

Preface

Welcome to *Criminal Law*, your guide to a fascinating yet challenging topic. This engaging and interactive textbook will enhance your ability to be successful in academics or a career in criminal justice.

1 Content

Criminal Law begins with the foundations of law and the legal system and then extensively explores criminal laws and defenses using general state principles, federal law, the Constitution, and the Model Penal Code as guidelines. Although it is neither possible nor desirable to discuss every criminal law, this textbook provides a basic yet thorough overview of the American criminal justice system. After completing *Criminal Law*, you will be familiar with the nature and sources of law, the court system, the adversarial process, the most prominent crimes, and accompanying criminal defenses.

2 Approach

Criminal Law uses a two-step process to augment learning, called the *applied* approach. First, after building a strong foundation from scratch, *Criminal Law* introduces you to crimes and defenses that have been broken down into separate components. It is so much easier to memorize and comprehend the subject matter when it is simplified this way. However, becoming proficient in the law takes more than just memorization. You must be trained to take the laws you have studied and apply them to various fact patterns. Most students are expected to do this automatically, but application must be seen, experienced, and practiced before it comes naturally. Thus the second step of the applied approach is reviewing examples of the application of law to facts after dissecting and analyzing each legal concept. Some of the examples come from cases, and some are purely fictional. All the examples are memorable, even quirky, so they will stick in your mind and be available when you need them the most (like during an exam). After a few chapters, you will notice that you no longer obsess over an explanation that doesn't completely make sense the first time you read it—you will just skip to the example. The examples clarify the principles for you, lightening the workload significantly.

3 Features

Let's face it, legal textbooks can be dry. This is unfortunate because law, especially criminal law, is an intrinsically compelling topic. To hold your attention and keep you alert, *Criminal Law* employs a variety of instructional techniques that should engage you from start to finish.

First, chapters contain embedded videos, ethical scenarios, charts, diagrams, and tables to demonstrate the legal concepts and examples provided. These enhancements break up the text and also appeal to various learning styles.

In addition, instead of wasting valuable textbook space by reprinting edited cases, *Criminal Law* links to cases online. You can read more cases that way, and cases are like examples—they demonstrate the application of law to facts. Also, you can read the entire case exactly the way the judge wrote it, instead of an edited version that has been shrunk to fit into a limited amount of pages.

Have you ever tried to check your answers to review questions in a textbook, only to find that the correct answers are nowhere in sight? *Criminal Law* gives you the answer to every question at the end of each chapter. Go ahead and check the answers first. Contrary to popular belief, this actually improves—and does not detract from—learning.

In addition, *Criminal Law* includes hundreds of footnotes that link to online cases and statutes; supplementary links to articles, websites, and statistics online; and plenty of reference material for a term paper or other research project. In short, *Criminal Law* should contain everything you need to successfully complete your course. It is also a valuable guide to which you can refer throughout your criminal justice career.

4 Goals

Although academic success is important, I wrote *Criminal Law* to increase your awareness as you read the newspaper (or read the news online), watch television, or discuss legal situations with friends and colleagues. Law is an integral part of life, yet most people lack the most fundamental understanding of legal concepts. My sincere hope is that once you have finished reading *Criminal Law*, you will become your own most trusted legal authority.

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