2. Law’s branches
Raymond Wacks

As social life is transformed, the law is rarely far behind to invent and define new concepts and rules, and to resolve the disputes that inevitably arise. Thus our brave new legal world continues to usher in novel subjects such as space law, sports law, Internet law, and media law. However, at the core of most legal systems are the fundamental disciplines that hark back to the roots of law: the law of contract, tort, criminal law, and the law of property. ‘Law’s branches’ describes the most significant branches of the law, including public and private law, contract, tort, criminal law, property law, and constitutional and administrative law.

5. Criminal law
G. Edward White

Crime and the treatment of criminals have been pervasive themes of American legal history. ‘Criminal law’ shows that in contrast to the early conceptions of crime and punishment as largely private activities, diagnosing and responding to crime has become a distinctly public activity, as susceptible to changing public attitudes as other sectors of American political life. Americans have been responsive to the idea that individual citizens have rights not to be subjected to arbitrary criminal process by the state; but also they have rarely been opposed to the prospect of criminals being locked up for a long time. Balancing those attitudes has not been easy, and at present the balance seems tipped toward incarceration.

2. Domestic violence
Jonathan Herring
‘Domestic violence’ looks at the view of domestic abuse in family law. The law in all jurisdictions has been reluctant to interfere in cases of domestic violence. In the last few decades, the law has begun to accept that this issue is a major social problem that needs a legal reaction. There is no solid definition of domestic violence. A definition should include emotional and financial abuse. Domestic violence is not restricted to a cohabiting couple, but includes all those who live in an intimate relationship. The notion of inequality in a relationship is an important consideration in defining domestic violence.

6. Child abuse
Jonathan Herring

‘Child abuse’ examines this extremely emotive and hotly debated area of family law. The law is able to remove a child from a situation where abuse is suspected, but this is a power that must be exercised with great caution. What constitutes child abuse? There must be some consideration of cultural differences in the definition. The law has to consider a number of issues: what should be done when there is a suspicion of abuse but no proof? How bad must the abuse be before it justifies removal of a child? Judges have to deal with these questions every day.

6. Law and domestic relations
G. Edward White

‘Law and domestic relations’ follows the transformations of domestic relations law. In early America, as extended households composed of persons in several versions of master-servant relationships began to dissolve, the idea of the household as a domestic realm emerged. Paradoxically, the creation of a domestic sphere that would serve as a private sanctuary from the outside world stimulated the emergence of legal trustees of the state who served to define the parameters of the domestic realm in accordance with mainstream public values. American domestic relations law thus became a set of public regulations for an area of life whose preservation has been deemed especially valuable because of its private character.
Law has played a central role in American history. From colonial times to the present, law has reflected the changing society in which legal decisions have been made and has played a powerful role in shaping that society, though not always in positive ways. American Legal History: A Very Short Introduction sheds light on the impact of law on several key social issues: Native American affairs, slavery, business, home life, and criminal and civil offences. The expansion of laws regarding property rights is also considered, as well as the evolution of criminal punishment, the rise of tort law after the Civil War; and the progress in legal education.

Family Law: A Very Short Introduction
Jonathan Herring

Family Law: A Very Short Introduction provides insight not only into what family law is, but why it is the way it is. How have laws had to respond to social changes in family life? The last few decades have seen rising divorce rates and an increase in the use of surrogate mothers. How do family courts deal with the chaos of modern family life? Family law has recently been challenged to keep up-to-date with the social and scientific changes which affect it. What is a family? What makes someone a parent? What rights should children have? What will families look like in the years ahead? What new dilemmas will the courts face?

1. Military command and military discipline
Eugene R. Fidell

To be effective, and something more than a collection of individuals with weapons, a military unit must be commanded. Commanders are responsible for achieving the unit’s objective, a function that requires them to ensure that subordinates will do as they are told. With this power comes responsibility. In some circumstances commanders can be penalized for the misconduct of subordinates. In the classical model of military justice, commanders played (and in some countries, such as the United States, still play) a powerful role. ‘Military command and military discipline’ considers the powers exercised by commanders in these commander-centric systems—in particular the disposition, or charging, power—and looks at efforts to reform these systems.

Epilogue
G. Edward White
The ‘Epilogue’ concludes that this VSI may be taken as an effort to demonstrate how much of American history can be seen as connected to law and legal institutions. Of all the evidence demonstrating the role of law as a central force in the history of American culture, the most visible has been the status of the legal profession itself. Since the early settlements in colonial British America, a knowledge of law has been associated with governing institutions, politics, and influence in community affairs. The future role of the legal profession in American history is considered. Will the profession retain its position of centrality in American life?

Law: A Very Short Introduction

Raymond Wacks

Law is at the heart of every society, protecting rights, imposing duties, and establishing a framework for the conduct of almost all social, political, and economic activity. Despite this, the law can seem highly technical, with its antiquated and often impenetrable jargon, obsolete procedures, and complex statutes and legislation. Law: A Very Short Introduction introduces the major branches of the law, describing what lawyers do and how courts operate, and considers the philosophy of law and its pursuit of justice, freedom, and equality. This second edition considers the pressures of globalization and digitalization on the law and the nature of the law in our culture of threatened security and surveillance.

6. The future of the law

Raymond Wacks

In our rapidly changing world, growth and adaptation are more pressing than ever if the law is to respond adequately to the novel challenges—and threats—that it faces. ‘The future of the law’ attempts to uncover some of the major shifts in contemporary society and the formidable challenges they pose to the law. It considers the globalization of law and its internationalization through the United Nations, regional organizations, and the European Union; how privacy and freedom can be reconciled with the threats of terrorism and extremism; and the massive impact of technology on the law, from cybercrime to technologies such as DNA profiling and CCTV that have transformed criminal trials.