

AMERICAN LEGAL SYSTEMS

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A Resource and Reference Guide

FOURTH EDITION

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PREFACE

In 1997, I published the first edition of *American Legal Systems*. It was the book I would have wanted to read before beginning law school, generously informed by my work as an instructor in NYU's Lawyering Program and my years of litigation practice. I am delighted that the book has had the legs to see its fourth edition.

As a young law instructor, I had created a series of tables and charts to help explain to my students the fundamental concepts of the legal system, terms, institutions, and sources of law. These tables and charts became the foundation for *American Legal Systems*. The book's goal was to be deeply informative in a comprehensive yet accessible way—elements that remain the defining characteristics of this book.

American Legal Systems presents a guide to the interrelationships among U.S. legal institutions and legal authorities. It discusses the defining role of precedent and the doctrine of *stare decisis* in our common law system and demonstrates how to determine and apply the relative priorities of sources of law, all in the context of the legislative process, agency action, and principles of constitutional and legislative supremacy. *American Legal Systems* ties many of these concepts to the realities of law practice by demonstrating how to locate and use specific sources of law, understand legal terms, and prepare commonplace legal documents.

American Legal Systems can be used for reference purposes in conjunction with doctrinal course work or it can be used in connection with an experiential task, such as legal research and writing. As such, it can serve as a complement to other course work or on its own as an introduction to the U.S. legal system. I hope that it also will prove to be a valuable resource

for practitioners, members of the general public, and students of diverse disciplines, including law, government, political science, pre-law studies, and paralegal studies.

Comments and suggestions, as always, are encouraged. I am deeply grateful to the many users who have provided helpful feedback over the years.

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