



Laws of Image: Privacy and Publicity in America

Samantha Barbas

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Americans have long been obsessed with their images—their looks, public personas, and the impressions they make. This preoccupation has left its mark on the law. The twentieth century saw the creation of laws that protect your right to control your public image, to defend your image, and to feel good about your image and public presentation of self. These include the legal actions against invasion of privacy, libel, and intentional infliction of emotional distress. With these laws came the phenomenon of "personal image litigation"—individuals suing to vindicate their image rights.

Laws of Image tells the story of how Americans came to use the law to protect and manage their images, feelings, and reputations. In this social, cultural, and legal history, Samantha Barbas ties the development of personal image law to the self-consciousness and image-consciousness that has become endemic in our media-saturated culture of celebrity and consumerism, where people see their identities as intertwined with their public images. The laws of image are the expression of a people who have become so publicity-conscious and self-focused that they believe they have a right to control their images—to manage and spin them like actors, politicians, and rock stars.



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