LEVITIN

BUSINESS BANKRUPTCY Financial Restructuring and Modern Commercial Markets



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Financial Restructuring and Modern Commercial Markets

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Professor of Law Georgetown University Law Center



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To Sarah for everything. You deserve all the credit. The aim of this book is to provide an overview of the modern financial restructuring process. In so doing, the book aims to revitalize the traditional bankruptcy course with a healthy dose of "bankruptcy realism." By this I mean that my goal is to provide a book that can be used to teach bankruptcy law as it actually lives in a broader legal ecosystem.

Bankruptcy realism has three components. First, it means teaching bankruptcy law as but one piece of the restructuring puzzle (even if it is the most important piece). My goal in this book is to broaden the scope of "bankruptcy law" as taught in law schools to include more than the in-court Chapter 11 restructuring process. The traditional bankruptcy course is focused on big-B Bankruptcy lawyering, meaning representing either debtors or creditors in litigation in Chapter 11 cases (or in consumer bankruptcy cases in Chapters 7 and 13). The traditional bankruptcy course largely ignores the small-b bankruptcy lawyering, including the transactional work in Chapter 11 cases, as well as out-of court restructurings and bankruptcy-influenced transaction design.

The traditional big-B conception makes for a coherent class, but is, in my view, too narrow. It presents bankruptcy as a stand-alone process divorced from the non-bankruptcy world. I want students to come away from the course seeing how bankruptcy fits with non-bankruptcy restructuring. Chapter 11 is a very powerful tool, but it is not the only one in the restructuring toolbox. The importance of bankruptcy as a system can only be understood once one understands the legal limitations of out-of-court restructurings. At the same time, what is possible in out-of-court restructurings as a practical matter is shaped by the parties' knowledge of what could happen in bankruptcy. Accordingly, the law of out-of-court restructuring, including private contractual limitations in loan syndications and securitizations, the Trust Indenture Act, and exit consent solicitations are properly part of the bankruptcy course, rather than a topic for a corporate finance class.

A second component of bankruptcy realism is teaching bankruptcy law as including not just the actual restructuring of financially distressed companies, but also transactions shaped by bankruptcy concerns. Thus, a second goal of this book

^{1.} This broader vision of bankruptcy law is not just a Chapter 11 issue. In another book, I make a parallel move relating to consumer finance, which prior to the creation of the CFPB was largely the bailiwick of consumer bankruptcy scholars, who examined the consumer finance system through the bankruptcy system, in part because of the availability of rich empirical data. The creation of the CFPB should underscore that bankruptcy filing is an exceptional behavior for consumers. Most consumers in financial distress do not file for bankruptcy, and most consumers are not in financial distress at any given time. Instead, the consumer finance system needs to be examined holistically from the front-end, not from the back, and not just from a consumer perspective, but from consumer, business, and regulatory perspectives.

is to introduce students to modern financial transactions and products that are shaped by bankruptcy law: asset securitization, repos and derivatives, syndicated loan structures and intercreditor agreements, intercompany guaranties, and leveraged buyouts. Just as small-b bankruptcy is properly part of a restructuring course, so too are transactions structures that are heavily driven by bankruptcy concerns.

In my experience, law students are desperately thirsty to understand complex modern financial transactions. They know that they'll encounter some, if not all, of these transactions in practice, and that law school is the only place they will get a systematic overview of the transactions. Unfortunately, despite the ubiquity of complex financing transactions, they receive no reliable coverage within the law school curriculum, yet they are vitally important to the world of practice students are preparing to enter. If these transactions are covered at all in law school, it is usually only passingly in secured credit or corporate finance classes. All too often, secured credit classes are hyper-focused on the details of UCC Article 9 at the expense of considering either actual deal documents or the dynamics of the modern lending marketplace, which no longer fits the model of local bank making a Main Street loan. To understand both mega- and middle-market lending, one needs to understand the transactional structure and institutional framework of these financial products.

The typical bankruptcy course touches on these transactions only to the extent necessary to explain bankruptcy law issues, such as the scope of the automatic stay or fraudulent transfers. This book gives these topics much more emphasis. The goal in this regard is to provide students with an introduction to what these products are and how they are shaped by bankruptcy law; this is not a text about financial product regulation. Because these transactions are all shaped by bankruptcy concerns, bankruptcy attorneys are often involved in these transactions, just as they are in out-of-court restructurings. Hopefully students will come away from this book with a sense of the broader world of what bankruptcy attorneys do and what bankruptcy law affects beside Chapter 11 itself.

The third component of bankruptcy realism is teaching the reality of modern business bankruptcy practice. Too often bankruptcy courses present a collection of restructuring principles and theories applied haphazardly to both consumer and business debtors without systematic treatment of bankruptcy practice's non-statutory features that are perhaps more important than statute in shaping restructurings. While there is "one Code to rule them all" the issues, economics, policies, and often statutory provisions involved in consumer bankruptcies are fundamentally different from those involved in business bankruptcies. The combined consumer-business bankruptcy course is the standard offering in American law schools, but I do not think it does a favor to either consumer or business bankruptcy to try to cover both topics in a single course. Both topics are sufficiently rich and complex to merit their own courses.

This book confines itself to business bankruptcies, and it attempts to provide a view of the Chapter 11 process that reflects the realities of modern Chapter 11 reorganizations. This is an aim that is intimately connected with understanding modern financial transactions and the institutional participants therein. Thus, topics such as bankruptcy sales, including sales procedures, valuation issues and methodologies, first-day orders and DIP lending agreements, and claims trading

and responses such as lock-up agreements, are given more extensive and integrated treatment than in existing texts. I have attempted to incorporate excerpts from actual transactional documents as much as possible so that students actually get some experience reading these real documents. Likewise, I have tried to provide more "color" about what is really going on in bankruptcy cases through the use of case studies that position particular bankruptcy issues within larger transactional fights.

It's impossible to cover everything in a casebook of reasonable (or publishable) length, much less in a 3- or 4-credit course. Obviously some things have to get cut. Bankruptcy jurisdiction and international coordination didn't make it. Bankruptcy jurisdiction gets some attention regarding venue and jurisdiction over personal injury and wrongful death claims, but bankruptcy jurisdiction is largely a federal courts topic (although largely ignored by federal courts scholars). Chapter 15 coordination issues are again a set of jurisdictional issues. Executory contracts get shorter shrift than in other texts. They are covered, but I do not believe that a deep dive into the morass of section 365 is worth the coin. Likewise, all the twists and turns of section 547(c) get limited coverage, despite being beloved of law professors for creating exceptions to exceptions, thus providing great exam questions. A final area that gets scant attention are the issues relating to the retention and regulation of bankruptcy professionals. For a practitioner these are quite important, but they are largely quite unrelated to understanding the system of financial restructuring and the transaction structuring that occurs in its shadow.

Adam J. Levitin August 2015 I owe a debt of gratitude to many people for helping see this book to fruition. First, my teachers, without whom I would never have fallen in love with the world of credit and finance: Martin Bienenstock, Richard Levin, Mark Roe, and especially Elizabeth Warren. I was fortunate to have had such an extraordinary and inspirational group of teachers when I was in law school, and know that if I had not been assigned to Elizabeth's 1L Contracts class, my life would have been entirely different. My 1L section assignment is a serendipity I cherish, even if this book eschews of Elizabeth's approach to teaching consumer and business bankruptcy together. I hope she will see my approach as exactly the sort of a challenge a good teacher hopes to encourage in her students.

One of the joys of my job is how I get to keep learning, and colleagues have played no mean part in this. Bill Bratton provided the most generous mentoring to me when I joined Georgetown as a junior professor. Bill was the one who made me first aware of the Trust Indenture Act and its background without which the absolute priority rule never really made sense, and Bill's avuncular wisdom in regarding corporate finance and scholarly and institutional norms was invaluable. I hope I can pass it on. Bob Thompson not only took over Bill's office, but also picked up on all aspects of the mentoring with unmatched patience. He is a treasured colleague, and I am in his debt. David Kuney and Peter Friedman, both part of Georgetown Law's amazing roster of adjunct faculty, provided valuable suggestions, infused with the knowledge gained from practice.

My co-bloggers at Credit Slips, particularly Bob Lawless, John Pottow, and Stephen Lubben, have all been fantastic and good-humored sounding boards on a range of bankruptcy issues, as has Ted Janger, who has engaged me with enthusiasm ever since I was a pup on the academic job market. And my Georgetown colleague and co-blogger Anna Gelpern has been my kindred comrade and friend in the academy ever since we created our very own Frankenstein. As she knows, I'm still working on Marshal Budyonnii.

My colleagues from my brief time in practice at Weil Gotshal, particularly Rachel Erlich Albanese, Ronit Berkovich, Sara Coelho, Harvey Miller, Chris Mirick, and Andrew Troop, have continued to be resources for me, as has Emil Kleinhaus. I am grateful for their time.

Several research assistants have helped along the years in assembling the materials that are now in this book: Ari Dropkin, Robert Enayati, Grant McQueen, Galena Petrova, and Anna Sandor. I am grateful for their hard work, as I am for the help of my faculty assistants Cynthia Rockwell and Roger Bourcicot. Additionally, students at Georgetown and Harvard served as unwilling guinea pigs for draft versions of this book, and their feedback, and, in some cases detailed line edits, helped improve the manuscript.

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My mother and father (z''l), brother and sister, and in-laws have always supported and encouraged my curiosity, even if they might not understand my particular interest in bankruptcy, and that is love.

Finally, the deepest of thanks to my family. This book was written on Sarah, Amalia, and Kalman's dime. You endured my chatter about bankruptcy and finance with generous patience and love, tolerated my eccentricities, and inspired me in my work. You are my happiness and are indubitably without equivalents. A hartsikn dank.

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SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

Contents Preface Acknowledgi	ments	xi xxix xxxiii
	AL RESTRUCTURING AND THE MODERN RCIAL LANDSCAPE	1
CHAPTER 1	Leverage, Liquidity, Restructuring	3
	Priority	25
CHAPTER 3	Modern Commercial Structures I	59
CHAPTER 4	Modern Commercial Structures II	87
CHAPTER 5	Financial Restructuring Outside Bankruptcy I: Fraudulent Transfers	121
CHAPTER 6	Financial Restructuring Outside Bankruptcy II: The Trust Indenture Act	149
CHAPTER 7	Financial Restructuring Outside Bankruptcy III: Exchange Offers	171
CHAPTER 8	Financial Restructuring Outside Bankruptcy IV: Loan Syndications and Participations	191
PART II BANKRU	JPTCY FUNDAMENTALS	213
CHAPTER 9	Filing for Bankruptcy	215
	Property of the Estate	231
CHAPTER 11	The Automatic Stay I	247
CHAPTER 12	The Automatic Stay II	271
CHAPTER 13	Valuation	287
CHAPTER 14	Claims	321
CHAPTER 15	Claim Allowance	343
CHAPTER 16	Secured Status	363
CHAPTER 17	Liquidation	391
PART III BANKRU	UPTCY PLAN CONFIRMATION	407
CHAPTER 18	Consensual Plan Confirmation	409
CHAPTER 19	Plan Voting	441

ix

CHAPTER 20	Impairment and the Right to Vote	475
CHAPTER 21	Solicitation of Votes and Prepackaged Plans	503
CHAPTER 22	Cramdown: Non-Consensual Plan Confirmation	515
CHAPTER 23	Rights of Undersecured Creditors: Section 1111	547
CHAPTER 24	The Absolute Priority Rule	559
CHAPTER 25	Absolute Priority Rule Exceptions	573
CHAPTER 26	Claims Trading	603
CHAPTER 27	Discharge, Third-Party Releases, and Post-Confirmation Matters	635
PART IV OPERATI	NG THE FIRM IN BANKRUPTCY	653
CHAPTER 28	Governance in Bankruptcy I	655
CHAPTER 29	Governance in Bankruptcy II	687
CHAPTER 30	Use and Sale of Estate Property	713
CHAPTER 31	Sales Versus Plans	751
CHAPTER 32	Financing in Bankruptcy and First-Day Orders	769
CHAPTER 33	Executory Contracts and Unexpired Leases	811
CHAPTER 34	Labor and Pension Issues and Ipso Facto Clauses	837
PART V RESHAP	ING THE BANKRUPTCY ESTATE	847
CHAPTER 35	Avoidance Powers I: Strong-Arm, Statutory Liens, Setoff, and Recoupment	849
CHAPTER 36	Avoidance Powers II: Voidable Preferences	871
CHAPTER 37	Avoidance Powers III: Fraudulent Transfers	899
CHAPTER 38	Equitable Remedies I	939
CHAPTER 39	Equitable Remedies II	957
CHAPTER 40	Contracting Around Bankruptcy	999
Table of Cas	es	1031

CONTENTS

Preface Acknowledgments	xxix xxxiii
PART I FINANCIAL RESTRUCTURING AND THE MODERN COMMERCIAL LANDSCAPE	. 1
CHAPTER 1 Leverage, Liquidity, Restructuring	3
I. Debt	3
II. Financial Restructuring Through Bankruptcy	4
Levitin, Bankrupt Politics and the Politics of Bankruptcy	7
III. Why Bankruptcy?	8
A. Addressing Collective Action Problems	8
B. Preserving Going-Concern Value	8
C. Fresh Start and Debt Overhang	9
D. Social Insurance	9
E. Reducing the Cost of Capital	10
Problem Set 1.1: Going-Concern Value	10
IV. Case Study: The Chrysler Restructuring	11
A. The Leadup to Bankruptcy	11
B. The Bankruptcy	14
Indiana State Pension Trust v. Chrysler LLC	15
Problem Set 1.2: Chrysler Questions	19
C. Chrysler Dénouement	19
CHAPTER 2 Priority	25
I. Acceleration	26
Sahadi v. Continental Illinois National Bank & Trust Co.	27
II. Security Interests	30
A. Unsecured Creditors	30
B. Secured Creditors	32
C. Foreclosure Sales	33
Problem Set 2.1: Foreclosure Sale Priority	35
D. Security Interest Operation and Terminology	36
III. Negative Pledges	38
IV. Contractual Subordination	39
A. The Legal Status of Subordination Agreements	39
B. Subordination of Payment vs. Subordination of Lien	40 43
Chemical Bank v. First Trust, N.A. (In re Southeast Banking Corp.)	43

	Structural Priority	46
VI.	Guaranties	48
	A. Standby Letters of Credit	50
	B. Guaranties Within the Corporate Family	50
	Problem Set 2.2: Priority and Collections	53
	APTER 3	
Mo	odern Commercial Structures I	59
I.	Equity	59
II.	Non-Financial Creditors	60
III.	Financial Creditors	61
	A. Simple Bank Loans	61
	B. Debt Securities	61
	Sunstone Hotel Partnership Indenture	64
	C. Syndicated and Participated Loans	71
	Widen, Lord of the Liens: Toward Greater Efficiency in Secured Lending	72
	1. Syndications vs. Participations: Definitional Issues	73
	2. Syndications	74
	Standard & Poor's, A Guide to the Loan Market	75
	UniCredito Italiano SPA v. JPMorgan Chase Bank	76
	3. Participations	81
	4. Modern Syndicated Commercial Loan Structures	82
	5. Second Lien Loans and Intercreditor Agreements	84
	Problem Set 3	85
СН	APTER 4	
M	odern Commercial Structures II	87
I.	Securitization	87
	A. The Securitization Transaction	88
	B. Management of Securitized Assets	91
	Calyon New York Branch v. American Home Mortgage Corp.	92
	C. Credit Enhancements	93
	D. Resecuritization and CLOs	93
	E. The Effect of Securitization on Investors	94
	In re Innkeepers USA Trust	94
II.		97
	A. Forward Contracts and Futures Contracts	97
	B. Repos	99
	Calyon New York Branch v. American Home Mortgage Corp.	100
	C. Swaps	103
	D. Credit-Linked Notes	107
	E. Master Netting Agreements	109
	F. International Swaps and Derivatives Association Documentation	109
	ISDA 2002 Master Agreement Excerpt	110
	Problem Set 4	117

Fin	PTER 5 ancial Restructuring Outside Bankruptcy I: Fraudulent nsfers	121
I.	Workouts	121
П.	Fraudulent Transfer Law	125
	Twyne's Case	125
	Study Questions	127
	A. Actual Fraudulent Transfers	127
	Uniform Fraudulent Transfer Act, Section 4	128
	Uniform Fraudulent Transfer Act, Section 1	129
	B. Constructive Fraudulent Transfers	130
	Uniform Fraudulent Transfer Act, Section 4	131
	Uniform Fraudulent Transfer Act, Section 5	131
	Uniform Fraudulent Transfer Act, Section 3	133
	Uniform Fraudulent Transfer Act, Section 1	133
	Uniform Fraudulent Transfer Act, Section 2	134
	Allstate Insurance Co. v. Countrywide Financial Corp.	134
	C. Liability for and Defenses to Fraudulent Transfers	142
	Uniform Fraudulent Transfer Act, Section 7	143
	Uniform Fraudulent Transfer Act, Section 8	143
	Uniform Fraudulent Transfer Act, Section 8	145
	Problem Set 5	145
Fin	ancial Restructuring Outside Bankruptcy II: e Trust Indenture Act	149
I.	Coordination and Legal Problems by Type of Debt	149
	A. Trade Creditors	149
	B. Employees	149
	C. Tax Authorities	150
	D. Tort Debt	150
	E. Leases	150
II.	Bond Debt and the Trust Indenture Act	151
	A. Bond, Debentures, Indentures, and Trustees	151
	B. The Trust Indenture Act of 1939	152
	Trust Indenture Act of 1939, Section 302	152
	Trust Indenture Act of 1939, Section 303	154
	Trust Indenture Act of 1939, Section 316	155
	Sunstone Hotel Partnership Indenture	156
	Aladdin Hotel Co. v. Bloom	157
	Study Questions	161
	Meehancombs Global Credit Opportunities Funds, LP v. Caesars Entertainment Corp.	161
	C. No-Action Clauses	166
	Meehancombs Global Credit Opportunities Funds, LP v. Caesars	100
	Entertainment Corp.	166
	Problem Set 6	168

Fin	ancial Restructuring Outside Bankruptcy III: change Offers	171
II. III.	Consent Solicitations Exchange Offers Exit Consents Moise Katz v. Oak Industries, Inc. Assénagon Asset Management SA v. Irish Bank Resolution Corporation Ltd. (formerly Anglo Irish Bank Corp. Ltd.) Problem Set 7	171 171 172 174 180 188
Fin	APTER 8 lancial Restructuring Outside Bankruptcy IV: an Syndications and Participations	191
	Restructuring Loan Syndications and Participations A. Authority of the Agent Bank Sample Syndicated Loan Agreement Excerpts B. Individual Rights of Action In re Chrysler LLC C. Holdouts Sample Syndicated Loan Agreement Excerpts D. Securitization and CLOs E. Second Lien Loans and Intercreditor Agreements In re Boston Generating, LLC	191 191 193 193 196 197 200 201 201
	The Shadow of Bankruptcy Problem Set 8 Liquidations Outside of Bankruptcy A. Foreclosure B. Receivership	205 206 208 208 209
	C. Assignments for the Benefit of Creditors RT II NKRUPTCY FUNDAMENTALS	211
CH	APTER 9 ing for Bankruptcy	215
I.	Filing for Bankruptcy A. Voluntary Bankruptcy Filings 11 U.S.C. § 301. Voluntary Cases B. Involuntary Bankruptcy Filings 11 U.S.C. § 303. Involuntary Cases	215 215 215 216 217
II.	Eligibility to File for Bankruptcy 11 U.S.C. § 109. Who May Be a Debtor Good Faith In re SGL Carbon Corp. Solow v. PPI Enterprises (U.S.), Inc. (In re PPI Enterprises (U.S.), Inc.)	219 219 220 220 223
	Study Notes and Question	225