

AP English Language and Composition  
Question 1: Synthesis (2018)  
Sample Student Responses

**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 effect 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 lumbent 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,

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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.

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**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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> ammendment 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 back fires. 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 high way, 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 5<sup>th</sup> ammendment 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

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positive impacts, isn't it better to keep a precedent of preserving communities rather than keep a precedent of destroying them?

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**Sample B**

[1] Eminent domain, or the power of the government to take land from private owners in the name of the public good, has been a major source of controversy over the past few centuries. The most common defenses for eminent domain, while well-intentioned, are ultimately built on flawed concepts that go against the American value of individual freedom. Although eminent domain might benefit some people in certain cases, the ends do not justify the means. It is unethical and un-American to sacrifice the rights of the poor, the needy, and the few under the guise of “the greater good.”

[2] Eminent domain was originally intended to be used for public benefit, not for the gain of private corporations. Early in our nation’s history, the federal government used this power to “facilitate transportation, supply water, construct public buildings, and aid in defense readiness” (Source A). Also, eminent domain was used to create “federal parks, preserves, historic sites and monuments” (Source A). Perhaps this was necessary in our country’s beginning. However, now that we already have land set aside for public use, is it really necessary to continue forcing people off their private land? There must be a point when the public has enough, and we have likely reached that point. Almost every town has a public park, and most cities have several. Every state has monuments and historic sites for the public to tour. Also, we have public buildings, water supply, and transportation. How much more is truly necessary?

[3] While eminent domain was originally intended to serve the needs of the public, it has now predictably become a way for the powerful to oppress the poor. In modern times, government officials often have stronger ties with wealthy corporations than with the voting public. As a result, communities are seized under eminent domain, and they are turned into factories and plants. This is done under the guise of helping people through “new jobs and increased tax revenue” (Source B). However, these plans often fail to deliver “the rebirth, community benefits and jobs they promise” (Source B), leaving behind polluted land and uprooted communities. This tends to “victimize the poor, racial minorities, and the politically weak” (Source C). Poor and minority neighborhoods are disproportionately targeted by the abuse of eminent domain. Besides having a negative effect on the economy, overuse of eminent domain “damages the social fabric of poor communities” when churches and neighborhoods are uprooted. Poor people tend to rely heavily on community support. When they no longer have that support system in place, it becomes even more difficult for them to make ends meet.

[4] Overall, the use of eminent domain has led to more harm than good, especially over the past few decades when corporations have had a major hand in politics. Eminent domain as we know it is a civil rights violation that destroys poor and minority communities in favor of corporate profit. Any system that allowed the powerful to oppress the disadvantaged is

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inherently flawed. Widespread, government-approved theft and discrimination cannot be tolerated in a free and equal society.

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**Sample D**

[1] Eminent Domain is productive and beneficial because the government needs it to provide for its citizens and the people receive full compensation, for what is lost.

[2] To begin the authorities require the power of eminent domain as it allows them to provide the basic rights to their people. In fact, Justice William Strong believed that eminent domain is “essential to [...] independent existence and perpetuity” of the federal government (Source A). The opinion of Justice Strong emphasizes the governments necessity for eminent domain. This power allows it to provide such basic human needs is water, heat, gas and electricity. “Eminent Domain has been used traditionally to facilitate transportation, supply water, construct public buildings, and aid in defense readiness” – functions that every nation requires (Source A). Eminent Domain only helps people. It provides what the government otherwise could not, in places where government can not reach. This power allows the authorities to help people with the needs of otherwise could not.

[3] Furthermore, while the government does take private property, it compensates people for it, thus ensuring their well being. For example, in the Freetown neighborhood in Greenville, poor half-ruined houses were destroyed and the owners were compensated with the amounts ranging from \$10,000 to \$20,000 which helped the residents make down payments on new improved homes built by the government (Source D). Compensation for their ruined property provided for the future of those people. It allowed them to sell the property that otherwise couldn't have been sold. An issue my family has to face today, as we cannot sell our apartment in Russia for the appropriate money because the country is in crisis. The power of eminent domain would help us. If the government would buy our home in Russia for appropriate amount, it would allow us to buy a new house in “Basking Ridge, New Jersey [sub1].” Eminent Domain compensates what is lost, thus only further helping the people.

[5] Although, one issue rises with this compensation. Is the amount appropriate? Thankfully, the system of checks and balances ensures that it is; in October a Franklin County Common Pleas jury decided that a village that wanted to use farmers property had to pay \$545,625 in contrast to the originally offered amount of \$9,249 (Source F). different branches of government make sure that the federal government does not abuse Eminent Domain. This system provides the people with appropriate compensation for what is lost [sub2].

[sub1]: one of more expensive regions of NJ.

[sub2]: The government is able to provide basic needs to its people and compensate them for everything they lose through Eminent Domain, thus securing the benefits and [ILLEGIBLE] in the government.

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**Sample H**

[1] The issue of eminent domain has frequently entrenched itself into American history. While the Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution does not advocate directly for the practice, it does mention that private property can be taken for public use only when a just compensation is offered to those affected. Thus, eminent domain has been used as an effective tool to promote beneficial government interests. However, while projects requiring the use of eminent domain usually aim to help the public, the practice becomes unjustified when minorities are victimized, a “reasonable compensation” is not attained, and the government works with private companies in the economic philosophy of corporatism.

[2] First and foremost, groups of lower income and diverse backgrounds are, at times, unequally affected by projects involving eminent domain. Source C confirms this idea, stating that such undertakings “tend to victimize the poor, racial minorities and the politically weak.” Although these inequalities are usually unintentional, they arise via a lack of resources, political influence, and opposition to powerful interest groups (Somin). Ultimately, families are displaced and the communal social fabric of poorer communities is broken.

[3] Eminent domain is also abused when private companies benefit at the cost of other private entities or citizens. This practice is known as corporatism, in which the government works closely with private businesses to stimulate economic growth. Unethicality arises, however, when the public-private ties become corrupt, leaving some prosperous and other destitute. Often the case, promises are left unfulfilled so that, in the long run, more than harmed than helped. Such an outcome is exemplified in Source B, which details a failed plan by the New London Development Corporation to “revitalize a small Connecticut town.” The “quasi government body” worked in tandem with Pfizer, giving the company tax breaks and offering to help clean up pollution. While the plan intended to benefit many more residents, compared to the amount of homeowners displaced, the company soon abandoned the plant, leaving an empty open 90 acre field. In the end, nobody was helped in this private-public project, and many were left worse off than beforehand. The financial disaster of Detroit can also be attributed to failed undertakings of corporatism, and altogether, such projects fail: By the time the projects are completed, other, more urgent, more salient public issues arise (Somin). Disapproval of corporatism is further demonstrated in Source E, where the combining of public and private interests, using eminent domain, is described as the “greater Foe” (Cartoon).

[4] Government ambitions involving eminent domain are not always harmful. In fact, when properly used, the government acquisition of land provides the public with a multitude of desirable provisions, including transportation, water systems, public buildings, defense aid, historical preservation sites, and natural parks (U.S. Department of Justice). The process, however, becomes unethical when governments work closely with private industries, causing social inequalities, unnecessary displacements, corruption, and unfulfilled promises.



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**Sample F**

[1] There are many people that argue whether eminent Domain is a positive thing or not. Eminent Domain is the act of the government taking away private property for public use. Eminent Domain is productive useful because it can open up opportunities for people, and it can benefit many people.

[2] Eminent domain is useful because it can open opportunities for people. When the government takes a property, it can open up many job opportunities. In source B written by Timothy Carney, the editorial states that New London's development plan may hurt, but also help people especially those who need a job. While eminent domain may seem like a bad thing, it can be very beneficial. Opening up a private property can help many people with jobs. In source A written by the United States Department of Justice, the article says that eminent domain is used for things like transportation, supply water, and construct public buildings. Both sources A and B explain how eminent domain is used for good. All the things that it is used for also open up jobs and opportunities for people.

[3] Eminent Domain is also useful because it benefits more people than it hurts. While the government does take property away, they do use it for good reason. This is shown in source D when the author states, "Today Freetown is a different place after undergoing a complete makeover that replaced decaying housing and long-strewn jobs with 80 affordable new homes and ten rehabilitated residences" (source D 8). Eminent Domain may seem like a bad thing to a lot of people. In the end, it does help benefit more than it hurts. Due to eminent domain happening, the government was able to open new homes for a community. They were able to help fix up a whole town. Eminent Domain ended up helping many people instead of hurting them.

[4] People will always argue on whether or not eminent domain is a good or bad thing. People will argue that it helps people or it does not. Eminent domain is useful because it opens up opportunities for others, and it benefits people more than it hurts them.

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**Sample A**

[1] Eminent Domain: Power the government holds to take land from private property owners, yet they still must pay compensation for the properties value. Although one may think this is completely fine many argue that its extreamly unfair. Both cases are right eminent domain is a two sided coin; eminent domain is good and bad depending on what side you stand on and how it effects you or others.

[2] First of all we must consider the damages of eminent domain. Source F gives a primes example of a damage due to eminent domain. If the government took his property their would be various causes of damage to his work. With this we see that not only must he be paid for the land but damages for his work environment. Eminent domain also leads to environmental damages not just to ones personal property but the communities property as well. Source B, we head that through eminent domain the Long Island South received a heavy burden when the government took a persons property just to leave it worse off then it already was. Eminent domain can have a good side and a bad side the Sources B & F demonstrated that the governments US of eminent domain may leave or has left damage behind in which most cases is left unfixed and permantly damaging.

[3] We see this permante unfair damage in various forms such as property damage but one that most greatly effects people is home and hob loss. Looking at Source E we may laugh at the satirecal piece at first but then we come to relize that this is no joke a lot of people lose their homes to the government. Although we may see a brightside such as a new place to create jobs you just made a family lose their home for it. We can also see the damages when we read Source C we see that the people who receive the short end of the stick is small communities. The damage that eminent domain holds on people is great.

[4] Through all the bad we also see some good in eminent domain as seen in Source A where the government took land to preserve a place with great historical significance. In cases like this we see that eminent domain isn't that bad because we are left with some great places such as parks, recs, historical land marks, ect. We also see the good in Source D where we read that in the end sometimes the people cry out for help and thorough emenet domain they recived the help they needed to get out of a horrible situation into a good one. As we see that the use of emenate domain can't be all bad in the end their will be good that can come out.

[5] Finally when we look at emenet domain we see that yes it has it costly damages on properties and comunitis in the forms of job and home loss but we can also see that there is good when emenet domain takes place. When emenet domain is first spoken we must not just focus on the good or bad because in the end we truly don't know which will occur.

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**Sample C**

[1] The government pretty much controls everything throught out the United States. If the government wanted to take your land for necessary need, they can do that. But it's all maily for a good cause in the area people are in. Many people would agree that taking someone's property is bad. But I would disagree because when the government take's someones land, they do it for a good cause. Eminent Domain should be used for a better future ahead an benefical. The government untilzing Eminent Domain can be so helpful in many ways like considering better facilitates for transportation, better buildings, and better ways of supplying water. But many people would argue that the Eminent Domain is wrong for what there doing by taking over so much land and the land is owned by a private owner. The Eminent Domain has brough plenty of environment for residents by bringing American parks.

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**Sample G**

[1] There is no way all the people who reside in the US will ever agree on a topic. No not possible. Hopeful as many may be it just isn't in the cards for this free country. Therefore why should the topic of eminent domain be any different. The times the US is at right now are trying no doubt, especially with the whole FBI watching and the theory that the government is slowly trying to take over our freedom, many people are reluctant to agree that eminent domain is beneficial. Don't get me wrong it definitely has its "beloved" perks in "protecting environmentally sensitive areas" (U.S. Department of Justice). This power the government has "play[ed] a central role...infrastructure" and given us many beautiful ways to escape the havoc its created also (U.S. Department of Justice). Without this power its safe to say these preserved sites would not necessarily be where they are today. But with every great thing there is also a down side. Someone always suffers. The one suffering are "African Americans and other minorities" (Shelton). Communities of minorities usually are the victims of the abuse of eminent domain. "These groups...lack...resources...to resist" therefore causing more and more problems (Somin). So yes there are down sides but in cases like Freetown, the benefits just seem to outway. Beautiful places of nature are preserved for an abundance of people to visit and towns are "complete[ly] ma[d]eover" (Porter). It's just a matter of preception.