

***PART I***  
***CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE FIELD***

**INTRODUCTION**

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The Special Issue begins with two comments on the field of research. In the first comment, Lawrence Friedman draws our attention to the progress of the field by describing what has been learned through longitudinal research on trial courts. In the second, Joseph Sanders offers constructive criticism of the theory underlying longitudinal trial court studies, suggesting that research tap a different level of theory, which he describes.

Friedman reviews what studies of courts over time has revealed about the relationship between courts, litigation, and change. Friedman shows that the field has made a substantial contribution to our understanding of important changes that are occurring in the relationship between law and society, changes that would appear less significant, or that would have been missed altogether without longitudinal research on trial courts.

Many criticisms of longitudinal research on trial courts have been published previously, and are referred to in the introduction. Few of those criticisms have given sufficient attention to the problem of formulating appropriate questions for new research. Sanders provides insightful criticism, focusing on the inappropriateness of the level of theory employed. At the same time, he offers a specific suggestion about a route out of the dilemma, and in developing this point he breaks new ground. While his suggestions in this regard are supplemented by those of others in subsequent essays, these comments set the stage for the constructive criticism and new theoretical departures offered in this Special Issue.

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