
American Law 101: An Easy Primer on the U.S. Legal System is a comprehensive, well written, instructive introduction to the U.S. legal system. The work is written in plain English with little legalese, jargon, or American slang. As such, Kim achieves his stated goal to appeal to a “broad spectrum” of readers, “including American and foreign lawyers, business professionals, law and business students, and administrators, as well as the simply curious.” Using a software/hardware analogy, Kim starts with the “software” in an introductory chapter on how to think and write like an American lawyer. In this chapter, Kim details the IRAC (Issue, Rule, Apply, and Conclusion) legal research and writing methodology and the “plain English” writing style with easy to understand examples. The “hardware” analogy is covered in Chapter 2 with an explanation of both common law principles and the state and federal court systems, along with a basic introduction on the three branches of government. Kim concludes this section with how to read, understand, and brief a case.

The next chapters introduce core principles in contracts, torts, constitutional law, and criminal law and procedure in U.S. law. In each chapter, Kim uses easy to understand examples to highlight key points. The contract law chapters include helpful short problem sets that include the answers and brief explanations. Each chapter concludes with a summary section that reinforces the important concepts.

Chapters 8 and 9 address the American law perspective on international business law and international public law and when such law is binding. The international business law chapter also provides lengthy definitions of various business entities and an introduction to concepts such as securities regulation, foreign investment options and guarantees, geographic free (trade) zones, and banking and finance in the international business arena. Chapter 9 provides a modern view of international public law, tracing its history from 1945 to the present. Kim includes brief descriptions of the United Nations and the various international tribunals, such as the International Court of Justice and International Criminal Court. Most interesting is the discussion on the growing global impact of international public law and the encouragement to all lawyers to develop and leverage their skills in this area. Concisely described case law is interspersed to highlight key points in both chapters. Similarly, these chapters also end with a reinforcing summary section.
Kim concludes the work with a chapter on alternative dispute resolution and civil procedure. After covering the main alternative dispute resolution strategies of arbitration, mediation, and negotiation, Kim turns to a discussion of civil procedure basics such as jurisdiction, service of process, and discovery. The pre-trial discussion is followed by a wrap-up of the courtroom part of the litigation cycle, from opening statements to verdict and possible appeal.

Continuing in the accessible and readable plain English narrative style used in the rest of the work, the book includes three useful appendices: "Appendix A: How the American Legal Process Works," "Appendix B: U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights," and "Appendix C: Glossary of Legal Terms in Plain English." Appendix A walks the reader through the court system and describes how a case moves through the courts. Kim provides succinct but comprehensive descriptions of the role and structure of the courts, role of judges and juries, including both grand juries and trial juries, and the guarantees of judicial independence. The "Diagram of How a Case Moves Through the Courts" moves the reader seamlessly through jurisdiction and venue, pleadings, motions, discovery, opening statements, evidence, closing arguments, verdicts and judgments, sentencing, and appeals. Along the way, Kim introduces and explains relevant concepts such as burden of proof and jury nullification without interrupting the flow of the process. Covering everything from bankruptcy to court reporter to litigation processes to standard Latin terms, the 18-page "Appendix C: "Glossary of Legal Terms in Plain English" is a valuable instructive read in itself.

American Law 101: An Easy Primer on the U.S. Legal System is a comprehensive, well written guide to the U.S. legal system. Kim's ability to summarize and use complex case law as illustrative examples without dumbing down the content or appearing condescending will be much appreciated by all readers. As such, the work is an excellent option for college, university, and law school libraries, as well as most public libraries. In addition, it has significant potential for use in courses. I came upon the work in my search for new instructional materials for teaching legal research. The book provides a valuable information bridge for those graduate library science students exploring law librarianship who may be frustrated by a lack of legal grounding when taking a legal research class. It would also perform well in undergraduate pre-law and business courses. Similarly, the book is a very good primer for international LL.M. students, especially because the work avoids the use of American slang and cultural references. LL.M. students with little or no experience with U.S. law would be well served by reading this short work prior to starting a program at a U.S. law school.

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