

INTRODUCTION

Since I entered the field of law librarianship more than forty years ago (1976), there has been a marked increase in the number of self-help law books on the market. This has largely been a response to the high cost of legal representation that leaves a sizable segment of the population without the financial resources to hire private legal counsel. It also reflects the efforts of publishers, both old and new, to tap this previously underserved market. While wealthy individuals can hire the best representation money can buy, and the poor may have access to legal aid services, or public defenders, many in the vast swath of the middle class, and the poor, are left out in the cold. Many of these, by necessity, attempt to represent themselves, and find themselves knocking nervously on the doors of their closest courthouse, or publicly accessible law library. This book is intended for them, and the librarians, both public and law, who render them assistance.

It is important to remember that the public law libraries in the United States are yours to use. They are paid for with your tax dollars, or filing fees paid into the coffers of state or municipal governments. They are not the exclusive domain of lawyers. Unlike other professions, lawyers benefit from the fact that public tax dollars buy for them the tools of their trade. A carpenter or a plumber cannot say as much. But those tools should be shared by everyone who has need of them, and that includes YOU!

Unlike previous bibliographies of self-help law books, this book adopts a new approach. Each subject-specific bibliography is prefaced by commentary on the nature of the law of that field, together with links to online sources for further information, including legal research guides. The intent is to give laypersons some broader context in which to comprehend the nature of the specialty of their concern. For example, where does the law impacting their issue reside? Is it federal, state, or local in nature? Is it a statutory question, or does the answer lie in the relevant regulations? If local, does it lie in the application of municipal ordinances, or zoning ordinances? What about the caselaw? Is it primarily a caselaw-driven field, like contracts or torts, or one which combines statutory law that is fleshed out by the interpretative caselaw.

The titles selected for review, while predominantly of the self-help variety, also include the more succinct law school texts (for example, those in the West Academic Nutshell Series), and some scholarly titles, written for a law student or academic audience that are certainly accessible by the determined layperson without formal legal training. The self-help books vary in quality. My aim has been to choose those of higher quality, written by those with specialized expertise in the field in question. As a rule, the titles selected have been published within the last ten years (since 2008), but there are exceptions for books that are still relevant, have not been superseded by more recent editions or other offerings, and remain a viable option.

The reviews or annotations themselves are often lengthier than those appearing in previous annotated bibliographies of self-help law books. The intent is to provide more substantive reviews that educate the reader about the nature of the law in question, rather than merely describe the book's content.

This is intended to be a selective, rather than comprehensive, bibliography, since, as stated above, many of the self-help titles vary in quality. In any event, there are more than enough titles to satisfy all but the most demanding lay researcher. Most state-specific titles do not include annotations, since these would be largely repetitive of what appears in the review of books intended for a national audience.

Finally, pricing is included as a general guide as an aid who may wish to acquire the titles in question. While list prices may hold steady over several years, used prices on amazon.com will naturally fluctuate. For those titles that exceed the reader's budget, your local law library may be consulted.

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