Planning Theory & Practice ›

Volume 20, 2019 - Issue 3

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Pages 423-446 | Published online: 03 Jul 2019

Cite this article https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2019.1629197

Introduction

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Over the past year, taxi drivers around the world have protested the appearance of ride-hailing apps Uber and Lyft, creating massive traffic slowdowns in London, Warsaw, Hong Kong, Paris, and Berlin. In the most extreme and tragic incidents, some taxi drivers have committed suicide publicly, naming economic desperation brought on by competition with app services as the reason. Proponents of the platform apps point to consumer convenience and lower (albeit heavily subsidized) costs, blaming the excessive regulation of the taxicab industry for its stagnation, but rarely speak to the cost for driver workers. Meanwhile, the ride-hail companies are fighting legal challenges around the world over using 'freelance' contracts to circumvent labour laws. As Uber and Lyft make their IPO debut on the stock exchange, drivers for the services in the U.S. have staged a strike, asking customers to boycott the apps in support of their protests about minimum pay and their status as independent contractors, not employees with full benefits and protections. Whether working for the disrupter or disrupted, the people providing the actual labour of driving customers are trying to address working conditions and wages in a new 'platform economy' city. In the previous issue's Interface, Planning and the So-Called 'Sharing' Economy, authors from around the world considered the challenges of regulating platform apps based on their impacts on neighbourhoods, traffic, and the services they provide. In this issue, scholars and practitioners address how planning might consider these sharing platforms as they define work and the urban economy. The essays describe what the work of the sharing economy – both platform and informal – really is; consider the workers' status as employees, and make a case for planners to engage more with the economic development aspects of growing platform app market.

Zwick and Spicer's and Kim's essays are drawn from in-depth qualitative interviews with drivers for informal taxi services. These pieces explore the conditions of work, and what real alternatives are available for drivers, particularly for immigrants in the U.S. The 'better than what I was doing before' experience of drivers in Zwick and Spicer's study suggests that economic restructuring and a loss of stable employment points out that as cities accept the ‘disruptive’ ride-hail apps’ presence despite their attempts to evade regulation, immigrant drivers in Los Angeles who were called ‘bandits’ are facing deteriorating wages with increased competition, while still being considered illegal. Kerzhner, considering home-sharing via Airbnb, asks the question; what work happens when the platform doesn’t acknowledge workers at all? While there are explicit debates about the drivers for ride-hail services, the hosts of Airbnb are a hidden labour force. The job of readying, renting, and resetting rooms and units often falls to women, whose efforts are under-compensated and may even disrupt formal employment.

As Baber argues, these shifts towards flexible or ‘gig’ jobs are growing much more significantly with the rise of platforms during a moment when there are many workers looking to supplement unstable or low-paying jobs. The gig economy, she notes, benefits platform companies far more than it does workers or cities. Green takes this argument further to make the case for planners, specifically, to be far more active in the debate over platform apps as employers with responsibilities to labour, not just as go-betweens for customers and independent contractors. He views the question of jobs as integral to economic development, with planners taking a lead role envisioning equitable and sustainable urban economies. Finally, activist and practitioner dominic t. moulden describes the project of worker cooperatives – both in his organization in Washington, D.C. and their inspirations around the world. As the presence of ‘co-working’ spaces proliferates in his gentrifying city, he views the cooperative movement as an antidote to increasing competition for gigs – a way to plan a shared, sustainable economy.

This two-issue Interface section has focused on the rise of the ‘sharing’ platforms that have become so prominent in how we live in cities – affecting transportation, housing, work, and community. These apps have grown quickly, and planning research and practice are now catching up with the wide-ranging impacts of their presence in cities. Authors have made important distinctions between ‘sharing’ and informal economic activities and the technology platforms used to make connections, and between the potential for wealth-building in locally rooted exchanges and the extraction of global technology companies. The cross-national examples presented point to the universality of the issues of planning for a platform city; they also provide opportunities for scholars and practitioners to ask how in their local economic and regulatory context, they might use examples from abroad.

Blight or Remedy: Understanding Ridehailing's Role in the Precarious "Gig Economy"

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A new form of industrial relations, the 'Gig Economy', has rapidly displaced traditional labor-employment relations. In this new gig economy, firms, predominantly those with digital origins, are dependent upon the fleeting hired help of independent contractors, where employment is now often measured in minutes. There is no industry that embodies this scenario better than ride-hailing, the platform economy transportation-for-hire service in which Uber holds over two-thirds of the US market-share as of December 2018 (Molla, 2018).

With all the criticism of platform firms, like Uber, we set out to understand why workers willingly enter into precarious employment arrangements, particularly in a strong economy where there is often little shortage of alternative employment opportunities that offer more stability. When asking Uber drivers about their past and current employment, along with their future ambitions, however, we began to notice an odd pattern: the archetypal narrative that Uber is prime driver of precarious employment (Zwick, 2017) – by turning stable taxi-driver jobs into unstable gigs – is, at best, incomplete. Earlier studies on Uber addressed open questions on safety (Feeney, 2015), inequality (Rogers, 2015), consumer protection (Koopman et al., 2015), and policy disruption (Spicer et al., 2019), but lost in all the discussion is the question; Why do Uber drivers drive for the platform?

We decided to delve deeper into this question by asking Uber drivers directly. We began these dialogues on a small scale, conducting 14 interviews with Uber drivers between January 2018 and March 2018 in Toronto, Canada. By doing so, we began to question our underlying assumptions derived from the academic literature, that ridehailing firms, such as Uber are merely a cause of precariousness in the platform economy and are actively undermining the nature of work. A second smaller sample of five additional interviews, conducted in November and December 2018 in New York City, reinforced our initial observation: although Uber may be a cause of precarious employment, it is just as much a tool for workers to survive bouts of precariousness, some of which are require flexibility. Although through some workers' eyes, Uber appears to part of the blight spreading through the modern economy, other workers see it as a remedy for an already precarious economy. In short, the relationship between platform firms and drivers may not necessarily be always exploitative, as some may wish to portray.

The barrier to entry to driving on the Uber platform is low. In most jurisdictions, merely having a license, a smartphone, and a clean criminal record is enough to begin as an Uber driver. In some circumstances, Uber is able to provide the vehicle, or financing to acquire one, if the driver does not already own one (for a fee, of course). Some jurisdictions now require driver-training, vehicle inspections, and other government mandates to protect consumers and align this new transportation-for-hire service with pre-existing taxi regulation.

Uber provides drivers with an immense amount of flexibility in scheduling. Drivers are able to choose when they log onto and off from the platform, controlling how long and under what conditions they work. While this flexibility can be interpreted by some as negative (Bajwa et al., 2018), in that those logging on to drive with Uber lack employee benefits, consistent wages, and job security – particularly in contrast to the taxi drivers that they are displacing – some drivers see the situation very differently.

From our interviews, all but two mentioned the flexibility of Uber as a central reason for driving for the platform. Because Uber drivers have no set schedule and control when they want to earn money, the flexibility allowed nearly everyone in our sample to concurrently work another – potentially, more personally fulfilling – job. Additionally, three different Uber drivers – one a realtor, another a financial advisor, and a third a small business entrepreneur – handed us their business cards and pitched their services, clearly noting that they used Uber to help find additional clients and customers. Uber allowed many in our sample to fill income gaps, or to find new leads during bouts of precariousness in their careers.

The drivers interviewed seemed very cognizant of the potentially inconsistent pay of Uber. Mishel (2018) found those driving for Uber earn, on average, $11.77 (USD) an hour, far lower than the average taxi cab driver and low-paid service occupation workers, and after taxes, fees, and vehicle expenses are considered, the average Uber hourly wage fell further to $10.87 (USD). Our interviewees acknowledged the need for surge pricing – Uber's practice of using higher fares during peak riding times – to often determined strategies to maximize their fares. Two different respondents mentioned they only work select shifts for Uber, morning rush-hour and late evening accordingly, to maximize surge-pricing. Another described the tactics he took to try to maximize airport trips, which tend to be longer drives with less down-time between hails. As such, many of those in our sample with some experience driving for Uber found ways to maximize their earnings, where possible, using the platform.

Most part-time drivers acknowledged that Uber was probably not a better alternative to their full-time job, but rather allowed them to quickly exchange labor for cash. For some drivers, however, Uber allowed them to move from a poorly compensated precarious job to a more consistent, higher paying one. One of the drivers interviewed, who previously worked as a Domino’s pizza delivery driver, noted that he felt the work was similar, but with Uber was now working with better hours and better pay. Likewise, a former retail worker in New York City, who enjoyed the night hours, discovered he could earn a better living by driving fewer night hours to earn the same income.

We also heard that drivers appreciate the autonomy that the platform provides. One respondent recently quit his stable job as a grocery store clerk to drive full-time for Uber. He complained that his former manager often scheduled night and double-shifts for him on short-notice, and then yelled at him and threatened to fire him if he protested. Now, he enjoys shorter hours and the only ‘boss’ he has to report to is a smartphone application. After he quit his original job, the grocery store offered him a promotion to Assistant Manager, were he to return to work, which he less than politely declined. Another respondent, who was a Middle Eastern immigrant with a heavy accent, cited a lack of discrimination from the platform as a benefit. He felt that he had been previously overlooked for hiring and promotion because of his ethnicity, while the app only cared about his driver rating and his willingness to work – allowing merit to make a difference. A few others also mentioned the ‘blindness’ of the app in terms of race, gender, and religion. While there are valid critiques of the equity of labor access in the platform age, particularly for low-skilled workers on the wrong side of the digital divide, there can no doubt be benefits for certain parts of the population. Listening to the experiences of workers can allow for a more holistic look at the choices they weigh up when seeking out work.

Along the same lines, some drivers mentioned the relative politeness of their customers. Some drivers enjoyed talking to their customers; others preferred them to experiences with customers also mentioned it was rare – and did not often last long when it did occur. One driver noted that he had only one customer use a racial slur towards him during his two years of driving for Uber. He did note, however, that customers in his previous job used similar slurs against him on a near daily basis.

The low barrier to entry makes ridesharing not only an easy job to start, but also an easy job to leave. Cook et al. (2018) found that "more than 60% of those who start driving are no longer active on the platform six months later." Many might be taking a 'break' for months at a time as they found a better job, or merely a better gig. However, considering Uber constantly recruits, the vast majority probably 'quit' – an odd term considering they were never legally employed to begin with – soon after starting as they determined driving for the platform did not suit them. Those that we interviewed were overwhelmingly happy with the service, however, there is an obvious 'survivor bias' occurring. Those who were happy kept driving, while those who were not, simply stopped.

Almost every driver we interviewed, except one, had been driving for at least a year. That single exception among our sample had only joined the platform two weeks earlier. The interviewee had mixed feelings about Uber. While they openly weighed the good and the bad of working for the platform, they were unsure how long they were going to continue to drive for Uber. The respondent was impatiently waiting for something better to come along, but thought this was "good enough in the mean time."

This sentiment sums up how we think Uber is best understood. Those who we interviewed are using Uber to fill gaps in their working life or to complement their earnings elsewhere. Some are using it to help make ends meet, while others are driving occasionally to buy Christmas gifts for their family or saving for large purchases they may not ordinarily be able to afford. They are, for the most part, aware of the precariousness involved in the platform, but view it as a short-term remedy – an opportunity they can occasionally seize until something better happens. But what occurs when nothing better comes along? What if the temporariness of this gig work is only imagined? If all (or, at least substantially more) work becomes precarious, as this appears to be the direction in which the economy is heading. Then there will be nothing better around the corner. What then?

Our work cannot answer that question, but it does provide some clarity as to how conclusive, this brief study challenges some prevailing opinions about Uber's role in the modern economy and perhaps places the role of labor in the platform age into a different light. Ridehailing should not be instantly dismissed as a blight on the labor landscape without further exploring how operators fully utilize and potentially benefit from its existence. Furthermore, as Zwick and Spicer (2018) note, policy-makers and planners should carefully weigh all of the costs and benefits to all of their constituents prior to making any decisions about the platform economy's fate.

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Labour, Gender and Making Rent with Airbnb

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Work in the Gig Economy

How is the shared economy to be understood as a labour practice, within the context of the commodification of the city and displacement of lower income residents? As Airbnb – and other 'gig economy' platforms, as well as zero-hour contracts in formal workplaces become more prevalent, employment patterns shift into a hustle. (Schneider & Harknett, 2017). Based on pilot interviews with renters in Jerusalem (a low-income city with a housing crisis and high demand from tourists for lodgings,) who were active as Airbnb hosts, I argue that gig economy flexibility that offers a structures, limiting many aspects of daily and personal life, including curtailing opportunities for other employment.

The value and impact of this shift is only beginning to be understood. Questions of individual physical and emotional labour, unequal dispersion of benefits and impacts on long-term employment and social mobility can be considered in tandem with the questions of the impact on the city. As jobs and incomes are increasing variable, unreliable and unprotected, and each job – whether through a platform or an employer – is insufficient to make a living, the relative flexibility of gigs is becoming especially attractive in the ability to meld it around other work and other responsibilities, such as child or elder care, education or health needs – and in the case of home-sharing, with a basic need for housing.

Homeshares for Fun and Profit

Airbnb and similar platforms have met with widespread criticism for turning homes serving long-term residents, into hotel rooms serving tourists, raising rents and home prices and furthering displacement and gentrification. Research shows that Airbnb income is driven primarily by commercial Airbnb, entire units using the platform to operate as unregulated hostels or hotels, with no permanent residents and no 'host'.

Arguably, this falls outside of the intended pattern of home-sharing operations, as reflected in the advertising and language used by firms; Airbnb introduces itself as "A community built on sharing … millions of hosts and travelers choose to create a free Airbnb account so they can list their space and book unique accommodation anywhere in the world." (Airbnb, 2018.) This, rather than the use of internet platforms to avoid state regulation, supposedly represents the benign principles of the sharing economy, as anti-commercial, community-minded, equitable and sustainable, but there are widely recognized tensions between the 'sharing' language and ideology performed by these economic practices and their capitalist practice and unequal distribution (Richardson, 2015).

While regulation and community backlash are slowly catching up with commercial Airbnb, the 'intended' form has met with less scrutiny. Commercial Airbnb is supposed to be fundamentally different from the 'real' host, who lets an otherwise empty room, or their whole home while away on their own holiday. This 'real' host makes an extra income out of nothing, incurring no actual or opportunity costs, by using a space that otherwise would stay empty. Interactions with guests are presented as being cost-less or even valuable.

Even as cities move to restrict or ban Airbnb, provisions are made for home-sharing and hosting to continue. In Berlin, a ban enforced by 100,000 Euro fines applies only to commercial renters – partially owner-occupied rentals are entirely exempt. San Francisco has limited short-term rentals to 90 days per year – unless owner-occupied. Santa Monica has banned whole-home rentals, but continues to allow home-sharing. Boston's tax for entire homes in the short rentals market is $1000, but only $25 for shared home rentals. (AirDNA, 2017)

I would argue, however, that the home-sharing side of the practice too deserves consideration through the lens of de-formalizing urban labour and spiralling housing costs. Short-term rentals are more profitable than long-term ones, and it is necessary to identify, characterize and quantify this added value. It appears to emerge from the shorter lease (and thus higher risk to the lessee), but also in the furnishing and setting up of the existing household, the ease of access and marketing of the space, and the booking, directing, meeting, explaining, hosting and cleaning of it. In other words, the labour of the Airbnb host.

For some Airbnb hosts, this labour may be marginal, and even, as intended, desirable. However, based on interviews, I found that it is also work – time-consuming, physically laborious, and especially emotionally stressful and unpredictable. Not only through hours of labour placed directly into hosting, but also through the loss of the home as a genuinely private, personal space.

For renters faced with rising housing costs, the extra income to be gained from Airbnb allows them to stay in locations that would otherwise be out of reach. Hosts would prefer to live alone or with permanent roommates, but can afford neither. The income from Airbnb allows them to lower their share of the rent (as opposed to splitting it equally with a roommate) and remain in the area, but at the cost of significant time and physical and emotional labour.

Embodied Labour of Host and Home

Writing in 2011, McDowell points out that all work is embodied, "a fleshy person has to turn up every day", but in the case of Airbnb, this may no longer be entirely true;

no face-to-face human interaction, rendering the 'host' an entirely digital presence. Who are the hosts taking advantage of this kind of reduction of labour and dis-embodiment? It is precisely the small, 'authentic' hosts, who rent out spaces in their own homes, who have not entirely automated the process and must maintain an embodied presence to handle both the logistical and emotional interactions with their guests/customers. This labour and these interactions require closer scrutiny in order for us to understand the implications for Airbnb hosts' lives, particularly with regard to gender, age, class, family status, other employment and their own housing status.

My preliminary interviews suggest some troubling hypotheses. Being able to maintain a full Airbnb schedule requires a combination of flexible and part-time employment, the shifting about and even skipping of paid work, and drawing extensively on favours and social capital from family and friends. (At the same time, it is never, on its own, sufficient to make a living.) Emotional and social labour – performances of friendliness, hospitality, cleanliness, homeliness, authenticity, elegance and constant availability – are also crucial to maintaining good reviews and thus being able to continue to draw visitors.

Women appear to be required to dedicate more labour, and make more allowances, in this regard. A wide body of literature identifies feminized, embodied labour practices requiring an emotional and social presence, and it is unsurprising that Airbnb hosting fits this pattern. Women are both socially inclined to provide more embodied labour, and are also held to higher standards in its provision by guests. Women are also more likely to be rent-stressed, thanks to lower average incomes and over-representation in precarious labour.

Some hosts and homes are less privileged in the performance of hospitality – through location and styling of the home (smaller, poorer, less matching the class aesthetic with its target audience) or through the body itself (non-white, disabled). In order to earn, either the space and the individual must be policed into acceptability at ever greater expense, or the hosting must be more extensive and more conditional – renting at a cheaper price, more often, with more amenities for less money. Hosts increase efforts asymptotically towards elusive ideas of 'acceptability.'

Hosts in this situation are reliant on the income from Airbnb and required to maintain schedules adapted to meeting and accommodating visitors. The hosts interviewed –

passed up interviewing for 9–5 jobs and risked losing their jobs through lateness and poor preparation caused by the need to take care of unpredictable and stressful Airbnb guests. In the long term, they might be forced to reorient their professional trajectories, struggling to balance the requirements of good hosting with already precarious employment situations. It is difficult to assess the hourly value of Airbnb work but – thanks to bloated rents and deflated wages – it may in practice be more remunerative than work requiring more education, having higher status and greater potential for social mobility.

The Price of the City

At its most extreme, this re-emergence of the labour-intensive housekeeper role, particularly amongst women, may be translating high rents into stymied career progress and even long-term labour market disadvantage. In the short term, Airbnb is an expression of the gig economy, part of the pattern of de-formalized employment, where workers must carry risk without any potential return on investment. Renting Airbnb space is becoming another arrow in a quiver of income strategies, moving away from a 'standard' employment pattern of formal employment with a single employer and well defined and predictable remuneration, benefits and protections.

As McDowell observes (2011), women's movement into the formal, salaried workplace in the second half of the 20th century both contributed to and coincided with changes to formal employment, but also changed women's lives. As well as independent incomes, women were able to access the workplace as a social space of interactions, networks and connections that can contribute to social and economic capital and mobility, as well as emotional and personal well-being.

Airbnb (and arguably other forms of the sharing economy) break this down in literal ways. The woman's home is once again the workplace; its quality measured in some part by her domesticity, cleanliness and display of hospitality, both in person and in the digital avatar she presents through the platform. This is not a side effect, but intrinsic to the sharing economy – it requires workers to capitalize on their existing home, car, or person with extremely limited input from their 'employer'/facilitating app, negating the social and communal experience of the salaried workplace – literally, a collective, employer-provided place.

The city itself becomes the object of consumption, and the very act of being in the city is precarious and conditional. For some Airbnb hosts, at least, hosting is a necessary strategy for accessing the employment, education and social opportunities of the city – but their reliance on it requires a restructuring of their lives and labour precisely in ways that limit their ability to fully take advantage of these opportunities.

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The Gentrification of 'Sharing': From Bandit Cab to Ride Share Tech

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Many years ago, as a graduate student at the University of California Los Angeles, I worked with the late, great Jackie Leavitt on a project with the newly formed LA Taxi Workers Alliance (LATWA, 2005). As a young Korean American scholar, working with various workers' centers in Los Angeles (the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance, the Labor-Strategy Center, the Garment Workers Center, and the UCLA Labor Center) and as a child of the city who had traversed the parallel corridors running from Korean ethnoburbs to Koreatown, I was fluent (enough) in Korean but also fluent in the language of informality that dominated these ethnic networks.

For the LATWA project, I worked with Dr. Leavitt, interviewing Korean speaking taxi drivers for a report for the UC Transportation Center (Blasi and Leavitt, 2006) on the 'entrepreneurship' of taxi cab drivers, and the history of attempts to form a union from the 1980s through the early 2000s. From a labor perspective this was an important across the country. In particular, one driver's story stood out to me, and later informed the ethnographic process for my dissertation (UCLA, 2011) on the importance of Los Angeles' informal economy. More importantly it revealed that the informal economy should not be seen as a secondary, lesser, shadow network, rife with exploitation, but rather, for many, it is a critical survival (and 'thrive-al') economy that is resource rich.

The driver I met that day, 'Sam,' was a frustrated Korean immigrant in his late 40s, doing things the 'legal' way, and working as a taxi driver for a large taxi company. Sam's main frustration was that taxi drivers had a hard time earning a living wage in the structure as owner-operators for large companies, but also that as a Korean driver, he competed with people doing things the 'wrong' way – meaning a large network of Korean immigrant drivers who worked as, what were then called, 'bandit' cab drivers.

Out of respect, rather than 'bandit' cab drivers, I use the term co-ethnic drivers. Korean co-ethnic drivers work for smaller, unlicensed Korean companies in Los Angeles, giving rides exclusively within the Korean American urban and suburban spaces of Southern California. (See Table 1 for a sampling of rates charged by co-ethnic Korean drivers. The table shows flat fees by location from Koreatown to the various Korean ethnoburbs of Southern California.) The term itself, 'bandit cab,' a common moniker given to this type of ride-sharing before the apps existed, tells us everything we need to know about how cities and 'official' cab companies treated both the drivers and the riders who rode with them. Much like the City of Los Angeles' complicated regulation and policing of street vendors – a decade-long struggle by activists to legalize street vending (Pincetl, 1994; Vallianatos, 2014), planners and policy-makers have for a very long time treated many immigrants who tried to 'share', like criminals. From both a labor organizing and a planning perspective, co-ethnic cabs were a disruptive force to be dealt with in the pre-Lyft and pre-Uber era. This hidden industry was seen as a problem, and was treated as clearly, unequivocally 'illegal' as it was subject to none of the rules and regulations that informed the traditional taxi industry.

Table 1. Korean cab pricing for travel within greater Los Angeles.

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This time, not for their illegality, but because many Korean immigrants, especially undocumented Korean immigrants, spoke of how they were able to utilize co-ethnic Korean drivers as a 'safe' mode of transportation in post 9–11 Los Angeles. When buses became targets of ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement), and taxis remained too expensive, using underground Korean drivers were the ways in which immigrants learned to 'ride-share' – before ride-sharing apps existed.

> "The taxi system here is set up really well here [Koreatown, LA] – though of course the taxi system is illegal, too. Yellow cab or legal cabbies are really expensive; tick, tick, tick, the prices go up. My cabs, I can get from home to work for about 4 or 5 dollars a trip. The buses used to have free transfers, so for a bus from work to home, I had to take two buses, but now they make you pay twice, so it's 1.50 × 2 = $3 but I have to walk about 10 to 15 minutes to get home. Why should I risk that danger [of deportation] for 1 dollar when I can pay the dollar more and make sure I get home. So most people I know use these taxis. So, you know governments and cities, banning it, doesn't stop people from doing it. Because there is a need. Where there is a need people do it." – Author interview with Undocumented Korean Taxi-Rider

In empirical terms, any Korean-speaking person in greater Los Angeles county can access informal co-ethnic cabs with less than what is needed to access the predominant mode of platform app 'ride-sharing' – a smart phone, credit card, and verified social media identity. For many monolingual Koreans in Los Angeles, the old sharing – via easily accessed contact with drivers – still remains the primary mode of sharing in transportation. I have collected many of these cards and cigarette lighters (another common mode for cabs' advertising in Koreatown), and this particular one was received while dining in Koreatown on 3/29/2019. (See Figure 1). Now people with access to English have learned to use the mainstream apps to ride-share. The platform ride-share industry has become a larger policy problem to be reckoned with – although generally, cities welcomed this particular kind of sharing, working quickly to decriminalize the extractive platform sharing economy, in ways that are still to be done with the informal immigrant economy.

Figure 1. Front of business card advertising Korean co-ethnic cab services.

The extractive sharing economy is no less exploitative than that which has always been imagined and assumed about the ethnic economy or the informal economy: that drivers are driven into the dark to a place where wages are low, hours are long, and the potential conditions exist for employers (usually ‘co-ethnic’ employers) to exploit linguistically isolated populations (Kim, 1999; Hum, 2000). Some recent studies on Uber suggest that despite its visibility, the new platform economy does not offer driver-workers better working conditions. Even with a more exclusive, primarily native-born (up to 75% in the case of one study), ‘driver-partners’ as Uber calls its ‘employees,’ the working conditions for drivers have deteriorated (Washington Post, 2019). Over a short period of time between 2017 and 2019, there have been accumulated costs (by the worker) to participate in the formal sharing economy – including additional incurred debts through sub-prime auto lending, and lower overall wages earned (Washington Post, 2017).

This ‘gentrification’ of sharing has seen a move from low-income Angelenos’ dependence on co-ethnic cabs as an alternative to over-policed public transit networks and the high costs of taxi cabs or other private drivers, to the use of ride-sharing platforms by middle and upper-class professional classes. One version of sharing has increasingly become legalized, while the other continues to be left in the dark. As the benefits of ‘sharing’ become legalized, commercialized, and capitalized, there will be real consequences in continuing to ignore the practices of immigrant sharing that so many Angelenos are still dependent on.

Some of these consequences may mean that as ‘bandit’ cabs are pushed further underground, price cutting (already happening in the more legitimized extractive sharing economy) may lead to more dangerous, risky or underpaid relationships within the informal sharing economy. Planning for sharing and changes to transportation policy may be helpful in opening up one end of the sharing spectrum while remaining in complete ignorance of a sizeable market for co-ethnic sharing that often continues to remain illegible and untranslated (see Figure 2). Bringing fresh attention to the ‘old’ ways of sharing that still exist today expands our ability to know what happens in communities that continue to have limited access to the app-based sharing economy, and also to pay attention to how sharing behaviors in some linguistically isolated communities may change as a result of the new and emergent forms of sharing.

Figure 2. Rear of business card advertising Korean Co-Ethnic Cab Services (Pricing has been translated into Table 1 above).

귀빈택시

지역	요금	
	싱글	대리
다운타운	$9	$20
글렌데일	$15	$30
파사데나	$20	$35
라크라센타	$20	$35
버뱅크	$20	$40
가디나	$20	$35
세리토스	$25	$45
플러턴	$30	$50
벨리	$30	$50
부에나팍	$30	$50
하시엔다	$30	$50
가든그로브	$40	$70
얼바인	$50	$80

커 머 스 왕 복 요 금 $ 30

산마뉴엘 카지노	(왕복)	$130
모롱고 카지노	(왕복)	$150
페창가 카지노	(왕복)	$150

4시간 대기

Display full size

Notes on contributor

Anna Joo Kim's research is focused on immigrant participation in the informal economy and ethnic labor markets, as well as community economic development and health outcomes related to the built environment. Email: anna.kim@sdsu.edu

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The 'Sharing Economy'? Precarious Labor in Neoliberal Cities

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The 'sharing economy' has certainly gained a lot of attention over the last few years. Through the use of app-based platforms, people have the ability to use their personal assets to gain income. With few exceptions, anyone with a suitable car, maintenance skills or extra space in their home, can gain income through Uber, TaskRabbit or Airbnb. The term 'sharing economy' seems to stem from the ability of private citizens to sell their services or assets through an internet or app-based platform. Yet, there is something crucial missing from this categorization of this emerging economy; precarious labor and the impact on cities. By calling the sale of personal assets or services the 'sharing economy', the broader processes of growing labor market precarity are obscured. The 'sharing economy' is complex and embedded with social relationships, namely the 'flexiblization' of labor. This relationship is not new, but rather rises under precarious labor market conditions within neoliberal cities as a response to economic, political and social restructuring (Zwick, 2018).

On-demand, short-term or temporary work have been a part of the labor market since at least WWII. While temporary help agencies trace back to the 1940's, their rapid expansion began in the 1970's, coinciding with social, economic and political shifts (Kalleberg, 2011). Jobs ranging from clerical to warehouse work could be acquired by using a temporary help agency to place you with employment opportunities on a temporary, on-demand and short term basis. Responding to accumulation pressures, firms began to tap into the cost saving, and subsequently profit producing, markets of temporary labor. By the 1990's bricks and mortar temporary agencies could be found in most major urban areas (Peck & Theodore, 2001). Marketed as a beneficial employment workers and the employee seeking work. Workers can pick up jobs as needed and conversely, firms adjust their employee base as fluctuating production needs dictate.

Comparatively, recent advances in technology have resulted in a rapid influx of app-based platforms which provide services on-demand, sometimes referred to as 'gig' work. This emerging form of work acquisition parallels the employment relationship of the temporary help industry. Job seekers use their smart phones to access apps which allow them to pick up jobs as they become available (Healy, Nicholson & Pekarek, 2017). Take for example Uber; drivers will log into their Uber app which will put them in contact with customers seeking a ride. Drivers will then 'pick up' the rider and drive them to their destination. The driver will then wait for an alert from their app for their next employment opportunity. Therefore, neither the temp nor gig worker has a guarantee of income, a permanent connection to the labor market or employer provided protections (Zwick, 2018), ultimately resulting in precarity and exploitation.

As scholars have been quick to point out, gig and temporary labor are linked with growing inequality and insecurity for workers on the one hand and subsequently capital accumulation for firms on the other (Scholz, 2017; Standing 2011; Theodore, 2003; Zwick, 2018). Temporary and gig laborers often go for long periods of time without health insurance, paid leave, and a stable income (Berg & Johnston, 2019; Purser, 2012). Further parallels emerge between the temp and gig industries, as they both extract profit from workers, use mechanisms of surveillance and control and function as a job matching service (Gonos, 1997; Healy et al., 2017). Meanwhile these flexible forms of labor continue to grow as new industries emerge, particularly in urban areas (Peck & Theodore, 2001; Theodore, 2003).

The gig-economy has expanded quicker than regulatory processes, creating an exploitative 'grey area' where companies can avoid the costs associated with employees (Bailey, 2016; Gurran, 2017). Some regulatory battles waged by workers against gig companies have seen success and been backed by union representation (Johnston, 2016), while others have seen rulings in favor of the billion dollar companies (Hanks, 2017; McCormick, 2016). Interestingly, these cases have often begun at and been determined by city or regional courts (Hanks, 2017; McCormick, 2016; Sisson, 2016), pointing towards important connections with urban areas. For example, in 2016, London Uber drivers with the support of the GMB union, won the right to be classified as employees instead of independent contractors, resulting in protections for these share companies have been required to pay a higher minimum base-pay of approximately $17 an hour (Santus, 2018), a rate that drivers in other cities are unlikely to reach without a mandated minimum wage (Berg & Johnston, 2019). Conversely, recent rulings in Miami went in favor of the gig-industry, as a worker was denied unemployment benefits after he was shut out of a ride-sharing app, essentially firing him from his job (Hanks, 2017). These examples highlight the role of cities in mediating or mitigating the impacts of the gig economy.

Beyond the regulatory connections to cities, these flexible forms of labor rely on a concentration of workers and customers; factors typical of urban areas. Reflected in the geography of low-wage temp agencies, areas that lack job opportunities and hold high unemployment rates are prime locations for ‘hiring halls’. Temp agencies have a vested interest in being located closest to their product; unemployed workers. Locating near swathes of folks with a lack of employment options allows for temp agencies to provide on-demand workers for their clients with ease (Peck & Theodore, 2001; Purser, 2012). Similarly, with the increase in app-based on-demand service platforms, concentrations of clients and available workers become crucial for successful operation for companies such as Uber, Wag, Task Rabbit or Insta-cart. For example, Uber, a company that boasts personal on-demand drivers in just a few minutes, would have a difficult time operating efficiently and as advertised in more rural or suburban areas with considerable sprawl. Large geographic gaps between customers and workers make this business model less viable, particularly when considering a company such as Uber or Lyft who provide services at a fraction of the cost of their Taxi Cab counterparts.

In addition to the spatial dynamics of the gig industry, broader labor market precarity is revealed as an integral component for workers who rely on gig work as supplemental or primary income (Berg & Johnston, 2019). Workers who have stable, secure and well paid jobs have little need to earn extra cash by driving for Uber in their spare time, posting their apartment on Airbnb when out of town, or waiting at a staffing agency for the afternoon, seeking a job placement. Therefore, these instances point to urban areas as an important realm from which to examine the growing flexiblization of labor. Important questions arise from the recent emergence of gig work: What role do cities play in the growth of this flexible labor? And what is the geographic relationship to the rise in gig and temporary labor?

Complicit within neoliberalization, cities across the United States have engaged in

Neoliberalization shapes how cities respond to labor market restructuring; often sandwiched between global capital and local business interests, cities have to decide how and when to act. As the interests of capital shape the geography of cities, the process transpires in decidedly uneven ways. Integral to uneven development are the state institutions intervening to provide a favorable regulatory landscape for capital accumulation (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). Labor markets at the city level are produced by patterns of uneven development which result from neoliberal governance and ultimately, develop unevenly as well (Peck & Theodore, 2001).

While this interaction can be taken as an unintended consequence, there are additional intentional manipulations of the labor market working to drive down unionized and stable employment while valorizing flexible labor markets. The recent battle between Uber and the city of Austin can be seen as evidence of this interplay. In 2016, Uber and Lyft left Austin after legislation was passed requiring regulations of transport companies, including stricter background checks and security measures. Prior to the passage of legislation, Uber invested over $8m in advertising and campaigning against the proposed measures. Once the legislation passed, Uber and Lyft abruptly stopped service, which also meant they abruptly eliminated jobs (Sisson, 2016). Recently, with the passage of state-wide legislation, Uber and Lyft have returned to Austin sans stricter background checks and increased security measures (Sisson, 2017). This example reveals a complex relationship between regulatory bodies, cities and flexible labor markets, all of which are concealed by terming this the ‘sharing economy.’

Across cities, unions are under attack, full-time, stable and well paid employment opportunities are limited, labor markets are de-regulated in favor of capital and social welfare is shifted towards corporate tax subsidies creating the conditions under which flexible labor flourishes (Standing, 2011). The rise of flexible labor is a dynamic and complex process and urges a deeper analysis, one that stops using the miscategorization of the ‘sharing economy.’ Scholars should embark on investigating the uneven geography of flexible labor to provide insight into the crucial role of the local state and capital in the manipulation of labor markets. Future research should also seek to understand the overall impact of the rapid expansion of ‘gig’ work and property rentals in urban areas. But the first thing scholars and practitioners should do, is stop calling it the sharing economy.

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Where Is Economic Development in the Platform City?

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In the online sci-tech magazine OneZero, Susie Cagle, a journalist and commentator on Silicon Valley politics and labor practices, offers a retrospective analysis provocatively titled 'The Sharing Economy Was Always A Scam' (Cagle 2019). She describes how early ventures, like the first iteration of Zipcar or CouchSurfing, were more idiosyncratic or collective in nature and that these contemporary businesses, transformed by the demands of venture capital, have morphed into naked rent seekers. An always vague concept, the 'sharing economy' – to paraphrase Cagle – did not tame the excesses of capitalism and consumerism, but stoked them.

The ultimate result of this shift, Cagle emphasizes, is that 'sharing economy' companies now largely make the issues they were purportedly founded to solve, worse. Uber and Lyft are linked to increased traffic, congestion and vehicle miles travelled (VMT), in addition to acting as direct competitors to public transit. Airbnb is dominated by multiple unit owners who essentially operate illegal hotels, crowding the small-time renter who would offer their couch or an extra room to travellers in need of a cheap place to stay (Wachsmuth et al. 2018).

Many archetypal sharing firms like Airbnb or Uber/Lyft have now rebranded themselves as 'platform' companies, giving up the 'sharing' language. And, most importantly for planners, these platform companies now shape our cities through 'platform urbanism'. And just as companies cynically deployed 'sharing' rhetoric to give cover to business models built upon skirting, or outright violating, municipal regulations, 'platform' companies is marked only by ambition. Where older sharing companies sought to transform personal relationships through sharing, platform companies seek to dominate and transform the built environment itself.

While there is a growing realization of the challenges platform companies pose to cities in terms of traditional planning priorities, such as residential land-use conflicts and traffic impacts, the threat these companies pose in terms of local labor markets and their conception of economic development is just as, if not more, harmful than some of these more conspicuous issues. As ‘platform’ companies continue to try to dominate municipal and state policies while promising efficiency and prosperity, it is incumbent upon us to critically appraise what kind of prosperity these companies promise.

Misclassification and Wage Theft

Platform companies are adept at constantly changing their public facing missions while pursuing the same profit-driven ends. The branding shift from ‘sharing’ to ‘platform’ by companies like Lyft is emblematic of this shift. While this rebranding can be read as another example of casual corporate cynicism, the adoption of ‘platform’ as a label serves a specific goal. That goal is the systemic misclassification of many of these companies’ largest class of workers in order to maximize profit while minimizing any hint of liability.

Worker misclassification is the labelling of workers as independent contractors, as oppose to actual employees of the firm. The benefits to the firm are obvious. Firms have no greater responsibility to independent contractors, such as providing health benefits, human resources protection, or union contracts of a more formal workforce. One could counter this criticism by noting that the use of contractors is common practice in Silicon Valley. Many of the world’s most successful tech companies actually employ more contractors than full time workers (Weber 2017). While disheartening, such contracting is fundamentally different to the strategies of platform companies, particularly ridesharing firms, who deliberately misclassify their drivers as contractors as an essential part of their business plan.

Employee misclassification in the U.S. is a long-time strategy of low-road practices in industries infamous for labor violations, such as residential construction, restaurants, and retail. But where such practices were seen as necessary evils at the bottom end of the labor market, platform companies’ notoriety, political power and sheer wealth an employee is based on a series of guidelines that examine the relationship of the worker to the paying firm. Succinctly, independent contractors should be truly independent in that they can largely set the terms of their employment including pay, hours and the manner in which certain tasks are completed (Weil 2017). When a company can dictate to you how long you have to work and the way that you perform the work then it is clear you are not independent but actually an employee. For Uber/Lyft, classifying their hundreds of thousands of drivers as independent contractors saves them hundreds of millions of dollars a year in obligations, two of the most important being paying a minimum wage and offering overtime. Of course, the basic proposition by these firms that drivers are contractors is hard to accept as they control basic aspects of the everyday operations of drivers, such as dictating the look of cars and policing driver behavior through soliciting feedback from customers to offer performance reviews to drivers. Additionally, Uber and Lyft offer supplemental services to their drivers that further place them under corporate control through vehicle financing schemes that charge exorbitant rates for drivers to either buy or lease a new car for the purpose of giving rides. The relationship of these companies to their employees can only be described as predatory.

Misclassification can be seen as one aspect of a larger epidemic of wage theft, a tremendous problem in the US that results in billions of dollars per annum in lost wages (Traub 2017). Joining other low road employers many platform companies go beyond the bureaucratic strategy of misclassification and move to blatant theft as a matter of policy. Instacart and Doordash, popular food and grocery delivery companies, are currently facing customer pushback and legal scrutiny for their tipping practices (Ghaffary 2019). Instead of paying their workers a straightforward hourly wage, Instacart and Doordash instead take workers’ tips, pool them, and them pay them back out as wages for other workers. The result is that workers lose their tips and are paid based on whatever rules the company has for compensating workers based on the nature of their deliveries. The end result is that hourly wages for workers are highly variable and the one area upon which workers could traditionally depend for more security – tips – are simply taken by the company.

To add insult to injury, both companies vigorously proclaim the classification of workers as independent contractors is necessary according to the questionable logic that such jobs are explicitly designed to be ‘side gigs’ in order to justify cheating workers out of wages.

What Platform?

Beyond the questionable labor practices of these firms, critics of the sharing/gig/platform economy like Cagle point towards the utterly cynical and dishonest rhetoric around what these companies actually are. Just as ‘sharing’ ultimately was little more than a branding instrument for many of these firms, the notion of the ‘platform’ is equally empty of any real meaning, and in the case of labor, a deliberate misrepresentation to free these firms of any responsibility they have to the bulk of their labor force.

What is a platform? If you take the word of the major players in this space, then a platform is simply any middleman service that connects buyers (or renters) to sellers. But even under casual scrutiny it is clear that ‘platform’ companies do not even meet their own shallow definition. These companies are not simply a featureless plane where market actors can meet (a real example of this would-be Craigslist), but fully fledged service providers that are intimately involved in every stage of the service process. Uber and Lyft do not merely provide an app, but dictate standards on driver behavior and car cleanliness. Airbnb is not merely Craigslist with pretty pictures, but nearly a fully-fledged property management company. Beyond allowing them to steal wages from their workers, these companies who label themselves ‘platforms’ are afforded the excuse to violate any other number of regulations. One of the more egregious examples of this is Airbnb’s facile claim to being merely a platform even as it encourages the creation of illegal hotels in cities around the world, and lobbies city councils and state governments to give them carve-outs that legitimate hotels and motels cannot escape, regarding safety regulations.

The actions of these companies expose the real visions they have for our future cities. The platform city, then, is one staffed primarily by a large contingent, underpaid workforce that services a minority of highly skilled workers lucky enough to be counted as actual employees. The platform city is one where blatant violations of the law are dismissed because companies offer some marginal improvement to individual convenience with massive social costs. The platform city is a city where freedom is not defined by the security of individual social, political and economic rights but by the ‘right’ to consume individualized services through brightly colored apps.

So, what are planners to do? It seems as if companies like Uber, Lyft and Airbnb have

have fundamentally reshaped regulations in many cities and have inserted themselves into policy discussions where traditionally planners have not had to contend with well-funded opposition. Additionally, cities were, and remain, way too credulous with respect to the claims of ‘platform’ companies especially on questions pertaining to economic development.

A necessary first step is for planners to view the economic development claims of these companies with a much more critical eye. What kind of growth do these companies promise? What are the actual corporate strategies the company takes with respect to labor or taxes? Is it friendly to employee bargaining? Are most of its employees direct employees or are their workers routed through a series of opaque staffing agencies?

Planners should also offer a clear vision of the kind of work that will allow their residents to lead fulfilled lives. Such a vision can include job upgrading through labor market policy such as determining a proper living wage and mandating sick leave. Beyond that, economic development planners should identify industries that offer good pay, benefits and advancement for all classes of workers, and seek to expand those. This can include encouraging, or protecting, certain industrial users at risk of being pushed out of industrial districts due to commercial and residential conversion, and working with anchor institutions to invest in local communities and worker cooperatives such as the Evergreen Cooperatives. These kinds of approaches offer a more coherent, inspiring, and equitable vision of labor markets than anything that Uber, Airbnb, or DoorDash can offer.

In their seminal work, Fitzgerald and Leigh (2002) offer a definition of economic development centred on improving the quality of life for all residents and fighting for a more equitable distribution of the benefits of economic growth. Taking this definition seriously offers planners a set of values they can use to evaluate the claims of these companies. Planners are now more adept at critiquing the claims of transportation companies like Uber/Lyft, after nearly a decade of observing that their primary claims – that networked transport will solve the last mile problem and lower VMT- are false. But we must now extend our critiques to larger questions regarding industrial relations. Uber/Lyft, and their ilk, risk not only transforming how people travel or stay in our cities, but also have the potential to fundamentally transform urban economies, and largely for the worse. Some approaches may include increasing wage theft enforcement, lobbying to states to limit misclassification abuses or even mandating a minimum wage growth, but the alternative is our cities becoming more unequal, less sustainable and, ultimately, less free.

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Shared Economy: WeWork or We Work Together

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The Manhattan Laundry in the 1980s was an abandoned, Art Deco designed laundry in the heart of Shaw and a few blocks away from 'Black Broadway' – the historic U Street area in Northwest DC (Figure 1). Today if you browse the WeWork Manhattan Laundry website you will see a description for a "handsome building on Florida Ave" featuring coffee shops and a beer garden (https://www.wework.com/buildings/manhattan-laundry–washington-DC). The description continues with 'the site attracts "creative firms", tech startups and nonprofit organizations'. For people like me, who have walked and travelled on foot around these corners and spaces for the last thirty years, the WeWork Manhattan Laundry is a signpost of the sadly mistaken and misguided reading of Richard Florida's 'creative class' theory. The creative class theory is a posited socioeconomic class identified by Professor Florida as a key driving force for the economic development of post-industrial cities in the United States (Florida, 2002)

Figure 1. WeWork Manhattan Laundry building, photo by dominic moulden.

Display full size

The WeWork spaces are a facade of shared work and the shared economy. WeWork spaces are individualized entrepreneurial places for the rugged individual under the guise of collective work, space, and play. Hyper-capitalism is fooling us again into believing with our eyes something that is not really there – a shared economy space and place. We must be very sceptical and critical of shared work spaces that are actually planned, designed, and based on individual interests and needs, while the capitalist marketing and public relations machine spins a wonderful romantic language of sharing, caring, and building spaces for the new economy.

I am a long time community organizer in DC and a witness to how racialized capitalism and extractive local economies destroy neighborhoods. ONE DC's mission is to exercise the political strength to create and preserve economic and racial equity. An example of ONE DC's work is the purchase and future renovation of the Black Workers and Wellness Center (BWWC) in Anacostia, in Southeast Washington, DC. The purpose of the center is to build local power and create economic alternatives that give control to local residents in the local economy. We host GRID solar energy apprenticeship workshops the Laborers' International Union of North America). Cooperation DC is a project of the BWWC and is currently providing economic, legal, technical, and intern support to two Latinx worker-owned cooperatives in the development phase; – Co-Familia, a childcare coop and Dulce Hogar, a cleaning coop. On the wellness side of our organisation, the BWWC hosts community mediation and restorative justice training, returning citizens' skills job training, and job development programs with Friends and Families of Incarcerated People and the Re-entry Network.

The shared economy we are building is about authentic bonding and cooperative values based on democratic economics. Real sharing is designed, planned, and practiced as a social, political, and economic goal. The bottom line is a people and ecological-based ecosystem of humane, balance, and earth-friendly work, play, and living.

We work together as a collective process. We work together to create cooperative spaces for shared work and shared values. We work together not to maximize capital extraction. Maximizing profits is viewed as an unhealthy economic principle. A healthy economy is practiced when humans and nature are tied together in a daily work ecosystem, where the needs of everyone and everything are given consideration for fully living a happy and balanced life.

Together laborers and managers confront challenges of capitalism. Workers struggle daily in a precarious and extractive work place and faux spaces, such as WeWork. Whether it is a WeWork space, Uber or Lyft driver, Creative work or Tech worker – we are all disposable and heading towards precarity. WeWork spaces gladly get us workers to naively embrace the 'dog eat dog … .Uber eats rat' race. Uber and Lyft drivers become resentful pro-capitalist entrepreneurs vying to conquer people and places in the economic cyclone of destructive work.

The urgent challenge in cities is to create and develop meaningful work. A way to do this is through working together in the cooperative movement. The cooperative movement began in the 19th century when people organized themselves around a collective or common goal using cooperative principles of leadership and management. Here are a few examples to review to let us know that our current work-shared economy is not the best model and is not the only way to share work.

In the Bronx, New York, an extraordinary effort is being made and is making progress in a real shared economic way through the Green Worker Cooperatives green businesses to create a strong, local, and democratic economy rooted in racial and gender equity. Their vision is an economy that works for all. The Green Worker Cooperatives range from artisanal art, birthing services, cleaning services, compost, food, manufacturing and design.

If and when we work together, we can create a non-extractive, humane and ecologically stable shared economy for all, and gradually challenge and replace the unstable, precarious, destructive, extractive capitalist class and exploitative individually centered economy. It is time to plan, design, and boldly create a shared economy.

The Working World (www.theworkingworld.org) identifies the root of the precarious shared economy with the historical crises of 'the extractive economy.' TWW states clearly on their website that "our system makes profit for a few by extracting from people and planet." Their goal is to transform this current crisis into a "democratic economy." Here's how they do it: they recreate finance that is non-extractive, provide pragmatic training through democratizing capital and democratizing knowledge, they put people in charge so communities control resources – and they plan to grow virally and transform the world. TWW invests in workers and community owned businesses, like those which the Green Worker Cooperatives create and develop.

Can this movement and new set of practices grow virally? There are a few of us cooperative organizers and practitioners who believe it is gradually making waves. Jackson, Mississippi and the emergence of Cooperation Jackson are an example. Cooperation Jackson (www.cooperationjackson.org) is building a 'solidarity economy' in Jackson, anchored by a network of cooperatives and worker-owned, democratically self-managed enterprises as stated on their website. Their emerging network includes Freedom Farms Cooperative, Green Team Landscaping, and Fannie Lou Hamer Community Land Trust. Their work ties nicely into The Working World's goal of community control of resources – especially land.

The work of Cooperation Jackson and the gradually developing Cooperation DC – a project of the ONE DC's Black Workers and Wellness Center – are key building blocks to the little known history of cooperatives in the Black community. Professor Jessica Gordon-Nembhard, the leading authority on Black cooperatives in the United States, writes about this profound and unknown history in her book, Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice. Professor resistance of workers was to gain power and freedom through shared work and shared economic practice in cooperatives. Learning this history has framed our development of Cooperation DC as part of a long trajectory of Black freedom movement work to not only provide economic security, but to also build community power. Cooperative movement organizing succeeds when people come together to study and learn about alternatives. Study groups and learning circles are a key part of building a collective and people-centered economy.

If and when WE WORK TOGETHER, we can create a non-extractive, humane, ecological, stable and shared economy for all. We can gradually challenge and replace the unstable, precarious, destructive, and extractive capitalist class and exploitative individually centered economy. It is time to bravely plan, design, and create a shared economy.

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