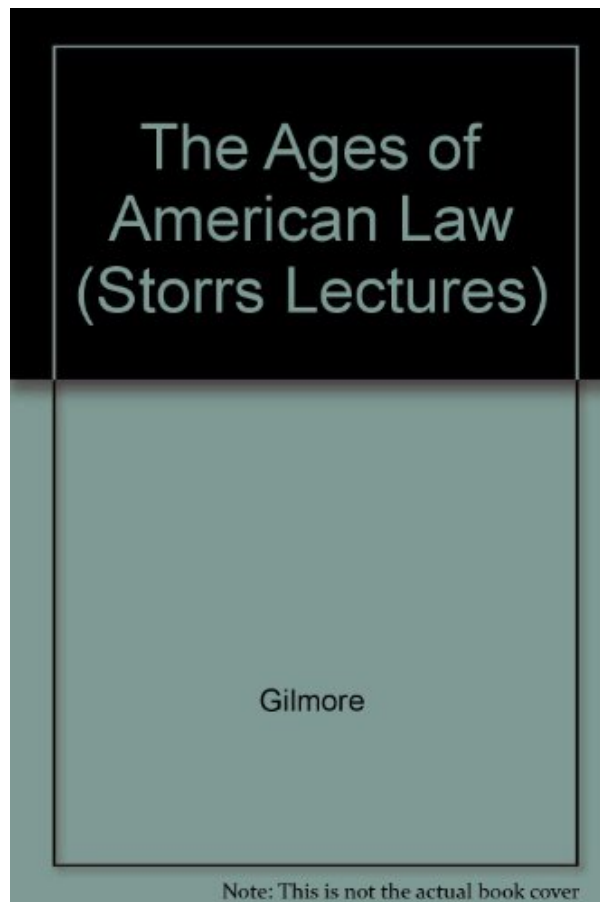


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A concise classic.

By Richard L. King

When Lawrence M. Friedman wrote his landmark "A History of American Law," he remarked that American legal history has been a neglected field. Some progress (although not enough) has been made in the field since Friedman published his History in 1973. Part of that progress has been the publication of Grant Gilmore's little book, "The Ages of American Law," which is justly considered to be a classic. The book is based on the lectures Gilmore gave during the 150th Anniversary of Yale Law School for the Storrs Lecture Series in 1974. Although "The Ages of American Law" is an "expanded" version of the Storrs Lectures, the book is still remarkable for its concision as well as for its clarity. Gilmore does not purport to offer an authoritative history of American law in the same vein as Friedman's History. Rather, he captures the grand sweep of history and condenses it into a gem of 154 pages. It remains in print nearly twenty-five years after first publication for good reason-it is well worth reading.

4 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

Notes for a Longer Book

By A Customer

I don't know why The Ages of American Law is regarded as a classic of American legal history. It's clearly written but tries to cover way too much ground in a very short space (111 pages of text with large print and big margins). Based on a series of lectures, The Ages of American Law strings together short observations on legal topics ranging from Lord Mansfield to the development of the Uniform Commercial Code. No subject is developed in depth: at best, the "book" is notes for a real book. One of my professors at law school used to rave about this book. It must have been because he's mentioned favorably in an endnote.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

An Excellent Primer for A Person About to Begin Law School

By Robert Bolton

Grant Gilmore is best known as the author of The Death of Contract (a well-known supplementary text in law school) and as one of the most cited contracts scholars in the twentieth century. This book, however, also shows his skills as a legal historian as he tracks the progression of American law from its earliest days after the Revolution, up through the mid-1970s.

Without giving away too much of the work, Gilmore explains how each era of America viewed law through a different prism, and analyzed the forces that shaped those worldviews. For example, the era of John Marshall through the Civil War took law as an instrumental force used to regulate society, acting in conjunction with other political forces and natural law. From the Civil War up through World War One, American law schools were primarily populated by the Formalist school, which believed rules of logic could be used to deduce certain legal principles. That those legal principles almost always matched the writer's personal viewpoint was something to be politely overlooked. The final school, with modifications, is the one we follow today: Legal Realism. Its prophet was Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. and its apostle Karl Llewellyn. A legal realist sought to understand the social pressures that interact with a judge's decision-making, and see how those factors produced the ultimate ruling. While the suggestion that a judge might be influenced by what he reads in the newspaper is unsurprising today, it was very controversial in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Gilmore throughout also peppers the text with interesting tidbits of legal history, such as how Christopher Columbus Langdell first proposed the casebook method for law schools and how law schools began using moot courts to prepare for appearances before a real judge. It also touches on some of the other experiences a law student is likely to undergo their first year, no matter where geographically or academically the school is situated. Another reviewer alluded to Lawrence Friedman's *A History of American Law*. Were I to offer my personal opinion, Gilmore is your best resource as you enter law school, and Friedman is your best resource as you exit. I certainly have recommended this book in person to younger friends about to enroll.

In sum, a great little book that touches on both legal theory and history that would serve as a great introduction for any prospective lawyer to American law.

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