape that was shaped by the intersections of social systems but not unilaterally overdetermined by them.

Navigating these disparate interests, pulling them together, and making claims became the work of coalitional politics. While identity does provide insight into how social relations structure one's life, the responses to these relations remain distinct. People who share similar social locations land differently on where they stand in regard to STR regulations. In responding differently to a shared urbanism, city residents find and align with different factions in order to secure their vision of the economy and housing. This is not an allegiance that is indifferent to racialization, systems of gender, and class, but rather one that depends on disparate reactions to these very structural forces. In this chapter, I explain the organization of the STR debate along the lines of coalitions. I aim to do justice to both the "bundling" done by coalitions and the "bundled" who constitute the claims-making apparatus. I situate the coalitional politics within a framework of hegemonic struggle over the future of urban development.

Literature Review

Beyond Grassroots and Astroturf

In 1985, the Democratic Senator Lloyd Benston said, "A fellow from Texas can tell the difference between grass-roots and AstroTurf." He was pointing to the difference between grassroots movements defined by people-led, bottom-up organizing and Astroturf, which Pfarrer et. al. (2019) define as "synthetic grassroots organizing by a front group that masks the true identities and interests being represented, for the purpose of transmitting unverifiable information to lobby for their claims or to challenge claims that go against their interests." Edward T. Walker (2014) argues grassroots movements are valorized spaces that are free from concerns of business and government interference — a place where people could have their say. The democratic promise of the grassroots and the affront to that promise through Astroturf groups are a regularly recurring discursive trope in the social movement landscape.

While grassroots and astroturf are useful heuristics, they cannot fully grasp the full extent of contemporary political participation. In *Grassroots for Hire*, Walker (2014) details the rising use of public affairs consultants by non-profit and corporate actors to give the appearance of

grassroots support where none exists. He shows how grassroots groups have turned to these public affairs consultants to run their campaigns, thereby blurring the easy lines between grassroots and astroturf. Walker thought it was possible to distinguish and weigh the merits of these hybrid astroturf and grassroots groups by revealing their funding and giving people an informed say on whether to trust these groups or not.

Scholars have followed Walker's call to help people weigh the merit of groups. Luke Yates argues that platform corporations use a set of tactics to build their platform legitimacy and give the appearance of an organic grassroots movement while obscuring the level of corporate involvement:

- *Mobilizing the user base.* Mobilizing the user base "refers to short-term initiatives where the everyday users of platforms are encouraged to support a corporation in response to a specific and local regulatory threat by signing petitions, contacting representatives and responding to consultations" (Yates 2020, 126). In the case of Airbnb, this can look like outreach staff at the platform emailing, direct messaging, and calling users to recruit them to speak to media, come together at rallies, and do get-out-the-vote efforts such as the one against Proposition F, a 2014 Ballot Initiative to regulate Airbnb in San Francisco. Yates critiques efforts like these because they are not spontaneous grassroots mobilizations, but rather public relations campaigns that mobilize users for a specific side (sometimes, in Yates' estimations, against their own best interests).
- *Partnering with Existing Grassroots Groups:* The second tactic, partnering with existing grassroots groups, looks like a platform corporation recruiting public support through donations (Yates 2020, 128). Yates provides the example of Uber and Lyft partnering with Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the National Center for Transgender Equality to give the appearance that these groups supported the rideshare companies. In my work, a less direct relationship was present, where anti-regulation coalitions were able to recruit groups like the D.C. Chamber of Commerce to their side. I also overheard gossip that a local nonprofit tenants' rights group in D.C. didn't speak out against STRs because they received funds for affordable housing construction from Airbnb.
- *Creating Front Groups*: Finally, Yates discusses the formation of front groups and activist stories that give the appearance of grassroots support but are actually carefully cultivated corporate public relations. In the case of Airbnb, Yates highlights the role of "home-sharing clubs" (Yates 2021). Home-sharing clubs are social organizations, whether grassroots or started by Airbnb, where hosts come together to discuss best business practices, hear from speakers on STRs, and come together to take political action. Yates says these groups aren't as grassroots and independent as they seem — drawing attention to the forms of support Airbnb offers these home-sharing clubs including

providing refreshments, offering logistical support and training for protests, and suggesting pro-STR policies to clubs (Yates 2021, 20).

These platform legitimization tactics have led scholars of social movements and corporate involvement to develop new systems to track how different actors are mobilized by corporate and non-corporate interests to advocate on behalf of an issue. However, as Seidl (2022) shows in his mapping of the political influence among all the actors in the New York City Uber regulation debates, non-platform and pro-regulatory actors similarly engage in legitimization tactics that may obscure the true nature of their activism. In short, the critique of platform legitimization has one big problem: Yates' criticisms of Airbnb and other STRs can be just as easily applied to the pro-regulation coalitions. Using Yates' topology, we can see how his criticisms can be applied to pro-regulation actors:

- *Mobilizing the User Base*: The American Hotel and Lodging Association — a trade group that represents lodging real estate investment trusts, Marriott International, Hilton Worldwide, and Hyatt Hotels among others, spearheaded many of the research efforts to discredit Airbnb as a "mom and pop" operation — created a policy toolkit to communicate a pro-hotel pro-regulation message at legislatures, and mobilized hotel owners across the country to speak out against STRs. Likewise, hotel unions like Unite Here rely on the continuation of the hotel business and sided with the American Hotel and Lodging Association. So, they have a vested interest in turning out their members to fight for a particular issue that they claim could cost them their jobs.
- *Partnering with Existing Grassroots Groups*: Second, the hotel unions gave the hotel industry pathways to partner with existing labor allies and community groups, while also organizing within those groups to bring stories of evictions and abuse to the forefront. As I discuss below, the coalition in San Francisco was able to put together an odd-fellows coalition consisting of landlord associations, tenants' rights groups, neighborhood groups, hotel unions, and the hotel industry. While it is true that the hotel union had existing ties and long-standing relationships with these groups, someone on the pro-STR side could argue that the hotel industry partnered with the hotel union strictly to gain access to the appearance of a grassroots organization.
- *Creating Front Groups*: In D.C. and San Francisco, the hotel industry, the hotel unions, and their partners came together under the banner of ShareBetter. This organization presented itself as the face of local residents in favor of regulating STRs, but consisted of the membership of the groups already fighting to regulate STRs. They held media events, protests, and deployed ads depicting paid actors in key regulatory cities to give the appearance that STRs would hurt local residents. In a particularly egregious instance,

> ShareBetter placed an ad in D.C. claiming to represent local Black residents. However, D.C. STR hosts pointed out to me that the ad was filmed in New York City and used paid actors in place of actual STR hosts — a point that pro-regulation activists confirmed. Using Walker's framework, this alliance could be interpreted as a front group made up of existing groups and their members.

Left with this world of corporate influence on both sides, how do we make sense of what's happening with coalitional politics? It's easy enough to say that both sides are tainted by corporate influence and leave it at that. Another option is to look at the impact of STRs in cities and decide which of the two coalitions better represents the truth. But I think an alternative framework, hegemony, can help us understand why these debates are important and motivate some of the social movement lessons we can learn from these movements with corporate partners. Hegemony helps us understand how different social groups come together and fight for certain policies without resorting to the purity rhetoric of grassroots and astroturf.

Coalition Hegemonic Contests

To understand this complexity, I turn to Laclau and Mouffe's conception of hegemony organized through the postliberal vertical aggregate (PVA). For Laclau and Mouffe, hegemony is a never-settled form of social relations that arises from constant competition and resolution across different social antagonisms. In the contemporary moment, these social antagonisms are navigated through PVAs: porous organizations made up of state actors, corporate interests, and residents at various intersections of power. The PVA's role is to "hegemonise hegemony" by providing a structure through which different actors come together to navigate the tensions of power and domination that emerge in a transnational world through "conflicting alliances of diverse interests which try to dominate the process of transnational neoliberal globalization" (Papadopoulos et. al. 2008, 28). While transnational neoliberal globalization gives rise to images of border-crossing private military contractors, cross-state migration, transnational corporate conglomerates, and imperialist ventures, it is just as important to think about cities. Planetary urbanization is the postulate that all spaces in capitalism — from the agricultural village to the industrial city — are part of an urbanized fabric geared towards profit accumulation (Lefebvre 2014, 38). It is a theoretical hypothesis that contends that, over time, urbanization will take on a planetary character and organize all social relations — a character that is emerging in the present moment. It is an evolutionary conception of urban development that is likened to the leap from agricultural society to industrial cities (ibid, 46). In practice, complete urbanization looks like all forms of urban life — from the city megamarket to the tiniest hamlet — being interconnected in a fabric of highways, electrical grids, and other forms of urbanization (Schmid 2014, 69). In this

conception of urban development, the world becomes an interconnected spread of variegated spaces with different allocations of resources (Schmid, 2012, 57). Saskia Sassen (2004) argues that global cities have become central sites for negotiating the claims made to urban space by transnational capital, labor, and other sectors of the urban population. They are central sites where capital is circulated, labor is concentrated, and conflicts over urban space arise.

The city acts as a contested political site where PVAs compete with each other over access to resources and governing influence. Critical urban theorists posit the city as a politically charged center for the organization of society (Schmid 2012, 47). The right to the city is a rallying cry for people to unmask the uneven development of urbanism, what Henri Lefebvre (2014, 51) calls "a mask for the state and political action, a tool of interests that are disseminated within a strategy and a sociologic." It posits a common, but differentiated, dispossession characterized by market fundamentalism, instrumentalist education, state bureaucracy, and dominant logics of exclusion and supremacy (Brenner et. al. 2012, 8). It calls for a break from the uneven development of capitalist urbanization to a more just and democratic development that attends to the needs and welfare of marginalized peoples.

Peter Marcuse (2009, 192) defines the right to the city as "multiple rights… not just one, not just a right to public space, or a right to information and transparency in government, or a right to access to the center, or a right to this service or that, but the right to a totality, a complexity, in which each of the parts is part of a single whole to which the right is demanded." Kafui A. Attoh (2011) argues that these multiple rights are not necessarily commensurate or the same type of right. Rather, they engage in a "strategic fuzziness" to create connections between the rights of different city residents, such as the rights of a bus rider, a homeless person, and a low-wage worker. However, this strategic fuzziness leads to competing claims among city residents who do not align on what they want their city to look like. Attoh (2011, 679) argues that "not all rights are created equal and that different kinds of rights are not necessarily commensurable." He notes the tension between the majoritarian impulse to exercise collective power and the equal importance of protecting minoritarian rights (Ibid, 677). For example, does a homeowner's right to enjoy a public park overturn the right of the houseless to camp in that park and potentially obstruct the homeowner's enjoyment? Or, in the case of Airbnb, does a defense of an owner's rights to do what they will with their property overpower the tenants' rights to safe and stable housing?

PVAs play a crucial role in this strategically fuzzy space of contested claims-making over the future of urbanization. PVAs arise as ways to bundle shared claims to the city in a vertical aggregate of power that seeks to hegemonize the space of governance claims. This hegemonizing of hegemony then fulfills the classic Gramscian role of producing "a certain type of civilisation and of citizen (and hence of collective life and of individual relations), and to eliminate certain customs and attitudes and to disseminate others" (Gramsci 1989, 246). Certain

conceptions of rights proliferate while others fall by the wayside. In the case of the STR regulatory debates, coalitions act as PVAs that bundle various interests into different claims to the future of urbanization in cities. Race, gender, sexuality, and class play a key constitutive role in coalitions and their actions. Brenna Bhandar (2018, 11) reads Stuart Hall's theory of articulation to argue that while "race and racism, gender, and sexuality shape the nature and form that class relations take and, significantly, how they are experienced," there is no guarantee that a "given social class or social groups will respond to economic relations in a particular way." These relations are articulated differently based on geography, history, and social location. As Laclau and Mouffe (2001) argue, the contested breaks along the lines of social antagonism are the core feature of any hegemonic struggle. While PVAs bundle, the parts bundled aren't free-floating actors separated from the constitutive features of a polity, but actors deeply embedded in histories of racialization, gender, and class.

Identities do provide insight into how social relations structure one's life, but the responses to these relations remain distinct. People who share similar social locations land differently on where they stand regarding STR regulations. Puar (2012) argues that intersectionality is a form of assemblage — complex arrangements that define their meaning by putting different concepts into conversation with one another. She suggests an intersectional-assemblage reading that focuses "on the patterns of relations — not the entities themselves, but the pattern within which they arranged with each other" (ibid, 60-61). While intersectionality points at how political institutions create social normativity and disciplinary apparatuses, assemblages help us think through what is prior and beyond these apparatuses. In other words, intersectionality as assemblage gets at both the attempts to discipline but also the escape of discipline: a negotiation of hegemony in its purest form. Puar's incitement here is that it is not sufficient to *strictly* focus on subjecthood for a full comprehension of the political world we find ourselves in. She suggests a reading of Brian Massumi's domestic violence on Super Bowl Sunday. Puar draws our attention to how certain intensities of the body (affect), are put into relationship with one another so that they can exercise certain capacities (assemblage/agencement). These bodies — the television, the husband, the wife — give rise to many different potentialities and becoming. She argues that "intersectional identity comes into play, as the (white) male is always already ideologically coded as more prone to violence" (ibid, 61). The choices are limited by structural forces of power. The choice is then reterritorialized at the strike — the hand to the face — the social script enacted.

Puar's model of affect/assemblage-agencement/intersectionality/reterritorialization becomes one way to think through how coalitions act as claims-making devices that work to enact a form of hegemony. Residents are brought together in urban environments via coalitions (assemblage/agencement) and respond to a novel form of property monetization (affect). Their

options of response are shaped by their relationship to structural forces of power (intersectionality), but importantly they are not limited to them (Stuart Halls' articulation). The potentialities are then put forward as a claim to how STRs should be regulated (reterritorialization). These various responses are then bundled together by coalitions to constitute a claim for how regulations ought to unfold and to advocate for that specific policy plan (antagonism). The victor of this antagonism then sets the hegemonic landscape until the next round of this antagonism.

Thinking of the development of housing through an intersectional-assemblage approach points us to how social forces create and discipline, but do not always overdetermine. STR coalitions are PVAs that take different attempts to navigate these forces of urban development and people within them take different forms. Two actors may face the same mode of racialized urban development, but they can take two different paths toward ameliorating it. It should be noted here that almost every STR host I spoke to was a homeowner or property owner in some way. Their investment in their home as a piece of material physical property, as a site of profit and investment could not be underestimated. At the same time, these investments differed. As one Black host pointed out to me, there was a long history of Black people being displaced from the very city they built and forcibly removed for the benefit of white residents and transplants. This mirrors broader patterns of urban development where Black communities — regardless of class status — were destroyed, run out of the county, or bulldozed for the development of infrastructure. This host tied her use of STRs to a specific legacy of Black civic activism in Washington D.C. In Washington D.C., home rule was a hard-fought victory after decades of white civic campaigns for segregation, federal government control, and the destruction of social programs. The right to own one's home, to profit from it, and to stay in the city long-term were all elements of the intersectional assemblage that led this host to fight against STR regulations in spite of potentially sharing the same class and race position as another city resident.

In this chapter, I use this intersectional-assemblage analytic alongside the concept of PVAs to track how various coalitions negotiate STR regulations. In regulatory debates, coalitions function as a type of PVA to make disparate claims about the future of urban development. I aim to do justice to both the "bundling" done by coalitions and the "bundled" who constitute the claims-making apparatus. I first discuss two coalitions, the STR Coalition and Regulatory Coalition and their respective histories in San Francisco, Washington D.C., and the Boston area. By providing this account, I show how coalitions came to bundle a diverse, often antagonistic, range of actors together around a common hegemonizing project. I also show the interconnection between these coalitions on a national level. I then move on to discuss the racial, gendered, and class antagonisms at play within these coalitions.

Bundling Coalitions

I use the term bundling due to its double meaning as a group of things held together (e.g., a bundle of newspapers) and an entity embodying a certain characteristic (e.g., a bundle of joy). There is, of course, also the term software bundle where software programs are sold together at a combined price that is lower than buying each entity independently. To bundle a coalition here means to bring together a set of actors and bind them together through shared forms of claims-making. Once bundled as such, coalitions and the entities that comprise them are associated with a specific kind of characteristic. For example, due to the bundling of STR hosts into coalitions against expansive regulations, the STR host is often associated with the political position of being against regulations even if it isn't uniformly shared by every STR host.

The coalitions I discuss below were brought together through competing visions for the future of STRs and urbanization. STRs, when practiced in an unregulated form, posed the following challenges for city residents:

- *Housing Instability and Unregulated Financialization*: STRs arose in an urban landscape defined by unaffordable rental rates, sky-high housing prices, and an investor-friendly climate. The problem of affordable housing and lack of housing period came to define Boston, D.C., and San Francisco. When STRs entered the picture, tenants faced yet another barrier in their search for housing: a more profitable use of space preferred by some landlords. In practice, this led to tenant evictions and even removed whole buildings from the local rental market in favor of STRs. Granted, not all STRs caused evictions or were driven by financial playres, but even these localized units arguably made it more difficult to access housing units that would otherwise be on the housing market. Returning to the more egregious forms of STR financialization, STRs created a perfect recipe for urban accumulation. For instance, a hotel worker told me how one landlord in Boston transformed her entire bed and breakfast business into STR rentals. The return on STRs allowed her to buy up an apartment building and convert half of the buildings to STRs (another hotel worker told me it was the whole building). And, as Wacshmuth and Wiesler (2018) show, this profit incentive is generalized through the creation of a rent gap between the rent that could be earned from STRing versus the rent earned through long-term rentals. This profit incentive existed across all three of my sites — with participants across the political spectrum telling me stories of similar occurrences. This created a lop-sided incentive to financialize the space of a whole unit, be it an apartment or house, and convert them to STRs while displacing tenants.
- *Safety and Quality of Life*: When an STR goes bad, it makes national headlines. Raucous parties, gun violence, sexual assault, racist evictions, drug sales, sex work, thrashed apartments, and rude guests have all made national headlines. Residents living next to

these STRs have raised the issue of STRs acting as hubs of illicit activity that disturbed their neighborhood's quality of life. Granted, these concerns are often associated with conservative tendencies that demonize loud celebration, sex work, drug trading, and poverty. However, this neighborhood-level claim to the sonic and living space of their neighborhood was a major reason for implementing limits on STRs, creating a system for disallowing certain properties from hosting, developing a code of conduct, and creating an avenue for affected residents to seek damages.

- *Impacts on Hotel Union Jobs*: Hotel owners and landlord associations were quick to point out that Airbnb was essentially running a hotel without having to face the same liability. In city council hearings, hotel owners argued that Airbnb listings did not have to comply with disability accommodations, government inspections, or obtain the same level of insurance as hotels. Furthermore, the unregulated competition meant that hotels were seeing fewer bookings. This in turn impacted unionized hotel workers because their wages were tied to the hotel's business. A Washington D.C. hotel union representative told me, if you had fewer bookings, the hotel would hire less staff. He then explained that as one of the last working-class positions with good income and benefits that enabled tenants to stay in the city, Airbnb was essentially pushing unionized labor out of their jobs and out of the city. Landlords stated they faced increased premiums when their tenants rented on Airbnb because their building didn't have the proper insurance for commercial activity. This combined sense of liability grated against the fiction of a good-will sharing of the home as it exposed sharing as a largely unregulated commercial enterprise in competition with landlords and hotels.

At the same time, STRs provided the following benefits for STR hosts but city residents more broadly:

- *Housing stability and retirement money*: When I talked to hosts, I spoke with people who used Airbnb, but also other STR platforms such as VRBO and local professor-student networks. These homeowner residents spoke to the challenge of being able to afford home payments in rapidly unaffordable cities. STRs provided a way for them to supplement their income, pay their bills, and even spend on luxuries like vacations and home repairs. For senior residents, STRs provided a monetary pathway to retirement. Some senior residents used STR money in addition to their retirement payouts. Others continued to work while banking on STR money as a way to pay off their home while putting money in the bank. In short, STRs were used by homeowners as a survival strategy.

- *Using vacant housing stock:* Hosts told me that if they did not STR, their rooms would sit vacant. A white homeowner in Cambridge comically told me a story where her neighbor had a bad experience renting to some college kids and left their basement sitting vacant. Another white homeowner who had several bad experiences with past roommates told me that she preferred STRing to having roommates because the guests were temporary rather than permanent fixtures that could potentially damage her property or cause her discomfort. On a larger scale, one host in Brookline explained that she only STRed rooms and apartments that otherwise would sit vacant. She worked with a company that rented these spaces to traveling nurses and families seeking medical care in the area.
- *Localized tourism and small business growth*: Every host I talked to pointed to the fact that they would send their guests to "holes in the walls" or "parts of the city" that they would not see if they stayed at a major hotel in the center of town. They saw themselves as cultural ambassadors that gave guests a "taste of the local." Hosts prided themselves on bringing tourism money to neighborhoods and parts of town that didn't reap the benefits of this cash flow.

These challenges and benefits of STRs brought users and residents into coalition with one another. These coalitions worked as claims-making devices to forward a particular vision of housing and economic development. These claims-making processes included sharing stories, lobbying legislators, and doing protests. They would clash with one another in political debates in public forums. And, they sometimes employed less than savory tactics including misrepresentation, false cover, and outright lying. For example, Dave — a 30-something white man who had lived in the D.C. area for a decade and had been engaged in several social justice causes — told me about the influence of Airbnb on the opposition to STR regulations:

> I was by chance standing in this circle and the Airbnb person handed out these documents and I literally turned around and said to the homeowners, this is literally not true. I had a highlighted copy of the bill and I pulled it out and read it to them. It was a real surreal kind of moment because I remember one person incredulously being like, "That's not in the bill." And I was like, "No like, this is literally highlighted." I do feel like that it's worth commenting on because very rarely have I seen lobbyists from the opposition, I don't know what other word to use, but like straight up lie about what's in the bill as a scare tactic or organizing tactic.

Coalitions became sites where a range of political strategies were employed by actors to push for their vision for the city's future. The groups in the STR debate concentrated into two loose coalitions: what I call the STR Coalition and the Regulatory Coalition. Grassroots activists in San Francisco, D.C., and Boston used different names for these coalitions: whether pro-home sharing, Airbnb, ShareBetter, the Hotel Lobby, or other names. I choose the STR/Regulatory distinction to emphasize the locus around which the coalitions formed: the right to STR with

minimal government interference and the desire to regulate and minimize the impact of STRs. Importantly, these coalitions are uneven and did not always agree on the kind of policy they wanted implemented. For example, landlords with multiple homes in the STR Coalition wanted the right to rent multiple properties while STR platforms pushed a “one host, one home” model. However, they were aligned on the central goal of allowing STRs to continue with minimal government oversight.

STR Coalition

The STR Coalition is my name for the coalition that arose to push for minimal STR regulations in municipalities — what Airbnb called “sensible regulations" that codified STR platforms’ ability to do business in the city while allowing them to self-regulate. The STR Coalition is driven by the desire to do three things: 1) make sure STRs are allowed to operate in the city; 2) remove restrictions to the operation of STRs while standardizing business operations and product quality; and 3) allow hosts and STRs to maximize profit while minimizing bureaucratic work. The STR Coalition has two core constituent groups: the STR corporations and their hosts. These groups were supported by pro-business organizations like the local Chamber of Commerce and a spate of other STR users.

Though the user’s group may seem straightforward, it is actually a complex array of people using STR platforms to turn a profit (see Figure 2). Airbnb and VRBO tended to emphasize hosts who did short-term stays in their primary home in their “one host, one home” advocacy, but this did not represent the full spectrum of users who took part in the coalition. Hosts often relied on intermediary-length rentals of greater than 30 days but less than one year through platforms like Airbnb, Sonder, and Domio. Other hosts contracted with property management companies that ran hundreds of STR properties in a city. And some hosts openly operated multiple STR units that were not their primary residence. While these hosts banded with STR corporations under the banner of “sensible regulations,” they wanted to push the Coalition beyond the “one host, one home” model.

STR host demographics are difficult to come by due to privacy protections and STR companies’ tight control over their data. However, a report by Airbnb showed that older hosts — especially women over 60 — were the fastest-rising cohort of hosts in the United States. According to Airbnb (c 2018), this group of hosts consisted of empty nesters who relied on STR income to supplement their retirement. Organizations like San Francisco’s Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, Boston’s Alliance of Downtown Organizations, D.C. Share Better, and InsideAirbnb showed that hosts were primarily renting out a single home. In my fieldwork, long-term hosts tended to be 40 to 60 or older homeowners, though there were notable exceptions for younger hosts and renters.

Racial demographics were more difficult to come by from STR companies. My primary data came from STR hearings and from interviews with hosts. At San Francisco, Boston, and Washington D.C. STR hearings, the hosts who testified were primarily white, but there were Asian, Black, and Latinx hosts that spoke at each hearing. Host groups in San Francisco and D.C. volunteered their demographic data. A San Francisco-based host explained that his group "very much reflects San Francisco. We'd like to have more African Americans… it used to be a larger percentage was African American but that's no longer the case. So that's reflected in our membership too. A lot of Asian members. Obviously white members. A few Latino members." In D.C., host groups for Ward 7 and 8 members reflected the majority-Black demographics of the area.

STR hosts unevenly experienced the pressures of urban displacement and rising housing costs. On the one hand, you had single-family homeowners in different areas of the city experiencing rising housing costs and pressures from developers to sell. Decades of urban renewal, predatory financialization, and structurally imposed poverty and policing led Black, Asian, and Latine homeowners to seek out STRs as a means to hold onto their homes and survive these hurdles. Working-class white hosts, while not blunted by the same forces of racial development, were still displaced by the rising housing costs and retirement costs that they hoped to displace with STRing. On the other hand, you had landlords, property managers, and homeowners with multiple homes trying to rent their properties on STR platforms. These hosts, while primarily white, exhibited a specific imagination for what they should be able to do with their property investments in the city. Notably, renters were rare among the pro-STR crowd, but the ones who did appear argued that STRs enabled them to pay rent while also spending on luxuries such as taking a vacation abroad. As such, the combined pressures of lowered wages, historic patterns of urban inequality, and the difficulty of holding onto a housebound these disparate forces together.

These internal distinctions displayed how the STR Coalition was composed of a combination of pro-business advocates, STR corporations, and primarily, though not exclusively, homeowning hosts throughout the city. Each hoped to secure the future of the STR industry and their future ability to turn a profit for their own unique reasons. These in turn were bundled into STR policies that advocated for fewer restrictions on the number of units one could rent and for minimal enforcement requirements placed on users and STR platforms. Though the policy proposals of each group differed and at times were contradictory (e.g., one home versus multiple homes), they weren't so strongly opposed to one another that they destroyed the internal cohesion of the coalition.

The role of platform corporations in the STR Coalition should not be understated. Platform corporations mobilized their user base through platform messages and emails to get

them to come to legislative hearings, meetings with legislators, and strategy sessions. Hosts in D.C., Boston, and San Francisco told me about how STRs brought them together through in-app messages. At the same time, hosts organized outside of the app ecosystem. In San Francisco, hosts came together to exchange STRing tips and best practices. They later mobilized to argue against the pro-regulation ballot measure Proposition F and created a template for Airbnb to replicate in other cities. This grassroots group, the San Francisco Democratic Home Sharer's Club, was replicated in cities across the U.S. through Airbnb's advocacy platform Airbnb Citizen. These host clubs became a key avenue for hosts and STR platforms to come together, plan legislative strategies, and push their vision of regulations.

The Regulatory Coalition

On the other side of the debate is the Regulatory Coalition, my name for the loose coalition of groups that came together to argue that STRs and Airbnb needed to be regulated in their given city. The unifying principle of the Regulatory Coalition is to throttle and control the operation of STRs so that they do not completely reshape the city. As stated in the introduction, this included policies like holding platforms legally and financially accountable for illegal STR listings, creating a licensing and registration system for STRs, and setting up best practices around taxation, living requirements, and safety rules. The call for these throttles arose for a variety of reasons, be it an attack on other industries and their workers, a limit to the quality of life in an area, and a decrease in housing stock. While the coalition consisted of many actors, some common elements found across all three cities were the cooperation between hotel industry groups, neighborhood and condo associations, and hotel workers' unions. Other groups that came into this coalition included allied labor groups, tenants' unions, landlord associations, disability rights groups, STR hosts against gentrification, and pro-Palestinian groups protesting Airbnb's decision to allow STRs in illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories (see Figure 3).

One side of the coalition consisted of community members directly impacted by STRs, union workers who organized to fight back against an encroachment on their livelihood, and members of non-profit groups that supported the platform of anti-corporate, pro-worker, and pro-affordable housing policies. While I do not have quantitative demographic data on any of these groups, I do have my observations of legislative hearings and conversations with group leaders. Though some groups, like the tenants' union in San Francisco and condo residents in Washington D.C. and Brookline, tended to be primarily older and white, the hotel union members and community members were of all ages, genders, races, and homeowner/rental statuses. These groups were in turn supported by representatives of the hotel and lodging industry and landlords. Though these two sets of coalition members were traditionally opposed to one another

on almost every other issue, they found common cause in wanting to regulate STRs — even if the reasons for why they fought to do so differed.

When I spoke with members of the Regulatory Coalition, a common element came up: a concern over housing stock and the livelihood of long-term tenants. A landlord association representative explained that landlords didn't want renters to use their spaces for STR because this would violate the landlord's insurance policy and cause a disturbance to other long-term tenants. During a walk-through of San Francisco's North Beach, a white older tenants' rights organizer showed me the various houses that were once multi-generation familial households that were evicted for the landlord to return to their home only to be placed on STR apps weeks later. A thirty-something white hotel union representative explained that while there was an immediate impact on hotel business, they worried that the decrease in business due to unregulated STRs would both impact their member's ability to earn a livelihood while being able to find housing in the Bay. Finally, the hotel and lodging association representatives didn't want uneven competition from the unregulated STR industry and worried about their workforce having to travel further due to the lack of housing.

While these forces were brought together by these common concerns, it was still, as one member described, an "odd-fellows coalition" that was opposed to each other on multiple fronts. A member of the Regulatory Coalition described their meetings as such:

> We worked in the conference room of the landlord association. The tenants' union was at the table with their lawyers. The housing rights group was at the table with their lawyers. And we would work for an hour, an hour and a half every week and the landlord association would cater lunch. And it wasn't poisoned. And we'd finish our meeting and the tenant organizations, and the landlord organizations would walk across the street to City Hall and beat the shit out of each other over the latest iteration of rent control or eviction protection or whatever. And next week we'd come back and sit around the table and have lunch and *laughs* It was pretty crazy. But it was very effective.

While housing was the central locus of concern, solidarity with hotel workers was another key platform. Partner groups would bemoan the ways the hotel workers' union would spin the affordable housing numbers. One leader told me: "They were using correlation with specific housing prices as causation. I don't think the reason prices are going up in Columbia Heights and Adams Morgan mostly is from Airbnb. It wouldn't seem credible to the general public or to legislators." Hotel union representatives countered by saying that their concern for housing was genuine and members were committed to fighting for more affordable housing.

While protecting hotel workers was a key concern for coalitional members, hotel union representatives countered that it was not pure employment concerns that drove their members.

Housing was not strictly a red herring, but rather a core concern for rank-and-file members. Hotel workers saw their jobs tied to their ability to live in an increasingly unaffordable city. Sam, a white union organizer in San Francisco, explained that “the motivation really was driven first and foremost by concern of the housing market.” Hotel workers were doubly impacted by STRs. The unionized hotel work in San Francisco and D.C. was one of the “few service sector jobs where a working person can get a job and get a decent income and full family healthcare and a pension.” STRs undercut this opportunity by taking business away from hotels and thereby keeping unionized workers from being employed. Moreover, the threat of housing instability made it difficult for workers to live in the city. He explained that two-thirds of hotel workers lived and worked in San Francisco in 2008 and that number dropped to below 50% that year. Sam told me, “Housing is housing. We are still in a housing crisis. It takes a union room cleaner — one of the highest hotel workers anywhere in the country — has to work 40 hours a week just to pay rent, let alone food, childcare, and luxuries. We need housing more than we need hotel rooms.”

Hotel workers weren’t the only union members impacted by STRs. Noah, a DC-based white non-profit worker fighting in favor of regulations, explained, “I talked to unions who, Airbnb wasn’t directly impacting their work. Their members are working-class people whose members are being pushed out of the city and the coalition had union members who weren’t the hotel union.” He went on to discuss how the fight against STRs wasn’t just about hotel workers’ jobs, but also about “who controls the shape of how the city develops and who has control over neighborhoods.” Noah explained that union organizing not only focused on workers as laborers, but also on their roles as families, tenants, and other positions. He stated that unions sought to “address their needs and wants and hopes.” The activism by hotel union members against STRs later led unions to become involved in rent control fights in Washington D.C. and San Francisco.

The movement between laborers as workers and tenants opened the path for relating the STR struggle to other members of the coalition. Sam told me that “apartment owners, big landlords in apartment buildings, hated the fact that some of their tenants were rent-controlled tenants and making a huge profit in violation of their leases and also in ways that made it difficult to enforce those leases.” In addition to concerns over insurance and the kind of business being done in the building, a San Francisco landlord association representative expressed concern for the tenants in buildings with STRs, “It was chaos. The majority of tenants couldn’t have their kids play in the hallway because they didn’t know who was coming and going. It was a safety issue.”

Calls by landlords were echoed by tenants and local residents. In D.C., tenants living in a high-end building complained about their building being turned into an Airbnb hotel with constant noise from the STR guests moving in and out. This concern was echoed by neighborhood representatives in San Francisco who explained, “A lot of these activists have lived in their neighborhoods for many decades. They don’t want their neighborhood turned into a Manhattan. It

makes it a good place to live and to grow old in." A tenants' union representative joked, "They couldn't argue with the tenants' union because we could bring in these little old ladies who had been evicted. You can't argue with us."

The Regulatory Coalition and the STR Coalition became the dominant coalitional forms in the cities I studied. Although actors agreed with the coalition's broader claims-making strategies, they did not always fall in line as I will show below. In the next section, I will discuss how coalitional actors, bundled together, made claims toward their vision of STR regulations and the future of urban development. I will highlight how actors in the coalition a range of strategies to push forward their vision, but also home in on the disagreements that challenge the cohesive vision of a coalition.

Negotiating Urban Hegemony

In this section, I will focus on four themes that arose across all three cities. I will look at how different coalition members pursued their vision of regulations through their depiction of STR business, arguments about the proper price and form of STRs, and claims to the right of the city. These four themes showcase the process of coalitions laying claim to the right to shape urban hegemony while also highlighting how coalitions are internally divided. In doing so, I show how the process of claims-making may appear uniform and simple but is actually composed of complex internal politics.

Weaponized Astroturf: The Hotel Lobby vs Airbnb

During my fieldwork, any discussion of STR regulations gave way to conspiratorial murmurs about corporate interests putting their weight on the scales. Members of both Coalitions, which had members of large industry groups, enjoyed commiserating with me about the undue influence of corporate power in cities. Two figures appeared each time: the Hotel Lobby and Airbnb. Both signaled an entrenched industry with capital to spare and flattened the division within the coalitions to focus on the overall power of one large actor. These representations were invoked with a knowing tone that assumed that these coalition-specific terminologies were shared across the political debate.

The Hotel Lobby was the STR Coalition's catch-all term for proponents of STR regulations. A San Francisco host explained the meaning of the term to me over tea at his home one evening. In his view, the Hotel Lobby was a unified name that the opposition had given to proponents of the bill: the hotel industry, the hotel union, labor groups, progressive allies, and sympathetic hosts and legislators. In my experience, who was and was not part of the Hotel Lobby was mercurial. Sometimes it was just the hotel industry. Sometimes it was the industry and the union. Other times it was all the actors above.

Many times, STR hosts have bemoaned the single-mindedness of the Hotel Lobby and decried that certain members (whether labor unions, progressive allies, legislators, or even other STR hosts) held the wrong idea about what regulations would do. Sophie, a white D.C. homeowner and host, told me a story about how she went up to a member of a local progressive group and host speaking in favor of regulations. Sophie asked this member if she knew who she was in coalition with. Sophie said the member went "'Uh, I don't know.' They can't even identify what they're supporting." She then mentioned an ad by a local pro-regulation group that ran in D.C. The ad purported to show a woman from Anacostia speaking up against STRs, but the woman was a paid actress from New York. Sophie said, "Everyone in Anacostia thought it was a hilarious joke."

Hosts like Sophie would blame the hospitality industry for hand-writing the regulations and falsely convincing their allies of the housing and economic benefits of regulating STRs. Other times, they would accuse ally groups of being bought and paid for by the hospitality industry writ large. The claim of misinformation was tied to the belief that the Hotel Lobby sought to protect hotel profits in the face of a booming tech disruptor. According to hosts I spoke to, STRs as a disruptor were either delivering a superior service that overshadowed hotels or in a completely different industry than hospitality. They claimed the Lobby manipulated data, partnered with elected officials close to the hotel industry, funded false academic studies, and created copycat bills to pass in every city, regardless of need. In the eyes of these hosts, the Lobby was using affordable housing as a shield to cover their true intent. Dakota, a white gay homeowner in San Francisco told me that the cover of affordable housing didn't make sense. He explained that while regulations had forced 4,000 units off the market, this didn't have the intended impact that was promised. Dakota explained, "The promise was that regulating Airbnb and getting the big investors off the platform would help decrease rents, I don't see that happening." He also complained that San Francisco had a rental and home-ownership price increase in 2018 and 2019 and said the restrictions on STRs didn't help address that or add more units to the market. He concluded by saying, "If I had a long-term roommate again, my house would be market-rate housing."

The over-exaggeration of the claims about affordable housing sometimes took a comical tone. Sophie explained how "When the first [STR regulatory] bill was introduced by Vincent Orange... That bill had the track changes from the American Hotel and Lodging Association. So, people were like, what is this? You're literally just sending them the bill?" In Sophie's eyes, there was a direct connection between the Hotel Lobby and the contents of the bill. Regardless of what they tried to say, it was a direct desire to protect hotel industry profits.

This accusation had a tenor of truth. One union member I spoke to admitted shyly that "if we didn't take up the affordable housing issue, our bill would be dead in the water." However, he

quickly explained that the desire to regulate affordable housing was genuine. He argued that union members should not only have good jobs and benefits, but they should also be able to stay to live in D.C. without being forced out of the District into more affordable areas like Prince George's County.

This narrative of the Hotel Lobby sometimes took on a more sinister tone of political corruption. One group of San Francisco hosts I met with discussed the supposed "dark money" collaboration between hotels, unions, and a prominent leader of the STR Coalition. Dark money references political spending by non-profit organizations that are not required to disclose their donors. Citing the state's sunshine laws, one member called a leader in the Regulatory Coalition "a paid bastard." A host went on to explain that:

> He helps run the group that wants to regulate Airbnb. He's paid by, usually funded by the union, and the funds are funneled through the union by the Hotel Lobby. He confessed he's a lobbyist for the hotels, but he hides behind the shield of the union. He's relentless. He's behind the campaign to end unhosted stays even though that's the only kind of stay the city allows us to do right now. And he has meetings with our local Office of Short-Term Rentals. Why is a political operative speaking directly to a San Francisco agency clerk?

Refrains about a misunderstanding of how STRs worked and members of PVAs being used as political pawns were constant among hosts and their allies when they spoke about hotel workers. In these hosts' view, hotel workers and their allies had the wrong idea about regulations and were duped by the money provided by the larger hotel industry. This attitude downplayed the role of hotel workers as renters and homeowners in the region and dismissed any exercise of political power as a ploy by a shadowy corporate cabal.

These depictions were hardly shared. During an interview, ironically, inside a hotel lobby, I asked one member of the Regulatory Coalition what he thought about the "Hotel Lobby." In a moment of confusion, he asked: "You mean our organization, and the union, and all that?" This confusion over what the Hotel Lobby even meant belied the internal divisions and disagreements within the Regulatory Coalition. Hotel workers union leaders would tell me how they had to work hard to convince the hospitality industry's lobbying groups to go along with their version of the bill. Partner groups would bemoan the ways the hotel workers union would spin the affordable housing numbers. One leader told me: "They were using correlation with specific housing prices as causation. I don't think the reason prices are going up in Columbia Heights and Adams Morgan mostly is from Airbnb. It wouldn't seem credible to the general public or to legislators."

Other members of partner groups disagreed with the hotel union's strategy entirely, calling it too transactional and narrow-minded. A member of a non-profit working to support the regulatory legislation explained how he disagreed with the focus of the campaign:

> I would be doing the campaign differently. Airbnb spent a ton of money on television ads too. They tried to respond in kind. I've never seen a campaign in D.C. do television ads before on either side. And I just imagine that the money that they spent could've financed, literally probably could've financed some community organizations for probably a couple years. I don't know if the final expenditures were, but it was a lot of money. And I also felt like the framing messaging was right, but my thinking on these things often times is like, we're better together, and that if they could've gotten more buy-in and more support if they had had a broader agenda. But if it's just to stop STRs, that touches a very small audience. And, the audience that it touches, with STRs in their top three issue priorities, enough for folks to be motivated to want to organize, to mobilize, to speak out, to contact their elected officials, is pretty small. But if it's a broader campaign or effort, say around affordable housing, taking on developers, taking on the neoliberalization of the city, whatever it might be, then folks would be more passionate about doing it. But that might mean that the STR item would be one of several items on a broader agenda.

In this advocate's view, the hotel union led a too-narrow campaign on STRs when they could have put together a large grassroots coalition around affordable housing. He chalked this up to the fact that the hotel union had collaborated closely with members of the D.C. government and worked hard to get these council members re-elected time and time again. He then compared the D.C. effort to how the union fought a much more grassroots and far-reaching STR fight in Prince George's County in Maryland.

One thing that remained unshakeable in their accounts was the genuine belief that hotel workers were fighting with clear eyes and with a determined focus. A D.C. based-union representative explained to me:

> It's a regional industry, but this definitely impacts our members here in D.C. It's actually the issue that our members are the most involved in. When our members go to hearings, there's usually not a single seat available, as you saw. It's an issue our members really care about. They do a lot of organizing in-shop and mobilize their coworkers to come out to hearings and to do lobbying with Council legislators, making calls, writing letters, and testifying. We've had dozens of members come talk to us about this and they definitely care.

What became clear through my interviews is that, whether misled or not, hotel union members had a central role in the STR fight and strategically lobbied for regulations that they believed would help them work and stay in the District.

On the opposite side of the Hotel Lobby was what I broadly call Airbnb. The invocation of Airbnb here isn't to conjure the corporation itself, but rather a larger amalgam of STR power. Paul, a member of the Regulatory Coalition, explained that Airbnb was short-hand for STRs more broadly, "Airbnb being the sort of generic description for what is otherwise known as STRs. It's sort of the way we use Kleenex instead of tissue." In my experience talking to members, activists deferred to using Airbnb as short-hand for STRs because Airbnb was the largest player in the STR arena in Boston, San Francisco, and Washington D.C. The other reason was because

Airbnb was the key challenger to STR regulations in the area. It was mostly Airbnb hosts who came to testify at legislative hearings, Airbnb that pushed forward legal challenges to regulations, and Airbnb that funded publicity campaigns in favor of STRs.

Airbnb functioned as an amalgam because of how Regulatory Coalitions members would bring up the members of the STR Coalitions. Hosts discussed Airbnb as a multi-layered group that used hosts as a front to mask Airbnb's true source of profit. As Dave explained earlier, there were "mom-and-pop" hosts who had been misinformed about the contents of the legislative bill and set onto legislatures in an irrational panic by savvy Airbnb lobbyists. As many regulatory activists told me, they didn't want to stop "mom-and-pop" shops from renting legally. The second layer behind the hosts was the Airbnb Citizen lobbying team, a corporate lobbying team that outreached to hosts, organized their efforts, and made sure they got media placement. The third layer of it all was alternatively called "illegal hotels" and "illegal hosts". This layer was responsible for the largest chunk of STR business on a scale similar to hotels. They had no reason to show up at legislative sessions and Airbnb had a direct financial incentive to keep these operations going. The more illegal hotels, the more rentals, the bigger the profit.

Hosts, like those in Ward 7 and 8 in D.C., pushed back on this depiction because they had a direct interest in keeping the cost of business as low as possible and had no real hotel competition in the area. Other hosts labeled themselves as working-class and saw kinship with Regulatory PVA members but believed they were misled over the scale of multi-host rentals. Likewise, the Airbnb conceptualization of the STR Coalition ignores the division between Airbnb's advocacy for single-unit hosting and hosts who came to testify against regulations that undercut their ability to host multiple units. While a pro-regulation member waved off this difference by arguing that Airbnb was in practice still condoning illegal rentals by not accepting platform accountability, the differences remain important to understanding the STR Coalition.

Not everyone shared this easy division between the Hotel Lobby and Airbnb. Instead, they argued for a viewpoint that contextualized regulatory activism within the broader rental and lodging economy. Pat, a white customer service representative for a DC-area STR management company, told me that Airbnb had coached the owner of their company on what to say and how to talk with legislators in 2017. Likewise, he and an owner of another company both told me that they saw the STR regulations to be a battle between two corporate forces (STR companies and the hotel industry). Pat told me that he felt like the management companies saw how the hotels and STR companies shifted the ground beneath them and had to respond accordingly. He didn't buy the rhetoric on either side of the debate and instead hoped there was a way to find a happy medium between both depictions.

The distinction between the Hotel Lobby and Airbnb, as well as the call to contextualize regulatory activism in the proper economic context, shows how regulatory activists understood

their positions within the city writ large. There is an uncontestable desire to protect profit on both sides — whether it be from hotel stays or STRs. This protection of profit is cast differently depending on one's relation to STRs, profit, and housing. When weighing the desire to keep hotel workers employed in good jobs and able to afford housing against allowing homeowners to not lose their homes, the way the scales fall largely depends on your political inclinations. The weight obviously shifts one way when weighing the relative merit of homeowners in the city against hotel greed. Or, for that matter, the ascendancy of a major tech company against the lives of hotel workers and working-class renters. The uneven depiction of one's regulatory opponent as well as a dismissal of concerns from the other side helps solidify the "bundling" of PVA interests and makes a direct political claim to the kind of economy and city members of the PVA want.

What counts as a unit anyways?

A key site for STR debates was the housing unit itself. Commonly understood, the STR's ideal owner is "the middle-class homeowner seeking to provide for his or her family, a subject whose contours become sharply visible when positioned against a background of neoliberal welfare reform" (Doorn, 2020: 1819). While the homeowner has a certain edge in the STR regulatory debates, there was an open contest on what could count as acceptable homeownership. The vehicle of homeownership, presented as the latest form of economic precaritization under late-stage capitalism, has a far too easy import into this debate. The limitations on STRs that took hold across my sites had a common element: a requirement that this was a permanent residence, a potential cap on how many days an owner could be absent from the unit, and limitless hosted stays so long as the owner was present and met the proper requirements. These limitations raise a series of questions: Why homeowners and not renters? Why prioritize a single unit and not multiple units owned by a single host? While it is undoubtable that neoliberal policies shaped this urban regulatory debate, as I show in Chapter 1, it is far too deterministic to assume that the homeowner is a readymade figure, especially in framings where the "horizontal governance networks favored by neoliberal urbanism are increasingly interspersed with vertically integrated platforms engaged in their own political programming" (Ibid: 1818).

The answer over what counts as a unit became a core site for negotiating urban hegemony — the basic unit, the STR, under contest was also a unit under constant redefinition. Across the three cities, I found a debate over what counted as a short-term rental unit. Was it a shared space, a room in a home, or the whole space? Could hosts rent out another unit they owned, and if so how many? Was the market strictly for hosts who owned one home or could multi-unit hosts and corporations get into the market? What were the baselines of safety these units should have and how could a city possibly keep track of them?

The three areas discussed above landed on the following definition of short-term rentals:

- *San Francisco:* a permanent resident (living in a unit 275 nights a year) may rent their unit year-round and have 90 unhosted nights a year.
- *Washington D.C.*: a host's primary residence. It may be rented out 90 nights a year unhosted. There is an exemption on the 90-day cap for people who work and travel for over 90 days per year.
- *Boston*: Hosts may rent their primary residence or an adjacent unit in an owner-occupied two-to-three-unit building. An owner can only rent out one unit at a time (so one's own or owner-occupied). There is no cap on hosted or unhosted rentals. Units can be rented year-round.
- *Cambridge*: Like Boston, an owner may either rent their dwelling unit or their own unit and another unit in a building they own of 4 residential dwellings or less. There may be any number of rooms rented within the unit.
- *Somerville*: STRs are limited to one rental listing in an owner-occupied unit.
- *Brookline*: STRs are limited to user-owned primary residences and are allowed for tenants if they do not "override any lease or rental agreements, condominium bylaws, or any other regulations" (Brookline Building Department, 2023).

These decisions didn't come without serious disagreement. The ones I will discuss in this section include the decisions to limit the amount of unhosted stays, to limit rentals to owner-occupied properties, and to give property owners the final say over whether STRs would be allowed in their tenants' buildings.

The limit of STRs to owner-occupied properties and a limit on the number of unhosted stays ties to a similar fear of what I call the investor host: a host that owns multiple buildings in the name of making a profit for investment capital firms, large-scale STR corporations, and foreign investors. Though I discuss investor hosting in greater detail in Chapter 3, for the sake of this chapter it's important to note that the threat of the investor host group was that it would displace long-term residents in favor of more lucrative STR options. If left unregulated, investor hosts would be free to swallow up more long-term rentals and convert them to STRs, thereby displacing residents.

The decision to limit rentals to owner-occupied properties was largely driven by a desire to stop investor hosts from profiting off affordable housing. Owner-occupied properties, the thinking went, would limit hosting to one unit and fulfill the STR promise of renting out a room or a unit while on vacation to make ends meet. This would limit the scale and expansion of the STR industry. Multi-unit hosts had a clear problem with this categorical decision, but surprisingly so did single-unit STR hosts. The reason was that, in many versions of the draft legislation, there was a proposal to limit unhosted stays to 30-60 days per year. Though these stipulations were loosened

to 90 days in the final legislation or removed entirely, there was a real fear among hosts that they would not be able to rent their whole home year-round and lose a major source of revenue. As such, these single-unit hosts were sympathetic to multi-unit hosts who were trying to rent a neighboring duplex, basement, or other arrangement that was curtailed by similar regulations.

This created what some Regulatory Coalition members called the “split-cap loophole.” One regulatory advocate explained to me that there was no way to take a host at their word when they said that they were present at home. As such, any limit placed on unhosted stays was virtually unenforceable. Hosts could easily rent their home STR for the entire year while living elsewhere. By allowing unlimited hosted stays while having no way to enforce unhosted stays, regulations created a loophole between hosted and unhosted stays that could be used to do unlimited unhosted stays. This created the conditions for an investment STR, albeit at a smaller scale. Though many regulatory activists and government regulators were happy with the current state of affairs, other regulatory advocates sought to eliminate the loophole by capping all STR activity at 60 days total.

Hosts recoiled at the prospect of this regulation because it would no longer make STRs profitable for them. During an STR host meeting in San Francisco, many hosts who owned homes told me that if there was a 60-day limit, there would absolutely be no reason for them to host because the profits would be so meager compared to the cost of renting. Similar sentiments were shared by hosts in D.C. who were worried about the status quo changing to further limit their ability to rent. When I told a San Francisco regulatory activist that hosts worried about losing money, he replied, “Am I supposed to feel bad they can't make a profit? No policy guarantees the profit of landlords. STRs were illegal before we made this law and we already saw that as a compromise. Now they want more? It's just bizarre.” A tenants' rights member agreed, “According to Airbnb, the average rental is 48 days a year, so I thought we were being generous.”

This disagreement over unit rentals became a discursive way to negotiate profit-making within one's unit. While hosted stays were allowed, unhosted stays were precarious because they opened a window for a form of profit-making which leveraged the ownership of a property and not the dwelling within it. The status of dwelling in the rentals became the lens through which to interpret whether a profit-making on property rentals was a form of supplemental income or parasitic property ownership that risked swallowing up the city's housing supply.

While the split-cap loophole was hotly contested, its discursive contours were shaped by the decision to limit STRs to owner-occupied buildings. The push to keep multi-unit hosts out of the STR market was driven by a desire to stop the practice of displacing long-term tenants in favor of STRs. Across San Francisco, Boston, and D.C., regulatory advocates pointed to the burgeoning practice of multi-unit hosts favoring STR rentals. Organizations like San Francisco's Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, Boston's Alliance of Downtown Organizations, and D.C. Share

Better produced reports citing the overwhelming amount of full-time entire-home rentals, multi-unit commercial operators operating in the open or disguised as individual hosts across several Airbnb profiles, and a spate of evictions that displaced long-term renters for STRs. All these factors, the reports argued, created conditions where long-term housing stock was taken off the market, thereby displacing city residents in favor of STR travelers.

The solution to this problem differed across cities, but an overlapping policy was limiting STRs to owner-occupied units. Some cities like Boston allowed the renting of adjacent spaces in the same unit while others forbade it entirely. The thinking behind these policy proposals took Airbnb's "One Host, One Home" proposal at its word. If Airbnb was truly designed for singular hosts, then legislation sought to inscribe this corporate promise into law. Of course, by this time, STRs had spun into businesses far outside what the one host per home policy would permit. Landlords renting extra units short-term, STR property managers, and homeowners living in two-unit buildings all represented STR users who vehemently protested against the rules limiting the scope of STRs.

In D.C., landlords who had lived in the city for decades argued that there was no reason for a single unit to get preferential treatment compared to multi-unit property owners. Dr. Eugen Gorinko, a white landlord who managed six units, argued that D.C.'s STR law, "didn't recognize the diversity and specificity" of STRs and "discriminated against the number of residents." He also added that regulations against the absence of property owners should not be there, as this was an invasion of his privacy. He called for regulations that restricted STRs on rent-controlled units.

Sergei Mikaelev, another white landlord, made the argument that eliminating whole-home STRs would cause economic harm without impacting housing rates. He argued that the bill incorrectly used the term affordable housing and that nothing in the bill guaranteed an increase in affordable housing. He then explained his living situation. He owned a two-unit building where the basement was considered a separate building. His wife stayed at home and managed the building while he worked. He believed that users should be allowed to rent out the second unit in a rowhouse if the first unit is occupied by another resident or to rent out a second home if they're a natural person and not a corporation.

Finally, Amy Rothsburg, a 66-year-old white homeowner, opposed the bill because of her unique living situation. Her unit, a three-bedroom house in Georgetown, had been a full-time vacation rental since 2014. She used to live in the unit, but after the financial crash of 2008, she could no longer afford to do so. She tried to sell the building in 2010, but had no luck due to the downturned housing market. So, she got her required forms and licenses, moved into an apartment nearby, and began renting the house. Though the rent covered the mortgage, it failed to cover the property repairs, taxes, insurance, and other costs. She had no luck selling it afterward and listed it on VRBO — which helped her pay her bills and earn extra income.

Breaking down into tears, she said that she got 60% of her income from the house and that the bill would be financially devastating to her as a senior citizen with no prospect of future income and an inability to sell her property. She joined other landlords and multi-unit hosts in calling on legislation to focus on “the bad apples, not the whole bunch.”

While D.C. and San Francisco ultimately did not side with arguments like Mikaelev and Rothsburg’s, Boston and Cambridge made room for regulations that allowed the rental of units that the owner stayed in. However, the blanket ban against multi-unit listers remained. An older white host in Boston told me that this ban was misplaced and cut into her property management business. She argued that the City should focus on existing code violations and corporate buildings that promised to provide affordable housing during the planning phase of development but failed to do so. She stated that her property management business was not interfering with the City’s need to develop affordable housing due to the small-scale nature of her work.

Here white landlords and multi-unit hosts relied on two conceptualizations to justify their claims to more expansive STRing. The first was the imaginary of the homeowner’s home as their castle. These landlords, in their invocation of property owners’ privacy and familial management, argued that these forms of property usage were just and should not be curtailed as they ultimately did no harm to the city’s affordable housing stock. They even went so far as to call the targeting of these extra units as discrimination. This move relied on differentiating the white property owner’s use of property against more harmful and dangerous uses committed by non-natural persons, which moved the way their own property committed these wrongs away from scrutiny. The second conceptualization they used was arguing for their right to make profit on their property. While it is easy to sympathize with a person struggling to pay for their mortgage, the inability to sell a house, and the belief that the regulations did not secure affordable housing, these claims still ignore the potential harm that could be done to a city’s housing stock by unrestricted STR usage. While potentially no harm was being done by these landlords at the time, the issues of housing unavailability persisted in the District and taking long-term properties off the market, however affordable or not they may be, did not benefit the overall housing stock.

Landlords and multi-unit tenants were not the only ones impacted by STR limits. Tenants in each city faced the double bind of having to ask for permission from their landlords as well as get the city to approve their STRs. A San Francisco-based tenants’ rights organization representative told me that, after looking at data from the city, “the percentage of tenants was 10-15%, tenants had to get landlord approval, so landlords weren’t willing to do it. It was a single-family homeowner kind of phenomenon.” I heard similar refrains from organizers in D.C. and Boston.

Though most of the STR hosts were homeowners, a small number of renters had turned to STRs for income. During a DC hearing on STRs, a white man in his 20s spoke about how

sharing a room or renting the entire unit while he was on vacation allowed him to keep up with rental costs, pay for vacations, and pay down his student loan debt. A white Boston-area tenant in her 30s told me how she rented on Airbnb prior to regulations passing in the area. She told me that she used to rent her room on Airbnb while going over to a friend's house and crashing on their couch. This extra Airbnb income allowed her and her roommates to pay for appliances in the house, buy furniture, and upkeep their garden. The double hurdle of getting approval from landlords while also having to report to the city kept her from looking into it any further.

By reducing the number of tenants who STRed, these limits worked out in favor of landlords who were able to avoid any potential penalties on their insurance. As one landlord's association representative told me in San Francisco, most insurances didn't cover commercial activity in buildings and if the insurance company found out there were STRs in the property, they would cancel the policy. Not only were landlords able to maintain control of their properties, but they were also able to create STR-in-suite where a long-term tenant coincided with a rotating cast of STR guests. A San Francisco-based tenants' organizer told me, "I heard some weird stories about tenants who had gotten apartments with Airbnbs already in them. They later found out that they had no control over who was in the Airbnb; the landlord controlled it. So, it was like living with strangers. That's not legal, you can't force strangers to live together." Though this practice is hardly widespread, this does show how property ownership rather than dwelling became the active force for controls over STRs.

The prioritization of property rights over dwelling in determining whether a tenant could STR accomplished two things simultaneously: it limited the total amount of STR room rentals that could be done in the city while allowing landlords to retain control over their properties. This served as a simultaneous giveaway of economic tenant power to landlords and a protection of rent-controlled housing from exploitation. Some landlords in San Francisco complained that there were cases of rent-controlled tenants who lived elsewhere while STRing their apartment. This both kept a rent-controlled unit out of circulation while allowing a tenant to profit. However, I do not want to dismiss the real concerns made by renters about not being able to break their lease or earn extra money to pay the higher rents that came every year. Overall, this development underscored the need for more and cheaper housing for renters and for increased tenant power in the face of both corporations and landlords.

The cost of doing business

This split between individual business owners and activists wanting to keep large-scale STR businesses in check created a conflict over the extent to which governments should regulate hosts. One worry that surfaced continually in the STR Coalition is that the government would make it prohibitively expensive to STR. Tina, a Black woman hosting East of the River, made this

case compellingly when explaining the lengths she had to go to in order to maintain her STR. At the time of our conversations in the summer of 2019, hosts in D.C. were still in limbo — with the Zoning Commission not having passed its rules for STR zoning and the DCRA failing to create a system for registration. Tina explained that the whole process of getting licensed was confusing, even for someone as familiar with the law as her. She worried about laypeople navigating the system for the first time. But her main objection was:

> More to do with the fines, the extent to which they are imposed and under what mechanism. It cuts into the earnings of people like me who are owner-occupied or are on this side of the city. Or are, it's just like another expense to add on to what we're earning. In some ways I feel like it could impact the kinds of hosts the city is saying it's not against.

While Tina did not know the exact amount of fees, the current proposed regulations specify that one must obtain a "basic business license with a 'Short-Term Rental' endorsement, in addition to any other license based on the use of the property that is required by law." This included a valid Basic Business License ($70), a valid Certificate of Occupancy or Home Occupation Permit (anywhere from $35 and up), a Clean Hands Certification, liability insurance of at least $250,000, and a Short-Term Rental Endorsement ($99). Tina worried that these business and licensure costs would stifle STR usage in her Ward. She explained that there has been next to no development on her side of the Ward: "There's not a new grocery store. There's not been a lot of new development. Not been a lot of new draws of people or economic foot traffic. But it's still been Airbnb bringing in guests. So I'm concerned about if you're creating barriers to doing it for just everyday folk over here and they drop off, then you're starting to like stifle the activity that we've been wanting, needing for such a long period of time."

For Tina, concerns over corporate control and gentrifying developers like Christa's were misplaced. While Wards in Northeast D.C. may have experienced the effects of gentrification and mass buyouts, those in the majority-Black and working-class Southeast D.C. faced a complete lack of investment and meaningful economic infrastructural development like grocery stores. With a city that failed to provide these economic amenities, Tina saw entrepreneurial hosting through Airbnb as a way to bring tourist capital into the area and allow it to do better. Government regulations, in her estimation, closed off this form of development to the benefit of hotel industries and at the expense of the underserved communities in her Ward.

While some on the Regulatory Coalition were sympathetic to the hosts, others dismissed these claims as the cost of doing business. However, there were clearly more fiscally conservative homeowners in the STR Coalition who disagreed with the cost of doing business assessments. While he was in favor of removing larger actors because "Airbnb was meant for mom-and-pop shops like ours," a white gay STR host in San Francisco told me that he hoped that

they hoped to “elect a less progressive Board of Supervisors. It ultimately comes down to if you support capitalism or not and this Board doesn't." The host laid out a vision of the Board of Supervisors, who by my watch is adamantly pro-capitalist, as an anti-capitalist force that sought to regulate and curtail the freedom to monetize one's property. I can understand why this host comes to this point of view. He had faced uncertain employment for the last three years and is currently unemployed. He was able to pay for his bills and mortgage, as well as weather the current wave of pandemic economic impact, thanks to them doing STR as a part-time gig. Regulating STRs to the extent that San Francisco had — and adding limits on the type of hosting one can do and for how long one can do it in addition to bureaucratic costs and labor — made this host angry as he saw a version of regulations that supported enterprises like his or simply did not intervene at all.

Another area of major contestation was the cost of platform accountability. As discussed above, members of San Francisco, Boston, and D.C.’s Regulatory Coalition stressed holding platforms accountable for illegal listings posted on their app. This penalty, fines of up to $1,000 for each illegal booking transaction, gave platforms what advocates called “skin in the game.” Without this incentive, platforms could agree to regulations but there would be no way for the city to enforce regulations outside a huge investment in STR policing. However, platform accountability itself required a dedicated STR regulatory operation to ensure that platforms were reporting properly and to fine platforms and hosts. The reaction to platform accountability among hosts was mixed. A white STR host in Brookline told me, “I don’t need to be taxed on top of the taxes I’m already paying from this sort of project.” Other hosts agreed that increasing the cost of entry to STRing by introducing fees, taxes, and licenses was less than desirable. More libertarian hosts objected to the idea of platform accountability entirely — believing that it impeded the ability of STR business to succeed, that regulations would be enforced unfairly thereby giving hotels the edge, or that it was an unconstitutional form of government overreach. Still others expressed a fear that a badly implemented form of platform accountability would leak their housing information and make it publicly searchable online. These hosts feared that they would be put in danger and that their privacy would be violated.

These discussions show how the disagreement about regulations is a contest over how capitalist development ought to take place. Regulations could have clearly gone in a much more laissez-faire direction in cities. The difference between Brookline, Cambridge, and San Francisco on the question of platform accountability shows how this vision takes shape. A lack of platform accountability essentially creates a voluntary structure of opt-in registration that remains unenforceable because platforms have no incentive to comply with removing unregistered hosts. Even when they’re explicitly illegal, STRs could survive unbothered, so long as nobody complains, because towns like Brookline don’t have the financial resources or government

apparatus of larger cities like San Francisco. And, there is no prescribed reason for why STRs should be treated as akin to hotel and lodging industries. Though many hosts made the comparison between the two industries, others made the case that their STR hosting was part of a longer legacy of boarding houses in cities. Hosts in San Francisco, Boston, and Washington D.C. all told me stories of grandparents who boarded their homes to make extra income and placed themselves and their use of STRs as a continuation of this history. They believed that their use of STRs should continue unabated by any large-scale regulation or registration system.

However, regulations ultimately treated STRs as a subset of the hotel and lodging industry and created a cost of doing business that had previously not been present. While the STR industry could have been treated differently, legislatures decided in favor of developing an economic landscape that limited STRs to one unit and ensured that these units were thoroughly vetted. In creating this economic category of STR and its attendant bureaucratic management apparatuses, city legislatures sought to curtail a wildfire spread of STR units into all forms of rental properties and to ensure a strict cohesion to a type of economic activity that had previously slipped through government notice. This had uneven impacts on hosts in terms of costs of doing business that made STRs less profitable than they had previously been. And, the geographic impacts of this regulation differed as hosts in areas with fewer STRs faced the brunt of this regulatory apparatus designed to mitigate speculation.

Who are regulations for?

Both coalitions are defined by their relations to property. Both groups tried to preserve their economic interests, hoping that one vision of the economy would beat out the other. It is impossible to think of the economy without asking what purpose it serves. On whose behalf are economic decisions made? Both coalitions provide an answer if one looks at the way that they represent themselves in the media, in person, and in legislative hearings.

Perhaps the clearest answer came from Noah, a DC-based white non-profit worker fighting in favor of regulations, “we recognized that it was an intersectional issue of workers’ rights, housing, control over people’s neighborhoods, and corporate influence in the city. Airbnb isn’t the issue that’s driving displacement in the city. But it's emblematic of it. Regulating it is part of a larger platform we need.” Noah identified the overlapping concerns that put together the coalition: “I’ve been doing political work for 20 years and I don’t think I’ve ever worked in a wider coalition.”

As stated above in an interview with Sam, a union organizer in San Francisco, this coalition came together to contest “who controls the shape of how the city develops and who has control over neighborhoods.” The Regulatory Coalition members came together for a variety of reasons. Hotel union workers fought to protect their benefits, jobs, and ability to eke out a

working-class life in the city. They were joined by other union workers and tenants' rights groups that saw the attack on hotel jobs as linked to a broader housing crisis that STRs were worsening. The attack on workers and housing coincided with an attack on the long-term landlord and hospitality industries. As such, industries that otherwise were hostile towards workers and tenants found common cause with them in their struggle to preserve an economic arrangement that allowed landlords and hotels to remain profitable while preserving the ability of their workers and tenants to stay in the city. STR regulations became a pathway to fight for this vision of the city.

However, support for regulations was not uniform among city residents. Noah explained that there was a correlation between voting against Proposition F, the proposition to limit STRs, and income. He explained, "The neighborhoods where we lost the worst were the neighborhoods where working-class people live. I think part of the reason for that is because Airbnb was able to tap into this aspirational ideology amongst working-class people that does not connect to reality." He gave the example of the Bayview-Hunters Point neighborhood, a predominantly Black and Chinese area, that had the least STRs in the city but showed up most prominently to vote against Proposition F. He guessed that the reason for this is because working-class communities bought the advertising about STRs being a way out of poverty. These areas, where STRs were least prevalent and where working-class residents were concentrated, served as a reminder that the STR Coalitions could succeed despite calls for working-class unity or renter's rights. Support for small business ventures, the ability to earn extra income, a belief that STRs didn't create problems, lower overall voter turnouts for municipal elections, and other issues all led to no votes in these areas. Coalitions not only had to sell their vision of a just future but also turnout support at the ballot box.

STR Coalition members shared similar concerns with the Regulatory Coalition over the future of the city and housing. Many STR hosts supported regulation for larger-scale players while also worrying that these larger regulations would negatively impact their business. Many hosts I spoke to were baffled that the hotel industry could have any say over what they did in their houses or how they acted in their neighborhoods. They saw STR regulations as an incursion by a large industry into working-class practices of survival. As I show in Chapter 3, hosts saw STRs as an avenue for being able to stay in the neighborhoods. As an older white district schoolteacher said in an Airbnb promotion video against regulations, STRs were for working-class people and neighborhoods like hers. In a D.C. hearing on STR regulations, Marguerite Rizzoli, a third-generation D.C. resident from an Irish family, explained that D.C. "had gotten really expensive. It's not the Capitol Hill of my childhood… You know what's missing? The working class, the middle class. I was able to buy a house with a rental unit… Airbnb and VRBO have been the only way to raise my children in the neighborhood their grandparents grew up in."

Other residents opposed STR regulations due to the potential impact they would have on private property rights. Abby, a semi-retired 50-year-old white woman living in the house she bought when she was 30, asked me what drew me to my research. I explained that I was interested in the different ideas of home people brought into the STR regulation debate. When I laid out the stakes in this way, she was very forthcoming in describing why she opposed the new 60-day restrictions to STRs:

> It's almost like the next step would be to force all people with houses or apartments to give it up to a homeless person or a low-income family. And that doesn't sound right to me. That's not what I signed up for. Every penny I had of savings when I could afford it to buy this house, thinking that it could be a bit of a nest egg for me. So, someone coming saying 'oh you can't monetize' that to me that would be a very unwelcome change...
>
> So, because we have a housing shortage in SF, the rental laws are extremely renter-favoring. To the extent that if you have a renter in your home, in your apartment, or in your building. It makes no difference; there's no distinction being made. If they stop paying rent, you're not allowed to evict them for 60 days. And then after the 60 days, if they refuse to leave, the recommended way to get them out by legal professionals is to pay them off. So, if you add up those expenses, a couple months rent, which could be $3000 plus a payoff. A friend of mine was asked for $16,000. And that's terrifying and I couldn't afford that right now. I'd be pushed out of my own home by a squatter. Those laws apply when someone's been at your home for 30 days. Once they're there for 30 days, they have as much right to be there as you do, as the owner, whether they're paying or not. And that's scary, especially to me as a female living alone. Someone could take advantage... I had a friend whose roommate was a junkie who wouldn't pay and she could not legally kick her out... I could not bear that kind of financial loss. And what if it's a guy and he gets angry?

Abby expressed her frustration with the 60-day cap along the following lines: 1) an inability to monetize her property as she intended and 2) a fear of what homeless or low-income tenants could do to her and her property. With regard to the first motivation, Abby expressed her fear that her rights as a property owner would shift and get taken away from her. She wanted the house to be a nest egg: a real estate investment she could sell for a sizable sum of money after it had accrued value over the last 30 years. A threat to the ability to monetize this asset, even if it was for the greater good of the city, was unpalatable and unfair to her since she had worked hard to save for, maintain, and pay for this property.

Regarding her second motivation, Abby expressed her fear of homeless and low-income tenants. In Abby's portrayal, these tenants were threatening because they were either addicted to drugs, renters who refused to pay rent, money-hungry squatters who wouldn't leave unless they got a payoff, or potential violent abusers. These anti-poor stereotypes reflected the classed and racialized imagery I had heard in Boston and D.C. In Boston, an older white female Airbnb host cited a young black tenant who refused to follow the house rules and left her unit in disarray as one of the reasons she pivoted to STRs. In D.C., during the initial STR regulation hearing, an

older white woman immigrant from Eastern Europe told the D.C. Council that she refused to rent to tenants for almost the exact reasons as Abby mentioned: strong tenants' laws like the Tenant Opportunity for Purchase Act created conditions that made it impossible to kick out property-destroying tenants who refused to pay. She said that the bill "made me feel like I'm back in the USSR." In all these cases, STRs, usually by middle-class travelers from across the globe, were portrayed as reliable, trustworthy, limited, and controllable rental arrangements unlike the chaotic poor. Clearly, there is fear of the racialized poor among property owners.

The irony of these fears is that STRs present just as much of a risk for this kind of behavior. Abby told me a story of how an Italian man came to stay at her Airbnb and would walk around naked in the common areas and would even attempt to enter her bedroom. When she reached out to Airbnb for help, they talked to him and said that there was a cultural misunderstanding and that he would not do this again. Abby did not want to put up with this and kicked him out of the apartment without a refund. This gives credibility to Abby's desire for control and ability to not live with bad tenants. And her fear of sexual violence is palpable, a fear I had heard from other women hosts.

Legislators in favor of regulation weaponized these tensions over property rights and fear of tenants to argue that STR regulations would help expand access to affordable housing and stop people with multiple properties from hoarding housing stock. However, the call to help those who do not have access to affordable housing didn't cross over well in areas like Ward 7 and Ward 8 in Washington D.C. While hosts in white-dominated areas across the river from these wards might have been renting out their second home, Tina, a Black host who was involved with STR advocacy in D.C., told me about the stories other Black hosts from her ward shared on lobby days:

> The stories you talk about from people in my group are more compelling. I have a host here in Ward 7 who says that she just does a room in her home for daycare, which is expensive. There are other people, typical stories of they lost their job and they're just sort of making ends meet. And then there are the businesses that sort of benefit from that. Again, the food desert problem we have over here. The unemployment problem we have over here. Other folks can't really speak to that in any of the other Wards.

Tina contrasted these stories of hardship and STR relief to those of hosts from wealthier Wards. She said: "It's just that it's a very lucrative option for them and the responses they get time and time again is that 'I'm not really concerned about your second home, I'm concerned about people having a home.'" Tina explained that she thought that this claim was a farce. In her view, most of the new buildings coming up were unaffordable to a majority of D.C. residents. She asked, "So who is it for? Who is it that they're building for? So it's disingenuous. You're not prioritizing any housing. Their housing priorities belie what they're saying.

Tina pushed back on visions of regulations that conformed to the ones I discussed above. She accused hotel companies of wanting to save their profits and not doing anything for affordable housing, pointing to there not being any hotels in Wards 7 and 8 and how the regulations would impact hosts adversely. The response to this analysis differed. Hotel association representatives told me that while they cared about the impact on housing, they were also concerned about competing with an unregulated market entity that could expand exponentially without needing to comply with the same regulations as a hotel. Representatives explained that it was a fundamentally unfair business climate that would gut the hotel industry. In Boston, a member of the hotel association even expressed frustration with how easily the industry stepped back from regulations once the threat to their profits was sequestered. She told me that she was fundamentally concerned with the lack of affordable housing for city residents and hotel workers, but her fellow association members didn't share her concerns and gave up any political action in this area.

Overall, the tensions brought forward by both Coalitions circled around the themes of profit, industrial regulations, housing access, and corporate control. While both Coalitions argued they represented city residents, the portion of which residents they represented and what those residents valued differed. The fundamental divide came down to weighing the impact on housing, private property rights, and industrial fair play against one another. Each of these had their own interest groups of varying class, race, and gender composition. The Coalitions worked to bundle these interests into a coherent political claim that they could then make in legislatures.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I showed how various interests came to be bundled together to make claims on the future of urban development through the regulation of STRs. My goal for this chapter has been to not only trace how coalitions make political claims that are new forms of governance, but also to do justice to the composite parts of the coalitions — the actors who come from a range of class, race, and gender backgrounds and bring their unique desires, dreams, and demands to the STR fight. By doing so, I have highlighted that coalitions are governing structures that do not supersede identity claims but are in fact dependent upon them to do governance. The linkages that coalitions depend on to make claims are necessarily based on unifying different actors with one another on a common, though fractured, basis.

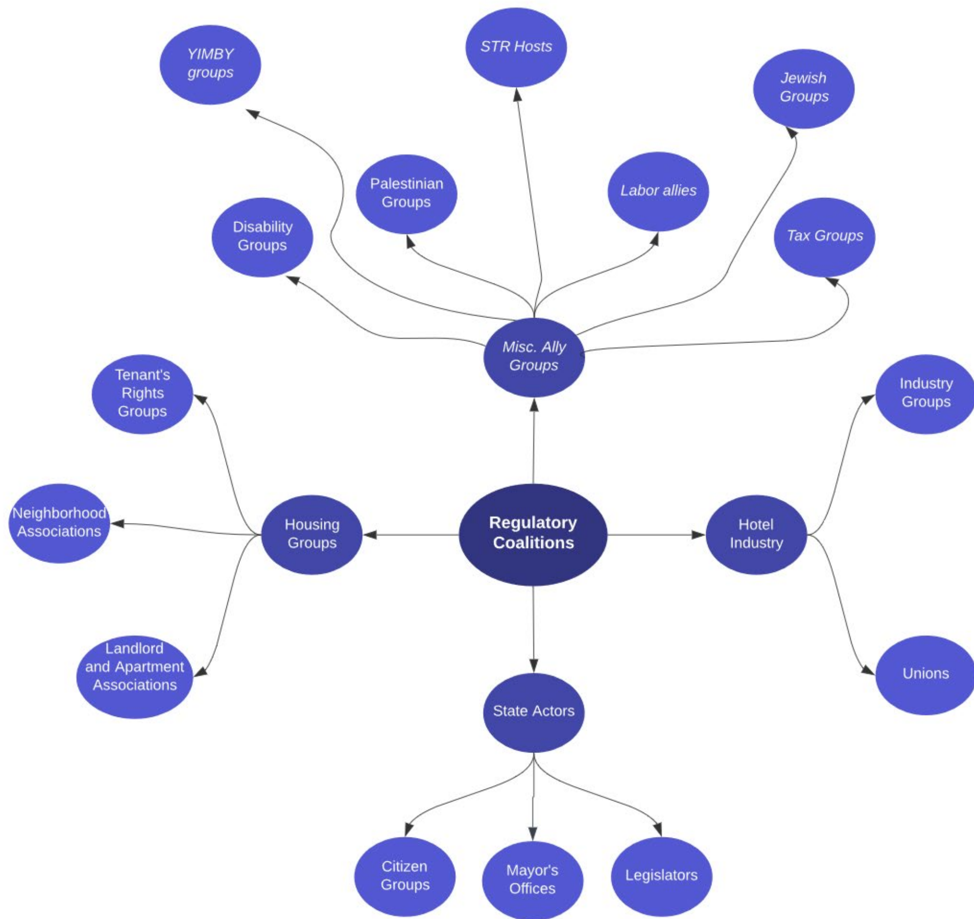
Coalitions are a way to funnel political opinion, but they are reactive to circumstances at various scales (e.g., San Francisco court challenges, local organizations and government composition, etc.) This discussion of scale, and coalitions' interrelation across these three areas, allows scholars to think of how coalitions established locally are in many ways following lines of capital forged across time. The STR Coalition follows Airbnb's path toward international

proliferation while the Regulatory Coalition follows the path created by the hotel industry, unions, and tenants' rights fights. Hosts and activists find one another along these paths and interlink together to share tactics, models, and strategies.

Tracing these connections creates a need for a new kind of scholarship to capture the extent of how these formations operate. In some ways, this both gives credence to, while also expanding upon, Lisa Rofel and Sylvia Yanagisako's call to engage in relational and collaboratives studies of "the ways in which specific national/transnational histories and legacies shape transnational capitalist engagements and collaborations, including their modes of engagement, conflicts, and shifts in relations of production over time." (2019, 4) I could not come to the conclusion I did without a comparative methodology in all three areas. However, my own research complicates their conclusion that "there is no universal capitalism or singular 'modal' form stripped of multiple social, cultural, and political dynamics" (7).

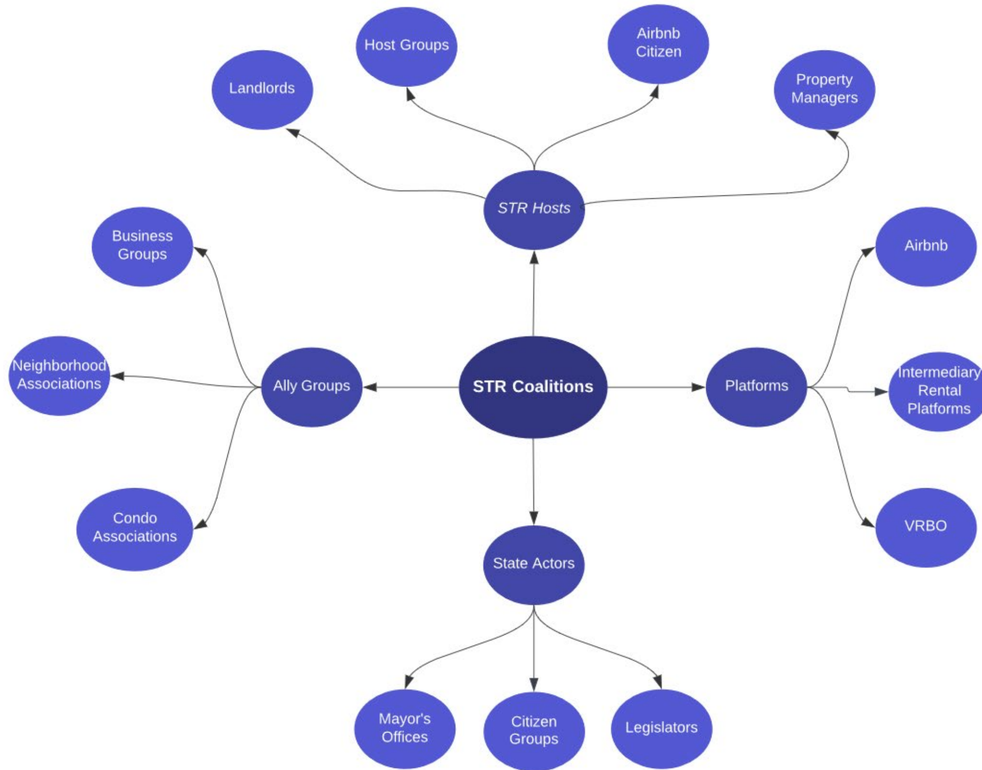
My work here has outlined commonality across all three cities — a common strategy employed in geographically and historically distinct transnational spaces. While this is far from an argument for a universal ethos of capitalism, I do want to argue that there are elements of commonality that arise to bind and funnel diverse interests in specific ways. If this was not the case, the coalitions, their multiple actors, and their presence across all three cities would not share characteristics. Rather, this is a project in kinship with Rofel and Yanagisako's — one that seeks to identify how these centers of commonality arise and operate *in spite of* multiple social, cultural, and political dynamics. These structures of commonality operate at different scales and are by no means universal in scope. In the next two chapters, I show how these structures of commonality take shape through STR hosts' conceptions of their rentals and activist strategies to shape how STRs operate in their cities.

Figure 2: Regulatory Coalitions



YIMBY groups
STR Hosts
Jewish Groups
Palestinian Groups
Labor allies
Disability Groups
Tax Groups
Misc. Ally Groups
Tenant's Rights Groups
Industry Groups
Neighborhood Associations
Housing Groups
Regulatory Coalitions
Hotel Industry
Landlord and Apartment Associations
Unions
State Actors
Citizen Groups
Mayor's Offices
Legislators

Figure 3: STR Coalitions



Chapter 3: The Romantic Anti-Capitalism of Hosting

In 2016, Airbnb released one-minute videos profiling Airbnb hosts in the Boston area, San Francisco, and Washington D.C on its home sharing advocacy YouTube channel, Airbnb Citizen. Though the videos differed in terms of representation — with the Boston video featuring white hosts, the San Francisco video highlighting a mix of white and Asian hosts, and the D.C. video focusing exclusively on Black hosts — their message remained the same: Airbnb helps hosts supplement their income in an unaffordable city, send tourists to local businesses, save for future plans like marriage, and make the area affordable for working-class and long-term residents. Airbnb created these videos in response to a looming regulatory debate about whether Airbnb and other companies like it are beneficial to these cities, or whether they are detrimental for taking away housing from long-term residents and promoting unregulated tourism.

At the heart of this debate is a fundamental conflict around urban space. In the ideal city, every resident would have a place to live, but in current cities residence is demarcated by property. Property ownership serves as a fundamental exclusion criterion as it helps determine which residents get to live in the city and which become displaced. This chapter focuses on the tension of how cities balance the contradictory needs of propertied and non-propertied residents. I trace how hosts negotiate the tension between the exclusionary nature of property ownership and the civic good by way of their portrayal of STR practices. I find that hosts abstract the negative effects of their monetization. Hosts displace the displeasing aspects of property ownership onto the abstracted category of the investor host, who stands in for investment capital, indifferent corporations, and foreign money. I argue that STR owners replicate what Iyko Day (2016, 171) calls romantic anti-capitalism, a mode of critiquing capitalism that valorizes the local and concrete uses of capital while displacing capital's destructive effects onto an abstracted and racialized other. tie their use of private property monetization to the civic good, defined here as the positive urban impacts of a particular practice, all the while foreclosing a debate about the potential I discuss how this romantic anti-capitalism is part of a larger set of techniques that shape the kinds of urban communities we live in. At the same time, I hold the tension of how property ownership and romantic anti-capitalism itself shift depending on one's position within settler-colonialism.

To do so, I draw on the above Airbnb Citizen videos as well as my conversations with thirty-two STR hosts who are property owners, like the ones in the video, and four property managers. In Boston, the hosts consisted of nine white women of various ages and four older white men. In San Francisco, the hosts included thirteen older white men and women and three Latine and Asian men and women of various ages. Finally, D.C. hosts consisted of two older black women, a young black woman, and one younger white woman — as well as an older white woman, a younger white woman, and a young white man who worked as property managers.

Imaginary of Hosting

The Airbnb Citizen ads were released online and ran on TV for the purpose of informing city residents and legislators about the benefits of home sharing. The three Airbnb Citizen ads follow the same format. Four to five Airbnb hosts are profiled about their experiences with short-term renting. Their testimony is accompanied by a slug showing their first name and area of residence (e.g. Chekesha, Historic Anacostia). The videos use shots of hosts in their homes, playing with their children, gardening, working on their business, riding a bike, and doing a variety of tasks in their homes and neighborhoods. Title cards are interspersed between the testimony to add context to the testimony or bring home a larger point. The videos usually feature a small business owner or local worker, a heterosexual couple, someone struggling financially, and someone espousing the tourist benefits short-term rentals bring to the area. The same hopeful song with light piano and swelling strings plays during each ad.

Although the videos have a template format, the message they communicate as well as who they represent differed for each city:

- *Boston*: The Boston video opens with a white middle-aged woman named Sherry. Sherry says that "Airbnb has totally improved my life. I have this extra little bit of money, cash now." A title card then explains that "As economic inequality grows, Airbnb helps Greater Boston families earn a little extra money." A white senior woman named Phyllis describes how she collects Social Security and Airbnb helps her "pay for the things that I would not have had the income to pay for." A white senior woman named Andrea then goes on to discuss how they send their guests to local businesses and how there is a "symbiosis between the hosts and the small businesses here." A title card states, "When Airbnb guests stay in Boston's neighborhoods they spend more at local businesses." The video then profiles Jason and Stephanie, a young white heterosexual couple from South Boston. Jason explains how the income is helping them save for their wedding. The video concludes by returning to Sherry, who says that she is a teacher who lives where she works. She explains that Boston is unaffordable and that Airbnb "gives us that little income that's going to keep the city for us affordable. For the working class, for the working people." While she is speaking, a final title card explains, "62% of Airbnb hosts in the Boston area said they use the money they earn to help pay their rent or mortgage" (Airbnb Public Policy 2016a).
- *San Francisco*: The San Francisco video opens on Esther and Kevin, a middle-aged white heterosexual couple, discussing how Airbnb helps them save money for the future and their children's college funds. A title card explains, "As economic inequality grows, Airbnb helps San Francisco families earn a little extra money." Lorraine, a senior white woman, then says that she doesn't want to draw on her retirement savings and that

Airbnb allows her to gain extra income. The title card explains that "97% of rental price goes directly to the Airbnb host." The video concludes with a profile of Alice, a younger Asian woman and business owner, and an unnamed younger white woman who is a homeowner. Alice discusses how Airbnb has helped her start her own business in an expensive city. The young homeowner states that guests are staying longer, spending more money on local businesses, and providing her with much-needed income. A final title card reads, "60% of Airbnb guests in San Francisco say they visited local businesses based on their host's recommendation (Airbnb Public Policy 2016b).

- *Washington D.C*: Chekesha, a Black homeowner in Historic Anacostia, says, "When the economy crashed in 2008, you know, it devastated a lot of people." Randy, a Black homeowner who owns a generational and historic home with his wife, explained that "Airbnb, at first, was a way out. I didn't know exactly how I was going to keep this house. I've been here since I was 4 years old." A title card then stated that "48% of Airbnb hosts in Washington D.C. said they use the money they earn to help pay their rent or mortgage." Synta, a Black homeowner in Lincoln Heights, talks about how Airbnb is "keeping people in their homes" and allowing them to keep up with the high cost of living in D.C. while showing an "authentic part of the city. An authentic part of America." A title card, much like the one in San Francisco, reads that "97% of the rental price goes directly to the Airbnb host." Kanita, a young Black small business owner, then states that she is someone who lives and invests in the area and that Airbnb has allowed her to pour her money into her community and business. Chekesha explains how Airbnb "allowed people to basically take control of their financial destiny." An Airbnb title card states, "As economic inequality grows, Airbnb helps Washington families earn a little extra money." The video ends with Kanita and Randy enthusiastically speaking in praise of Airbnb. Kanita calls Airbnb "really an amazing phenomenon" and Randy says that "the sharing economy is out of this world" (Airbnb Public Policy 2016c).

Each of these Airbnb Citizen videos communicates a story about hosting in each city. The Boston video focuses on working-class whites of all ages and the aid home sharing provides in an increasingly unaffordable city. The San Francisco video puts the spotlight on economic inequality and how Airbnb helps white seniors afford their rent. It then pivots to a younger Asian woman and how home sharing helps her run her business alongside a host who talks about how guests patronize local businesses. Airbnb in this instance is a lifeboat for city residents but also supports the people who are working to create more economic opportunities. Finally, Washington D.C. tells the story of how Airbnb helps Black communities after the fallout of the 2008 financial crash. Home sharing helps Black community members stay in their generational homes, start small

businesses, and drive investment to an area that's traditionally been underinvested by the local government.

The hosts in the video are local residents, small business owners, homeowners, seniors, and families. Notably, they are running small-scale operations: with one host hosting out of their primary residence. This portrayal paints home sharing as a small-scale endeavor taken on primarily by local residents who are trying to survive and thrive in their city. Though there are many qualms about this representation and how well it hews to the true nature of STRs, I discuss them in detail in chapters 2 and 4. However, the figure of the small-time STR host who is hustling to make ends meet is a powerful one on all sides of STR regulatory debates. Critics of STRs readily conceded that they didn't want to stop "Grandma from renting a room in the basement. We want to stop illegal hotels." This framing reflected Airbnb's own and gave way to a romantic anti-capitalist portrayal of hosting, one where concrete local uses of property were contrasted to abstract uses of property. Hosting was allowable if it was practiced locally on a small scale. It only became bad if it was practiced by out-of-towners or on a larger scale than the individual home.

In this chapter, I seek to take the romantic anti-capitalism of hosting seriously. I want to ask: How do the hosts I met in the field relate to the imagery of hosting Airbnb is trying to capture in their videos? What is their relationship to home sharing, the city, and business? And how do they relate to hosts who do not fit the imaginary Airbnb puts forward: the hosts with multiple units or the host who doesn't host out of her primary residence?

To start, the imaginary of hosts created by Airbnb didn't wholly reflect the hosts I spoke with nor their own discussion of hosting. Hosting isn't a category that existed in the ether but reflected the legal particularities of the geography. Although each city passed its own variant of regulations, the regulations overall created three categories of hosts: compliant, non-compliant, and uncertain. The compliant hosts represented two subsets of hosts. The first subset consisted of residents who were allowed to rent their space by way of regulations and then followed the requirements imposed by the city — registering one's property with the city, undergoing a safety inspection, and paying the proper taxes and impact fees. The second subset consisted of hosts who stopped their STR operation after they were deemed as breaking the law by the regulations. Non-compliant hosts, on the other hand, consisted of hosts who were forbidden to rent their units by the regulations and continued to do so in spite of the law. The final category, uncertain hosts, comprised mainly hosts operating in Brookline, although hosts in Washington D.C. occupied the position of uncertain hosts before regulations were passed in 2019. At the time of my interviews with hosts, Brookline was in the unique position where there were no regulations in place and STRs were forbidden because of a little-known interpretation of an STR court case by the Planning Commissioner. In community meetings, a member of the Planning Department explained that while STRs were de jure banned in Brookline, the town was not going to prosecute

hosts in any systematic way and really could not due to the sheer number of hosts and lack of town resources – choosing instead to go on a complaint-by-complaint basis. Hosts would only be told to stop doing Airbnb if their neighbors believed they were worth reporting. As such, hosts remained in an uncertain position where hosting was illegal but mostly decriminalized.

The other main difference from Airbnb's imaginary of hosting was what hosts talked about when discussing STRs. Though they mirrored Airbnb's framing on certain issues, they went into greater detail about the role of STRs in their city and their benefits and drawbacks. In addition to the benefits STRs brought to them monetarily, hosts framed their STRs as a civic good against what I have termed immoral STRs — immoral uses of STRs that do not hew to the imagery of civic good placed by hosts. The concept of civic good was not explicitly named by the hosts, but each host made reference to regulations by the good or damage they were doing to city residents as a whole. In other words, the civic good can be understood as the harm or benefit a given practice brings to a community — whether financial, physical, aesthetic, or otherwise. For example, one of my participants described a newly opened marijuana dispensary in Brookline and told me that it brought in tax revenue to the neighborhood while also making it hard for neighbors to park. In the case of the dispensary, it was good for its tax revenue but negative due to the physical side effects. We can think of the ways that hosts presented STRs as similar to the dispensary. Civic good is a category under contest: where different benefits and harms are weighed to determine the viability of a particular practice. Hosts positioned their use of STRs as inherently good by way of appeals to the reasonableness of their business, the good that STRs brought to the community, and the idea that their STRs were not to blame for the ills discussed by critics.

While compliant and uncertain hosts accessed the civic good as a justification for their monetization of their home, they also distinguished themselves from a category of non-compliant hosts known as investor hosts. STR hosts I interviewed spoke about investor hosts as engaging in a type of STR that was detrimental to neighborhood and city life — one that valued an indiscriminate pursuit of profit above the well-being of city residents. Though the investor host appeared across my three sites, it was most clearly defined during the Boston STR debates. Investor hosting, or hosting in multiple units to earn a profit, was originally a part of the proposed Boston regulations. The proposed Boston ordinance provided a since struck-down category for investor units: "Investor Unit. A Residential Unit offered as a Short-Term Rental that is not the Primary Residence of the Operator. Occupancy shall be limited to five bedrooms or ten guests in an Investor Unit, whichever is less" (City Council of Boston 2018). This category was defeated after neighborhood advocacy groups, unions, and hotel industry lobbyists spoke against the inclusion of the category at city council hearings. Calling the investor unit classification a poorly regulated loophole by which investors could continue to turn a profit, advocates argued that

allowing for an investor unit classification would make it difficult to combat the scourge of investor units in Boston neighborhoods like Chinatown and Back Bay. Similar exemptions were attempted in San Francisco and Washington D.C. and were denounced with equal vehemence.

My interviewees deemed the investor host a problem due to perceptions of her status as a foreigner, a profit-driven agent, and as a deformation of the quality of STRs. Though the category of the investor host was not uniformly used by my interviewees, they did mention aspects of the investor host identity when they spoke about the kind of hosting they did not want to encourage in cities. The investor host became an enemy of the civic good and an abstract representation of the kinds of practices that hosts wanted to discourage in their community.

Genres of Romantic Anti-Capitalism

By positioning their concrete uses of property as a civic good against an immoral use of property in the hands of larger, abstracted owners, hosts engage in a type of romantic anti-capitalism. Iyko Day's conception of romantic anti-capitalism is based on Moishe Postone's reading of the double character of the commodity and its connection to anti-Semitism. Postone explains that the commodity contains the dialectical tension between use-value (manifested in the commodity itself) and value (manifested as money). The commodity seems to be the manifestation of concrete use-value against the evils of abstract capitalist value. The commodity fetish obscures how use-value and value co-constitute the commodity and instead focuses on the virtue of one against the other. When "the form of a quasi-natural antinomy in which the social and historical do not appear" becomes the root of anti-capitalism, Postone (1980, 109-110) says that this anti-capitalism becomes a romantic form of revolt that positions itself as anti-bourgeois while at the same time being unable to overcome the basic nature of capitalist social relations. In this romantic anti-capitalism, the "thingly" dimensions of capital (e.g., industrial labor, artisanal craft labor, etc.) are stood in opposition to "parasitic" abstract finance capital (ibid, 112). Postone goes on to argue that this romantic anti-capitalism easily gives way to modern anti-Semitism and outright Nazism — anti-capitalist movements that seek to strike out the evils of "abstract" Jewish people and their relation to finance capital in the name of the concrete "thingly" life (ibid, 110). Put succinctly by Day (2016 10-11):

> Under a romantic anticapitalist view, what is real, sensory, or 'thingly' is the tree in your backyard, the dusty work boots by the door, the reliable pickup truck in the driveway. These make up the concrete realm. What is unnatural or intangible is capital accumulation, surplus value, and money. These form the abstract realm… The antinomical view that characterizes romantic anticapitalism glorifies the concrete dimension while casting as evil the abstract domination of capitalism.

Notably, capital social relations are naturalized and valorized on the "thingly" side of the relation.

Day extends Postone's analysis by focusing on how Asians in North America could inhabit the position of abstract capital in the antimony of romantic anti-capitalism. While Postone focuses on how Jewish people were tied to abstract capital through their segregation in the financial sectors of the economy, Day (2016, 16) focuses on the role of labor time in aligning Asians with the abstract dimension through the depictions of Asian labor as efficient and aligned with abstract domination against the concrete labor of white settlers. She situates the romantic anti-capitalism against Asians within a larger triangulation of Settler, Native, and Alien in the realm of settler colonialism. In triangulating settler colonialism, Day works to show "how land and labor are constitutive features of heterogeneous processes of settler colonial racialization" (ibid, 25). Thereby, Day extends Postone's work by theorizing how romantic anti-capitalism is fundamentally racialized,

For Day, the North American Settler project of settling Native land and exploiting racialized Alien labor relies on two logics that produce three structural positions: the Settler, the Alien, and the Native. The Settler position covers white people engaged in the ongoing process of settling a colony. The Alien position covers the exploited laborers alienated from the settler state they labor in — encapsulating both the racialization of Black and Asian people. Day contends that the Alien category is subject to differing logics of exclusion — where Black people are alienated due to their *indisposability* in the settler state while Asian people are alienated due to their *disposability* as foreign migrants. And, although Day doesn't discuss it in her analysis, Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2015, 64) shows that it's possible to interpret the racialization of Mexican Americans and other Latine identities within the Alien framework of disposability. These logics of exclusion employed tactics ranging from police violence to immigration restrictions to maintain the control of the white settlers over alienated labor. Meanwhile, the Native position is subject to a logic of elimination — one that attempts to either kill or assimilate an indigenous population out of existence to secure the settler project of land ownership.

Notably, this triangulation differs sharply from the Afropessimist theorization of a global libidinal economy of blackness and non-blackness. Day (2015, 113) argues that such a move is non-dialectical in its inability to contend with histories where Black subject positions mirror those of Indigenous and Asian subjects. However, she does accept the Afropessimist argument that Black enslavability cannot be compared to the traditional worker and opens the space to theorize "how the internal dialectics of the racial state shape and distort the view of social labor, revealing irrationalities that exceed normative circuits of capitalism" (Day 2015, 116). For Day, the Native's position of being unable to labor to cultivate the land as well as the slave's perceived lack of productive value outside the circuits of capital are both key analytic moments that give animating force to the violence done by settlers in the triangulation of settler colonialism by way of one's inability to labor alongside the settler's demands.

While Day's focus on labor is instructive, I want to take a brief moment to put Day's triangulation in conversation with texts working to bridge Black and Indigenous Studies. Tiffany Lethabo King argues that settler colonial studies replicate a kind of conquistador humanism by focusing on land and labor in place of the logics of conquest and genocide, the making of bodies as less than human, as flesh. King (2019, 118) states that "labor as a governing frame obscures other processes, relations, locations, and symbolic economies that Black bodies and representations of Black embodiment produce and sustain within New World spatial expansion and geography's attendant project of humanmaking." She seeks to draw attention to the relationships Native and Black people have to one another as well as the land, plant life, and nonhuman life forms beyond labor.

Placed within this context, the triangulation of labor becomes one frame through which to interpret the wider structures of settler colonialism and conquistador conquest. This multiplicity of frames creates a theoretical space through which to appreciate, understand, and analyze what Mark Rifkin (2019, 30) calls the irreducible difference of Black-Indigenous engagement — one that centers the relationship between the two movements and fields rather than attempt to resolve it in a central structure. While Day's framework appears to foreclose relational considerations, I believe her focus on social labor fits King's call to think beyond the human genre of the worker and Rifkin's emphasis on relationality. Settler/conquistador capitalism structures labor to be the dominant form of subjectivity and forces Indigenous and Black people into the frame, thereby alienating them from their relations to land, one another, production, and nature through their subjectivization as Human. All societies are organized alongside social relations of labor and a reading of King through Day could look like thinking through how capitalism considers only certain forms of social labor rational and thereby eliminates other supposedly irrational relationships to suit what it considers the productive forces of capital: nature, bodies, land, materials, etc. There appears to be commensurability between Day, King, and Rifkin's theoretical frameworks — so long as one maintains a rich conception of social labor responsible to the theoretical demands and challenges put forth through Black Studies and Indigenous Studies.

With this conceptual scaffolding in place, I want to return the discussion back to hosts and STRs. The home serves as a unique commodity sitting at the enfolding conceptions of property, commodity, exchange, and dwelling. The home as a commodity brings the contradictory relationship between abstract and concrete value into view. One's home is one's intimate dwelling while at the same time being linked to a host of abstract industries. The home's very possibility in the city depends on its ties to the real estate industry, financial industry, and municipal urban planning. City planners, through zoning, bonds, and other planning tools, partner with real estate developers and potential funders in finance to create the conditions for residential housing in cities. As Samuel Stein (2019, 39) points out, the conditions for this planning are painfully narrow:

"land is a commodity and so is everything atop it; property rights are sacred and should never be impinged; a healthy real estate market is the measure of a healthy city; growth is good — in fact, growth is god." On a federal level, Susan Saegart, Desiree Fields, and Kimberly Libman (2009, 302) argue programs to increase homeownership in the 1990s oversold the wealth and stability benefits of homeownership while exposing marginalized homeowners to radical forms of risk including debt, staving off foreclosure, and a loss of equity. The foreclosure crisis, in tandem with predatory lending and municipal policies that profit off policing and gentrifying neighborhoods, created conditions of police terror and financial despair in disinvested neighborhoods, particularly Black neighborhoods (Wang 2018, 77). For all the intimacy of one's dwelling, any home in the city is a commodity and directly linked to capitalist markets and modes of development. This contradiction of home as commodity lends itself to Postone's imminent reading of Capital: Marx's critique is not to show a class antagonism between owners and the proletariat but to critique the nature of labor, accumulation, and the subject positions within the social system of capitalism. The dwelling of home is not distinct from the commodity of home but rather they are imbricated in one another.

I want to emphasize the importance of settler colonialism in the dynamic of home. Home's role is not uniform for the Settler, Native, or Alien. Brenna Bhandar (2018, 17) argues that property laws and racial subjectivity developed in relation to one another within specific geographic and historical settings, a relationship she calls "racial regimes of ownership." The Settler relation to property and home is thus distinct from other racial subjectivities formed across time, much less from other Settlers in other geographical realms. When I spoke to Black, Asian, and Latine hosts, they expressed a relationship to property distinct from that of white hosts. And yet, they maintained a romantic anti-capitalist relationship regarding STR usage. This naturally leads to the question: *What does romantic anti-capitalism mean when practiced by those structurally positioned as the Native or the Alien?*

Though my research can only speak to the Alien side of the question, I believe the answer lies in expanding romantic anti-capitalism to encompass a range of analyses of capital. Robert Sayre and Michael Löwy (1984, 52) state that romantic anti-capitalism is a worldview that is historically and geographically localized. They profile different types of romantic anti-capitalism, from Rousseauian liberalism to fascist interpretations to anarchist revolutionary futures, that share a common yearning for a world displaced by the capitalist present and a future-driven revolt against this displacement — whether through a political project of establishing a new utopia actualizing Romantic values or returning to a past state of affairs (ibid, 59). Though their analysis is limited in its focus on a white Euro-American corpus, their analytic point stands: romantic anti-capitalism is not a singular theoretical trajectory but rather a concept that seeks to capture a variety of anti-capitalist traditions motivated by a shared ideological core.

When held in tandem with Day's triangulation of settler-colonialism and King's emphasis on multiple frames for critiquing conquest, Sayre and Löwy allow us to track varieties of romantic anti-capitalisms beyond that of the Settler's relations to abstracted foreign labor. The Native and the Alien can have their own strands of romantic anti-capitalism. And it contextualizes romantic anti-capitalism as a distinct response to the conditions of capitalist modernity and a potential outline for a political future. This approach to romantic anti-capitalism takes these worldings seriously and avoids the pitfalls of labeling certain analyses of the world as false consciousness. While these romantic anti-capitalisms are not beyond criticism, they do reveal the character of tensions within a historically and geographically specific instance of capitalist modernity.

In this chapter, I track three strands of romantic anti-capitalism put forward by my hosts. These three strands share a valuation of the local above the abstract forces of capitalist development, but do so in distinct ways. The first strand, put forth by white hosts in the Boston area, appraises settler monetization of STRs as a civic good while raising fears of a foreign Asian investor buying property for STR usage. The second strand, put forth by Black, Asian, and Latine property owners in D.C. and San Francisco, makes the complicated move of positioning their STR usage as a response to racialized disinvestment by the municipal governments and various industries. They put forth their usage of STRs as a kind of counter-development that benefits their community. Finally, the third strand, raised by white property managers in D.C. and Boston, delineates the difference between two scales of actors who monetize multiple properties. Property managers distinguish their multi-unit monetization from that of investors who "buy up whole apartment buildings."

All three strands of romantic anti-capitalism, in their own distinct ways, recoil at large-scale monetization of STRs, municipal regulations, and different forms of tourism development in favor of STRed practices based in a community of locals. By putting forward their practices of monetization as inherently good without reckoning with their potential consequences on a larger urban scale, hosts employ forms of romantic anti-capitalism that naturalize certain uses of capitalism while revolting against others. These hosts, through their regulatory activism, are fighting for a specific kind of regulatory future — one that benefits their own households in a city increasingly pressed for housing stock. Granted, there is nothing inherently evil about trying to survive in an increasingly unaffordable city and the regulatory activism here makes sense as a way for hosts to stay in their homes and continue earning money. However, simply accepting their answer to the hard question of property dodges the political impacts of their actions.

Strand 1: Good Locals, Foreign Outsiders

When I asked hosts to discuss STR regulations, they invoked a sense of civic good by way of how their STRs were a reasonable monetization of property. Lydia, a compliant host who only

rented her downstairs unit even though she could've rented other properties, expressed this sentiment when she walked me through registering her STR with Cambridge. She said,

> I think it was all very reasonable. It makes sense. I mean, just like any apartment or any dwelling, they just want to make sure it's safe, it's reasonable, people aren't taking advantage. The City answered all of the questions. The fee was reasonable. Paying a hundred dollars a year seems reasonable. They came over and inspected it, and obviously my house is up to code, so I think it all made sense.

Lydia showed how her STR was compliant with regulations. She positioned STRs in general as a sensible and low-impact way to ensure that homes that were being STRed were safe for tenants and properly vetted by the city.

Earl, a compliant Cambridge Airbnb host who hosted two units in his building, explained that he was largely indifferent to the regulations, but wanted to position his free use of his property to make money via STRs as a reasonable venture. He enjoyed doing STRs because they helped his family save for retirement, pay for his son's college, pay off car loans, and upgrade the house. He also liked introducing travelers from all over the world to the Boston area. Earl expressed indifference towards the effectiveness of regulations and instead emphasized that he wanted to ensure that he could keep doing his business. He stated:

> We registered right away because there's nothing to hide here or anything. And I didn't want the city telling me, 'Oh, you can't do it now, Earl,' because that's none of your business what I do. I should be allowed to do what I want in my own house. So those issues were kind of funny but we're fine. We had inspectors come in and they looked and they said everything's fine.

Earl begrudgingly accepted the regulations because they allowed him to continue to do what he was doing in his home. In fact, Earl went above and beyond to seek government sanction as he attempted to apply for city licensure through many different avenues before regulations went into effect. For example, he attempted to register his house as a bed and breakfast even though his home didn't meet the criteria. Earl positioned the civic goodness of STRs by way of his ability to do his business and be left alone. Even though Earl is specifically positioning STRs as a market venture, he is still making a statement of the good of STRs by way of government regulations. For him, STRs are good for community members and the civic good is helped by the government getting out of the way and allowing people to go about their business.

Both Lydia and Earl mentioned investor hosts in my conversations with them. When I asked them who they thought investor hosts are, they specified Asian investors. Earl explained, "There's a lot of overseas Asian money flowing through Cambridge. Asians are buying up all the property. My neighbors, they tell me that this beautiful Asian couple with a baby is moving in. Oh Earl, you're going to love them. A few weeks later, they're gone and their house is up for rent." Similarly, Lydia sternly rebuked absentee owners who had managers run their listings and treated

STRs as money-making ventures. She felt that being an absentee owner and making a profit went against the original intent of Airbnb, which was to share the space one owned. Lydia indicted absentee owners for not following through in creating a desirable apartment or neighborly atmosphere by treating STRs as a real estate venture. She castigated hosts for not being involved in the neighborhood due to their foreign ties:

> There's a lot of Asian money in Cambridge buying real estate, cash. There was a real fear of absentee landlords coming in and making a bunch of money. You know, Asian investors buying a condo and having someone else run it. This is a desirable apartment right outside of the square, very well-maintained property, and there had actually been some problems with noise and parties and stuff, but they weren't people that were keeping their finger on it.

Lydia continued by distinguishing herself as a good local against absentee outsiders. Outside users were marked by their unavailability to check on the property, a disregard for the neighborhood and its residents, and their desire to make a profit at the expense of a city's livability. Lydia explained how she saw the absentee owner compared to herself and other hosts who rented a property that they didn't live in:

> I wasn't an absentee landlord, because I was on the premises, but it wasn't my primary residence, so I think the absentee landlord is one level removed. It's like hiring somebody to manage your property. I don't think that is appropriate for Airbnb, because then Airbnb becomes strictly a commercial venture managed by a third party, and I think it takes it one step too far away. It's really easy then for problems to happen. At the end of the day, absentee hosts don't take as good care of their properties. They don't have an incentive to.

Lydia portrayed local hosts, while far from perfect, as people simply trying to live in the city while making extra money on the side and as present entities that stewarded their properties. Investor hosts created problems precisely because of their lack of local stewardship and immediate connection.

In these cases, absentee investment by foreign capital impacted the white neighbors precisely because of their desire to make money. Due to their status as foreigners, as being outside the white neighborhood and not of it, investor hosts could not care and had no incentive to care about the neighbor's wellbeing. There is also a clear conflation between Asianness, foreignness, otherness, and ill intent — the Asian owner's inability to be in the community or assimilate into it, of consistently being outside. Absentee ownership in this case played on the xenophobic fear of foreign money from Asia disrupting the white American community for profit. Aihwa Ong (1993, 766) describes how Asian investors in the U.S. and Canada are portrayed "as extraterritorial citizens, capital-bearers and operators on the margins of Pacific Rim empires. Their positioning is… determined by corporate interests that view trade competition as war."

Asian investors in this imaginary are seen as specific cultural and economic capital that can be deployed in a trade war for or against Asian-Pacific economic ascendancy. In the case of investor hosts, this Orientalist trade war framing emerges in discussions of new Asian investors moving into historically white Cambridge neighborhoods and capitalizing on the conversion of neighborhood life into tourist capital.

In Day's (2016, 170) terms, this portrayal of an Asian investor aligns them with pure market rationality and the pursuit of profit. Asian investors and immigrants are perceived as having "only economic rather than 'human' motivations." This in turn aligns Asian personhood with the category of abstracted labor — one that hews to the needs of capital over those of more concrete settler needs. In the context of the home, Asian investors are strictly pursuing the needs of profit while being excluded from more concrete property relations that are associated with whiteness and belonging to a geographical area. The white host is presented as a steward of the home, one who lives at home and engages with the reproductive labor therein. Asian investors, on the other hand, pervert the home by moving it away from concrete use by homeowners and putting it strictly in the market. The curated aesthetics of one's dwelling, attention to one's neighbors, and a cycle of money from the STR to the local community become impossible for the Asian investor who merely rents the home and keeps the money circulating in the abstract realm of finance.

This portrayal conceals the concrete ways that private social labor is tied to broader market labor as well as overlooks the hosts' own pursuit of profit as a secondary rather than private motivation. In practice, I felt this distinction between foreign absentee and local hosts was practically nonexistent at times, especially as some local hosts rented two to three full-unit listings short-term. One white Cambridge host I interviewed discussed how their multi-family rental unit was managed through a loophole. While they followed the law by only renting one unit in the building, they used a loophole in the law to rent a second unit through their child's name and then manage that property on an alternative Airbnb account. Hosts also told me stories about local white bed and breakfast business owners who owned multiple condo units and rented them out on Airbnb. Likewise, parties at locally white-owned STRs were waved off as a playful nuisance that could be fixed with a neighborly phone call rather than an existential threat to the character of the city. Yet, the supposed care of the on-site local resident and the stigma of the outsider made those cases more sympathetic to my interviewees than that of the faceless or racialized outside investors. By displacing the harmful impacts of abstract property ownership onto a foreign other, hosts were able to overlook the ways that their own local practices of STR management were deeply imbricated in the same systems that they espoused against.

Strand 2: Specters of Counter-Development

While white hosts in Cambridge employed a more traditional form of romantic anti-capitalism, the Black, Asian, and Latine hosts I spoke to in D.C. and San Francisco gave an account of STRs as a sort of counter-development in the face of a city trying to marginalize or displace them. These hosts portrayed themselves as long-term residents working against the combined forces of gentrifying developers and neoliberal government policies. When these forces sought to push them out of the city and displace their way of life, they turned to STRs as a way to stay in spite of the development pressures.

Ximena, a Black-Filipina host and homeowner in D.C., gave a nuanced account of D.C.'s political economy when it came to STR regulations. She said:

> I'm good with regulating the big players who buy up whole apartment blocks. But I don't support the way the bill is worded. The more restrictive the bill is, the more the hotel industry wins. And, hotel workers can't afford to live in D.C. So it's not serving the hotel workers, and it's not serving average Washingtonian homeowners.

In Ximena's analysis, the D.C. STR regulatory bill, although it had a proper target in investor properties, went too far and put the interests of the hotel industry above its workers and D.C. residents. In her account, hotel workers couldn't afford to live in D.C. so restricting STRs had no benefit to D.C. residents.

When I asked her to elaborate, she said:

> I'm not a speculator. I'm not transient. I've invested here. I'm not rich and I'm not ultra poor, so these regulations really hurt people in the middle like me. And we here in D.C. have put up with so much. We get taxed and have no say. And it's all take and take and now they're trying to push us out. Don't you think it's fucked up? Damn right it's fucked up."

Here Ximena distinguishes herself, a D.C. resident "in the middle," from speculators, transient residents both rich and poor, and short-term tristate area residents who moved in and out of the city.

Ximena had lived in D.C. for decades — through years of disinvestment, government policies that favored development in the neighboring states of Maryland and Virginia over D.C., and disinterest from local government. She told me a story about living in D.C. during the 1980s, "when crack came to D.C.," and how her neighbor's house was being broken into. When she called the police, they simply told her they could not arrive on the scene and to go check things out. She laughed:

> Oh no, I can't do that. I mean, you know, this is ridiculous. They were like, we're short. And I'm like, bitch, I can't go out here and get killed *laughs.* I'm sorry. I mean. I feel

> sorry for my neighbor, but I can't go out there. I'm calling you because I think it might be an emergency situation and you're telling me to go investigate.

Ximena told me similar stories of how the city failed to deliver her any basic taxpayer services all while she dutifully paid her taxes. She complained about how the city built homeless shelters exclusively in some black neighborhoods and thereby lowered property values, "It's not that I don't support the homeless, I just don't know why all the shelters have to be built here and bring down my house's value."

She was especially bitter now that this work as a D.C. resident was being put in jeopardy by the gentrification of the nation's capital. Citing her work on a D.C. mayoral campaign, Ximena explained that D.C. was a gold mine and that "developers are moving here at a mad pace and they had finally gotten the administration in place of giving them the go-ahead. There are a lot of people who are at threat of being displaced and they're looking around for ways that they can maintain some of the gains that were hard fought." She believed that having lived through that, and now crushed under the burdens of limited job mobility, stagnant wages, and increasing taxes, she was being forced out by the very government that she helped keep afloat over the decades.

She explained the racialized process of gentrification to me in these terms:

> I've seen the cycle before and I know how it happens. There's the cycle of, let's just face it, black people come in and white people move out. When white people move out, the government no longer has the money or is interested in investing in the city, so the city goes to seed. The property values shwoop, they plummet. And then the white people come back. They buy up everything. And then people who have been there are typically driven out by the cost of everything. So, I always lived modestly because I know that the storm is always coming.

Ximena was intimately aware of the cycle of gentrification — having seen it firsthand in D.C. and heard about it from her grandmother's stories of running boarding houses in San Francisco. Her grandmother made do by buying homes cheap, running boarding houses, and then retiring off that income and sale of those homes when gentrification came around. Ximena positioned herself similarly to her grandmother and saw her use of STR as a way to invest in the future and buttress against the effects of gentrification. She explained:

> I always live frugally. After my divorce I was raising two kids on a single income, without any alimony, so I started renting rooms and it helped me pay off the house. My house is modular. I can have as many spaces for rent as I want. I don't need that much space. I have an upstairs unit for myself and I make $120 on a good night.

Surviving gentrification was not for her alone, Ximena then went on to discuss how she was passing on these lessons of survival to her adult children, "Now me and my kids practice collective economics, I want to make sure my kids have a home they can always come back to

and do whatever they want with it whenever I'm gone. I bought the house for $150,000 and it's worth a lot more now. Airbnb helps me hold onto it."

Other hosts mirrored Ximena's discussion of the benefits Airbnb brought against the bulwark of financial insecurity, alongside an analysis of the racialized aspects of urban policy. In San Francisco, Gloria was a 30-something-old Mexican mother who lived in a four-unit building that was classified as a single-family home. Gloria was the first in her family to go to law school: "I don't come from money. My father works with his hands. When I finished law school and got a job with a law firm, I was making a six-figure salary. That was an infinite supply of money for me and the bank would extend me credit that was unheard of. I could essentially borrow without limit." Gloria used this newfound credit line to convert her home into a 4-unit apartment. She lived in one unit while renting the other units as a mix of STRs and long-term rentals.

Gloria explained that STRs were a boon to her and allowed her to quit her law firm job to spend time with her kids. In addition, the STR funds allowed the kids to take Spanish classes and visit the children's mother, who was deported to South America, in what Gloria called the more queer-friendly Costa Rica. She then situated her STR use within the context of counter-development. Her newfound wealth allowed her to do things that her neighbors and family couldn't fathom of doing, and she helped out by spreading the money around — both by sending it to her father and by investing in her tenants. She explained, "If I lost everything else, this would at least let me keep staying at home and run a business. I feel like this country was built to screw the person with a paycheck. Now that I run a small business, I get so many deductions. I wouldn't have all this if I was living paycheck to paycheck."

Prior to the halt in travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic, she used the deductions she received as a small business owner and her profit from STRs to benefit her tenants. Gloria told me that:

> Some of my neighbors aren't happy about [Airbnb.] Back in 2016, before it was legal, my neighbor's son, who is a radical deep grassroots mask-wearing progressive, even more left than me, said Airbnb was destroying the city, but we were family friends so he wouldn't turn me in *laughs.* For my tenants, I use the money to keep their rent below market. I spread the money around. So I don't hear too many complaints.

Through her status as a landlord, Gloria was able to create a different rental environment against a developmental policy that hiked rents on tenants. When Gloria was hit by the COVID-19 slowdown of STR travel, she told me:

> I don't know how we're going to hold onto the building. Our tenants, elderly couples living on retirement and others, came to rely on the STR money to pay way below market. And now I'm afraid they'll be displaced. We slowly tried hiking the rents to prepare them for

> the shift and now, I'm worried that some developer is going to buy the building and kick them out. I don't know...

While Gloria is an example of a beneficial form of counter-development, this monetization of space had a darker side. During a public hearing on STR regulations in 2018, Lisa Shaw, a landlord who rented a four-unit apartment building in D.C.'s Ward 7, called out the D.C. Council for "picking on small businesses while protecting big developers and hotel industries." She chastised the Council for only coming around during election time and called on the Council to craft:

> Legislation that helps landlords remove professional tenants. And fair and beyond that, making rents affordable and comparative. It's an injustice to talk about affordable houses when we landlords are paid $1300 to $2000 less just because of our zip codes. When you say Airbnb illustrates the housing crisis, that's not true. Airbnb levels the playing field across the board. You all force us to decide whether we build a community or allow them to deteriorate with professional tenants."

She then compared Airbnb guests to her long-term tenants who did affordable housing. Airbnb guests not only allowed her to survive and pay the bills, but they also "willingly contribute to the infrastructure of our community. They shop at Safeway, they take our buses… and they post on social media how beautiful the East of the River is." In contrast to Airbnb guests, she stated that landlord-tenant laws were unfair because they were biased towards tenants, allowed tenants to pay much less for housing than she felt it was actually worth, and prevented landlords from discriminating on the basis of criminal or credit history.

Shaw puts into the public record a simply stated moral judgment against "professional tenants" — working-class tenants who used affordable housing and fought for their legal rights — who deteriorated a community and a preference for small business owners who the community belonged to ("our community.") It is a claim that helps get at the romantic anti-capitalism of counter-development put forward by D.C. and San Francisco hosts. While a counter-development for one's community is just on its face, it bears asking, as Arlene Dávila (2004, 48-49) does, who constitutes "the people" of a community? As multiple ethnographies of gentrification have shown, it is all too simple for middle-class residents to displace their poorer neighbors in the name of a collective racial uplift (Boyd 2005; Freeman 2006; Gregory 1999; Low 1999; Walker 2018). The romantic anti-capitalism at play here is accounting for racist development policies in one's neighborhood while positioning oneself as a simple homeowner who drives traffic to local businesses and builds up the area. The distaste towards homeless shelters bringing down property values, an unfounded statement of workers being unable to afford to live in D.C., and a valorization of STR guests over renters all displayed the complicated tension interrelation of class and race.

Notably, this genre of romantic anti-capitalism was put forth by white hosts I spoke to in the Boston area, San Francisco, and Washington D.C. They too believed that they were bringing capital into areas traditionally looked over by tourist industries and remained skeptical of government development policies. However, what distinguishes the hosts discussed in this section is their twin status as a subject and object of romantic anti-capitalist narratives. The disposability of Black and Asian urban life is very much due to the romantic anti-capitalism of the settler. However, the resistance here both resists this form of romantic anti-captialism through duration and survival while replicating another: one that ignores the impacts of one's capitalist practice. While resisting settler romantic anti-captialisms of disinvestment and abstraction, these hosts replicate a romantic anti-capitalism that values the promotion of an STR monetization of one's home and a general interest in developing the urban space through a market-led infusion of tourist money.

Strand 3: "A Regular Person with a Couple Investment Properties"

I sat down with Debra, a white STR host, at a crowded coffee shop in Adams Morgan. Debra ran an STR management company in the District. Property owners would contact Debra and ask for their home, whether a part of it or the whole thing, to be managed by the company. Debra's company would do everything from maintain the listing on Airbnb, set rental rates, hire plumbers and HVAC technicians to do maintenance on the property, hire a cleaning contracting company to clean the space, run an in-house laundry that cleaned all the linens between visits, and run a customer support team on-hand to help with any guest emergencies 24/7. Debra's operation had about 60 listings. Before D.C. STR regulations came into place, more than half of her housing stock was "pure investment" properties. After the regulations, that number came down to less than a fourth.

When I asked Debra to share her thoughts on investment properties, she said,

> It's anything that [the client's] not living in. I think if they are single family homes or apartments, I think it's ludicrous that they can't be rented in this way. What I do understand is that if someone has an investment property that is like eight, twenty, or thirty units and they try to put everything on Airbnb or short-term. I understand that that kind of volume can be disruptive. But I think that if you're a regular person with a couple of investment properties and you're not kind of creating fifty listings in one building, my opinion is, why isn't that allowed?

In this quick excerpt about investment properties, Debra invokes a romantic anti-capitalism of scale — one that was common to many multi-unit operators across my three sites. Whether they were landlords STRing two units in a row house, a property management company that STRed for homeowners, or an STR rental company that rented apartments for medical stays, a logic of being distinct from the pseudo-hotel multi-unit operator emerged consistently.

Multi-unit hosts I spoke with made three key distinctions between themselves and pseudo-hotels. The first echoes the good local, foreign outsider strand of romantic anti-capitalism discussed earlier. Multiple multi-unit hosts spoke about the care they take to create a standardized, well-maintained, and safe property. Debra explained that she wanted regulations because "there's a lot of properties out there that are poorly run, and you want to make sure that guests are in a property that's safe and well maintained. It would be nice to get a unified product in D.C. so everybody knows what they're getting and everything's run above board." While Debra didn't specify the dangers of a foreign other, the property managers I spoke with did lay out their local credentials — emphasizing how they personally went to properties, did the maintenance themselves, and provided a degree of local care that out-of-town investors couldn't hope to emulate.

Second, multi-unit hosts spoke about the value they brought to the city relative to pseudo-hotels. Cindy, a middle-aged white owner of an STR management company in the Boston area, explained that she simply used housing stock that would have otherwise gone unused. She worked with rental companies to rent housing stock — basement dwellings, unrented one-bedroom apartments — that would otherwise have gone off the long-term market. She put the housing stock to use by providing families with loved ones who had long-term illnesses access to an affordable kitchen and private space near the hospitals. She contrasted her affordable rates to that of expensive area hotels. She saw herself as providing an important service by putting unused housing stock to work for a good cause all while bringing tourism dollars to the Boston area. In Cindy's view, the STR regulations were misdirected at multi-unit hosts trying to do good in the city instead of targeting large-scale owners who didn't provide any benefit.

Other hosts picked up the theme that regulations were misplaced, but moved the blame from STR hosts to property owners who had unused housing space. Barb, a white compliant host who rented her downstairs unit and sold her condominium once Cambridge made it legal to only rent owner-occupied housing, complained that cities were going after STR operators rather than finding underutilized properties:

> Do you know how many vacant apartments and houses are in East Cambridge because the old Portuguese grandmother owns the house, the kids, maybe one son lives with the family on the second floor… they decide not to rent it because they had such a bad experience with some college kids renting long-term and they just say, "It's not worth it, we're not going to do it, we're just going to use it for storage."

In Barb's analysis, people who used their space to turn a profit via STRs were being unduly demonized when the city had existing housing stock that went unused by its property owners. If

the problem was a lack of housing stock, then people STRing legally were unduly blamed relative to other property owners.

Finally, Pat, a white twenty-something employee at a D.C.-based STR company, explained how STR property managers provided a solid middle ground between small-scale enterprises and large-scale pseudo hotels. Pat distinguished his business from what he called "Craigslist hustlers" — property managers with one or two properties they were trying to monetize into an income stream. He believed that Craigslist hustlers lacked the sophistication of a larger property management operation because they didn't have the capital to buy STR management products like background checking software, unit noise and smoke monitoring services, and security cameras. He then compared his under-one-hundred-unit property management company to larger companies that turned buildings into pseudo-hotels. These larger operators may have had access to the same tools that Pat's company did, but they did not have the time or will to monitor their huge housing stock. Pat chuckled as he told me that both of these other operators led to neighbors upset by irresponsible guests partying in a residential neighborhood.

Pat then made the case for allowing property managers to rent housing stock:

> I think that the big battle that's going is between the rich and the rich. It's between Airbnb and the hotel industry. The rest of us are the medium-sized people fighting over the scraps. The hotels mask it as we're looking out for the poor and we're looking after the low-income people. I think they're more concerned about their bottom line, but that's what they're preaching. Airbnb is preaching about the middle-class property owners. These are people who can't afford to live in Northwest D.C. if they didn't rent out their basement or their second home. I think there are certain truths to both parts. There are plenty of homes that wouldn't be affordable housing if they weren't STRs. Like if we're renting out a four-bedroom in Georgetown, low-income families wouldn't be able to afford that if it was long-term rental. Airbnb says there's no proof that affordable housing is being taken away, but I think they are, they're ignoring some companies who buy up entire apartment buildings and turn them into hotels without the regulations of a hotel. I think we need to find a happy medium where both sides aren't affecting anyone too negatively.

Notably, Pat doesn't see himself as someone who is hurting low-income residents, taking housing stock away, or unjustly profiting from STRs. Instead, he positions his property management of many units as a justified use of housing stock that does little to no harm in the city and is a casualty of larger conflicts between two large industries.

Similarly, Cindy argued that the prohibition on STRs for "middle-of-the-road" people failed to tackle the larger problems in Boston, saying, "they could have created better laws that will protect the people that need affordable housing and the middle-class people and they have not and they did not. They have not set up enforcement procedures. I doubt that their law will resolve the problem that they claim that Boston has." She quickly pointed to the fact that the regulations did not get to the much larger problem of developers building massive condominiums and the failed enforcement of zoning laws that necessitated a certain amount of rental stock go to

affordable housing. Cindy also made grudging references to the fact that the regulations were pushed forward by legislators fed bad information by uninformed neighborhood association groups and hotel lobbying groups looking to squash the competition from STRs. In both Pat and Cindy's cases, regulations were a misplaced attempt to do good that ultimately hurt city residents.

What these three distinctions have in common is a bifurcation between multi-unit hosts and larger entities who rent many units in a single building or large industries that have little regard for the impacts they have on multi-unit hosts. The romantic anti-capitalist logic at play here is one that refuses to see one's multi-unit rentals in the same light as those of other, larger industries. The supposed concrete labor and minimal impact of these multi-unit businesses and the money one makes off this concrete labor forecloses their entrance into more abstract debates into city debates. The housing stock isn't being taken out of affordable housing markets and if it is, it is taken out because it is being underutilized by city residents.

It is not that multi-unit hosts aren't aware of the abstract dimension of their rentals. Multiple hosts I spoke with used Property Management System software that helped them monitor how much they could charge for a property in a given season, what percentage they could take from overall profit, and the overall flow of money from guests to hosts to property managers. Multi-unit hosts were comfortable with a degree of abstract capitalist flow that they characterized as "reasonable" compared to other forms. They were also quick to dump investment properties in favor of legal forms of rental and worried about the impacts their loss of business would have on their employees, contractors, and own livelihoods.

Instead, multi-unit hosts engaged in selective abstraction. While their forms of labor and their abstract impact on housing stock are labeled as just, other negative effects are tied to abstract domination. In other words, the abstract dimensions of their profit are concretized in the sense that they become "thingly"— a natural outgrowth of the management that they do with properties. Other forms of management let this thingly dimension slip, whether it is because of the scale of their operation, their inability to keep up with the demands of stewarding a property, or their misuse of property in ways that provide no tangible economic or social benefit. They move into the realm of abstract domination because they are no longer put to use in a way that reflects ethical demands. Sara Ahmed (2019) points to how "use is a relation as well as an activity that often points beyond something even when use is about something; to use something points to what something is for" (23). The use of abstract property here shifts from the concrete realm and an allowable abstraction to the full abstract domination of capital. While they engage in similar forms of multi-unit rentals as other parties, multi-unit hosts justify their monetization through romantic anti-capitalist uses of property.

Conclusion: Romantic Anti-capitalism and the Hard Questions of Property

The romantic anti-capitalisms discussed here obfuscate the impact of property ownership by shifting the blame of capital onto foreign others, forces of urban development beyond one's own control, and actors who worked at a large scale but failed to follow proper standards of cleanliness and safety. Simultaneously, these romantic anti-capitalisms cut off the debate about the legitimate use of property by tying concrete uses of STRs to the civic good. In other words, property cannot be thought of in its concrete and abstract dimensions simultaneously. Both constitute dimensions of property and must be dealt with in the larger conversation around negotiating civic good and property ownership. If we understand civic good as balancing the need of propertied and non-propertied residents, then the uses of property become a central tension point in how to do right by city residents. In dodging the hard questions of property use, STR operators naturalize the conditions of their private property ownership and the broader real estate state.

This is not to say that all hosts obfuscate in the same way or that romantic anti-capitalism is inherently reactionary. Hosts are responding to forces of development in their neighborhoods and making sense of their STR practices as a way to push back. For some hosts this is dealing with foreign capital, for others it is trying to survive in a city defined by racialized violence, disinvestment, and hyper-policing. The romantic anti-capitalism here is one that sees a different kind of capitalism as a way out of the detrimental problems with current trends in urban development. Hosts differently positioned in the triangulation of settler colonialism have their own reasons for indulging in their preferred form of romantic anti-capitalism. For Black, Asian, and Latine hosts, romantic anti-capitalist analyses of STRs become a way to reject settler forces of alienation that seek to drive out life and gentrify a neighborhood. Yet, these analyses are limited in their valorization of the role of the homeowner above other residents in the city. Fully contending with the property use will enable us to create liberatory visions of romantic anti-capitalism that contend with the full force of urban capitalist development in settler colonies.

Chapter 4: The Durability of New Jim Code

Introduction

Situating STR hosting within systems of racial capitalism reveals how the ongoing racism on Airbnb's platform epitomized a fundamental contradictory social relation. Despite calls to "belong anywhere" and build an international accepting community of difference, Airbnb continued to face charges of racial discrimination through its interface, user policies, and treatment of guests and hosts of color. To its credit, Airbnb has taken these accusations seriously and conducted a research study with discriminated users that helped them create a non-discrimination policy in 2016. As I've argued in other work, these efforts did not go far enough and Airbnb had to continue to address racial discrimination on its platform (Medvedeva 2021). In 2020, Airbnb launched Project Lighthouse in partnership with the racial justice non-profit Color of Change and Upturn. Drawing on the guidance of civil rights groups and privacy organizations, "including Asian Americans Advancing Justice - AAJC, Center for Democracy & Technology, Color Of Change, The Leadership Conference on Civil & Human Rights, LULAC, the NAACP, National Action Network, and Upturn," Project Lighthouse was developed to understand when and how racial discrimination occurs on Airbnb (Airbnb l, 2023). In December 2022, Airbnb released a report documenting its ongoing efforts to fight discrimination on its platform which included statistical analyses that showed host and guest bookings went up when Airbnb initially hid their profile pictures and commitments to improving the booking experience and expanding the number of hosts of color (Airbnb k, 2023).

Looking at the scope of Airbnb's non-discrimination efforts, guest and host booking experiences, host community make up, and platform social norms, we see a limited vision of what fighting discrimination on Airbnb means. Airbnb employs a kind of official anti-racism by promising to fight against the racist world by constructing a corporate community committed to anti-racism and belonging. When this promise inevitably fails, they engage in emotional governance to ensure that users feel their instance of discrimination is addressed and resolved (Medvedeva, 2020).

In this paper, I extend beyond broken promises and redress and focus on how discrimination is broadly conceived on platforms like Airbnb. I read Benjamin Bratton's design concept of The Stack through Ruha Benjamin's (2019 b) concept of "discriminatory design" to argue for a geopolitical conception of racism on platforms which I call the Colonial Racial Capitalist Stack (CRCStack). I theorize how racism on the CRCStack operates at multiple overlapping layers, focusing specifically on how discrimination on Airbnb impacts users, neighborhoods, cities, and the wider real estate market.

In applying the CRCStack as a political economic framework, I argue that the CRCStackmakes racism more durable. In the platform world, durability is a key metric by which

platforms are measured. McIntyre, Srinivasan, and Chintakanda (2021) suggest that more durable platforms create strong ties among users and leverage cross-platform benefits. Platforms that are unable to create durability, whether by cultivating a loyal user community, harnessing the network effect, or technological necessity, are tossed by the wayside and replaced by other systems. Reading technology as a racializing and racialized tool helps us understand how racism, as a system, is innovated and entrenched through technological means. Technology and platforms not only work to make racism more durable in their design, the way social biases get coded into the "different objects and tools that we use in everyday life" (Benjamin 2019 b, 5), but also entrench racism as a geopolitical ordering of the world by extending further into the life worlds of peoples through technology.

Some important caveats. First, my cut into the CRCStack through Airbnb is just one of several approaches one can take. I do not mean to make Airbnb exceptional as scholars of rideshare drivers, on-demand laborers, and task workers could just as easily slot in as a way to analyze the functions of CRCStack. The CRCStack, following Bratton (2016) is one where all platforms operate simultaneously — an assemblage of platforms, technology, and society. The second caveat I make is to push back on this globe-trotting scale of the CRCStack. Drawing on Weheliye's (2014) theorization of race as assemblage and Wynter's (2003) theory of Man as genre, the CRCStack is not everywhere spatialized equally nor is it always reflected in even ways. Though the racialized logic that wound themselves throughout the CRCStack may share a core in elevating one genre of Man over another, they do not always do so in the same ways geographically and temporally. Genre and sociogenic principles do not spin out evenly under colonial racial capitalism and the Stack is no different. Finally, I do not intend for the CRCStack to be a Theory of Everything that encapsulates all previous analyses of technology under itself. Rather, the CRCStack is a geopolitical framework for appreciating the distinct ways that platforms operate across scales and layers. It is one tool among many for analysis and pushing back against colonial racial capitalism.

This chapter defines the CRCStack and explains its functions. It follows how the CRCStack makes colonial racial capitalism more durable through an exploration of the Stack's layers: User/Interface/Address, City/Cloud, and Earth. I focus specifically on the experiences of hosts in D.C.'s majority-Black Wards 7 and 8 to explore the colonial racial capitalism spatialization through these layers. I conclude by thinking through what reckoning with the CRCStack would mean for corporations like Airbnb and its users, a counter-reading of the so-called Stack to Come defined below.

The Colonial Racial Capitalist Stack

The Stack is Benjamin Bratton's design schematic of how platforms function geopolitically and how they govern. According to Bratton (2016, 42), the platform is "a standards-based technical-economic system that simultaneously distributes interfaces through their remote coordination and centralizes their integrated control through the same coordination." They do so by creating generative mechanisms "that set the terms of participation according to fixed protocols" and expand in size by creating a structure for unplanned interactions among users and these interfaces (ibid, 46). Platforms generate User identities, set the stage for actions to occur by creating a system to manage data and enable digital emergence, and create mechanisms for the governance of Users (ibid, 47-49). Platforms generate surplus value for users by organizing information and for themselves by profiting from User input with information (ibid, 374).

The Stack is a platform of platforms, a way to think through the overlapping and interfacing ways that different platforms interact with one another, shape political subjectivity, and make claims on geographic spaces. The Stack is composed of six layers - The User, The Interface, The Address, the City, the Cloud, and the Earth. The User — whether human, machine, or animal — uses the Interface to interact with the platform (see Figure 4). The Interface can be a smartphone app or application program interface (API). The various User and Interface components of the platform are given unique Addresses that allow them to be cataloged and sorted. The Stack plots these addresses in urban space (the City) and extends certain privileges and differential levels of access to these addresses depending on who they are. All these data are stored in the Cloud which itself is cross-territorial as an accessible set of resources but also grounded in concrete space such as server farms, cell phone towers, and internet cables. The Stack is powered by manipulating the Earth layer — the raw materials that must be extracted and used for the Stack to function (66).

The Stack interfaces with the state as some states use the Stack for the governance of space. At the same time, the Stack is a third institutional form independent from the state and corporation, as many of the contests over platforms and their impacts in the world show. Platforms exercise a kind of platform sovereignty: "the still immature combination of legally articulated political subjectivities and an infrastructurally determined sovereignty produced in relation to the platform infrastructures" (Bratton 2016, 374). Bratton distinguishes between the many stacks we have in our platform-filled world and his conception of the Stack, which encompasses all of them as a boundary-breaking cross-geographical political system.

The Stack is a provocative way to theorize how contemporary platforms function geospatially. However, the Stack is disconnected from the conditions of colonial racial capitalism. To take one example, Bratton envisions the future of the Stack as moving towards a post-user, post-human world where planetary-computation overcomes the human ability to regulate the

Stack. Bratton quotes eugenicist, artificial intelligence (AI) researcher, and decision theorist Eliezer Yudkowsky to motivate the political questions that will come with this Stack-to-come: "The AI does not hate you, nor does it love you, but you are made out of atoms which it can use for something else." In Bratton's vision of a Stack-To-Come, the attention of the Stack shifts away from human actors and toward non-human users (ibid, 361). While Bratton envisions a role for "a certain humanism and companion figure of humanity" in some instances, he calls on us to abandon the human-centric vision and instead focus on the political possibilities of planetary-scale computation privileging non-human and ahuman actors in the Stack-to-come (2014).

This vision of a post-human world divided into a world of machine and human aligns with what Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora (2019, 4) critique as "technoliberalism":

> The political alibi of present-day racial capitalism that posits humanity as an aspirational figuration in relation to technological transformation, obscuring the uneven racial and gendered relations of labor, power, and social relations that underlie the contemporary conditions of capitalist production. Technological futures tied to capitalist development iterate a fantasy that as machines, algorithm, and artificial intelligence take over the dull, dirty, and repetitive, and even reproductive labor performed by racialized, gendered, and colonized workers in the past, the full humanity of the (already) human subject will be freed for creative capacities.

While Bratton may not harbor a celebratory fervor for a post-automation society nor eugenic aspirations for an AI-enhanced humanity, instead pivoting towards a concerned stance about what the Stack-to-Come and AI may mean for human actors in its geopolitical mesh, Bratton's combination of all human actors into a singular undifferentiated humanity is rooted in the technoliberal imaginary. The "feeling human" made possible through the larger Stack depends on an imaginary that fails to pay "attention to the composition of the human as an abstract category whose expansive capacities continually reaffirm the racial order of things that undergirds Euro-American modernity" (ibid, 5).

If the Stack trends towards the indifferent Stack-to-Come and lumps humanity into one category, then this imaginary of the Stack fails to understand the racialized differentiation inherent to its working and overlooks them as an excuse to draw on the coloniality of Being and the hierarchies of Man that it entails (Wynter 2003, 287-288). Wynter explains that knowledge systems enable people to understand who they are through different genres of being human. The dominant Western-European mode of humanity (Christian Man, Man 1, Man 2) — inaugurated through colonization, racism, accumulation-by-dispossession — justifies racism and other practices of violence through a variety of knowledge systems — ranging from biblical to evolutionary — that hold up certain segments of humanity (white, Western, bourgeois) as ideal while diminishing and punishing others modes of being (Black, Native, colonized) (McKittrick, O'Shaughnessy, Witaszek 2018, 867; Wynter 2003, 316-317). The Stack in its flattening of all

racial, economic, and national differences into one mode of being risks replicating these existing knowledge systems in a new form: The Stack-To-Come. Though Bratton may not share the AI-eugenic tendencies of someone like Yudkowsky, a technoliberal Stack-To-Come could just as easily reproduce a system of racialized violence “based on degrees of selected genetic merit (or eugenics) versus differential degrees of the dysselected lack of this merit: differential degrees of, to use the term made famous by The Bell Curve, ‘dysgenicity.’” (Wynter 2003, 323).

Though Bratton’s vision for the future Stack mirrors technoliberal ones, the Stack as an analytic concept does not necessarily have to. In this chapter, I attempt to merge my commitments to Marxist feminist hegemonic analysis, discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 2, with Black feminist and critical ethnic studies work grounded in Wynter’s theorization of genres of humanity and the sociogenic principle. In response to Marxist feminist theorizations, Wynter (2018, 52) has called for "a feminism in its own name" that "turns 'materialist logic' on its head" and focuses on the coercive force of "symbols, of systems of representations, of their violence" and offers "to mankind a breakthrough that goes even beyond the invention by the Western middle classes, of the natural sciences." Here, I attempt to do due diligence toward Wynter’s principled focus on the role of racializing systems in constituting and determining our material world through the processes of hegemony while keeping Marxist materialist logic in place. Drawing on Anatasoski and Vora’s provocation to theorize the racial valuation behind technological imaginaries, I argue that we should understand the Stack as a geopolitical object that reinforces colonial racial capitalism: an analysis that centers the exploitation and ongoing dispossession of land and labor under systems of “racism, settler and franchise colonialisms, and capitalism across a variety of historical and geographical contexts” (Koshy et. al. 2022, 6). In centering the work of technology in racial capitalism, I draw on Ruha Benjamin’s (2019 b, 3) concepts of discriminatory design and the New Jim Code: “The employment of new technologies that reflect and reproduce existing inequities but that are promoted and perceived as more objective or progressive than the discriminatory systems of a previous era.” Discriminatory design is a conceptual lens that enables us to theorize how the New Jim Code comes to be coded into laws and policies and the “Different objects and tools that we use in everyday life” (Benjamin 2019 a, 5). In

The Colonial Racial Capitalist Stack draws on Bratton’s design brief for how platforms function geospatially as a third space of governance — interlaced with the state and the market but also extending beyond them. In reading Bratton's Stack as a design brief through the lens of discriminatory design, we can see how the material conditions of racialization, colonialism, and capitalism build in racialized valuations into the Stack. Though I focus on Airbnb in this paper, this valuation exists across the Stack: in the data sets we train data on, on the way technology is designed for White users at the expense of users of color, on the way technological systems

discriminate against racialized and impoverished users, on the way that systems extend carcerality, dispossession, and policing into communities of color, just to name a few (Benjamin 2019 a; Noble 2018; Wang 2018).

In thinking through the overlap of colonial racial capitalism and the Stack, we begin to see a relationship of durability created in this new institutional form. The State and the market, already embedded within and reproductive of colonial racial capitalism, give birth to the Stack — so it is little surprise that it too finds itself a terrain for racialized hegemony. The CRCStack, as I show below, functions at all layers to reproduce a racialized grammar of Humanity reinforced through systems of labor exploitation, racialization, and resource extraction. My employment of durability here draws from the idea that platforms are defined by their durability through their staying power in the market, their institutional connections, their value-add to their user base, and of course their own ability to generate profitable value extraction and rents. Colonial racial capitalism, as a structure ordering our world, is similarly made durable by its ability to continue functioning. Jodi Melamed (2011) has argued that State regimes employ "official anti-racisms" to tamp down the inherent racial dispossession at the heart of this economic system. Discourses add to durability, but discourses also work alongside infrastructural mechanisms and technologies to instantiate a given world. As a geopolitical object, one that spans across territorial lines and creates new user subjectivities, but at the same time grows from the soil of slavery, genocide, exploitation, and colonization, the CRCStack is the container of the technological and infrastructural techniques that continue racial capitalism. The relations aren't necessarily novel in their content as they are in their delivery: in their distribution of profits, goods, and services. The CRCStack continues long-standing patterns of disinvestment and exploitation. Analyzing the CRCStack and all its layers helps feminist scholars unpack a new terrain of action that must be faced in the ongoing fight against racial capitalism.

The Durability of New Jim Code in Washington D.C.'s 7th and 8th Wards

To fully explore how the CRCStacks fortified the New Jim Code across multiple layers, I turn to look at host experiences with Airbnb in Washington D.C.'s Wards 7 and 8. Home to historical and contemporary Black working-class life in the nation's capital, Washington D.C.'s 7th and 8th Wards are located across the Anacostia River. According to the D.C. Policy Center, these wards experience persistent poor health, high rates of poverty, low educational attainment, and high rates of incarceration (Browne 2017). These inequities are due to decades of job and housing discrimination, an increased carceral apparatus in the Wards, government disinvestment in the area, and urban development policies that prioritize high-income residents and displace D.C.'s Black working-class population (Prince 2019). Yet, despite these state-enforced disparities and negative connotations, residents in Ward 7 and 8 take pride in their neighborhoods. As

previous studies of Ward 7 and 8 have shown, in response to white spatial imaginaries of crime, poverty, and underachievement, Black residents emphasize the community's beauty, the neighborly ties, the community's long-standing history for Black Washingtonians, and their success in the face of hardship (Prince 2019; Lipsitz 2011; Summers 2019).

According to the short-term rental analytics website AirDNA in 2021, Airbnb stays in Wards 7 and 8 make up 7% of total active listings in D.C. These listings generated $3.75 million in extra income for residents between June 1, 2017 and May 31, 2018, or about $4,712 a year per host (Airbnb b, 2018). Hosts I spoke to said that these visits were an important injection of tourist dollars into an area that otherwise has no hotel industry. This money was incredibly important for hosts in the face of rising rents and cost of living prices. According to one D.C. government report, "about 20% of respondents from Wards 7 and 8 indicated that they felt it would be likely that they would need to move within the next three years due to inability to pay a bank or landlord" (Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development and The Lab @ DC 2019, 3).

On its face, Airbnb may seem like a simple injection of tourism dollars into a community that needs it, but as I showed in Chapter 3, this picture obscures the full extent of the impact SRTing has through a framing known as romantic anti-capitalism. In the face of this romantic anti-capitalist framing, I go through the layers of the Stack (User/Interface/Address, City/Cloud, Earth) to show the impact of Airbnb in D.C.'s Wards 7 and 8. In doing so, I show how the New Jim Code becomes embedded into the area and functions with ongoing older systems of colonial racial capitalism to make the racialization of this area more durable. I look at Airbnb's Star Rating system and its impacts on Black hosts in these wards. I then expand beyond the User and Interface level to theorize how the relatively straightforward technological fix is part of a wider toolset of disinvestment and displacement.

USER/INTERFACE/ADDRESS

In 2016, Airbnb host Synta Keeling appeared on NPR's Hidden Brain to share her story of hosting as a Black woman living east of the Anacostia River. She recounts what a white male guest told her after a day out in D.C., "I was the only white person on the bus, and it was all these black people. And I asked myself, were they going to hurt me? Am I unsafe? And then I realized they weren't hurting me and nothing was going to happen to me. Like, they were just sitting there normal" (Penman and Vedantam 2016).

While Keeling's guest recognized the horridness of what he was saying, other hosts east of the river faced the brunt of anti-Black discrimination. Non-Black guests expressed their bias against the predominantly Black, working-class people in this part of D.C. through their in-app ratings of their trip. Airbnb is one of the many platform corporations that use star ratings to rate

interactions between users. Supplemented by written reviews, star ratings become a way for guests and hosts to rank their experiences with one another. Ratings are determined through a mix of qualitative measures including listing accuracy, host communication, and cleanliness. These ratings impact how likely a host will come up in future Airbnb searches. Airbnb hosts rely on their positive ratings to gain the trust of prospective guests and earn an income. Though research on star ratings has found that they tend to trend uniformly positive, so much so that they may be a useless indicator, the experiences of users in Ward 7 and Ward 8 emphasize the impacts of negative ratings by racist guests.

Many hosts told me about how Airbnb's Location Rating acted as a way for guests to communicate their racial bias against the area without significant pushback from Airbnb. The Location Rating is described as follows on Airbnb's website: "Location. How did guests feel about the neighborhood? This may mean that there's an accurate description for proximity and access to transportation, shopping centers, city center, etc., and a description that includes special considerations, like noise, and family safety" (Airbnb e 2021). The flexibility of what "special considerations" and "safety" mean creates the conditions for the Location Rating to work as a tool for racial bias. Guests' feelings of being "unsafe" were translated into lower ratings for hosts, sometimes as low as 2- or 3-stars out of 5.

Anita, a Black host, told me about how her brother hosted a tall white man who had come to the area for a Congressional internship. The guests' parents had booked the stay and gave the host a low rating. When the host asked why they gave a low Location Rating despite all the proper information being in the listing, the guests' parents explained that the intern had checked the location on his phone and it said it was Anacostia. After he went to the Congressional office and his co-workers asked him where he was staying, he said Anacostia. His white co-workers told him the area was unsafe. Anita expressed frustration over her brother's experience, "As opposed to saying or refuting it, he just doubled down on it. And that at times he felt unsafe. But it's just sort of like, you felt unsafe but when you looked around you all you saw were Black people who were working-class. So what's that say about you." The guests' parents tried to deflect the charge of racism by saying that they lived in a majority-Black city. Anita replied with a laugh, "I'm sure you live in the majority-white side. I have this problem with people here and the city is still 65% African-American. Just because they live in D.C. doesn't mean they're any less racist. Trump lives here, that has not improved him."

Jasmine, a Black host, told me a story about her friend Sophie, a white host in the area. She explained that a white woman booked a stay at Sophie's home. Sophie, who didn't put her picture on her profile due to experiences of sexual harassment, received a message from the guest after she arrived in downtown historic Anacostia. The guest said, "I don't feel safe here as a white woman." Sophie quickly called her out on her racism, "Oh that's interesting because I'm a

white woman and I felt perfectly fine here." Jasmine explained, "You kind of have to leverage who you are to call people out on their nonsense."

Both these guests marked their hosts' ratings down through Airbnb's Location Rating, thereby bringing the hosts' overall rating down and damaging their ability to recruit guests in the future. Though hosts impressed upon me that they also had many guests who didn't mark them down, the problem of the Location Rating reoccurred often enough that it remained salient.

The lowered overall ratings had several effects on hosts that were materialized through the CRCStack. First, the lowered ratings changed the way that hosts were addressed as Users by the platform. Airbnb hosts in Ward 7 and Ward 8 relied on the status of Superhost. This status marks hosts as reputable vendors in the Airbnb system, moves them up in Airbnb searches, and allows them to charge more for their listings. The lowered Location rating threatened hosts' ability to attain Superhost status — which required an overall rating of 4.8 out of 5 (Airbnb g). A lowered rating and the loss of the Superhost status push hosts to lower their prices and make it harder to compete with Superhosts who do not get marked down due to racial bias in other parts of the District. Thinking through the User/Interface/Stack layer, we see here how guest User's actions can be mobilized to punish hosts for living in majority-Black neighborhoods.

Second, the lower rating impacts how Ward 7 and 8 hosts show up in searches on the Airbnb app and website, the Interface layer of the Stack. At the time of writing, upon searching Airbnb for Superhost listings or all listings in Washington D.C., nothing pops up in these areas. Users must manually zoom into the area to see any listings whatsoever. Ward 7 and Ward 8 hosts already had to compete with hosts in whiter, richer, and more invested areas for guests by lowering their prices and doing extra legwork to recruit hosts through the Superstar rating. By relying on a star rating system, Airbnb created a system where hosts in majority-Black areas were already excluded from general searches but also created an interface where bias had an undue impact on how listings were shown.

Finally, beyond technological ramifications, the lower ratings reinscribe racialized stereotypes of both Wards. Disinvestment came with racial stereotypes of the area that were actively reinforced by the racist Location Ratings — visions of the area as riddled with crimes, unsafe, and dangerous for visitors. This reinscription forwards a platform-mediated white spatial imaginary over and above Black conceptions of these Wards. Lipsitz argues that "a white spatial imaginary based on exclusivity and augmented exchange value forms the foundational logic behind prevailing spatial and social politics in cities today… the white spatial imaginary idealizes 'pure' homogeneous spaces, controlled environments, and predictable patterns of design and behavior. It seeks to hide social problems rather than solve them" (Lipsitz 2011, 28-29). We can see the white spatial imaginary present in guest descriptions of fear, scruples with insignificant details in listing accuracy, and import of white fears of over Wards 7 and 8.

White guests who travel to Black neighborhoods are conditioned to accept specific aesthetic features that these listings unwittingly challenge. The Airbnb listing, in its ideal format, mirrors the white aesthetic imaginary of what Verge writer Kyle Chayka (2016) calls the aesthetics of AirSpace: "The same hallmarks everywhere you go: a profusion of symbols of comfort and quality… Minimalist furniture. Craft beer and avocado toast. Reclaimed wood. Industrial lighting. Cortados. Fast internet. The homogeneity of these spaces means that traveling between them is frictionless." These ideal white aesthetics are propagated by a practice called photogrammetry, which creates the conditions where Airbnb can amass a data set of private images that it can subject to machine learning in order to figure out how to best extract value from a particular listing. The ideal Airbnb home must conform to certain trends of cleanliness, aspirational living, and homeliness — guaranteed through multiple systems of surveillance and enforcement, what Bialski (2017, 87) calls "the ideological and aesthetic regime of how to be a host, how to create and 'market' one's home, and in what way to interact with one's guest." Notably, these spaces are empty save for the individual's enjoyment of them.

The AirSpace aesthetic cannot sustain itself in Black neighborhoods. Living in Black working-class neighborhoods breaks the white guest's sense of comfort and pushes them to reestablish control over their mediated space. The lowered Airbnb rating is one of many tools that white guests use in order to reestablish their dominance over Black space, ensuring the durability of racial imaginaries and the systems that undergird them. As one Black host told me, a white guest called the police on their Black neighbor who was outside his house and mowing the lawn. Thankfully, the police call didn't result in violence or altercations and the Black host and their neighbor were able to get the police to leave. Unsurprisingly, the white guest left a low location rating for the host. These apparatuses of violence, of enforcing the white spatial imaginary, remain at the ready for white guests and are extended through the layers of the CRCStacks.

Hosts weren't simply compliant recipients of these discriminatory ratings, instead employing a range of tactics to push back against them. First, some hosts reached out directly to Airbnb to contest the ratings. They wrote letters of complaint and included attachments of all correspondence, proving that the ratings were inaccurate. However, this tactic's effectiveness wasn't guaranteed. Airbnb would only take down ratings and reviews if they contained explicit hate speech. More expertly coded or unintentional forms of racial bias remained unrecognized. Second, hosts discussed the issue of racial bias with their guests directly. On their listings, they used keywords and phrases to clue in potential guests that they would stay in a majority-Black area, aiming to deter racist guests before they booked a stay. Other times, hosts directly had conversations with their guests during or after their stay. Finally, hosts took action outside the confines of the Airbnb app ecosystem. A Ward 7 and 8 host group partnered with D.C. Attorney

General Karl A. Racine to draft a letter to Airbnb about the racialized impacts of the Location Rating, requesting a change to the system.

The combinations of these effects evidenced how Location Ratings served as a tool for discriminatory spatialization. Though not necessarily designed as such or used exclusively to reinscribe racist perceptions of Ward 7 and 8, Location Ratings nonetheless served to hide Black-hosted rentals from the Airbnb map, impacted hosts' ability to earn an income, and forced hosts to contend with highly skewed racialized visions of their homes. The Airbnb Location Rating acted as "a permanent battleground for those who wish to reinforce or challenge hierarchies" of race — a form of New Jim Code (Benjamin 2019 b, 60). Regardless of the designer's intentionality, the Location Rating engaged multiple layers of the CRCStack to devalue Black space through a system that allowed anti-Black racial biases to go unchecked.

CITY/CLOUD

Beyond individual Users and their interactions with Interfaces and Addresses, we reach the City layer and the Cloud layer that sustains it. The City layer takes all individual addresses and users and maps them across a given urban area, an operation made possible by the supercomputing power of the Cloud. Airbnb, since its inception, has depended on Amazon Web Services (AWS) products to manage its app and user database — whether using over a thousand Amazon Elastic Compute Cloud instances to manage its applications and distribute user traffics, analyzing fifty gigabytes of daily data through Amazon Elastic MapReduce, managing fifty terabytes of user photos, automating its data management, or creating web services like API. Airbnb's use of AWS has allowed the company to dedicate a single five-person operations team to manage this data while using its engineering capacity to better improve its services (AWS 2023).

In conjunction with AWS, Airbnb creates a large-scale map of homes, users, and prices across a given city. Access to the information on this City layer, provided to users through Airbnb's API, enables professionalized landlords and investors to take advantage of this information to buy property, set high prices, and make so-called "buy-to-let" property investments. Research on Airbnb in Europe and the United States underscores the emergence of a consolidated professionalized marketplace made of investors and corporate landlords (Cocola-Gant et. al. 2021). Among the "actual people'' short-term renting there is an increasing push to professionalize through programs such as Airbnb's Cohost, Superhost, and Plus programs (Bosma and Doorn 2022). This group of landlords and investors, sometimes referred to by the ideological category of the Investor Host, partner together to maximize the profit they can earn in a city, sometimes even going so far as to evict long-term residents and flip their apartments into short-term rentals for a large profit.

At the City level, we can begin to think about platform urbanism at scale. While Ward 7 and Ward 8 may seem distinct from the other Wards in the District, we can see the partnership between platform corporations, investors, landlords, and individual hosts reveal an interrelation otherwise previously unseen. As we can see in the political coalition, the larger-scale partners need the testimony and appearance of hosts in Ward 7 and 8 to argue that short-term renting helps make the city affordable, all the while profiting from the very forces that push forward gentrification and disposability in other parts of the city. While Ward 7 and Ward 8 may not have the majority of Airbnb listings nor necessarily experience Airbnb-led displacement and gentrification at the same level as other Wards, we can see the precarity of Ward 7 and 8 hosts, one that STRing offers a temporary salve for, used by Airbnb and members of its coalition to argue for laissez-faire regulations for STRs. As I said in the above chapters, the Ward 7 and 8 hosts arguing for their self-interest are not dupes and are not victims of false consciousness. Yet, the attribution of agency and more complex theorization of coalitions should not draw attention away from how these hosts stood in coalition with the very forces responsible for displacement in other Wards. The City layer enables us to see this coalition as an instance where the death-dealing abstractions and hierarchical divisions of racial capitalism create the conditions where the relief of one group's suffering also in a roundabout way leads to that suffering in other parts of the City layer.

Moreover, Airbnb in Wards 7 and 8 can be seen as an incipient form of gentrification. Fields and Raymond (2021, 1631) show that financialization "combines finance, data, and digital technology with racial hierarchies" in order to abstract geographic specificities through quantitative methods while reinscribing "hierarchies of death-dealing racial difference." Airbnb provides yet another data flow for large-scale digital landlords to take advantage of in their conquest for profit at the expense of racialized populations. Cowen and Lewis (2016) draw our attention to how the disinvestment of Black urban spaces through redlining and other practices created a ripe space for gentrification. The subsequent displacement of Black communities into the suburb and hostile urban housing markets created a population that was taken advantage of through subprime lending while at the same time being overpoliced in both urban and suburban space. Situating these trends on a structural level, Wang (2018, 88) argues that we pay attention to how Black racialization is formed "by way of a logic of disposability *and* a logic of exploitability." Gentrification and policing (as disposability) and the subprime mortgage crisis, rising rents, and money to the carceral apparatus (as exploitability) are both standout structural features of the city.

As Lisa Shaw's testimony in Chapter 3 demonstrates platform-enabled displacement, disposability, and exploitability are not foreign to property owners and landlords based in Wards 7 and 8. As a landlord, Shaw sees Airbnb creating new opportunities for profit that match the rents

extracted by her competitors in other Wards as well as providing a new class of renter clientele who do not make the life of landlords laboriously as “professional tenants” do. Though we remain in the area of speculation until new data on Airbnb hosting and its impacts are released in Wards 7 and 8, it is evident that Airbnb can potentially act as a force of gentrification in these wards in the future and possibly even has in the case of Shaw’s multi-unit building.

Through its potentiality as a force of displacement in Wards 7 and 8 and its active displacement without redevelopment in other D.C. Wards, the City layer allows us to understand Airbnb as one among many digital landlord platforms that enable its users to take part in racial capitalist abstraction that make the city unaffordable and unlivable. In conjunction with Amazon, which at the time pit D.C. into a tax break and government benefits competition with neighboring Arlington and other cities nationwide over the placement of its HQ2, Airbnb functions on the City and Cloud layer as an avenue for racial capitalist extraction — an added layer that makes these processes more durable through large-scale computation and city-spanning capture.

EARTH

Perhaps the least obvious but also the most directly connected to colonial racial capitalism is the Earth layer: the layer through which materials are harnessed and the planet is mapped to create the extractive mechanisms that will satisfy the Stack’s demand for planetary computation. The Stack cannot exist without the Earth to feed it. Its geopolitics span states and reconfigure the planet to its ends. However, this globe-expanding view, with its extraction and uses, is a fundamentally colonial racial capitalist one. The Stack’s extractive projects are inheritors to the “racial logics naturalize capitalist inequalities and the violence that maintains them by naming the differences that justify unequal social relations as innate—as “biological,” “cultural,” “environmental,” and so forth. These differences refer to unequal social relations, which can—but do not always or necessarily—correspond to skin color” (Koshy et. al. 2022, 2).

To create a Stack, to create manufacturing and technology, to create the conditions for this extraction, requires a colonial racial capitalist system that visions the land through the settler gaze, builds on the moments of so-called primitive accumulation, and harnesses racialized and colonized people to feed its appetites. The Earth layer, as a relationship to land, is a fundamentally Settler one that treats it as a resource to feed its geopolitics. The Stack’s imaginary of land as resources to be counted, organized, and extracted is fundamentally one that slates the stack into the larger project of extraction and exploitation at the heart of colonial racial capitalism. Every data center, every cell phone, every fiber circuit, and every Internet hotspot depends on the Settler conquest of land and forcible extraction of its resources. Without Settler extraction, the Stack could not exist.

While this may seem like fundamentally outside the scope of Airbnb itself, it is unquestionable that Airbnb could not exist without this relation and as such, in moving forward without addressing it, plays a part in colonial racial capitalism's continuation — both indirectly as a consumer of energy but also directly as a business profiting off colonized lands in Palestine, formerly allowing rentals on cabins of the enslaved in the US South, among other relationships. It is a vision of land and territory that is fundamentally colonial racial capitalism at its core. And from this core, the CRCStack is built.

Ward 7 and 8 are two sites where the colonial racial capitalist relationship continues to endure. To the east of these two wards is the Anacostia River, a long-standing contested site between the Black and White community and place-making. As Sabiyah Prince (2019) shows, Black uses of the river were frowned upon and Black residents were often barred from using the river by elite white boat clubs and actors. Likewise, the new environmental restoration projects along the Anacostia River in Ward 7 and 8 — 11th Street Bridge Park and Poplar Point — became sites of "environmental colonization" as these areas were redeveloped to make way for hip cafes and policed green space meant to attract wealthier and whiter residents (Anguelovski 2023). These former industrial areas becoming environmental tourism spots show how the Earth layer is enacted through Airbnb as well as how the CRCStack builds on historical and ongoing processes of displacement and division.

Conclusion: Facing Down The Stack-To-Come

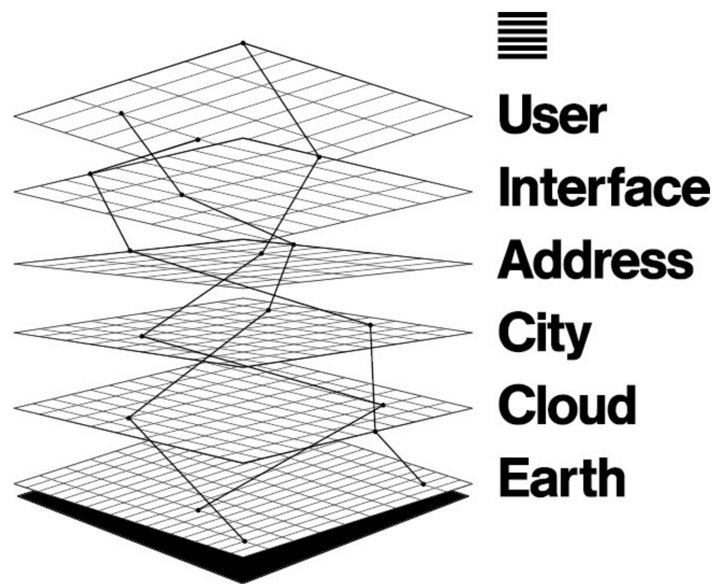
At the heart of the Stack is an organization of resources and a way to call them. What must not be obfuscated is that this organization and calling is paired with a colonial racial capitalist logic that makes racialized hierarchies of divestment, death, and poverty durable. By recognizing the CRCStack, we can begin to see the drawbacks of so many corporate-led efforts to shape and address the Stack-To-Come towards diverse, inclusive, and equitable pathways.

Airbnb has attempted to address racialization on its platform through non-discrimination policies, data gathering, and interface-level changes. In their six-year update on how Airbnb worked to fight discrimination on its platform, Airbnb states that it addressed racial disparities in host bookings by increasing overall "Booking Success Rate" by hiding the profile pictures of Hosts until a trip was booked — ostensibly working to eliminate bias against perceived racial groups. Likewise, they worked to help Black and Latino/Hispanic travelers get more reviews as those perceived as being in these racial categories received fewer reviews than those perceived to be white or Asian (Airbnb m 2023, n 2023). This focus on interface level changes pairs with Airbnb's efforts to increase diversity in its host community through "strategic partnerships, expanded communications and engagement plans." In conjunction with the organizations like NAACP, League of United Latin American Citizens, and the Airbnb Entrepreneurship Academy,

Airbnb has sought to increase the number of hosts from "historically marginalized communities outside traditional tourism hubs" by providing training, education, and economic opportunities to communities of color (Airbnb k 2023).

The focus on Instant Booking Rates and increasing host diversity showed how Airbnb's vision for discrimination failed to address a broader problem of racialized disinvestment. Yet, even this focus on location ratings doesn't show the full extent of how Airbnb creates systems that reify racialized structures of valuation. It is on the next two layers of the Stack, the City/Cloud, that we begin to see the fuller extent of how Airbnb relies on a particular arrangement of urban life to function — one that comes at the expense of racialized residents.

Figure 4: Benjamin H. Bratton's Stack



Chapter 5: Contesting Platform Urbanism at Home

Beyond users and their imbrication in the CRCStack, we find the residents and people who are impacted by platforms even if they are not immediately users of them. Chapter 5, "Contesting Platform Capitalism at Home," is my intervention into the scholarship on platform governance in two areas: 1) the way users and non-users envision their place within platforms and 2) the scale of intervention necessary to impact the development of platforms. Pushing against the impulse to theorize that platforms are only contestable on the level of finance, this chapter uses an approach called platform geographies to examine how municipal STR regulatory activism plays a crucial role in the development of platforms in their cities. I discuss how pro-regulatory activists in Boston, D.C., and San Francisco, have pushed back against campaigns that position STRs as small-scale "home sharing" to highlight the reality of real estate speculation through STRs in their cities. Drawing on three tactics — the D.C. Sting Operation, the San Francisco Occupation of Airbnb Headquarters, and Grassroots Housing Tours — I explain how STR regulatory activists forward a vision of STRs in the city and create a reason for regulation.

From corporate citizenship to platform geographies

In the 1990s and early 2000s, corporations gained scholarly attention as sites where consumers and workers entered new relations of citizenship outside the nation-state. Nestor Garcia Canclini went so far as to argue that neoliberal globalization had demolished the modern conditions that allowed for a homogenous identity based on a territorial, monolinguistic nation. In its place, neoliberal globalization created a heterogeneous world where identities are based on transnational codes of interpretation provided through corporate communities. He argues that culture "becomes a process of multi-national assemblage, a flexible articulation of parts, a montage of features that any citizen in any country… can read and use" (Canclini 2001, 17-18). When the old units of analysis do endure, it is only as "mobile pacts for the interpretation of commodities and messages" (Ibid, 43). In Canclini's view, consumer citizenship shifts us away from the territorial nation-state to a postmodern transnational nation based on consumer preference.

Though Canclini's prognostication about corporate citizenship may not have come to pass, the appeal to political homes outside the nation-state rings true as platforms are fast taking the place of corporations in the critical imaginary. Today, platforms hold the space of the alter-state. Activist responses on the ground have shown that Airbnb's institutional force has been difficult to assess. Some activists talk about Airbnb as the latest landlord that they must fight in their campaign for a just city for tenants. Some Airbnb hosts talk about the corporation in terms of a real community of hosts who come together to connect the world as well as a simple vacation rental platform that is the most profitable monetization of their space. In this light, I am

sympathetic to Srnicek's view that Airbnb is a way to organize and profit from otherwise unused spaces. Where my account differs from his is the constitution of Airbnb's user base. In his account, Srnicek lumps Airbnb into a category known as a lean platform: "a hyper-outsourced model, whereby workers are outsourced, fixed capital is outsourced, maintenance costs are outsourced, and training is outsourced. All that remains is a bare extractive minimum – control over the platform that enables a monopoly rent to be gained" (Srnicek 2017, 40). In his worker-centered analysis, Srnicek has an easier time thinking through Uber and TaskRabbit workers as exploited laborers. His analysis stumbles on Airbnb, where the rent gap between long-term rent and short-term rent makes it difficult to see why the outsourcing of costs is a problem for the Airbnb user — especially in unused spaces and rented spaces for property types unsuitable for the long-term rental market (e.g., basements without kitchens). The profit generated by switching to STRs is an immediate benefit that hardly reads as exploitation in the same way as stolen wages and lack of benefits, much less in the eyes of Airbnb users. In this light, the Airbnb host is not an exploited worker but a small business owner using a given platform to advertise their space.

Srnicek could respond that this reality bolsters rather than weakens his characterization of Airbnb as a lean platform. It is just a place to connect unused assets, regardless of whether there is a profit motive. Airbnb doesn't produce a profitable business model that generates and sells data while changing the face of communications infrastructure like Facebook and Google. Yet, as detailed in accounts of platform urbanism and the professionalization of Airbnb, this is precisely what Airbnb does (Bosma and Doorn 2022, 6). Through its hosting programs (whether Host Clubs, Airbnb Action, or Airbnb Citizen), Airbnb can mobilize a politicized user base to lobby with it in city councils for certain kinds of regulation. Airbnb generates not only data about travel, an algorithm that calculates where guests can stay and at which rates, and different kinds of travel experiences (and by proxy an STR ecosystem based on keypad locks, cleaning services, property management, and guest communications), but also seeks to reshape the urban landscape to suit this growing economy.

Doorn (2020) is more cogent regarding Airbnb. He proposes looking at Airbnb and its hosts from a parallax view — where one’s perspective on the phenomenon changes based on one’s viewing position. For Doorn, projects like Airbnb Citizen and the host clubs facilitate the creation of a regulatory entrepreneur who is both operating in their own right and in conjunction with a broader corporation. From the view of the host, platforms like Airbnb act as infrastructural connectors between many independent hosts who just happen to be on the same network. In Doorn’s view, hosts act as Foucauldian market subjects — neither fully private nor public — that argue that they can better govern themselves than any government. However, when the platform is put back into view, it is evident that this politicized hosting — one that depends on

entrepreneurs believing in the redistributive promise of democratized capitalism — is a form of platform urbanism that shifts the very ground for how politics are done in the city. And, in the end, the platform, as an STR marketplace provider and regulator, remains the ur-actor that sets the conditions for how hosts mobilize in the first place.

The concept of platform urbanism brings forward considerations of sovereignty and hegemony. Airbnb defers to municipal and national laws, making it appear as if it is simply a corporate actor trying to do business. Airbnb has no interest in overthrowing Miguel Díaz-Canel in Cuba or skirting Chinese data reporting laws and risk being banned in the country. The corporation only wants to be able to do short-term vacation rentals. However, Airbnb does exercise corporate sovereignty: it governs its users through policies and guidelines, creates and mobilizes publics to advocate on behalf of its interest, and takes part in an urbanization effort, whether sanctioned or not, that allows the platform's continual expansion. On a global scale, Airbnb also standardizes a code of conduct and host/guest assessment for its users. And, as Roelofsen and Minca (2018) have argued, Airbnb's work of constructing a "community" and a disciplined user functions as a form of biopolitics.

Airbnb's function may not seem different than what other corporations already do. The uniqueness of an app or a platform doesn't make it a sovereign exception to how we conceive corporate power. Just because Marriott has standardized rules for the pool and a global design standard for hotel room layouts doesn't mean that it is a sovereign force. It is a corporate actor, under the *nomos* of a sovereign nation and a constituent of a broader hegemony, as is Airbnb. However, I think this account brings light to some of the limits in Schmittian and Gramscian thinking. For these two theorists, power sublimates into a single unified force, whether sovereign or party. There are certainly challenges that arise to these unified forces, but the locus of structural power — whether to decide exceptions or promote specific forms of life and extinguish others — remains with them. In Aihwa Ong's (2004, 70) words, this sense of sovereignty is a container concept. An alternative approach to sovereignty could be to see it "as the outcome of various administrative strategies that seek to improve the economic and political well-being of the nation." While Ong's focus is also state-centric, the attention to how various actors, rather than one overwhelming sovereign, implement administrative strategies to produce a kind of outcome is helpful for thinking through Airbnb and its relation to the state.

If we understand Airbnb to be an actor exercising certain administrative tools for a given socio-political economic end, it engages in a type of platform sovereignty. When placed into an urban context, we can see Airbnb as one of many actors striving for its administrative actions to gain hold. The state attempts to create a container to resolve these issues through courts, legislatures, and enforcement, but it is far from total in its reach. The role of the state as territorial master becomes much murkier in this account. Rather, these different actors and forces vie to

"install dominant hegemonic alliances" between "different segments of nation states and different social actors" (Papadopoulos et. al 2008, 27-28). In combination, the conglomerate of platforms may act as a machine that “not only pierces and distorts Westphalian models of state territory but also produces new spaces in its own image: clouds, networks, zones, social graphs, ecologies, megacities, formal and informal violence, weird theologies, all superimposed one on the other” (Bratton 2016, 52). However, it does so by passing through state containers that delimit its expansive project, however imperfectly that delimitation works in practice.

This multi-actor approach to sovereignty pushes back at the limited role given to users and residents in discussions of platform sovereignty. The user is typically cast as either a laborer desperate for unionization or a member of a transactional public who remains powerless over the platform overlord. Or, worse yet, they “are the shadows of the personified simulations of ourselves” — where we as humans become less important than the data-selves who make their way across multiple platforms simultaneously (ibid, 255). By situating users as one of many actors vying to shape the field of power and the role of platforms in the wider political economy, I shift the focus of platform studies away from monolithic platforms to the geographically situated and specific ways that users, activists, governments, and platforms change the urban environment.

Likewise, I also shift the theorization of non-users. Non-users are often theorized as inadvertently interpellated publics — people who may not actively take part in platforms but are nevertheless placed squarely in their grasps. The platform doesn’t necessarily care if a user — be they human, an electron, or a water molecule — has opted in, it will nevertheless engage these entities in its analysis (ibid, 258). For example, features such as AirDNA’s Rentalizer draw on date from over data from over 10 million Airbnb and VRBO listings to help hosts maximize the profit they can earn in a given area. This rent maximization has a direct impact on local housing markets as they are associated with incremental rent increases and housing supply being taken out of the market (Wachsmuth and Weisler 2018, 1150-1151). The non-STR user is impacted by these platform logics even if they themselves do not actively engage in them. However, in looking to STR regulatory activism, we see the non-user as a much more active participant in the shaping of platforms: one who recognizes the impacts platforms have on them and does not go along with their logics.

Analyzing at this level not only provides an advantageous vantage point from which to study platforms but also reveals how platforms are themselves fundamentally shaped and reshaped at the level of the user. I use the term platform geographies for this analytics lens through which to conceptualize contested platform sovereignties. I am not the first to use the concept of platform geographies. In his Bachelor’s thesis on Uber, Grab, and Gojek workers in Singapore, Tan Yong Hao (2020) uses the term to describe his project of bringing geographic

perspectives into the study of platform capitalism. My usage draws inspiration from Hao's in that I think it is important to situate platform economies in their spatial contexts. It differs in that it extends the scope to include government regulators, activists, city residents, and both host and guest users. I see platform geographies as a pathway to contest, control, and limit platform sovereignty. In his discussion of platform urbanism, Mark Graham (2020) posits that platforms exist in a kind of conjectural space — where they are both simultaneously embedded and disembedded from their urban spaces. He states that this conjectural geography creates the impression that "platforms in the urban environment are fundamentally reshaping urban geographies while being apparently too big to control, too new to regulate, and too innovative to stifle" (Graham 2020, 456). However, these conjectural geographies are becoming stabilized as regulators, consumers, neighbors, users, and workers learn how to interact with platforms on an urban level. Platform geographies, as an analytic lens, is committed to the process of tracking how various actors reverse platform conjecture.

"Make Airbnb Sound like an STD:" Disrupting Imaginaries of Home Sharing

Early in my fieldwork, I met Paul, an older hippy-ish white man in his 50s, at a coffee shop near San Francisco's Panhandle on an overcast day. Paul was a member of a large San Francisco-based coalition that formed in response to a housing crisis exacerbated by STRs. When I asked Paul about his "home sharing activism," he looked at me suspiciously and asked me why I didn't use the term "short-term rental." When I told him I've mostly been talking to Airbnb hosts in my preliminary fieldwork, he relaxed and explained his apprehension,

> I haven't heard this term for a long time except for the home sharers. It's so warm and fuzzy. Their whole notion was to hide this large commercial enterprise by people doing fifteen, twenty, twenty-five units and then selling this [operation] as mom and pop talking to lovely Swedish tourists around the family dining table. Even our side would refer to it as home sharing. How do you run a campaign against sharing their home? So, we knew we were in a political fight. We had to make Airbnb sound like an STD [sexually transmitted disease].

Paul's statement shows how the idea of home is central to the political fight against Airbnb. He deconstructs the idea of home sharing in order to argue that Airbnb leaned on a particular imagery of home to defend itself and other STR corporations from regulation. The public face of Airbnb was a sweet image of an older couple housing tourists while the reality, as I show in Chapter 2, included landlords renting out multiple listings out of buildings, sometimes rent-controlled, that could have gone to or were actively taken away from long-term tenants in areas stricken by housing shortages. Activists like Paul had to disrupt this imaginary of home sharing in their cities for their legislative efforts to gain traction.

The disruption of this imaginary was a multi-faceted activist effort that happened ahead of legislative sessions to pass STR regulations. Activists and residents from different groups came together to do everything from grasstops advocacy recruiting influential lobbyists to speak to legislators to grassroots protests against STRs. I will discuss three advocacy tactics in San Francisco, D.C., and Boston that were representative of the broader move to replace Airbnb's imaginary of home sharing with activist visions of urban development. These practices are a form of platform geography that displace conjectural visions of platform impact with grassroots counter-mappings that worked to influence the public and legislators in favor of regulating STRs.

Washington D.C.: Sting Operations That Escape Conjecture

Columbia Heights is a historic hub of working-class and middle-class Black life located in Northwest D.C. Since the 1970s, the neighborhood has had a steady rise in working-class Latinx residents. Today, Columbia Heights is a highly gentrified neighborhood made of an uneasy mix of long-time Black, Latinx, Asian, and white residents and a new influx of wealthier white residents (Maher 2011). In 2013, Columbia Heights was called one of the fastest gentrifying neighborhoods in the United States (Petrilli, 2012). Columbia Heights still faces the problem of limited housing, rapidly rising housing prices, and a displacement of working-class and immigrant Black, Latinx, and Asian people from the neighborhood.

In late 2016, a tenant's organizer visited 3504 13th St. NW, a rent-controlled building in the neighborhood. He was in the building to alert residents of their Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) rights to purchase the building after a stake in the building went up for sale. Instead of finding long-term tenants, he found people who had rented rooms in the building on the vacation rental STR platform, VRBO. Upon further inspection, the organizer found a room in the building for rent on Airbnb. The organizer reported this building to a local labor partner group and the group set up a sting operation — renting a two-bedroom apartment in the building on Airbnb for a three-night stay. In total, the amount came to $1,161, or $270 per night with a $100 cleaning fee. Organizer Valerie Ervin, a Black organizer who worked alongside the Working Families Party, stated she "actually paid for the rental what most people pay in that neighborhood for an entire month" (Giambrone 2016).

Dave, a white 30-something member who helped organize the sting operation, explained how the building had changed aesthetically:

> It really was jarring to go in there and every doorknob had been replaced with a keypad. You walked in there and there was just like a little basket with tour guides and stuff you would expect to find at a hotel. People often use the language 'pushed out' when new younger, typically white, families move into a neighborhood, but this was an occasion where it was like landlords literally pushed people out of their building.

The building in Columbia Heights represented an egregious move in the eyes of these organizers: one where STR platforms incentivized landlords to convert their buildings to unregulated hotels and rent them out at high per-night rates. The organizer went on to say that when they reported the building to a regulatory agency, the building was cited, but nothing was done to stop STRing or return the displaced renter population. This provided the impetus for a press conference around the building and the threat posed by STRs to housing in D.C. Joined by Councilmember Brianne Nadeau, the Working Families Party, and the Latino Economic Development Center, the press hearing brought attention to the issue of unregulated STRs and the need to regulate them. Ward 1 Councilmember Brianne Nadeau explained to the Washington City Paper that "The point of this exercise is that at least one property owner we know of is illegally operating a hotel in the District, which undermines our affordable housing stock. Not to single out Airbnb per se, but there are some bad actors utilizing these products" (ibid).

The response from STR proponents was mixed. Dave explained that, at the press conference, "we were met oddly enough by counter-protesters and Airbnb who I think their counterprotest was really tone-deaf." The property manager of the building stated that it wasn't unusual for residents in the building to rent out their condos in the building on VRBO and Airbnb. Airbnb as a platform reacted by stating that a majority of hosting didn't happen in buildings like this and that it was in favor of so-called "sensible regulations" (ibid). In essence, while pro-regulation activists saw an instance of a housing monster in its embryonic stage, STR proponents saw nothing out of the ordinary.

This building was just one of many contests over Airbnb's impacts on the District. As I explain in Chapter 2, affordable housing and Airbnb's impact on housing stock was a hotly contested topic in STR regulatory fights. In calling for "sensible regulations" that created a "one host, one home policy" that STR providers had no obligation in regulating, pro-STR activists worked to cement a hegemonic urban condition of platform conjecture that enabled cases like the Columbia Heights illegal hotel. These cases had to be either called out through activists like this grassroots sting operation or through neighborhood complaints. But as cases like the Columbia Heights illegal hotel showed, even this barebones regulatory operation was only as effective as its implementation: with building owners being able to shrug off fines in the face of their massive profit streams. Pushing back against these visions of platforms in the city was core to activist concerns about STRs.

Laura, a white 30-something member of a group who partnered to fight for STR regulations in the District, explained that focusing on cases like the Columbia Heights building was key to combating Airbnb's narrative and strengthening long-fought for tenant protections that made D.C. livable for working-class people in spite of sky-high rents and gentrification pressures:

> DC has really good tenant protections, right? So, there's this incentive to make money on your unit without actually having to offer protected housing to people. These are neighborhoods, with Black and Brown communities that are living there still trying to hold on, and there are all these incentives that are like "Oh, instead of charging $2000 a month, you can charge $300 a day." You know, that's bad for us.

Laura's account here shows the stakes for disrupting Airbnb's imaginary of hosting. By positioning STRs as owner-occupied single-family homes, Airbnb was shifting the terrain of the debate in two ways. First, it shifted the focus of the debate from a broader discussion of tenant power in the city to the rights of property owners. While STR providers wanted to focus on individual owners or legitimize STRs as business, Laura portrayed this debate as being one between tenants, developers, and property owners. Tenants had historically fought hard to secure tenants' rights protections in the 1970s and 1980s to win hallmark achievements like TOPA, the very tenant protection legislation that led to the Columbia Heights building being discovered. For pro-regulatory activists, it was imperative to keep STRs from carving out a category of rentals that undercut the tenant protections that residents had fought for. This was especially true in a city where the majority of tenants rented and avenue for rent increases could force even more working-class Black and Brown tenants out of the city. The potential of rentals in apartment buildings and other multi-unit locations all underscored the threat STRs posed if they were minimally regulated.

Second, Airbnb's narrative of sensible regulations naturalized the single-family home as a site devoid of tenant protections. Recollecting her experiences in the D.C. Council, Laura stated that the Council bent over backward to allow homeowners to do what they wanted with their housing. While extensive STR regulations may not have seemed like a compromise for pro-STR groups, they contained a major giveaway to homeowners. Laura explained, "I feel like even basement apartments being completely unregulated in the new law is a concession, even though nobody is framing it that way. My first apartment in D.C. was a basement. That is a whole unit of housing in D.C." Basement apartment STRs took away housing from prospective long-term tenants. In focusing on the broader politics of housing beyond immediate STR regulations, Laura alerted me to the wider political implications of how housing is conceptualized for tenants and property owners in the District:

> There's no hearts and minds on the housing crisis part. It's just on solutions. Nobody's saying it's not a problem, it's just a matter of how we're fixing it. We have to be willing to hold private capital more accountable. That's what STRs is about, that's what rent control is about. It's about being a city that says, "No, we won't do anything for developers."

The shifting terrain of battle and securing a more advantageous position for tenants was at the core of STR battles and it was a position that pro-regulation advocates wanted to make sure wasn't lost in the mix about good versus bad home sharing.

The sting operations like the one in Columbia Heights put this conflict front-and-center — refocusing the fight away from property owners' rights and onto tenants' rights, housing affordability, and displacement. Legislative regulations were motivated to stop full-scale rentals like those in Columbia Heights by making STRs trackable, regulatable, and enforceable. This is a form of platform geography as it creates a counter-mapping of the stakes of the STR debates both immediately for STRs and beyond the immediate impacts of regulations. The STR regulatory fight also created new alliances in the broader struggle over housing in the city. By supporting the hotel unions in their calls to regulate STRs, tenants' rights and workers' rights groups created the conditions for the hotel union to collaborate with these actors on a wider rent-control campaign to push back not only on STRs but the conditions of housing precarity more broadly.

San Francisco: Occupying Airbnb HQ

On November 2, 2015, housing and homeless rights activists occupied Airbnb headquarters in San Francisco. Spearheaded by the housing rights group Causa Justa: Just Cause and the Coalition on Homelessness, San Francisco, this protest happened the day before the City of San Francisco was set to vote on the ballot initiative Proposition F, or the "City of San Francisco Initiative to Restrict Short-Term Rentals." Drawing attention to the impact STRs had on homeless residents, Causa Justa: Just Cause organizer Maria Zamudio said, "There are over 3,000 homeless children in San Francisco. Airbnb's practice of turning homes into hotels is exacerbating those conditions" (Wong 2015).

One of the most eye-catching parts of the protest was red paper houses attached to black helium balloons floating to the top of the Airbnb headquarters' atrium (Ibid). The balloons bore messages like "Evictions. Love, AirBnB," "Homelessness. Love, AirBnB," "Deregulation. Love, AirBnB," and "Pay-to-Play Politics. Love, AirBnB." These messages were in direct response to a multi-million-dollar ad campaign launched by Airbnb in October 2015 to combat proposition F. Stationed on bus shelters and billboards across San Francisco, the ads were meant to draw attention to the benefits that Airbnb and its users' tax payments brought to San Franciscans. However, the ads were not well received and were taken down by the company almost immediately (Carson 2021).

The core tension at the center of the ads was their passive-aggressive tone. One ad read, "Dear Public Library System, We hope you use some of the $12 million in hotel taxes to keep the library open later. Love, Airbnb." There was immediate upset with the ad due to the belief that it was criticizing librarians for the work that they did. One Twitter user replied, "Dear

@Airbnb These passive-aggressive bus kiosk ads are *not cool* No love, the librarians" (Jessamyn! Mlib 2015). On Facebook, San Francisco State University professor Martha Kenney crunched the tax numbers and concluded (Wong 2015):

> Assuming each employee works 5 days per week minus holidays, this is $0.78 per employee per day. Since that's significantly under San Francisco minimum wage ($12.25/hr), I doubt that your hotel tax can keep the libraries open more than a minute or two later. However, had you donated that $8 million you spent fighting Proposition F directly to the public libraries you love so much, that could have made a bigger difference. Oh well. Hindsight is 20/20!

The public backlash against the library ad was not a singular event. Other ads included statements like, "Dear SF Tax Collector, You know the $12 million in hotel taxes? Don't spend it all in one place. Love Airbnb," "Dear Public Works, We Hope you use some of the $12 million in hotel taxes to put escalators on all the hills. Love, Airbnb," and "Dear Parking Enforcement, Please use the $12 million in hotel taxes to feed all the expired parking meters. Love, Airbnb" (Kyle Huey 2015). One reporter characterized these ads as "the equivalent of being rude to a public worker and then yelling, 'I PAY YOUR SALARY'" (Wong 2015). Other Twitter users read the ads as, "going after all underpaid public servants" (Fangman, 2015). Another rejoined, "They're winning at going viral. That's about it" (nickybseen 2015). These reactions to Airbnb's ads showed a distaste for the corporation masking a necessary corporate activity, paying taxes, as a social good. Hannah, a regulatory activist in the Bay, explained that "Prop F changed the whole narrative. When people saw the amount of money and these condescending ads. They were really turned off. So I think Airbnb did a lot of damage to themselves with that."

Reminding Airbnb employees of their blunder and San Francisco residents of their spite towards the company, Coalition to End Homelessness and Causa Justa: Just Cause tapped into the feeling of resentment towards Airbnb's sarcastic tone to draw attention to the larger urban implications of Airbnb and other STRs in San Francisco. The invocation of evictions, deregulation, homelessness, and pay-to-play politics tied to "Love, Airbnb" highlighted the corporation's place in the larger housing crisis in San Francisco. Airbnb's imagery of home sharing depended on the association between STRs and the ability to stay in one's home. The protesters at Airbnb's headquarters highlighted that this portrayal of housing was just one side of the relationship. If left unregulated or minimally regulated, STRs like Airbnb spun out into housing monsters that led to evictions by landlords seeking to make money on STRs or to sell to investors, rising housing prices due to developer interest, and displacement and homelessness for those that are evicted or cannot afford housing any longer. By pairing Airbnb's imaginary of the home with homelessness, rent hikes, and evictions, pro-regulation activists made the case for Airbnb's culpability in the housing crisis to San Francisco's residents ahead of a critical Proposition F vote.

The Airbnb headquarters action highlights not only the innovative platform geographies put forward by grassroots actors, but also the limits of platform sovereignty and urbanism as a totalizing analytic. Airbnb's communications misstep highlights how platforms are fallible political institutions that exercise imperfect forms of sovereignty, in spite of claims of their algorithmic optimization, technological prowess, and avoidance of regulatory capture. Much like the State, a platform's governance is contestable even in the face of its perceived monetary and operational might. It is this fallibility that non-user activists exploit to organize for a housing justice reshaping of the broader urban hegemony.

Boston and San Francisco: Grassroots Maps and Housing Tours Against Speculation

On October 5, 2017, bilingual chants in Chinese and English rang through the streets of Boston's Chinatown: "Chinatown is residential. We don't want your short-term rental! Corporate landlords can't you see? We don't want Airbnb!" A large group of Asian, Latinx, Black, and white protesters walked down the city streets of Chinatown — some wearing red t-shirts and others wearing casual fall clothes (Chinese Progressive Association-CPA Boston, 2017). The group stopped in front of a brick rowhouse and taped a handmade paper vector red pin icon, much like the one seen on Internet mapping sites like Google Maps, to the gate. The pin had writing in Chinese and English stating, "Stolen home. Previous: $1000/mo, Airbnb: $5820." A member of the Chinatown Progressive Association explained that this building used to be a residential building that was converted exclusively for multi-unit STRs. A former resident came forward to speak about her experience of being displaced from the building. She told the crowd about how her landlord wanted to raise her rent from $930 a month to $1450 a month and how the landlord had used all sorts of tactics to force her out of her home, ranging from fake criminal complaints, disrepair, and knocking on her door at random hours to scare her children.

The crowd marched on for over an hour, from home to home in Chinatown, telling similar stories and hanging red pins on STRed buildings that had previously been residents' homes. This protest, put on by members of the Chinese Progressive Association, Chinatown Community Land Trust, Community Labor United, Massachusetts Affordable Housing Alliance, and UNITE HERE Local 26 Housing Trust, was called the "Chinatown S.O.S!" walking tour. The purpose of the tour was to highlight former long-time Chinatown family residences that had been converted to Airbnb and to call for regulations of all STRs. The group had four demands: i) one host, one home, ii) require registration of STRs and a turnover of data to Boston, iii) basic safety and health standards and a limit of STRs per unit, iv) impose a registration fee that could be used for enforcement.

The protest ended at the steps of the Massachusetts state legislature where the crowd reiterated their stories and were joined by state legislators Representative Aaron Michlewitz and

Senator Joe Boncore. The legislators thanked the crowd for telling their stories and promised to fight for state-level STR regulatory policies that would ensure that Chinatown stayed residential and was “not a vacation destination.” The chant leaders of the protest re-emphasized the need for one host, one home and encouraged the crowd to call 311 and report illegal STRs in the meantime.

When I spoke to Sarah, a middle-aged Asian-American woman who had taken part in the protest, she argued that these protests were crucial for STR regulations to pass in Boston locally and in the state of Massachusetts:

> I think that was very effective in getting our message across of how the STR industry was really destroying our community and really affecting working-class families and destabilizing them. And, you know, as a result of the action I think, the City Councilor, the District City Councilor for Chinatown became probably the strongest advocate for STR regulation in the city. Because he was so moved by that tour.

Sarah explained that Chinatown was home to the most vulnerable tenants in the city — working-class Chinese immigrants who had just gotten to the United States. Historically, the area was undesirable, but with the construction of downtown, highways, and phases of urban renewal, Chinatown had become much more valuable — with Tufts University’s campus moving into the area and the development in the nearby downtown neighborhoods. Luxury developments around Chinatown kicked up what Sarah called a "domino effect" that led to increasing property values and rents. Sarah explained that the boom in luxury development, “changed the nature of how people saw Chinatown. Which used to be much more run down and also next to the city’s adult entertainment district.”

With the change of perception came a rush to profit from Chinatown’s historic row houses. Sarah explained that illegal “mini-hotels” started popping up overnight — with families being evicted to make room for these investment operations: “The buildings were being cleared of residents in order to sell to investors that were interested in turning them into STR properties. I’d say about half of the row houses became mini-hotels. You know, really devastating this very small, low-income community.” These mini-hotels acted as investment properties that used the entirety of all the units in a rowhouse, renting for roughly $1600-1700 a month per unit, and charging between $100 and $140 a night per unit. Sarah laughed as she told me how the investors who had bought the buildings to STR were now desperately trying to turn over the buildings to other owners or redevelop them into luxury condos after the passage of regulations.

The S.O.S Chinatown protesters made the connection between speculation, eviction, and land ownership by STRs. A middle-aged Chinese woman who was a member of the Chinatown Progressive Association made this connection clearly in a speech during the protest:

> As you walk with us on the tour, you see how many STR units are there in a small neighborhood like Chinatown. It's urgent and it's necessary to regulate STR. Landlords or homeowners speculate on land to push out long-term residents, who need the community, who need the very resources of the community for survival. We need to stop that.

This woman framed the conflict over STRs as one between speculators and long-term residents who rely on community care and resources for survival. The historical community that formed in Boston's Chinatown over the decades provided residents with important aid and care, whether it was to help navigate immigration, translate documents, secure housing and employment, or find friendship. STR speculation, as a direct incursion into this community, severed these community ties in the name of speculation, thereby also severing the survival practices of Chinatown's residents. In this instance, as I have shown in Chapter 4, STR platforms worked as a tool of colonial racial capitalism by enabling the ongoing extraction from communities of color under settler colonialism. To fight against platform-enabled STRs was to take a stance in favor of one lifeway against unchecked profit-making and speculation.

Protesters also extended their critique beyond STRs, naming them as just one tool in the wider colonial racial capitalist apparatus that must be fought against. Standing on city-owned public land currently used for a cosmetical center at Tufts Medical University hospital parking lot, Lydia Low, the Director of the Chinatown Community Land Trust, explained how housing was necessary for community survival,

> People can see, from the STRs that we've seen, how obscene the housing crises are, how obscene the land speculation is in this community. To stabilize this community, we need STR regulation at the state and the city level. And even before we get that regulation, we can have a crackdown right now on these illegally operating hotels in our residential community. There are other policies that we need, such as a tenant's right of first refusal, so that when a building is sold, tenants would have the right of first purchase their building and stay in their homes. And they could work with a non-profit to do that. We need opportunities to take housing out of the speculative market, that means that housing should not be for profit, it should be for people and human needs. And that's why we're standing on parcel R1 today, because this is a piece of public land and public land should be used for public good. We want this land to be used for affordable low-income housing to stabilize Chinatown. Now the city tells us that Tufts Medical Center also needs parking and that hospitals are also important to the city, so if the city needs parking, if there was going to be parking, then why can't this land be owned by the community, as by a community land trust, so we can use the parking revenue to subsidize tenants to stay in their homes.

Low moves through and beyond the politics of STR speculation to underscore the political economy of land, property, and ownership that undergird them. She redefines the housing struggle as being fundamentally about taking "housing out of speculative markets" and creating forms of housing that were "for people and human needs." Low here offers a reformist vision for

how this radical housing justice demand can be met. Working inside the structures of capitalism, she proposes a community-owned form of landownership where capital that is otherwise extracted into private institutions such as the Tufts Medical University can be made to recirculate in the community through a community land trust that helps residents stay in their homes and avoid rental speculation — a form of home and sharing that stands fundamentally at the opposite end of Airbnb's vision of a homeowner renting out their unit for private profit.

What these two activists show is that STR regulatory debates are not strictly about STRs per se. STRs are a symptom of some of the worst tendencies embedded in the broader urban political economy. The speculation of STRs is not a singular phenomenon, but rather part and parcel with the runaway speculation happening in cities. While Chinatown residents called out STRs specifically, they also pointed to both private and government forces of development that were shifting Chinatown from its historical space as a home to immigrant workers. Furthermore, they made the connection between land, community, and resources. Long-term residents depended on their presence in the community to survive — both on their connection with their neighbors as well as local forms of grassroots activism and services that had been built up over the decades. They proposed a range of policies — including regulating STRs — to fight back against this urban political economy and protect residents in Chinatown.

The S.O.S housing tour acted as a form of platform geography by spatializing the impact of STRs, making this impact a reality for government legislators, and connecting their counter-mapping to a broader activist trajectory of changing the development of land and property in the city. While Airbnb's imaginary focused on one host-one home, Chinatown residents expanded the impact of STRs to bring the whole process of speculation into light. As such, they crafted a more complex account of the housing economy and the state of STRs — one that the imaginary of Airbnb elided in its focus on individual homeowners and bad actors.

Regulatory activists in Chinatown were not the only ones who used the housing tour and mapping tactics to push for alternative platform geographies. In the Bay, San Francisco Tenants Union's Jennifer Fieber published a piece on San Francisco's 48Hills blog giving neighbors several ways to fight short-term rental evictions and illegal multi-unit rentals (Fieber, 2016). The piece showed the burgeoning regulatory apparatus soon to be commonplace across cities. Fieber suggests that activists can identify illegal STRs by looking at San Francisco's online property database and STR registration records. They can then send complaints to the newly established Office of Short-Term Rentals so that the Office can investigate the rentals and take them offline if needed. Outside of government interventions, the activist can also sue Airbnb, place stickers warning prospective tourists that apartments in a building were "illegally converted to hotel

rentals," or tip off the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project on potential illegal STRs (Gullicksen 2018). The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (a 2021) investigated these tips and worked to create a map tracking illegal Ellis Act evictions that led to long-term residences becoming STRs. This spate of tools showed the possibility for alternative forms of platform geographies that pushed back against platform conjecture by spatializing the impact of STRs and politically challenging their existence.

Fieber’s suggestion to place these stickers was inspired by an action by pro-regulation activists in the North Beach neighborhood in June 2014 (Cosco 2014). Neighborhood activists formed a housing speculation watch group and spent hours poring over Airbnb photos, comparing them to their knowledge of the local neighborhood, and identifying buildings that evicted residents in favor of STRs or hosted illegal multi-unit listings. They scoped out buildings where they knew people were evicted and looked out for tell-tale signs of STRs like suitcases and lock boxes. They then organized a protest walking tour where they used bright green stickers with bold font to visualize the STRs that were hidden through the platform’s anonymization features. A white middle-aged neighborhood activist familiar with the protest explained:

> We did a tour. Like Halloween. We dressed like the Grim Reaper. We went from building to building in North Beach because there was a whole cluster of [short-term rentals]. And then we had this woman, she was the neighborhood kind of busy-body, and she knew everything. And so she would give a little talk. And so it was like, ‘And this is where Sergio lived. And he was 90 and he got kicked out.’ And like all this media. So that was super fun. We blocked a Google Bus we happened to see there too just for fun.

The connection between STRs, evictions, community displacement, and Google buses was not incidental. Susan, a white senior woman who was displaced by STRs, contextualized the rise of STRs to what she called the “tech gold rush… Dot Com Boom 2.0.” Susan described North Beach as a traditionally Italian neighborhood for a hundred years. She had grown up in the community and worked as a volunteer in the service of its development. Susan explained how twenty-people people on her block alone, including her, were served Ellis Act notices. The Ellis Act was a law that allowed landlords to retire from the business of land lording. However, the Act was increasingly used to sell landlord properties to investors who would evict residents with high rent prices, a supposed need for repairs, and harassment. These long-term units were then converted to STRs and placed on the tourist STR market. Susan connected the STR price raise with the ongoing gentrification made possible by companies like Google. She explained:

> All along North Beach, there are stops now for Google. And what happens is then, anywhere where there is a Google stop, suddenly you will find the landlords harassing tenants, trying to get them out because then they can rent the units to the high-tech earner. And that’s part of their model, you will see that’s part of their advertising of a unit.

Here Susan makes an explicit connection to how two forms of tech disinvestment — displacement of long-term working-class renters for high-earning tech renters and STRs — were two sides of the same coin. Since the expansion of the technology economy in the Bay Area, housing has been an increasingly profitable commodity and site of speculation. Multiple boom and bust tech cycles have fundamentally transformed the urban landscape of San Francisco as property investors and developers thrived from "the new generation of skyscraper offices and high-rise residences" and hip cafes and street life while displacing the racialized working-class tenants that had called these neighborhoods their home (Walker 2018, 168-169). Tech's outsized presence in San Francisco — both through its property investment and the arrival of a tech workforce that can vastly outspend other renters — created a housing rent gap.

Citing a particularly egregious example, Susan told me how she had overheard a developer take a phone call in a bakery in her neighborhood,

> I overheard him saying: 'Yeah, I told her, she's only paying $1900 a month and I could get at least a thousand more. And so, she is going to move out. Hell, if these techies are willing to pay $3000 a month. I'm willing to collect it.' That's how arbitrary it is, right? It was what everyone wanted, believed they had the right to jump on this wagon of speculation, you know? Nobody wanted to miss out on the gold rush. And so, then you're seeing people forced out of the city because the rents have been jacked up so high.

Airbnb, Google buses, and Ellis Act evictions all tapped into the Tech Gold Rush-enabled rent gap at different points of profit and investment. Each process shifted the urban landscape towards a housing economy where speculators selling to technology workers made huge profits at the expense of working-class tenants. Likewise, Airbnb, the latest in this process of rent gap extraction, went even beyond the tech worker-oriented form of displacement as it opened San Francisco's housing market towards leisure and business travel that otherwise would have gone to hotels — forms of housing that added to the onslaught of displacement pressures already faced by tenants. Visualizing these impacts through housing tours, filing reports to government regulatory agencies, and contributing to data collection efforts by housing justice organizations became ways for tenants like Susan to push back against property monetization and displacement and create an alternative imaginary for housing in the city.

Susan, along with other tenants, charted the interrelationship between the tech gold rush across the city. Susan had met with activists in other neighborhoods in the city, like the Mission District, and started making common cause with them as tenants. As part of this effort, she began to understand the role of community and how easily tech displacement was carving up her community. Susan told me that developers saw communities as potential buildings ripe for profit and she countered, "It's not just a building, it's a home." She emphasized the role of the community in caring for one another, knowing each other through the years, and creating

organizations that would support each other. She also noticed how easily STRs co-opted the language of community to displace this form of criticism:

> I remember at first going there and saying something about this destroying our community. Well, all of a sudden, they started using the word sharing community. I said, not one of you has yet to mention the word community. Not one of you realized the impact you have and this business model has on a community. Then all of a sudden. So they're really good at co-opting, so be careful of sharing.

Susan critiques platform-based "sharing" community as a cooptation of a grassroots neighborly community displaced by the very forces who now claim the community's name. Community here was a coopted term grabbed straight from grassroots activists to justify the process of rental extraction. Similarly to how Paul wanted to make Airbnb sound like an STD, Susan here wants to ensure that a business model does not overshadow the neighbors who had been displaced for rentals. In doing so, she refuses the terms of Airbnb's imaginary in order to underscore the people impacted by the processes of STRing.

Activists in San Francisco pushed back against Airbnb's imaginary of the sharing community by highlighting the role of displacement, evictions, and speculation in the process of STRs. By naming STRs that displaced community members and counter-mapping the spaces of illegal STRs, San Francisco activists emplace within the context of urban development and create a vision for alternative platform geographies that value community and long-forming bonds in neighborhoods.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shared stories of how residents pushed back against Airbnb's framing of STRs. City residents made a claim to the development of STR platforms and the future of urban economies on symbolic, geographical, and interpersonal levels. These contestations to platform urbanism, a collection of processes I call platform geographies, show the potential of STR activism to fundamentally reshape the city and create new modes of sociality in its wake. What is most exciting about these contestations is the housing justice alternatives they offer. Ranging from TOPA activism to rent control to community land trusts to tenant advocacy, these alternative platform geographies push back on platforms as sites of extraction and instead ask what it would mean to create urban futures that help residents stay in their neighborhoods and turn housing into a social good.

Platform sovereignties and state sovereignty are not absolute forces. They are contestable by grassroots activists and can be made to take new forms. While these contestations are by no means total in their ability to undo the property system nor the processes of rent extraction, they open new potentials for urban life that would have otherwise been

foreclosed by platform expansion. It is a form of worldmaking that makes platform geographies so compelling to follow as platforms establish themselves in our urban landscapes.

Conclusion

Overview and Significance

This dissertation followed how city residents came together to put forward their hegemonic visions for the home, urban development, and the city through a novel form of coalitional politics. At the heart of this politics was a disruption to the existing socio-economic order and property regime around housing through STR platforms like Airbnb. Previously taken-for-granted assumptions in the urban market were flipped on their head: the home could be a site of short-term travel stays, homeowners could use platforms to monetize the space in their houses for maximum gain in short amounts of time, and the platform could enable this monetization while largely evading any responsibility for hosts breaking laws or irreparably harming access to the housing stock.

I situated this disruption within a broader history of racial capitalism, urban housing policy, and the development of home as the political unit we know today. STRs arose from a specific history of dispossession, exclusion, and selective enfranchisement. I followed how city residents made interventions into this political moment through coalitions and interpreted their intervention by way of the framework of hegemony. Instead of focusing on the grassroots or astroturf nature of activism, I focused on how it recruited different actors to change the shape of governance and the economy. I looked at how individual city residents interpreted their activism as well as how they intervened in the spread of STR platforms before significant regulation. I argue that platforms are just one urban actor among many others and that they can be held to account through social movement strategies such as walking tours, occupations, and sting operations.

In tracking the STR regulatory fight, I offer feminist engagements with the home in the city a lens into the contemporary social movements shaping platform power. I show how these activist interventions are dependent on socially reproducing systems of property, home life, financialization, and racialization. I interpret STR regulatory debates as hegemonic claims to *how* social reproduction occurs within the platform-driven iteration of racial capitalism. I show how city residents, governments, and corporations fight for a specific vision of economic life in the city and theorize the potentials and limits of this activism. As I show below, the regulatory victory in all three of my cities doesn't' make STRs a settled matter. Rather, as I show below, this is just the current hegemonic state of play — one that is already under contest and ripe for future research.

Limitations

This study has at least three limitations. The first is a lack of contact with Boston and Washington D.C. regulatory offices. At the time of research, both offices were just getting started and didn't have the capacity to speak with me about their operations. Though I attempted initial contact and

followed up multiple times over the course of several months, I was met with a dead end. Being able to speak to the workers at these offices would have enriched my understanding of how STR laws were enforced. It would have buttressed the lessons I learned from interviewing Brookline, Cambridge, and San Francisco government employees charged with regulating STRs.

Another limitation of this study is the absence of major markets that have been at the center of the STR fight: New York City, Chicago, Santa Monica, and New Orleans. Likewise, this study is limited to the United States and does not address the larger international and transnational implications of STR regulation. Fortunately, the literature is full of case studies at these sites. I see my dissertation as one contribution to the broader understanding of how STRs function. But including these other field sites could have enriched the data and findings.

Perhaps one of the largest limitations of this study was the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the middle of my 2020 fieldwork year, in-person interaction ground close to a halt due to the spread of the COVID-19 virus. I was unable to travel to my field sites in San Francisco and Boston for follow-up research through 2020 and 2021. Fortunately, I didn’t fully lose ethnographic contact as I met with hosts and regulators in online spaces, conducted dozens of interviews, and followed local news and changes. However, the lack of in-depth in-person research and in-person participant observation remained a notable limitation even in spite of these fixes.

With these limitations laid out, I want to touch on a part of the STR story that has largely gone untold in this dissertation: the COVID-19 pandemic. In this conclusion, I provide an overview of the STR world during the COVID-19 pandemic as an addendum to the timeline at the introduction of this dissertation. While the introductory timeline covered the first decade of STR regulations, this timeline will be more limited in scope. I will cover how Airbnb and STR hosts responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and end with the current state of play for STRs. Afterward, I will discuss directions for future research on STR regulations.

Snapshots from the COVID-19 Pandemic

On March 17, 2020, I received an email from Airbnb. It was a message from CEO Brian Chesky where he linked to a video discussing how Airbnb was going to "weather the storm" of COVID-19 (Airbnb h, 2020). In this virtual town hall, Chesky apologized to hosts for how the corporation had acted unilaterally around COVID-19 without consulting Airbnb hosts as "partners." Here he was referencing Airbnb’s decision to refund guest bookings amidst the rising COVID-19 pandemic without giving hosts any say. He discussed how he had held online listening sessions and taken feedback from hosts in the past week in an attempt to make sure hosts felt included as partners. He then laid out a proposal for a $250 million pot to cover costs of COVID-19 cancellations, a $10 million Superhost Relief Fund, a fund where Airbnb guests could

contribute to hosts, a pilot program that would allow Airbnb hosts to host emergency workers, new pandemic cleaning guidelines, and how hosts could avail themselves of the federal bailouts Airbnb had lobbied for in Congress. He ended the video broadcast by hearkening to Puerto Rican Airbnb hosts' experiences after Hurricane Maria. He said that, although the hosting market was decimated, it grew back larger and stronger than ever in just a few years. He believed that Airbnb had experience weathering disaster events and attempted to assure hosts that travel would return to previous levels.

After the town hall, I spoke virtually with hosts who were ambivalent about Chesky's proposal. Abby, a white middle-aged host in Boston, had not heard about the relief options at all until I brought them up. Other hosts heard of them but remained skeptical. For the $250 million pot, Dakota — a white gay man in San Francisco — explained,

> I think people were happy until they realized you would get 25% of whatever your booking policy was. So our cancellation policy was a strict 50%. So we would get 25% of that 50%. On a $100 night, that would mean we earn $12.50, which is not much. This is a company that builds zero homes. We are the hosts, we are the product. They have $3 billion in the bank and giving hosts 25% of the cancellation fee, that is like a drop in the bucket for Airbnb. We are your business. There are people who are still going to be upset, are still going to push a class action lawsuit.

His partner Paul raised an issue with the Superhost pot,

> You have to fill out an application. You have to explain what your loss of income has been or will be. I was taken aback about this whole application process and I assume they're trying to vet candidates. But there's going to be a level of subjectivity. What criteria are they using? Is it purely numbers, is it because you're a better creative writer? Are they waving it more towards hosts with multiple properties or someone with one room?

In addition to the question of criteria, Paul raised questions of how this would apply to Airbnb hosts across the US and the world, "It's not one size fits all. We have one host one home in [San Francisco] but you could be a real estate investor with 20 homes in central Florida because there's no legislation in that market. There's so many different criteria around the world based on the kind of home sharer you are." Paul and Dakota then said they didn't want to avail themselves of the relief funds because they were uncertain about how they would be distributed and wanted to make sure that seniors who were dependent on Airbnb for their primary source of income would be compensated. After our conversation, I looked at Airbnb's guidelines for the Superhost fund (Airbnb i, 2020). The funds were limited to hosts who: a) Only share their primary or secondary residence—no more than 2 active listings, b) show a reliance on Airbnb as a vital source of income, c) have a verified identity, d) have been a Superhost for 1+ years, and e) have lost a significant percentage of their earnings due to COVID-19.

Airbnb’s proposal did not fly over well with all Airbnb hosts. In a video taken down from Twitter, an anonymous white thirty-something Airbnb host railed against Airbnb's change to their extenuating circumstances cancellation policy. The host has a flair for the dramatic and some have even accused him of playing at satire. I take his video to be completely in earnest as it aligns with what I've seen in Facebook groups, Twitter threads, and private conversations with Airbnb hosts:

> This message is for Brian Chesky of Airbnb. We are your loyal hosts and most devoted supporters. Well that is... we used to be. Now with FIRE boiling through our veins, we are collectively OUTRAGED. We thought you cared... until you STABBED us in the back and left us to die. You give us the ILLUSION of stability... then you TEAR it from our bleeding hands when we need it most. You let us 'choose' a cancellation policy then you OVERRIDE it on your whim... like a SADISTIC TYRANT.
>
> Maybe you're good at big numbers. Engineering the perfect algorithm. Designing the perfect culture. Building systems at gravity-defying scale. But you greedy, selfish, arrogant, flippant, wishy-washy, backstabbing bastard... YOU WOULD NOT HAVE AN EMPIRE WITHOUT US. It's OUR homes on your platform. It's OUR face on millions of listings. It's OUR soul that brings the magic. It's OUR thoughtful touches they love. It's OUR coffee they drink each morning. It's OUR place that makes YOU money. You may have started this company... BUT WE HELPED YOU BUILD IT.
>
> As you sit in your fancy office dreaming up your next billion — WE are the legion that makes it possible. WE are the fuel that powers your machine. WE are the ones standing in line for 5 HOURS to buy toilet paper so what few guests we have left can clean their ass before they cancel PENALTY-FREE. YOU ARE NOTHING WITHOUT US. We are not numbers. We are not data. We are PEOPLE. Bleeding out with your EVIL, UNETHICAL AND IMMORAL extenuating circumstances policy. Mark my words—

The reactions to this video on Twitter ranged from jokes that "theater kids should not have rights" to people replying "cringe" to others making fun of a landlord having to turn to a long-term rental as a source of profit. Others still have taken this video as a chance to show how major tourist cities from San Francisco to Madrid are seeing a rise in long-term rental housing as Airbnb hosts are pushed to place their listings on Craigslist and long-term rental platforms.

While this reaction is notable, I want to pause and look at the discursive work that this video does. Airbnb and hosts have been quite the odd fellows in the broader sharing economy/precarity conversation. Unlike service platforms like Uber, commentators about the sharing economy have had a difficult time imagining an exploitative relationship between Airbnb and its users. Rather, many have aligned hosts and the corporations as having similar interests: renting out as many units as possible, as unsafely as possible, all for monetary gain at the expense of city residents. The victims of Airbnb were city residents deprived of housing and potential guests who arrived in what has jokingly been documented by one Twitter account as "Airbnb Hell."

I have taken a different approach to mapping the relationship between Airbnb and its users. I take Airbnb to be an assemblage of the corporation, its various hosts, and its users. Up until this moment, the dissatisfaction in this assemblage did not fundamentally question the STR arrangement. Users noted race, gender, sexuality, ability, and location as potential axes of discrimination, complained about Airbnb's fee structure, and had varying opinions on how Airbnb should and should not comply with city regulations. However, none of these contradictions fundamentally questioned the profit-making and space-sharing portions of the monetary exchange.

This video represents a break in the unity of the assemblage. In an unexpected move, Airbnb sided with guests instead of hosts when it came to COVID-19's impact on travel. Any guest who wanted to cancel a trip could get a full refund, including Airbnb's fee. The outrage documented above represents a rudimentary form of host class interest. The host in the video portrays Brian Chesky as a rich tyrant disconnected from the struggles of real people who make his wealth possible. All the while, he makes the case for why hosts are essential to Airbnb's operation. Much like Uber is nothing without its drivers and their cars, Airbnb is nothing without hosts and their homes. It is the host's home displayed online, decorated immaculately, and provisioned with coffee, snacks, and toilet paper. Likewise, this host also takes a particularly hostile stance towards guests. In his portrayal, the guests enjoy the host's amenities and then leave without having to pay. There is betrayal and indulgence at play here. Everyone but the host makes out well. The guest receives a refund and Airbnb keeps its cash reserves. In this portrayal, the only one hurt is hosts — who are calling to be thought of as more than data, more than numbers, but as people.

Airbnb has tried to quell this rebellious reaction with the concessions mentioned above. However, the damage seems to be done and some hosts vowed to never return to the corporation. All the while, critics and onlookers had begun to use the hashtag #AirbnbCollapse to discuss Airbnb's decline. The hashtag included the now oft-retweeted articles about long-term rental housing coming back online in cities like Dublin, New Orleans, and others. Others on the hashtag pointed out efforts by governments, like the European Union and Governor Tom Wolf of Pennsylvania, to shut down STRs across the board for fear of improper sanitation and the need to open housing stock for long-term rental. Still others have noted that Airbnb has shifted from prepping for a public IPO to navigating the economic crisis. They noted that the corporation could potentially issue convertible notes to investors, a form of debt that can be converted to cash or equity in a company at a future date.

Just two short months later, Airbnb appeared resurgent. According to Airbnb's (j, 2020) self-reported travel trends, guests were mainly seeking entire home rentals, within 50 miles of them, for last-minute bookings. Guests who were able to provide their entire home, or at least a

unit they can rent as an entire home listing, are at an advantage while guests who share a room or space are at a disadvantage. By December 2020, Airbnb was listed publicly on the Nasdaq stock exchange. To celebrate its initial public offering, Airbnb hosted a webinar video. Nasdaq President and CEO Adena Friedman kicked off the video by discussing how travel lagged due to COVID-19 restrictions, domestic travel improved and Airbnb's business model grew in impressive ways. It then cut to an extended clip of hosts around the world joining Airbnb in ringing the doorbell and ended on Airbnb's first three guests ringing the doorbell on the first Airbnb ever rented. The video then cut to Airbnb's co-founders Brian Chesky, Joe Gebbia, and Nate Blecharczyk where the co-founders talked about the benefits of travel, expressed their disbelief of being there, and thanked Airbnb hosts and employees for taking "the idea into your home and expanded it to a scale beyond our hopes and dreams." Brian Chesky then told Airbnb's origin story and how the three co-founders started Airbnb as a way to pay their rent. He then gave a speech thanking the various groups that made Airbnb's IPO listing possible:

> You see when people first discover Airbnb, what they first see are homes. But behind every home is a host. And hosts are what makes Airbnb special... They provide connection. They provide a connection between the people who visit and people who live there. Today we are a community of 4 million hosts around the world. So to our hosts, thank you for making Airbnb into what it is today. You are some of the kindest people I've ever met. You have faith in others and you trust them enough to let them into your home. The connection you provide is needed now more than ever before. But I can't just thank our hosts because without our guests, there would be no host. To our millions of guests who've stayed with us, thank you. You gave us hope that the idea of strangers staying together in each other's homes is not so crazy after all. To our employees and alumni, we've been through so much together. Thank you for working tirelessly for our community all these years. I'm so proud of you. And finally, to our investors, thank you for believing in us even when it wasn't the obvious thing to do. Airbnb is rooted in the fundamental idea that people are good and that we're in this together. In the end, we're not just a company but a community. So now, it makes sense that we take Airbnb public so we can share Airbnb with more of the world.

After Chesky spoke, the video cut to a live feed of the Nasdaq MarketSite stock exchange building in New York City. The video screen on top of the building read "Welcome to Airbnb's listing day: we wouldn't be here without our hosts" and showed clips of hosts hugging one another. There was a countdown from three to zero and the video ended with clips of hosts around the world ringing their doorbells to mark the Nasdaq bell ringing for Airbnb's IPO (see Figure 5). The stock rose from $68 a share at the top of the day to end at $144 a share and made Airbnb a $100 billion company. This shocked many commentators, including Chesky who expected the stock to trade at $30 a share. Some commentators, like Erin Griffith (2020) of the New York Times, cited fears of a stock bubble as Airbnb and Doordash surged at the stock market back-to-back.

Two years later, at the beginning of 2022, Chesky tweeted about the trends he had seen in the STR market. Among the more notable was that "in the past year, 100,000 Airbnb guests booked stays of 3 months or longer. In 2022, I think the biggest trend in travel will be people spreading out over thousands of towns and cities, staying for weeks, months, or even entire seasons at a time." Airbnb proved to be more resilient than any of its critics had anticipated. Airbnb had not collapsed, but rebounded and expanded.

As the US moves past the state-recognized phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, Airbnb and STRs continue to remain an urban puzzle. In New York City, a city with platform accountability laws and an STR registry, there were more entire-home Airbnb rentals available than available apartments (Velsey, 2022). As STR platforms pivot to medium-to-long-term stays, the function of STR hosts as housing versus short-term stays fundamentally shifts their role in the city. And, as travel picks up once again, the STR itself continues to be a problem figure. In cities with a reputation for strong platform accountability like San Francisco, Offices of Short-Term Rental must vigilantly assess STR data, find bad actors, fine and legally punish them for violating the STR law, and ensure that they do not continue to rebound and pop-up. The current STR moment is ripe for study and I will present potential avenues for future research below.

Directions for Future Research

The current state of STRs opens several avenues for promising research. First, there is a need for research that tracks how STR regulation offices implement their enforcement and how this regulatory apparatus impacts hosts based on their class position, sexuality, gender, and racialization. STR offices have been operating at different lengths across the country and some cities have even hired so-called "digital sheriff" government contractors to enforce STR laws. Regulations have been in the books for multiple years, but the problem of unlicensed STRs remains. A future line of research ought to assess whether STR regulations meet their goals of protecting affordable housing as well as how regulations impact hosts based on their racialization, class, nationality, and gender. I am particularly interested in how cities and regulatory departments weigh considerations around property rights, resident privacy, housing equity, and criminal punishment in implementing regulatory enforcement. For example, one government worker told me about how he caught a first-generation immigrant woman hosting illegally after she came up in his monthly data pulls from an STR corporation. He had the option of giving her a fine, but instead asked her to come to his office so he could walk her through registering her home. It turned out she had just moved to the U.S. that year and was out on probation for running what the worker called "a happy hour massage place." She was worried about compromising her immigration status, but the worker assured her she would not be in trouble for working with the regulatory office. A few months later, she had gotten her STR certificate and was filing quarterly

reports at the short-term regulatory office. She told the worker that the ability to focus on STRing enabled her to get away from the people who brought her into sex work and “allowed her to keep her nose clean.” Moments like this are common and show why STR regulatory enforcement is a key site for understanding the interrelation of technology, labor, racial inequality, policing, and housing justice.

The current state of STR literature focuses more on what STR platforms do prior to regulations and less on what happens after STR regulations are implemented. The combination of city enforcement, the shift to intermediary rentals among STR hosts, the selective use of carceral apparatuses to enforce STR regulations, and the uneven landscape of funding and city capacity offers an opportunity for scholars to understand how urban hegemony is sustained after it is shifted. Likewise, the international connections between different STR offices are a topic worthy of further research. During my interview with Omar, a San Francisco-based STR regulator, he told me about how government employees across the country and in Europe began to speak to each other about best practices for how to regulate STRs. This transnational contact helped people new to the regulatory game figure out best practices while putting cities in touch with each other regarding STRs. These transnational connections and flows between different city governments is another future area of STR study.

A second future study for directions could be the larger STR ecosystem. STRs are more than just a host, the platform, and the guest. A young white woman host managed an STR management company sent me visualizations of the larger STR ecosystem that her management company relied on (see Figure 5). These visualizations show a small subsection of the market of STRs more broadly. This property manager explained how she automated her property management business. She told me that she managed twenty-five properties "from Seattle to Spain" and only really had direct property management work when something went wrong. When I asked her to explain how she navigated the various regional regulations and the differentiation of property types, she told me about her product flow. First, she used a "loophole" through Airbnb's co-hosting feature. The Co-Host is someone who manages an Airbnb for a host who owns the property. The co-hosting loophole allows the co-host to manage unlimited properties around the world without having to buy or own properties outright. Second, she stays away from particular markets where regulations are especially burdensome and where her business would come under particular scrutiny. Third, she employs a host of contractors and services ranging from a cleaning company to a booking company to an on-call helpline. This allows her to only touch the property when something goes wrong with the guest's stay, when her and her assistant must vet a guest remotely, or when there is a labor dispute between her and one of the companies/contractors she hires. She told me a story of how she had to go to court in Albany, New York because there was a discrepancy between what a cleaner thought she was being paid

and what the company paid her. Finally, she explained that while she was a small-sized property management company, she knew that larger companies got help from Airbnb and other platforms by having high-ranking hosts and guests sent their way. This STR automation allowed her to become a success story in the "Finance Independence, Retire Early" movement — an attempt to retire early by cutting costs, working to accumulate capital, and then having that capital generate enough wealth so that one can live with minimal labor. My gut is to write this host off as the worst kind of parasitic landlord. She owns nothing and outsources most of her labor to subcontractors. However, this STR property manager portrayed herself as a savvy entrepreneur who cared for the properties and brought tourist capital to an otherwise overlooked neighborhood, a familiar Airbnb talking point. She saw this life under threat when jurisdictions passed municipal regulations and didn't want whole buildings being evicted for STRs. She wished that there was a global STR jurisdictional standard that allowed her to operate her business smoothly and create a mix of STRs and long-term rentals in multi-unit buildings. This broader STR ecosystem and the labor and monetization it makes possible is an intriguing area for future study. Work by Bosma and Doorn (2022) and Cocola-Gant et. al. (2021) provide promising examples of this research in the European context, but further work should be done on U.S.-based impacts.

Finally, it is worth examining areas of housing justice that have gone unaddressed in the STR regulatory framework. As I have written elsewhere, in 2017, a white Airbnb host in California told Dyne Suh that she wouldn't let Suh stay in her apartment because Suh was Asian. Suh was left crying, stranded houseless on Big Bear Mountain in the middle of a snowstorm. Suh's case wasn't unique. Viral hashtag movements like #AirbnbWhileBlack surfaced anti-Black discrimination against hosts and guests on the home sharing platform. Following these accusations, Airbnb worked with the ACLU, Color of Change, and other racial justice non-profits to create a corporate non-discrimination policy and committed to an internal research project on non-discrimination called Project Lighthouse. More broadly, home sharing platforms have sought to mitigate discrimination by creating user standards of conduct, moderation, and careful analyses and presentations of user data (e.g., Airbnb found hiding a marginalized user's profile picture increases bookings). However, five years after these efforts, discrimination on Airbnb persists. As recently as October 2022, Wandile Mthiyane, a Black South African entrepreneur, filed a discrimination claim against his Airbnb host — a white South African woman who had a "racist dog" that harassed Mthiyane during his stay. Airbnb determined that Mthiyane's complaints didn't meet their non-discrimination policy standards and allowed the host to continue unabated. Cases like this show how discrimination persists on Airbnb in spite of the corporations' efforts. A future line of research could work to understand how racism becomes a durable feature of platforms and communities through an ethnographic study of user experiences with the Airbnb app, Airbnb's response team, and state actors that handle discrimination.

Figure 5: Airbnb's Initial Public Offering Announcement

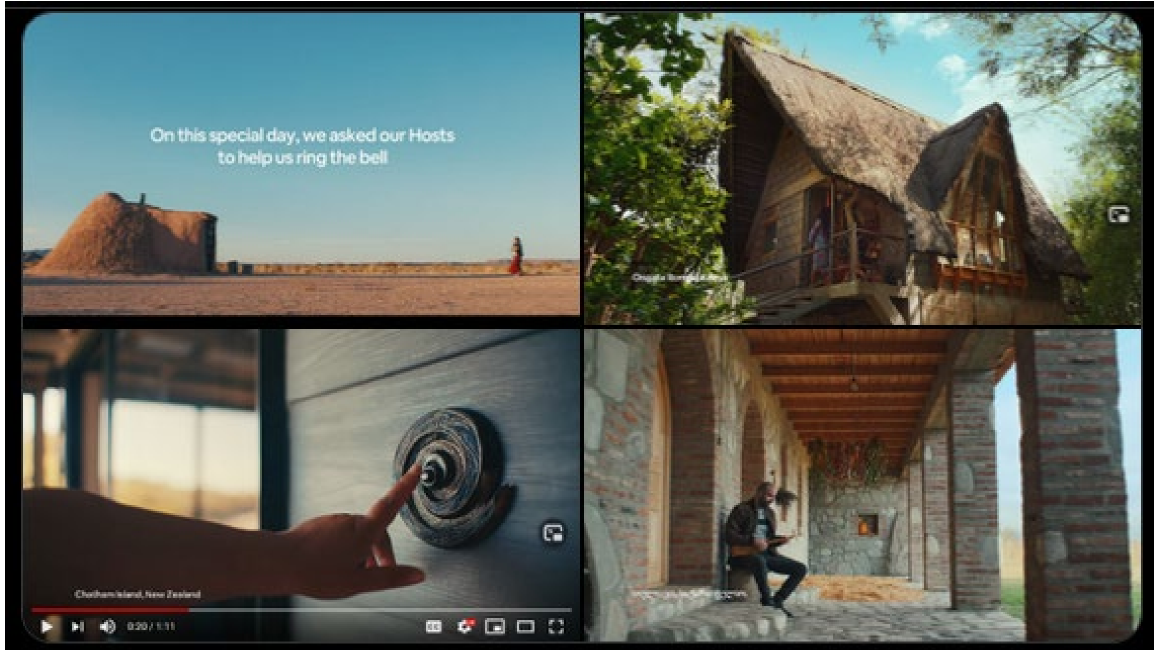


Figure 6: Jason Shuman's (2020) Short-Term and Vacation Rental Market Map

Afterword

When you study emergent technological manifestations like platforms and algorithms, it is only a matter of time before they become historical objects. As I write this afterword in 2023, artificial intelligence is quickly eclipsing the platform and algorithm as a cause of concern for industry, academics, governments, and social movement actors. I think that as we theorize these emergent and fast-paced trends, we risk losing what's so important about them. When we move from once world-changing objects towards new career-defining and paycheck-earning technological marvels that threaten to overturn society as we know it, what gets missed is just how brittle these technological arrangements of capitalism truly are. People working in solidarity, people coming together in new ways to challenge technology's unimpeded disruption, it is this that is so important to contesting all future techno-capitalist incursions in the fight for our collective liberation.

We don't have to start from scratch. Social movements have shown that they can respond to constantly shifting arrangements of capital. This should give us hope in an affective time where loss and pessimism about our leftist formations are widespread. The STR regulatory debates and the vulnerability of Airbnb present an optimistic path forward: one that may not overturn existing society entirely but does reveal how people can stand up to a Colonial Racial Capitalist Stack that tries to infiltrate every aspect of our lives.

We have leverage. Our movement forebearers and we ourselves have built it through decades of struggle. We know how to use it and we must never give it up.

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