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Hasan Minhaj satire and commentary on retirement

Our world population has reached 8 billion but much older than before. In the U.S, the census bureau marked that by 2030, baby boomers “will be older than 65” and will outnumber younger Americans (Bureau, 2021). As the baby boomers increase in age, the more it will strain retirement programs like Social Security and they’ll require more assistance in daily activities. A statistic by the National Poll on Healthy Aging said that half of Americans that are “50 or older” are caregivers for people that are 65 or older (Searing, 2022). An aging population is starting to be discussed more widely but retirement plans and how to take care of older people is not talked about enough to a younger audience. A show called *Patriot Act*, hosted by Hasan Minhaj, had an episode satirizing America's retirement plans. Hasan has a skit where he pretends that he’s old, stating that young people don’t care about old people's problems. That medicare is screwed, nursing homes are crap, and no one has savings anymore. Having a moment of “realization,” Hasan realizes that retirement is a possible episode for *Patriot Act*. Hasan’s satire and commentary brings awareness about retirement and how it will affect younger generations.

In Hasan’s *Patriot Act* episode, called *Why We Can’t Retire*, he explains how companies switched pensions to 401 k, Social Security being underfunded, and people saving less. Traditional forms of retirement are slowly deteriorating and becoming less secure. Most Americans reaching retirement are in a worse financial situation than their parents, with an estimated 10 million Americans around the age of 65 still working (Minhaj, 2019). As Thomas DiNapoli of NY stated, “most Americans” aren’t sure how they are going to retire in the future (DiNapoli, 2012). Hasan interviewed Bernie Sanders in order to get an understanding of our retirement system. Even though most young people are worried about climate change, student

debt, racism and according to Hasan, mango juul pods; Bernie states that they should keep in the back of their mind about how young people will retire in the future with security (Minhaj, 2019). Furthermore, in the interview, Hasan asks how we screwed over with retirement to the point that pensions are like typewriters; we know what it is but never will have one (Minhaj, 2019). Bernie explains how corporate America started to shift from pensions to 401ks during the past 30 to 40 years (Minhaj, 2019). This holds because policy changes during the Reagan era, like higher bracket income tax cuts or reduced funding for social programs, did persist and structurally changed our economic system (Polivka, 2015). These changes are what led to pensions shifting to 401ks and decrease in funding for social security. These policy changes, deregulation in the financial market as an example, is what made the Great Recession devastating for many Americans (Polivka, 2015). The height of the financial recession caused a retirement movement to start called FIRE.

The FIRE movement or Financial Independence Retire Early is a movement that started during the 2008 recession to achieve financial independence. Not relying just on a '9-5 job' to be financially secured/independent. To have a "million dollar nest egg" in financial investments by their 30s or 40s in order to retire early. This strategy does require savings but it's much more aggressive depending on the method and lifestyle. Usually, have a minimalist lifestyle or not living beyond your means. However, when the COVID pandemic hit, FIRE followers were "nervous" and unsure what to do because of the stock market decline (Kurutz, 2020). A couple, named Krsity Shen and Bryce Leung, from this NYT article lost "six figures" in their investment portfolio (Kurutz, 2020). People can become financially independent if they follow the FIRE movement but can't stop working completely. Nor will everyone become financially independent

enough to retire early or comfortably. How many people from this movement will rely on traditional retirement methods in the future if their strategies don't work.

Retirement plans like pensions or social security have changed significantly for the past 40 years. Pensions are a guaranteed payment that is given to retired employees, funded by their employers. Since the 80s, employers have been shifting away from "pension plans" with "wages" and savings declining (Polivka, 2015). This change coincided with Regan era tax cuts, decrease funding for public programs, deregulation in industries like airlines, etc. As traditional forms of retirement started to deteriorate, retirement security started to become more precarious. These changes in our economy is what led to the FIRE movement starting. Focusing more on financial investments that provide an alternative to the 'work and save' method from the boomer generation. Our society "values capital more than labor" as one FIRE follower stated (Kurutz, 2020). Hasan emphasizes this in his *Patriot Act* episode; that corporations can "save billions" by switching their employees to 401k (Minhaj, 2019). 401ks are direct-contributed, employer sponsored, retirement accounts that are tied to financial investments. Hasan ridicules this by comparing 401ks and pensions with Kieran Culkin and Macaulay Culkin. That we favored a "corporate tool" like Kiera Culkin [401k] over someone more reliable like Macaulay Culkin [pensions] (Minhaj, 2019). This holds weight because New York State Comptroller, Thomas DiNapoli, stated 401ks "lost a collective \$1 trillion" for retirees during the 2008-09 financial recession (DiNapoli, 2012). 401ks have expose people to financial speculation, poor investment strategies, and unexpected life expenses; while "40%...near retirement age" don't have any ownership of retirement account assets (Polivka, 2015). This will cause people to rely more on public programs like Social security, putting more strain in the system. Furthermore, it's estimated that the Social Security trust fund will run out of money by 2033 without further

funding (Polivka, 2015). With low funding in Social Security, retirees currently only get less than \$1470 each month. Hasan put it bluntly, that “doesn’t cover shit” for anyone, quipping that it’s Joe Biden’s weekly teeth budget (Hasan, 2019). Changes in our economic system led to precarity in our retirement system.

Some will argue that projections actually show that retirees will benefit more in the near future than current retirees (Polivka, 2015). Saying that these findings regarding the retirement system may be over exaggerated and simply fear mongering. Some will even take it further by saying that social security actually is disadvantageous for society. An economist named Laurence Kotlikoff calls “social security” and other elder service programs as “fiscal child abuse” (Ghilarducci, 2013). Programs that benefit older people actually rob younger people from their income. Causing intergenerational inequities to form in society. However, these arguments only justify cutting these programs which can actually further equity in our system. First, the projections that say future retirees will benefit more than the current retirees report that “25% and 35%” of future retirees will struggle to make ends meet (Polivka, 2015). Especially P.O.C workers and single women (Polivka, 2015). Even subgroups in Generation X and Baby boomers who are high school dropouts, unmarried, black Americans, not part of a union, and people with low lifetime earnings (Polivka, 2015). Second, an economist named Axel Boersch-Supan “examined 16 countries” and found that generous funding for the elderly does not take away funding for younger people (Ghilarducci, 2013). Furthermore, research was done that younger workers work with older workers to support pensions (Ghilarducci, 2013). The New York State Comptroller stated that retirees pay “1.3 billion in property taxes” that helps the state fund for other social programs (DiNapoli, 2012). Reinforcing that there’s mutual benefit for older people and younger people. The idea of retirees stripping away funds for programs meant for younger

people is simply false. The argument only justifies cutting programs that benefit both old and young. These arguments fall flat to the evidence that shows how older people help fund programs meant for young people.

With traditional retirement plans falling out of favor, medical care for retirees is also another issue that isn't talked about. Hasan makes a comedic comparison to the traditional forms of retirements as stools; that they're the "graham crackers" of chairs and everyone hates them (Minhaj, 2019). Many millennial parents or GenZ grandparents are probably going to need some sort of medical care. And the generation that will be "footing the bill" for the long term will be millennials (Minhaj, 2019). Hasan then goes to his "famous game" called *Hasan's Shitty Options!*, with a simple catchphrase of "No matter how much you try, you'll lose" (Minhaj, 2019). Serving as an analogy of the many choices that we have that aren't great for our elderly parents. The first option is nursing homes, a top consumer of "pudding and fox news" (Minhaj, 2019). A private room in a nursing home, nationally, costs around "\$102,200" or more (Minhaj, 2019). A government website called Nursing Home Compares is supposed to help with finding the best nursing homes with a reasonable cost to them. However, there's a catch to this, the website doesn't record state violations of the nursing homes (Minhaj, 2019). Health inspections are done independently and only have self-reported statistics (Minhaj, 2019). Furthermore, the federal government doesn't double check the data (Minhaj, 2019). This has dire consequences as we saw during the height of the COVID Pandemic. In New York state, former Gov. Andrew Cuomo, had covered up the amount of deaths from COVID-19 in nursing homes in order to evade investigation from the Trump administration, leading up to an estimated 13,000 deaths and possibly more in the nursing homes (McKinley, 2021). The failure of the federal government oversight and Andrew Cuomo's coverup is a systemic problem that had festered for years on end.

COVID-19 simply gave us a mirror to look at it. Another nursing scandal, on a lesser scale than NY, was in New Jersey. Governor Phil Murphy was “blasted” by the Veterans of Foreign Wars for the abuse and neglect in controlling COVID-19 in Menlo Park Memorial Home (Fallon, 2022). Causing 100+ resident deaths in the nursing home (Fallon, 2022). The issues behind nursing homes is something that is not mentioned to many millennials/GenZ with parents/grandparents who might need help. As Hasan calls them, they’re simply “expensive above-ground cemeteries” for our grandparents (Minhaj, 2019).

Another option from *Hasan’s Shitty Options* is assisted living facilities. A place where one doesn't need constant supervision but some assistance with daily tasks (Minhaj, 2019). On the contrary, the federal government doesn’t regulate or have any oversight on assisted living facilities. Which can lead to cases of neglect to more bizarre cases. An assisted living facility in Winston-Salem had 3 women arrested for running a fighting ring in the facility (Minhaj, 2019). Another case of elder abuse was in an assisted living facility in Wisconsin. Where a nurse amputated a patient foot off and was planning to put in her family’s taxidermy shop (Lethang, 2022). The nurse did this without any order from a doctor in the facility (Lethang, 2022). Ironically enough, there’s no rule for A.L.F (assisted living facilities) to have a medical director on staff (Minhaj, 2019). Most of them don’t have “on-site doctors” and about a third don’t even “provide skilled nursing services” (Minhaj, 2019). Hasan quipped that people in A.L.F are getting the same service that kids get from a “school nurse;” providing “apple juice and crackers” if someone had a broken hip (Minhaj, 2019). The lack of medical staff and proper nursing services can be fatal for many elders in A.L.Fs. An example is Emeritus Corporation, where many seniors died from pressure wounds or bedsores (Minhaj, 2019). There’s one case of neglect where a dementia patient “died from drinking detergent” (Minhaj, 2019). The Emeritus

CEO response to this was that human error happens. Hasan ridicules this reasoning by saying that he hopes the Emeritus CEO goes to prison, specifically one of his own A.L.Fs (Minhaj, 2019). The underregulation of A.L.Fs is not really talked about enough, especially younger people who have to make a choice for where they want their grandparents/parents to live.

With all these issues with our retirement security, some might argue that it wasn't completely in the U.S control. With the global economy being more globalized, competitive "labor markets", and technological advancements that require more educated people contributed to the erosion of "economic security" for many retirees and workers in America (Polivka, 2015). Companies offshoring jobs, specifically manufacturing, to places with cheaper labor costs like China caused deindustrialization in places like Buffalo, NY or Detroit, MI. Some would go further by mentioning that pension funds are more detrimental than helpful. A city in Pennsylvania called Chester had to file for bankruptcy because of "massive debt" to its employee pension fund (Lowenkron, 2022). However, the one main issue with this argument is that it doesn't take into account public policy being a significant driver of these issues. Policies that favored the "economic interests" of the wealthy played a dominant role in the decline of economic security (Polivka, 2015). This is further exemplified with the "Pension Act of 2006" which provided automatic enrollment in 401 k plans (Polivka, 2015). However, as previously mentioned, 401ks lost \$1 trillion in total during the Great Recession of '08 and aren't stable retirement funds for people. This coincides with local cities declaring bankruptcy after the Great Recession (Lowenkron, 2022). With public policy in consideration, we can also compare the U.S with other countries as well. Scandinavian countries and Germany still have an "extensive" welfare state that provides programs for retirees and has other programs like extensive job training programs and unemployment benefits (Polivka, 2015). These programs don't sacrifice

anyone and are still able to provide “social mobility” for their citizenry (Polivka, 2015).

Policymaking is crucial in dictating the direction of society and has major impacts on people's lives.

Hasan’s satire allowed his commentary to bring awareness to an issue to a younger audience. This is mostly reciprocal in the comment sections of the video. One commenter mentioned how she’s 40 years old with no kids with “little extended family” makes driving off a cliff attractive (Hasan, 2019). Another commenter mentioned how they “got anxiety” from watching the episode and they are 23 years old(Hasan, 2019). One commentator mentioned how they “hope” that their parents drop dead because her mother-in-law has no savings to help herself, the commentator and their husband had to step in to cover the finances of their mother-in-law (Minhaj, 2019). Another commentator mentioned how they couldn’t afford to retire in Hawaii and live better in Thailand than the U.S (Minhaj, 2019). Lastly, one commentator mentioned that this is “One of Patriot’s best episodes for young people” (Minhaj, 2019). Hasan’s episode gave an outlet for people online to speak and tell about their own stories. It was able to bring awareness to a wide range of people, specifically young people.

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