Social Progress   
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Affirmative Case by Joshua Johnson

**Summary**

The purpose of this affirmative case is to provide a simple, straightforward defense of the resolution that you and your audience can easily understand and connect with. The definitions I provide are operationally defined based on various definitions and online articles. If your opponent argues that you need a specific definition from a specific dictionary, provide the following responses: (1) No such definitions exist that accurately reflect the enormous scope of these concepts. (2) These are real world definitions that everyone understands and relates to. There does not have to be a definition debate.

The value of social progress is fairly open yet this should not hinder you. Expect that your opponent will say it is vague or unachievable. Nevertheless, have the following responses in mind: (1) **It’s inherently good and worth pursuing**. Every nation needs roads, bridges, freeways, grocery stores, health care, postal services, etc. When these are provided for society, the public flourishes as a whole economically, politically, and socially. Social progress is not something you achieve overnight. Rather, it’s a work in progress to best benefit and provide for the citizens of a nation. (2) **It’s essential for *every* society’s survival**. If a nation does not care for its social, political, and economic needs, problems arise. The Great Depression is a great example (not provided in this case) that demonstrates what happens when we become stagnant and fail to move forward: people lose jobs, prices skyrocket, crime rates increase, human lives degrade, and societal morale decreases. (3) **It’s foundational for all other values**. Most likely your opponent will have a value similar to human dignity. When you care for the social, political, and economic wellbeing of society, you provide for citizens and their overall lives. Better freeways bring greater travel. Greater travel brings better transportation for food and jobs. More food and jobs means healthier citizens and more sources of income. Greater health and income benefits families, companies, and organizations alike. The needs of society affect everything.

For the applications of Narita airport[[1]](#footnote-1) and China’s nail houses,[[2]](#footnote-2) I recommend you look up pictures online to cement the impact of valuing private property rights over public needs in your mind (I have included two links for you in the footnotes). Yes, there are farms in the middle of Narita’s runways, and this has greatly harmed Japan’s social progress as an industrial nation. Yes, there are buildings all over China in the middle of freeways and roads, and these have greatly harmed China’s social progress as one of the world’s largest industrial countries.

For the application of Houston’s baseball field and eminent domain, expect that your opponent will provide applications like *Kelo v. New London* and others to say this concept, as a general rule, is bad and detrimental to private property rights. Keep in mind the following responses: (1) **Most cases of eminent domain are not abusive**. The media *loves* to capitalize on the few bad examples that people run across (very much like gun rights). But according to a fantastic article by David M. Lewis (an expert economist and university lecturer), after thorough analysis concerning major cases dealing with eminent domain, he concludes the following: “In most cases eminent domain is used sensibly.”[[3]](#footnote-3) I highly recommend you read the article as it is very helpful with examining the overall picture of eminent domain that your opponent’s cases will likely overlook. (2) **Eminent domain provides for society’s social progress**. Again, the public needs freeways, roads, grocery stores, postal services, etc. This is why I include three Supreme Court case examples of eminent domain being used for good. There are so many examples that demonstrate the importance of valuing public needs over private property.

Overall, the case (for me) is 6 minutes long speaking moderately. If you decide to use it, I recommend you practice speaking it out loud several times and speak at a consistent pace. Also, speaking with appropriate pauses and word articulation are important when presenting to your audience. However, if you find yourself needing more time, you could mention only one or two of the three Supreme Court cases under Contention 2. The reason I provide three Supreme Court case examples is to simply make it obvious that valuing public needs above private property rights is good and essential. Another option is you could mention one Supreme Court case and then in response to your opponent’s response(s), you can provide the other two Supreme Court cases. You are not giving a new argument; rather, you are providing more proof for why eminent domain is good and essential.

I hope you have a blessed speech and debate season! Remember who your true audience is: Christ. I can guarantee as you seek to glorify and love Him through your rounds He will bless you immensely! Many blessings!

Social Progress

*“Without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement, and success have no meaning.”[[4]](#footnote-4)*

It is because I agree with Benjamin Franklin that social progress is essential for a growing society that I affirm the resolution: the needs of the public ought to be valued above private property rights.

The key terms in the resolution are defined as follows:

# Definitions

Public needs are a public’s means of maintaining or supporting itself at a minimum level.[[5]](#footnote-5) Examples include basic medical services, educational programs, assistance in obtaining food, shelter, clothing, transportation, freeways, roads, etc.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Private property rights are the rights owners have to the exclusive use and disposal of private land or belongings.[[7]](#footnote-7) Examples include buildings, money, copyrights, patents,[[8]](#footnote-8) personal data, and information.[[9]](#footnote-9)

In order to weigh the resolution, I provide the value of Social Progress:

# Value: Social Progress

Social progress is the improvement and progression of society’s social, political, and economic structures, programs, and policies.[[10]](#footnote-10) Social progress is foundational for any nation because without it, society would collapse. Providing for the social, political, and economic aspects of society allows a nation to move forward and support other important values like human life and human dignity.

This leads me to my first contention:

# Contention 1: Private Property Rights Harm Social Progress

Private property rights harm social progress because they stifle a nation from progressing forward. While private property rights are important, when they conflict with the needs of the public, it is essential that public needs be valued higher or else society is harmed.

## Application 1: Japan’s Narita Airport

In 1978, Japan opened Narita airport in order to accommodate for more businesses, international travelers, and the nation’s major economic growth. However, eight families owning 53 acres of farm land have continually prevented the airport from finishing two of its necessary five runways because the farmers refuse to give up their private property.[[11]](#footnote-11) Conflicts rage between the farmers and police, having resulted in officer deaths and the destruction of airport property.[[12]](#footnote-12) According to the New York Times, as of 1986, Japan experienced “a $9 billion deficit in its international travel account, the largest among the industrialized nations.”[[13]](#footnote-13) As of 1991, Narita handled 22 million passengers a year despite only having the capacity to handle 13 million.[[14]](#footnote-14) In other words, Japan’s economy and international business has been harmed because private property rights are valued above public needs, stifling social progress.

## Application 2: Chinese Nail Houses

In 2007, China passed several laws protecting the private property of citizens.[[15]](#footnote-15) However, these laws cause major problems. As China’s cities continue to grow economically and structurally, stubborn homeowners are preventing companies from efficiently building necessary bridges, roads, and highways because they value their private property over public needs.[[16]](#footnote-16) Consequently, various “nail houses” stand out in society because China’s laws stifle the removal of such homes. This harms economic growth, stifles transportation, and increases financial costs for companies to build necessary structures for China.

In order to avoid harming social progress, we must value public needs above private property, leading me to my second contention:

# Contention 2: Public Needs Promote Social Progress

Public needs promote social progress because they allow for society to move forward economically, socially, and politically. Economist and university lecturer [David M. Lewis](http://www.planetizen.com/taxonomy/term/3226) said it best: “Sites are needed for schools, hospitals, libraries and police stations. And where would our cities be if there were no roads, freeways or corridors of transit that were built with the aid of eminent domain?”[[17]](#footnote-17) Consider the following examples:

## Application 1: Houston’s Baseball Stadium

In 2000, Houston built the Minute Maid Park in response to the city’s growing need for tourism attractions and business. According to David Lewis, the city used eminent domain to obtain the property of an old train station in order to build the stadium, which has benefited the community greatly. [[18]](#footnote-18) Not only has it brought in millions of tourists, “Around the ballpark, developers have created loft dwellings for young professionals, old buildings have been transformed into hotels, and a new high-rise residential tower is under development.” In other words, the construction of the baseball stadium has greatly enriched the city, providing for greater business, tourism, and beautiful structures, thereby providing for the social progress of Houston.

Despite the criticism that eminent domain often receives, the evidence clearly shows how good it is for society.[[19]](#footnote-19) While many more examples could be provided, David Lewis concluded the following after thorough research concerning major cases dealing with eminent domain: “In most cases eminent domain is used sensibly, and we must not forget it.”[[20]](#footnote-20)

## Application 2: Supreme Court Cases

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, “Eminent domain has been utilized traditionally to facilitate transportation, supply water, construct public buildings, and aid in defense readiness.”[[21]](#footnote-21) This has greatly provided for society’s needs and social progress. Take the example of *United States v. Great Falls Manufacturing Company*. In 1862, the United States used eminent domain to appropriate land belonging to Maryland’s Great Falls Manufacturing Company in order to build aqueducts for the cities of Washington and Georgetown.[[22]](#footnote-22) This provided much needed water for the cities’ inhabitants. Take another example of *Kohl v. United States*. In 1875, the U.S. government used eminent domain to appropriate a piece of land belonging to several building owners in order to provide a post office, a customs building, and some other essential government buildings for Cincinnati, Ohio.[[23]](#footnote-23) These buildings provided Cincinnati’s basic need for a postal service. Take another example of *Sharp v. United States*. In 1903, the U.S. government used eminent domain to appropriate a piece of farm land belonging to the Gibbons along the Delaware River near Fort Mott in order to provide greater “fortifications and other works of defense.”[[24]](#footnote-24) This strengthened the nation’s social progress by providing for its national security.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, social progress is essential for any society and therefore public needs ought to be valued above private property rights.

Negative Brief: Social Progress

Remember that the resolution is setting up a conflict between public needs and private property rights. While public needs are important, when they conflict with private property, they should never be held higher because private property rights are an inseparable part of our humanity.

While this affirmative case provides many, many examples stressing why public goods are necessary for social progress, stress the even greater harm of what happens when we devalue private property rights for the sake of social progress. Germany definitely wanted social progress after their defeat in World War I. Their economy was in shambles, their morale was gone, and their military was defeated. They elected Hitler and his Nazi Party because they believed he could turn Germany around for the better. Hitler did just that. He raised up the German economy, boosted morale, and strengthened the military. Germany most definitely progressed socially, economically, and politically. However, this came at the incredible cost of private property and other human rights. One example is the seizing of Jewish property throughout World War II in order to eradicate the Jews and contribute to Germany’s economy.[[25]](#footnote-25) Not only were these human rights violations, but they were committed in the name of German elitism and social progress. Similar examples can be seen in the Soviet Union and Mao Zedong’s People’s Republic of China. Remind your audience of these terrible, worldwide tragedies. Social progress is a good thing, but it has allowed for many evil men to commit terrible atrocities ending in the deaths of millions.

For Narita airport, something you can impact is that the people who built it actually regret their decision to build it where they did. Geoffrey Tudor, director of public relations for Japan Air Lines said the following: “'It was the wrong site, and we're never going to be able to forget that.”[[26]](#footnote-26) As the Negative, while you cannot say that private property wasn’t the problem at Narita, you can argue that the application has less credibility because the airport constructors admit they built it in the wrong place.

For Chinese Nail Houses, I would recommend researching the stories of Chinese citizens whose homes have been torn away from them without proper compensation.[[27]](#footnote-27) Stories are powerful ways to lessen the impacts of this example. I would also encourage you, as the Negative, to argue against the overall picture of Chinese nail houses and examine case by case situations. While many people fight for their homes, there are also many people who willingly accept just compensation for their homes and move on. There are also many people (even outside China) who, despite having resisted eminent domain and had their surroundings completely changed, continue to live reasonable lives in their homes. Take the example of Edith Macefield (link provided below).[[28]](#footnote-28) Also, really impact the fact that despite how well eminent domain is supposedly used, there is *always* a loss in human dignity. Many people who have submitted to eminent domain have still expressed frustration afterwards because they felt as if they had no choice in the matter (there are many examples online). And philosophically speaking, taking away a person’s home is actually taking away a part of their very humanity. [[29]](#footnote-29) This is a violation of dignity because public needs are held higher than private property rights.

Considering Houston’s baseball stadium and the Supreme Court cases, there are several things you can do and think about. Research shows that despite the many reasonable cases of eminent domain, there really isn’t much of an economic, social, or political gain. According to economists Carrie Kerekes and Dean Stansel, there is “virtually no evidence of eminent domain’s economic benefit” in major cases dealing with government seizing of private property.[[30]](#footnote-30) They also found that there is “no statistically significant relationship between eminent domain activity and the level of government revenue.”[[31]](#footnote-31) In other words, while we would like to hope that most cases dealing with eminent domain result in economic progress, eminent domain actually doesn’t do as much as we think it does. This statistical evidence will help lessen the impacts of Houston’s baseball stadium and the Supreme Court cases. Also consider looking up cases like *Kelo v. New London* and others to show how eminent domain can be abusive.

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2. “China’s ‘nail houses’: The homeowners who refused to budge.” CNN. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/05/19/asia/gallery/china-nail-houses/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Lewis, David. Eminent Domain article [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Franklin, Benjamin. “goodreads quotes.” <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/103000-without-continual-growth-and-progress-such-words-as-improvement-achievement> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Operationally defined based on Clark Lorren’s article and various online definitions of “public” and “needs.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Clark, Lorren. “Definition of Want vs. Need.” Learning to Give. <https://www.learningtogive.org/resources/definition-want-vs-need> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Based on the dictionary.com definition of private property. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/private-property> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Business Dictionary. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Titus, Aaron. “Is Personal Information Property?” Because I am Here. <http://www.aarontitus.net/blog/2009/01/17/is-personal-information-property/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Operationally defined [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Sterngold, James. “Narita Journal; An Airport Is Being Strangled by Relentless Foes.” The New York Times. <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/09/26/world/narita-journal-an-airport-is-being-strangled-by-relentless-foes.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Kelly, Tim. “Tokyo’s Airport Battle.” Forbes. <http://www.forbes.com/2009/05/22/japan-narita-airport-tom-cruise-opinions-tokyo-dispatch.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Sterngold, James. Narita Journal article. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Brull, Steven. “New $1.36 Billion Terminal Is No Cure-All: Tokyo’s Troubled Airport.” <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/12/03/news/03iht-nari.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Sim, David. “China’s nail houses: Defiant homeowners who refuse to make way for progress [Photos].” International Business Times. <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/chinas-nail-houses-defiant-homeowners-who-refuse-move-out-make-way-progress-photos-1512027> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Lewis, David. “Eminent Domain: Still a Useful Tool Despite Its Recent Thrashing.” Planetizen. <http://www.planetizen.com/node/21109> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Lewis, David. “Eminent Domain: Still a Useful Tool Despite Its Recent Thrashing.” Planetizen. <http://www.planetizen.com/node/21109> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. “Responsible Use of Eminent Domain.” The New York Times. <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/26/opinion/26mon3.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Lewis, David. Eminent Domain article [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. “History of the Federal Use of Eminent Domain.” The United States Department of Justice. <https://www.justice.gov/enrd/history-federal-use-eminent-domain> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. “UNITED STATES v. GREAT FALLS MANUF’G CO.” Legal Information Institute. <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/112/645> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. “KOHL v. US.” FindLaw. <http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/91/367.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. “SHARP v. US.” FindLaw. <http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/191/341.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. “Jewish property seizures.” Alpha History. <http://alphahistory.com/holocaust/jewish-property-seizures/> [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Sterngold, James. “Narita Journal; An Airport Is Being Strangled by Relentless Foes.” The New York Times. <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/09/26/world/narita-journal-an-airport-is-being-strangled-by-relentless-foes.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Sim, David. “China’s nail houses: Homeowners who refuse to leave Shanghai’s partly demolished Guangfuli neighbourhood.” International Business Times. <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/chinas-nail-houses-homeowners-refuse-leave-shanghais-partly-demolished-guangfuli-neighbourhood-1558447> [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
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31. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)