Introduction

David Lander  
*Thompson Coburn LLP*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarship.law.slu.edu/plr](https://scholarship.law.slu.edu/plr)  
Part of the Law Commons

**Recommended Citation**  

This Introduction is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Saint Louis University Public Law Review by an authorized editor of Scholarship Commons. For more information, please contact Susie Lee.
INTRODUCTION

DAVID LANDER*

In December 2004, Saint Louis University School of Law co-sponsored the first conference of scholars from the fields of economics, sociology, social work and law to think together about the explosion of consumer credit and its traumatic effects on the economy and society. Although the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation has labeled this credit expansion a “revolution,” the impact of the “Consumer Credit Revolution” has not been well scrutinized by individual disciplines, and interdisciplinary analysis is absent. In addition to panels of economists, sociologists, social workers and bankruptcy law professors, the conference included a panel of consumer advocates who work on credit issues. Many important connections arose from the Conference, such as the one formed between George Ritzer’s work in the Journal of Consumer Culture and the work of Karen Gross in the field of bankruptcy debtor education. Richard Brown, Chief Economist of the FDIC, strengthened his relationship with consumer advocates from the National Consumer Law Center, Neighborhood Economic Development Assistance Project, Demos and the Center for Responsible Lending. The work of both academics and consumer advocates is greatly enhanced by this discourse.

This issue of the St. Louis University Public Law Review includes several of the outstanding papers presented at the Conference on the Consequences of the Consumer Lending Revolution, which was sponsored by The Center for Social Development at the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University, Saint Louis University School of Law, the Consumer Federation of America and the National Consumer Law Center. The goal of the conference was to bring together scholars from these key fields with consumer advocates and consumer educators to provide the enhanced insight available from such an interdisciplinary study and mix of academics and consumer advocates. The papers range from Vice Provost Teresa Sullivan’s examination of the disparate impact of these issues on women to Richard Brown and Susan Burhouse’s efforts to identify the causes of the increase in the number of consumer bankruptcies. We hope you find them insightful.

The benefits of the consumer lending revolution are generally known. For example, consumer spending, which is fueled by this credit extension, is

* David Lander is an adjunct professor at Saint Louis University School of Law.
playing an ever more important role in stimulating the U.S. economy. In
addition, the profitability of consumer lending is an increasingly key segment
of financial institution profitability. Unfortunately, neither the media nor
academia have devoted nearly this much attention to the increasing misery
caused by the same consumer lending revolution. This Conference was an
effort to launch the kind of linkage between the Academy and the trenches that
will fuel both scholarly inquiry and effective consumer activism.

In Professor Gross’ cogent essay she makes reference to the work of Paulo
Freire, the noted Chilean educator and political thinker. She makes the point
that “financial literacy” may require more than telling a debtor how to
calculate the delinquency rate of interest on their primary credit card. More of
an effort must be made to help people change their spending and saving
behavior. Perhaps it is only when an illness, job loss or other type of family
emergency hits, and no cushion or reserve remains that many Americans
realize we are being manipulated by powerful and heinous forces that allow
our “wants” and “needs” to take us to the very edge of our ability to repay, and
beyond.

We hope you enjoy and learn from these papers. We would like to thank
the Editors of the Saint Louis University Public Law Review for publishing
them and for supporting the Conference.