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# The Journalist's Guide to American Law

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## The Journalist's Guide to American Law

How do you report on the latest sensational criminal trial or newest controversial legislation without a basic understanding of how the American legal system works?

This easy-to-use guidebook offers an overview of American law that should be found on the desk of any journalism student or professional journalist. It provides an overview of major legal principles and issues in simple terms for journalists who cover any aspect of the legal system. The Journalist's Guide to American Law can be used in two ways: first, as a sit-down read that gives an overview of American law; and second, as a reference that can be used every day under deadline pressure for a specific purpose. Every feature of the book is designed to serve both functions. The book's organization captures both the bird's-eye view of a subject; and, alternatively, permits a quick review of a given section when the professional needs to understand a distinct concept. The areas covered range from professional concerns such as the First Amendment, cameras in the courtroom, sunshine laws, and access to government documents, to general legal matters such as the institutions of law and the law-making function of the judiciary; core constitutional principles such as separation of powers and judicial review; and how courts function.

The book is ideal for use in general newswriting and reporting courses, particularly those with a focus on legal or court reporting, and may also be used as a supplementary text in Media Law courses.

John T. Nockleby, Laurie L. Levenson, Karl M. Manheim, F. Jay Dougherty, Victor J. Gold, Allan P. Ides, and Daniel W. Martin are all faculty members at Loyola Law School, Los Angeles, which annually hosts the Journalist Law School, a fellowship program for professional journalists.

"The Journalist's Guide to American Law came home with me from my fellowship at the Journalist Law School at Loyola Law School, Los Angeles and took its place on my office bookshelf, displayed prominently among my most treasured volumes. Dog-eared and heavily marked up, its physical integrity is showing the signs of overuse . . . testament to its proud position as a top resource!"

-Ashleigh Banfield, host of "Legal View," CNN

"When you're writing about the law, being on deadline is no excuse for winging it. This volume belongs on every reporter's desk."

-Martin Kaste, National Public Radio

"The Journalist's Guide to American Law provides an excellent overview of the U.S. justice system, written in a fashion that is easily digestible for both the layman and legal expert. Covering the gamut of legal issues in America, this book is a must-have for every journalist who spends time covering the criminal justice system or civil procedure."

-Brian Skoloff, Associated Press

"The Journalist's Guide to American Law is indispensable for journalists—professional, aspiring or self-starters—who want to understand the Third Branch of government. It's accessible yet complex, and required reading for any reporter who wants to do the job well."

-Levi Pulkkinen, seattlepi.com

"Condensing three years of Law School into just what journalists need to know. When you need the answer ASAP, this reference guide is easier—and faster—than calling an attorney."

-Robert Kovacik, anchor/reporter, NBC Los Angeles

#### Preface

This book has many parents. Nearly a decade ago, working in partnership with a number of bar organizations, the Civil Justice Program at Loyola Law School created the *Journalist Law School*, a four-day boot camp in law for professional journalists who cover the courts and legal system. Each year the JLS attracts hundreds of applicants for 35 Fellowships, and has proven to be the most exciting teaching most of us do. Indeed, this book was inspired by our work with scores of Journalist-Fellows who represent all types of media.

The authors are all law professors, but most of us have worked with journalists for years. Indeed, collectively we have given thousands of press interviews on a wide variety of subjects. Many of us teach constitutional law, and have a special concern for the First Amendment protections accorded those who report on matters of public concern, including legal matters. We hope this book continues to support the work of journalists and others who wish to understand the legal system in a more comprehensive way.

We would be remiss if we didn't also tell a story about how a chance lunch led to the creation of the Journalist Law School, and eventually this book. A number of years ago, John Nockleby was invited to a lunch with the incoming President of an influential bar organization, the American Board of Trial Advocates, or ABOTA. We knew that the ABOTA was a highly-selective group of some of the finest trial lawyers in the country, whose membership hailed from every state. In their professional life, some ABOTA members represent large companies and insurers; others represent individuals and small businesses. More recently, the organization had become active in promoting civic education in high schools, helping teachers gain a deeper understanding of the legal system, and supporting public education about the law, particularly the jury system and judicial independence.

The incoming President of ABOTA was Donna Melby, a partner in a major Los Angeles law firm. When Donna heard about our idea for the Journalist Law School, she immediately took it to ABOTA. As a result, the organization got behind the idea and used their brains, connections and muscle to turn the idea into reality. Indeed, without the support of ABOTA

and the ABOTA Foundation, the JLS would not have come into existence and this book would not have been written. We are deeply grateful to all the members, but especially to current and past presidents of ABOTA and the ABOTA Foundation: Mick Callahan; John V. Phelps; Mark Robinson; Lewis Sifford; Craig Lewis; Bill Callaham; Mike McGuire; Bill Sieben; Bill Ginsberg; Charles Baumberger; Wylie Aiken; Tom Harkness; Joel Collins; Harry Widmann; Pat Simek; Ron Rouda; Gordon Rather; Tom Girardi; John Holcomb; Robert Stone; Gil Jones; Bob Barbagelata; Bob Baker; Ed Nevin; and of course, Donna Melby.

We continue to receive support for the JLS from many other organizations that have made wonderful contributions to the success of the program. These include the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ); the National Center for State Courts (NCSC); the Los Angeles County Bar Association (LACBA); the California Federal -State Judicial Council; the Consumer Attorneys Association of Los Angeles (CAALA); the Defense Research Institute (DRI); the American Association for Justice (AAJ); the Consumer Attorneys Association of California (CAOC), and many local ABOTA Chapters from around the country. We are deeply appreciative of all the support from these organizations.

We also want to thank our faculty colleagues who have generously given of their time to participate in producing the JLS. Each year over 50 lawyers, judges, and law faculty participate in helping make the JLS a success. Both the current Dean of Loyola Law School, Los Angeles, Victor Gold, and the previous Dean, David Burcham (now President of Loyola Marymount University), have been strong supporters of the program from inception. Our co-authors—Jay Dougherty, Allan Ides, Dan Martin, and Dean Gold—have not only regularly participated in the JLS, but shared their expertise in the development of this volume. Tim Oppelt (LLS '07) helped edit several chapters, and our faculty secretaries, Linda Wysocky and Valda Hahn, have been stalwart assistants for many years.

And to all journalists who strive to find meaningful stories about the legal system, and who diligently work to explain the justice system to the public: we thank you.

John Nockleby, Laurie Levenson and Karl Manheim Loyola Law School, Los Angeles February, 2014

### Contents

	Preface	xvii
1	Introduction JOHN T. NOCKLEBY	1
	State Law vs. Federal Law 2 State Courts vs. Federal Courts 5 Criminal Law vs. Civil Law 6 Common Law (Judge-made Law) vs. Statutory Law 7 A Comment on Retaining vs. Overruling Precedent 8 Can the Legislature Change the Common Law? 9 Judicial Independence and Judicial Accountability 10 The Judge's Role in Civil Litigation (vs. Jury Role) 11 Stages of Civil Litigation 11 Trial Roles of Judge and Jury 13	
2	Constitutional Law	15
	KARL M. MANHEIM	
		28
	The Supremacy Clause—Preempting State Law 30	

2 1 12 2	
Separation of Powers—Struggle between the	
Three Federal Branches 32	
The Power of Congress 33	
Beyond Legislating 34	
Bicameralism and Presentment 35	
Executive Power 36	
War and Treaty Powers 36	
Executive Orders 39	
Privileges and Immunities 39	
The Judicial Branch 41	
Due Process and the Protection of Individual Rights 42	
Incorporation 43	
Standards of Review 45	
The Right of Privacy 47	
Family Rights 48	
Abortion Rights 48	
Procreation and Parental Rights 49	
Marriage, Divorce, and Sexual Intimacy 50	
The Right to Die 52	
Positive Rights 53	
Education, Health Care, and Government Benefits	53
Government Protection 55	
Economic Rights and the Origin of Substantive Due P	rocess 55
Deprivations and Undue Burdens 56	
Procedural Due Process 58	
Equal Protection of the Laws 59	
Standards of Review 61	
Fundamental Equal Protection Rights 62	
Voting Rights 62	
Right to Travel 64	
Protected (Suspect) Classes 66	
Race, Ethnicity, and Religion 66	
Sex, Alienage, and Birth Status 67	
Sexual Orientation and "Almost" Suspect Classes	68
	00
State Action Requirement - 69	
The Requirement of Purpose 71 The First Amendment 72	
Background 72	
Unprotected and Lesser-Protected Speech 73	
Time, Place, and Manner Regulations 75	
Speech in Public Places 75	
Speech in Private Places 76	
Symbolic Speech 77	
Government Speech 78	
Commercial Speech 78	

Campaign Speech 79		
Privacy, Technology, and Propriety Rights	80	
Surveillance and Access to Data 81		
Neighboring Rights (Copyright; Right o	f Publicity) 81	
Free Press 82	7 1 110 110 110 110 110 110 110 110 110	
Reporter's Privilege 82		
Right of Access 83		
Prior Restraints 83		
Religious Rights (Separation of Church and	d State) 84	
Establishment Clause 85		
Free Exercise Clause 87		
Economic Rights 88		
Due Process 89		
Price Control 89		
Procedural Fairness 89		
The Contracts Clause 90		
Fifth Amendment—The Just Compensation	n Clause 91	
Public Use Requirement 92		
Possessory Takings 92		
Regulatory Takings 93		
Judicial Review 93		
Our Dual Judicial System—The Role of Sta	ate Courts 94	
Justiciability—Standing, Mootness, and Po		
Standing 96		
Ripeness and Mootness 97		
Political Question 98		
Jurisdiction Stripping—Congress's Control	over Courts 98	
Abstention 99		
Criminal Law	10	)2
LAURIE L. LEVENSON		
Introduction 102		
Criminal Acts 102		
Criminal Intent 103		
Analyzing Crimes 104		
Overview of the Criminal Justice System 10	4	
The Players 104		
The Criminal Process 105		
Homicide Law 108		
Causation 108		
Human Being 109		
Murder vs. Manslaughter 109		
Murder 109		
Manslaughter 111		

Felony-Murder and Misdemeanor-Manslaughter
(Unlawful Act Doctrine) 112
Death Penalty Cases 113
Other Crimes of Violence 114
Assault 114
Kidnapping 115
Robbery 115
Mayhem 115
Arson 115
Sexual Offenses 115
Solicitation, Attempt, and Conspiracy 117
Accomplice Liability 119
Theft Crimes 119
White-collar Crimes 120
Narcotics Offenses 123
Civil Rights Violations 124
Terrorism Crimes 125
Common Defenses to Crimes 125
Alibi 125
Self-defense 126
Battered Spouses 126
Defense of Others 127
Defense of Property 127
Law Enforcement Defense 127
Necessity 127
Duress / Coercion 128
Intoxication 128
Insanity 129
Diminished Capacity 130
Entrapment 131
Mistake of Law and Mistake of Fact 132
Consent 133
Sentencing 133
Purposes of Punishment 134
Sentencing Procedures 134
Constitutional Limitations on Sentencing 135
Juvenile Justice System 136
Criminal Procedure
LAURIE L. LEVENSON

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Purpose of Criminal Procedure 137

Introduction 137

137

Standing and State Action 137 Enforcement of Criminal Procedure Rights—The Exclusionary Rule 138 Suppression Motions and Hearings Investigative Criminal Procedure 139 Searches 139 What Is a Search? 139 Probable Cause 140 Warrant Requirements Execution of Search Warrants Exceptions to Warrant Rule 142 Temporary Stops ("Terry Stops" or "Stop and Frisk") Wiretapping and Electronic Searches 148 Arrests 149 Warrantless Arrests 150 In-Home Arrests 150 Hot Pursuit Arrests 150 Confessions and Interrogations Voluntariness Requirement Miranda Rule 151 Invocation of Right to Counsel 154 The Massiah Rule 154 Obtaining Information through Jailhouse Informants Demanding Testimony or Production of Evidence from a Defendant 154 No Adverse Inferences in a Criminal Case Subpoenas for Evidence 155 Only Testimonial Evidence Is Protected 155 Special Rules for Police Officers Use Immunity and Transactional Immunity 156 Good Faith Basis for Asserting Fifth Amendment Right Waiver by Testifying Lineups and Identifications 157 Lineups 157 Photospreads 157 Show-ups 158 Reliability of Identifications 158 Problems with Eyewitness Identifications 158 Rules Governing the Adjudicative Process: How a Criminal Case Goes through the Court System 159 Overview 159 Critical Stages of a Criminal Proceeding

Arraignment / First Appearance / Pleas

Bail and Pretrial Release 162

Formal Charging 163
Preliminary Hearing 165
Right to Counsel and Right to Self-Representation 166
Discovery 168
Pretrial Motions 168
Plea Bargaining 169
Guilty Pleas 169
Pretrial Publicity, Change of Venue, and Gag Orders 170
Speedy Trial Rights 170
Jury vs. Court Trial 171
Trial Rights 172
Sentencing 175
Appeals 177
Habeas Corpus and Collateral Challenges 178
Double Jeopardy 178
Execution and Clemency 179
Prisoner Rights 179
Conclusion 179
Torts 18
JOHN T. NOCKLEBY
What Is a Tort? General Definition 181
What Is a Tort? General Definition 181 Intentional Torts 184
Battery and Assault 185
Intentional Infliction of Emotional Distress 186
Defamation 186
What Is Defamation? 186
Defenses to Defamation Suits 188
Invasion of Privacy 188  Treations to Land, Naisance, Treations to Chattale (Parsonal Prot
Trespass to Land; Nuisance; Trespass to Chattels (Personal Property); and Conversion 191
Fraud and Misrepresentation 192  False Statement of a Material Fact 193
Justifiable Reliance by the Alleged Victim on the Statement 19
Other Business Tort Claims 195
Defenses to Intentional Torts 195
The Negligence Tort 196
Establishing Duty and Breach 197
The Reasonable Person 197
Departures from RPP Standard:
Government Regulations and Statutes 199

Departures from Customary Safety Precautions

Expert Testimony 200		
Circumstantial Evidence 200		
Foreseeable Risk 201		
Establishing Causation 202		
General Principles 202		
Complicating Causation 203		
Damages and Other Relief 205		
Injunctive Relief 206		
Compensatory Damages 206		
Punitive Damages 206		
Defenses to Unintentional Torts 206		
Contributory Negligence 206		
Comparative Fault 207		
Assumption of Risk 207		
"No Duty" 208		
Strict Liability 211		
Wild Animals and Blasting 211	A 7 0 5	
Abnormally Dangerous Activities	211	
Products Liability 212		
Contemporary Controversies Concern		
A Comment on Competing Theorie	s of Responsibility 213	
Civil Lawsuits and Torts 216		
Stell Edite Shifts Wild 10713 210		
	21	۱۵
Contract Law	21	19
	21	19
Contract Law		19
Contract Law VICTOR J. GOLD		19
Contract Law VICTOR J. GOLD Introduction: What Are Contracts and Them? 219 Enforceable Promises: The Requireme	Why Do We Make nt of Consideration 220	19
Contract Law VICTOR J. GOLD Introduction: What Are Contracts and Them? 219 Enforceable Promises: The Requireme The Mechanics of Assent: Offer and A	I Why Do We Make  nt of Consideration 220 acceptance 223	19
Contract Law VICTOR J. GOLD Introduction: What Are Contracts and Them? 219 Enforceable Promises: The Requireme The Mechanics of Assent: Offer and A Termination of Power to Accept: Revo	I Why Do We Make  nt of Consideration 220 acceptance 223 accation, Rejection, Lapse 224	19
Contract Law VICTOR J. GOLD  Introduction: What Are Contracts and Them? 219  Enforceable Promises: The Requireme The Mechanics of Assent: Offer and A Termination of Power to Accept: Revo	I Why Do We Make  nt of Consideration 220 acceptance 223 accation, Rejection, Lapse 224 Frauds 226	19
Contract Law VICTOR J. GOLD  Introduction: What Are Contracts and Them? 219  Enforceable Promises: The Requireme The Mechanics of Assent: Offer and A Termination of Power to Accept: Revo Defenses to Enforceability: Statute of I Other Defenses: Problems of Status, B	I Why Do We Make  nt of Consideration 220 acceptance 223 accation, Rejection, Lapse 224 Frauds 226	19
Contract Law VICTOR J. GOLD  Introduction: What Are Contracts and Them? 219  Enforceable Promises: The Requireme The Mechanics of Assent: Offer and A Termination of Power to Accept: Revo Defenses to Enforceability: Statute of I Other Defenses: Problems of Status, B Status 227	I Why Do We Make  nt of Consideration 220 acceptance 223 accation, Rejection, Lapse 224 Frauds 226	19
Contract Law VICTOR J. GOLD  Introduction: What Are Contracts and Them? 219  Enforceable Promises: The Requireme The Mechanics of Assent: Offer and A Termination of Power to Accept: Revo Defenses to Enforceability: Statute of Defenses: Problems of Status, B Status 227  Behavior 227	I Why Do We Make  nt of Consideration 220 acceptance 223 accation, Rejection, Lapse 224 Frauds 226	19
Contract Law VICTOR J. GOLD  Introduction: What Are Contracts and Them? 219  Enforceable Promises: The Requireme The Mechanics of Assent: Offer and A Termination of Power to Accept: Revo Defenses to Enforceability: Statute of Dother Defenses: Problems of Status, B Status 227  Behavior 227  Fairness 230	I Why Do We Make  Int of Consideration 220 Incceptance 223 Incation, Rejection, Lapse 224 Increase 226 Increase 226 Inches 226 Inche	19
Contract Law VICTOR J. GOLD  Introduction: What Are Contracts and Them? 219  Enforceable Promises: The Requireme The Mechanics of Assent: Offer and A Termination of Power to Accept: Revo Defenses to Enforceability: Statute of Dother Defenses: Problems of Status, B Status 227  Behavior 227  Fairness 230  What Are the Terms of the Contract?	I Why Do We Make  Int of Consideration 220 Incceptance 223 Incation, Rejection, Lapse 224 Increase 226 Increase 226 Inches 226 Inche	19
Contract Law VICTOR J. GOLD  Introduction: What Are Contracts and Them? 219  Enforceable Promises: The Requirement The Mechanics of Assent: Offer and A Termination of Power to Accept: Revolution of Power to Accept: Re	I Why Do We Make  Int of Consideration 220 Incceptance 223 Incation, Rejection, Lapse 224 Increase 226 Increase 226 Inches 226 Inche	19
Contract Law VICTOR J. GOLD  Introduction: What Are Contracts and Them? 219  Enforceable Promises: The Requireme The Mechanics of Assent: Offer and A Termination of Power to Accept: Revo Defenses to Enforceability: Statute of Defenses: Problems of Status, B Status 227  Behavior 227  Fairness 230  What Are the Terms of the Contract?  The Parol Evidence Rule 232  Interpreting Terms 234	I Why Do We Make  Int of Consideration 220 Incceptance 223 Incation, Rejection, Lapse 224 Increase 226 Increase 226 Inches 226 Inche	19
Contract Law VICTOR J. GOLD  Introduction: What Are Contracts and Them? 219 Enforceable Promises: The Requireme The Mechanics of Assent: Offer and A Termination of Power to Accept: Revo Defenses to Enforceability: Statute of Dother Defenses: Problems of Status, B Status 227 Behavior 227 Fairness 230 What Are the Terms of the Contract? The Parol Evidence Rule 232 Interpreting Terms 234 Gap Filling 236	I Why Do We Make  Int of Consideration 220 Incceptance 223 Incation, Rejection, Lapse 224 Increase 226 Increase 226 Inches 226 Inche	19
Contract Law VICTOR J. GOLD  Introduction: What Are Contracts and Them? 219  Enforceable Promises: The Requireme The Mechanics of Assent: Offer and A Termination of Power to Accept: Revo Defenses to Enforceability: Statute of Dother Defenses: Problems of Status, B. Status 227  Behavior 227  Fairness 230  What Are the Terms of the Contract?  The Parol Evidence Rule 232  Interpreting Terms 234  Gap Filling 236  Third-Party Issues 236	I Why Do We Make  Int of Consideration 220 Incceptance 223 Incation, Rejection, Lapse 224 Increase 226 Increase 226 Inches 226 Inche	19
Contract Law VICTOR J. GOLD  Introduction: What Are Contracts and Them? 219  Enforceable Promises: The Requirement The Mechanics of Assent: Offer and A Termination of Power to Accept: Revolution of Power to Accept: Re	I Why Do We Make  Int of Consideration 220 Incceptance 223 Incation, Rejection, Lapse 224 Increase 226 Increase 226 Inches 226 Inche	19
Contract Law VICTOR J. GOLD  Introduction: What Are Contracts and Them? 219  Enforceable Promises: The Requireme The Mechanics of Assent: Offer and A Termination of Power to Accept: Revolution of Power to Accept: Revo	I Why Do We Make  Int of Consideration 220 Incceptance 223 Incation, Rejection, Lapse 224 Increase 226 Increase 226 Inches 226 Inche	19
Contract Law VICTOR J. GOLD  Introduction: What Are Contracts and Them? 219  Enforceable Promises: The Requirement The Mechanics of Assent: Offer and A Termination of Power to Accept: Revolution of Power to Accept: Re	I Why Do We Make  Int of Consideration 220 Incceptance 223 Incation, Rejection, Lapse 224 Increase 226 Increase 226 Inches 226 Inche	19

Performance and Breach 241 Discharge of Duties 241

	Performance 243 Remedies for Breach 244 Damages 244	
7	Intellectual Property	247
	F. JAY DOUGHERTY AND KARL M. MANHEIM	
	Copyright Law 248  A Brief History 248  Copyright Theory: An Introduction 249  Copyright Doctrine 251  Subject Matter 251	
	Duration and Formalities 256	
	Ownership and Transfer 258 Rights Protected 258	
	Infringement 259	
	Indirect Infringement 260 Defenses 261	
	Conclusion 262	
	Trademark Law 263	
	Introduction and Historical Roots 263	
	Ownership 264	
	Validity 266	
	Distinctiveness 267	
	Likelihood of Confusion 268	
	Defenses 269	
	Titles and Selected Other Interesting Applications 270	
	Trademark Expansion and the Future 271	
	A Brief Guide to Patents 272	
	Background 272	
	How Is a Patent Obtained? 275	
	What Inventions Can Be Patented? 277	
	Criteria for Obtaining a Patent 279	
	Patent Licensing and Infringement Suits 281	
	Challenges to a Patent After It Is Issued 283	
	Innovation or Anti-Commons 283	
8	Civil Procedure	285
O		403
	ALLAN IDES	
	What Is Civil Procedure? 285	
	Commencing a Lawsuit: Pleadings 286	
	A Court's Power over Persons or Property: Personal Jurisdiction	288

Notice and the Right to Be Heard 293 Due Process 293 Service of Process 293 The Types of Cases a Court May Hear: Subject Matter Iurisdiction 294 Federal Question Jurisdiction: Statutory "Arising Under" Diversity of Citizenship: Statutory Diversity 298 Supplemental Jurisdiction 300 Removal Jurisdiction 301 The Geographic Location of the Lawsuit: Venue 301 The Law to Be Applied in Federal or State Court 303 Discovery 305 The Composition of Civil Action: Parties and Claims Resolving the Substantive Dispute Pretrial 311 The Demurrer or Motion to Dismiss for Failure to State a Claim 311 Summary Judgment 311 Trial and Appeal 312 Trial by Jury 312 Taking a Case Away from the Jury 313 Appeal 314 The Finality of Judgments Claim Preclusion 315 Issue Preclusion 316 9 Evidence LAURIE L. LEVENSON

318

Introduction 318 Purpose of Evidence Rules 318 Development of the Evidence Rules 318 *Judges' Discretion* 318 How Evidentiary Issues Are Decided Harmless vs. Plain Error 319 Burdens and Presumptions 319 Judge's vs. Jury's Role 320 Relevance 320

Relevant Evidence Is Generally Admissible Direct vs. Circumstantial Evidence Excluding Relevant Evidence 321 Judicial Notice 321

Hearsay 322 Right of Confrontation 322 Basic Hearsay Rule 322

	Hearsay Exceptions 323	
	Admissions and Co-Conspirator Statements 323	
	Prior Statements by Witnesses 323	
	Reactive Statements 324	
	Other Exceptions 324	
	Character Evidence 325	
	Character of the Defendant 325	
	Character of the Victim 326	
	Specific Prior Acts 326	
	Impeachment and Character Evidence of Witnesses 326	
	Presentation of Witnesses 327	
	Expert Witnesses 328	
	Privileges 328	
	Attorney-Client Privilege 328	
	Physician-Patient Privilege 330	
	Psychotherapist-Patient Privilege 330	
	Marital Privileges 330	
	Spousal Testimony Privilege 330	
	Marital Confidences Privilege 331	
	Clergy-Penitent Privilege 331	
	Reporter's Privilege 331	
	Government Privileges 331	
	Informer Identity Privilege 332	
	Rape Shield Laws 332	
	Privilege against Self-Incrimination 332	
	Tribuege against seif-incrimination 332	
10	Ethical Obligations of Lawyers and Judges	334
10	LAURIE L. LEVENSON	331
	LAURIE L. LEVENSON	
	Ethical Duties of Lawyers 334	
	Duty of Competence 334	
	Duty of Confidentiality 335	
	Conflicts of Interest and a Lawyer's Duty of Loyalty 336	
	Lawyer's Goals for Representation 337	
	Conduct During Trial 337	
	Pretrial Publicity 338	
	The Business of Being a Lawyer 338	
	Clients Who Lie 340	
	Special Ethical Duties of Prosecutors and Defense Lawyers	340
	Corporate Clients 341	
	Pro Bono Services 341	
	Disciplinary Proceedings against Lawyers 342	
	Judicial Ethics 342	
	Judicial Conduct and Speech 342	