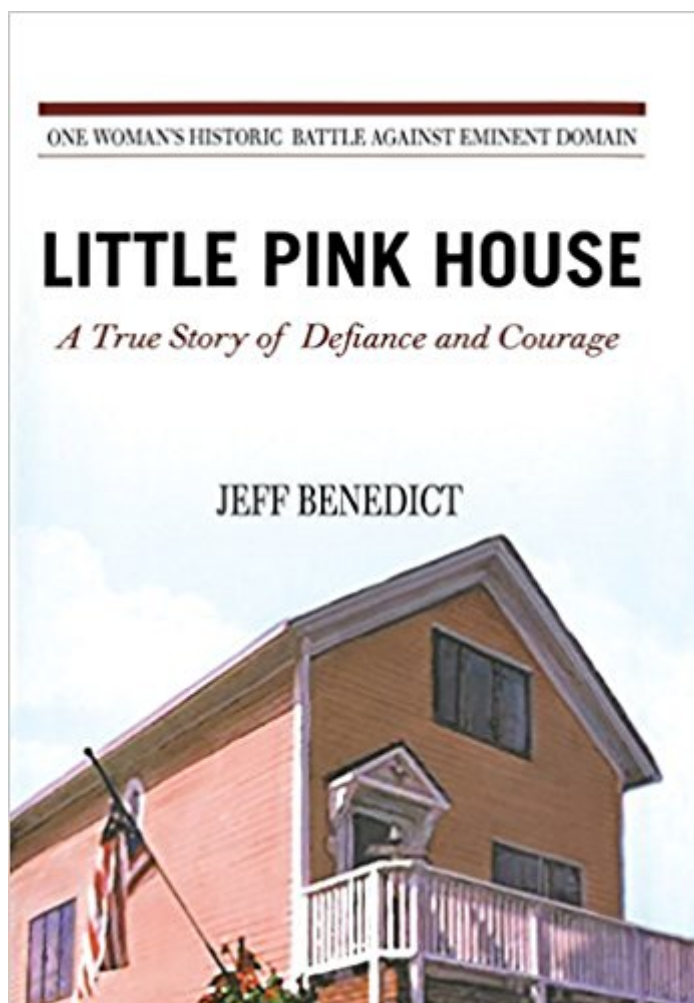


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# Little Pink House: A True Story Of Defiance And Courage



## Synopsis

Suzette Kelo was just trying to rebuild her life when she purchased a falling down Victorian house perched on the waterfront in New London, CT. The house wasn't particularly fancy, but with lots of hard work Suzette was able to turn it into a home that was important to her, a home that represented her new found independence. Little did she know that the City of New London, desperate to revive its flailing economy, wanted to raze her house and the others like it that sat along the waterfront in order to win a lucrative Pfizer pharmaceutical contract that would bring new business into the city. Kelo and fourteen neighbors flat out refused to sell, so the city decided to exercise its power of eminent domain to condemn their homes, launching one of the most extraordinary legal cases of our time, a case that ultimately reached the United States Supreme Court. In *Little Pink House*, award-winning investigative journalist Jeff Benedict takes us behind the scenes of this case -- indeed, Suzette Kelo speaks for the first time about all the details of this inspirational true story as one woman led the charge to take on corporate America to save her home.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Benedict (*The Mormon Way of Doing Business*) has taken a complicated court case centered on eminent domain and turned it into a page-turner with a conscience. In 1997, an EMT named Susette Kelo left her husband, bought a cottage and started over in the economically depressed Ft. Trumbull neighborhood of New London, Conn. In February 1998, the New London Development Corporation began trying to muscle the neighborhood into selling homes to make way

for a Pfizer research complex. Benedict's passionate account is rife with heroes and villains – he delights in pillorying Kelo's foil, Claire Gaudiani, the president of Connecticut College who lured Pfizer to consider New London. The fight escalated when the city tried exercising eminent domain to seize the homes of Kelo and others who refused to sell, leading to the case, *Kelo v. City of New London*, reaching the Supreme Court in 2005. Raising important questions about the use of economic development as a justification for displacing citizens, this book will leave readers indignant and inspired. (Feb.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

\* 'Passionate...A page-turner with conscience...will leave readers indignant and inspired.

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

This book is a case study on the disconnect between the American people and their government at both the state and federal levels. It shows that the bureaucrats in Washington and Hartford (in this instance) simply operate in a world of their own that has no connection with the reality of the life of a typical American citizen. (Addendum to this review: In November of 2009, Pfizer announced that it was closing its New London office, thereby reinforcing the harsh criticism of the inept development planners in New London -- as well as the critics of the controversial U.S. Supreme Court ruling against the local homeowners and in favor of the commercial development of New London on Pfizer's behalf. Moreover 43 states have since enacted legislation preventing the kind of eminent domain taking that is described in this book.) The book's author, Jeff Benedict, tells the tale of a woman in New London, Connecticut and seven of her neighbors who watched in horror as their government proceeded to use eminent domain to seize their private homes and eventually bulldoze them to the ground in an effort to help the Pfizer drug company expand its research facilities in the town of 25,000 people on the Connecticut shore. Worse, when the woman, Susette Kelo, and her supporters seek justice at the nation's highest judicial level, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that the town has the right to seize private property to further commercial interests, all in the name of the "public good" - even though the commercial interests destroy lives in local neighborhoods. The whole New London episode was, in a word, a scam against the private property rights of American citizens. In her dissenting opinion of the Supreme Court's ruling, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor said: "...the fallout from this decision will not be random. The beneficiaries are likely to be those citizens with disproportionate influence and power in the political process, including large corporations and development firms. As for the victims, the government now has license to transfer property from

those with fewer resources to those with more. The Founders cannot have intended this perverse result." "Perverse" is the operative word here. The U.S. Supreme Court essentially broadened the concept of eminent domain far beyond the narrow definition that the founding fathers used to allow governments to seize private property for the "public good." Under the new Kelo precedent, local, state and federal governments can do anything they want irregardless of the injustice they inflict on private citizens and their property. The lead character in this book is Susette Kelo, a single woman with five children. After her marriage fails, Kelo becomes a emergency medical technician in New London and on one of her calls she sees a small house on the New London waterfront near a defunct revolutionary military facility, Fort Trumbull. Kelo is captivated by the house, eventually buys it, renovates it (she paints it pink) and makes it her castle. But not for long, because up in the ivory tower at nearby Connecticut College, the president of the exclusive school gets it in her mind that she wants to help New London rejuvenate itself. Dr. Claire Gaudiani is a saucy, ambitious woman who likes to flaunt her feminine mystique. On the prowl for a civic role, she decides that the Fort Trumbull area of New London is the perfect place to develop in support of the Pfizer pharmaceutical company's plans to expand its research facilities. Under Gaudiani's "vision," the 90-acre parcel of land will be the site of a luxury hotel, a marina, fancy shops and upscale office and residential neighborhoods that will support Pfizer's expanded facility. The scheme is an audacious effort to attract upscale tenants that will fatten New London's tax base. The only obstacle to the scheme is the poor neighborhood of residential homes in the Fort Trumbull area. No problem, Gaudiani concludes: just seize the homes under the eminent domain principal, and bulldoze them down to the ground. The neighborhood, however, doesn't see eye to eye with Gaudiani and her New London Development Corporation, and their plight captures the attention of a lot of sympathetic prominent officials, including New London Mayor Lloyd Beachy. Over the course of several months, the locals also attract the attention of Scott Bullock, an attorney at the Institute of Justice in Washington, DC. The institute is a public interest organization that focuses on property rights, economic liberty, free speech and school choice, and the plight of the Fort Trumbull residents whose homes are threatened by the prospect of seizure under eminent domain proved to be an ideal issue for the institute to defend..In this well written, well documented book, author Jeff Benedict details the eight-year confrontation between Gaudiani and the NLDC versus the local neighborhood and the Institute of Justice. Benedict's narrative captures all the flavor of the participants and the issues. (Benedict is the author of *Without Reservation*, a book about how Native Americans in southeast Connecticut were able to build one of the largest casinos in the world through the manipulation of willing state and federal officials in Hartford and Washington). In Benedict's account of the New

London fiasco, Kelo and her neighbors are clearly the heroic victims who stands up for their rights (which they ultimately lost). The villains are Claire Gaudiani and the NLDC, Governor John Rowland (who ended up in jail on separate corruption allegations), and the majority on the U.S. Supreme Court who affirmed New London's right to seize private property in favor of private development. But there are lots of other colorful characters, as well, who figure prominently in Benedict's narrative. Former New London Mayor Lloyd Beachy took the residents side from the beginning and almost negotiated a compromise that would avoided all the legal skirmishing. But that didn't happen. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court, which defied all practical logic and affirmed the city's right to seize and destroy private property in its quest for more tax revenue. Even more astonishing, however, was the public reaction after the court's ruling. Benedict tells how Kelo and her neighbors drew support from all over the country. The Institute of Justice took advantage of that reaction to conduct an educational campaign that encouraged the U.S. Congress and state legislatures to revise the law so that private property rights were even further protected. Ironically, one of the few states not to take action in that regard was Connecticut. In the end, Kelo and her neighbors finally, and reluctantly settled their case when the state offered significant monetary settlements to move on. Kelo held out for her pink house to be moved out of the 90-acre tract and relocated nearby where it has become a symbol of the fight for property rights. She herself found a similar waterfront property across the river in Groton where she has since relocated. And the 90-acre plot that was supposed to be developed into an upscale commercial/residential neighborhood with a marina and luxury hotel? The local homes were flattened and the 90-acres was cleared. But Benedict reports that nothing was built, and given the current economic crisis, it is likely that for all its efforts to trample over its residents and their property rights, the state and the New London Redevelopment Corporation spent more than \$70 million of public money to acquire a very large vacant lot where no one is paying any taxes. Now there's a disconnect.

It shows exactly the character of government at all levels and how much regard government officials have for the ordinary citizen. NONE! ZERO! ZIP! NADA! NYET! Government officials act like they are not aware that there even is a private sector, where ordinary people are struggling to make a living even while they pay taxes they can ill afford so that officials and bureaucrats can enjoy high salaries, high pensions, tenure and other perks. And what happened to hero Susette Kelo and her neighbors can happen to any property owner (who has to pay property taxes to, and follow capricious rules made by, the very people who are paid so much to wield all that power. You think we are living in a free country? Well think again. Then act by supporting the Institute for Justice

(ij.org) and the Libertarian Party. And, educate yourself. Start right here with Little Pink House, go on to something like Healing Our World by Mary Ruwart, and works by Steven Greenwald.

What a story for those of us who have stood before the powers-that-be to fight gentrification, and to remain in our homes. This happens across the US - and the world, I expect - and I salute the real-life warriors of this story. Compelling, riveting, and powerful story!! cannot WAIT for the film!

A very skillful and almost gripping story of a nurse and how many forces conspired to take her little dream house away for a pointless project that failed anyway in the end. The story became hot news all across the USA and remains a charged controversy over public policy and private property.

This book should be required reading in all civics, American History and Poly Sci classes. This is the real life story of a situation that made me crazy about 5 years ago. That is when a faction of our government in historic and patriotic New England - with their rich history of standing up to "the man" - had their representatives reinterpret the concept of Eminent Domain Law to name Pfizer Pharmaceuticals as the lottery winner in a land grab. There were news stories that chronicled the Supreme Court ruling as one of the most "in your face blue collar workers" of all time. States could now turn over land seized under the guise of public use to private corporations. Political cronyism was now officially in bed with the Capitalist pigs. God help us all. This case eventually went to the Supreme Court and we, the people, lost! One of the best Supreme Court Dissents I've ever read was from Sandra Day O'Connor over this very case. It reads like a sad country western ballad. Read this book and learn, my friends, and cry.....bg

Gripping, maddening, fantastic! Read the book in one day, I could not put it down. It reads like a novel and tells a devastating story about a true miscarriage of justice.

The story is filled with details about how CT worked with a Corporation and how regular people lost their homes in a big fight over eminent domain. It was sad, ugly, how the government supported this endeavor and triumphant in how people pulled together to protect and help the underdog. This was in effort to bring new jobs into the area and build up the waterfront community. Tax breaks were offered, valuable property given away. It made me mad. The corporation eventually left the site leaving CT holding the bag-jobs that came and went, people who lost their homes; for what? It was really outstanding.

The only upside to this sad story is the talented storytelling. The reader benefits from plenty of detail - but not too much - as well as the local and national implications of this landmark case.

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