

"Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj" Spec Script

PORTIA LUNDIE

This script is based on my work as a community organizer in Harlem. I was elected as Secretary to the Tenants Association two years ago and as a result, immersed myself into New York Housing research and advocating for tenants rights in the building where I currently reside. This spec serves as a collection of the knowledge I have gained and illustrates my passion for educational media.

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INT. THE PATRIOT ACT STAGE

Hasan Minhaj walks onto the stage to an audience of hundreds of young people of color. Sporting his classic enthusiasm he jumps right in.

HASAN

Welcome, welcome, everyone. My name is Hasan Minhaj and today we are going to talk about a topic that's much-discussed among people in big cities like New York and Los Angeles, but not many people know what it really means. Gentrification.

Sure, we understand that gentrification is when a Whole Foods comes and replaces a P.C Richard and Son, but how does it actually work?

At it's most basic level, gentrification is when a low-income neighborhood gets taken over by white people with \$2000 baby strollers, which brings more expensive restaurants, grocery stores, and yoga studios, thus increasing the market value of the neighborhood, and pricing out low-income families.

You might be one to say, hey, Hasan, I'm sorry, but this is a natural occurrence. Neighborhoods change over time and maybe that's a good thing.

Well, to that I'd tell you to take your socially liberal, fiscal conservative bullshit elsewhere.

So how does gentrification actually happen...

You might be surprised to hear that it all starts with the government. (Dun, Dun, Dun music plays in the background).

(CONTINUED)

HPD, or New York City Department of

Housing Preservation and Development, is a state-run organization that functions to help people keep their housing.

Their job is to basically keep New York City affordable and diversify neighborhoods, and if you've ever walked around the Upper East Side in New York, you know they might not understand what they're supposed to be doing.

"Housing New York" is an initiative run by HPS. It's a thing Mayor Bill de Blasio did -- "to build or preserve 300,000 affordable homes by 2026." That means the city is subsidizing buildings to be built where 50% of homes are classified as "affordable."

Wow. It's never been a better time to tell your mom you're quitting med-school to move to New York and become an actor. Right?

Before you do that, let's talk about what Bill de Blasio means by "affordable housing."

You might think that it has to do with rent control and the 30% of New York households that live below the poverty line. Well you would be wrong.

They calculate what is affordable using "AMI," or, Area Median income. The AMI in NYC is \$96,100. That means when you make about \$96,000 for a 3 person household, you are considered "middle income." According to nyc.gov, you are qualified for affordable housing if you are in the bottom 30% of AMI all the way up to ...165% AMI. That means if you make \$160,000 a year for a three-person household you are eligible for affordable housing.

Does that sound like a place for a low-income person?

If you go onto the affordable housing website, you will see most buildings with minimum 80% AMI requirements. That's a minimum of \$75,000 a year. That's entry position at Goldman-Sachs money, that's not for regular people.

According to Bill Blasio's act, the luxury buildings going up in Battery Park City are considered "affordable."

Those who can meet rigorous income requirements and a highly competitive lottery system might have a hope of getting in, but do you think these buildings were built for the people who are struggling keep up with rent because Logan from SolarTech moved in next store and now there's a vegan donut shop on every corner?

No-- These buildings are for wealthy New Yorkers who don't want the super-rich to price them out of Chelsea.

They call it 'affordable housing' but really it's just the city funding luxury buildings so that more high-income people will have a place to live without the Park Avenue prices.

And we get it, \$100,000 a year is considered "middle income" because half of the people in New York are the super-rich. But why are those people dictating the cost of housing? How is that fair to the bottom 50%?

That's just one aspect of this unfair displacement.

HPD has other programs put in place to help people keep their homes in case of economic hardship.

One in particular is called the TPT program, or The Third Party Transfer program. It was put into place to help people whose buildings had gone bankrupt or succumbed to indecent living conditions, so that they could

renovate their buildings, and then buy their apartments at low-cost and form a co-op. Sounds like a great idea! Only thing is, if they fail to meet a round of rigorous and time consuming requirements, their building is possibly put up for sale, resulting in a hike in rent and tenants forced to move.

The TPT program has been in place for years and with so-so results.

HPD's job when it comes to the TPT program is to monitor the real estate agencies that act as landlords for the these buildings.

Unfortunately, this program is notorious for it's slow movement, neglect of tenants, and even cases of managers suing and forcing out their own tenants.

We spoke to one activist, Portia Lundie, who has been living in a building with this program and getting nowhere with her managers.

INT. INTERVIEW SPACE

Hasan and Portia sit across from each other. Hasan is very serious. Portia is collected, but friendly and approachable.

HASAN

Thanks so much. So your building has been in the TPT program, for how long?

PORTIA

My building has been in the TPT program for over 10 years. About 15.

HASAN

Fifteen years? That's sounds like way too long. I have Savage Fenty underwear exchanges that have taken less time.

PORTIA

Yeah, it's insane. For the most part, we have been in the dark about why it

has taken so long.

HASAN:

So, can you explain what the TPT program is and why your building wants to go through it ?

PORTIA :

Sure. It's apart of the Multifamily Preservation Loan Program which designates qualified tenants to purchase and rehabilitate distressed buildings, like the one I live in. Basically preserving properties in order to allow people to continue live in the place they grew up, affordably.

My building has been apart of this program since 2005. That's when they made renovations, and even at that time many people were kicked out of the building who were behind in rent.

The tenants in my building were told that if they meet the requirements they can convert to a co-op. So, 80% of people in the building need to be up to date on rent and willing to purchase...and as long as there are no major building violations and tenants have taken training courses, you know, on how to run a co-op housing building-- At that point, we should get an offer from the management company that was given to us by the city, and would we all own our apartments which would secure housing for over 40 families in my building.

HASAN

So, what's been the problem? Have you reached that 80% and gotten the training?

PORTIA

In 2005, I was 12 so, not me personally, but my family members did have that training and as far as they knew, met all of the other requirements. But there was radio silence from management.

HASAN

What do you mean?

PORTIA

The management company, you know the people who handle the landlord duties like repairs, maintenance, - they were impossible to get a hold of.

Hazardous issues like bed bugs, trespassers, even simple maintenance requests went un-responded to. There was a period of 6 months that my building didn't have gas and no one was told why or when it would be repaired.

HASAN

No gas? Like no heat?

PORTIA

No heat, no stoves. But they did give us electric heaters and, like, I had a really great toaster oven at the time so - ya know - not too bad. (sarcastic).

HASAN

I love a good toaster.

PORTIA

Yeah, so the building eventually lost faith in our property managers and things were in disarray for a long time. I joined the committee about two years ago and shortly after we enlisted Legal Aid to help us communicate more effectively with our building manager.

HASAN

Wait - you mean, in order to talk to your landlords, you need to go through a lawyer?

PORTIA

Yes, our Building Manager only will communicate with any of us through our city-appointed Lawyer. But I'm happy that there is any communication at all. Things got a little bit better

after we got representation.

HASAN

So the security issues are dealt with?

PORTIA

(overly excited to emphasize how minimal the changes are)

Well they started waxing the floors again! Oh, and they re-painted my door!

(winding down) No, honestly, even though it might seem small, we really do take for granted what it means to come home to clean floors and a feeling of safety.

They recently installed cameras in our hallways, which is something we had been pushing for, for a long time. So, some recent successes. Unfortunately, we are still kept in the dark about our building's income. We aren't provided with any records of our building's success or failure to meet these milestones. We've been at a stand still for years because our management company doesn't seem to want to share this information with us.

HASAN

Not even with your lawyers?

PORTIA

Well, my building is represented through Legal aid, so it's not like they have tons of resources at their disposal to help us. Talks are on going and it takes a lot of emails and pushing for a program that was put into place to help - for the advancement tenants.

HASAN

Where is your building?

PORTIA

In Harlem next to Central Park.

HASAN

Oh, I have a ton of rich friends that live there.

PORTIA

Yes, my building is worth a lot more than me or the tenants in my building would pay if we are successful in this program.

HASAN

So, excuse my asking, but, why is it fair that you should get that? I mean, my rich friends worked hard for their money investing other people's money.

PORTIA:

Well, the families in my building have lived there their entire lives. The organizers and the artists and the hair salons there, are what make it attractive to your rich friends. Ownership means security and the people who made these neighborhoods a great place to live in deserve to be there.

HASAN

So, is HPD going to hold the building managers accountable? Do you think you will ever convert your building into a co-op and the tenants in the building own their apartments?

PORTIA:

As of today, HPD has converted a total of 3 of the 5 buildings in my neighborhood that were put into the program 15 years ago. Communication with HPD and Management has increased a little bit in the last year so we are hopeful.

HASAN:

Why do you think your management company is so uncooperative?

PORTIA

My best guess is that the market value of the building is much higher than "affordable." So, the longer we wait

to convert, the higher the price will be for the new tenants that move into my building whether the conversion happens or not. Right now they are telling us that the conversion is definitely happening, but they are not telling us when or why an offer hasn't been made yet.

All I know is, if the tenants were to convert to a Co-op, then the income of my building would be managed by a board of elected tenants, not this real-estate company that manages 42 other buildings.

HASAN:

What could ownership do for some of the people in your community?

PORTIA:

Well it would bring a lot of security to the people in the building, but more than it means that their children have that stability as well. It seemed crazy to me that a government agency would let these corporations do the tenants like that. So that's why I've committed as an elected Secretary of the Steering committee, to sending them a lot of emails until things get done.

HASAN

"All the best" with those e-mails.

PORTIA

Thank you.

HASAN

Thanks for speaking with us today.

END.

Thank you to furmancenter.org and nyc.gov for the housing information in this script.

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/services-and-information/area-median-income.pag>

<https://furmancenter.org/thestoop/entry/focus-on-poverty>