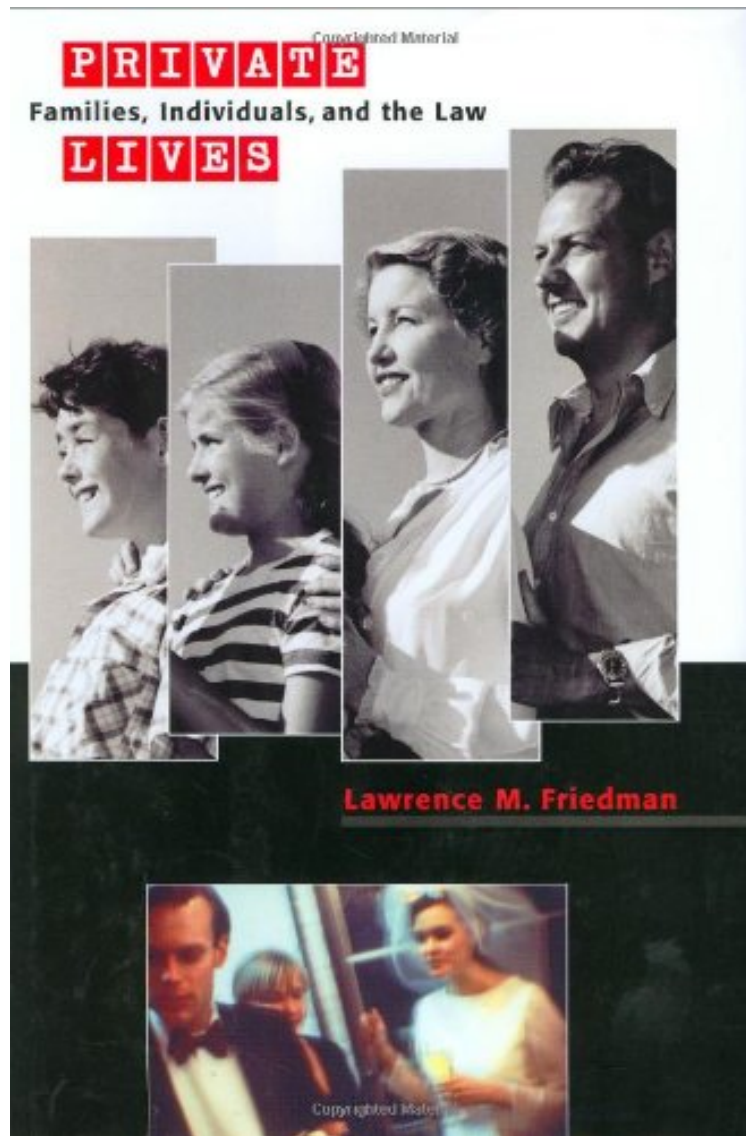


(Mobile book) Private Lives: Families, Individuals, and the Law

## Private Lives: Families, Individuals, and the Law

*Lawrence M. Friedman*

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**Lawrence M. Friedman : Private Lives: Families, Individuals, and the Law** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Private Lives: Families, Individuals, and the Law:

What is a family? Grandparents, mom, dad, and kids around a Thanksgiving turkey? An egg mother, a womb mother, a sperm donor, and their mutual child? Two gay men caring for their adopted son? In this provocative essay, a leading

American legal historian argues that laws about family are increasingly laws about individuals and their right to make their own, sometimes contentious, choices. Drawing on many revealing and sometimes colorful court cases of the past two centuries, *Private Lives* offers a lively short history of the complexities of family law and family life--including the tensions between the laws on the books and contemporary arrangements for marriage, divorce, adoption, and child rearing. Informal common-law marriage was once widely accepted as a means to regularize property arrangements, but it declined as the state asserted its authority to dictate who could marry and reproduce. In the twentieth century, state attempts to control private life were swept away, most famously in the creation of "no-fault" divorce, a system in which laws that made divorce nearly unattainable were circumvented. Private life, the author argues, as a legitimate sphere, was once basically confined to life in nuclear families; but the modern law of "privacy" extends the accepted zone of intimate relations. The omnipresence of the media and our fascination with celebrity test the boundaries of public and private life. Meanwhile, laws about cohabitation and civil unions, among others, suggest that family and commitment, in their many forms, remain powerful ideals.

Lawrence Friedman is the premier historian of American law, and particularly of family law. Here he distills the results of his immense learning into a fascinating brief narrative of clear, broad themes and illuminating details. *Private Lives* is written with dash and charm, and the shrewd awareness that, although law ultimately changes in response to social pressures, the rules prescribed by the family law on the books are often very different from the actual behavior of people making choices about marriages, divorces, sex lives, and children. (Robert W. Gordon, Yale University) Lawrence Friedman never forgets that the formal law is always subject to the living law. *Private Lives* tells a story of formal law declaring one thing, people coping with its demands, the law becoming more and more out of phase with practice, and then law makers patching it up more or less successfully, while the courts, for lack of any alternative, are asked to decide the undecidable. As always, Friedman gives a good story, told with insight, irony, and humor. (Stewart Macaulay, University of Wisconsin Law School) *Private Lives* is a delightful and invaluable short work. In five solid, well-written, and fully documented chapters, Friedman highlights the main changes in American family law since the nineteenth century...This work is so readable it could be used as an undergraduate text and so solid it can serve as a desk reference for professionals. (Joseph M. Hawes *American Journal of Legal History*) About the Author Lawrence M. Friedman is Marion Rice Kirkwood Professor of Law at Stanford University and author of many books, including *A History of American Law*, *Crime and Punishment in American History*, and *American Law in the Twentieth Century*.