

No. 24-435

In The
Supreme Court of the United States

GHP MANAGEMENT CORPORATION, ET AL.,

PETITIONERS,

V.

CITY OF LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, ET AL.,

RESPONDENTS.

On Petition for Writ of Certiorari
to the United States Court of Appeals
for the Ninth Circuit

**Amici Curiae Brief of The
Small Property Owners of San Francisco Institute
and Owners Counsel of America
Supporting Petitioners**

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INTEREST OF THE AMICI CURIAE

The Small Property Owners of San Francisco Institute (“SPOSFI”) is a California nonprofit corporation (Internal Revenue Code § 501(c)(3)) and organization of small property owners that advocates for the rights of property owners in San Francisco. SPOSFI’s members range from young families to the elderly on fixed incomes, and its membership cuts across all racial, ethnic, and socio-economic strata.¹

SPOSFI is also involved in education, outreach and research. Through education, it helps owners better understand their rights and learn how to deal with local government; through outreach to community groups and to the public, it demonstrates how restrictive regulations harm both tenants and landlords, and through research projects, it aims to separate hyperbole from fact on the effect of rent control on housing stock. Through legal advocacy, SPOSFI seeks to protect the rights of small property owners against unfair and burdensome regulations.

SPOSFI has appeared as amicus curiae in this Court in support of petitions seeking to protect the rights of property owners.

Owners’ Counsel of America (OCA) is an invitation-only national network of the most

¹ No counsel for any party has authored this brief in whole or in part and no person other than the amicus has made any monetary contribution to this brief’s preparation or submission. The parties were timely notified of intent to file.

experienced eminent domain and property rights attorneys. They have joined together to advance, preserve and defend the rights of private property owners, and thereby further the cause of liberty, because the right to own and use property is “the guardian of every other right,” and the basis of a free society. *See* James W. Ely, *The Guardian of Every Other Right: A Constitutional History of Property Rights* (2d ed. 1998). As the lawyers on the front lines of property law and property rights, OCA brings unique perspective to this case. OCA is a non-profit 501(c)(6) organization sustained solely by its members. Only one member lawyer is admitted from each state. Since its founding, OCA has sought to use its members’ combined knowledge and experience as a resource in the defense of private property ownership, and OCA member attorneys have been involved in landmark property law cases in nearly every jurisdiction nationwide. Additionally, OCA members and their firms have been counsel for a party or *amicus* in many of the property cases this Court has considered in the past forty years, including most recently *Sheetz v. County of El Dorado*, 601 U.S. 267 (2014); *Tyler v. Hennepin County*, 598 U.S. 631 (2023); *Sackett v. EPA*, 598 U.S. 651 (2023); *Wilkins v. United States*, 598 U.S. 152 (2023); *Pakdel v. San Francisco* 141 U.S. 2226 (2021); *Cedar Point Nursery v. Hassid*, 594 U.S. 139 (2021).² OCA members have also authored and

² *See also* *Knick v. Township of Scott*, 139 S. Ct. 2162 (2019); *Koontz v. St. Johns River Water Mgmt. Dist.*, 133 S. Ct. 2586 (2013); *Horne v. U.S. Dept. of Agriculture*, 576 U.S. 350 (2015), and *Arkansas Game and Fish Comm’n v. United States*, 133 S.

edited treatises, books, and law review articles on property law and property rights.³

Ct. 511 (2012); *Stop the Beach Renourishment, Inc. v. Fla. Dept. of Env't'l Protection*, 130 S. Ct. 2592 (2010); *Winter v. Natural Resources Def. Council*, 555 U.S. 7 (2008); *Kelo v. City of New London*, 545 U.S. 469 (2005); *San Remo Hotel, L.P. v. City and County of San Francisco*, 545 U.S. 323 (2005); *Lingle v. Chevron U.S.A., Inc.*, 544 U.S. 528 (2005); *Tahoe-Sierra Pres. Council, Inc. v. Tahoe Reg'l Planning Agency*, 535 U.S. 302 (2002); *Palazzolo v. Rhode Island*, 533 U.S. 606 (2001); *City of Monterey v. Del Monte Dunes at Monterey, Ltd.*, 526 U.S. 687 (1999); *Dolan v. City of Tigard*, 512 U.S. 374 (1994); *Lucas v. South Carolina Coastal Council*, 505 U.S. 1003 (1992); *Yee v. City of Escondido*, 503 U.S. 519 (1992); *Preseault v. ICC*, 494 US 1 (1990); *Nollan v. Cal. Coastal Comm'n*, 483 U.S. 825 (1987); *First English Evangelical Lutheran Church v. Los Angeles County*, 482 U.S. 304 (1987); *Agins v. City of Tiburon*, 447 U.S. 255 (1980); *Kaiser Aetna v. United States*, 444 U.S. 164 (1979).

³ See, e.g., Michael M. Berger, *Theft, Extortion, and the Constitution: Land Use Practice Needs an Ethical Infusion*, 38 *Touro L. Rev.* 755 (2023); Michael M. Berger, *Whither Regulatory Takings*, 51 *The Urban Lawyer* 171 (2021); Michael M. Berger & Gideon Kanner, *The Nasty, Brutish And Short Life Of Agins v. City Of Tiburon*, 50 *The Urban Lawyer* 9 (2019); William G. Blake, *The Law of Eminent Domain—A Fifty State Survey* (Am. Bar Ass'n 2012) (editor); Leslie A. Fields, *Colorado Eminent Domain Practice* (2008); John Hamilton, *Kansas Real Estate Practice And Procedure Handbook* (2009) (chapter on *Eminent Domain Practice and Procedure*); John Hamilton & David M. Rapp, *Law and Procedure of Eminent Domain in the 50 States* (Am. Bar Ass'n 2010) (Kansas chapter); Gideon Kanner, *Making Laws and Sausages: A Quarter-Century Retrospective of Penn Central Transportation Co. v. City of New York*, 13 *Wm. & Mary Bill of Rts. J.* 679 (2005); Dwight H. Merriam, *Eminent Domain Use and Abuse: Kelo in Context* (Am. Bar Ass'n 2006) (coeditor); Michael Rikon, *Moving the Cat*

INTRODUCTION

Philosophical differences between landlords and tenants are hardly new. Nor are they strangers to this Court. However, the “solutions” now being devised by some municipalities (sometimes by city councils, sometimes by voter initiative measures voted in by the tenants themselves) to perceived problems in the residential rental setting have gone beyond this Court’s consistent teachings about property takings. Compulsory, uncompensated transfers of interests in property are becoming commonplace. Particularly in the rental context, this Court has seen a steady flow of litigation. E.g., *74 Pinehurst LLC v. New York*, 59 F.4th 557, 563 (2d Cir. 2023), Docket no. 22-1130, cert den.; *335-7 LLC v. City of New York*, no. 21-823, 2023 WL 2291511, at *2 (2d Cir. 2023), Docket No. 22-1170, cert den.; *Kagan v. City of Los Angeles*, 2022 WL 16849064 (9th Cir. 2022), Docket no. 22-739, cert. den.; *El Papel v. City of Seattle*, No. 22-35656, 2023 WL 7040314 (9th Cir. 2023), Docket no. 23-807, cert. den.; *Gonzales v. Inslee*, 2 Wash.3d 280 (Wash. 2023) Docket no. 23-935, cert. den.; *G-Max Management, Inc. v. State of New York*, Docket no. 23-1148.

This case provides the Court with the opportunity to reexamine, revise, and enforce the standards for Fifth Amendment takings evaluation in the residential rental context. SPOSFI and OCA

into the Hat: The Pursuit of Fairness in Condemnation, or, Whatever Happened to Creating a “Partnership of Planning?”, 4 Alb. Gov’t L. Rev. 154 (2011); Randall A. Smith, *Eminent Domain After Kelo and Katrina*, 53 La. Bar J. 363 (2006); (chapters on *Prelitigation Process* and *Flooding and Erosion*).

pray that the Court take the opportunity and rationalize this confused area of constitutional law.

SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

Although this Court has permitted property and wealth redistribution schemes in the past, it has never done so unless the party whose property was being taken was compensated. Indeed, the presence of compensation has been the key to upholding such schemes. *Hawaii Housing Authority v. Midkiff*, 467 U.S. 229 (1984); *Berman v. Parker*, 348 U.S. 26 (1954). As this Court put it in *Berman*, when explaining why it was permitting a forced transfer of property from one citizen to another through the government's coercive eminent domain power:

“The rights of these property owners are satisfied when they receive that just compensation which the Fifth Amendment exacts as the price of the taking.” 348 U.S. at 36.

Below, the City focused on what it viewed as the needs and problems of tenants in the Covid era. Neither the members of SPOSFI and OCA nor, we suspect, the petitioners we are supporting, are unsympathetic to the problems of their tenants. The members represented by SPOSFI, for example, are not large, faceless, corporate bureaucracies out of touch with the real world. Most of them are small “mom and pop” operations.

Ends and means. As is so often true in constitutional litigation, that’s what this case is about.

The problem arises when simplistic solutions are chosen for complex problems; when, in haste, one-sided “cures” are devised. Here, the City has precluded landlords from reclaiming possession of any of their units due to the Covid pandemic, allowing tenants to remain in possession regardless of their rent payment status or the ending of their leases. The means chosen to provide this protection are now before this Court. In other words, is it constitutional to allow tenants to shelter in place during the pandemic without paying rent?

To meet perceived needs, Los Angeles has cast its net too broadly. It has transferred palpable interests in property from landlords to tenants. Without compensation. That, the constitution forbids.

ARGUMENT

I

“THE POLITICAL ETHICS REFLECTED IN THE FIFTH AMENDMENT REJECT CONFISCATION AS A MEASURE OF JUSTICE.”⁴

It is hard to improve on this Court’s vintage words.⁵ However, what the Ninth Circuit has

⁴ *United States v. Cors*, 337 U.S. 325, 332 (1949).

⁵ Professor Michelman’s classic expansion on that thought is worth noting, nonetheless: “any measure which society cannot afford or, putting it another way, is unwilling to finance under conditions of full compensation, society cannot afford at all.” Frank Michelman, *Property, Utility, and Fairness: Comments on the Ethical Foundations of “Just Compensation” Law*, 80 Harv. L. Rev. 1165, 1181 (1967).

approved is the precise opposite of this Court's simple and fair summary of the Just Compensation Clause's mandate.

A.
A Complete Takeover of Property
Would Unarguably be a Taking.

Perhaps a hypothetical can illustrate the reality facing owners of apartment buildings in Los Angeles today.

Suppose that the City decided that a large set of apartment buildings housed the city's poorest citizens and, to protect them from joining the ranks of the homeless, the city decided to acquire all those apartment buildings to maintain as low-income housing. To accomplish that, the city assembled the apartments' owners and informed them that the city was taking them over. A sort of *coup de apartments*. In exchange for title to their properties, the owners would receive contracts to manage the new city-owned buildings and would be paid a salary based on a percentage of the rent collected. But the city would set the rent; the rental rates would change only when the city decided they could; funds for upkeep, insurance, and maintenance would have to come from the rents collected or money borrowed by the "managers," as the city would invest no money of its own; and the tenants could either remain in perpetuity or designate their successors in interest.

Had the City actually commandeered title to the properties and placed title in the City's name, there is no doubt that a Fifth Amendment violation would have occurred. Property would have been taken for

public use without any compensation changing hands. The acquisition of title would have made the taking obvious.

As this Court explained:

“government action that works a taking of property rights *necessarily* implicates the ‘constitutional obligation to pay just compensation.’ [Citation.]” *First English Evangelical Lutheran Church v. County of Los Angeles*, 482 U.S. 304, 315 (1987); emphasis added.

When legislation is enacted that takes property with no intent to provide compensation, the legislation is invalid. *Hodel v. Irving*, 481 U.S. 704 (1987).⁶

How does the hijacking of title from the apartment owners in the hypothetical differ from what the Los Angeles ordinance actually did to these apartment owners? In only one meaningful way: In the hypothetical, the owners would be relieved of the dubious honor of paying taxes on the property, as they would no longer hold title to it. As the New York Court of Appeals put it in its enduring exposition on the difference between overt and covert confiscation:

“The only substantial difference, in such case, between restriction and actual

⁶ The statute in *Irving* was intended to solve a problem caused by intestate succession to miniscule Native American estates. In the process, however, the property right of devise and descent was taken from current owners without any intent to pay for taking that “stick” from the bundle of property rights. As a result, this Court struck down the statute.

taking, is that the restriction leaves the owner subject to the burden of payment of taxation, while outright confiscation would relieve him of that burden.” *Arverne Bay Constr. Co. v. Thatcher*, 15 N.E.2d 587, 592 (N.Y. 1938).

Aside from the taxation issue, the Los Angeles ordinance has stripped apartment owners of all useful indicia of ownership. Hyperbolic as this may sound, it is the reality. The stringent regulations have reduced the ownership of an apartment building in Los Angeles to something akin to a public utility, where all decisions are made by the government and the titular owners of the properties have lost not only control over what they can charge and who they can rent to, but have been compelled to transfer substantial property interests to their tenants with no compensation whatever.

B.

A Compelled Transfer of a Recognizable Interest in Property is a Taking.

As noted earlier, this Court approved Hawaii’s plan for land reform and its use of the power of eminent domain to accomplish the breakdown of a feudal land tenure system (*Hawaii Housing Authority v. Midkiff*) and also approved the concept of urban redevelopment in the District of Columbia and its use of the power of eminent domain to assemble large tracts of land for resale to developers who would redevelop decayed city cores (*Berman v. Parker*).

In neither case, however, was there any doubt that compensation was a key element in the package. Indeed, the entire discussion in *Midkiff* was directed at the “public use” aspect of the Fifth Amendment because, as the unanimous opinion put it, “we assume for purposes of these appeals that the weighty demand of just compensation has been met” 467 U.S. at 245. Absent this Court’s ability to make that crucial assumption, the land title reform system which compelled the transfer of fee simple title from landlords to tenants could not have passed constitutional muster.

Nor is this surprising. The extent of the power of eminent domain has been described in terms more suited to breathless ingenues than judges:

“The power of eminent domain, next to that of conscription of man power for war, is the most awesome grant of power under the law of the land.” *Winger v. Aires*, 89 A.2d 521, 522 (Pa. 1952).⁷

When recognized property interests are compulsorily transferred from a private citizen on orders from the government, compensation is mandated:

“This Court has stated that a sovereign by ipse dixit, may not transform private

⁷ See also *Township of West Orange v. 769 Assoc., LLC*, 969 A.2d 1080, 1085 (N.J. 2009); *Maryland Plaza Redev. Corp. v. Greenberg*, 594 S.W.2d 284, 291 (Mo. App. 1979); *City of Oakland v. Oakland Raiders*, 220 Cal.Rptr. 153, 156 (Cal. App. 1985); *Miles v. Dawson*, 830 S.W.2d 368, 370 (Ky. 1991).

property into public property without compensation This is the very kind of thing that the Taking Clause of the Fifth Amendment was meant to prevent.” *Ruckelshaus v. Monsanto Co.*, 467 U.S. 986, 1012 (1984); quoting *Webb’s Fabulous Pharmacies, Inc. v. Beckwith*, 449 U.S. 155, 161 (1980).

In the context at bar, there is no issue that such a transfer has taken place. Wordplay alone stands between these apartment building owners and the property right which has been taken from them and given to their tenants.

C.

A Taking Occurs When Government Commands a Property Owner to Stand Aside and Permit Physical Occupation of Property by Another.

1. The General Rule is That Physical Occupation is a Taking.

The Los Angeles scheme goes beyond mere wealth transfer. It commands property owners to permit permanent physical occupation of their property by strangers.

Physical invasion has always been viewed by this Court as a particularly obnoxious form of governmental intrusion, one which can more readily be seen as a Fifth Amendment violation. *Cedar Point Nursery v. Hassid*, 594 U.S. 139, 147 (2021); *Penn Central Transp. Co. v. City of New York*, 438 U.S. 104, 122 (1978); *Loretto v. Teleprompter Manhattan CATV Corp.*, 458 U.S. 419, 436 (1982).

“Property” consists of many things. Indeed, the concept is so complex that this Court has repeatedly used the bundle of sticks analogy to help illustrate it, concluding that either the taking of an entire “stick” from the “bundle” or the taking of a part of all “sticks” in the “bundle” violates the Just Compensation Clause of the Fifth Amendment.⁸

One “stick” which has received special protection from this Court has been the right of the property owner to exclude others from his property. This Court has repeatedly referred to the right to exclude others as ... one of the most essential,”⁹ “most fundamental,”¹⁰ and “most treasured strands in an owner's bundle of property rights.”¹¹ In like fashion, this Court has routinely affirmed that private property ownership, and the legal system’s protection of it, is fundamental to social order. See, e.g., *Cedar Point*, 594 U.S. at 147.

⁸ E.g., *Kaiser Aetna v. United States*, 444 U.S. 164, 176 (1979); *Loretto*, 458 U.S. at 433, 435; *United States v. Security Indus. Bank*, 459 U.S. 70, 76 (1982); *Ruckelshaus*, 467 U.S. at 1011; *Hodel*, 481 U.S. at 716; *Nollan v. California Coastal Commn.*, 483 U.S. 825, 831 (1987).

The “sticks” obviously affected here are the right to exclude others from one’s property, the right to possession of one’s property and, because of the wealth transfer aspects of the ordinances, the right to alienate one’s property.

⁹ *Kaiser Aetna*, 444 U.S. at 176; *Loretto*, 458 U.S. at 433, *Ruckelshaus*, 467 U.S. at 1011, *Irving*, 481 U.S. at 716; *Nollan*, 486 U.S. at 831.

¹⁰ *Alabama Ass’n of Realtors v. Dept. of Health & Hum. Servs.*, 594 U.S. 758, 765 (2021).

¹¹ *Loretto*, 458 U.S. at 435.

Recently, in *Sheetz v. County of El Dorado*, 601 U.S. 267, 274 (2024), the Court emphasized that “the right to compensation is triggered” where the government “interfere[s] with the owner’s right to exclude others from it.”

Moreover, the Court has been particularly protective against governmental actions which permit strangers to invade the property of others:

“This is *not* a case in which the Government is exercising its regulatory power in a manner that will cause an *insubstantial devaluation* of petitioners’ private property; rather, the imposition of the navigable servitude in this context will result in *an actual physical invasion* of the privately owned marina.” *Kaiser Aetna*, 444 U.S. at 180; emphasis added; *see also Loretto*, 458 U.S. at 436.

Like *Kaiser Aetna*, this case does not involve “insubstantial devaluation” of property. The actual physical transfer of interests effected by the ordinance causes injury to the apartment owners which is evident and substantial.

This Court later explained its rule as affording protection to a property owner against “an interloper with a government license.” *FCC v. Florida Power Corp.*, 480 U.S. 245, 253 (1987).¹² That analogy seems apt here, where the Los Angeles ordinance

¹² Or, as Professor Tribe colorfully expressed it, “government-invited gatecrashers.” Laurence Tribe, *American Constitutional Law* § 9-5 at 602 (2d ed 1988).

permits—or, more properly, requires—a perpetual stream of strangers to occupy the apartment units.

Coerced acceptance of physical invasion is enough—by itself—under this Court’s precedents to find a taking. However, the Los Angeles intrusion may be qualitatively worse than the others already condemned by this Court. For here we are not talking about boats on a waterway (*Kaiser Aetna*) or strollers on a beach (*Nollan*) or wires in a building (*Loretto*). Here, we are talking about living quarters. The landlords have lost all ability to determine who will live in their buildings. That control has shifted to their tenants.

2. *Yee v. City of Escondido* Is Not Compatible With Settled Law.

The Ninth Circuit thought that *Yee v. City of Escondido*, 503 U.S. 519 (1992), a mobile home rent control case, compelled its action. That conclusion is in error. *Yee* was, in fact, an aberration that ought to be recognized as such and discarded.

Yee was based on two concepts that are antithetical to this Court’s takings jurisprudence, both past and present. First, it is based on the idea that only coerced physical occupation offends the Fifth Amendment and, second, it relies on the fact that the regulation did not completely eliminate the property owner’s interests. This Court’s cases are contrary on both counts.

First, the Court’s physical takings jurisprudence is not limited to coerced physical occupation. The Court’s physical takings cases are based on facts on the ground. In *United States v. Causby*, 328 U.S. 256

(1946), for example, the taking was caused by overflights. In *Pumpelly v. Green Bay Co.*, 13 Wall. (80 U.S.) 166 (1872), the taking was caused by unintended flooding. *Nollan* authorized casual beach use. Although, to be sure, some physical takings cases are based on coerced physical occupation, e.g., *Loretto*, 458 U.S. 419, plainly all are not. The question is whether there was a sufficient physical invasion to compromise property rights.

Moreover, the idea that the owners' "voluntary" participation (by offering the property for rent) undermined their ability to contest the occupation was dealt with by the Court in *Horne v. Dept. of Agric.*, 576 U.S. 350 (2015). There, reversing the Ninth Circuit's holding that "voluntary" participation in the government's "raisin market" precluded challenging the constitutionality of the program was simply "wrong as a matter of law." (576 U.S. at 365)

Second, *Yee* found no taking because the owners retained significant value. The courts below magnified this holding by undermining the "bundle of sticks or rights" concept that this Court has consistently used. According to them, a physical taking cannot occur unless government action takes "the entire bundle" of rights. But that has never been the test. This Court has viewed each of the component sticks in the bundle as being property protected by the Takings Clause. See, e.g., *Kaiser Aetna*, 444 U.S., at 176, describing the right to exclude as "*one of the most essential sticks*" in the bundle (emphasis added); *Dolan v. City of Tigard*, 512 U.S. 374, 393 (1994) (same); *United States v. Security Indus. Bank*, 459 U.S. at 76 (security

interest); *United States v. General Motors Corp.*, 323 U.S. 373, 378 (1945) (rights “to possess, use and dispose”); *Consolidated Rock Products Co. v. Du Bois*, 312 U.S. 510, 528 (1941) (rights of bondholders in bankruptcy); *Babbitt v. Youpee*, 519 U.S. 234, 242 (1997) (right of devise; “completely demolish *one* of the sticks”) (emphasis added); *Loretto*, 458 U.S. at 533 (“*one* of the most essential sticks”) (emphasis added); *Cedar Point Nursery v. Hassid*, 594 U.S. 139 (2021) (“*one* of the most important sticks”) (emphasis added); *Ruckelshaus*, 467 U.S. at 1011 (trade secret); *Stewart v. Abend*, 495 U.S. 207, 253 (1990) (right to prevent derivative publication); *Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. v. Goldsmith*, 143 S.Ct. 1258, 1261 (2023) (right to derivative works).

If there were any doubt, the Court swept it away in *Horne*, 576 U.S. at 362-63, where the Court held that leaving the property owner with one stick out of the bundle is not sufficient to avoid a taking: “Whether the government may avoid the categorical duty to pay just compensation for a physical taking of property by reserving to the property owner a contingent interest in a portion of the value of the property, set at the government's discretion. The answer is no.” Leaving property owners with one (or more) of the sticks in the bundle they began with does not immunize the government from takings liability. See Richard A. Epstein, *The Unfinished Business of Horne v. Department of Agriculture*, 10 N.Y.U.J.L. & Liberty 734, 758-61 (2016).

In short, the underpinnings of *Yee* have been done away with by more recent decisions, to the extent they had validity in the first place.

In 2019, the Court did not shy away from overruling another aberrant Takings Clause ruling from that developing era in this field of the law, i.e., *Williamson County Regional Planning Commission v. Hamilton Bank*, 473 U.S. 172 (1985), overruled in *Knick v. Township of Scott*, 139 S. Ct. 2162 (2019). *Knick* discarded *Williamson County* because it was “not just wrong. Its reasoning was exceptionally ill founded and conflicted with much of our takings jurisprudence.” (*Knick*, 139 S.Ct. at 2178.) So, too, with *Yee*, which deserves the same fate as *Williamson County*.

II. Good Intentions Are Constitutionally Irrelevant.

This brief does not challenge the good intentions of the Los Angeles government to care for its residents. (See App. p. 20a.) The question, however, is whether their good intentions should count for anything in this constitutional analysis? In a word, no.

That the city professes to be seeking to do good is beside the point. It proceeds as though recognition of a legitimate governmental *goal* validates whatever *solution* is chosen. And the Ninth Circuit bought into that. Not relevant. Determination of a legitimate governmental objective is the first, not the last, step. We distinguish between means and ends, and the means chosen to achieve the objective must survive Constitutional scrutiny the same as the ends.

Good intentions are constitutionally irrelevant, although they may be legally and morally necessary. For the proper exercise of any governmental power,

the underpinning of such a beneficent purpose must exist. That much was settled no later than 1922, when this Court examined a statute designed to stop land subsidence caused by underground coal mining and concluded that the prerequisites for exercise of *both* police power *and* eminent domain were present:

“We assume, *of course*, that the statute was passed upon the conviction that an exigency existed that would warrant it, and we assume that an exigency exists that would warrant the exercise of the power of eminent domain. But the question at bottom is upon whom the loss of the changes desired should fall.”¹³

More recent authority echoes that conclusion: “the Takings Clause *presupposes* that the government has acted pursuant to a valid public purpose.” *Lingle v. Chevron USA, Inc.*, 544 U.S. 528, 543 (2005) (emphasis added).

Once it is determined that the government action is done to achieve a legitimate goal, then the means

¹³ *Pennsylvania Coal Co. v. Mahon*, 260 U.S. 393, 416 (1922) (emphasis added). See also *Florida Rock Indus, Inc. v. United States*, 18 F.3d 1560, 1571 (Fed. Cir. 1994): “It is necessary that the Government act in a good cause, but it is not sufficient. The takings clause already assumes the Government is acting in the public interest” More than that, it assumes that the Government is acting pursuant to lawful authority. If not, the action is *ultra vires* and void. Compare *Youngstown Sheet & Tube Co. v. Sawyer*, 343 U.S. 579 (1952) (unlawful wartime seizure voided) with *United States v. Peewee Coal Co.*, 341 U.S. 114 (1951) (compensation mandatory after lawful wartime seizure).

chosen must be examined against the constitutional matrix to ensure that private rights have not been violated. Governmental power is not permitted to run roughshod over the constitutionally protected rights of individuals. That is what the Court was talking about when it concluded in *First English* that:

“many of the provisions of the Constitution are designed to limit the flexibility and freedom of governmental authorities and the Just Compensation Clause of the Fifth Amendment is one of them.” 482 U.S. at 321.

Pennsylvania Coal was merely one in a long line of decisions in which this Court—speaking through various voices along its ideological spectrum (*Pennsylvania Coal* having been authored for the Court by Justice Holmes)—patiently, and consistently, explained to regulatory agencies that the general legal propriety of their actions and the need to pay compensation under the Fifth Amendment present different questions, and the need for the latter is not obviated by the virtue of the former.

The Ninth Circuit, however, seems not to have gotten the message. Evidently believing that the city was pursuing the public good by allowing people to remain in their existing housing during an emergency, that court granted summary judgment to the city. Demonstrating the error of that theory, the dissenting opinion in *Pennsylvania Coal* had argued the absolute position that a “restriction imposed to protect the public health, safety or

morals from dangers threatened is not a taking.”¹⁴ Eight Justices rejected that proposition.

In *Loretto*, New York’s highest court upheld a statute as a valid exercise of the police power, and therefore dismissed an action seeking compensation for a taking. This Court put it this way as it reversed:

“The Court of Appeals determined that § 828 serves [a] legitimate public purpose ... and thus is within the State’s police power. We have no reason to question that determination. *It is a separate question, however, whether an otherwise valid regulation so frustrates property rights that compensation must be paid.*”¹⁵

Similarly, in *Kaiser Aetna*, the Corps of Engineers decreed that a private marina be opened to public use without compensation. This Court disagreed, and explained the relationship between justifiable regulatory actions and the just compensation guarantee of the Fifth Amendment:

“In light of its expansive authority under the Commerce Clause, there is *no question* but that Congress *could* assure the public a free right of access to the Hawaii Kai Marina if it so chose. *Whether a statute or regulation*

¹⁴ 260 U.S. at 417 (Brandeis, J. [Holmes’ usual constitutional soulmate], dissenting).

¹⁵ 458 U.S. at 425 (Marshall, J.) (emphasis added).

that went so far amounted to a taking, however, is an entirely separate question."¹⁶

Or, as the Court put it in *Nollan*:

"That is simply an expression of the Commission's belief that the public interest will be served by a continuous strip of publicly accessible beach along the coast. The Commission may well be right that it is a good idea, but that does not establish that the Nollans (and other coastal residents) alone can be compelled to contribute to its realization. Rather, California is free to advance its 'comprehensive program,' if it wishes, by using its power of eminent domain for this 'public purpose.'"¹⁷

That is why the Court concluded in *First English* that the Fifth Amendment was designed "to secure *compensation* in the event of *otherwise proper interference* amounting to a taking."¹⁸ This bedrock principle of the law of constitutional remedies goes back to the unanimous decision in *Hurley v. Kincaid*,¹⁹ where the Court held that the remedy for a taking resulting from valid governmental action is just compensation, not judicial second-guessing of

¹⁶ 444 U.S. at 174 (Rehnquist, J.) (emphasis added).

¹⁷ 483 U.S. at 841 (Scalia, J.).

¹⁸ 482 U.S. at 315 (Rehnquist, C.J.) (first emphasis, the Court's; second emphasis added).

¹⁹ 285 U.S. 95 (1932) (Brandeis, J.).

governmental policies and decisions through disruptive injunctions.²⁰

In a similar vein are cases like *Preseault v. I.C.C.*,²¹ *Ruckelshaus v. Monsanto Co.*,²² *Dames & Moore v. Regan*,²³ and the *Regional Rail Reorganization Act Cases*.²⁴ In each of them, the Court was faced with the claim that Congress, in pursuit of legitimate objectives, had taken private property without just compensation. The goal in each was plainly legitimate (respectively, the creation of recreational trails over abandoned railroad right-of-way easements, obtaining expert input prior to licensing pesticides, dealing with the issue of compensation in the aftermath of the Iranian hostage crisis, and widespread railroad bankruptcy). Nonetheless, the Court did not permit those virtuous legislative goals to trump the constitutional need for compensation when private property was taken in the process. In each, the Court directed the property owners to the Court of Federal Claims²⁵ to determine whether these exercises of

²⁰ Justice Brandeis' opinion for the Court in *Hurley* shows his acceptance of the Court's holding in *Mahon* that takings require compensation. Justice Brandeis had been the lone dissenter in the latter case, expressing the belief (abandoned in *Hurley*) that valid regulation does not require compensation.

²¹ 494 U.S. 1 (1990) (Brennan, J.).

²² 467 U.S. 986 (1984) (Blackmun, J.).

²³ 453 U.S. 654 (1981) (Rehnquist, J.).

²⁴ 419 U.S. 102 (1974) (Brennan, J.).

²⁵ When litigation is brought in that court, the Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit has consistently affirmed judgments making the United States liable for takings that precluded

legislative power, *though substantively legitimate*, nonetheless required compensation.²⁶

This consistent teaching probably explains why the Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, the body which hears all appeals from the Claims Court (the court which adjudicates more takings cases than any other because it is virtually the exclusive forum for takings cases against the United States), has had no trouble recognizing that the Just Compensation Clause operates against proper governmental action:

“In such cases the characteristic feature is the defendant’s use of rightful ... regulatory rights to control and prevent exercise of [private] ownership rights the defendant is unwilling to purchase and pay for.”²⁷

development in order to further proper environmental goals. E.g., *Whitney Benefits, Inc. v. United States*, 926 F.2d 1169 (Fed. Cir. 1990) (surface coal mining); *Florida Rock Indus., Inc. v. United States*, 18 F.3d 1560 (Fed. Cir. 1994) (limestone mining); *Creppel v. United States*, 41 F.3d 627 (Fed. Cir. 1994) (dredging and filling wetlands).

²⁶ To this end, the Fifth Amendment’s just compensation guarantee has been held self-executing. The availability of compensation validates and constitutionalizes the otherwise wrongful government action. *City of Monterey v. Del Monte Dunes*, 526 U.S. 687, 714-15 (1999) (Kennedy, J.); *United States v. Clarke*, 445 U.S. 253, 257 (1980) (Rehnquist, J.).

²⁷ *Florida Rock Indus., Inc. v. U.S.*, 791 F.2d 893, 899 (Fed. Cir. 1986) (quoting with approval; emphasis the Court’s). *See also Whitney Benefits*, 926 F.2d at 1177; *Skaw v. United States*, 740 F.2d 932, 939 (Fed. Cir. 1984).

In sum, for a taking to occur, it matters not whether the regulators acted in good or bad faith, or for good or bad reasons. What matters is the impact of their acts, not the purity *vel non* of their motives. Indeed, if their motives are benign—or done for the best of reasons—that only fortifies the need for compensation required by the Just Compensation Clause of the Fifth Amendment.²⁸

“[T]he Constitution recognizes higher values than speed and efficiency. Indeed, one might fairly say of the Bill of Rights in general, and of the Due Process Clause in particular, that they were designed to protect the fragile values of a vulnerable citizenry from the overbearing concern for efficiency and efficacy that may characterize praiseworthy government officials no less, and perhaps more than mediocre ones.”²⁹

Thus, it is not enough to conclude that it is a good thing to radically reorganize our system of property ownership. As a matter of Constitutional policy, severe invasions of protected property rights cannot occur unless compensation is paid. Such radical change cannot be accomplished with the stroke of a word processor. If Los Angeles believes that the idea

²⁸ See *Hughes v. Washington*, 389 U.S. 290, 298 (1967): “[T]he Constitution measures a taking of property not by what a State says, or by what it intends, but by what it *does*.” (Stewart, J., concurring) (emphasis original).

²⁹ *Stanley v. Illinois*, 405 U.S. 645, 656 (1972) (footnote omitted). See also *Shelton v. Tucker*, 364 U.S. 479, 488 (1960).

is otherwise worthwhile then, as this Court put it in *Nollan*, “it must pay for it.” 483 U.S. at 842.

CONCLUSION

Certiorari should be granted.

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