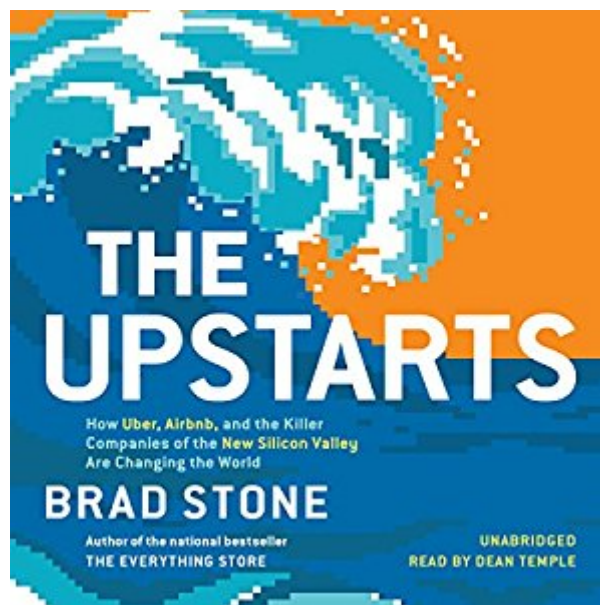




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The Upstarts: How Uber, Airbnb, And The Killer Companies Of The New Silicon Valley Are Changing The World



Synopsis

A look deep inside the new Silicon Valley from the New York Times best-selling author of *The Everything Store*. Ten years ago the idea of getting into a stranger's car or walking into a stranger's home would have seemed bizarre and dangerous, but today it's as common as ordering a book online. Uber and Airbnb have ushered in a new era: redefining neighborhoods, challenging the way governments regulate business, and changing the way we travel. In the spirit of iconic Silicon Valley renegades like Steve Jobs and Bill Gates, another generation of entrepreneurs is using technology to upend convention and disrupt entire industries. These are the upstarts, idiosyncratic founders with limitless drive and an abundance of self-confidence. Led by such visionaries as Travis Kalanick of Uber and Brian Chesky of Airbnb, they are rewriting the rules of business and often sidestepping serious ethical and legal obstacles in the process. *The Upstarts* is the definitive story of two new titans of business and a dawning age of tenacity, conflict, and wealth. In Brad Stone's riveting account of the most radical companies of the new Silicon Valley, we discover how it all happened and what it took to change the world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Uber and Airbnb have radically impacted taxis/car rental, hotels and vacation rentals. If they have their way, they'll soon be disrupting a whole new set of adjacent local industries, including food delivery, local tours and "experiences." Business Week's Brad Stone, author of *The Everything Store: Jeff Bezos*

and *The Age of Sharing* and one of our keynoters, has been tracking both companies and their industry segments from their emergence, roughly six years ago. In *The Upstarts*, he provides a sustained look at their founders, their evolving missions, their competition, and especially, how they are using social media and intense lobbying to take on local authorities and entrenched industries. Superficially, the two San Francisco-based companies don't have much in common. But they know each other as tech industry peers. In alternating chapters, Stone lays out how they have both embraced the use of other people's property — cars and apartments — to build new businesses based on smartphone messaging, geolocation and automatic payment processing. Granted, the public images of the two companies couldn't contrast more. Of the two founders, Airbnb's Brian Chesky is generally seen as the idealistic visionary, who was inspired by Neal Gabler's great biography of Walt Disney, *Triumph of the Imagination*, to build his worldwide community of friendly Airbnb hosts. Uber CEO Travis Kalanick, meanwhile, has built a reputation as a hard driving and coarse businessman. As such, he's often villainized as the creator of a relentless, bulldozing (and anti-women) culture that smashes its way to success, crushing taxi owners, local politicians, critics and journalists along the way. #DeleteUber, indeed. The reality is that the leaders of both companies are hard and sometimes, perhaps, unethical drivers, as Stone aptly chronicles. Airbnb, especially, is not entirely a viral success story. Rather, it uses the questionably legal, growth-hacking skills of co-founder Nathan Blecharczyk to spam Craigslist and build its base of apartment listings. Unless they have to, neither company intuitively looks out for the interests of their drivers or apartment owners. Kalanick, especially, eagerly embraces the vision of Google's driverless car to accept a multi-billion dollar investment from Google (before they went their separate ways). And Airbnb has left apartment owners on their own to take on local authorities and insurance companies. *The Upstarts* is a terrific read from start to finish, and provides strong insight into the mindsets and history of the companies' leadership. At the same time, Stone doesn't seem convinced that the Sharing Economy is a true paradigm for the future, as some social scientists are contending. It is really just about growing their individual companies, pushing down the barriers, and innovating with an eye to win.

I did not know much about the founding of these two companies and have heard blurbs in the news over the past several years about each which you might have as well. Putting all the things I

currently know about these two businesses along with the news reports to go along with this book makes for quite a fascinating journey. The book is extremely readable and put together nicely in a timeline that follows Uber 1 chapter and AirBNB the next but within roughly the same timeline. I did not know that the two founders were such good friend and the parallels between these two companions is fascinating. I would recommend this book to a certain type of person like someone business-minded or an entrepreneur, or someone looking to start-up their business....but ultimately this is a story for anyone to better understand the revolution in the way services are being delivered to our society moving forward. The impact these two companies have had on our life-styles and society in general is fascinating and ground breaking. The journey for them to get where they are is at the crux of this book and provides for a compelling piece no matter who you are.

I read this at warp speed. Like, I read it in the tube, I read it in a taxi (bad idea,) I read it while code was compiling. I had to know what happens next. Did it address any of the big issues about the sharing economy? Let's put it this way: the author is very clearly aware of all the questions that come up. The narrative is always set in the context of the impact the sharing economy is having on all of us: those who work in it, those who share in it (and often would not have access to some rather basic services without it), those who invest in it, those who are fighting it, those who win from it and those who stand to lose. But "The Upstarts" is not an economics book or a sociology text. If you're buying it to find out what's about to happen to the hotel industry in North America (my take: 5% of the world's population / 42% of the world's hotel rooms before AirBnb came out of nowhere, you do the math), you've come to the wrong place. If you ordered the book to look for an analysis of how much unpaid tax is being transferred from heretofore protected cab drivers to the city hall and if the rest of us are left better off or worse off, again, you've come to the wrong place. Funky observations about how in London AirBnb is threatened with a ceiling on days while in New York it's having to deal with a floor are conspicuous through their absence. The book does not particularly dwell on the long-term either. The rather rude fact that all money ever made from taxis has historically come from exercising market power? Look elsewhere. Uber and AirBnb's prospects of dominating markets with only limited network effects? Pass. There's good news here, though: If you bought "The Upstarts" to get to know Travis Kalanick and Brian Chesky, if you'd like to ride with them from their ramen noodle eating days to the David Guetta-DJ

super parties, you have come to the right place. You could not possibly be in better hands than Brad Stone. If this book (which, let's admit it, is a business book) had been written as a novel, it would still be pretty awesome. You get fed new faces only when they help develop the story and they're woven into the narrative at a pace that will not leave you guessing. There is significant character development here too, as you witness young idealists transform into steely capitalists and, if you're paying attention, there's a bonus waiting for you in the shape of an mini-course in entrepreneurship! The author is not afraid to tell you why these guys are doing the winning, but he does not want you to take his word. He does the necessary work to get the view out of somebody else's mouth. The director of Y Combinator, for example, leaves you in no doubt that the founders of AirBnb succeeded for one reason only: they were "cockroaches" who refused to die. So they kept it alive long enough on their own, until their "world is my oyster, I'm busy on a million better things" Harvard-grad, former teenage spamming industry millionaire friend deigned to turn his magic to their project. Significantly, the author is NOT making it up as he goes, he knows it all and he knows it first-hand. He's on first-name basis with everybody in the industry that counts and he has not been shy about getting the story straight from the horse's mouth, doing his own "cockroach" thing and stalking the young CEOs to the other side of the globe if that is what it will take to get an audience. I'm sure a lot of the detail is how "the good guys" see it (for example, do we really believe it was Travis who broke up with his girlfriend?) but the point is Brad Stone is only ever quoting first-hand here. He really is the man to write this story and he tells it in a style that would leave Quentin Tarantino breathless, jumping from Uber to AirBnb, via Zimride and Didi and all the regulators and competitors too.

"Jumping" as in jumping and "jumping" as in tracking them all down to talk to them and giving them their chance to tell their story. It's tremendous stuff. It never sags, it never lets up and it brings it all the way up to a couple hours before publication. Anything I didn't like? Actually, yes: how about editing out every single instance of "this turned out to be the best investment he / she / it had ever made!" Not only does it get tiring, but most of these guys have not yet taken profit, have they? The story is compelling enough on its own, besides.

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