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Third Edition

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WORK LAW: CASES AND MATERIALS

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Preface

The law of work has evolved as a patchwork of legal interventions in the labor market, sometimes by statute, and sometimes through the common law of judicial decisions. Most law school curricula divide the law of work into three topical areas—Labor Law, Employment Law, and Employment Discrimination—and offer separate courses in each area. Labor law in the United States is understood to encompass the study of the National Labor Relations Act, the law governing union organizing and collective bargaining. It is the law of collective rights at work. Employment law refers to the statutes and common law governing individual rights at work. It ranges from minimum standards legislation to judicially created doctrines based in tort and contract law. Employment discrimination law deals with the statutes and interpretative case law advancing the antidiscrimination norm in the workplace. These statutes address the problem of status discrimination at work (e.g., discrimination on the basis of race, sex, national origin, ethnicity, religion, disability, or sexual orientation).

Regulation of the employment relation defies such categorical thinking, however. The law has struggled with the tension between the desire to leave things to private contract and market forces, and the impulse to intervene to redress inequitable results occasioned by the imbalance of power between employees and employers. In some areas freedom of contract principles have prevailed. In other areas the law has considered it essential to extend protection to employees to act collectively in dealing with the employer, as in the labor laws. An increasingly prevalent response is government legislation to afford minimum standards of protection to all workers, and particularly to those historically disadvantaged in the American labor market, such as people of color, women, and persons with disabilities. These legal regimes overlap and relate to one another in complex ways that are obscured by categorical study.

We believe that acquaintance with historical context and the multiple legal structures governing the workplace is vital for today's lawyers. Historical legal context affords important insights about how the law may evolve in the future. Understanding the story behind the decline of labor unions and labor law provides critical assistance in evaluating new employee representation systems and conceptualizing rights. Minimum standards legislation was established partly because gaps in union representation left many workers unprotected at the workplace. Antidiscrimination law responded to union failures to represent the rights of subordinated groups. Is there any logical stopping point to this progression? As each new right is conceptualized and political momentum builds for legal protection, will laws continue to proliferate? Similarly, as groups of employees previously excluded from protection against discrimination press for legal agency, will new employment discrimination statutes be enacted? Where is the sunset? Yet at the same time, the politics of the global economy militate in favor of more flexibility for U.S. employers attempting to compete in an international market. Will employers block such legislation? Will legislative impasse ensue, as it ultimately did in the area of labor law? What, then, might evolve to replace individual statutory rights?

A comprehensive study of the law of work also provides an opportunity to assess critically what form enforcement of rights should take. Should conflicts between employers and employees be channeled into private resolution systems such as collective bargaining or contractual arbitration, or is the public interest sufficient to justify

Preface

committing administrative, judicial and legislative resources to it? What is the significance of casting employee rights as collective—and therefore entrusting their enforcement to an employee representative such as a union—versus conceptualizing them as individual? Must such a collective representative be independent of the employer, or do employer-initiated employee committees further worker voice just as effectively? Doesn't history also warn of the risks of subordinating individual interests to those of the collective, particularly in the context of a diverse workforce with minority groups characterized by race, ethnicity or gender?

Accordingly, we have denominated this text “Work Law” and endeavor here to present basic materials on each system of labor market regulation. We identify core themes of conflict and concern in the workplace, canvass the governing law, and offer a vantage point for assessment. Several themes furnish the organizing structure for the book. We ask how law should mediate the perennial conflict between employer and employee rights; what difference it makes whether employee rights are conceptualized individually or collectively; what significance the increasing racial, ethnic, and gender diversity of the workforce should have for legal policy; whether dispute resolution systems should be privatized (via collective bargaining or individual contract) or remain in the public fora (courts and legislatures); and whether law is the most effective way to address interests of employers and employees (as contrasted, for example, with human resource practices, employer initiatives, or employee self-help measures).

The book will be most useful in Employment Law courses that address the significance of conceptualizing rights at work individually as opposed to collectively. Its strength, we believe, is its refusal to categorize the law of the workplace in doctrinal boxes that may be out-of-date by the time the book reaches maturity. We advert to Labor Law principles at a number of points throughout the book, but at a policy level rather than a doctrinal level, as a way of introducing and evaluating an alternative model of employee representation; we assume no knowledge of Labor Law on the part of teacher or student and make no effort here to provide a satisfactory substitute for a Labor Law text. We offer some detail in the law of Employment Discrimination but do so primarily with an eye toward surveying the field and assessing antidiscrimination regulation as a response to an increasingly diverse workforce, rather than providing an in-depth study of Employment Discrimination principles.

This text surveys the existing legal landscape, but it does not stop there. Work Law is an exciting and intellectually stimulating practice area because it is of necessity in a constant state of flux, responding to labor market innovations. Flexibility in thinking is vital to this area of practice. We urge students to reject traditional rigid categories and to ask: what new paths might emerge from a holistic conception of Work Law, and the demolition of categorical divides between Labor Law, Employment Law, and Employment Discrimination Law? Toward that end, we offer the following specific questions as a guide for study. We suggest that professors and students consider them in each area covered throughout the course:

1. Which worker desires predominate in this area? Which employer desires predominate? What public interests, if any, are at stake? In short, what is the justification for law to enter the market in this area?
2. What form has the law assumed in this area: e.g., statutory, common law, agency regulation/decisionmaking?

Preface

- A. What is the substance of the law?
 - B. Who is covered by it (how are covered employees defined, which employers are covered)?
 - C. What are the catalysts for change and is the law in this area receptive to change?
3. What remedies does the law offer for the harms/problems it conceptualizes? Are they adequate?
- A. How is the law enforced and what are the enforcement mechanisms? Who enforces it (e.g., watchdog system or individuals, agency or union, etc.)? Is the law enforced by federal or state authorities?
 - B. What is the interaction between systems of law addressing a given area (e.g. collective bargaining and individual statutory rights; federal vs. state regulation)?
 - C. Is adjudication private or public? What is the significance of this choice?
4. What extralegal alternatives are available? What human resource strategies have employers developed to manage their workforces? What self-help strategies do employees utilize, both individually and collectively? Are they adequate?

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We have included relevant statutory provisions at appropriate points in the text for convenience; accordingly, use of a Statutory Supplement is not necessary. We chose to edit the cases according to the following conventions: parallel citations and other distracting material have been removed to make the cases as readable as possible. Extraneous detail was omitted to conserve space and focus attention on the issues in the principal cases we included, using ellipses to indicate all deletions of text other than footnotes or citations to authority. Original footnote numbers for included footnotes are shown in brackets at the outset of the footnote. We conformed to bluebook citation format wherever possible to ensure consistency, but ignored the rules when they were silly or unhelpful.

We hope you enjoy this journey through the law of work!

Marion Crain
Pauline Kim
Mike Selmi

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part One	INTRODUCTION: REGULATING WORK	1
Chapter 1	ORIGINS	3
A.	THE MEANING OF WORK	4
	Kenneth L. Karst, <i>The Coming Crisis of Work in Constitutional Perspective</i>	4
	Notes	6
B.	THE RISE AND FALL OF FREEDOM OF CONTRACT	9
	<i>Lochner v. New York</i>	11
	Notes	17
C.	THE NEW DEAL LABOR LEGISLATION	21
1.	The Labor Laws	22
	<i>NLRB v. Jones & Laughlin Steel Corp.</i>	23
	Notes	25
2.	The Philosophy of Unionism, Industrial Pluralism, and the Practice of Collective Bargaining	28
	RICHARD B. FREEMAN & JAMES L. MEDOFF, WHAT DO UNIONS DO?	28
	Notes	29
3.	The Decline of Unionism, Collective Bargaining, and Labor Law	33
D.	THE INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS MODEL	38
	Katherine Van Wezel Stone, <i>The Legacy of Industrial Pluralism: The Tension Between Individual Employment Rights and the New Deal Collective Bargaining System</i>	39
	Cynthia Estlund, <i>Rebuilding the Law of the Workplace in an Era of Self-Regulation</i>	40
	Notes	40
Chapter 2	THE CONTEMPORARY ERA—SHIFTS IN THE DEMOGRAPHICS AND STRUCTURE OF WORK	43
A.	THE WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE	44
	Mitra Toossi, <i>Labor Force Projections to 2022: The Labor Force Participation Rate Continues to Fall</i>	44
	Notes	44
B.	CHANGES IN THE STRUCTURE OF WORK	49
	Matthew Bidwell, Forrest Briscoe, Isabel Fernandez-Mateo & Adina Sterling, <i>The Employment Relationship and Inequality: How and Why Changes in Employment Practice are Reshaping Rewards in</i>	

Table of Contents

	<i>Organizations</i>	50
	Marion Crain, <i>Managing Identity: Buying into the Brand at Work</i>	56
	Notes	57
C.	DEFINING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP	64
1.	What Is the Nature of Employment?	65
	<i>O'Connor v. Davis</i>	65
	Notes	69
2.	Who Is an “Employee”?	74
	<i>FedEx Home Delivery v. National Labor Relations Board</i>	74
	<i>Alexander v. FedEx Ground Package System</i>	80
	Notes	89
3.	Who Is the Employer?	93
<hr/>		
Part Two	BALANCING EMPLOYER AND EMPLOYEE INTERESTS: INDIVIDUAL VERSUS COLLECTIVE RESPONSES	97
<hr/>		
Chapter 3	CONTRACTING FOR INDIVIDUAL JOB SECURITY	101
<hr/>		
A.	THE PRESUMPTION OF EMPLOYMENT AT-WILL	102
1.	Historical Background	102
	Jay M. Feinman, <i>The Development of the Employment at Will Rule</i>	102
	Notes	104
	<i>Savage v. Spur Distributing Co.</i>	109
	Notes	111
2.	Alternative Models	113
a.	The Union Sector	113
	Roger I. Abrams & Dennis R. Nolan, <i>Toward a Theory of “Just Cause” in Employee Discipline Cases</i>	113
	Cynthia L. Estlund, <i>Free Speech and Due Process in the Workplace</i>	114
	Notes	115
b.	Public Employment	116
	<i>Board of Regents of State Colleges v. Roth</i>	116
	Notes	119
3.	The Contemporary Era	122
B.	OVERCOMING THE PRESUMPTION BY AGREEMENT	124
1.	Written Contracts	124
	Notes	126

Table of Contents

2.	Oral Contracts	127
	<i>Toussaint v. Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mich.</i>	127
	<i>Rowe v. Montgomery Ward & Co.</i>	128
	Notes	129
3.	Implied Agreements	133
	<i>Woolley v. Hoffmann-LA Roche, Inc.</i>	133
	Notes	139
	<i>Asmus v. Pacific Bell</i>	144
	Notes	149
C.	WHAT IS “CAUSE”?	151
	<i>Cotran v. Rollins Hudig Hall International, Inc.</i>	154
	Notes	159
D.	OTHER CONTRACT-BASED LIMITS ON EMPLOYMENT-AT-WILL	161
1.	Promissory Estoppel	161
	<i>Goff-Hamel v. Obstetricians & Gynecologists, P.C.</i>	161
	Notes	164
2.	The Implied Covenant of Good Faith and Fair Dealing	168
	<i>Fortune v. National Cash Register Co.</i>	169
	<i>Murphy v. American Home Products Corp.</i>	172
	Notes	174
Chapter 4	PUBLIC POLICY PROTECTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL JOB SECURITY	179
A.	THE PUBLIC POLICY EXCEPTION	180
	<i>Sheets v. Teddy’s Frosted Foods, Inc.</i>	180
	Notes	185
	<i>Petermann v. International Brotherhood of Teamsters</i>	187
	<i>Frampton v. Central Indiana Gas Co.</i>	188
	<i>Nees v. Hock</i>	189
B.	WHAT CONSTITUTES PUBLIC POLICY?	190
	<i>Hayes v. Eateries, Inc.</i>	191
	Notes	195
	<i>Gantt v. Sentry Insurance</i>	199
	Notes	203
	<i>Kirk v. Mercy Hospital Tri-County</i>	207
	Notes	210
C.	WHAT IS A “DISCHARGE”?	212
	<i>Strozinsky v. School District of Brown Deer</i>	212
	Notes	214

Table of Contents

D.	THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STATUTORY AND COMMON LAW REMEDIES	216
E.	THE SPECIAL CASE OF ATTORNEYS	219
	<i>Crews v. Buckman Laboratories International, Inc.</i>	221
	Notes	228
F.	REVISITING THE PRESUMPTION OF AT-WILL EMPLOYMENT . .	230
	Richard A. Epstein, <i>In Defense of the Contract at Will</i>	230
	Pauline T. Kim, <i>Bargaining with Imperfect Information: A Study of Worker Perceptions of Legal Protection in an At-Will World</i>	232
	Notes	234

Chapter 5 COLLECTIVE JOB SECURITY 241

A.	COMMON LAW CONTRACT, PROPERTY, AND TORT CLAIMS . .	241
	Kent Greenfield, <i>The Unjustified Absence of Federal Fraud Protection in the Labor Market</i>	241
	<i>Local 1330, United Steel Workers of America v. United States Steel Corp.</i>	243
	Notes	250
B.	WORKER ADJUSTMENT AND RETRAINING NOTIFICATION ACT	261
1.	The Statute	261
2.	Enforcement and Compliance Issues	262
3.	Statutory Interpretation Issues	264
	<i>Childress v. Darby Lumber, Inc.</i>	266
	Notes	270
	<i>Ellis v. DHL Express, Inc.</i>	272
	Notes	278
C.	COLLECTIVE JOB SECURITY UNDER THE NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS ACT	281
1.	Union Organizing Drives	282
	<i>Textile Workers Union v. Darlington Manufacturing Co.</i>	282
	Note	285
2.	Threats to Close in Response to Union Organizing Activity	286
	<i>NLRB v. Gissel Packing Co.</i>	286
	Note	287
3.	Plant Closings Where the Workforce Is Already Unionized	288
	Notes	291
D.	THE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE SYSTEM	294
	Gillian Lester, <i>The Unemployment Insurance and Wealth Redistribution</i>	295

Table of Contents

Notes	296
Chapter 6	EMPLOYEE MOBILITY 303
A.	COVENANTS NOT TO COMPETE 304
	<i>Hopper v. All Pet Animal Clinic, Inc.</i> 304
	Notes 312
B.	TRADE SECRETS 320
1.	Protecting Trade Secrets 320
	<i>Saturn Systems v. Militare</i> 320
	Notes 324
2.	Inevitable Disclosure 328
	<i>Pepsico, Inc. v. Redmond</i> 328
	Notes 333
C.	THE DUTY OF LOYALTY 336
	<i>Augat, Inc. v. Aegis, Inc.</i> 336
	Notes 339
	Problem and Thoughts for the Future 344
D.	EMPLOYEE INVENTIONS 344
	<i>Wommack v. Durham Pecan Co.</i> 345
	Notes 350
Chapter 7	DIGNITARY INTERESTS 353
A.	AVOIDING EMOTIONAL HARM 354
	<i>Wornick Co. v. Casas</i> 355
	Notes 357
	<i>Bodewig v. K-Mart, Inc.</i> 358
	<i>Hollomon v. Keadle</i> 362
	Notes 364
B.	PRIVACY 368
1.	Constitutional Protection for Public Employees 369
	<i>O'Connor v. Ortega</i> 369
	Notes 374
2.	Common Law Protections for Private Employees 377
a.	Intrusion on Seclusion 378
	<i>K-Mart Corp. Store No. 7441 v. Trotti</i> 378
	Notes 381
b.	Publicity to Private Life 387
	<i>Borquez v. Robert C. Ozer, P.C.</i> 387
	Notes 390
3.	Collective Approaches to Protecting Employee Privacy. 393
	<i>Colgate-Palmolive Co. and Local 15, International</i>

Table of Contents

	<i>Chemical Workers Union</i>	394
	Notes	396
4.	Privacy of Electronic Communications	398
a.	Constitutional Law	399
	<i>City of Ontario v. Quon</i>	399
	Notes	403
b.	Reasonable Expectations of Privacy	404
	<i>Stengart v. Loving Care Agency, Inc.</i>	405
	Notes	409
c.	Statutory Protections.	412
	<i>Pure Power Boot Camp v. Warrior Fitness Boot Camp</i>	413
	Notes	416
d.	Social Media	418
C.	OFF-DUTY CONDUCT AND ASSOCIATIONS	420
	<i>McCavitt v. Swiss Reinsurance America Corp.</i>	422
	Notes	425
D.	TESTING, SCREENING, AND MONITORING	430
1.	Genetic Testing	430
2.	Drug Testing	433
	Notes	435
3.	Monitoring and Data Analytics	437
E.	REPUTATION	439
	<i>Zinda v. Louisiana Pacific Corp.</i>	439
	Notes	444
	<i>Chambers v. American Trans Air, Inc.</i>	447
	Notes	450
Chapter 8	EMPLOYEE VOICE	457
A.	EMPLOYEE INTERESTS IN VOICE	457
	Cynthia L. Estlund, <i>Working Together: The Workplace, Civil Society, and the Law</i>	458
	Note	460
B.	CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTIONS	460
	<i>Connick v. Myers</i>	462
	Notes	467
	<i>Garcetti v. Ceballos</i>	472
	Notes	478
C.	THE COMMON LAW	482
	<i>Novosel v. Nationwide Insurance Co.</i>	482
	<i>Edmondson v. Shearer Lumber Products</i>	486
	Notes	490

Table of Contents

D.	STATUTORY PROTECTIONS FOR EMPLOYEE SPEECH	493
1.	State Statutory Protection for Speech and Political Activity	494
2.	Statutory Protections Against Retaliation	496
3.	Whistleblower Protections of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act	498
a.	Who Is Protected?	501
	<i>Lawson v. FMR LLC</i>	501
	Notes	508
b.	What Is Protected Activity?	509
	<i>Wiest v. Lynch</i>	509
	Notes	517
4.	Whistleblower Provisions of the Dodd-Frank Act	520
a.	The Bounty Provisions	521
b.	The Interaction Between Dodd-Frank and Sarbanes-Oxley	523
E.	COLLECTIVE VOICE PROTECTIONS—THE NLRA	525
1.	The Voice-Protection Function of NLRA § 7	526
	Clyde W. Summers, <i>The Privatization of Personal Freedoms and</i> <i>Enrichment of Democracy: Some Lessons from Labor Law</i>	526
2.	Balancing Employer Rights to Manage and Control the Business Against Employees' § 7 Rights	527
	Cynthia L. Estlund, <i>Labor, Property, and Sovereignty After</i> <i>Lechmere</i>	529
	Notes	531
3.	NLRA § 7 Rights in the NonUnion Workplace	534
	<i>NLRB v. Washington Aluminum Co.</i>	535
	<i>Timekeeping Systems, Inc.</i>	538
	Notes	543
4.	NLRA § 7 Rights on Social Media	547
	<i>Hispanics United of Buffalo, Inc.</i>	547
	Notes	550
5.	Employer Policies Restricting Collective Employee Speech	551
	<i>Karl Knauz Motors, Inc.</i>	551
	Notes	556

Part Three	FREEDOM FROM DISCRIMINATION VERSUS FLEXIBILITY	561
-------------------	---	------------

Chapter 9	EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION LAW	563
------------------	--	------------

A.	INTRODUCTION	563
B.	CLAIMS OF INTENTIONAL DISCRIMINATION: THE DISPARATE TREATMENT MODEL	567
1.	Individual Claims of Intentional Discrimination	567

Table of Contents

	<i>McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green</i>	569
	Notes	571
	<i>St. Mary's Honor Center v. Hicks</i>	572
	Notes	580
2.	The Mixed-Motives Proof Structure	585
	<i>Desert Palace, Inc. v. Costa</i>	585
	Notes	589
3.	The "Cat's Paw" Theory	592
	<i>Staub v. Proctor Hospital</i>	592
	Notes	597
4.	Intentional Discrimination Class Claims: Pattern or Practice and the BFOQ	603
a.	Pattern or Practice Claims	604
	<i>Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. v. Dukes</i>	606
	Notes	615
b.	The BFOQ Defense	617
C.	DISPARATE IMPACT CLAIMS AND THEIR RELATION TO OTHER THEORIES OF DISCRIMINATION	619
	<i>Griggs v. Duke Power Co.</i>	619
	Notes	623
D.	SEXUAL HARASSMENT LAW	630
1.	The Hostile Working Environment Theory	631
	<i>Billings v. Town of Grafton</i>	631
	Notes	637
2.	Employer Liability	643
	<i>Burlington Industries, Inc. v. Ellerth</i>	643
	Notes	652
E.	DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION: THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT	658
1.	Defining Disability	659
	<i>Weaving v. City of Hillsboro</i>	661
	Notes	671
2.	The Duty to Accommodate	673
	<i>US Airways, Inc. v. Barnett</i>	673
	Notes	681
F.	CONTEMPORARY WORKPLACE ISSUES	686
1.	Age Discrimination	686
2.	Diversity in the Workplace	692

Table of Contents

Chapter 10	CHALLENGES TO EQUALITY IN A DIVERSIFYING WORKPLACE	699
A.	THE IMMIGRANT WORKFORCE	699
1.	The Impact of Immigrant Labor	700
	Frances Lee Ansley, <i>Rethinking Law in Globalizing Labor Markets</i>	700
	Notes	702
2.	Undocumented Workers	703
	<i>Hoffman Plastic Compounds, Inc. v. NLRB</i>	703
	Notes	709
	<i>Williams v. Mohawk Industries, Inc.</i>	714
	Notes	722
3.	Language and Accent Discrimination	727
	<i>Maldonado v. City of Altus</i>	728
	Notes	734
B.	BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY	737
1.	The FMLA and Gender Equality	738
	<i>Nevada Dept. of Human Resources v. Hibbs</i>	739
2.	The FMLA's Provisions and Its Effects	741
3.	The Policy Debate	744
	Joan Williams, <i>Our Economy of Mothers and Others: Women and Economics Revisited</i>	745
	Michael Selmi & Naomi Cahn, <i>Caretaking and the Contradictions of Contemporary Policy</i>	748
	Notes	752
4.	Stereotypes About Working Mothers	755
	<i>Back v. Hastings on Hudson Union Free Sch. Dist.</i>	755
	Notes	759
Part Four	GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD: LEGISLATING A SAFETY NET	761
Chapter 11	THE REGULATION OF WAGES AND HOURS	765
A.	HISTORICAL ORIGINS	766
	Scott D. Miller, <i>Revitalizing the FLSA</i>	766
	<i>West Coast Hotel Co. v. Parrish</i>	769
	Notes	773
B.	OVERVIEW OF THE FLSA	776
1.	Minimum Wage Provisions	776
2.	Overtime Pay Provisions	779
3.	The Child Labor Provisions	780

Table of Contents

4.	Enforcement of the FLSA	782
a.	Basics	782
b.	Retaliation Complaints	784
c.	Defenses and Limitations on Liability	786
d.	State Wage and Hour Laws	787
e.	Rule 23 Class Actions and FLSA Collective Actions	788
f.	Public Sector Employment	791
C.	THE FLSA’S PURPOSES: WEALTH REDISTRIBUTION AND WORK-SPREADING	792
1.	The Minimum Wage Provisions	792
	Daniel Shaviro, <i>The Minimum Wage, the Earned Income</i>	793
	Richard B. Freeman, <i>What Will a 10% . . . 50% . . . 100% Increase in the Minimum Wage Do?</i>	796
	Brishen Rogers, <i>Justice at Work: Minimum Wage Laws and Social Equality</i>	797
	Notes	799
2.	The Overtime Pay Provisions and the “White-Collar” Exemptions	803
	Deborah C. Malamud, <i>Engineering the Middle Classes: Class Line-Drawing in New Deal Hours Legislation</i>	803
	Notes	805
D.	WHO IS COVERED?	810
1.	Individual or Enterprise Coverage of Employees	810
2.	The Existence of an Employment Relationship	810
3.	Exemptions from Coverage	812
4.	Applications	815
a.	Independent Contractors	815
	<i>Heath v. Perdue Farms, Inc.</i>	815
	Notes	821
b.	Trainees and Interns	823
	<i>Glatt v. Fox Searchlight Pictures Inc.</i>	825
	<i>Wang v. Hearst Corp.</i>	831
	Notes	835
E.	WHAT IS COVERED WORK?	839
1.	“Off-the-clock” Work	839
	<i>Davis v. Food Lion</i>	839
	Notes	843
2.	“On-call” time	847
	<i>Dinges v. Sacred Heart St. Mary’s Hospitals, Inc.</i>	848
	Notes	851
3.	Rest and Meal Periods	854
4.	Training Time	855
5.	Travel Time	856

Table of Contents

6.	“Preliminary and Postliminary” Activities	858
	<i>IBP Inc. v. Alvarez; Tum v. Barber Foods, Inc.</i>	858
	Notes	860
F.	THE OVERTIME EXEMPTIONS	864
1.	Traditional White-Collar Employees: Executives, Administrative Employees, Professionals, and Outside Salespersons	865
a.	Executive Employees	867
	<i>Morgan v. Family Dollar Stores</i>	867
	<i>Grace v. Family Dollar Stores</i>	868
	<i>The Starbucks Cases</i>	869
b.	Administrative Employees	870
	<i>Roe-Midgett v. CC Servs., Inc.</i>	871
	<i>Desmond v. PNGI Charles Town Gaming LLC</i>	872
	<i>Kennedy v. Commonwealth Edison</i>	876
c.	Professional Employees	876
	<i>Dalheim v. KDFW-TV</i>	882
	<i>Freeman v. NBC, Inc.</i>	882
	<i>Reich v. Gateway Press, Inc.</i>	882
	<i>Sherwood v. Washington Post</i>	882
d.	Outside Sales Employees	884
	<i>Christopher v. SmithKline Beecham Corp. d/b/a</i> <i>Glaxo-SmithKline</i>	885
2.	Computer professionals	888
	<i>Martin v. Indiana Michigan Power Co.</i>	889
3.	The Combination and Highly Compensated Exemptions	890
Chapter 12	HEALTH AND PENSION PLANS—ERISA REGULATION	893
A.	HEALTH BENEFITS	894
B.	PENSION BENEFITS	897
1.	Defined Benefit Plans	900
a.	Vesting of Benefits	900
2.	Defined Contribution Plans, 401(k)s, and Their Investments	901
	<i>LaRue v. DeWolff, Boberg & Associates, Inc.</i>	901
	Notes	904
	<i>Fifth Third Bancorp v. Dudenhoeffer</i>	905
	Notes	913
Chapter 13	HEALTH AND SAFETY	919
A.	WORKERS’ COMPENSATION	920
1.	The Origins of Workers’ Compensation Laws	920

Table of Contents

a.	The Common Law Approach	921
	<i>Farwell v. The Boston and Worcester Rail Road Corp.</i>	921
	Notes	924
b.	The Compensation Acts	928
	Arthur Larson, <i>The Nature and Origins of Workmen's</i> <i>Compensation</i>	928
	<i>New York Central Railroad Co. v. White</i>	929
	Notes	932
2.	Basic Benefits and Coverage	933
a.	Benefits and Procedures	934
b.	Who Is an Employee?	936
c.	"Arising out of and in the Course of Employment"	938
	<i>Prows v. Industrial Commission of Utah</i>	939
	Notes	944
	<i>Houser v. BI-LO, Inc.</i>	945
	Notes	948
3.	Exclusivity of Remedies	949
a.	The Fundamental Bargain	949
	<i>Eckis v. Sea World Corp.</i>	949
	Notes	953
b.	Exception for Intentional Acts	954
	<i>Whitaker v. Town of Scotland Neck</i>	955
	Notes	958
c.	Non-Physical Torts	962
	<i>Cole v. Fair Oaks Fire Protection District</i>	963
	Notes	966
B.	OSHA	969
1.	The Structure of the Statute	970
a.	Promulgating Standards	970
i.	Ergonomics Standards	970
ii.	Other Enforcement Means	972
b.	Inspection and Enforcement Scheme	972
2.	The General Duty Clause	973
	<i>Seaworld v. Perez</i>	973
	Notes	982
3.	Employee Rights	985
	<i>Whirlpool Corp. v. Marshall, Secretary of Labor</i>	985
	Notes	991
C.	REFLECTIONS ON WORKER SAFETY	992

Table of Contents

Part Five	SYSTEMS OF JUSTICE: PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE, COLLECTIVE VERSUS INDIVIDUAL	995
Chapter 14	ARBITRATION OF WORKPLACE DISPUTES	997
A.	ARBITRATION AS A WORKPLACE DISPUTE RESOLUTION MECHANISM: ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION	997
	RICHARD A. BALES, COMPULSORY ARBITRATION: THE GRAND EXPERIMENT IN EMPLOYMENT	997
	Notes	1000
B.	LABOR ARBITRATION AND THE PROBLEM OF OVERLAPPING REMEDIES	1003
	<i>Alexander v. Gardner-Denver Co.</i>	1003
	Note	1006
C.	ARBITRATION IN THE NONUNION WORKPLACE	1006
	<i>Gilmer v. Interstate/Johnson Lane Corp.</i>	1006
	Notes	1013
D.	THE USES AND LIMITS OF PREDISPUTE EMPLOYMENT ARBITRATION AGREEMENTS	1015
1.	Effective Vindication of Statutory Rights	1016
	<i>Cole v. Burns International Security Servs.</i>	1016
	Note	1018
2.	State Contract Law Principles	1019
	<i>Hooters of America, Inc. v. Phillips</i>	1019
	<i>Alexander v. Anthony Int'l, L.P.</i>	1021
	Notes	1022
3.	Provisions Barring Class Claims	1024
a.	Statutes That Provide for Group Litigation as an Enforcement Mechanism	1025
	<i>Sutherland v. Ernst & Young LLP</i>	1025
	Notes	1031
	<i>Chavarria v. Ralphs Grocery Co.</i>	1033
	Notes	1036
b.	NLRA Rights	1036
	<i>D.R. Horton, Inc.</i>	1037
	Notes	1039
4.	The Impact of Arbitration Agreements on the Public Interest	1041
	<i>Equal Employment Opportunity Commission v. Waffle House, Inc.</i>	1041
	Notes	1042
E.	RECONSIDERING EMPLOYER-PROMULGATED ARBITRATION SYSTEMS	1043

Table of Contents

	Katherine Van Wezel Stone, <i>Mandatory Arbitration of Individual Employment Rights: The Yellow Dog Contract of the 1990s</i>	1044
	Samuel Estreicher, <i>Saturns for Rickshaws: The Stakes in the Debate over Predispute Employment Arbitration Agreements</i>	1046
	Alexander J.S. Colvin & Kelly Pike, <i>Saturns and Rickshaws Revisited: What Kind of Arbitration System Has Developed?</i>	1046
	Notes	1049
Chapter 15	SELF-REGULATION	1053
A.	EMPLOYER SELF-REGULATION	1053
	Cynthia Estlund, <i>Rebuilding the Law of the Workplace in an Era of Self-Regulation</i>	1053
	Susan Sturm, <i>Second Generation Employment Discrimination: A Structural Approach</i>	1057
	Notes	1061
B.	WORKER REPRESENTATION AND SELF-GOVERNANCE	1063
1.	Identity Caucuses and Worker Centers	1064
2.	Employer-Initiated Vehicles for Collective Voice	1067
	Notes	1071
3.	Works Councils	1072
	Table of Cases	TC-1
	Index	I-1