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Capitol Hill and the Organized Protest: Gauging  
Capitol Hill Residents' Responses to and  
Understandings of the Capitol Hill Organized  
Protest

By

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## **Abstract**

Capitol Hill is a gentrified urban neighborhood in Seattle, Washington. In the summer of 2020, it became home to the Capitol Hill Organized Protest (CHOP), a protest occupation that emerged out of the George Floyd protests against police brutality and other systemic injustices in Black communities. Through interviews with residents and an analysis of local and national media on the event, this paper assesses how Capitol Hill residents responded to and understood CHOP. It finds that Capitol Hill residents' reactions to CHOP interacted with their understandings of Capitol Hill, along with who and what belongs there. While this led some resident to tend toward support for CHOP and other residents to tend toward opposition, this paper shows that ambivalence and mixed emotions prevailed in reactions to CHOP, as many sympathized with the protesters but felt increasingly uncomfortable about the instability in their neighborhood. Ultimately, my paper highlights the interplay between understandings of space and reactions to protest. In the case of CHOP, neighborhood context did not play a background role. Rather residents' relationships with their neighborhood played a vital role in how they understood the protest.

*Keywords:* Protest, understandings of space, place attachment, commoning

## **Capitol Hill and the Organized Protest: Gauging Capitol Hill Residents' Responses to and Understandings of the Capitol Hill Organized Protest**

In the summer of 2019, bars serving \$15 cocktails, a boutique that sold Maison Margiela's latest collection alongside experimental modernist furniture, and a growing array of luxury apartment buildings offering \$4,500-a-month one bedrooms called the area surrounding Eleventh Avenue East and East Pine Street in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood home. One summer later, in 2020, the boutique and many of the restaurants had shut down, in response to COVID, and the intersection had become the epicenter of the Capitol Hill Organized Protest (hereafter, CHOP), a protest occupation that emerged as part of a nationwide movement against police brutality and other systemic injustices in Black communities. As CHOP cordoned off streets and took over a large nearby park, art arose on the side of boarded up businesses; tents popped up that handed out mutual aid; and people gathered to listen to speakers, engage in conversations about racism, and participate in marches. During its existence, CHOP transformed a gentrified consumerist landscape into a commons that imagined what an anti-capitalist, police-free society would look like. However, just as quickly as it arose, CHOP seemed to disappear. As Capitol Hill entered 2021, auto traffic returned to East Pine Street, and COVID-safe sidewalk cafes replaced mutual aid tents.

CHOP occurred as part of summer 2020's protests in response to the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. On May 25, 2020, Derek Chauvin, a white police officer, murdered George Floyd, a Black man, after kneeling on his neck during his arrest over suspicion of use of a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill. In response, protests formed throughout the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and Saint Paul) but soon spread to cities across the country. According to *The New York Times*, an estimated 15 to 26 million people participated in these protests nationwide

(Buchanan et al., 2020). In Seattle, protests first formed in the city's central business district. However, they soon migrated to the Seattle Police Department's East Precinct, located at Eleventh Avenue East and East Pine Street in Capitol Hill. There, protestors stood off against police for eight days. On June 8, the police abandoned the East Precinct, and, with no state authorities asserting control over the area, protestors took over the surrounding blocks, along with an adjacent park, Cal Anderson Park. With this, the protest transformed from a standoff to an occupation, which protestors would eventually name CHOP. CHOP made three formal demands to Seattle city leadership: Cut the Seattle Police Department's budget by 50%, shift funding to historically Black communities, and ensure amnesty for protestors. Along with the aforementioned mutual aid networks, CHOP housed protestors and individuals experiencing homelessness in encampments in Cal Anderson and experimented with forms of direct democracy in lieu of centralized leadership.

As such, CHOP resembled occupation-based protests that came before it, such as Occupy New York, in which protestors gathered in New York City's Zuccotti Park, near that city's major Wall Street financial institutions, to protest financial inequality and corporate greed; the 15-M movement in Spain, in which activists occupied Madrid's Puerta del Sol plaza, and plazas throughout Spain, to rally against austerity policies; the 25 January Movement, in which organizers took over Cairo's Tahrir Square to contest police brutality and demand the resignation of then president Hosni Mubarak; and many others like it. However, it differed in one important way. Whereas these protests occurred in heavily trafficked squares in downtowns, CHOP occurred in a mixed-use neighborhood, where many people lived. Indeed, much of the footage of CHOP comes from people filming out of their apartment windows.

This fact begs the question – how did Capitol Hill residents respond to CHOP? More specifically, how did residents in a heavily gentrified neighborhood place CHOP within their understanding of their neighborhood and its history? Additionally, why, according to area residents, did CHOP happen in their neighborhood and not another part of Seattle?

Through exploring Capitol Hill residents' responses to CHOP, this paper argues that residents' understanding of their neighborhood – along with who and what belongs there – influenced how they reacted to CHOP. The residents with whom I spoke felt their neighborhood helped shape CHOP. As it took over Cal Anderson and the surrounding blocks, it established practices of commoning, the equitable and democratic production and management of resources and space. This spatial practice disrupted life on Capitol Hill. Some residents welcomed this disruption, as they felt it brought identities and activities back to the neighborhood that gentrification had displaced. Meanwhile, other residents detested it, as it upset norms of civility and use of public space on which they felt neighborhood stability depended. While these reactions led residents to tend toward support for or opposition toward CHOP, their responses were much more nuanced and often defied simple opposition or support. In particular, despite widespread sympathy for protesters, increasing, often violent, disorder in the neighborhood led many to call for a return to neighborhood order. As such, this paper highlights the interplay between space and protest. Not only did residents' understandings of their neighborhood influence their responses to CHOP. Often, their proximity to an increasingly unstable protest occupation influenced their tolerance for it.

## **Literature Review**

### **Responses to Protest**

This paper explores how Capitol Hill residents understood CHOP within the context of their neighborhood to shine a light on the interplay between space and protest. Extant literature on responses to protest tends to focus on residents' uniformly negative reactions to protests, the media's role in shaping these reactions, and related policy and policing outcomes (Davis, 1993; Maskovsky, 2017; Matei & Ball-Rokeach, 2005; Underhill, 2016). This research importantly highlights how mainstream media, city governments, and the opinions of (often white and wealthy) citizens interact to demonize minority populations and those that contest existing power structures. In doing so, what becomes evident is how systems of power work to exclude certain segments of society from having a right to the city (Lefebvre, 1996; Purcel, 2013). However, this research also constructs a binary between residents, on one hand, and protesters, on the other. It paints protestors as an invading force and ignores residents' capacity to sympathize with, support, and even become involved in protests – as many Capitol Hill residents did during CHOP.

### **21<sup>st</sup> Century Urban Uprisings and Commoning**

Two additional bodies of literature help explain the interplay between neighborhood context and protest: literature on 21<sup>st</sup> century urban uprisings along with the practice of commoning and literature on place attachment. First, an emerging thread of scholarship has noted how urban uprisings in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have differed from earlier protest movements (Harvey, 2013; Holston, 2018; Hughes, 2011; Magaña, 2020; Maharwal, 2017; Pickard & Bessant, 2018; Stavrides, 2016; Susser & Tonnelat; Swyngedouw, 2018, Uncu, 2016; Vasudevan, 2014). According to these scholars, in the past, political parties, interest groups, and labor unions with narrow interests typically mobilized protesters in a hierarchical fashion to demand rights and policy changes from formal political and business leaders. Conversely, they

argue today's urban uprisings are decentralized, leaderless, and comprised of diverse segments of society with multiple grievances.

Much of the above scholarship looks at the commonalities these movements share and their internal dynamics. Within this lens, the spatial context in which these protests occur, although recognized, often plays a background role. However, a number of scholars have begun to probe how protesters' understandings of spatial contexts play a role in these movements. For example, in his study on Istanbul's 2013 Gezi Park protests, Baran Alp Uncu (2016) explored how the importance of Gezi Park to different segments of Istanbul society allowed leaders to mobilize different (often historically antagonistic) groups to occupy the park to protest its development and contest a range of other issues. Similarly, Manissa Maharwal (2017) argued that 2014 nationwide Black Lives Matter protests took on local dimensions in the San Francisco Bay Area, as protesters targeted gentrification, along with police brutality, as systemic injustices against BIPOC communities. Meanwhile, in his ethnography of the 2006 Oaxaca protests, Maurice Magaña (2020) detailed how the networks and spaces youth activists created – such as DIY cultural centers – allowed them to stake claims in a city whose neoliberal policies had rejected them and how these spatial claims outlived the hostilities that defined the protests. My paper builds upon this scholarship. Similar to the above movements, local understandings of place helped build support among Capitol Hill residents. However, they also incited resentment along with feelings of ambivalence, as some found themselves torn between a pre-existing order they detested and the violent destabilization the protest occupation provoked.

Commoning – which I define as the equitable and democratic production and management of resources and space – is another spatial lens through which to analyze CHOP. I base my definition off the work of David Harvey (2013), James Holston (2018), Ida Susser and

Stephane Tonnelat (2013), and Stavros Stavrides. While disagreement exists around whether commons should have boundaries and firm governance (Harvey, 2013) or should strive to be porous, heterogeneous, and “always expanding” (Stavrides, 2016, p.40), these scholars agree that commoning has become integral to 21<sup>st</sup> century urban social movements, as concentrated urban populations demand access to and management of the goods and relationships they produce. In the case of CHOP, protesters not only attempted to re-envision what community safety would look like free of police. Against the capitalistic order outside CHOP, they democratically produced and managed food, supplies, healthcare, and housing for protesters as well as those in need who turned to CHOP as a place of refuge.

### **Place Attachment**

Literature on place attachment serves as a second strain of literature that informs this study. Place attachment describes an emotional bond between a person and a place (Florek, 2011). It can occur at any scale, from a room within a building to an entire country (Low & Altman). Within the context of Capitol Hill residents’ responses to CHOP, Melinda Milligan’s (1998) study on the relocation of a college campus student-run café helps illuminate the processes that lead individuals to develop emotional bonds to places and what happens when external events disrupt these bonds. According to Milligan, both one’s memories of a place and what one sees as possible within a place leads one to develop a secure bond with a given place. When a place experiences disruption, and the activities with which one has associated a place are no longer possible in the place, the bond created becomes disrupted, leading to negative emotions and nostalgia. These processes – of bond formation and disruption – need not be individual, as newcomers can find themselves socialized into the identity of a place. Milligan’s scale is small – she investigates a coffee shop – and she focuses on physical factors, such as

floorplan, instead of social ones. Nevertheless, her framework helps explain the bonds residents formed with Capitol Hill before CHOP and how disruptions both before and during CHOP ruptured these bonds.

For some Capitol Hill residents, gentrification acted as a major source of disruption *before* CHOP. Previous literature has explored how gentrification can disrupt one's attachment to a neighborhood (Alawadi, 2017; Brown-Saracino, 2004; Helmuth, 2019; Larkin, 2010; London, 2017; Matthews, 2008; Ocejo, 2011; Perry, 2004; Shaw & Hagemans, 2015; Torres, 2020; Tuttle, 2019; Zukin, 2010). This happens as social networks disintegrate; activities that once defined a neighborhood disappear; third places that fostered one community find themselves replaced with businesses that support new ones; and hostile newcomers replace friendly neighborhood acquaintances. Ultimately, the upset market-led gentrification, as well as top-down redevelopment, creates often provokes protest (Larkin, 2010; Perry, 2005; Shepard, 2013; Uncu 2016). While none of my respondents understood CHOP as an explicit anti-gentrification protest, anger over changes to Capitol Hill played a role in how some residents understood and supported CHOP.

Meanwhile, CHOP's appropriation of what many saw as public space – namely, Cal Anderson Park and the streets around it – became a major source of disruption *during* CHOP for some residents. Scholars have highlighted that under neoliberalism, public space has become increasingly associated with consumption and respectability (Sorkin, 1992; Madden, 2010; Zukin, 1996). Consequently, city governments, often at the behest of concerned citizens, have worked to restrict undesirable populations, such as those experiencing homelessness, and activities, such as camping or using drugs, to ensure that the general public can use public space for publicly sanctioned activities (Amster, 2003, Cianciotto, 2020; Davis, 1990; Trouille, 2014).

By opening Cal Anderson and its surroundings to camping and other activities, CHOP disrupted Capitol Hill residents' ability to use Cal Anderson for the publicly sanctioned activities with which they associated the park, such as jogging, playing frisbee, and picnicking. This, along with a rising tide of violence CHOP provoked, produced considerable neighborhood ire.

My work sits in conversation with literature on responses to protest, 21<sup>st</sup> century urban social movements, and place attachment. It complicates existing literature by highlighting that neighborhood residents' responses to protest are not uniform but influenced by their emotional bonds to the neighborhood, particularly as it relates to how they understand the neighborhood and who and what belongs there. Because CHOP took the form of a commons, which commandeered and repurposed neighborhood space, CHOP disrupted Capitol Hill's spatial order. In some instances, certain residents welcomed this disruption as needed change. In others, certain residents saw it as a threat to their daily lives. Despite this, ambivalence and mixed emotions complicated neighborhood responses to CHOP, as many sympathized with protesters yet had to deal with increasing neighborhood instability.

## **Site and Methods**

### **Site**

**Figure 1**

*CHOP's initial territory (in peach). Adapted from Google Earth, n.d.*



Capitol Hill is an urban neighborhood, which has witnessed heavy gentrification in the past thirty years. The northern half of the neighborhood largely consists of single-family homes, while multi-family dwellings, businesses, and entertainment venues dominate the southern half, where CHOP occurred. In the late sixties and seventies, Capitol Hill experienced a decline, as the Puget Sound region suburbanized and experienced the economic fallout of the Boeing Bust (Pulkkinen, 2016). In the ensuing years, on the southern half of the Hill, artists repurposed warehouse-like structures vacated by auto dealerships that had moved to the city's eastside

suburbs into studios and theaters. Additionally, queer businesses migrated to the neighborhood (Atkins, 2003; Chalana, 2016). The cultural activity these communities generated attracted development. By 2016, *The Seattle Times* labeled the neighborhood, “the epicenter of Seattle’s nightlife,” and rents in the neighborhood had skyrocketed, leaving much of the area’s original queer and arts communities to feel alienated from the Hill, especially given the rising rates of anti-LGBTQ+ hate crimes in the 2010s (Romano, 2016).

Events in 2020 disrupted Capitol Hill’s trajectory of unbridled growth. In addition to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which shut down many of the neighborhood’s defining small businesses and cultural institutions, Capitol Hill became home to CHOP. As previously mentioned, when police abandoned the East Precinct, protesters quickly assumed control over the area. Specifically, protesters exerted control over virtually all of Cal Anderson, East Pine Street from 10th Avenue East to 13th Avenue East and roughly block-long stretches of 11th Avenue East and 12th Avenue East that bisected East Pine Street (Bush, 2020). However, city officials would negotiate with protesters to reduce this footprint on June 16, 2020 to improve traffic flow (Gutman, 2020). As mentioned, in lieu of formalized leadership, CHOP implemented decentralized governance and experimented in direct democracy in the form of people’s assemblies. Protesters would disagree on whether CHOP existed merely as means to accomplish its objectives – defund the police, invest in historically Black communities, and secure amnesty for protesters – or as a larger utopian experiment that sought indefinite occupation (Gardner, 2020; Gupta, 2020; King & Shephard, 2020).

Although right wing media and politicians characterized CHOP as an anarchist takeover of an American city, in its first weeks, many Democratic politicians and much of the mainstream media pointed to a positive atmosphere at CHOP (Fox News, 2020; Musto, 2020). In particular,

positive portrayals of CHOP highlighted the protest's festive atmosphere, moving artwork, and robust networks of mutual aid (Durkan, 2020; Garcia, 2020; Royale, 2020; Roberts, 2020; Scigliano, 2020; Vansyghnel, 2020).

However, as the month of June wore on, the mood soured. CHOP became a site of violence. Stories of armed gangs attempting to assert control of the area emerged (Burns, 2020; KING 5, 2020; Reeve & Guff, 2020). On top this, media outlets reported on white supremacists antagonizing protesters and inciting violence in the neighborhood (Gutman et al., 2020 Keimig, 2020b; Reeve & Guff, 2020; Scigliano, 2020; Seattle Black Voice Collective, 2020; Smith, 2020). By the end of June, six shootings had occurred in CHOP, two of them fatal. Citing this, the Seattle Police Department retook the territory on July 1 (Kiley et al., 2020). However, individuals camping in Cal Anderson remained until police swept their settlements on December 18 (Graham, 2020a).

## **Methods**

Interviews provided the bulk of the data for this study's analysis. In line with the neighborhood's demographics, my sample skewed young and white. According to the 2012 to 2016 American Community Survey, Capitol Hill is 76% white – compared to 66% for Seattle overall – and 56% of the neighborhood's residents are under the age of thirty-five (City of Seattle, Office of Planning & Community Development). As such, twelve of my participants were white, and six identified as people of color; six were over the age of thirty-five, and eleven were between eighteen and thirty-four. Additionally, my respondents, along with scholars and local commentators, have identified Capitol Hill as Seattle's current central gayborhood (Atkins, 2003; Ghaziani, 2014; Pulkkinen, 2016; Stafford, 2016; Romano, 2016). Accordingly, ten out of my seventeen respondents were queer. For the purposes of this paper, I use "queer" broadly to include anyone who is not heterosexual and/or cisgender. Finally, both my respondents and local

commentators have described Capitol Hill as a gentrified neighborhood (Constant, 2018; Romano, 2016). Reflecting this, eight of my respondents held white-collar jobs; three held social service positions; one worked as an activist and organizer; one held a blue-collar position; one was unemployed; and three were retired.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted all interviews remotely. I recorded all but two interviews over Zoom. In instances where I reference the two unrecorded interviews below, I provide paraphrases, rather than direct quotes, as my notes did not capture what these participants said verbatim. My interviews followed a semi-structured format. While I followed a planned interview guide to explore how my respondents reacted to CHOP along with their experiences living on Capitol Hill, my interviews largely took the form of a free-flowing conversation. This allowed my respondents and I to explore unanticipated subject matter (Bernard, 1988; Weiss, 1994). Additionally, I adjusted my interview guide from interview to interview as new themes emerged (Weiss, 1994).

To further explore themes upon which my interviews touched, I complemented my interviews with a text analysis of news articles and social media posts. For news articles, I searched keywords that emerged during my interviews, such as, “violence,” “police,” and “Cal Anderson Park,” across local newspapers and media outlets, namely, *KING 5*, *KOMO*, *Q13*, *The Seattle Times*, *The South Seattle Emerald*, *The Stranger*, and *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Additionally, I entered these keywords into Google News to explore national portrayals of CHOP. For social media posts, I consulted the pages of several activists and local journalists my respondents named, as well as conducted searches for hashtags, such as “#CapitolHillOrganizedProtest,” “#CalAnderson,” and “#SeattleProtests.”

Additionally, I conducted a site observation of the former CHOP site: Cal Anderson, the Seattle Police Department's East Precinct, and the surrounding six blocks, in January 2021 to see how the area had evolved since the occupation protest. While there, I documented my observations in "jottings," which I later fleshed out in a more formal memo (Bernard, 1988).

As I conducted my research, I analyzed my textual data on a qualitative data analysis platform, MAXQDA. Following methodological recommendations from Johnny Saldaña (2013), I coded my data in a multi-step process. First, I conducted initial open coding, summarizing and grouping concepts that I noticed. This allowed ideas to emerge organically in a bottom-up fashion. I then mapped out connections between what surfaced and grouped observations into broader categories. For my second cycle of coding, I conducted structural coding, a top-down coding protocol that uses a project's research question as its guiding framework, paying particular attention to my respondents' values. This allowed me to zero in on my respondents' explicit expressions of their responses to CHOP. From this analysis, multiple understandings of Capitol Hill and CHOP emerged. Within interviews, which generated the bulk of my data, these understandings rooted themselves in the experiences and identities of my respondents. Thus, the below analysis is not a complete picture of how everyone on Capitol Hill viewed CHOP at a macro level, but, rather, a deep exploration of nuanced understandings that emerged from my respondents' differing relationships with Capitol Hill and CHOP.

### **Why CHOP? Why Capitol Hill? Gauging Capitol Hill Residents' Initial Understandings of**

#### **CHOP as a Commons**

This paper explores how Capitol Hill residents understood and responded to CHOP. Later sections will unpack how Capitol Hill residents responded to CHOP in nuanced ways that interacted with their understandings of Capitol Hill along with who and what belongs there. This

section will outline how Capitol Hill residents understood CHOP at a high level. These high level understandings begin to point to the interplay between understandings of Capitol Hill and CHOP. Capitol Hill residents saw CHOP as an outcome of the nationwide protests against police brutality that broke out in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd. On the surface, they did not attribute its formation to any causes specific to Capitol Hill. Nevertheless, when they explored the issue deeper, many of my respondents believed Capitol Hill played an active role in gathering protesters, due to the neighborhood's geography and reputation for activism, and in fueling the energy of the protest, due to endemic tensions surrounding gentrification and homelessness in the neighborhood. Ultimately, in line with local and national press accounts, they described the occupation they saw take shape as a commons.

### **Why CHOP?**

When asked, "Why did CHOP happen?" almost all of my respondents voiced that it occurred as a result of the national uprising that took form in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd. According to many of my respondents, what James Jasper (1997) calls "moral shock" over the murder of a Black man at the hands of the police, along with other systemic injustices Black communities face, provoked protesters from a variety of backgrounds throughout the greater Seattle area to gather first in the city's central business district (p.106). Since they were protesting police brutality, they eventually marched to the East Precinct, which happens to be on Capitol Hill. Ultimately, the police abandoned their post, and in the ensuing power vacuum, protesters established CHOP. In this high-level understanding, Capitol Hill became a coincidental backdrop to the Seattle chapter of a national uprising. As Christina, a white digital marketing strategist in her late twenties, explained, "[CHOP was not] necessarily a Capitol Hill thing... It was a Seattle thing that happened to be on Capitol Hill."

## Why Capitol Hill?

However, as my respondents discussed CHOP more in-depth, many attributed Capitol Hill-specific elements to its formation. First, many of my respondents felt that CHOP occurred in Capitol Hill, as opposed to another neighborhood, due to its central location and reputation for political activism. Several of my respondents brought up that CHOP emerged on Capitol Hill because the neighborhood is roughly in the middle of the city. Several bus lines connect Capitol Hill to other neighborhoods, and the region's Link light rail has a station across the street from Cal Anderson Park. Consequently, anyone who wanted to participate in CHOP could travel there relatively easily.

To this, many respondents added that Capitol Hill has a reputation for political activism that invites protest. Gary, a white retired man in his early seventies, reasoned, "Capitol Hill... is probably the most political subzone in all of Seattle. This is kind of where protests naturally occur." He went on to cite that protests against Donald Trump, protests for LGBTQ+ rights, and even elements of the 1999 World Trade Organization protests found a home on Capitol Hill. Similarly, Rachel, a white graphic designer in her early thirties, reflected, "Oh man, it's the perfect place to gather... Since I moved [to Capitol Hill], I have never been so actively involved in protests." In particular, within Capitol Hill, several respondents identified Cal Anderson as the "public plaza" of the neighborhood – if not the city – where protests start and end. Capitol Hill may have not sparked CHOP. However, according to many respondents, the neighborhood's central location and its reputation for activism played a role in gathering protesters.

Furthermore, many respondents went on to allege that Capitol Hill not only played a role in gathering protesters. Pre-existing tensions in the neighborhood, namely gentrification and homelessness, helped fuel CHOP, as well. The national media even picked up on these

understandings of CHOP, with *Newsweek* running an article titled, “Protesters Want Seattle De-Gentrified – This Is How It Could Happen” about CHOP (Rahman, 2020). According to Henry, who is Latino man in his early thirties who holds a temporary administrative role for Washington State Medicaid, gentrification has produced a sense of resentment among what he identified as the neighborhood’s original inhabitants, chiefly its queer and arts communities: “It almost gives them a territory that they feel is theirs, that they feel is more worth defending.” By his reasoning, CHOP provided an arena for those facing displacement to claim a right to Capitol Hill.

According to respondents, gentrification also produced homelessness, which further propelled CHOP. Alex, a white community mental health worker in their late twenties, discussed at length what they saw as the painful irony of the number of queer individuals “priced out” and experiencing homelessness in the city’s main gayborhood. Alex partially saw CHOP as individuals experiencing homelessness coming together to proclaim, “Hello! We’re not getting the support that we need if we’re literally creating a city within our city.” Gary, who identified homelessness as a major problem on Capitol Hill, added that CHOP ultimately attracted people experiencing homelessness from across the city. There, they could receive free food and live relatively safely, compared to “those camps under the freeways where violence is endemic.” While these understandings do not argue that homelessness or gentrification caused CHOP, they testify that these issues, which affect all of Seattle but have strong resonance on Capitol Hill, added local dimensions to Seattle’s practice of a national uprising. On a surface level, my respondents did not feel like Capitol Hill-specific factors triggered CHOP. However, when they explored the protest more deeply, they articulated how Capitol Hill-specific factors collected protesters and further drove the protest occupation. This shows how, according to my respondents’ conceptions, place played an integral role at CHOP.

## **CHOP as a Commons**

As CHOP took shape, my respondents, along with local and national media, began to see it as an act of commoning, which, as previously mentioned, I define as the equitable and democratic production and management of resources and space. Although neither my respondents nor the media I consulted explicitly described CHOP as a commons, they discussed, at length, CHOP's ability to manage community resources, CHOP's communal production of art and knowledge, and CHOP's experimentation with direct democracy – all components of commoning according to scholars (Harvey, 2013; Holston, 2018; Susser & Tonnelat; Stavrides, 2016).

When CHOP took over Cal Anderson and the surrounding blocks, practices of mutual aid quickly took form. Volunteers assembled free food and supply tents; area restaurants donated meals; a left wing gun club joined forces with willing non-violent protesters to guard the perimeter against violent right wing extremist attacks; doctors and nurses volunteered in medical tents; organizers worked to provide shelter for protesters and individuals experiencing homelessness; and a community garden even sprouted as an alternative use of park space (Guarente, 2020; Gutman et al., 2020; Royale, 2020; Scigliano, 2020; Vansynghel, 2020). Additionally, CHOP gathered activists, artists, and interested Seattleites to make art and knowledge. People established lending libraries and “conversation cafés,” where anyone could educate themselves on racism and social justice; sculptural memorials flanked the chain-linked fence that wraps around Cal Anderson; a wooden Black Power Fist arose in the park's baseball field; and seventeen BIPOC artists collaborated to paint, “BLACK LIVES MATTER,” on East Pine Street. No hierarchical body governed this activity. Rather, CHOP experimented with direct democracy. Attendees noted that seemingly anyone could participate in people's assembly

governing sessions, which, as Christina recounted, “Almost felt like science fiction. We,” she continued, “[were] not just trying to iterate on our world to make it incrementally better. We [were] going to scrap the playbook and start fresh.” Although many of my participants, along with journalists, would later partially blame CHOP’s decentralized governing structure for its territorial collapse, at the time, it seemed “revolutionary” and “utopian” (Gardener, 2020; Gupta, 2020; Roberts, 2020). In the eyes of many, CHOP invited people from across the region to take control of space and resources to engineer the “social order [they sought] to enact” through commoning (Vasudevan, 2014, p.316).

With such descriptions, my respondents, along with the media, understood CHOP as a commons. More specifically, due to its open nature and invitation to collaboration, CHOP strove to become what Stavrides (2016) would call a practice of “expanding commoning” (p.30). Recognizing CHOP as a commons reveals how the protest occupation became a spatially disruptive exercise. It appropriated commercial space and turned it into sites of communal production and consumption, with mutual aid tents taking over outdoor bar space and murals covering up the windows of businesses. Similarly, it commandeered a park, formerly governed by city legislation and agencies, and allowed commoners to occupy it. As the subsequent sections will show, these spatial disruptions provoked varying levels of support and opposition among Capitol Hill residents.

### **CHOP as a Welcome Disruption**

CHOP’s spatial disruptions of Capitol Hill interacted with neighborhood residents’ conceptions of the Hill and who and what belongs there. As Seattle’s premiere gayborhood and arts district, many of the residents with whom I spoke saw Capitol Hill as a neighborhood centered around the celebration of heterogeneity. They felt that anyone, particularly marginalized

communities, should feel welcome there and that productive artistic expression should define the neighborhood. However, in the eyes of many, gentrification was homogenizing the Hill.

Although none of my respondents saw CHOP as an anti-gentrification protest, many that supported CHOP saw it a welcome disruption to neighborhood gentrification. It made activities and identities respondents associated with diversity and self-expression welcome on the Hill again. On top of this, CHOP openly called out gentrifiers and forced them to confront their impact on the neighborhood.

### **Capitol Hill: A Place for Diversity and Self-Expression**

In line with Milligan's (1998) framework of place attachment, respondents grounded their conceptions of Capitol Hill as place that values heterogeneity in their memories and common understandings. Many of those connected to queer communities formed these conceptions in nightlife venues and community spaces where they felt "accepted." Newcomers socialized themselves into these understandings through stories about the neighborhood's past and by seeing rainbow flags and crosswalks throughout the neighborhood. Meanwhile, many of those connected to the arts understood Capitol Hill as a place that celebrates heterogeneous creative encounter through memories of venues and gatherings that provided opportunities to experience art and served as incubators for collaboration. They felt that the neighborhood's artistic reputation continued to attract those drawn to the arts. With this, in the minds of many of my respondents, Capitol Hill, in the words of Christopher, a Latino marketing strategist in his late twenties, emerged as a neighborhood that "push[es] against norms and against shame" through its celebration of diversity and self-expression.

### **The Threat of Gentrification**

However, those that felt a strong sense of attachment to Capitol Hill due to its identity as a place that celebrates heterogeneity felt that gentrification was threatening this identity. According to Milligan (1998), when the activities with which one associates a place become impossibilities, one's sense of attachment to a given place experiences disruption. Gentrification made many of the activities several of my respondents associated with a heterogeneous Capitol Hill impossible. For example, those involved with the arts highlighted that arts in the neighborhood have moved from everyday collaborative production to transactional consumption. The artists with whom I spoke highlighted that rising rents had priced venues and artists out of the neighborhood and that, as the neighborhood began to lose its artistic opportunities and atmosphere, additional artists relocated, creating a domino effect. As a result, the daily opportunities for collaboration and networking have dwindled, and artists increasingly have had to connect online. Within this context, art remains on the Hill but as a structured commodity for gentrifiers to consume in their pursuit of a cultivated, distinctive lifestyle (Bourdieu, 1984; Zukin, 2010).

On top of this, the neighborhood's celebration of diversity has increasingly felt like a sham for multiple reasons. First, as previously mentioned, as Capitol Hill has gentrified into "the epicenter of Seattle's nightlife," anti-LGBTQ+ hate crimes have spiked in the neighborhood, leading many of the queer residents with whom I spoke to see the act of expressing queerness openly in public as less of a possibility (Balk, 2016; Romano, 2016; Stafford, 2016). Second, reflecting extant literature, many of my queer respondents felt that the gentrified neighborhood only cared about and catered to market-friendly, mainstream queers. According to Alex, Capitol Hill is still gay, "but, like, gay flags hanging off of Bank of America. [It's for] people that identify more with a homonormative concept of queerness...classically beautiful cisgender

couples that make hundreds of thousands of dollars a year [and work out at] Gold's Gym." This gentrified Capitol Hill, they elaborated, excludes queer BIPOC individuals and queer individuals experiencing homelessness. Thus, only certain forms of queerness can thrive on Capitol Hill, an idea that clashes with many of my respondents' beliefs that Capitol Hill should welcome in those whom mainstream society has rejected. Third, many felt that Capitol Hill struggles with racism. A number of the BIPOC residents I interviewed felt they stood out in Capitol Hill and reported experiencing overt hostilities and microaggressions in public, and, anticipating this, a few of the white residents I interviewed questioned if BIPOC individuals felt welcome on the Hill. As such, existing as a BIPOC individual on Capitol Hill becomes a challenge. With this, many expressed that they felt like Capitol Hill had failed to live up to its promise of diversity. As Grace, a Black activist and organizer who played an instrumental role in CHOP, explained, Capitol Hill "prefers the semantics that make them look progressive over actual progress." Ultimately, the Capitol Hill residents that wanted a heterogeneous neighborhood felt great dissonance, torn between their memories and understandings that cemented the neighborhood as a place for diversity and self-expression, on one hand, and their experiences with restricted possibilities under gentrification, on the other.

### **CHOP and Reawakened Possibilities**

Among these residents, CHOP elicited support because, by disrupting gentrification, it restored the neighborhood's "spirit" of heterogeneity. As previously mentioned, resident supporters did not see CHOP as an explicit anti-gentrification protest. However, through it, neighborhood activities that had become memories for many of my participants due to gentrification spilled out into the streets, and populations the gentrified neighborhood had

unwelcomed now seemed to have a home. On top of this, many supporters felt that CHOP provided an opportunity for residents to unsettle gentrifiers.

CHOP brought everyday collaborative artistic production back to Capitol Hill. As my earlier descriptions of CHOP as a commons highlighted, art had a defining presence at CHOP. Commenting on the murals, sculptures, and installations that took over Cal Anderson and the surrounding blocks, Jasmyne Kemig, a staff writer at *The Stranger*, pointed out, “In a moment when people ostensibly came together to protest the murder of Black people by police (and the existence of the police itself), art seemed tangible, playing a role in some people’s healing and organizing” (Keimig, 2021). At CHOP, art burst free from its commodification and played a meaningful role in the construction and definition of a new space centered on the envisioning of police free communities. As Christopher championed, “Art was the way [CHOP] fought back.”

For residents connected Capitol Hill’s arts scene, the elevation of art to the everyday allowed it to become a possibility in their neighborhood again. Irina, a white computer engineer and DJ in her late thirties, lamented that spontaneous encounters with art had disappeared from Capitol Hill and had become increasingly digital. However, at CHOP,

A lot of art projects went up. There was so much expression that I saw. You could kind of just do whatever, like there was no policing, because that was the whole point, right?

There was all this crazy art that was going on that was like here one day, gone the next. I remember, this kid was watching me put up my stencil, and he was like, ‘Oh, how do you do that?’ and I was like, ‘Here, let me show you how to spray stencils.’ So there was all this skill share that happened.”

For her, CHOP felt like the “[creative] release valve that we needed.” While rents left Capitol Hill out of reach for many artists, CHOP allowed art to become a daily experience on Capitol

Hill again, not merely as a commodity but as an everyday practice. Thus, CHOP allowed many to feel like the neighborhood's artistic energy had reawakened and that Capitol Hill had again become a heterogeneous place.

Similarly, in the face of growing hostilities against marginalized populations on Capitol Hill, many saw CHOP as a physical safe space for individuals supposedly welcoming Capitol Hill had rejected. In the words of Clare, a white copywriter in her late twenties, "CHOP was all about [the] congregation [of] and [creating a] safety space for marginalized people." Many respondents pointed to the housing of individuals experiencing homelessness as an example of this. In this way, CHOP acted as a means for those whom the capitalist police city had cast aside to take up space and survive in one of its most expensive and gentrified neighborhoods. For Maria, a Latina social worker in her late twenties, "It was cool to see the way the community came together and offered resources for each other." For supporters, the welcoming nature of CHOP stood in sharp contrast to the exclusionary practices of the gentrified neighborhood.

Additionally, residents saw CHOP uplift diversity through its explicit focus on race. For some, CHOP was the first time Capitol Hill actually felt diverse. CHOP allowed BIPOC people to take up space in Capitol Hill, disrupting the predominantly white demographic balance of the neighborhood. As Maria explained, "Honestly, I saw more Brown and Black folks at that time than I had ever seen in Capitol Hill." CHOP also made the neighborhood reckon with race. Several residents I spoke to reported that they had engaged in serious and challenging conversations on race for the first time in response to the summer 2020 protests. Furthermore Grace, underscored that CHOP "[made it] clear whether you cared or didn't. You either stepped up and we're in the space [CHOP] and were supportive of what was going on. Or you were silent. And that silence was enough because it was time to speak." In the face of CHOP, Capitol

Hill could not sidestep racial issues. Although, I imagine, few of my respondents would say these changes solved racism on Capitol Hill, CHOP forced the neighborhood to examine its commitments to diversity.

Finally, respondents who looked at gentrification disdainfully upheld the fact that CHOP's disruptions forced gentrifiers to assess their presence in and their impact on the neighborhood. Henry attested, "Higher income people suddenly had to face the reality of income inequality [in the neighborhood.] They had to come to terms with the fact that they were probably responsible for a lot of this anger." Maria added that CHOP "disrupted... the people that live in those high-rise luxury apartments that call the police on people." While she acknowledged, "those [luxury] apartments are still there," she argued "it did bring conversation." In addition to forcing gentrifiers who rely on the police for their sense of safety to recognize their complicity in police brutality, the disruption of CHOP forced them to confront their impacts on the community into which they moved. In the words of Henry, "They had to come to terms with what the neighborhood actually stood for before they moved there."

Ultimately, for many residents, by creating a space that centered art and marginalized people, CHOP reinvigorated Capitol Hill's heterogeneous "spirit." Although Dr. Orlan, a Middle Eastern aeronautical engineer and filmmaker in his late thirties, emphasized that he "didn't feel like the old Capitol Hill came back" during CHOP, since gentrification had displaced so many of his friends in the queer and arts communities, he reflected that joining "all walks of life – Black, white, Middle Eastern, Muslim, Jewish, gay, lesbian, straight – in the stand against police for eight days straight [made him] think the old Capitol Hill was there and [that it] gave life to this movement." As the range of protesters invoked highlights, Capitol Hill, in the eyes of many CHOP supporters, became a truly heterogeneous place that valued diversity through CHOP and

the protests that led up to it. Consequently, in Dr. Orlan’s mind, “the old Capitol Hill was there,” even if its original residents had long departed. As this passage underscores, residents’ understandings of their neighborhood and who and what belongs there helped shape their responses to CHOP. For the resident supporters that I spoke to, CHOP made heterogeneity, which gentrification had threatened, possible in the neighborhood again.

### **CHOP as Unwelcome Disruption**

However, CHOP also attracted neighborhood opposition. When the Seattle Police Department abandoned its East Precinct in June of 2020, stories of a neighborhood under siege quickly materialized. Citing cries from upset residents, local news outlets *KOMO* and *Q13* alleged that CHOP was holding Capitol Hill “hostage,” while *KING 5* claimed, “local residents want their neighborhood back” (Miller, 2020; Robertson, 2020; Q13, 2020). These stories reflected growing neighborhood frustration with the protest. However, these stories neglected to contextualize this frustration. This section contextualizes neighborhood grievances against CHOP. Just as neighborhood supporters rooted their support in their understandings of Capitol Hill and who and what belongs there – namely, diversity and self-expression – neighborhood detractors rooted their opposition toward CHOP within their understandings of Capitol Hill and who and what belongs there. The detractors with whom I spoke centered their understandings of Capitol Hill around order and respect for public space. According to them, Capitol Hill belonged to rule-abiding residents that followed norms of civility. They believed that respectable “public” behavior belonged in public spaces and that those who passed through the neighborhood had a responsibility to help maintain neighborhood order. Additionally, they valued Capitol Hill’s identity as an orderly, respectable neighborhood. Consequently, for them, the commons of

CHOP commandeered and debased public space and sewed disorder, which communicated chaos to the outside world, leading to frustration.

### **An Unacceptable Appropriation of Public Lands**

Parks emerged as some of my respondents' – both CHOP supporters and detractors – favorite places in Capitol Hill. In line with Milligan's (1998) framework, memories and common conceptions influenced how respondents understood these parks and what should be possible there. Although a few respondents argued for a more inclusive definition of public space – specifically voicing the right of individuals experiencing homelessness to camp there – most associated public space with publicly sanctioned activities, namely exercise, relaxing, and respectfully hanging out with friends, reflecting extant literature (Cianciotto, 2020; Madden, 2010; Trouille, 2014).

CHOP repurposed Cal Anderson as a commons. Detractors saw this as unacceptable, as it made their favorite publicly sanctioned activities impossible in the park and wrested control of the park from what they saw as the rightful public. Many of the frustrated residents with whom I spoke felt that people experiencing homelessness had taken over the park, making it uninviting and impossible to use. They spoke of litter, drug activity, and human refuse covering Cal Anderson and the surrounding blocks. In their minds, this stole the park away from its rightful users – the neighborhood residents who used parks for outdoor activities. As a *Capitol Hill Seattle Blog* commenter wrote, “The children... have been chased out. No one can go sit on the benches and read. They are covered with trash or someone sleeping under a tarp. During the [COVID] shutdown, we NEED outdoor spaces” (jseattle, 2020b). Mirroring this post, many of the upset residents with whom I spoke complained about the loss of recreational space during a time when many felt trapped indoors. Responding to the loss, Rachel voiced, “We should have a

say in how we're using the space that we're all in, and I think that [say] should be limited to the people who live in the neighborhood.”

According to these individuals, CHOP was an accost to what they saw as the rightful public. CHOP overruled city legislation and expanded park access to previously banned individuals and activities, such as individuals experiencing homelessness and camping. This not only conflicted with residents' understandings of what should take place in the park and who should be there. It made the outdoor activities for which they coveted the park, particularly during a pandemic, seemingly impossible. By their understandings, undeserving outsiders had forcibly taken over and debased precious land that was not theirs. Just as gentrification had caused disruptions for certain Capitol Hill residents, CHOP upset how other residents had understood and what they felt was possible in park spaces throughout Capitol Hill. It brought in new populations and activities, which were dissonant with these residents' understandings. For this reason, CHOP elicited neighborhood ire.

### **The Communication of Disorder**

CHOP caused further upset by destabilizing the neighborhood and communicating this disorder to the outside world. Scholars have explored the role order and norms of civility – the lack of litter, the maintenance of property, and interpersonal relationships governed by proper etiquette – play in neighborhood attachment (Low, 2009; Trouille, 2014; Taylor, 1996). In particular, they have shown that the perception of these values within a neighborhood allow residents to feel secure in their middle-class identities (Low, 2009) and in the fact that outsiders see their neighborhoods in a positive light (Trouille, 2014). While CHOP supporters often defined Capitol Hill by community, specifically, its queer and arts communities, detractors often defined Capitol Hill by norms of civility. They voiced that residents had a responsibility to

maintain the appearance of the neighborhood and those who passed through the neighborhood should not disrupt the existing order. They rooted this understanding of Capitol Hill in their memories of and ongoing commitments to home improvement projects, cordial relationships with their neighbors, and volunteer roles at local parks. Because they desired a clean and orderly neighborhood, they often had little nostalgia for a Capitol Hill of years' past – unlike CHOP supporters, who felt as if gentrification had corrupted the neighborhood's identity. As Gary explained, "Some people have said that the Hill has gotten too upscale, too expensive. It's no longer kind of funky. I don't feel that way. To me, there are still funky areas on Capitol Hill. And to me, they just look kind of rundown. And I'm a person that doesn't like litter."

For these individuals, CHOP disrupted order and civility on Capitol Hill. They saw the litter, drug activity, and human refuse that had taken over Cal Anderson as symbolic of this. While many of the detractors I interviewed stated that the distance of their homes from Cal Anderson limited the extent to which this disorder disrupted their lives, many stressed that businesses and residents closer to CHOP found their daily lives derailed. Reflecting this, a self-identified neighbor of Cal Anderson Park vented on *Capitol Hill Seattle Blog* that the neighborhood had become "extremely distressing and belligerent." The commenter added that the constant noise, graffiti tagging, and cigarette and marijuana smoke outside of their window made people in the neighborhood wonder if they were "being intentionally terrorized" (jseattle, 2020b). For this resident – and many others in the vicinity of CHOP – the commons of CHOP upset the norms of civility they needed to live their lives. For them, CHOP threatened their right to live peacefully in their homes.

In addition to disrupting residents' ability to live in their neighborhood, many of the CHOP detractors with whom I spoke feared the negative impact this disorder would have on

Capitol Hill's reputation. For example, Barbara, a white retired woman in her early seventies, expressed, "[CHOP is] going to be remembered as Bedlam... Also, talk about perception – I think CHOP changed Seattle's perception of Capitol Hill. All of the sudden it was dangerous to be on Capitol Hill again." Earlier in our conversation, she explained that when she moved to Capitol Hill in the 1980s, it had a reputation as a dangerous neighborhood. However, through volunteer work, property investments, and the growth of small businesses, the neighborhood had become one of the most desired in Seattle. CHOP, she worried, reverted Capitol Hill to its previous untamed – and dangerous – status. For her, and many of the other residents I interviewed with similar concerns, CHOP not only hampered daily life. It turned the neighborhood they called home into a place of stigma. They feared that greater Seattle no longer saw it as a neighborhood renowned for its beautiful parks, quirky small businesses, and trendy restaurants but, rather, as another place of American urban anarchy that one should avoid (Anderson, 1999).

### **The Sweep of CHOP and the Re-establishment of Order**

Ultimately, city officials would cite these concerns around appropriate use of public space and disorder to justify its pacification of CHOP. As the Seattle Police Department cleared the remaining occupiers on the morning of July 1, 2020, then chief of police Carmen Best stressed, "Enough is enough... I was just stunned by the amount of graffiti, garbage, and property destruction" to explain the city's decision to retake the zone. In her framing, police control would bring much-needed order back to the neighborhood (KING 5, 2020; Barnett, 2020). Seattle Parks and Recreation promised similar salvation. Later, when the department swept the final encampment in Cal Anderson Park, superintendent Jesus Aguirre reasoned, "During the pandemic, access to outdoor space and recreation activities has been more important

than ever for the physical and mental wellbeing of so many in our community,” directly addressing the concerns over park access many in the neighborhood had voiced (Hirsch, 2020). Many residents I interviewed welcomed this re-establishment of order, as it brought “the park back to normal” and allowed them to return to their daily lives uninterrupted.

In this understanding, CHOP was antithetical to the neighborhood order resident detractors desired. The commons CHOP created ignored the rules and norms that had previously governed space and who and what belongs there. These rules and norms not only provided predictable stability on which their day-to-day lives depended. They helped foster a positive neighborhood image commiserate with how many residents saw their neighborhood. As such, while CHOP served as a welcome disruption to neighborhood gentrification to some, it served as an unwelcome disruption to neighborhood order to others.

### **Beyond Support and Opposition: Neighborhood Ambivalence toward CHOP**

The previous two sections explored how residents’ understandings of Capitol Hill – and who and what belongs there – mediated both positive and negative responses to CHOP. While this led individual residents to tend toward support or opposition, this section argues that most residents did not unequivocally support or oppose CHOP but, rather, held complex mixed opinions. Many of the detractors with whom I spoke couched their frustrations with CHOP in support for Black Lives Matter and sympathy for protesters. They simply wished the protest occupation had disrupted their neighborhood less, a desire that stood at odds with how some organizers understood CHOP. Meanwhile, many CHOP supporters, along with those who already held less positive opinions, grew increasingly wary of the protest occupation, as it attracted violence, which some supporters attested city officials had a role in stoking, to Capitol Hill. Nevertheless, residents directed much of their frustration to the police, rather than

protesters, due to the department's use of violent crowd control weapons, further complicating whom Capitol Hill residents saw as culpable for their neighborhood's increasing instability. The ambivalence that many supporters and detractors shared toward CHOP further highlights the role understandings of space play in neighborhood responses to protest. In the case of CHOP, "moral shock" and desire for change often competed with the need for stability in one's immediate neighborhood.

**"Tough-love for the anarchists and love-love for the non-anarchists": Support for Black Lives Matter and the Expectation of Peaceful Protest among Detractors**

While the detractors with whom I spoke vented about CHOP, many were quick to voice support for the larger Black Lives Matter movement that spawned CHOP. Many expressed that they felt an "overwhelming sense of sadness and despair" over police violence and persisting inequalities Black communities faced. They believed that elected officials and communities needed to work together to address the systemic racism upon "which this country was built." As such, many supported much of what they saw as peaceful protest activity that emerged in May and June of 2020. For example, reflecting on the Seattle protests that led up to CHOP, Barbara commented, "It was really encouraging. There were lots of parade routes that would come by our house. [At that time, I felt] a hopeful good. I felt the United States was waking up [to] the fact that lives for Black people throughout the country were quite different."

As such, detractors were less opposed to protesters' calls for racial equity and more opposed to the disruption they brought to their neighborhood. For example, the *Capitol Hill Seattle Blog* commenter who complained about graffiti and noise made sure to write that they felt impressed "by the courage of the protesters" and that they believed nationwide protests were moving the country in the right direction (jseattle, 2020b). They only voiced their disapproval

toward the disruption CHOP brought to their neighborhood. Anita, a white retired woman in her mid sixties, reflected this sentiment. Against many protesters' demands for police abolition, she wished the police had maintained a greater presence at CHOP to deliver "tough-love for the anarchists and love-love for the non-anarchists." She wished that protesters had "go[ne] to Gandhi to look at what's the non-violent way to protest." Anita never specified what this approved version of protest would look like. However, Barbara pointed to the January 2017 Women's March, which, like CHOP, made use of Cal Anderson Park. For her, the Women's March felt appropriate in Cal Anderson because it followed an orderly, set schedule. In her mind, protesters at the Women's March and protesters at CHOP both advocated for just causes. However, protesters at CHOP created discord because their protest occupation appropriated public space, debasing it in the process, rather than working with Seattle Parks and Recreation to schedule a sanctioned event. Thus, detractors opposed CHOP largely because of its methods, not its objectives.

With this, many felt that CHOP would have received a greater welcome in the neighborhood had organizers actively worked with neighborhood residents and businesses to coordinate a governing structure and mediate disputes. For example, while Dr. Orlan largely supported CHOP, he lamented the lack of structure in place to work with neighborhood businesses: "A utopian society can exist. However, there needs to be a sort of democratic way of bringing [neighborhood] businesses on board... I think CHOP could have survived if it was planned." Meanwhile, the just-mentioned *Capitol Hill Seattle Blog* poster regretted that CHOP "was unable to coordinate among residents and establish any consensus regarding rules or standards" (jseattle, 2020b). This desire for greater coordination between CHOP and neighborhood residents and businesses finds grounding in Stavrides' (2016) conceptualization of

“expanding commons.” According to him, commoning can only thrive if it welcomes in individuals that sit at its periphery and if it creates practices to negotiate differences. Through this scholarly interpretation, had CHOP organizers worked with neighborhood residents and businesses, it would have both disrupted neighborhood life less and benefited from increased neighborhood support.

However, this desire for a less disruptive CHOP stood at odds with how some organizers understood CHOP. Grace stressed that disruption was integral to CHOP. By disrupting neighborhood traffic, business, and residents’ ability to live their lives unimpeded, organizers had gained a “bargaining chip” to use in negotiations of their demands with city officials. Furthermore, she added, “If it bothered them [residents] that we were there everyday occupying the space, it should bother them that we [Black people] are oppressed and occupied in our own spaces, and those differences are really based in privilege.” While many residents, and some involved with CHOP, like Dr. Orlan, wanted CHOP to be a less disruptive “expanding commons,” some organizers saw this as antithetical to the purpose of the protest occupation. They wanted to create discomfort to gain concessions from the city and unsettle people who led comparatively comfortable lives. Thus, while many detractors supported organizers’ overall objectives, negating the notion that they unequivocally opposed the protest occupation, their opposition of disruption came in conflict with some organizers’ understandings of CHOP. Ultimately, this begins to question how much support disruptive protest occupations can attract, as they seek to unsettle unjust systems of power, such as a police force, on which local residents, in more privileged positionalities, nevertheless feel their lives depend.

### **Violence and Growing Neighborhood Unease**

Many CHOP supporters also held ambivalent feelings toward the protest occupation. In particular, many who had initially involved themselves with the protest occupation, along with those who held less positive feelings, grew increasingly wary as it attracted violence to the neighborhood. Respondents largely attributed violence to two sources: white supremacist attacks from outside and an increasingly armed power struggle from within. First, many recalled the increasing presence of neo-Nazis and “loud white trucks with blue lives matter stickers” circling the neighborhood at night, which led many to stay indoors at night for fear of attack. For example, Chloe, a Latina preschool teacher in her late twenties, said hearing about the presence of white supremacists led her to see the streets as increasingly dangerous: “Just like off the street from me, somebody had gotten jumped by some white supremacists. And I’m like, well, I could have been walking home, and that could have been me.” This growing threat, which she heard about in stories circulating throughout the neighborhood, led her to feel increasingly uneasy toward CHOP: “This is not the place I want to be.”

On top of this, many believed that violence was growing from a power struggle within CHOP, which emerged due to its lack of recognized governing structure. Although a loose band of organizers had coordinated speakers, venues for art, and a system for mutual aid, residents closest to the event agreed that weak governance created a power vacuum. Within this, armed “fiefdoms,” as Irina described them, emerged that attempted to wrest control over the territory. Local and national press saw this as an emerging problem as well (Gupta 2020, Reeve & Guff, 2020). As Dr. Orlan explained, “the beginning of the failure of the movement was people’s natural habits of climbing to gain power. [At CHOP,] whoever h[e]ld the gun, w[o]n.”

Importantly, while many pointed to a violent power-struggle within CHOP, respondents closest to the movement attested that this violence did not emerge unprovoked. Rather, they

insisted that city officials played an active role in instigating chaos. Dr. Orlan reasoned that the city did this to communicate, “You need the police to live. Otherwise, the world would fall into carnage, and nobody will survive.” Dr. Orlan and Grace recounted that the city achieved this by sending in operatives to destabilize the limited order organizers had established. One *Capitol Hill Seattle Blog* commenter even speculated that the Seattle Police Department had planned CHOP’s six shootings to further stoke opposition against the movement (jseattle, 2020a). According to Dr. Orlan, this strategy worked. Indeed, as CHOP became increasingly violent, many of the supporters I interviewed began avoiding CHOP, especially at night

Ultimately, the rising level of violence – both from outside and within CHOP – led many to grow frustrated with the protest and call for a return to order. Another commenter on a *Capitol Hill Seattle Blog* post voiced, “I moved here because of the vibrant, accepting neighborhood, and I honor the protest, the reason for the protests, and our right to protest. Yet, I don’t recognize this neighborhood now – especially as the general mood on the street is currently changing in an ominous direction, particularly after dark” (jseattle, 2020b). Meanwhile, a resident, quoted in *Vox*, explained that while the police did not make her feel safer, especially “when they were tear-gassing the neighborhood and shooting rubber bullets,” she voiced that she might feel safer if they “disperse[d] the people... who are perpetuating violence” (Burns, 2020). CHOP may have dismantled an order many detested. However, many felt that the violence that took hold in its place turned their neighborhood into a horror they hardly recognized. Within this, many expressed a desire for a re-establishment of order.

### **Frustration toward the Police**

However, as the resident quoted in *Vox* hinted, residents directed much of their ire around the destabilization of their neighborhood not toward protesters but toward the police, further

complicating whom residents saw as culpable for their neighborhood's instability. Throughout CHOP, Capitol Hill residents had to live with the constant presence of police helicopters and surveillance drones, and during the protests leading up to CHOP, the deployment of flashbangs and teargas. This use of violent crowd control weapons in the protests leading up to CHOP posed an elevated threat to residents who lived within a few blocks of the East Precinct, the epicenter of hostilities. In particular, residents reported having to tape their windows shut to prevent teargas from drifting into their homes. When they could not tape their windows in time, the results were gruesome. *The Urbanist* and *The Stranger* documented incidents of residents fleeing their homes, unable to breathe, and one resident testified at a City Council meeting that the gasses caused his three-month-old child to violently foam at the mouth and nose (Campbell, 2020; Graham, 2020b). In *The Urbanist*, Ethan Campbell (2020) summarized, "My neighborhood was fully transformed into a warzone. There is a horrific irony in seeing the iconic rainbow crosswalks of Seattle's 'gayborhood' engulfed in tear gas on the first two days of Pride Month."

Capitol Hill's transformation into a "warzone" generated feelings of siege and anger toward the police among several of the residents with whom I spoke. Christopher decried, "This is my neighborhood, and my neighborhood is under attack. Even if I'm at home, this isn't something I can watch on the news and click off." Adding to this, Chloe recalled, "I would come home from work and basically just hear a helicopter all night... It ma[d]e me feel unsafe; it ma[d]es me feel like something could be dropped on me." For Henry, who had to tape his windows shut during the protests leading up to CHOP, the barrage made him reevaluate his opinions on the police: "I come from a place [Nashville] where being a policeman is widely considered to be a dignified profession, [but CHOP and the protests leading up to it] definitely

harmed my perception of the police. [I felt] anger at the police because I thought their response was ridiculous.”

These experiences and perceptions complicate previously highlighted notions that the police were restoring order to the neighborhood. As the resident quoted in *Vox* underscores, strong feelings of ambivalence emerged as some saw the police department as the proper authority to restore safety and stability to the neighborhood but had experienced the department as a major source of violence and instability. The police department’s role in Capitol Hill’s destabilization additionally complicates who residents saw as culpable for derailing their daily lives. While many residents grew increasingly frustrated with CHOP as it attracted violence to their neighborhood, they did not see the police as a universal force of stability that stood in contrast to the universal force of chaos at CHOP. Rather, for many, the police played an integral role in their understanding of an unraveling neighborhood.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This paper addressed how Capitol Hill residents responded to CHOP and contextualized it within their neighborhood. Additionally, it assessed why Capitol Hill residents believed the protest occupation happened in their neighborhood as opposed to another part of Seattle. Through exploring Capitol Hill residents’ responses to CHOP, this paper found that Capitol Hill residents felt their neighborhood helped shape a protest occupation that, as a commons, radically disrupted life in their neighborhood. As such, their responses to CHOP interacted with their understandings of Capitol Hill – along with who and what belongs there. While this led residents to tend to support for or opposition to CHOP, their responses were much more nuanced and often defied simple opposition or support. In particular, the increasing and often violent disorder in the

neighborhood led many wishing for a return to order, regardless of their level of support for the protest occupation.

These findings have multiple implications. First, they show how spatial contexts influence people's reactions to protest. Spatial contexts not only play a role in mobilizing protesters – as Maharwal (2017) and Uncu (2016) have shown in their respective studies on protests in the San Francisco Bay Area and Istanbul – they also shape how those who live in a given area understand and react to emerging movements. Because different people have different relationships with the spaces they occupy, this paper also highlights how protests naturally produce different responses in a single neighborhood. In particular, neighborhood protests can compel certain residents to participate. At CHOP, several of my respondents involved themselves in the protest, donating cans of food, marching, and contributing to artwork. As such, my findings begin to blur the lines between protester and resident and speak to the possibilities of expanding commoning (Stavrides, 2016). Finally, my paper engages in a conversation on neighborhood safety and order. Nearly everyone with whom I spoke expressed a desire for a return to order as the protest occupation grew increasingly violent. On one hand, many people viewed the police as a cause of neighborhood instability, both due to their use of violent crowd control weapons and their agitation of discord within CHOP. On the other, many people, even those who sympathized with the protest, saw them as the logical party upon which to call. Thus, the summer of CHOP should force one to reckon with the implications of relying on the police for feelings of safety, as they rely on disruptive violence to maintain order and, as the original impetus of the protest stressed, endanger the lives of BIPOC individuals.

My work also sits in conversation with a growing body of literature on CHOP by showing how space and place attachments played out during CHOP and how various

stakeholders experience them. This report considered the experiences and understandings of area residents. Other works have focused on other populations. For example, in a graphic report, Seattle artist and writer Tessa Hulls (2020) explored how CHOP impacted local small businesses. Her findings profiled the ambivalences business owners faced and the frustrations they had with city officials due to their inability to work with protest organizers.

Additionally, whereas my work largely focused on the periphery of CHOP, others have written about CHOP's inner workings. In particular, some have profiled the challenges Black organizers faced leading in a largely white city and neighborhood (Jackson 2020, Malcolm & O'Brien, 2020). While not discussed in paper, some of my data touched upon this. During our conversation, Grace spoke to the prevalence of "toxic allyship" within CHOP, the false sense that many white allies got that they were "part of the Black experience," and many others commented on how white attendees took up space in what many saw as a "space for Black people to be leaders." Articles that have focused on this force one to consider how equity can be practiced in expanding commons and open movements that, due to their open nature, reflect the societies in which they sit – both demographically and in terms of how they reproduce systemic inequalities.

Finally, with the police department's recapture of Cal Anderson and the surrounding blocks, journalists have begun to consider the long-term impacts of CHOP. Noting the area's quick return to normal, Charles Mudede (2020) has argued that market interests on Capitol Hill made the protest occupation's collapse inevitable. In line with Henri Lefebvre's (1974) concepts of abstract and differential space, he saw CHOP as a space of difference that went against the market, which city leaders and property developers worked to homogenize to reinstate it in service to market growth. Contrasting this, Magaña (2020), in his work on the 2006 Oaxaca

protests, encourages that one look at protest movements not as events with neat start and end dates that succeed or fail but as “similar to the law of conservation of energy which states that energy can be transformed but not created nor destroyed” (p.1). In this vein, local artists and activists, such as Blue Cone Studios, have documented and celebrated both artwork created during the protest occupation and works that artists continue to produce that amplify CHOP’s political agenda. In the words of Magaña (2020), these works, along with the political tagging that continues to pop up throughout the neighborhood, carry CHOP’s energy by allowing “passersby to imagine alternatives to dominant spatial and social arrangements” (p.15).

The above portrayals enrich and contextualize my work by adding new perspectives to the growing conversation on CHOP. My research speaks to the experiences and understandings of a particular population, people who can afford to live on Capitol Hill. Additionally, my identity as queer white individual who grew up in Seattle shaped my conclusions. However, I hope my research serves as inspiration for future work on CHOP, as well as other urban social movements. A growing body of literature that investigates different populations, from authors with different perspectives and backgrounds, will sharpen our understandings of how people experience protest in urban settings. This will advance the field, as it needs contextually specific nuance to grasp the experiences and understandings that urban protests produce, for, as my work has highlighted, these complex events do not generate uniform responses.

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