Sample I

[1] On the outer limits of just governance and the preservation of private liberty lies the issue of eminent domain. Despite it repeatedly being upheld by the Supreme Court, many question whether or not a Democratic government should be able to seize private property without the consent of its rightful owner, especially if it is improperly valued, given to a private company, or never put to constructive use. This often has the most pronounced on the poor or minorities, as they lack the judicial power of financial security to protect their property or their way of life. However, these occasional failures are overshadowed by the resounding successes of many of these larger, often nationwide attempts of the government to construct much-needed infrastructure, and to tangibly alter the course of the nation in a way that cannot be done with just pen and paper. Although eminent domain can be misused to benefit private interests at the expense of citizens, it is a vital tool of any government that intends to have any influence on the land it governs beyond that of written law.

[2] When misused, eminent domain can displace thousands of families at the expense of economic rebirth, while delivering nothing but “weeds and rubble” in its place (Camey). Struggling, local governments will often use this power, originally intended for the creation of productive public lands, as a societal vacuum cleaner to clean out impoverished areas in the hopes of seducing a business into moving in and revitalizing the town. A famous example of this is Detroit, the failing manufacturing hub that tried to regain its former glory in 1981 by displacing “Some 4000 people and numerous businesses in order to transfer the property to General Motors for the construction of a new factory,” (Sornin). The societal impact of such a policy can be devastating, as thousands of families no longer have homes in which to live, and have to struggle to pull themselves out of homelessness, while a major corporation is provided on expensive lot and low taxes to entice it to settle down. As the new company enters the city, it can potentially underperform, like in Detroit, or it can never even come to fruition. This was seen with the New London Development Corporation in Connecticut, where a suburban neighborhood was transformed into a “vast, empty field – 90 acres – that was entirely uninhabited,” (Carney). When governments use eminent domain as a mismanaged attempt to bring in jobs, as opposed to generating new systems for public betterment, the result will likely be just as mismanaged and evident of negligence. American history has shown that eminent domain can sometimes be the death knell of a fading town instead of a lanbent sign of progress.

[3] However, characterizing eminent domain by its small-scale failures ignores its larger, more ubiquitous implications. If not for eminent domain, governments would be able to do little other than draft legislation and aim officials to enforce that legislation. Instead, they have an additional opportunity to exact change, and do so in a way that is constructive for the community at-large. Many of America’s most cherished infrastructure systems are the result of this unique power. Eminent domain is used to “facilitate transportation, supply water,
construct public buildings, and aid in defense readiness” (US Department of Justice). Eminent domain gives government the assurance that when it plans to construct infrastructure off other systems that improve the state of the country and promote policy, that it does not encounter any roadblocks. Otherwise, it would find itself much like the American Articles of Confederation, where the government had no ability to assert power or sustain itself. When used as intended, eminent domain goes beyond small-scale revitalization and rendering into the realm of sweeping progress and development.

[4] Eminent domain should not involve images of an ornery home-owner suing their city for wanting to build a road, not rother, a core principle or proactive government, and a literal instrument for change. Despite its potential for failure and misuse, eminent domain is a crucial power of any constructive government.
Sample E

[1] In the city of Baltimore, Maryland lie the district of Fells Point. This historically vibrant, lively corner of the sometimes-dull city is a refreshing retreat, yet during the late 20th century, this part of Baltimore was destined to become a freeway which would connect the city and reduce traffic. Through the efforts of the citizens of Fells Point, however, the area was saved, and Baltimore gained much more from this decision. This is not a stand-out example. Across the country, vibrant neighborhoods and private properties are threatened by the power of Eminent Domain. While there are many who argue the Eminent Domain can be used to revitalize, the power often exploits lower-income areas, violates 5th amendment rights, and often fails at the intended good.

[2] It is no big secret that there are many places in our country that need refurbishment. Low-income areas particularly face bad foundations and a lack of basic amenities. Eminent Domain proposes to help these areas, but its plan often backfires. Many times, the intentions to revitalize are backed by “corporatism: the belief that government and business should work together” (Source B). This belief often leads to the neglect of these areas which are targeted. The corporations focus on the profit they can get out of their new plan, rather than the interests of the people living or working there. Furthermore, the end product after the “revitalization” is often worse than before. In the end, the ones who profit are the corporations, not the community or the area.

[3] Another disappointing consequence of Eminent Domain is the way that it preys on minority areas. While “overt racism is rarely a factor in modern takings” it is clear that “unconscious bias plays a role” (Source C). Why should we trust a system that preys on minorities? Oftentimes, the counter argument to the use of Eminent Domain is that the people whose homes have been taken from them will have a new benefit to look forward to such as a highway, community center, or park, but when your home has been taken from you. Another counterargument may be that there is adequate payment for those who have lost their house, yet this is false. In many cases, homeowners are compensated for hundreds of thousands of dollars less than they should be, and the individual financial loss is wildly high (Source F).

[4] Fairness aside, Eminent Domain violates the right to private property. The 5th amendment to our constitution states that private property will not “be taken for public use, without just compensation” (Source A). How can we argue that Eminent Domain is “by the bank” if former owners are rarely compensated fairly? While there certainly are cases in which there is fair compensation and the end product is positive, sources show that this is often not the case.

[5] Unfortunately, not every community threatened by eminent domain can have the same outcome as Fells Point. It is sad to think about the neighborhoods which have been destroyed by Eminent Domain. This power is very often an unjust one, and it does have
positive impacts, isn’t it better to keep a precedent of preserving communities rather than keep a precedent of destroying them?