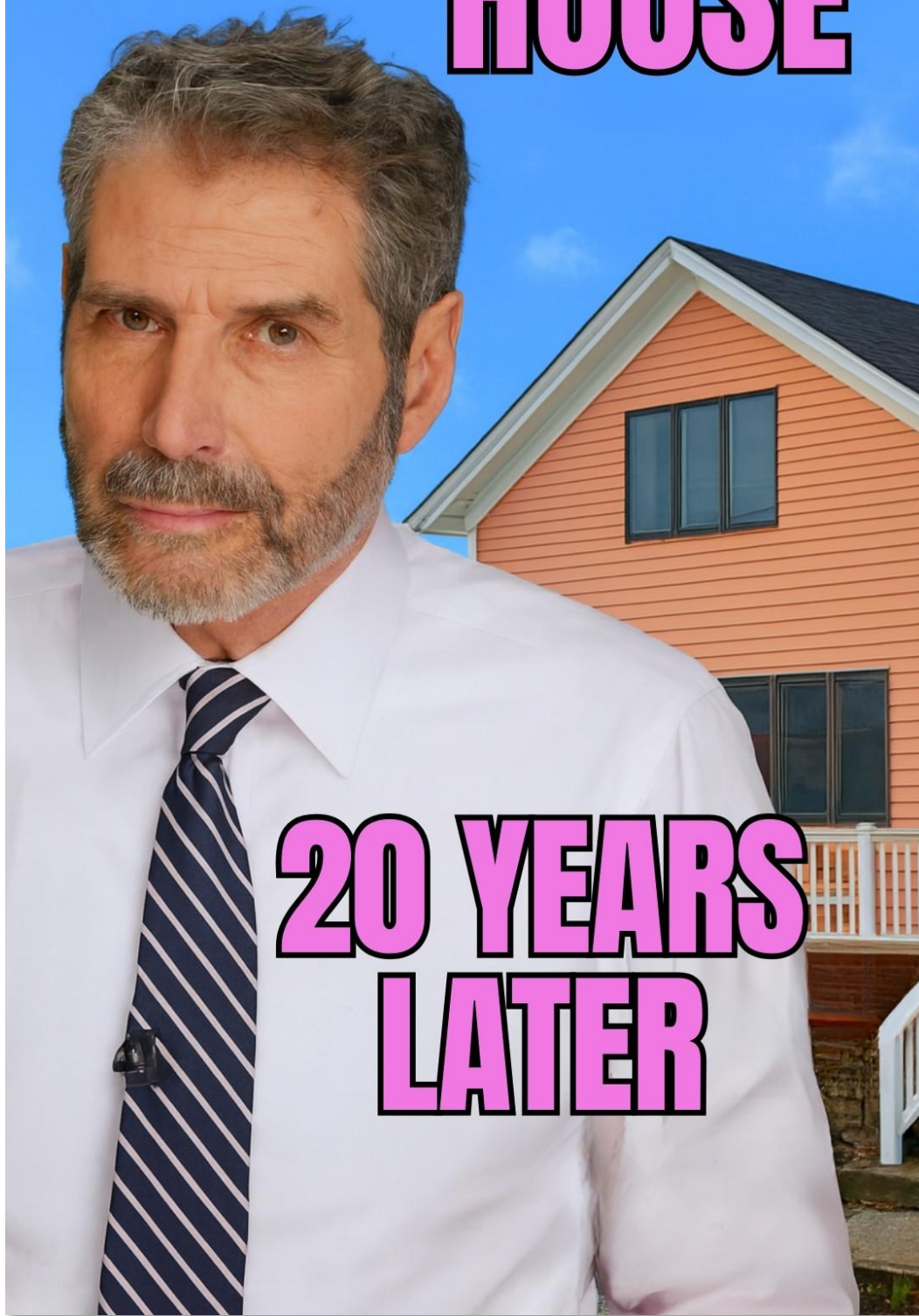


# LITTLE PINK HOUSE



20 YEARS  
LATER

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# Little Pink House 20 Years Later

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Video Length: 4:59

## **Lesson Description**

What if the government could take your house, not to build a road or school, but to hand it to a private developer? What if a promise of “public benefit” left whole neighborhoods bulldozed and empty? This video revisits the famous *Little Pink House* (Kelo) case and shows how eminent domain, meant for true public use, has been stretched to justify projects that often fail. Students will see how expanded government power can threaten property rights and raise tough questions about fairness, justice, and trust.

## **Objectives**

Students will be able to:

- identify examples of eminent domain presented in the video.
- explain how the use of eminent domain in the *Little Pink House* case differed from traditional public use projects.
- analyze the consequences of government taking property for private development on individuals and communities.
- evaluate whether the government’s use of eminent domain in these cases upholds or violates principles of justice and fairness.

## **Concepts & Key Terms**

**Eminent Domain:** the power of government to take private property for public use, with payment of “fair value” to the owner.

**Property Rights:** the legal rights to own, use, and control land, buildings, or other possessions.

**Public Use:** a purpose that benefits the general public, such as building roads, schools, or utilities, though courts have sometimes stretched the definition to include private development.

**Supreme Court:** the highest court in the United States, which has the final authority to interpret the Constitution and decide legal disputes.

## **Preview Activity**

Use Think, Pair, Share to have students answer and discuss these preview questions: Have you ever thought about what it would feel like if the government forced you to move out of your home? Under what circumstances do you think it’s fair for the government to take someone’s property? What do we lose as a society if property rights are not respected?

**OR**

Distribute copies of the K-W-L worksheet to the class. Have students fill in the K and W sections. After showing the video, have students complete the L section and answer the questions at the bottom of the worksheet.

### **Viewing Guide Instructions**

We recommend that teachers show the video twice: first to allow students to view the video and focus on the issues presented, and second to allow them time to complete the viewing guide. After they complete the viewing guide, allow students a few minutes to work in pairs to share and verify answers.

### **Answers to Viewing Guide**

1. private
2. money
3. important
4. poor
5. empty

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# Little Pink House 20 Years Later

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## Viewing Guide

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** As you watch the video, fill in the blanks with the correct words.

1. But developers also try to use it unfairly to force people to give up their homes for \_\_\_\_\_ projects.
2. I am confused that a railroad can come in and demand your property for no reason at all other than they want to use it to make \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The Supreme Court said the town could legally bulldoze the neighborhood to make room for that \_\_\_\_\_ development.
4. The one thing that all \_\_\_\_\_ neighborhoods share is that they don't produce much tax revenue.
5. Today, 20 years after eminent domain destroyed Suzette Kelo's whole neighborhood, her lot's still \_\_\_\_\_.

**Take a few moments to reflect on the video and answer these questions.**

Does the fact that the new development was never built influence your thoughts on the Kelo decision? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

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How is taking property for a road or school different from taking it for private development that will pay more taxes? \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Discussion & Analysis**

1. What does "eminent domain" mean?
2. Who was Susette Kelo and what happened to her house?
3. How is taking property for a road or school different from taking it for private development?
4. Why did some justices and lawyers worry about poor neighborhoods in this case?
5. What were the promises made to the people of New London about the new development?
6. What actually happened on the land where the little pink house once stood?
7. How did Susette Kelo's story change public opinion about eminent domain?
8. What did Justice Sandra Day O'Connor mean with her Motel 6 and Ritz Carlton example?
9. Why might politicians and developers want broader power to take land?
10. How does taking property for private gain compare to theft, according to the idea that theft and violence always reduce happiness, harmony, and prosperity of a society?
11. Do you think it is possible for government to decide "fair value" for someone's home? Why or why not?
12. How does losing property against your will affect trust between citizens and government?
13. What are some long-term effects on a community when homes are torn down but projects never happen?
14. If communities want development, how else might they achieve it through voluntary cooperation instead of force?
15. Should governments ever have the power to take private property for private projects? Defend your position.

## **Discuss These Lines from the Video**

They can take your home, they can take your land.

Any group of politicians can kick you out of your home?

So, you can take from A to give to B if B pays more taxes?

If this doesn't make you wish politicians had less power, what will?

I am confused that a railroad can come in and demand your property for no reason at all other than they want to use it to make money.

The homeowner didn't want the money. She wanted to keep her home.

### **Quotes for Discussion**

By 'property' he means 'life, liberty, and estate'... political society was established for the better protection of property.

– John Locke

What our generation has forgotten is that the system of private property is the most important guarantee of freedom, not only for those who own property, but scarcely less for those who do not.

– Friedrich Hayek

Where an excess of power prevails, property of no sort is duly respected. No man is safe in his opinions, his person, his faculties, or his possessions.

– James Madison

The right to life is the source of all rights—and the right to property is their only implementation. Without property rights, no other rights are possible.

– Ayn Rand

The concept of public welfare is broad and inclusive. The values it represents are spiritual as well as physical, aesthetic as well as monetary. It is within the power of the legislature to determine that the community should be beautiful as well as healthy, spacious as well as clean, well-balanced as well as carefully planned.

– Justice William Douglas

The specter of condemnation hangs over all property. Nothing is to prevent the State from replacing any Motel 6 with a Ritz-Carlton, any home with a shopping mall, or any farm with a factory.

– Justice Sandra Day O'Connor

Kelo exemplified the tendency of private-to-private takings to benefit the politically influential at the expense of the politically weak—while destroying more economic value than they create.

– Ilya Somin

The most natural reading of the Clause is that it allows the government to take property only if the government owns, or the public has a legal right to use, the property, as opposed to taking it for any public purpose or necessity whatsoever.

– Justice Clarence Thomas

I believe that the result of [Kelo] will be that working families and poor people will see their property turned over to corporate interests and wealthy developers.

– Bernie Sanders

### **Activities**

1. Have students complete the K-W-L chart in class or for homework. (Recall that the K and W sections are to be completed before watching the video and the L section after watching the video.)

2. Have students complete the political cartoon activity in class or for homework.
3. Have students complete the PMI chart in class or for homework.
4. Have students complete and submit the Exit Ticket as they leave class.
5. After the video, students write a short essay explaining how they would feel if their own home was taken by the government, even with money offered in return. They should also include how they would feel 20 years later if the proposed project that triggered the seizing of their home was never actually built.
6. The teacher posts statements around the room such as "Eminent domain is necessary" or "Government should never take property for private projects." Students move to the corner that matches their opinion and explain their reasoning.
7. Students write a one-page letter to a local official arguing either for or against expanding eminent domain powers.
8. Groups of students act as justices, lawyers, or citizens, re-enacting arguments from the *Little Pink House* (Kelo vs. New London) case, then vote on their own decision. <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/545/469/>
9. Students work in pairs to build a simple timeline of events in Susette Kelo's story, from the first notice to the empty lot 20 years later.
10. The class stages a mock town meeting where citizens, developers, and politicians debate about whether to use eminent domain for a proposed project.
11. Groups research one other case of eminent domain and give a short summary comparing it to the *Little Pink House* case.
12. Students research in small groups if there have been any local cases of eminent domain in their community, what the outcome has been, and present summaries to the class.



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

## Quiz: Little Pink House 20 Years Later

**Directions:** Select the answer that best completes the sentence.

1. Eminent domain is when government takes \_\_\_\_\_ for public use.
  - A. property
  - B. money
  - C. jobs
  - D. businesses
2. Susette Kelo's pink house was taken to build a \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. hospital
  - B. new road
  - C. business project
  - D. casino parking lot
3. The Supreme Court ruled \_\_\_\_\_ in the Little Pink House case.
  - A. to delay the case
  - B. against Kelo
  - C. to ban eminent domain
  - D. for Kelo
4. After 20 years, the land where Kelo's house stood is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. new homes
  - B. a hotel
  - C. still empty
  - D. providing more taxes for the local government
5. The main idea of the video is that \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. taxes are too high
  - B. the Kelo decision was good for citizens
  - C. developers should be favored over homeowners
  - D. eminent domain powers are often abused

Answer Key:

1. A
2. C
3. B
4. C
5. D

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

## Little Pink House 20 Years Later

### Political Cartoon Activity

**Directions:** Use the political cartoon to answer the questions.

Who is driving the bulldozer? What does he stand to gain from destroying the homes? \_\_\_\_\_

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What message does the cartoon send about the balance between individual property rights and government power under eminent domain? \_\_\_\_\_

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One sign says, "More taxes = fair?" Do you think it's fair to take property from one person just because someone else will pay more taxes on it? Why or why not?

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How does the cartoon suggest that promises of "future development" may not match the reality for families who lose their homes? \_\_\_\_\_

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

**Little Pink House 20 Years Later**  
**PMI Chart**

**P = Plus:** What might be some positive effects of government seizing property through eminent domain?  
**M = Minus:** What might be some negative effects of government seizing property through eminent domain?  
**I = Interesting:** What is interesting or surprising about government seizing property through eminent domain?

+ Plusses +	- Minuses -	I

How is taking property for a road or school different from taking it for private development? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Should governments ever have the power to take private property for private projects? Defend your position. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

## Little Pink House 20 Years Later

### K-W-L Chart

**Directions:** Complete the **K** and **W** sections prior to watching the video. After you have seen the video, complete the **L** section and answer the questions below the K-W-L chart.

<b>K</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>L</b>
What I know about eminent domain...	What I want to know about eminent domain...	What I've learned about eminent domain...

What did the government promise would happen after taking Susette Kelo's home and what actually happened?

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How does the Little Pink House case show the difference between public use and private development?

## Exit Ticket

Name	
Admit One	Should the government be allowed to take property for private development? Why or why not?
	_____
	_____
	_____
	_____
EXIT TICKET	

Name	
Admit One	Should the government be allowed to take property for private development? Why or why not?
	_____
	_____
	_____
	_____
EXIT TICKET	

Name	
Admit One	Should the government be allowed to take property for private development? Why or why not?
	_____
	_____
	_____
	_____
EXIT TICKET	

## **Transcript**

**John Stossel:** Is your property yours? Not if government takes it, and it can for what it calls public use. Eminent domain law has long allowed politicians to grab people's property and build needed public projects like roads and railroad tracks. But developers also try to use it unfairly to force people to give up their homes for private projects. Years ago, this developer did that.

**John Stossel:** You're bullying these people out because-

**Donald Trump:** I'm not. Excuse me, that's wrong. But for you to use the word bully, John, is very unfair. This is a government case. This is not Donald Trump.

**John Stossel:** Yes, it's Donald Trump. It's you and your cronies in government working together.

**Donald Trump:** For you to call these people cronies is very unfair.

**John Stossel:** Trump wanted this woman's home to add limousine parking for his casinos. A court eventually ruled against him.

**Donald Trump:** Do you want to live in a city where you can't build schools? Do you want to live in a city where you can't build roads or highways?

**John Stossel:** I get it that a highway is public use, but now, officials in the appropriately named town of Doulton, Illinois, have moved to take the new Pope's childhood home from its current owners so the town can turn it into a historic site.

And recently, Georgia's government approved eminent domain...

**Institute for Justice:** To take portions of up to 18 properties so it can build a railroad that would be used by a private company. If this happens, where would it stop?

**John Stossel:** A rail line carrying lots of passengers might be an appropriate use of eminent domain, but this train would just serve one rock quarry.

**Sally Garrett:** I am confused that a railroad can come in and demand your property for no reason at all other than they want to use it to make money.

**John Stossel:** This expansion of eminent domain isn't new. Twenty years ago, the Supreme Court actually approved it, ruling that politicians in New London, Connecticut could bulldoze this pink house to make room for an important new business development.

**Little Pink House Movie:** Eminent domain. They can take your home, they can take your land.

**John Stossel:** I covered that story when this movie about the little pink house came out. Here, the owner learns that eminent domain law lets government take your home to build a highway or a hospital.

**Portraying Susette Kelo:** But nobody's talking about building a highway or a hospital.

**Actor:** I know.

**Portraying Susette Kelo:** They just want my home.

**John Stossel:** The law requires that government give owners fair value for the property, but the bureaucrats decide what fair value is.

**Lawyer Portrayal:** Mrs. Kelo, I have great news. They have agreed to increase their offer by \$10,000.

**John Stossel:** The homeowner didn't want the money. She wanted to keep her home. But the Supreme Court said the town could legally bulldoze the neighborhood to make room for that important development. While this was going on, I interviewed the real-life Suzette Kelo.

**Susette Kelo:** We were backed into corners. It's like animals in a corner.

**John Stossel:** I confronted the city's lawyer. Any group of politicians can kick you out of your home?

**City Lawyer:** Well, that's true. But that's true if you want to put up a road, for example. The question is, is this serving an important public purpose? And we say it is.

**John Stossel:** It's giving them a lot of power.

**City Lawyer:** Yes, that's true.

**John Stossel:** At the Supreme Court, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor pushed back against the taking.

**Movie Portrayal of Justice Sandra Day O'Connor:** Say you had a Motel 6, and the city says, Well, if we had a Ritz Carlton, we would have higher taxes. Now, is that okay?

**Lawyer in Kelo Case (portrayal):** Yes, Your Honor, that would be okay.

**Another SC Justice:** So you can take from A to give to B if B pays more taxes.

**Lawyer in Kelo Case (portrayal):** If it is a significant amount, yes.

**John Stossel:** Here's Suzette's lawyer.

**Susette Kelo's Lawyer (portrayal):** The one thing that all poor neighborhoods share is that they don't produce much tax revenue. If the court affirms the lower court's decision, then you would put poor neighborhoods in jeopardy.

**John Stossel:** The court ruled against him and Suzette Kelo, five to four.

**Newscaster:** Us Supreme Court today affirmed the power of local governments to seize private property.

**John Stossel:** The decision alarmed people enough that some states passed laws limiting the politician's right to grab your property. Years later, I went with Suzette Kelo to look at the place New London said was going to be that booming development.

**Susette Kelo:** This was my stairs, and I had a long porch, and this is where the house was.

**John Stossel:** The city said they had to tear the It closes down because development would happen, tax revenues, all kinds of cool new things. And yet this is what they got. No hotel or upscale housing, no conference center, no nothing.

**Newscaster:** Kelo's house has been torn down, and the lot where it once stood is vacant.

**John Stossel:** Today, 20 years after Eminent Domain destroyed Suzette Kelo's whole neighborhood, her lot's still empty. And as I tape this, the only thing that's even started construction nearby is destruction nearby as this recreation center, which costs taxpayers money. If this doesn't make you wish politicians had less power, what will?