

# #1600 Housing Cannot be a Fundamental Human Right and a Commodity at the Same Time

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [00:00:00] Welcome to this episode of the award winning *Best of the Left* podcast in which we will look at the fact that the housing crisis is at a worst point than at any time in recent history. Solutions are available and require political will to bring into reality, but because the problem is now so widespread, we may actually be able to take action that would have been untenable before. Sources today include *Future Hindsight*, *Notes From America*, *The Majority Report*, and the *Thom Hartmann Program*, with additional members-only clips from *Notes From America* and *Channel 4 News* in the UK.

## Housing is a Moral Issue w Shaun Donovan - Future Hindsight - Air Date 12-7-23

**MILA ATMOS - HOST, FUTURE HINDSIGHT:** So let's jump right in. Describe the current crisis in housing and how is it worse than it ever was?

**SHAUN DONOVAN:** Well, I've been doing this about 30 years, starting in the South Bronx. I grew up here in New York City. And I would say the crisis has been getting worse over those decades. But during the COVID crisis, we actually saw rents increasing more than [00:01:00] we ever have since we started keeping records, literally never seen bigger increases, 18 percent increase in rent year over year. And I think what is different about it, beyond the numbers, is the level of homelessness we see on our streets.

And so often, the housing issues have been problems of the coasts or problems of big cities. Now, I was talking to a senator the other day who said, just nonchalantly, well, our housing crisis in Bozeman, Montana. And it is really that the crisis is everywhere now, the depth of it is so intense that I think people across the country are starting to grapple with issues that have long been issues in New York or other places, but now it's really become a national crisis in a different way.

**MILA ATMOS - HOST, FUTURE HINDSIGHT:** It's interesting that you mentioned that the rents have increased so much, 18 percent in some spaces, and that there is a housing crisis in places like Bozeman, [00:02:00] Montana.

What do you think is the source of this crisis? And is it really specifically COVID? Or is it well beyond that?

**SHAUN DONOVAN:** Well, what I would say is we've had a chronic crisis for a long time. If you go back decades, we've seen that more and more people are paying outrageous shares of their income towards rent, especially. And the challenge is that on top of that decades of increases, we then had this incredibly acute crisis on top of the chronic one during COVID. And part of that, frankly, was that people became much more interested in more space at home when you're working at home. You probably want to have something other than just a bedroom, right? And there was more and more demand for housing. But what we also saw was there was a short term help for people with rent. They were able to stay in their homes because the federal [00:03:00] government put lots of money into protecting people against evictions.

But As that money is going away, you have rents that are still much higher than they were, but people's incomes are going back down in ways that are really challenging them. And the most visible crisis that you see out of that is the homelessness on our streets. But there's a silent crisis too. Families living in shelters, people doubled up across the country.

And people not putting food on the table at night or not being able to buy their kids the books that they need or so many other ways that we always say rent eats first, everything else gets put to the side because rents are going up and up.

**MILA ATMOS - HOST, FUTURE HINDSIGHT:** Well, speaking of rent eating first, in your mind, what is affordable housing now? I know that simply means, broadly, that it's a housing that you can afford and that looks different in a place like New York or Bozeman or Detroit. But at Enterprise, how do you think about affordable housing?

**SHAUN DONOVAN:** Well, we think about it in a [00:04:00] few ways. The simplest way to answer that is we have a federal standard that people shouldn't pay more than 30 percent of their income, about a third of their income towards their housing. So that's a simple way of answering the question. But we also really believe that it isn't just about the housing being affordable. It is also about the quality of the housing. Think about the depth of whether it's asthma or lead paint or a whole range of problems that come from where we live.

It's also about your neighborhood. The truth about housing is that where you live determines so many things in your life because when you choose a home, you choose a neighborhood, right? You choose where your kids go to school.

You choose your access to jobs. Even one of the things we've seen, if your neighborhood isn't safe, if you don't have sidewalks, the ability to exercise, mental health, there's so many things that suffer based on the community that you [00:05:00] live in. And so we look at it not just as the affordability and the quality, but also making sure that homes are part of neighborhoods of opportunity. And housing is the primary building block, if you will, of neighborhoods.

## **Why NYCs Move to Privatize Public Housing Could Impact the Rest of the Country - Notes to America - Air Date 12-18-23**

**KAI WRIGHT - HOST, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** We are thinking this week about home: the place where you go for comfort and safety, where you settle down and unwind, maybe share holiday time off with your loved ones. How much should that cost us and how do we make it available to everybody? Because right now it's not something you can take for granted.

There's an official measure that determines when you can't afford the place you call home. Whether you rent or pay a mortgage, if you have to spend more than 30 percent of your income on housing, the federal government considers you "cost burdened" and therefore at risk of losing your home.

Right now, a record high number of Americans fit this definition -- more than 21 million households. Nearly 12 million renters [00:06:00] spend more than half of their income on housing. And we wonder why so many people feel so insecure about money. Perhaps it is more than gas prices, yeah?

The problem is not that everybody wants an overly fancy place to live. On the contrary, over roughly the past decade or so, there has been a dramatic decrease in the supply of affordable housing all over the country.

Now there is a very old solution to this problem. It's called Publicly Subsidized Housing, and I want to start this week by hearing from a young woman, a 17-year-old in New York City, for whom public housing has been a life changing force. Fanta Kaba moved around a lot when she was growing up because her family couldn't afford a place to stay. Public housing solved that problem, but she and many others now fear that the resource that gave her stability will not be available to the next generation of families. So she's been reporting on the

future of public housing as part of WNYC's Radio Rookies program, which is a program that trains people to [00:07:00] tell first person stories of what's happening in their communities.

We'll hear a couple of reports from Fanta in this show. First up, she kind of sets the stakes for our conversation. Here's Fanta.

**FANTA KABA - REPORTER, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** [Sounds of family talking]

I have a big family, so I barely get any privacy. When things get too loud or when my siblings annoy me, I just go to my room and shut the door.

All right, so this is my room. On the wall, there's a bunch of posters. One of them says, "Don't stop trying", and "Life is fantastic". I love my room. It's my favorite place. It's the one place where I can get some peace and quiet.

So there's a poster of Jimi Hendrix. And there's another poster for Tim and Paula. And another one is Rolling Stones. And then I do have to share it with my annoying little sister. But it's [00:08:00] way better than when I had to share one room with all five of my siblings. Or when we lived with my grandparents and aunts and uncles. Imagine, 15 people in a two bedroom apartment. That was one of the places we stayed.

Growing up, we moved around a lot. Harlem, Queens, the Bronx, even North Carolina for a while. My parents' jobs did not pay enough. My dad drove taxis and my mom was a home attendant.

Alright, so when you first came to America, where did you first go? Like, what was your first place you stayed at?

**FANTA KABA'S MOTHER:** When we first came to America we was living in Manhattan. Yes. Harlem.

**FANTA KABA - REPORTER, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** That's my mom. She and my dad moved here from Guinea, hoping for a new life. What they didn't know is that finding a home in a place like New York City is almost impossible.

When I was eight, [00:09:00] after bouncing around, we ended up at a shelter. So how did it feel to stay in the shelter with six kids, you know it's a temporary housing situation. How was it for you?

**FANTA KABA'S MOTHER:** Well, it was not that easy. But I was grateful at least I have a place to stay for my kids. And it was okay. It was okay.

**FANTA KABA - REPORTER, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** It was okay. We had a roof over our heads. But the shelter never felt like my home. It had blank white walls and I didn't put anything up. I knew we were just gonna leave again. I felt really uncomfortable there.

Then, the workers at the shelter helped my mom apply for a new apartment, a NYCHA apartment. That's what everyone calls the New York City Housing Authority, or our city's public housing, the projects.

I knew there was some stigma around living in the projects, but my parents told us we were going to have a big [00:10:00] new apartment with four bedrooms. They took us to Home Depot to pick out paint colors. And they said, this time, we're not moving again.

NYCHA gave my family stability and community. Out of everywhere I've lived, this is the only place I've ever considered home.

And I know thousands of New Yorkers can relate. Our buildings may not be the prettiest or the newest, but we know our rent won't go up. Everyone pays 30 percent of their income in rent, no matter how much or how little you make.

## **Biden In Trouble With Voters Over Inequality And Housing - The Majority Report - Air Date 11-28-23**

**SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** Recent *New York Times* / Siena poll of voters in six battleground states - and this is really the most relevant stuff too, right? - is 62 percent of Biden voters think the economy is only fair or poor compared with 97 percent of those who voted for Donald Trump. That's, uh...

**EMMA VIGELAND - CO-HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** And there are four basically indicators on that scale. They're excellent and good, or poor and only fair, and the generational differences here are striking, in [00:11:00] my opinion. The 89% of folks, Biden supporters in those swing states who are 18 to 29, believe that the economy is either poor or only fair, and in the 30 to 44 age cohort, that's 80 percent there. And you can draw some conclusions based

on that, or at least a correlation, which is that the supporters 29 and under, I would say that those are largely the folks who are being gouged by landlords, and who have to pay a ton in rent. And the 30 to 44 cohort are often people who are either also being gouged by rent, but maybe are trying to save for a home and they're seeing how high housing prices are and how the Biden administration has ticked up the interest rates in an effort to combat inflation during his presidency, what like ten times at this point it's more expensive to get a mortgage right now than it has been in decades. [00:12:00]

**SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** Well, I mean to be clear, the Fed is theoretically independent, so it's not necessarily the Biden administration has done the ... but that is what's happened. Interest rate has gone, essentially, on a mortgage anyways, uh, from high twos, mid threes, to mid sixes, to mid sevens. And the difference on that in terms of your buying power, two things happen. One is that to afford, even if prices of houses stay the same, the same house cost \$250,000 or \$300,000 as it did three years ago, the cost of carrying, let's say it's a \$300,000 house and you've got to put down 10%, the cost of carrying that \$270,000 mortgage, we're at an [00:13:00] interest rate of, let's say, 3 percent, is somewhere around, just 'back of the envelope', 1,100 bucks, is now going to cost you 2,200 bucks a month, maybe \$2,300-\$2,400 a month.

And what that does is, A) it prevents people from buying their first homes, and it increases the pressure on the rental markets, raises the rents there, and B) it also keeps people locked in and have no choice but to stay where they are. So maybe you wanted to move because you've had another kid and you want to get a bigger house. You can't. Because the 3.5% you're paying to buy the same house is going to cost you double. 'Cause you don't get to carry that mortgage over. So, if I'm in a \$300,000 house and I'm paying 1,100 bucks a month in a mortgage, I'm not going to go [00:14:00] get a \$500,000 house because the mortgage is going to, like, triple.

**EMMA VIGELAND - CO-HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** And that explains those generational differences there, where it's not, like, if this was just due to inflation and prices still remaining high, that would, in theory, I would say, at least decrease some of these stark differences because, of course, you know, the more money, the older you have [*sic*], and you're supposed to have more savings, etc. But, like, prices would at least, if that was the driving factor, mitigate those stark differences to some degree. But that's clearly not the case here, right? So, 45 to 64 and 65 and older, they're much more likely to already have a home and have paid off a good amount of it. And, yeah, not be as subject to this.



**SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** And all you need to do is... I mean, there's two things going on here. You have the economic numbers that are showing, like, the GDP is growing at a good rate, that wages are up to a certain extent, even over inflation, although some of these prices are locked in and, again, [00:15:00] housing is such a key component because it's not only impacts like your costs, but your flexibility and this is... I think you also look at like how much wealth...

**MATT LECH - PRODUCER, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** That's it.

**SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** ...people at age 30 have now as opposed to what they would have had...

**MATT LECH - PRODUCER, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** That's what the economy is good for.

**SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** ...20 or 30 years ago.. boomers had more money at any given age than Gen Xers that had any more money than Millennials that had more money than Gen Z at the same age. When you compare apples to apples.

**EMMA VIGELAND - CO-HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** Controlling for inflation, controlling for all of those things.

**SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** It's just in terms of who's controlling the amount of wealth in the country.

**MATT LECH - PRODUCER, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** It's property relations. Like, these sorts of things, like, because we only ask by income. So, it's under 50k, 500... But we don't ask, like, how much property you have. Are you a rentier, are you a business owner, or are you a worker? But age is a good proxy for that. [00:16:00] So I'd imagine most 65 year olds are on the rent.

**SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** It used to be. I mean, you, I'm saying that a 30 year old, in the year 2000 had more... 30 year old cohort had more of the wealth...

**MATT LECH - PRODUCER, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** Right. Yeah, of course.

**SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** ...than a 30 year old today. And so what we're dealing with is like, at one point you hit a critical mass

where people are like, This sucks! On top of which the boomers are like, You know, when I was your age, I wasn't whining about this as much.

**MATT LECH - PRODUCER, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** Well, speaking of boomers, *Washington Post*, November 13th, "Baby boomers are buying up all the houses this year. Median age for a repeat buyer was 58. According to...", yeah, it must be nice. I'd probably think the economy was pretty good.

**SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** And the reason why that is the case is because if you're at that age, and you've owned your house for 25 years, you have a lot more equity.

**EMMA VIGELAND - CO-HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** Oh, totally!

**SAM SEDER - HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** So, when you turn around, the interest rate doesn't influence you as much because you're going to have to borrow, if anything, less. And you can afford to put [00:17:00] down 50, 60, 70 percent, 80 percent in your house.

**EMMA VIGELAND - CO-HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** What did those folks also pay for college as well? And how much did they have in student loans? Like, the perception of the economy for people 44 and under, that's going to affect that, a ton. And also by income. And I should also just say, like, Osita Nueva, who's been a guest on this program before, had a tweet just basically saying, You know how Biden could get his numbers up maybe, is, like, actually start running on something and have some initiative and tell people what he wants to do if he gets re-elected. And my suggestion would be a national housing initiative. Like, whatever he wants. I'm sure it would be in some form of vouchers. I'm sure that, you know, it would not be exactly what I wanted, but we could have a beginning of the conversation of repealing the Faircloth Amendment, where we build more affordable housing for people and hopefully drive down some of these prices.

I don't know. They can workshop it. But that would be [00:18:00] something that maybe young people would be incentivized to come to the polls for you for because, gotta be honest, there's a lot of folks who are pretty angry right now about not just the economy but of course the administration's enabling of Israel's mass killing in Gaza.

**Housing is a Moral Issue w Shaun Donovan  
Part 2 - Future Hindsight - Air Date 12-7-23**



**MILA ATMOS - HOST, FUTURE HINDSIGHT:** I'm curious about your thoughts on the intersection of housing and democracy.

You know, it just does something that's a basic need that everybody must meet. You have to live somewhere. And since we are a pro-democracy podcast, we think a lot about the comments. Why is it important for a democratic society that everyone ought to be housed?

**SHAUN DONOVAN:** Well, I will say for me, housing is a moral issue, because it is one of our basic needs. And if you don't have a decent place to live, if you don't have a stable and affordable place to live, it is really hard to be a part of our democratic society [00:19:00] in fundamental ways.

Think about a child who's living in a homeless shelter or moving from couch to couch with relatives. Think about the challenge we saw them during COVID -- the ability even to learn remotely. So many other things that are really hard to do. Hard to hold down a good job if your housing isn't stable.

I do think there is a fundamental threshold of participation in our democratic society that requires housing to be a kind of platform or a foundation for that.

And I will say, in a country where it is an entitlement to get food assistance or to get assistance with health care, every child has the right to go to public school, only one out of five low income people in this country that is eligible on an income basis actually gets housing assistance. 20 percent get it. We need to have a fundamental conversation about housing, [00:20:00] whether you call it a right or say that everybody should get some assistance who needs it. So that's the first thing I would say.

The second is that, given the levels of particularly street homelessness that we're seeing in this country now, I hear more and more from people that they are questioning the ability of our democratic form of government to work. People are asking, What is happening with my tax dollars? Is government actually functioning? Because homelessness is the sort of tip of the iceberg of all of our social challenges in this country. And it is visible to people in a way that so many other of our social challenges aren't. It is in many places, I think, starting to undermine the belief in our government and the ability of our democratic form of government to function, if we can't do the basics to help people find a place to live.

And then the last thing I [00:21:00] would say about this is, one of the things that we're seeing is more and more segregation along economic lines. And as

our politics have become more skewed across education and income levels and economic levels, people are living with people like themselves: wealthier people with wealthier people, Democrats with Democrats, Republicans with Republicans. And one of the things that I think is fundamentally contributing to the polarization that we're seeing in our country, the lack of a civic engagement with people that are different from yourself is because housing affordability challenges are increasing, not just our political polarization, but our geographic polarization; that It is harder and harder for a low-income person, a person without a college degree, to live in many places. And that stratification and that polarization is [00:22:00] compounding the challenges to our democracy in a way that I don't think we talk about enough. Most people will say, look, it's Facebook, it's all of the online ways that we're living in bubbles, but we're actually living in geographic bubbles.

So I really worry about that because at the end of the day, what is the best way to change how people perceive people that are different from themselves? It's to have lived experience with them. It's for your kids to go to school with people that are different from themselves. It's for you to run in the grocery store or the post office or wherever it might be, somebody who has a different life experience and can begin to change your views about what "the other" is in this country.

And I think our democratic ideals, if we can't respect difference in this country, it's going to be hard for our democracy to survive.

**FANTA KABA - REPORTER, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** N

## **Why NYCs Move to Privatize Public Housing Could Impact the Rest of the Country Part 2 - Notes to America - Air Date 12-18-23**

YCHA is notoriously slow when it comes to fixing things. Right now, there are hundreds of thousands of open [00:23:00] work orders across the city, and it takes an average of 360 days for NYCHA to handle each one.

**JOHNATHAN GAVIA:** As has been very well documented, we have not been getting sufficient capital funding for decades to maintain the buildings at the level at which they should be maintained.

**FANTA KABA - REPORTER, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** That's Jonathan Gavia, NYCHA's Executive VP for Real Estate Development.

**JOHNATHAN GAVIA:** It is our hope that residents will see these opportunities as a way to bring the comprehensive renovations that they need and enhance services that they deserve.

**FANTA KABA - REPORTER, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** And here's the opportunity NYCHA came up with: inviting private developers in to take over public housing. Because private companies do have money, and they can take on debt to finance these big renovations. This public-private partnership plan comes from the federal government. It started 10 years ago in Greene County, Illinois. Since then, about 200,000 public housing units across the country have gone under private [00:24:00] management, in big cities like Los Angeles and small cities like Ypsilanti, Michigan. Most of our tenant protections are supposed to stay the same, but people don't trust these landlords to follow the rules. And I can see why. A report from a nonprofit called Human Rights Watch says there's not enough oversight of these private companies. And city officials in New York are investigating eviction rates in these buildings with private-public partnerships. So tenants here are scared... and they're fighting back.

**CALLER:** What private developer do you know that gives a damn about low income people? They don't.

**FANTA KABA - REPORTER, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** NYCHA's plan puts for-profit real estate companies in charge. They sign a 99-year lease. Then they pay for all the renovations and bring in a private management company. They do everything, from collecting the rent, to cleaning the hallways, to handling leaks.

So I wanted to know,[00:25:00] what does it really mean for families like mine?

**SANJI LOPEZ:** Hi, I'm Sanji.

**FANTA KABA - REPORTER, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** Hi. Nice to meet you, Sanji! Hi, my name is Fanta.

**SANJI LOPEZ:** Nice to meet you.

**FANTA KABA - REPORTER, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** Sanji Lopez grew up in Batances Houses, which is a few blocks away from my housing complex in the South Bronx. When Sanji's complex went under private

management three years ago, Sanji's family thought the new company would come in and solve all of the leaks, mold and pest issues in their apartment.

**SANJI LOPEZ:** They really showed us pictures of the before and after, of course, that got everyone excited and riled up, seeing what could be. Oh, they're gonna remodel everything. They're gonna take the cabinets down. Finally, these old cabinets that we've been dealing with for decades at this point are going to be removed and going to be replaced with better cabinets. The walls are going to be repainted, the bathrooms are going to be redone.

**FANTA KABA - REPORTER, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** She was so excited about this plan, which is called PACT, Permanent Affordability Commitment Together.

She even appeared in a promotional video NYCHA made. I [00:26:00] found it on YouTube.

**SANJI LOPEZ:** I trust that PACT has the residents best interests in mind.

**FANTA KABA - REPORTER, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** When did you realize the renovations weren't all cut up to be?

**SANJI LOPEZ:** The paint was the first thing. The paint started chipping in a matter of days. And I realized, oh my gosh, this wasn't really well done. It was, I don't know, the contractor they hired wasn't good, but there was still spaces where they didn't paint. Spaces that were missing paint, spaces that were painted over improperly, spots that were chipping away so fast, and also it was like incomplete in the bathroom, we had to complain about missing sealants around the bathtub. Mold, also, again, accruing even more than it did with NYCHA, right? And whenever I would tell the....

**FANTA KABA - REPORTER, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** Even though NYCHA usually takes forever to fix things, Sanji thinks this new system is much worse.

**SANJI LOPEZ:** It's just, send the email, hope that somebody responds, follow up again, two or three times, and then maybe they'll come.

**FANTA KABA - REPORTER, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** She says some things are better. [00:27:00] The kitchen looks much nicer with dark brown cabinets and new countertops. Someone fumigates so there are fewer roaches. But overall, she said, it feels like she traded one bad situation for another.

**SANJI LOPEZ:** Speaking to some neighbors on the same block, they've told me things, I've heard this quote twice, same crap, different toilet.

**FANTA KABA - REPORTER, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** She laughs about it because sometimes that's all we can do. Shrug it off. But the reality is, this is the plan that was supposed to make everything better. And residents in her building don't have another shot at another plan. Their complex is under private management now. For the next 99 years.

**SANJI LOPEZ:** Still, we have issues with heat and hot water during the winter time, so that didn't go away. The issues didn't go away. We thought that privatization was going to solve all of our issues, but it didn't.

## **Why The US Is Failing At Housing And How To Fix It - The Majority Report - Air Date 7-9-23**

**EMMA VIGELAND - CO-HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** Now, your story talks a bit about how Rhode Island, in particular, [00:28:00] the state legislature in June approved this new pilot program meant to target housing. Can you talk a bit about that program and what makes it different, and what makes it encouraging? Maybe something that other states could follow.

**RACHEL COHEN:** Yeah, and I should say, and this wasn't my story and I feel bad about it, but it only adds to the thing. I actually learned following my story coming out, my story looked at a couple of states, Rhode Island was a big one, Colorado, Hawaii, California. It turns out, 3 years ago, Massachusetts actually, I think Massachusetts was first and that they have been doing on a smaller scale... what they've been doing, which is really new, but arguably not done since pre-New Deal, is the state is stepping up and we're going to put money into develop[ing] new mixed income housing, affordable and market rate. We're going to own it. And I think something to understand is that, [00:29:00] and you kind of briefly mentioned this earlier, but in the 1990s Congress effectively made it so that it's really, really hard now to build any new federal public housing due to something called the Faircloth Amendment. That's something Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has been trying to repeal, but it is still around and so it's why, I mean, right now with federal public housing, there's tens of billions of dollars in backlogged repairs. That's where the leaky roofs and the clogged toilets and the mold and the asbestos, all that stuff that's not getting repaired, Congress is behind in funding those repairs, but they also are not building new units. We're fighting to maybe keep the units we have intact and out of disrepair.

So, what's really interesting and to me, exciting, about what's happening in those states I was mentioning earlier, like Rhode Island, is they're saying, Okay, the federal government can't build new public housing for all the reasons we just talked about, but we are going to invest ourselves [00:30:00] and we are going to build new housing and we're going to own it, which is really a very different way of thinking about housing because a lot of times the way affordable housing development has worked in the past is they've been on these, like, 15-20 year subsidy things and government will basically give tons and tons of subsidies to a private company and then the private company will build it and they will be under certain restrictions about how high they can charge in rent. But then after the 15-20 years runs up, then it's out of their hands and then, you know, might not even stay affordable after that and it can become in the private hands.

So, this is new in the sense that they're building housing and they're saying, We're going to keep it, and we're going to also capture all the value that comes from owning that unit. And we might be able to reinvest that in more housing production or other social services. And so I find it a very interesting example of how the public sector is thinking about flexing its muscles that they haven't [00:31:00] really done in a very long time.

**EMMA VIGELAND - CO-HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** Well, I mean, it's common sense, frankly, if taxpayer money - not to use an old, I guess, small 'c' conservative political term - but if taxpayer money is going towards the subsidization of this, then the government should own it. They should be the public developer of this project as opposed to just subsidizing it under private management, which is wildly inefficient, but it's just a way to get around the easiest answer to these questions, which I think a lot of members of our government don't actually want to reckon with. It reminds me of, I use this example all the time, during COVID, Nancy Pelosi bending over backwards for COBRA subsidies as opposed to temporarily expanding Medicare because, you know, we can't do that because of what that might lead to, as opposed to just doing what's most straightforward.

**RACHEL COHEN:** And I think I do think part of what's happening here is, [00:32:00] you know, public housing, federal public housing, doesn't have a great reputation right now. I think part of that is because of rules and defunding that Congress has done. And it doesn't mean all public housing has to be bad. We have strong models elsewhere and some states do a better job than others, but what it has meant is that... there's a lot of skepticism right now that the government can get in the housing game and do it well, and, like, they think of the Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago, which is sort of like the notorious example of, you know, segregated, underfunded, problematic towers, um, and



so part of what I think is for all the people who are who are getting into this space, they're saying, Look, yes, mistakes were made. Yes, we know there are all these problems with federal housing programs, but that doesn't mean we can't get it, right? And that doesn't mean we're doomed to make the same mistakes again. And so I think a lot of what's happening now, and a [00:33:00] really sort of very competent kind of successful place where this is happening is in Montgomery County, Maryland, and that's at the county level, but that's a place where they are showing how this can be done how it can be done in the kind of apartments you or I would probably love to live in, like, next to transit, really nice looking. You can't even, you wouldn't even know it's public housing in the traditional sense of what we sort of imagine that to look like. And I think part of what this will require is just getting some more proof points, like Montgomery County, like Rhode Island, like Massachusetts and Colorado and Hawaii to sort of help people shake the stereotype of what they think American governments building housing can look like and mean, because we have such a stigmatized image based on, you know, how the federal program has kind of shaken out

**EMMA VIGELAND - CO-HOST, THE MAJORITY REPORT:** Well, the federal program, they've made it anemic. And then they say, Well, it's unfixable. And so we're putting a moratorium on [00:34:00] it. And when you talk about Montgomery County, that is a suburb, right? And so that, I think, changes the conversation around public housing as well, and also just the outcomes because we've seen urban sprawl, people having to move out of the cities in order to afford a place to live, and when you, I think, make public housing more widespread as opposed to confines to certain areas of cities, then you're including middle class renters as well, as you write about, which might make these programs more durable.

## **Housing is a Moral Issue w Shaun Donovan Part 3 - Future Hindsight - Air Date 12-7-23**

**MILA ATMOS - HOST, FUTURE HINDSIGHT:** So part of your organization is solutions, which I understand to mean that you work in collaboration with local partners on policy and on systems change. What kind of systems change do you think is most necessary in this moment, and then what are the public policy ideas that you think are most promising to get us there?

**SHAUN DONOVAN:** Well, right now, given the scale of the [00:35:00] challenges that we have, I think there is an opportunity to create systems change at a scale we haven't seen. And, you know, my old boss, Barack Obama used to say, a crisis is a terrible thing, but it's also a terrible thing to waste. And I do

think the fact that housing has now become a challenge everywhere in this country and that more and more people believe that there needs to be system change, that we need to approach this in a different way, there is an opportunity to build at the federal level, but also at the state and local level, new solutions and policy change. One of the things that I think is most powerful is an increasing understanding that we're just not building enough housing and that barriers that stand in the way are outdated zoning codes, many of them racially and economically directed, where communities don't want low income people living [00:36:00] there and have resisted the ability to have denser housing, more affordable housing, and we're really seeing that start to change.

Zoning is generally controlled at the local level. We're seeing states and local communities stand up and say, We're going to create what's called inclusionary zoning rather than exclusionary zoning. That means when you build a new building, you could allow it to be a bigger building, but require, for example, that 20 or 30 or 40 percent of the housing has to be affordable housing. We're seeing more and more communities look at places where there are subway or train stops and saying, Because of the access to jobs that you get from a transit stop, we ought to be building bigger buildings there. And so they're up zoning. And we've also seen a lot of places say, Why does it take three or five years to build an apartment building? Why are we subjecting many of these processes to build new housing to [00:37:00] unending meetings and requirements that end up standing in the way of creating housing, making it much more expensive or just eliminating it altogether?

And so states like California and traditionally blue states, but also you see red states like Florida and Georgia and others that are coming together across very different political lines - housing activists, advocates for racial justice, combining with builders and private sector organizations - saying the lack of housing is really standing in the way of the future of our communities, and I think that really is bigger picture. More and more places around the country are not able to attract the workers that they need. We now have studies showing that GDP growth in large parts of our country is slowing down because of housing affordability challenges. And so people are seeing that housing isn't just a moral issue or an issue of justice for low income people. [00:38:00] It's a larger challenge for our society in a way that I think you're starting to see kind of political strange bedfellows come together and start to make change at a systems level that is really different. And that's what we do at Enterprise. The solutions part of it is actually creating new policy that is really going to make systems change.

**MILA ATMOS - HOST, FUTURE HINDSIGHT:** So, what's a gold standard for you? What's an area where you're like, Wow, they're doing it right. Like, that's where we should be living, or that's how we should be living.

**SHAUN DONOVAN:** Well, what I would say is I wish there were a nirvana for housing somewhere in the country. I've been working on this a long time and I think lots of places have really interesting pieces of this. Just to give you an example, the City of Minneapolis recently eliminated single family zoning.

**MILA ATMOS - HOST, FUTURE HINDSIGHT:** Eliminated it!?

**SHAUN DONOVAN:** Eliminated it. First place in the country to do that. And that has started to make real change, but there were also more incremental ways that people are [00:39:00] taking this on. Part of the problem here is the perception is when you hear affordable housing or you think about zoning changes, you're imagining you live in a single family home and there's going to be a 20 story building next door to you. That's not really the way it works.

One of the exciting things is starting to happen in many communities is a really wonky sounding name, which is accessory dwelling units, ADUs. Basically, that's like a granny flat in the backyard. If you have a single family home, you can build a garage with an apartment above it. And you can go from one unit of housing on a parcel to two. That effectively could double the amount of housing you have in a community, but in a way that doesn't really change the look of the community that much or create challenges in a way that some people perceive when you start to talk about these issues.

So, that's been a big policy change that we've started to see in Los Angeles. It's been tens of thousands of new units that can be created through that. That's true even here in New [00:40:00] York City, where we have many, many communities that are single family homes and lower density. So, there are lots of different strategies that depend on where you're living. In some places, it's going to be much denser, taller buildings and others it's going to look different. The fundamental issue is understanding that we have millions of people who don't have an affordable place to live because we're just not building enough housing in the country.

**THOM HARTMANN - HOST, THOM HARTMANN PROGRAM:** T

## **Can the French Plan For Social Housing Save America From Hyper-Gentrification w**

# Cole Stangler - Thom Hartmann Program - Air Date 11-9-23

think most Americans are familiar with the word gentrification. I'm not sure all of them understand exactly what it means or how it plays out. Can you describe what you mean when you talk about hyper-gentrification in the subtitle of your book and how it might be different, the way it's playing out in Paris than the way it might play out in NEW York or in Boise?

**COLE STANGLER:** Yeah, I mean, when I use the word gentrification, I'm talking about an economic process that I think there are really two fundamental manifestations of this process. One is rent hikes. So, significant rent hikes taking place in urban areas. [00:41:00] And the second part of that is displacement. So, you have people that are being forced to leave. And you have this process that can, you know, completely transform urban areas. We've seen it in so many cities in the United States. I'm from the northeast. I think about a place like New York, New York City, that has just been changed so much from the city that I knew that, you know, when I was growing up there, or when I grew up around there, excuse me. Or San Francisco. You have a lot of these cases in the United States of these cities that have been just completely transformed. Low income, working class people having to leave. And that changes the character of cities and in a lot of ways it's tragic to see the kind of identity being sucked out of these places because normal people, Ordinary people can't afford to live in them.

So that's the process. Paris, you know, I use the word hyper-gentrification because it's already a city that has a lot of wealth in it. We're not talking about neighborhoods that are very, very poor. We're talking about neighborhoods that are, you know, where ordinary people can still afford to live, that have, you know, some amount of wealth in them, but I think we've seen so many waves of this play out, and I think we're [00:42:00] kind of at a very advanced stage in the city of Paris.

One other kind of very specific thing about Paris is that the city is already very, very dense. And so it means that one of the solutions people talk about for dealing with housing is often to build more housing. That's part of it. Increasing supply. But that can be quite hard to do in a place like Paris, where the city is already tremendously dense. So, that's just kind of one important aspect of it to underline.

**THOM HARTMANN - HOST, THOM HARTMANN PROGRAM:** In reading in your book, you were talking about how you can still find an apartment, at least in this part of Paris, where you were living for 500, 600, 700 euros a month. But it's going to be a disaster. It's going to have a bathroom down the hall, or it's going to open onto a busy street, or you'll have to deal with rats crawling all over you. How bad is it? I mean, how bad has the situation become? And to what extent have the working class been driven out of Paris and its suburbs?

**COLE STANGLER:** Yeah, you know, the rent hikes have, I think since the year 2000, roughly, I've gone up, uh, housing costs have increased three times since the year 2000.[00:43:00]

**THOM HARTMANN - HOST, THOM HARTMANN PROGRAM:** Three times or 300%?

**COLE STANGLER:** 200%. So, you know, you have more than 10,000 people that have been leaving the city every year, according to the official data. And, as you mentioned, yes, so these neighborhoods people are living in, you know, kind of cramped spaces to be able to hold on, but I think in some ways, you know, the book is kind of trying to raise the alarm in some respects in the Anglophone world, but it's also trying to celebrate these neighborhoods for what they are, and, you know, these are tremendously diverse places, and I think that's something that can often be forgotten about in, you know, outside of France, just how multicultural and diverse of a city Paris is, and really France as a country, and so the places that I'm talking about in the book have large shares of immigrant population from West Africa, from North Africa, from China, from India. We don't often think about, you know, Paris as being the sort of melting pot, but it is in a lot of respects. And that's because of historically, you know, there's been affordable housing in [00:44:00] the city and that I'm trying to also show. When you take that away out of the equation, it means that you have a negative impact on the character of the city. And I think, just another aspect to highlight what we're talking about, why these neighborhoods have persisted over the years, right now there's many key elements, but I think one above all that I want to highlight, and that is we have something called social housing in France. So that's, that's state-managed, state-regulated housing at below market rates. And, if you look at these neighborhoods where the working class still lives, you have pretty high shares of social housing. That's one of the really important policy tools that's quite effective that we don't have, unfortunately, in the United States.

**THOM HARTMANN - HOST, THOM HARTMANN PROGRAM:** How would we do that in the United States? How would that lesson from Paris translate into a city in America?

**COLE STANGLER:** Yeah, you know, I think there are a few kind of policy measures. So, social housing is a big one. It's interesting. I think the conversation is shifting a little bit, it seems like. Although I'm obviously not on the ground in the US, but there seems to be an acknowledgement that maybe we should be turning more to these kind of solutions we have [00:45:00] in Europe for dealing with housing, social housing being one of them.

I think Seattle just, if I'm not mistaken, a couple of years ago, passed a referendum that created a social housing agency to start experimenting with this because, you know, there's one thing again, I'm repeating myself, but I think it's so important to emphasize for American audiences. In the US, we often talk about the YIMBYs versus the NIMBYs, you know, 'yes, in my backyard', 'not in my backyard'. I'm simplifying, but oftentimes the debate can kind of be simplified into this, you know, Do you want more supply, or do you not want more supply? And, obviously that's part of the equation, but it depends who owns the housing, who owns that supply? Social housing is the government stepping into the market and saying, We're going to build housing or manage the housing and regulate the price.

So, social housing is so key. And then rent controls are another tool that we do see in the United States to some extent. In Paris, they're experimenting with them again now, after a long break of not having rent controls. That's a very, um, it's an important tool as well. It's not a magic silver bullet, but [00:46:00] let's look at how Europeans regulate housing to think about, how can we deal with some of these problems that we have in the United States. I hope that's one of the takeaways, at least of the book.

**THOM HARTMANN - HOST, THOM HARTMANN PROGRAM:** How does social housing differ from what we refer to in America as the projects?

**COLE STANGLER:** Yeah, well, I think one big difference is that you've had just a lot more government funding of social housing. It's been recognized as a kind of important policy tool. And it's not reserved for only the least well off in France. It's not reserved for just the lowest income bracket. You know, people who are lower to middle income, even to middle income, have the right to have social housing. And it's actually even a source of debate in Paris where people are saying, Well, maybe we shouldn't be allowing so many middle class people access to social housing.



So, you do have this tradition of having good funding for the program, quality housing stock, too, that's such an important point. If you look at the social housing that's being built in Paris today, um, you know, these are nice looking places. They're enjoyable places to [00:47:00] live. And I got to tour a few of them for reporting. It's a question of political will, too. You know, it's been a priority. This has been a priority to fund this and to use it as a tool to combat the housing crisis in Europe. And I think that we're starting to maybe think that way a little bit in the US, but maybe not there yet.

## **BONUS - Why NYCs Move to Privatize Public Housing Could Impact the Rest of the Country Part 3 - Notes to America - Air Date 12-18-23**

**KAI WRIGHT - HOST, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** Which is to say in the 90s, as far back as the 90s now, there was a conversation about, Oh, we can't afford public housing, what if we privatize it? And I think some people, I certainly remember the coverage of that and the controversy at the time about the HOPE program. But it's interesting that it's something you hear about often now. I mean, this is not a big part of our public conversation, do you think?

**TATYANA TURNER:** It's not. But I will say residents do point to it when they do hear about PACT or, you know, when they hear about a possible demolition, they point to HOPE VI and they'll say, Oh, like look what happened at Cabrini Green or the Magnolia Houses in New Orleans. They'll point to...

**KAI WRIGHT - HOST, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** Cabrini Green in Chicago.

**TATYANA TURNER:** In Chicago, yes. [00:48:00] And they'll point to other developments across the country and say, Look at what happened with the displacement. And just to give some figures for HOPE VI, 200,000 units were demolished. They were removed and only 50,000 were for low income. This is across the nation. But even with those 50,000, it wasn't guaranteed that those residents, low income residents, were able to move back into those properties.

**KAI WRIGHT - HOST, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** So, let me make sure I followed that. So the outcome of this, of the 1990s-era privatization idea, was that they tore down 200,000 public housing units, and then only 50,000 people moved back into public housing.

**TATYANA TURNER:** Only 50,000 units, uh, apartments were for low income when they rebuilt them. But, as for the number of residents, it's not 50,000, unfortunately. People had to get rescreened and, yeah.

**KAI WRIGHT - HOST, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** The demand was much higher than there was supply.

**TATYANA TURNER:** Absolutely.

**KAI WRIGHT - HOST, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** What is at stake here in terms of, in privatization, in terms of [00:49:00] this tradeoff between investments that are needed financially and the rights of tenants? This is something that Fanta [Fanta Kaba, a reporter for WNYC's Radio Rookies] has talked about, that there's not enough money to do the repairs and so they're doing privatization and then that means you lose some rights. So, what does that mean? What policy change goes with moving from public to private.

**TATYANA TURNER:** Well, I want to say it's, like I said, with NYCHA, it's a sense of stability. Your rent is not going to go up. That's guaranteed. And under private management, there are more question marks. There's no definitives that I can give. Because, you know, with each developer it could be different. The relationship could be different. And let me just kind of break that down further. When I'm referring to PACT, each development that goes under the PACT program, they may each have a different developer. So, one development team may work better with a group than another might.

**KAI WRIGHT - HOST, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** So instead of having just 'the city', or the state or the [00:50:00] federal government as your landlord, now each complex has a different developer, and we know what that's like. Anybody living in private housing now, sometimes you've got a good landlord and sometimes you do not.

**TATYANA TURNER:** Right. So, it's chancy, and that's what residents are really pointing to. Like, it could be great, and I believe it was Sanjeev Batandas [?] who was basically like, you know, We were told that this was going to be a great fix, and we were really believing these promises only to be let down.

**KAI WRIGHT - HOST, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** Yeah. So, where privatization has occurred, if the trade off is supposed to be more investment in exchange for these question marks around stability, has the investment followed? Have we seen nicer countertops and paint that isn't chipped and all of

the things that we heard Fanta talk [about] in Fanta's report? Has that happened? Have they seen better repairs?

**TATYANA TURNER:** That has happened. There's one tenant I remember speaking with a couple of months ago and I asked him, uh, he's at the Baychester Houses in the Bronx, and he was saying that he's happy with the changes. He said that [00:51:00] there's more upkeep, better communication in place, more security and he feels safer and he feels more pride not only within his unit but just the development as a whole. On the complete opposite end, I've heard residents say that the relationship with the development team is not great, and they wish that they could go back to the traditional public housing Section 9 model.

**KAI WRIGHT - HOST, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** So again, Section 9 model meaning that it's in public housing.

**TATYANA TURNER:** In public housing. In NYCHA. Mm-hmm..

**KAI WRIGHT - HOST, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** But again, I mean, so it's like, sometimes it's worked for you, sometimes it doesn't. I guess I want people to understand, or I want to understand, like, why that's a bad thing then? How's that different than housing in general? That's life in housing, right?

**TATYANA TURNER:** I think because of a sense of familiarity and it might just, for residents that's uprooting them from what they know and the people that they know, the management that they know into other hands where you're just kind of taking chances that, yeah...

**KAI WRIGHT - HOST, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** Right. And again, the idea [00:52:00] is that folks in public housing are there because they needed the stability because of housing insecurity. We heard Fanta talk about the tenant activism in New York around this. And one change that officials have made here is to allow tenants to vote on whether they want to go private. That's a big deal nationally, right? Like the fact that that's happening. Put that in context for us. Has that happened anywhere else? Or is New York the first place that's happening?

**TATYANA TURNER:** To my understanding, it's New York so far. And just on Friday, Mayor Adams had announced that the Nostrand Houses in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, was the first development to go under a model called Public Housing Preservation Trust. But yes, that was the first development to ever even vote on what funding model they want for their future.

**KAI WRIGHT - HOST, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** And how did that vote go?

**TATYANA TURNER:** So, at the Nostrand Houses, just to walk it back a little bit, they found out earlier this year, I want to say in July, that there would be a vote. And between July and November there was a 100 days of [00:53:00] engagement period, where NYCHA management along with organizations would go to Nostrand and speak with residents about this vote, the three options that they have. And the three options were to stay in Section 9, stay as is. The other one was Permanent Affordability Commitment Together program (PACT), or The Public Housing Preservation Trust, which is an untested model. That's the one where funds are unlocked through bonds and mortgages. And that's the model that they chose, which was Public Housing Preservation trust.

**KAI WRIGHT - HOST, NOTES FROM AMERICA:** But this seems like a lot, first off, for, I mean, I'm having trouble following that. I can't imagine, like, my housing being dependent upon me having to make that choice. That seems like ... is this really a solution? I mean, to have that's a fairly high level of sophistication for you to have about a housing market to choose your road forward. I mean, do you think this is the way to do it? And if not, why?

**TATYANA TURNER:** I think that it's still too early to tell. My hope is [00:54:00] that it is a solution. From a financial standpoint, perhaps. But from a residential standpoint with people's experiences, I think it might vary.

## **BONUS - How to build beautiful social housing in a crisis - Channel 4 News - 9-7-23**

**PETER BARBER:** We looked at so many new developments, and this was the one that really caught our eye.

**RESIDENTS:** I actually feel quite safe here. It's like a way of living that I didn't think my children were ever going to experience.

**REPORTER, CHANNEL 4:** Forget tower blocks, forget glass fronted developments, forget the council houses of old.

**PETER BARBER:** That's the wonderful thing about doing architecture, and then several years later it actually gets built.

**REPORTER, CHANNEL 4:** This is the work of Peter Barber, an architect who focuses on urbanism and social housing. He's won accolades and admirers for his innovative approach. He takes small parcels of land and turns them into a housing haven, always centred around a street, a courtyard, where people mix, where communities form.

**PETER BARBER:** When I see a big tower block sitting in a sea of tarmac or grass, I sort of want to turn it on its side and turn it into a terrace.

**REPORTER, CHANNEL 4:** [00:55:00] Because you look at, you know, all the houses, you look at tenements, you look at back to back housing. I guess they had a stigma before, but you feel like they're worth looking back into.

**PETER BARBER:** Well, I think they are. These are places where people from all sorts of different backgrounds, and racial groups, and social groups, and economic groups are kind of thrown together and are at the very least visible to one another. The other advantage of this street-based housing that we have is that those people, the quite well off people and the not so well off people, are sharing the space, whereas quite often when you have tower blocks, you have a tower for the social housing, the tower for the wealthy people and they're kind of in glorious isolation.

**REPORTER, CHANNEL 4:** Avoiding isolation is crucial.

**PETER BARBER:** So there's a kitchen there. Uh, a shower room under there.

**REPORTER, CHANNEL 4:** Barber's practice built temporary housing for the homeless in Camden. Rather than adjoin the rooms along a corridor, they open out onto a garden space.

**PETER BARBER:** I mean, that's literally two weeks after they'd moved in.

**REPORTER, CHANNEL 4:** He also built homes for people over 60 in Barking. Gardens at the front open out onto their own [00:56:00] street; architecture stimulating, socialising for those who might be lonely. And he won the Neave Brown Award for Housing for this development in Newham. Twenty-six townhouses, available for those on social rent or shared ownership.

**RESIDENTS:** All the families have benefited the most probably, just being able to play freely like this is, is limited in London.

It's like a little family unit, if you need help, someone's there for you.

We are really proud, we like the architecture, we like our neighbourhood.

The council sort of making it affordable for us, it's really liveable.

It's really nice that Peter's changed the aspects. I think it's given people that confidence to be able to say, yeah, you know, like, yeah, I'm living in social housing.

**REPORTER, CHANNEL 4:** Barber works with local authorities, housing associations, as well as private developers. Like here, at Edward Mews in Finchley. Yet it's not all social housing. Many of the homes here are simply for sale, while others are available for shared ownership or classed as affordable housing. [00:57:00]

Because when we talk about affordable housing, do you think it actually is affordable?

**PETER BARBER:** No, it's troubling. And I think this sort of umbrella of affordable housing is a little bit of a, it's not specific enough. If you're buying something in shared ownership, which is 80 percent of market value, then, if it's in certain areas of London, it's clearly, you know, still beyond a lot of people.

**REPORTER, CHANNEL 4:** Is there a way to sort of solve the housing crisis?

**PETER BARBER:** We should have a social housing program on the scale that we're able to manage after the Second World War.

**ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE:** We know now that we have built more than 300,000 houses, new houses, in 1953.

**PETER BARBER:** In my mind, it's one of our proudest achievements as a society. In addition, I think we need to end the right to buy. They've done it in Scotland, they've done it in Wales, and I think we need to probably have rent controls as well.

**REPORTER, CHANNEL 4:** With the housing crisis in need of major intervention, Barber's work is a small part of the story, and only available in some pockets of London.

**PETER BARBER:** It does feel like a drop in the ocean, and it does feel like a band aid on the [00:58:00] problem really. Ultimately, you know, politicians have to commit a lot more money to social housing.



**REPORTER, CHANNEL 4:** Barber is slowly making waves in the architecture world. But as he admits himself, there's still a very long way to go.

## Final comments on why North America Can't Build Nice Apartments

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** We've just heard clips today, starting with *Future Hindsight*, describing the housing crisis. *Notes from America* featured a personal story about how public housing can provide stability. *The Majority Report* put the housing crisis in the broader context of current economics and interest rates. *Future Hindsight* looked at the moral issue of housing and its connection to democracy. *Notes from America* explored one effort to improve public housing through privatization. *The Majority Report* looked into publicly owned housing. *Future Hindsight* discussed how the political landscape may be ripe for transformational change on housing. And the *Thom Hartmann Program* compared the French housing plan with the US. That's what everybody heard, but members also heard a bonus clips from *Notes from America* discussing various ideas, [00:59:00] including public housing residents getting a vote in their own futures. And the *Channel 4 News* in the UK did a report on one social housing effort.

To hear that and have all of our bonus contents delivered seamlessly to the new members only podcast feed that you'll receive, sign up to support the show at [bestoftheleft.com/support](https://bestoftheleft.com/support). Remember that during December, we're offering 20% off on memberships for yourself, or as a gift. So, definitely take advantage of that while you can, or shoot me an email requesting a financial hardship membership, because we don't let a lack of funds stand in the way of hearing more information.

For more on housing in America, I have a couple of our episodes to recommend. #1496, "Home is where the hardship is", was published back in June 2022, which discussed the growing crisis, including the fact that corporations buying up houses is a big part of the problem of the housing shortage. And 1565, "Co-housing builds community and [01:00:00] fights loneliness" is just from June of this year, 2023, and looks at a non-traditional form of housing that increases housing density and helps form community at the same time. So, check those out again. Those were episodes 1496 and 1565 in your podcast feed.

Now to wrap up, I just want to add a point about housing regulation or maybe regulation more broadly. I came across this yesterday. A YouTuber was making a point about how a relatively small regulation on fire safety has had a massive

impact on housing in North America. So, let's just walk through the highlights real quick.

**NARRATOR:** This type of apartment building is called the Point Access Block. Its defining feature is that all its units share one staircase and elevator to the ground floor, which allows for a smaller, skinnier apartment. And these buildings are a common element in some of the most desirable neighborhoods in the world.

So, why don't we build these apartments here in North America? [01:01:00] Well, in Canada and the U. S., all apartments above two or three stories need to give their units access to two separate staircases. We're some of the only countries across the world that are this strict about this requirement. In most other places, it only kicks in after six or more stories.

And this one rule has huge implications. Staircases take up a lot of space, and fitting two of them in a small building means that there's much less usable floor space on every floor. As a result, developers here construct much larger buildings so that the staircases and hallways take up a much smaller proportion of the overall building.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** So American apartment buildings into being big and bulky, which means they're harder and more expensive to build.

**NARRATOR:** Single staircase buildings, on the other hand, can be much smaller, which means you can often build them on just one property. I think that makes these buildings an important solution right now, because cities today are increasingly looking to add more housing into their single family neighborhoods.

Properties in [01:02:00] these areas are already small to begin with and I think it'd be very difficult to add more housing at scale without single staircase buildings.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Another weird problem is that double stair apartment buildings end up only having apartments with windows on one side. So like corner units are pretty rare and windows on opposite walls that maximize breathe-through air ventilation, it's nearly non-existent in the US. And then on top of the window problem, which, you know, if you think about windows are nice, nice to have more windows, so Americans get fewer windows, but the window's problem actually compounds because it

makes it difficult to build apartment layouts with more than one or maybe two bedrooms. So, three bedroom apartments are also extremely rare. This is more clear if you can see the visuals in the video.

**NARRATOR:** This is a problem because our cities are facing a major shortage of apartments with three or more bedrooms, the kinds of spaces that are better suited for families. In Metro Vancouver, three bedroom apartments make up [01:03:00] 2 percent of units in the region's rental market, while studios and one bedroom apartments make up almost 75%. And this shortage of family friendly apartments is where I really see the potential of point access block buildings. When you have one staircase, you don't need a hallway, which means that units can wrap around the staircase in all sorts of different ways. That makes it easier to have more walls with windows, which allows for apartment layouts with more than one bedroom. Check out this apartment layout from France. You can see that the single staircase allows for a 3-bedroom unit, two 2-bedrooms, and two 1-bedrooms.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Now, I don't know about you, but for me, it's easy to never think about how three bedroom apartments basically don't exist in the US, or to just assume that well, yeah, there's no room for that many bedrooms in an apartment. Everyone knows that, apartments just aren't that big. And what logically follows is that if you need more than two bedrooms, like if you want a bedroom, a kid's room and a home office, which of course lots more people do now after the [01:04:00] pandemic, then the only option is to move to the suburbs and buy a bigger, detached, less efficient house than you would have otherwise, if only three bedroom apartments had existed. Now, the two staircase rule was put in place with very good intentions. It's all about giving people escape routes in case of fire. And that rule is more strict in North America because more of our buildings are made of wood than in Europe. And that rule definitely saved lives over the past, you know, a hundred or however many years. But now the question is whether we actually still need it.

**NARRATOR:** As you can see on this chart, the US and Canada don't have the fewest fire deaths per capita. Not by a long shot. It turns out, there are so many other factors that contribute towards fire safety. In fact, it seems like the real success story of our building codes hasn't been so much about helping people escape fires, but preventing them in the first place.

For example, regulating the materials buildings are made out of, [01:05:00] requiring fire doors, pressurized staircases, sprinklers, fire alarm systems, and fire extinguishers. Today, almost every aspect of your home has been vetted for fire safety. Even your mattress is required by law to be made out of fire resistant materials.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** So my takeaway from all this is about the potential benefits of reviewing old regulations to make sure they're still accomplishing what we need them to. There are a couple of old anecdotes that come to mind in cases like this.

The first is a story about an NPR engineer who asked about very slightly changing the format of the show he was working on and was told, No, we can't do that because there's an NPR rule about show structure and that change would go against the role. So, the engineer looked into the rule and found that it dated back to when they had to design the show format in a way that would give editors enough time to physically cut audio tape and put it together between segments, obviously [01:06:00] something that's not needed anymore.

Another story is about a family recipe that had been handed down and included some odd directions that no one could really understand the benefit of, but people followed the instruction specifically. It goes, you know, that's how grandma did it. Don't ask questions. And I think that eventually someone asks, Hey, grandma, these instructions are in this recipe. Why do you have to do it this way? And grandma explained, Oh, well that was just to accommodate the extremely small oven I had back in the day. You know, it required some creative thinking to get everything to come out right with such a constrained space. So, you know, we wrote the recipe for that reason alone. But like, no, of course you don't have to do it that way now. We have bigger kitchens, bigger ovens, the whole thing, right?

So, this certainly isn't a lesson about how regulation is bad across the board, right? The narrator from the video didn't even want to abolish the ruling entirely, just tweak it so that it only applied to taller buildings where it made more sense and [01:07:00] not apply to shorter apartment buildings under six stories. Where it was just not as necessary.

So, old rules rarely need to be entirely thrown out, but they may need some reviewing and some tweaking from time to time. The double staircase rule in North American apartment buildings seems to be a pretty good example of this, but there are undoubtedly others and in a crisis, like the housing crisis we are in, we should be looking at every option available. And besides, European-style apartments sound much nicer to live in, and are much more efficient than having families being forced out into the suburbs, into their own single family homes. So, the benefits to revising old rules may often compound in the positive direction, just as the drawbacks to those rules can sometimes compound in the negative.

That is going to be it for today. As always keep the comments coming in. I would love to hear your thoughts or questions about this or anything else. You can leave us a voicemail or [01:08:00] send us a text to 202-999-3991 or simply email me to [jay@bestoftheleft.com](mailto:jay@bestoftheleft.com). Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show and participation in our bonus episodes. Thanks to our Transcriptionist Trio, Ken, Brian, and Ben, who's making his triumphant return to the volunteer work, helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic designing, web mastering, and a bonus show co-hosting. And thanks to those who already support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at [bestoftheleft.com/support](https://bestoftheleft.com/support). You'll find that link in the show notes, along with a link to join our Discord community, where you can continue the discussion.

So, coming to from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington DC, my name is Jay, and this has been the *Best of the Left* podcast coming to twice weekly thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from [bestoftheleft.com](https://bestoftheleft.com).