

[PDF] Merriam-Webster's Dictionary Of Law

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Description:

To the ordinary person, who hasn't spent three years grinding through law school, legalese gets its point across as clearly and effortlessly as a dose of ancient Greek. Right up there with medical lingo, legal jargon confuses and alienates folks, makes them feel stupid and ill at ease. A translation or two, however, can go a long way toward clearing the legal air. With concise and sensible definitions, *Merriam Webster's Dictionary of Law* converts a lease, will, or summons into standard English, and removes the intimidation factor from what is, basically, an effort at reliable communication. Been wondering about tortfeasors and arrears, speculation and naked promises, John Doe summonses and Terry stops? From ABA (American Bar Association) to Zone of Privacy ("an area or aspect of life that is held to be protected from intrusion by a specific constitutional guarantee"), the dictionary defines and explains 10,000 legal terms, allowing a ready grasp of laws, statutes, and legal procedures to anyone who knows how to crack open a dictionary.

Despite the title, the book is more than a mere dictionary. There's a chapter explaining the United States judicial system, a chapter discussing important legal cases, and another summarizing important laws. There's also a section on important legal agencies in the U.S., followed by the full Constitution of the United States, making this a useful family legal reference, adding clarity to news reports, assisting with homework assignments, simplifying potentially scary legal actions, and making government agencies, civil rights, and legal options less daunting and more accessible. --
Stephanie Gold

About the Author

The Merriam brothers desired a continuity of editorship that would link Noah Webster's efforts with their own editions, so they selected Chauncey A. Goodrich, Webster's son-in-law and literary heir, who had been trained in lexicography by Webster himself, to be their editor in chief. Webster's son William also served as an editor of that first Merriam-Webster dictionary, which was published on September 24, 1847.

Although Webster's work was honored, his big dictionaries had never sold well. The 1828 edition was priced at a whopping \$20; in 13 years its 2,500 copies had not sold out. Similarly, the 1841 edition, only slightly more affordable at \$15, moved slowly. Assuming that a lower price would increase sales, the Merriams introduced the 1847 edition at \$6, and although Webster's heirs initially questioned this move, extraordinary sales that brought them \$250,000 in royalties over the ensuing 25 years convinced them that the Merriams' decision had been abundantly sound.

The first Merriam-Webster dictionary was greeted with wide acclaim. President James K. Polk, General Zachary Taylor (hero of the Mexican War and later president himself), 31 U.S. senators, and other prominent people hailed it unreservedly. In 1850 its acceptance as a resource for students began when Massachusetts ordered a copy for every school and New York placed a similar order for 10,000 copies to be used in schools throughout the state. Eventually school use would spread throughout the country. In becoming America's most trusted authority on the English language, Merriam-Webster dictionaries had taken on a role of public responsibility demanded of few other publishing companies.

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