

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

The 1955 Flood and its Changes

Grade - 7

Length of class period – 60 minutes three days

Inquiry – How the flood of 1955 caused the creation of a flood control dam that protects Putnam and the surrounding towns down river.
How Putnam changed, a comparison of the Town of Putnam before and after the flood.

Objectives – As a result of this lesson students will be able to

1. Compare and contrast maps from before 1955 and then after.
2. Research the changes created by the flood and the dam that was built.
3. Examine and compare eminent domain to acquire the land and compare it to the eminent domain case in New London, CT. and decided by the Supreme Court in the 2000's.

Materials: - Maps of Windham County and Southern Worcester County before and after 1955.
Court decision of the Supreme Court in 2005
Map of Putnam, CT. before and after the flood

Activities: -

- The students, working in small groups, will compare the county maps to see where the dam was built and why as well as the changes which occurred because of the dam. They will also look at the changes in the Town of Putnam, the villages that existed pre 1955 and what happened to them now.
- The students will read the Supreme Court decision of the 2000's in New London and compare it to eminent domain cases in Thompson, CT. in the 1960's.
- The students will present their findings to their classmates and prepare a debate, should the Thompson Dam have been built and should the people of Thompson have to lose their homes for the "Common Good".

How will you assess what student learned during this lesson?

- The students will write a news story in the first person as a witness to history. They were at the debate and what did they think of it. Was it correct to build the dam and why?

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards –

- demonstrate knowledge of the structure of United States and world history to understand life and events in the past and how they relate to one's own life experience;
- apply geographic knowledge, skills and concepts to understand human behavior in relation to the physical and cultural environment;
- **United States Constitution** Students will apply knowledge of the U. S. Constitution, **and Government** how the U. S. system of government works and how the rule of law and the value of liberty and equality have an impact on individual, local, state and national decisions.

Attachments: www.washingtonpost.com

Justices Affirm Property Seizures

5-4 Ruling Backs Forced Sales for Private Development

By Charles Lane
Washington Post Staff Writer
Friday, June 24, 2005; A01

The Supreme Court ruled yesterday that local governments may force property owners to sell out and make way for private economic development when officials decide it would benefit the public, even if the property is not blighted and the new project's success is not guaranteed.

The 5 to 4 ruling provided the strong affirmation that state and local governments had sought for their increasing use of eminent domain for urban revitalization, especially in the Northeast, where many city centers have decayed and the suburban land supply is dwindling.

Opponents, including property-rights activists and advocates for elderly and low-income urban residents, argued that forcibly shifting land from one private owner to another, even with fair compensation, violates the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution, which prohibits the taking of property by government except for "public use."

But Justice John Paul Stevens, writing for the majority, cited cases in which the court has interpreted "public use" to include not only such traditional projects as bridges or highways but also slum clearance and land redistribution. He concluded that a "public purpose" such as creating jobs in a depressed city can also satisfy the Fifth Amendment.

The court should not "second-guess" local governments, Stevens added, noting that "[p]romoting economic development is a traditional and long accepted function of government."

Stevens's opinion provoked a strongly worded dissent from Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who wrote that the ruling favors the most powerful and influential in society and leaves small property owners little recourse. Now, she wrote, 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."

D.C. Mayor Anthony A. Williams, who serves as president of the National League of Cities, issued a statement praising the court for upholding "one of the most powerful tools city officials have to rejuvenate their neighborhoods."

In addition to its national repercussions, the court's decision removed a possible obstacle to the District's plans to build a baseball stadium along the Anacostia River waterfront and to redevelop the Skyland Shopping Center in Southeast -- a project Williams said could generate 300 jobs and \$3.3 million in tax revenue.

A number of property owners in those areas had hoped the court ruling would help them resist the city's exercise of eminent domain. But David A. Fuss, an attorney for several of them, acknowledged that the court's ruling "is going to have a major impact."

The redevelopment program at issue in yesterday's case -- the plan of the Connecticut city of New London to turn 90 acres of waterfront land into office buildings, upscale housing, a marina and other facilities near a \$300 million research center being built by pharmaceuticals giant Pfizer -- was also expected to generate hundreds of jobs and, city officials say, \$680,000 in property tax revenue.

New London, with a population of about 24,000, is reeling from the 1996 closing of the Naval Undersea Warfare Center, which had employed more than 1,500 people.

But owners of 15 homes on 1.54 acres of the proposed site had refused to go. One of them, Susette Kelo, had extensively remodeled her home and wanted to stay for its view of the water. Another, Wilhelmina Dery, was born in her house in 1918 and has lived there her entire life.

The Connecticut Supreme Court upheld the city's plan, so the homeowners, represented by lawyers from the libertarian Institute for Justice, appealed the case to the U.S. Supreme Court.

According to the institute, the New London plan, which the City Council approved in 2000, is typical of "eminent domain abuse," which has spawned more than 10,000 threatened or filed condemnations involving a transfer of property from one private party to another in 41 states between 1998 and 2002.

Scott Bullock, a lawyer for the institute, said that the only recourse for property owners facing condemnation under eminent domain would be to sue in state court based on the property rights provisions of each state's constitution.

New London City Manager Richard M. Brown said he was "very pleased" by the court's decision. He said the city hopes to restart its redevelopment plan, which has lost money so far, partly because of the litigation.

In the disputed neighborhood, known as Fort Trumbull, most residents sold out and their homes were demolished. The site is now a flat expanse of dusty, rock-strewn soil dotted

by the few remaining houses. Signs advertising the development site are withered and torn; builders who once considered projects have moved on, deterred by the controversy.

Stevens was joined in the majority by Justices Anthony M. Kennedy, David H. Souter, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen G. Breyer.

Kennedy's vote was something of a surprise because he had expressed strong sympathy for property-rights claims in past cases. But in a brief concurring opinion he explained that the New London plan showed no sign of improper favoritism toward any one private developer.

O'Connor was joined in her dissent by Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist and Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas. They wrote that the majority had tilted in favor of those with "disproportionate influence and power in the political process, including large corporations and development firms."

And in a separate dissent, Thomas sounded a rare note of agreement with liberal groups such as the NAACP, which had sided with the property owners in the case.

He protested that urban renewal has historically resulted in displacement of minorities, the elderly and the poor.

"Regrettably, the predictable consequence of the Court's decision will be to exacerbate these effects," he wrote.

The case is *Kelo v. City of New London*, No. 04-108.

Staff writer Kirstin Downey contributed to this report.

Alice Ramsdell Thompson: Story by Margaret Foster / Feb. 5, 2002

In 1969, when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers asked the village of Thompson, Conn., to relocate to make way for a new dam, longtime resident Alice Ramsdell didn't budge. "They came to her house with the papers, and she came out with a gun," says Thompson resident Sue Vincent. "She was a fiesty lady. People were afraid of her."

So the government let Ramsdell stay on her family's farm until her death in 1995. The following year, it announced plans to demolish her farm, which had been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1989. Fortunately, Sue Vincent and her husband, Rob, bought the Ramsdell house and barn for \$1 and moved the buildings to their 17th-century farm a mile away.