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Cornerstone of Liberty: Property Rights in 21st Century America

Timothy Sandefur

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The right to own and use private property is among the most essential human rights and the essential basis for economic growth. That's why America's Founders guaranteed it in the Constitution. Yet in today's America, government tramples on this right in countless ways. Regulations forbid people to use their property as they wish, bureaucrats extort enormous fees from developers in exchange for building permits, and police departments snatch personal belongings on the suspicion that they were involved in crimes. In the case of Kelo v. New London, the Supreme Court even declared that government may seize homes and businesses and transfer the land to private developers to build stores, restaurants, or hotels. That decision was met with a firestorm of criticism across the nation. In this, the first book on property rights to be published since the Kelo decision, Timothy Sandefur surveys the landscape of private property in America's third century. Beginning with the role property rights play in human nature, Sandefur describes how America's Founders wrote a Constitution that would protect this right and details the gradual erosion that began with the Progressive Era's abandonment of the principles of individual liberty. Sandefur tells the gripping stories of people who have found their property threatened: Frank Bugryn and his Connecticut Christmas-tree farm; Susette Kelo and the little dream house she renovated; Wilhelmina Dery and the house she was born in, 80 years before bureaucrats decided to take it; Dorothy English and the land she wanted to leave to her children; and Kenneth Healing and his 17-year legal battle for permission to build a home. Thanks to the abuse of eminent domain and asset forfeiture laws, federal, state, and local governments have now come to see property rights as mere permissions, which can be revoked at any time in the name of the greater good. In this book, Sandefur explains what citizens can do to restore the Constitution's protections for this cornerstone of liberty.

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