The Irrepressible Myth of *Celotex*: 
Reconsidering Summary Judgment 
Burdens Twenty Years 
After the Trilogy

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1. Introduction

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of three important cases on federal summary judgment. Known as the "trilogy," Matsushita Elec. Indus. Co. v. Zenith Radio Corp., Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., and Celotex Corp. v. Catrett have had a profound impact on federal litigation. Federal courts have cited these three cases more than any other U.S. Supreme Court decisions. Collectively, the trilogy is viewed as a "celebration of

1. *E.g.,* Ann C. McGinley, *Credulous Courts and the Tortured Trilogy: The Improper Use of Summary Judgment in Title VII and ADEA Cases, 34 B.C. L. REV. 203, 206 (1993) (asserting that these three cases "changed the manner in which courts approach summary judgment").


5. See infra notes 24–27 and accompanying text (discussing the frequency with which federal courts cite the trilogy cases). If citations by both state and federal courts are counted,
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summary judgment" and a mandate for federal courts to embrace the use of summary judgment to dispose of cases before trial. Among the trilogy, Celotex is widely perceived as the most significant. Martin Redish recently wrote "[o]f the three, Celotex most clearly altered well-established summary judgment practice, and in any event, Celotex, far more than the others, decisively opened the eyes of the federal courts to the propriety of summary judgment in certain cases."

Celotex dealt with the most common summary judgment scenario: when the defendant moves for summary judgment, seeking to win the case without having to endure a potentially costly and risky trial. Celotex’s immediate impact was to expand the availability of summary judgment as a means for disposing of a plaintiff’s claims prior to trial. In particular, Celotex recognized that a defendant could obtain summary judgment not only by putting forth affirmative evidence that the plaintiff’s case was meritless, but also by showing that the plaintiff would lack evidence to prove some essential element of her claim. Celotex also spoke more generally to how burdens are allocated between the party seeking and the party opposing summary judgment and what materials may be considered in connection with these burdens. To this day, Celotex provides the Court’s most current instructions on these important questions.


7. See Celotex, 477 U.S. at 327 ("Summary judgment procedure is properly regarded not as a disfavored procedural shortcut, but rather as an integral part of the Federal Rules as a whole, which are designed "to secure the just, speedy and inexpensive determination of every action.""

8. See infra notes 109–13 and accompanying text (providing an in-depth discussion of then-Associate Justice Rehnquist’s majority opinion in Celotex).

10. See infra notes 123–30 and accompanying text (summarizing the main principles derived from Celotex).
Anniversaries are times for reflection.\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Celotex} is a significant decision from both theoretical and practical standpoints. It impacts core questions of procedural fairness,\textsuperscript{12} the proper roles of judges and juries in the federal system,\textsuperscript{13} the increasing caseloads of the federal judiciary,\textsuperscript{14} and distributive justice in the federal court system.\textsuperscript{15} It also provides the blueprint for the basic mechanics of litigating and adjudicating summary judgment motions.\textsuperscript{16} Over the past two decades, \textit{Celotex} has become the subject of sustained academic commentary,\textsuperscript{17} as well as a vital part of any first-year civil

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\textsuperscript{12} See Arthur R. Miller, The Pretrial Rush to Judgment: Are the "Litigation Explosion," "Liability Crisis," and Efficiency Clichés Eroding Our Day in Court and Jury Trial Commitments?, 78 N.Y.U. L. Rev. 982, 1044–48 (2003) (questioning whether the increased use of summary judgment following \textit{Celotex} and the trilogy is worth "negative effects on other system values, such as accuracy, fairness, the day-in-court principle, and the jury trial right").
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\textsuperscript{13} See id. at 1074–77 (exploring the impact of Rule 56 on the jury trial guarantee); Jeffrey W. Stempel, A Distorted Mirror: The Supreme Court’s Shimmering View of Summary Judgment, Directed Verdicts, and the Adjudication Process, 49 Ohio St. L.J. 95, 162–70 (1988) (explaining the change in the role and authority of the civil jury).
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\textsuperscript{14} See Kent Sinclair & Patrick Hanes, Summary Judgment: A Proposal for Procedural Reform in the Core Motion Context, 36 WM. & MARY L. Rev. 1633, 1656–59 (1993) (discussing federal summary judgment and arguing that \textit{Celotex} was "an effort by a majority of the Court to encourage active policing of the docket").
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\textsuperscript{15} See Samuel Issacharoff & George Loewenstein, Second Thoughts About Summary Judgment, 100 Yale L.J. 73, 75 (1990) (noting that the trilogy’s effect on summary judgment practice "results in a wealth transfer from plaintiffs as a class to defendants as a class").
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\textsuperscript{16} See infra notes 123–30 and accompanying text (summarizing the main principles derived from \textit{Celotex}).
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procedure course or federal courts treatise. While Celotex is a necessary authority and indispensable guide for the judges who must resolve summary judgment motions on a day-to-day basis, it remains the subject of conflicting interpretations by federal trial and appellate courts.

The twentieth anniversary of the trilogy provides an important opportunity to reconsider Celotex and its impact on summary judgment burdens. The recent passing of Chief Justice William Rehnquist, who authored the Celotex majority opinion as an Associate Justice, makes this a particularly appropriate time to revisit Celotex. If the empirical evidence is any indication, history will recognize Celotex as among his most significant contributions. Like many watershed cases, Celotex raised questions as well as answered them. Although Celotex appeared to establish an orderly sequence of burdens for the moving defendant and the nonmoving plaintiff, it left numerous ambiguities concerning the precise contours of these burdens and what materials may be used to satisfy them. These unanswered questions have given rise to competing myths about Celotex and summary judgment burdens. The justifications offered for the prevailing myths are principally each proponent’s policy preferences about how summary judgment procedure ought to operate in the federal system.

This Article treats Celotex not as an empty vessel for achieving optimal policy but rather as an object of interpretation. Thus, it takes a more traditional approach—long overdue in this area—that emphasizes what we customarily value when interpreting a decision. Specifically, this Article seeks an interpretation of Celotex that is consistent with prior cases, consistent with the governing textual sources, and coherent in light of its own factual and procedural posture. These values may seem simple, but taking them seriously points toward a fresh approach to summary judgment burdens that is a better reading of Celotex as a matter of case-interpretation.

By contrast, the prevailing myths of Celotex are not true to these interpretive values. They assume that Celotex intended to silently contradict


20. See infra notes 252–64 and accompanying text (discussing the lower courts’ conflicting interpretations of both defendants’ and plaintiffs’ burdens under Celotex).

21. See infra notes 34–39 and accompanying text (establishing Celotex as one of Chief Justice Rehnquist’s most significant contributions).
what the Supreme Court held sixteen years earlier in Adickes v. S. H. Kress & Co. Or they suffer from glaring inconsistencies with Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 56, the textual authority for summary judgment in the federal system. Or they proffer readings of Celotex that make little sense given the actual posture of that case. This Article provides—for the first time—an interpretation of Celotex that is consistent with prior case law, including Adickes, and with the text of Rule 56. My view also renders the majority opinion a coherent whole that fits with the case’s factual and procedural posture.

Part II of this Article examines the staggering empirical evidence of the summary judgment trilogy’s influence and argues that Celotex is an important part of Chief Justice Rehnquist’s judicial legacy. Part III describes the history of summary judgment prior to Celotex. Part IV details the Celotex case in both the lower courts and the Supreme Court. In addition to summarizing the Supreme Court’s instructions on summary judgment burdens, this Part identifies important issues that the Celotex majority failed to clarify.

Part V undertakes both a descriptive account and normative critique of the myths surrounding the Celotex decision. It first articulates three interpretive values: (1) consistency with prior cases; (2) consistency with the text of the governing statutes or rules; and (3) internal coherence with the decision itself and the case’s factual and procedural posture. This Part then summarizes and evaluates the current understandings of Celotex, and describes the conflict in the lower federal courts about what Celotex requires of litigants. Part VI proposes a new approach to Celotex that is consistent with past precedent, fits with the text of Rule 56, and makes sense in light of the factual and procedural posture of Celotex when it reached the Supreme Court. This Part also explains how this approach would achieve a reasonable middle ground between the two most common myths of Celotex and would resolve a long-standing misperception about the relationship between the Celotex majority opinion and the concurrence by Justice White. Finally, this Part responds to some likely critiques of the approach I propose.

II. An Empirical Tribute to the 1986 Trilogy

One measure of a decision’s impact and influence is the frequency with which other courts cite it. The empirical evidence of the trilogy’s impact is

impressive indeed. Federal courts cite Matsushita, Anderson, and Celotex more than any decisions ever issued by a federal tribunal.\textsuperscript{24} Anderson and Celotex are by far the top-two cases in terms of federal court citations, each with over 70,000.\textsuperscript{25} Matsushita, cited by over 31,000 federal opinions, is an admittedly distant third, but it is still more than 3000 citations ahead of Conley v. Gibson,\textsuperscript{26} the case with the fourth-highest number of federal court citations.\textsuperscript{27}

Measuring citations by all courts, state and federal, Anderson and Celotex are still the two most frequently cited Supreme Court cases, again by a staggering margin.\textsuperscript{28} Anderson and Celotex each have over 72,000 citations by federal and state courts.\textsuperscript{29} This places them more than 20,000 citations ahead of Strickland v. Washington,\textsuperscript{30} the third-most-cited case.\textsuperscript{31} Matsushita is the sixth-most-cited case with over 32,000 citations by state and federal courts, more than 2000 citations ahead of Anders v. California,\textsuperscript{32} the seventh-most-cited case.\textsuperscript{33}

The empirical data also tell us something quite surprising about the legacy of Chief Justice William Rehnquist. Most posit that Rehnquist’s greatest

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M. Landes et al., Judicial Influence: A Citation Analysis of Federal Courts of Appeals Judges, 27 J. LEGAL STUD. 271, 271 (1998) (using the number of citations to published opinions to measure the influence of individual judges); William M. Landes & Richard A. Posner, Legal Precedent: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, 19 J.L. & ECON. 249, 250 (1976) ("Where, however, the rule has been solidified in a long line of decisions, the authority of the rule is enhanced."); see also Michael E. Solimine, Judicial Stratification and the Reputations of the United States Courts of Appeals, 32 FLA. ST. U. L. REV. 1331, 1332 n.7 (2005) (noting that \"[v]arious types of citation analysis have been used for decades in the legal community to gauge the impact of books, law review articles, court decisions, or judges, among other things\")
\textsuperscript{24} See infra app. tbl.1 (ranking cases in terms of most citations by federal courts and tribunals). The citation counts described in this Part and in the appendix are based on the Shepard’s citation service.
\textsuperscript{25} Id.
\textsuperscript{26} Conley v. Gibson, 355 U.S. 41 (1957).
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Infra} app. tbl.1.
\textsuperscript{28} See id. tbl.2 (ranking cases in terms of most citations by all courts and tribunals).
\textsuperscript{29} Id. It is interesting that Anderson and Celotex, which address a Federal Rule of Civil Procedure, have so many citations by state courts. One state’s highest court explained: "[W]e are not bound to apply the summary judgment standard articulated by the United States Supreme Court in Celotex. However, we think it makes eminent good sense to do so." Kourouvacilis v. Gen. Motors Corp., 575 N.E.2d 734, 738 (Mass. 1991) (citations omitted); see also \textit{Michael E. Solimine, Anderson’s Ohio Civil Practice § 171.08 (2003) (noting that the Ohio Supreme Court explicitly adopted the U.S. Supreme Court’s Celotex standards)}.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Infra} app. tbl.2.
\textsuperscript{32} Anders v. California, 386 U.S. 738 (1967).
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Infra} app. tbl.2.
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legacy will be his decisions on federalism. But the empirical evidence indicates that his most influential contribution during a tenure on the Court spanning four decades is his majority opinion in Celotex. Cases that are typically considered Justice Rehnquist's influential federalism decisions—for example, United States v. Lopez, Seminole Tribe of Florida v. Florida, and United States v. Morrison—each have considerably fewer than 2000 citations by federal and state courts. While Celotex may have enjoyed a chronological head-start, a 70,000-citation deficit will be hard to overcome. The data confirm that any assessment of Chief Justice Rehnquist's judicial legacy must consider seriously the profound impact of his Celotex decision on civil litigation.

III. A Brief History of Summary Judgment

Prior to the 1938 adoption of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, a number of states, as well as England and some British colonies, had adopted summary judgment procedures. England introduced summary judgment in 1855. At the time, England authorized summary judgment only for claims on bills of exchange and promissory notes. Only a plaintiff could seek summary judgment, as the drafters intended for the procedure to weed out "frivolous or fictitious Defences." In the United States, several states adopted summary judgment procedures in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century,

34. See, e.g., Richard W. Garnett, The New Federalism, the Spending Power, and Federal Criminal Law, 89 CORNELL L. REV. 1, 11–13 & n.58 (2003) ("[I]t is a hallmark—and perhaps the legacy—of the Rehnquist Court to have brought back to the public law table the notion that the Constitution is a charter for a government of limited and enumerated powers.").
38. Chief Justice Rehnquist's second-most cited opinion, in all courts and tribunals, is Illinois v. Gates, 462 U.S. 213 (1983), which ranks thirty-fifth overall with approximately 9000 citations. infra app. tbl.2. Gates is a Fourth Amendment case concerning the exclusionary rule and the use of confidential informants to obtain a search warrant. Gates, 462 U.S. at 216.
39. Justice Rehnquist's majority decision in Celotex is described infra notes 109–30 and accompanying text.
40. See Charles E. Clark & Charles U. Samenow, The Summary Judgment, 38 YALE L.J. 423, 423 (1929) (listing jurisdictions that had developed summary judgment procedures by the time the Article was written). See generally id. (providing a history of summary judgment); Robert W. Millar, Three American Ventures in Summary Civil Procedure, 38 YALE L.J. 193 (1928) (same).
41. Clark & Samenow, supra note 40, at 424.
42. Id.
43. Id.
including Connecticut, Delaware, New Jersey, Illinois, Michigan and New York.\footnote{Id. at 423.} As in England, only plaintiffs could seek summary judgment, and then only as to particular enumerated claims.\footnote{E.g., id. at 440–41 (quoting nine types of actions for which summary judgment could be sought under \textit{CONN. RULE OF CIVIL PRACTICE} § 14(A)(1) as of 1929). As compared to other summary judgment procedures at the time, Connecticut's was described as "most extensive" in terms of the types of actions for which it was available. \textit{Id.} at 423.}

\textbf{A. The Federal Rules of Civil Procedure}

In 1938, the Supreme Court adopted the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure pursuant to the Rules Enabling Act.\footnote{See \textit{Weinstein, supra} note 11, at 1901 & nn. 1–3 (discussing the history of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure).} Rule 56 authorized either a plaintiff or a defendant to seek summary judgment.\footnote{\textit{FED. R. CIV. P.} 56(a)–(b).} The text of Rule 56 has remained remarkably constant since its initial promulgation. Then, as now, Rule 56(c) set forth the general standard for granting summary judgment motions:

The judgment sought shall be rendered forthwith if the pleadings, depositions, answers to interrogatories, and admissions on file, together with the affidavits, if any, show that there is no genuine issue as to any material fact and that the moving party is entitled to a judgment as a matter of law.\footnote{\textit{FED. R. CIV. P.} 56(c). The quoted material includes the one change that has been made to this language since its initial promulgation in 1938. The reference to "answers to interrogatories" was added by a 1963 amendment. \textit{FED. R. CIV. P.} 56 advisory committee's note (1963 amendment). The advisory committee explained that this phrase had been "inadvertently omitted" from the rule as initially drafted. \textit{Id.}}

The text of Rule 56(c) provided no further guidance on how courts should assess whether the documents listed "show that there is no genuine issue [of] material fact." It thus relied on the courts to develop the details and analytical structure for adjudicating summary judgment motions.

Rule 56 did, however, impose specific requirements for any affidavits used to support or oppose summary judgment. Rule 56(c) provided:

Supporting and opposing affidavits shall be made on personal knowledge, shall set forth such facts as would be admissible in evidence, and shall show affirmatively that the affiant is competent to testify to the matters stated
Rule 56 did not impose corresponding standards for the other documents listed in Rule 56(c)—pleadings, depositions, answers to interrogatories, and admissions—perhaps because the standards governing these materials were addressed elsewhere in the Federal Rules. In certain circumstances, even where the standard for summary judgment was otherwise met, Rule 56 gave the court discretion to relax Rule 56(c)'s mandate that summary judgment "shall be rendered forthwith." Rule 56(f) provided:

Should it appear from the affidavits of a party opposing the motion that the party cannot for reasons stated present by affidavit facts essential to justify the party's opposition, the court may refuse the application for judgment or may order a continuance to permit affidavits to be obtained or depositions to be taken or discovery to be had or may make such other order as is just.\(^{50}\)

A plaintiff typically uses Rule 56(f) when she is depending on the discovery process to uncover evidence to support her allegations. If the defendant moves for summary judgment before the plaintiff has had an opportunity to conduct discovery, she may invoke Rule 56(f).

**B. The 1963 Amendment to Rule 56(e)**

In 1963, Rule 56(e) was amended in response to a series of cases that, according to the Advisory Committee, had "impaired the utility of the summary judgment device."\(^{51}\) The Committee was concerned with the scenario where a party supported its motion for summary judgment with affidavits that, if accepted as true, would establish facts warranting judgment in its favor but the opposing party presented no evidentiary material sufficient to refute the movant's affidavits.\(^{52}\) A number of Third Circuit cases took the position that courts should not grant summary judgment in that situation as long as factual allegations contained in the nonmovant's pleadings refuted the movant's affidavits.\(^{53}\)

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52.  *See id.* (explaining the reason for the amendment).
The Advisory Committee found the Third Circuit’s approach "incompatible with the basic purpose" of summary judgment.²⁴ It explained that "[t]he very mission of the summary judgment procedure is to pierce the pleadings and to assess the proof in order to see whether there is a genuine need for trial."²⁵ In order to "overcome" this line of cases,²⁶ the following language was added to Rule 56(e):

When a motion for summary judgment is made and supported as provided in this rule, an adverse party may not rest upon the mere allegations or denials of the adverse party’s pleading, but the adverse party’s response, by affidavits or as otherwise provided in this rule, must set forth specific facts showing that there is a genuine issue for trial. If the adverse party does not so respond, summary judgment, if appropriate, shall be entered against the adverse party.²⁷

By preventing the nonmoving party from opposing a properly supported summary judgment motion with "mere allegations or denials" in its pleading, the 1963 amendment confirmed that a critical function of summary judgment was to look beyond the parties’ allegations to the question of whether there would be evidence to support those allegations. The amendment "recognize[d] that, despite the best efforts of counsel to make his pleadings accurate, they may be overwhelmingly contradicted by the proof available to his adversary."²⁸

C. The Adickes Case

One of the most significant pre-trilogy summary judgment cases was Adickes v. S. H. Kress & Co.²⁹ In 1964, Sandra Adickes taught at a "Freedom School" in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.³⁰ Adickes, who was white, and six of her black students went to have lunch at a store operated by S. H. Kress &

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²⁴ FED. R. CIV. P. 56 advisory committee’s note (1963 amendment).
²⁵ Id.
²⁶ Id.
²⁷ FED. R. CIV. P. 56(e).
²⁸ FED. R. CIV. P. 56 advisory committee’s note (1963 amendment).
³⁰ Id. at 146–47.
Co. The store refused to serve her, and Hattiesburg police arrested her for vagrancy after she left.

Adickes sued Kress under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, alleging that Kress’s refusal to serve her violated the Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause. In order to prevail on this claim, Adickes had to show that Kress acted "under color of law." On this issue, Adickes presented two theories. She first contended that Kress refused her service because of a "custom of the community to segregate the races in public eating places." This theory went to trial, where the district court directed a verdict for Kress. The Supreme Court ultimately reversed this directed verdict, ordering a new trial on Adickes’s "custom of the community" claim.

Adickes’s second contention—the one more significant in terms of summary judgment—was that the refusal to serve her was the result of a conspiracy between Kress and the Hattiesburg police. On this claim, the district court granted summary judgment for Kress. In support of its motion, Kress had submitted the following documents: (a) deposition testimony from Mr. Powell, the store’s manager, stating that he had not communicated with the police about refusing service to Adickes; (b) affidavits from the chief of police and the two arresting officers stating that Mr. Powell had not asked them to arrest Adickes; and (c) deposition testimony from Adickes, stating that she did not know of any communication between any Kress employee and the Hattiesburg police. In opposing the motion for summary judgment, Adickes had relied on (a) her own deposition testimony that Carolyn Moncure, one of her students, had seen a policeman come into the store; and (b) an unserved statement by Irene Sullivan, a Kress employee, stating that she had seen a policeman enter the store while Adickes and her students were there.

The Supreme Court reversed the grant of summary judgment, stating that Kress "failed to carry its burden of showing the absence of any genuine issue of

61. Id.
62. Id. at 146.
63. Id. at 147.
64. Id. at 150–52.
65. Id. at 147.
66. Id. at 147–48.
67. Id. at 148, 174.
68. Id. at 148.
69. Id.
70. Id. at 153–55 & nn.8–12.
71. Id. at 156–57 & nn.13–14.
fact."72 The Court reasoned that "[Kress] did not carry its burden because of its failure to foreclose the possibility that there was a policeman in the Kress store while petitioner was awaiting service, and that this policeman reached an understanding with some Kress employee that petitioner not be served."73 As the Court explained, Mr. Powell's testimony that he had not communicated with a police officer about refusing to serve Adickes did not foreclose the possibility that another Kress employee had done so.74 And the affidavits from the police officers, which had addressed only the arrest, not the refusal to serve, did not foreclose the possibility that either of them had been in the store and had communicated with a Kress employee in a way that influenced the decision not to serve Adickes.75 The Court concluded:

[Kress] failed to fulfill its initial burden of demonstrating what is a critical element in this aspect of the case—that there was no policeman in the store. If a policeman were present, we think it would be open to a jury, in light of the sequence that followed, to infer from the circumstances that the policeman and a Kress employee had a "meeting of the minds" and thus reached an understanding that petitioner should be refused service.76

The Court acknowledged that there were problems with the documents Adickes had submitted in opposition to Kress's motion. Adickes's deposition testimony that her student Carolyn Moncure had seen a police officer in the store was hearsay, and the unsworn statement of Irene Sullivan did not comply with Rule 56(e)'s requirements for affidavits.77 Rule 56(c), however, required the party moving for summary judgment "to show initially the absence of a genuine issue concerning any material fact."78 Because Kress had failed to meet this initial burden, there was no need for Adickes "to come forward with suitable opposing affidavits."79 Nonetheless, the Court stated in dicta that if Kress had met its initial burden, such as by "submitting affidavits from the policemen denying their presence in the store," Adickes "would have had to come forward with either (1) the affidavit of someone who saw the policeman in the store or (2) an affidavit under Rule 56(f) explaining why at that time it was impractical to do so."80

72. Id. at 153.
73. Id. at 157.
74. Id. at 157–58.
75. Id. at 155 n.12, 158.
76. Id. at 158.
77. Id. at 159 n.19.
78. Id. at 159.
79. Id. at 160.
80. Id.
The most significant aspect of Adickes for summary judgment burdens was the conclusion that Kress had failed to meet its burden because its supporting documents did not "foreclose the possibility" of a conspiracy between Kress and the police. If the existence of a conspiracy was "X," the Adickes Court held that Kress was required to produce affirmative evidence showing "not-X" (that is, that "X" is false). Only then would Adickes have had to come forward with evidence of a genuine issue regarding the relevant fact.

D. Celotex’s Trilogy Companions: Matsushita and Anderson

Matsushita, decided in March of 1986, involved an antitrust claim against Japanese television manufacturers. The plaintiffs alleged that the defendants had conspired to sell televisions to the United States at artificially low prices in order to force American manufacturers out of the market. In concluding that the lower court should have granted summary judgment in favor of the defendants, the Supreme Court stated: "When the moving party has carried its burden under Rule 56(c), its opponent must do more than simply show that there is some metaphysical doubt as to the material facts." Furthermore, "if the factual context renders [plaintiffs'] claim implausible . . . [plaintiffs] must come forward with more persuasive evidence to support their claim than would otherwise be necessary."

The Court decided Anderson on June 25, 1986, the same day as Celotex. The defendant in Anderson moved for summary judgment on the plaintiff’s defamation claim, arguing that it had not acted with "actual malice" as required for defamation claims by public figures. Because a plaintiff must establish actual malice by "clear and convincing" evidence, Anderson raised the narrow issue of the proper approach to summary judgment motions when the dispositive issue is subject to a heightened standard of proof. Nonetheless,

81. Cf. Shapiro, supra note 17, at 367 (using "X" and "not-X" terminology to illustrate basic summary judgment mechanics).
83. Id. at 578.
84. Id. at 586 (footnote omitted).
85. Id. at 587.
87. Id. at 245.
88. Id. at 247.
the Court made several important statements about summary judgment generally. In particular, Anderson stated that the summary judgment standard "mirrors the standard for a directed verdict" and thus depends on whether "there is sufficient evidence favoring the nonmoving party for a jury to return a verdict for that party." Anderson also instructed that courts may grant summary judgment when the evidence supporting the plaintiff's claim "is merely colorable or is not significantly probative."

Matsushita and Anderson helped to illuminate the general concept of what a "genuine issue" is for the purpose of Rule 56, with Anderson explicitly linking the "genuine issue" standard to the standard for a directed verdict at trial. However, Matsushita and Anderson provided little guidance on the details of each party's summary judgment burden. That guidance was left to the Court's Celotex decision.

IV. Celotex and Summary Judgment Burdens

Myrtle Catrett sued Celotex Corporation and several other defendants in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia for the wrongful death of her husband, Louis Catrett. Catrett alleged that her husband had died due to exposure to Celotex's asbestos products. During discovery, Celotex served

89. Id. at 250.
90. Id. at 249.
91. Id. at 249–50 (citation omitted).
92. As to these issues, the holdings of Matsushita and Anderson were arguably no different than what the Supreme Court had said in prior cases. See Mullenix, supra note 7, at 456–57 & nn.130–32 (stating that Matsushita's "articulation of summary judgment principles largely coincided with existing precedent" and that Matsushita "rel[ied] heavily" on First National Bank of Arizona v. Cities Service Co., 391 U.S. 253 (1968), and Monsanto Co. v. Spray-Rite Service Corp., 465 U.S. 752 (1984)); D. Michael Risinger, Another Step in the Counter-Revolution: A Summary Judgment on the Supreme Court's New Approach to Summary Judgment, 54 B . R E V . 35, 36 & n.9 (1988) ("The application of directed verdict sufficiency standards to summary judgment in [Anderson v.] Liberty Lobby was hardly a radical idea." (citing Sartor v. Ark. Gas Corp., 321 U.S. 620 (1944))).
93. In both cases, the Court assumed without deciding that the moving defendants had met their burdens under Rule 56. Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., 477 U.S. 242, 250 n.4 (1986); Matsushita Elec. Indus. Co. v. Zenith Radio Corp., 475 U.S. 586 n.10 (1986). In Anderson, the Court simply remanded so the lower court could apply the "correct standard." Anderson, 477 U.S. at 257. In Matsushita, the Court concluded that the materials on which the plaintiff relied in their argument to the Supreme Court would be insufficient to create a genuine issue of material fact, but it allowed the lower courts to consider whether other evidence existed that would be sufficient. Matsushita, 475 U.S. at 597–98.
interrogatories on Catrett asking her, among other things, for an identification
of potential witnesses supporting her claim and for detailed information about
any work Mr. Catrett did with asbestos.95 Catrett’s answers to these
interrogatories failed to identify any such witnesses or information, stating that
she would respond later with supplemental answers.96

In September 1981, Celotex filed a motion for summary judgment
contending that there was no evidence that Mr. Catrett had been exposed to any
Celotex asbestos product.97 Celotex withdrew this motion six weeks later but
then filed a second summary judgment motion in December 1981.98 This
motion asserted that the court should grant summary judgment because Catrett
had "failed to produce evidence that any [Celotex] product . . . was the
proximate cause of the injuries alleged within the jurisdictional limits of [the
District] Court."99 At the time of his alleged exposure, Mr. Catrett had
apparently worked not in the District of Columbia, but in Illinois, for a
company called Anning & Johnson.100

In opposing the summary judgment motion, Catrett relied on three
documents: (a) a letter from William O’Keefe of Aetna Casualty & Surety,
Anning & Johnson’s insurer, stating that Anning & Johnson had acquired
asbestos from a company that Celotex later purchased; (b) a letter from T.R.
Hoff, Anning & Johnson’s assistant secretary, describing Mr. Catrett’s duties
there and stating that Anning & Johnson had purchased an asbestos product
from a company Celotex now owned; and (c) deposition testimony by Mr.
Catrett in an earlier workers’ compensation proceeding stating that his duties
with Anning & Johnson involved direct contact with asbestos products.101

95. See Catrett v. Johns-Manville Sales Corp. (Catrett I), 826 F.2d 33, 34 (D.C. Cir.
1987) (reviewing Celotex’s interrogatories and Catrett’s responses), on remand from Celotex
Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317 (1986). One interrogatory asked Mrs. Catrett to identify “persons
having knowledge of facts relevant to the subject matter in this lawsuit” and to indicate whom
she planned “to produce as witnesses in the trial in this action.” Id. (quoting interrogatory
number 26). Other interrogatories asked for information concerning Mr. Catrett’s work with
asbestos, including the “type and identity of each such asbestos material” with which he worked.
Id. (quoting interrogatories number 51 and 52).
96. Id.
97. Shapiro, supra note 17, at 348.
98. Catrett v. Johns-Manville Sales Corp. (Catrett I), 756 F.2d 181, 183 & n.2 (D.C. Cir.
99. Celotex, 477 U.S. at 319–20 (alteration in original) (quoting Celotex’s second motion
for summary judgment).
100. Catrett I, 756 F.2d at 183.
101. Id.; Shapiro, supra note 17, at 348. One month after filing her opposition to summary
judgment but before the district court ruled, Catrett also filed supplemental interrogatory
answers that listed T. R. Hoff as a person with "knowledge of facts relevant to the subject matter
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The district court granted Celotex's summary judgment motion, stating at the close of oral argument that there had been no showing of exposure to a Celotex product "within the District of Columbia or elsewhere." A divided panel of the D.C. Circuit reversed. Judge Starr, joined by Judge Wald, held that Celotex had not met its burden under Adickes because it had "offered no affidavits, declarations or evidence of any sort whatever in support of its summary judgment motion. To the contrary, Celotex's motion was based solely on the plaintiff's purported failure to produce credible evidence to support her claim." Relying on Adickes, the majority explained:

In this case Celotex proffered nothing. It advanced only the naked allegation that the plaintiff had not come forward in discovery with evidence to support her allegations of the decedent's exposure to the defendant's product. Under settled rules, that barebones approach will not do. Mrs. Catrett was simply not required, given this state of the record, to offer any evidence in response.

Judge Bork dissented, arguing that "[t]he majority errs in supposing that a party seeking summary judgment must always make an affirmative evidentiary showing, even in cases where there is not a triable, factual dispute."

The Supreme Court granted Celotex's petition for a writ of certiorari. On June 25, 1986, the Supreme Court issued its decision. Celotex generated four separate opinions: (1) a majority opinion by then-Associate Justice Rehnquist, joined by Justices White, Marshall, Powell, and O'Connor; (2) a concurring opinion by Justice White; (3) a dissenting opinion by Justice Brennan, joined by Chief Justice Burger and Justice Blackmun; and (4) a dissenting opinion by Justice Stevens. The net result, by a 5-4 margin, was to reverse the D.C. Circuit's decision and to remand for further proceedings.


102. Catrett I, 756 F.2d at 183 n.3.
103. Catrett II, 826 F.2d at 33.
104. Catrett I, 756 F.2d at 184.
105. Id. at 185 (footnotes omitted).
106. Id. at 188 (Bork, J., dissenting).
108. Id. at 317.
A. Justice Rehnquist’s Majority Opinion

At the outset, it is worth noting the majority’s general comments on the goals and virtues of summary judgment:

Summary judgment procedure is properly regarded not as a disfavored procedural shortcut, but rather as an integral part of the Federal Rules as a whole, which are designed to secure the just, speedy and inexpensive determination of every action. . . . Rule 56 must be construed with due regard not only for the rights of persons asserting claims and defenses that are adequately based in fact to have those claims and defenses tried to a jury, but also for the rights of persons opposing such claims and defenses to demonstrate in the manner provided by the Rule, prior to trial, that the claims and defenses have no factual basis.109

As for the specific issues presented in Celotex, the majority rejected the D.C. Circuit’s premise that Celotex had to present affirmative evidence that Mr. Catrett had not been exposed to its asbestos products. “[U]nlike the Court of Appeals, we find no express or implied requirement in Rule 56 that the moving party support its motion with affidavits or other similar materials negating the opponent’s claim.”110 Rather, a defendant moving for summary judgment may discharge its burden by showing that there is “an absence of evidence” to support an essential element of plaintiff’s case when the plaintiff will bear the burden of proof at trial (as is typical).111

The majority also rejected the notion that Adickes imposed a heavier burden on a moving defendant. Although the majority agreed that the Court in Adickes reached the correct result,112 it stressed that Adickes should not “be construed to mean that the burden is on the party moving for summary judgment to produce evidence showing the absence of a genuine issue of material fact, even with respect to an issue on which the nonmoving party bears the burden of proof.”113 In other words, if “X” is a necessary element of the plaintiff’s claim, the defendant is not required to produce affirmative evidence showing “not-X”; the defendant can also meet its burden by showing that the plaintiff lacks sufficient evidence to prove “X” at trial.

109. Id. at 327 (citations and internal quotation marks omitted).
110. Id. at 323.
111. Id. at 325.
112. See id. (“It also appears to us that, on the basis of the showing before the Court in Adickes, the motion for summary judgment in that case should have been denied.”).
113. Id.
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The majority explained that when the defendant meets its burden, that is, when its motion is "made and supported as provided in this rule, n114 Rule 56(e) requires the plaintiff "to go beyond the pleadings and by her own affidavits, or by the "depositions, answers to interrogatories, and admissions on file," designate "specific facts showing that there is a genuine issue for trial." n115 A plaintiff must "make a sufficient showing on an essential element of her case with respect to which she has the burden of proof." n116 This "showing, if reduced to admissible evidence," must be "sufficient to carry [the plaintiff's] burden of proof at trial." n117

As for the materials with which a plaintiff might make such a showing, the majority wrote that a plaintiff is not required to use materials that are "in a form that would be admissible at trial." n118 The majority noted that "Rule 56 does not require the nonmoving party to depose her own witnesses." n119 Rather:

Rule 56(e) permits a proper summary judgment motion to be opposed by any of the kinds of evidentiary materials listed in Rule 56(c), except the mere pleadings themselves, and it is from this list that one would normally expect the nonmoving party to make the showing to which we have referred. n120

In articulating all of these principles, the majority did little to illustrate how they applied to the record presented in Celotex. Interestingly, the majority opinion never explicitly stated that Celotex met its burden. That finding is implicit, however, because the Court remanded the case solely to determine whether Catrett's showing in response to the summary judgment motion was sufficient. n121 Because the majority left that ultimate determination up to the

n114. Id. at 324 (quoting FED. R. CIV. P. 56(c)).

n115. Id. (quoting FED. R. CIV. P. 56(c), (c)).

n116. Id. at 323.

n117. Id. at 327.

n118. Id. at 324.

n119. Id.

n120. Id. (emphasis added).

n121. Id. at 327. The Court stated:

[T]he Court of Appeals declined to address either the adequacy of the showing made by respondent in opposition to petitioner's motion for summary judgment, or the question whether such a showing, if reduced to admissible evidence, would be sufficient to carry respondent's burden of proof at trial. We think the Court of Appeals with its superior knowledge of local law is better suited than we are to make these determinations in the first instance.

Id.
lower courts, one cannot infer whether Catrett's showing was, in the Supreme Court's view, sufficient to avoid summary judgment.122

To summarize, the majority set forth the following principles in connection with the defendant's and plaintiff's summary judgment burdens:123

(1) The plaintiff is not obligated to make a responsive showing unless the defendant's motion is "made and supported as provided in [Rule 56]."124

(2) The defendant may discharge its burden by showing that there is "an absence of evidence" to support an essential element of the plaintiff's case on which the plaintiff will bear the burden of proof at trial.125

(3) The defendant can make this showing using any of the documents listed in Rule 56(c), that is, pleadings, depositions, answers to interrogatories, and admissions, "with or without supporting affidavit."126

(4) If the defendant meets its burden of showing an absence of evidence on an essential element of the plaintiff's case, the plaintiff must respond by making "a sufficient showing" with respect to that element.127

(5) The plaintiff's showing is sufficient when her supporting materials are such that, "if reduced to admissible evidence," they would be "sufficient to carry [her] burden of proof at trial."128

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122. Dividing once again 2–1, the D.C. Circuit concluded on remand that Catrett had met her burden. See Catrett v. Johns-Manville Sales Corp. (Catrett II), 826 F.2d 33, 33 (D.C. Cir. 1987) (Bork, J., dissenting) ("The majority finds that she has met her burden, and has made enough of a showing to defeat the motion for summary judgment. I disagree."). On remand from Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317 (1986). It thus reversed the district court's grant of summary judgment. Id. The case settled shortly thereafter. Shapiro, supra note 17, at 360.

123. As elsewhere in this Article, I assume that the defendant is the party moving for summary judgment, which is the scenario addressed in Celotex and Adickes. Consistent with the identity of the parties in both Celotex and Adickes, I use "it" as the pronoun for the defendant and "she" or "her" for the plaintiff.

124. Celotex, 477 U.S. at 324 (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(e)).

125. See id. at 325 (describing the moving party's burden on a motion for summary judgment).

126. See id. at 323 (identifying the documents that a party seeking summary judgment may rely on to meet its burden); see also Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(e) (listing the documents that may "show that there is no genuine issue as to any material fact").

127. See Celotex, 477 U.S. at 323 (stating that "Rule 56(e) mandates the entry of summary judgment against a party who fails to make a showing sufficient to establish the existence of an element essential to that party's case").

128. Id. at 327.
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(6) In making this showing, the plaintiff is not required to use materials that are "in a form that would be admissible at trial." 129

(7) One would "normally" expect the plaintiff to make this showing from any of the documents listed in Rule 56(c) except for the pleadings, that is, depositions, answers to interrogatories, admissions, or affidavits. 130

B. Opinions by Other Justices

Justice Rehnquist’s opinion was the opinion of the Court and had the support of five justices. 131 Therefore, it states the Celotex holding for purposes of stare decisis and is binding on the lower federal courts. 132 Nonetheless, the other opinions are significant, both for the sake of completeness and because some have helped to shape the competing myths of Celotex.

1. Justice White’s Concurrence

Although Justice White joined Justice Rehnquist’s majority opinion, he also wrote a separate concurrence. White reaffirmed that a moving defendant "may rely on depositions, answers to interrogatories, and the like, to demonstrate that the plaintiff has no evidence to prove his case," 133 but he stressed that the defendant must still "discharge the burden the Rules place upon him: It is not enough to move for summary judgment without supporting

129. Id. at 324.
130. Id.
131. Some have called Justice Rehnquist’s opinion for the court a “plurality” opinion because of Justice White’s separate concurrence. See, e.g., Kennedy, supra note 8, at 230 ("Justice Rehnquist’s plurality opinion in Celotex raises a number of practical questions."); see also Friedenthal, supra note 17, at 777 (stating that Celotex was decided "without a majority opinion"). Such statements overlook the fact that Justice White also joined Justice Rehnquist’s opinion, which makes Rehnquist’s opinion a majority opinion supported by five justices. For further discussion of this issue, see infra notes 338–44 and accompanying text.
132. See Max Gibbons, Of Windfalls and Property Rights: Palazzolo and the Regulatory Takings Notice Debate, 50 UCLA L. REV. 1259, 1289 n.187 (2003) (noting that the Court’s majority opinion is binding, not any separate concurrence supporting the result); Earl M. Malz, The Function of Supreme Court Opinions, 37 Hous. L. REV. 1395, 1409 (2000) ("Treating majority opinions as binding upon other actors is an indispensable corollary to the view that the Supreme Court sits not only to decide cases, but also to establish more generally applicable rules of law.").
the motion in any way or with a conclusory assertion that the plaintiff has no evidence to prove his case."\textsuperscript{134} Justice White added:

A plaintiff need not initiate any discovery or reveal his witnesses or evidence unless required to do so under the discovery Rules or by court order. Of course, he must respond if required to do so; but he need not also depose his witnesses or obtain their affidavits to defeat a summary judgment motion asserting only that he has failed to produce any support for his case.\textsuperscript{135}

2. Justice Brennan’s Dissent

In dissent, Justice Brennan stated that he did "not disagree with the Court’s legal analysis."\textsuperscript{136} Justice Brennan wrote that "as the Court confirms, a party who moves for summary judgment on the ground that the nonmoving party has no evidence must affirmatively show the absence of evidence in the record."\textsuperscript{137} Justice Brennan explained how a moving defendant could show such an absence:

This may require the moving party to depose the nonmoving party’s witnesses or to establish the inadequacy of documentary evidence. If there is literally no evidence in the record, the moving party may demonstrate this by reviewing for the court the admissions, interrogatories, and other exchanges between the parties that are in the record.\textsuperscript{138}

Thus, according to Justice Brennan, "the nonmoving party may defeat a motion for summary judgment that asserts that the nonmoving party has no evidence by calling the court’s attention to supporting evidence already in the record that was overlooked or ignored by the moving party."\textsuperscript{139} He explained: "[i]n that event, the moving party must respond by making an attempt to demonstrate the inadequacy of this evidence, for it is only by attacking all the record evidence allegedly supporting the nonmoving party that a party seeking summary judgment satisfies Rule 56’s burden of production."\textsuperscript{140} Applying this standard, Justice Brennan concluded that Celotex failed to meet its burden because the three documents on which Catrett relied were already "in the record" at the time

\begin{footnotes}
\item[134] Id. (White, J., concurring).
\item[135] Id. (White, J., concurring).
\item[136] Id. at 329 (Brennan, J., dissenting).
\item[137] Id. at 332 (Brennan, J., dissenting).
\item[138] Id. (Brennan, J., dissenting).
\item[139] Id. (Brennan, J., dissenting).
\item[140] Id. (Brennan, J., dissenting).
\end{footnotes}
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Celotex filed its second summary judgment motion.\(^{141}\) Because the record revealed at least one potential witness (Mr. Hoff), "Celotex was required, as an initial matter, to attack the adequacy of this evidence."\(^{142}\)

With respect to Adickes, Justice Brennan agreed that the D.C. Circuit was wrong to read Adickes as requiring Celotex "to submit evidence establishing that plaintiff's decedent had not been exposed to Celotex asbestos."\(^{143}\) Justice Brennan emphasized, however, that his approach to summary judgment was "fully consistent" with Adickes.\(^{144}\) He noted that Adickes's response to Kress's summary judgment motion had "pointed to a statement from her own deposition and an unsworn statement by a Kress employee, both already in the record and both ignored by respondent, that the policeman who arrested petitioner was in the store at the time she was refused service."\(^{145}\) Because the presence of a policeman would allow a jury to permissibly infer a conspiracy,\(^{146}\) Justice Brennan viewed Adickes as holding that these documents meant that Kress "had failed to fulfill its initial burden of demonstrating that there was no evidence that there was a policeman in the store."\(^{147}\)

3. Justice Stevens's Dissent

Justice Stevens's dissent focused on the fact that Celotex's motion for summary judgment rested exclusively on "the lack of exposure in the District of Columbia."\(^{148}\) Therefore, the district court's unexplained conclusion that there had been "no showing that the plaintiff was exposed to the defendant Celotex's product in the District of Columbia or elsewhere"\(^{149}\) was "palpably erroneous."\(^{150}\) The best course, according to Justice Stevens, was to "affirm the reversal of summary judgment on that narrow ground."\(^{151}\) Thus, Justice Stevens disapproved "this Court's abstract exercise in Rule construction."\(^{152}\)

\(^{141}\) Id. at 335–36 (Brennan, J., dissenting).
\(^{142}\) Id. at 336 (Brennan, J., dissenting).
\(^{143}\) Id. at 334 (Brennan, J., dissenting).
\(^{144}\) Id. at 333 (Brennan, J., dissenting).
\(^{145}\) Id. (Brennan, J., dissenting).
\(^{146}\) Id. at 333–34 (Brennan, J., dissenting) (citing Adickes v. S. H. Kress & Co., 398 U.S. 144, 158 (1970)).
\(^{147}\) Id. at 334 (Brennan, J., dissenting) (quoting Adickes, 398 U.S. at 157–58).
\(^{148}\) Id. at 338 (Stevens, J., dissenting).
\(^{149}\) Id. (Stevens, J., dissenting).
\(^{150}\) Id. at 339 (Stevens, J., dissenting).
\(^{151}\) Id. (Stevens, J., dissenting).
\(^{152}\) Id. (Stevens, J., dissenting).
He noted, however, that Catrett had "made an adequate showing—albeit possibly not in admissible form—that her husband had been exposed to [Celotex's] product in Illinois."153

C. What Celotex Fails to Tell Us About Summary Judgment Burdens

The majority opinion in Celotex leaves significant ambiguities with respect to both the moving defendant’s burden and the nonmoving plaintiff’s burden. How may a defendant show an "absence of evidence" for purposes of meeting its initial burden? And what materials must the court consider in determining whether the defendant has met this burden? Assuming that the defendant meets its burden, what constitutes a "sufficient showing" by the plaintiff to avoid summary judgment, and on what materials may the plaintiff rely in making that showing?155

1. The Defendant’s Burden

The majority opinion did not explicitly discuss what a defendant must do to show an "absence of evidence," except to say that a defendant can use any of the documents listed in Rule 56(c) to make this showing.156 While the majority seemed to conclude that Celotex met its burden of showing an absence of evidence with respect to exposure, the opinion did not explain why or how. The facts of the case suggest at least two possibilities. One is that Celotex met its burden because the Rule 56(c) documents contained no evidence of exposure to a Celotex product. Another is that Celotex met its burden because it had served interrogatories on Catrett asking her to describe and identify evidence of her husband’s exposure to a Celotex asbestos product, and Catrett failed to do so.157

These two possibilities suggest very different approaches to determining whether a defendant has shown an "absence of evidence." Under the first, the defendant will meet its burden as long as the Rule 56(c) documents contain no evidence to support an essential element of the plaintiff’s claim. Under the

153. *Id.* at 338 (footnotes omitted) (Stevens, J., dissenting).
154. *Id.* at 325.
155. *Id.* at 323.
156. *Id.* at 324.
157. See *id.* at 320 (noting that Catrett had failed to identify in interrogatories any evidence of her husband’s exposure to Celotex asbestos products).
second, the Rule 56(c) documents must be ones that, like Catrett's interrogatory answers, would be expected to indicate supporting evidence but fail to do so.

As if to compound the ambiguity, the Celotex majority cited two influential scholarly articles that took opposite views on this subject. The majority stated that "[o]ne of the principal purposes of the summary judgment rule is to isolate and dispose of factually unsupported claims or defenses, and we think it should be interpreted in a way that allows it to accomplish this purpose." For this proposition, the majority cited articles by Martin Louis and David Currie.

David Currie's article endorsed the first approach. He argued that the mere filing of a summary judgment motion should be sufficient to require a plaintiff to "produce[e] evidence sufficient to sustain a favorable verdict." Currie would not require the defendant to conduct any discovery designed to elicit evidence that the plaintiff intended to use at trial. Martin Louis, on the other hand, believed that a defendant must use discovery to "obtain a preview of his opponent's evidence on an essential element and contend, in support of his motion, that the evidence is insufficient to discharge the opponent's production burden." Louis recognized that, when the plaintiff identified witnesses in response to such discovery, a defendant would be required to depose those witnesses in order to establish that the evidence they could provide at trial would be insufficient to carry plaintiff's burden.

A related issue that Celotex failed to resolve explicitly is which materials a court should consider in determining whether a defendant has shown an "absence of evidence." While the Celotex majority explained that the defendant could meet its burden using any of the documents listed in Rule

158. Id. at 323–24.
159. Id. at 324 n.5 (citing Martin B. Louis, Federal Summary Judgment Doctrine: A Critical Analysis, 83 Yale L.J. 745, 752 (1974); David P. Currie, Thoughts on Directed Verdicts and Summary Judgments, 45 U. Chi. L. Rev. 72, 79 (1977)).
160. Currie, supra note 159, at 79.
161. See id. at 77–78 (criticizing the Adickes Court for requiring the defendant to foreclose the possibility that there was a policeman in the store when the plaintiff had presented no evidence indicating otherwise).
162. Louis, supra note 159, at 750. Louis also recognized a second method by which a party might obtain summary judgment. He stated that "[b]y previewing his own proof, a summary judgment movant can attempt to show the nonexistence of an essential element asserted by the opposing party." Id. (emphasis added). This method was not pursued in Celotex, however. Celotex did not base its motion on evidence showing that Mr. Catrett had not, in fact, been exposed to any Celotex product.
163. See id. at 751 (noting that seeking summary judgment based on an absence of evidence "commends itself whenever the opposing party's witnesses are few and can be deposed without undue effort or expense").
56(c), it did not discuss whether other materials might also be considered to decide whether the defendant has met its burden. It is clear from the opinion that the majority did not consider Catrett’s materials when addressing Celotex’s burden. But the majority failed to explain why the Court should not have considered these materials in connection with Celotex’s burden.

One possible explanation is that the majority viewed Catrett’s materials as having been revealed after Celotex filed its motion. Justice Brennan disagreed with this characterization of the record, noting that Catrett had presented these materials in response to Celotex’s first motion, which was withdrawn. Thus, Brennan argued that Catrett’s materials should be considered for purposes of whether Celotex met its burden because they were already "in the record" at the time Celotex filed its second motion, which was the one granted by the trial court. The majority, however, viewed these materials as having been filed "in response" to Celotex’s motion. If this was the logic underlying the majority’s approach, then perhaps it would be appropriate—as Brennan argues—to consider materials favorable to the plaintiff as long as those materials were indeed "in the record" before the defendant sought summary judgment.

But this is not the only inference one might draw. One might also infer that the majority did not consider Catrett’s materials because the defendant’s burden is to be evaluated solely based on the documents on which the defendant relies. On this reading, materials submitted by the plaintiff "in response" to a defendant’s motion should be considered only in connection with whether the plaintiff has met its burden, regardless of whether they were "in the record" before defendant filed its motion.

2. The Plaintiff’s Burden

As for the plaintiff’s burden, the majority did not decide whether Catrett had made a "sufficient showing" in response to Celotex’s summary judgment

165. See id. at 320 ("In response to petitioner’s summary judgment motion, respondent then produced three documents.").
166. Id. at 335–36 (Brennan, J., dissenting).
167. Id. at 336 (Brennan, J., dissenting); see also Nelken, supra note 8, at 66 (stating that the majority "misread the record as to when Celotex became aware of the three documents relied on by the plaintiff").
169. Id. at 336 (Brennan, J., dissenting).
170. Id. (Brennan, J., dissenting).
171. Id. at 336 (Brennan, J., dissenting).
motion. The D.C Circuit did not address that issue in its initial opinion because it concluded that Celotex had not met its initial burden. Thus, the Supreme Court remanded the case for the D.C. Circuit to determine whether Catrett had made a sufficient showing of exposure to Celotex’s products.

While the Celotex majority gave some general guidance about how a plaintiff may satisfy its burden, the opinion begged obvious questions. Under what circumstances can materials that are not "in a form that would be admissible at trial" constitute a sufficient showing by the plaintiff on an essential element of her case? And under what circumstances may a plaintiff defy the "normal[] expect[ation]" and make this showing using materials other than affidavits, depositions, answers to interrogatories, or admissions? The majority’s opinion does not illuminate any of these issues.

V. The Myths of Celotex

Celotex’s unanswered questions have given rise to competing myths, which are described below. While these myths are plausible interpretations of Celotex (the majority opinion is ambiguous on many important issues), they are based principally, if not exclusively, on policy preferences—the myth-propounders’ own views about how summary judgment procedure should operate in the federal system. These policy perspectives are important, to be sure, and can help to illuminate the trade-offs that are at stake. However, the prevailing myths have put the policy cart before the interpretive horse. Scholars have yet to take a more traditional approach to finding the best reading of Celotex in terms of what we customarily value when interpreting a decision. This Article considers three such values: (1) consistency with prior cases; (2) consistency with the text that the decision purports to interpret; and (3) internal coherence with other parts of the majority opinion and with the case's factual and procedural posture.

These simple values are consistent with basic principles of interpretation and should not be controversial. As to the first, Celotex should be read to be

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172. See id. at 326–27 (deferring to the Court of Appeals decision not to address the adequacy of Catrett’s showing).
173. Id.
174. Id. at 326–28.
175. See supra notes 114–20, 128–30 and accompanying text (outlining what a plaintiff must do to satisfy her burden).
177. Id.
178. There is, to be sure, robust academic debate about interpretation and how best to
consistent with prior Supreme Court cases, at least absent any indication of an intent to overrule those cases. Second, *Celotex* should be read in a way that

perform that task. See generally RONALD DWORKIN, LAW’S EMPIRE (1986) (exploring the complexities of interpreting law); STANLEY E. FISH, IS THERE A TEXT IN THIS CLASS?: THE AUTHORITY OF INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES (1980) (arguing that interpretive communities create meaning); Michael S. Moore, A Natural Law Theory of Interpretation, 58 S. CAL. L. REV. 277 (1985) (espousing “a theory of interpretation within a larger theory of legal reasoning”); Cass R. Sunstein & Adrian Vermeule, Interpretation and Institutions, 101 MICH. L. REV. 885 (2003) (questioning the traditional methods of interpretation and suggesting new criteria); W. Bradley Wendel, Professionalism As Interpretation, 99 NW. U. L. REV. 1167, 1172 (2005) (discussing “the lawyer’s responsibility as a law-interpreter and private law-giver”). Although some might argue that the principal goal of interpretation is to achieve the best policy result, e.g., Richard A. Posner, Pragmatic Adjudication, 18 CARDOZO L. REV. 1, 5 (1996) (stating that “[t]he pragmatist judge” is one who “wants to come up with the best decision having in mind present and future needs, and so does not regard the maintenance of consistency with past decisions as an end in itself but only as a means for bringing about the best results in the present case”), many do not.

Ronald Dworkin, for example, has written:

> If [a judge’s] threshold of fit is wholly derivative from and adjustable to his convictions of justice, so that the latter automatically provide an eligible interpretation—then he cannot claim in good faith to be interpreting his legal practice at all.

DWORKIN, supra, at 255.

In any event, it remains important for a practitioner or judge to justify her interpretation in terms of “standard legal references.” Michael E. Sollins, Removal, Remands, and Reforming Federal Appellate Review, 58 Mo. L. REV. 287, 332 (1993) (“Most judges strive in drafting opinions to reconcile their preferences with standard legal references, such as statutory text and judicial precedent.”). Judge Posner might call this a positivist approach:

> The judicial positivist would begin and usually end with a consideration of cases, statutes, administrative regulations, and constitutional provisions—all these and only these being ‘authorities’ to which the judge must defer in accordance with Dworkin’s suggestion that a judge who is not a pragmatist has a duty to secure consistency in principle with what other officials have done in the past. [It is] the judge’s duty to find the result in the present case that would promote or cohere with the best interpretation of the legal background as a whole.

Posner, supra, at 4–5; see also DWORKIN, supra, at 262 (“[T]he grounds of law lie in integrity, in the best constructive interpretation of past legal decisions.”). Whatever divergent views scholars hold on interpretive theory, there should at least be consensus that, all other things equal, an interpretation that achieves the values of consistency and coherency I articulate is superior to an interpretation that does not.

179. See *Irwin v. Dept of Veterans Affairs*, 498 U.S. 89, 99–100 (1990) (White, J., concurring) (“[T]he doctrine of stare decisis demands that we attempt to reconcile our prior decisions rather than hastily overrule some of them.”); *Ex Parte Harding*, 219 U.S. 363, 378 (1911) (“We must then either reconcile the cases or if this cannot be done determine which line rests upon the right principle and having so determined overrule or qualify the others and apply and enforce the correct doctrine.”); *Scheiber v. Dolby Labs., Inc.*, 293 F.3d 1014, 1018 (7th Cir. 2002) (Posner, J.) (“We have no authority to overrule a Supreme Court decision no matter how out of touch with the Supreme Court’s current thinking the decision seems.”); *Nat’l Foreign Trade Council v. Nat’l Med.* 181 F.3d 38, 58 (1st Cir. 1999) (“Scholarly debate about the continuing viability of a Supreme Court opinion does not, of course, excuse the lower federal
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is consistent with the text of the governing sources, absent any indication that a superior legal source supersedes the governing text, such as when a statute or rule of procedure is unconstitutional. 180 Third, Celotex should be read so that different parts of the majority opinion are consistent with other parts of that opinion, and so that the majority’s statements are relevant in light of the factual and procedural issues presented by the case. 181

The myths of Celotex described below are not true to these values. On some issues, they cannot be reconciled with the Supreme Court’s holding sixteen years earlier in Adickes. On others, they conflict with the actual text of Rule 56. On others, they offer readings of Celotex that make little sense given the factual and procedural posture of the case.

A. The Paper Trial Myth

Many cases and commentators read Celotex as placing essentially no burden at all on a defendant seeking summary judgment. 182 Because the plaintiff will bear the burden of proof at trial, summary judgment should be granted unless the plaintiff can provide evidence to the court that would be sufficient to avoid a directed verdict if that were the evidence presented at courts from applying that opinion."

180. E.g., Jones v. United States, 529 U.S. 848, 859 (2000) (Stevens, J., concurring) (stating that the Court’s opinion, which he joined, "convincingly explains why its construction of 18 U.S.C § 844(i) better fits the text and context of the provision than the Government’s expansive reading"); United States v. Lasaga, 328 F.3d 61, 66 (2d Cir. 2003) (following an interpretation of a federal sentencing guideline that is "more consistent with the text"); United States v. Norris, 319 F.3d 1278, 1288 (10th Cir. 2003) (same); Lonberg v. Sunborn Theaters, Inc., 259 F.3d 1029, 1035 (9th Cir. 2001) (adopting a construction of the Americans with Disabilities Act that is "more consistent with the text and structure of the statute," even though "the evidence does not perfectly align in its favor"); see also Dworkin, supra note 178, at 338–40 (noting that a prudent justice must consider what the text of the statute requires).

181. See Carmick v. United States, 2 Ct. Cl. 126, 139 (1866) (stating that prior case law should be "read in the light of its own facts and history, and with reference to them, and not as an abstract homily on law in general"); see also Prymer v. Ogden, 29 F.3d 1208, 1213 n.2 (7th Cir. 1994) (rejecting proposed interpretation of Gray v. Lacke, 885 F.2d 399 (7th Cir. 1989), because Gray "must be read in the context of the procedural posture presented to the court in that case").

182. See Redish, supra note 8, at 1345 ("Since Celotex, the majority of lower federal courts have wisely read that decision to impose virtually no burden at all on the movant where she would have no burden of proof at trial."); see also Edward J. Brunet et al., Summary Judgment: Federal Law and Practice 79 (2d ed. 2000) (arguing that there is "no reason to impose any triggering burden on a movant for summary judgment who would not bear the burden of production at trial").
On this view, a defendant can "show" an "absence of evidence" merely by stating that plaintiff has yet to provide any evidence to support one or more essential elements of its claim. At that point, the plaintiff must come forward with evidence that would be sufficient to sustain its burden of production at trial.

Moreover, the plaintiff's evidence must meet a strict standard with respect to admissibility—one that mirrors the rules for admissibility at trial. It is not enough for the plaintiff to identify witnesses she plans to call at trial, even if the plaintiff indicates how she expects those witnesses to testify. Likewise, it is not enough to present information via deposition transcripts, interrogatory responses, or affidavits when the witness, signatory, or affiant would not be competent to testify to such information at trial. The plaintiff must provide what this Article calls "trial-quality" evidence—sworn statements, via

183. See Redish, supra note 8, at 134-44 (noting that the "standards for summary judgment and directed verdict are fungible"); see also BRUNET ET AL., supra note 182, at 85 ("There is no reason to impose a burden on the movant at summary judgment that he would not bear in moving for directed verdict at trial.").

184. See Kennedy, supra note 8, at 239 (reading Justice Rehnquist's opinion as holding that "the burden on the moving party can be met by pointing out that the discovery record fails to contain admissible evidence to support the nonmoving party's case").

185. See Street v. Bradford & Co., 886 F.2d 1472, 1478 (6th Cir. 1989) ("[T]he defendant could challenge the opposing party to 'put up or shut up' on a critical issue. . . . [I]f the respondent did not 'put up,' summary judgment was proper.").

186. E.g., Duplantis v. Shell Offshore, Inc., 948 F.2d 187, 192 (5th Cir. 1991) ("Celotex did not alter the settled law that 'Rule 56(e) requires the adversary to set forth facts that would be admissible in evidence at trial.'" (quoting 10A CHARLES ALAN WRIGHT ET AL., FEDERAL PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE § 2727 (2d ed. 1983)); see also Geiserman v. MacDonald, 893 F.2d 787, 793 (5th Cir. 1990) (finding that because plaintiff could not use proffered expert testimony at trial, he could not rely on it for summary judgment purposes); Garside v. Osco Drug, Inc., 895 F.2d 46, 50 (1st Cir. 1990) ("Hearsay evidence, inadmissible at trial, cannot be considered on a motion for summary judgment."); Canada v. Blain's Helicopters, Inc., 831 F.2d 920, 925 (9th Cir. 1987) (ruling that unauthenticated documents are not admissible because they cannot be admitted into evidence at trial); Redish, supra note 8, at 134 n.53 (questioning the reasoning by which the Celotex Court approached the standard of admissibility at trial versus the standard for summary judgment); Kennedy, supra note 8, at 233 (noting "the commonly understood implication that the content of the discovery record also must meet the same substantive trial test of admissibility in order to create an issue of fact").

187. See, e.g., Garside v. Osco Drug, 895 F.2d 46, 49-50 (1st Cir. 1990) (stating that a court may consider interrogatory answers only if they "show affirmatively that the signing party is competent to testify to the matters stated therein" (quoting FED. R. CIV. P. 56(e))); WILLIAM W. SCHWARZER ET AL., FED. JUDICIAL CTR., THE ANALYSIS AND DECISION OF SUMMARY JUDGMENT MOTIONS 47-52 (1991) (discussing the evidence on which the nonmoving party may rely and, in particular, restrictions on the use of inadmissible evidence).
affidavits, depositions, or interrogatory answers, by a swearer with personal knowledge of the facts stated. 188

This approach to summary judgment essentially treats the summary judgment record as a paper trial. When that record contains no trial-quality evidence, or when such evidence would be insufficient to carry the plaintiff’s burden at trial, summary judgment would be granted for the defendant. The plaintiff bears the burden of putting trial-quality evidence into the record just as she would at trial.

The policy rationale for treating summary judgment as a pretrial paper trial is straightforward. The purpose of summary judgment is to prevent trial when there will be no genuine dispute to be resolved by live testimony before the jury. If the plaintiff does not provide sufficient trial-quality evidence at the summary judgment stage, there is no reason to think she will be able to provide that evidence at trial. Since the defendant will have no burden of production at trial, there is no reason to impose a burden on the defendant for purposes of summary judgment. 189

This approach may be defensible as a matter of policy. However, it fails in terms of the interpretive values I have described above. First, this approach places Celotex in fundamental conflict with the Adickes decision sixteen years earlier. The Court’s rationale in Adickes—that summary judgment was improper because of Kress’s “failure to foreclose the possibility” that a police officer was in the store 190—is flatly inconsistent with the view that a defendant should face no burden when moving for summary judgment. Under the paper trial myth, the court should have granted summary judgment in Adickes because none of Adickes’s summary judgment materials were trial-quality. Adickes submitted (a) her own deposition testimony that her student had seen a police officer in the store and (b) an unworn statement by a Kress employee that there was a police officer in the store. 191 Thus, this approach cannot be reconciled either with Adickes or with the Celotex majority’s statement that Adickes reached the correct result. 192 If

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188. See, e.g., Garside, 895 F.2d at 49 (stating that interrogatory answers “should be accorded no probative force where they are not based upon personal knowledge”).

189. See Redish, supra note 8, at 1343 (“[T]here exists no justification for imposing any burden on a movant for summary judgment that would not parallel the burden that party would have at trial prior to moving for judgment as a matter of law.”); see also Brunet et al., supra note 182, at 85 (“There is no reason in logic or practicality, then, to impose a burden on the movant at summary judgment that he would not bear in moving for directed verdict at trial.”).


191. Id. at 156–57 nn 13–14.

192. See Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317, 325 (1986) (stating that the Court was correct in denying summary judgment in Adickes).
we accept the paper trial myth, we must also accept that Adickes was wrongly decided. 193

Second, this myth fails to provide a sensible account of what the Celotex majority meant when it said that a plaintiff does not have to use materials that are "in a form that would be admissible at trial." 194 The standard account that proponents of this view give is that the majority was simply recognizing that affidavits may be considered for purposes of summary judgment, even though affidavits (which by definition have not been cross-examined) are not admissible at trial. 195 They note that the very next sentence in the opinion states that "Rule 56 does not require the nonmoving party to depose her own witnesses," 196 and they infer that Rule 56 does require the nonmoving party to obtain affidavits of her witnesses. 197

The term "depose," however, frequently refers not only to the taking of a deposition as provided for in the federal rules, but also to the swearing of an affidavit. 198 Thus, the majority's statement that "Rule 56 does not require the nonmoving party to depose her own witnesses" may plausibly be read as

193. Indeed, many proponents of this myth freely admit that it does not reconcile Celotex and Adickes. See Brunet et al., supra note 182, at 81 (noting that Celotex's handling of Adickes was disingenuous insofar as it "suggest[ed] that no change was being made in the standard"); Redish, supra note 8, at 1342 ("[T]he Court's rejection of the prior standard for determining whether the court reaches the merits of the summary judgment action, associated primarily with its earlier decision in Adickes v. S. H. Kress & Co., makes perfect sense.") (emphasis added); id. at 1344 & n.53 (describing the Celotex majority's refusal to repudiate Adickes as "stubborn" and "mystifying" and stating that the majority's description of Adickes "brings to mind Grocho Marx's famous line when his wife surprised him in the company of his lover: 'Who are you going to believe, me or your own eyes?'").

194. Celotex, 477 U.S. at 324.

195. See Duplantis v. Shell Offshore, Inc., 948 F.2d 187, 192 (5th Cir. 1991) ("[I]t is clear that the Supreme Court meant merely that full depositions were not required, and that other documents listed in Rule 56(c), such as 'answers to interrogatories, and admissions on file, together with affidavits,' could suffice"); Canada v. Blain's Helicopters, Inc., 831 F.2d 920, 925 (9th Cir. 1987) (noting that affidavits could be considered for summary judgment purposes); Schwarzer et al., supra note 187, at 50 (concluding that "[t]he facts on which the nonmovant may rely must be admissible at trial, but need not be in admissible form as presented" in opposition to summary judgment).

196. Celotex, 477 U.S. at 324.

197. See, e.g., Schwarzer et al., supra note 187, at 50 (finding "that Celotex merely clarifies the nonmovant's right to oppose a summary judgment motion with any of the materials listed in Rule 56(c), including affidavits of its own witnesses that may contain testimony in a form not admissible at trial").


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rejecting the notion that a plaintiff must obtain affidavits of her witnesses in order to avoid summary judgment. Moreover, the view that the majority intended only to carve out an exception for affidavits cannot be reconciled with the factual posture of Celotex itself. Catrett had not relied on affidavits in opposing Celotex’s motion.200 Rather, she presented copies of two letters (from the insurer and the assistant secretary of Mr. Catrett’s employer) and the decedent’s own deposition testimony from an earlier proceeding to which Celotex was not a party.201 If affidavits are the only materials that courts may consider on summary judgment despite being inadmissible at trial, the majority would have had no need to remand the case. There certainly would have been no need to remand the case out of deference to the D.C. Circuit’s "superior knowledge of local law."202

B. The Dissenters' Myth

Other courts and commentators have endorsed the approach followed by Justice Brennan in his dissenting opinion.203 According to this myth, a defendant who seeks to meet its burden by showing that there is an "absence of evidence" must establish the inadequacy of any documents or potential witnesses reflected "in the record."204 There appears to be little or no admissibility requirement under this approach. The defendant would have to refute materials in the record even if those materials are (a) hearsay, such as Adickes’s deposition testimony that her student had seen a police officer in the store;205 (b) unwitnessed statements, such as Irene Sullivan’s unwitnessed statement on which Adickes relied;206 or (c) unauthenticated documents, such as the letters

201. Id.; see also Shapiro, supra note 17, at 348 (describing the materials that Catrett submitted in opposing the motion).
203. See, e.g., Nelken, supra note 8, at 68 (endorsing Justice Brennan’s approach).
204. Celotex, 477 U.S. at 332 (Brennan, J., dissenting); see also Nelken, supra note 8, at 68 ("[T]he party seeking to rely on the absence of record evidence as a basis for summary judgment has an obligation to pursue leads obtained in discovery.").
by O'Keefe and Hoff on which Catrett relied.\textsuperscript{207} Even if the record lacks such supportive materials, the defendant must also "show that reasonable efforts have been made to uncover the relevant evidence, through use of interrogatories, document requests, depositions, and requests for admission."\textsuperscript{208}

There are also valid policy rationales for this approach. One is to maintain the integrity of the discovery process set forth elsewhere in the Federal Rules.\textsuperscript{209} The discovery devices themselves authorize a defendant to obtain information about the plaintiff's claims and evidence. If a defendant wishes, for example, to test the credence or knowledge of a plaintiff's witness, it may notice a deposition of that witness.\textsuperscript{210} But a defendant who has not made use of such discovery procedures should not be able to use a summary judgment motion to force a plaintiff not only to disclose what her evidence will be but also to create trial-quality evidence that would support an essential element of her claim. Melissa Nelken explained that "[d]iscovery is as integral a part of the Federal Rules as summary judgment. There is little merit in an interpretation of summary judgment procedure that would encourage parties not to use the discovery rules, in hopes of then invoking summary judgment to force an opponent to reveal his case."\textsuperscript{211} Another policy justification for the dissenters' myth is the danger of harassment.\textsuperscript{212} If the rules impose little or no burden on a defendant who seeks summary judgment on an "absence of evidence" theory, defendants could file summary judgment motions simply to harass plaintiffs by forcing them to create affidavits from their own witnesses in order to avoid a summary dismissal.

While the dissenters' myth may enjoy the support of worthy policy arguments, it has serious problems as a coherent reading of Celotex in terms of traditional interpretive values. At the outset, of course, arguing that a case's holding is actually the one stated by the dissenters raises an interpretive red

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{207} Celotex, 477 U.S. at 335 (Brennan, J., dissenting).
\item \textsuperscript{208} Nelken, \textit{supra} note 8, at 68–69; \textit{see also} Nissan Fire Ins. Co., Ltd. v. Fritz Cos., Inc., 210 F.3d 1099, 1105 (9th Cir. 2000) (noting that "[i]n a typical case the moving party will have made reasonable efforts, using the normal tools of discovery, to discover whether the nonmoving party has enough evidence to carry its burden of persuasion at trial").
\item \textsuperscript{209} \textit{See} Nelken, \textit{supra} note 8, at 68 ("Any other rule would vitiate the incentive to do thorough discovery before moving for summary judgment.").
\item \textsuperscript{210} \textit{See} Fed. R. Civ. P. 30 (providing the procedures for taking oral depositions).
\item \textsuperscript{211} Nelken, \textit{supra} note 8, at 66.
\item \textsuperscript{212} \textit{See} Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317, 332 (1986) (Brennan, J., dissenting) ("Such a burden of production is no burden at all and would simply permit summary judgment procedure to be converted into a tool for harassment."); Nelken, \textit{supra} note 8, at 68 ("Any other rule would encourage the use of summary judgment to harass the nonmoving party or to force him to disclose his case prematurely.").
\end{itemize}
flag.\textsuperscript{213} Even so, the dissenters' myth of \textit{Celotex} cannot be reconciled with the Court's reasoning in \textit{Adickes}. Perhaps this myth can explain the result reached in \textit{Adickes}. As Justice Brennan states, "the record" in \textit{Adickes} indicated potential witnesses—Adickes's student Carolyn Moncure and the Kress employee Irene Sullivan—who might be able to testify that a police officer was in the store.\textsuperscript{211} Because Kress had not "demonstrate[d] the inadequacy" of these potential witnesses, such as by deposing them, adherents to the dissenters' myth would argue that Kress had failed to meet its burden and summary judgment should therefore have been denied.\textsuperscript{215}

But this attempt to reconcile the two cases ignores the \textit{Adickes} Court's actual reasoning. \textit{Adickes} concluded that Kress failed to meet its burden because Kress's own materials—the affidavits of the police officers and store manager—had "fail[ed] to foreclose" the possibility that a police officer was in the store.\textsuperscript{216} The Court did not base its finding on Adickes's hearsay testimony or Irene Sullivan's unsworn statement.\textsuperscript{217} To the contrary, it indicated that there were problems with these materials and that they would not have been sufficient to avoid summary judgment if Kress's affidavits had denied the officers' presence in the store.\textsuperscript{218}

In addition, the dissenters' approach is inconsistent with the text of Rule 56(c), which mandates summary judgment when the "pleadings, depositions, answers to interrogatories, . . . admissions . . . [and] affidavits, if any, show that there is no genuine issue as to any material fact."\textsuperscript{219} According to the dissenters' myth, the presence of materials suggesting potential witnesses or evidence can thwart a summary judgment motion even if such materials are not listed in Rule 56(c).\textsuperscript{220} But Irene Sullivan's unsworn statement in \textit{Adickes}, for

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{213} See, e.g., J. David Breeemer, \textit{Temporary Insanity: The Long Tale of Tahoe–Sierra Preservation Council and its Quiet Ending in the United States Supreme Court}, 71 FORDHAM L. REV. 1, 20 n.127 (2002) ("[C]ourts should resist relying too much on dissenting opinions when trying to interpret unclear sections of a majority decision.").
\item \textsuperscript{214} \textit{Celotex}, 477 U.S. at 333 (Brennan, J., dissenting); see also \textit{Adickes v. S. H. Kress & Co.}, 398 U.S. 144, 156–57 & nn.13–14 (1970) (discussing the statements of the witnesses).
\item \textsuperscript{215} See \textit{Celotex}, 477 U.S. at 333–34 (Brennan, J., dissenting) (finding that Kress "had ‘failed to fulfill its initial burden’ of demonstrating that there was no evidence that there was a policeman in the store" (citing \textit{Adickes}, 398 U.S. at 157–58)).
\item \textsuperscript{216} \textit{Adickes}, 398 U.S. at 157.
\item \textsuperscript{217} See id. at 160 (finding that the petitioner did not have to provide any opposing evidence because respondent had failed to meet its burden).
\item \textsuperscript{218} See id. (noting that if respondent had met its initial burden, petitioner would have been required to respond with appropriate affidavits).
\item \textsuperscript{219} FED. R. CIV. P. 56(c).
\item \textsuperscript{220} See supra note 204 and accompanying text (explaining the dissenters' myth).
\end{itemize}
example, was not a pleading, a deposition, an answer to an interrogatory, an admission, or an affidavit. Why should it be considered to determine whether Rule 56(c)'s threshold for summary judgment is satisfied?

Finally, it is unclear how the text of Rule 56 supports the requirement—however laudable as a policy matter—that the defendant make "reasonable efforts" to uncover plaintiff's relevant evidence. If Rule 56(c) required an examination of the defendant's discovery efforts, we would surely want to examine whether the defendant made requests for production of documents to uncover plaintiff's evidence, but Rule 56(c) does not list either requests for production or their fruits among the items that a court should consider in deciding a summary judgment motion. Likewise, we might expect Rule 56(c) to include not only "answers to interrogatories" but also the interrogatories themselves.

C. Other Myths

Shortly after Celotex was decided, John E. Kennedy offered an alternative understanding of Celotex that attempted to reconcile it with Adickes. He suggests that in both cases, the plaintiff had "made enough of an imperfect showing" to avoid summary judgment under Rule 56(f). Rule 56(f) allows the court to "order a continuance to permit affidavits to be obtained or depositions to be taken or discovery to be had." On this view, both plaintiffs had "made showings of sufficient strength and quality" such that "[t]he trial court would have abused its discretion not to allow both Adickes and Catrett continuances to perfect their summary judgment evidence." While neither plaintiff had provided supportive materials in "an evidentiary form acceptable to defeat summary judgment," their showings were such that they deserved an opportunity to convert their inadequate materials into an admissible form.

223. Id.
224. See Kennedy, supra note 8, at 247–48 (trying to reconcile the two cases based on Rule 56(f)).
225. Id. at 248.
227. Kennedy, supra note 8, at 247.
228. Id. at 248.
229. See id. at 247 ("The trial court would have abused its discretion not to allow both Adickes and Catrett continuances to perfect their summary judgment evidence."). This approach might be viewed as a milder version of the dissenters' myth. Justice Brennan took
Kennedy readily admitted that "[t]he problem with this reconciliation of the two cases . . . is that neither Adickes nor Catrett made requests for continuance under Rule 56(f)."230 In addition, the Supreme Court did not base its Adickes and Celotex decisions on Rule 56(f). The Court did not indicate, for example, that Adickes would still have to get an affidavit from either her student Carolyn Moncure or the Kress employee Irene Sullivan. To the contrary, the Court held that summary judgment was inappropriate because Kress had failed to meet its burden.231 Thus, like the dissenters' myth, it ignores the actual reasoning of Adickes, which based its reversal on Kress's failure to meet its burden due to problems with the affidavits that Kress provided in support of its motion.232 The Court did not find that Adickes's materials, which admittedly were not trial-quality,233 were sufficient to avoid summary judgment.

Kennedy also suggested, but did not endorse, another reading of Celotex that might reconcile it with Adickes: one might call it the right-to-remain-silent myth. On this view, "Kress waived its summary judgment right to remain silent by attempting to testify with affidavits on its own behalf."234 In Adickes, "Kress's own affidavits supplied and raised the issue of fact which negated Kress's satisfaction of its initial burden to show no issue of fact."235 In Celotex, on the other hand, "Celotex's silence in its motion supplied and raised no factual issue."236 Had Kress, like Celotex, provided no affidavits, then it would have met its burden.237

Kennedy himself recognized that "[t]his reconciliation is somewhat perverse."238 In terms of this Article's methodology, it strains against both the

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arguably the most plaintiff-friendly view of Adickes and Celotex—the presence of evidence that was not trial-quality was still enough to defeat a summary judgment motion because such evidence would preclude the defendant from meeting its burden. See supra Part IV.B, notes 205-09, and accompanying text (describing the dissenters' myth). In Kennedy's approach, the presence of such evidence is not enough to keep the defendant from meeting its burden but would warrant giving the plaintiff enough time to "perfect" it by converting it to trial-quality evidence. Kennedy, supra note 8, at 247-48.

230. Kennedy, supra note 8, at 248.
232. See id. (reversing summary judgment because Kress's materials did not "foreclose the possibility that there was a policeman in the store").
233. See id. at 159 n.19 (pointing out the flaws in Adickes's summary judgment evidence).
234. Kennedy, supra note 8, at 247.
235. Id. at 246.
236. Id.
237. Id.
238. Id. at 247.
text of Rule 56 and the actual language of the Celotex majority. The basic standard for granting summary judgment is whether the materials listed in Rule 56(c) "show that there is no genuine issue as to any material fact." While this language is admittedly vague and subject to interpretation, it is hard to see why a defendant should hurt its cause by introducing materials that would tend to support the defendant's view of the facts.

The right-to-remain-silent approach also conflicts with the Celotex majority's statement that a "principal purpose[] of the summary judgment rule is to isolate and dispose of factually unsupported claims or defenses, and we think it should be interpreted in a way that allows it to accomplish this purpose." If the defendant is truly able to show that the plaintiff will lack evidence to support her claim at trial, then summary judgment is appropriate even if the defendant also produced affirmative evidence that, standing alone, would not fully "foreclose" the plaintiff's claim. This leaves open the key question of what a defendant must do to demonstrate that plaintiff's claims are unsupported, but it illustrates that the presence of additional evidence supporting the defendant should not contaminate a showing that is otherwise sufficient to show an absence of evidence.

Finally, it is worth noting that a panel of the Eleventh Circuit endorsed a unique reading of Celotex. In Clark v. Coats & Clark, Inc., the court concluded that Celotex created only a narrow exception to Adickes's "general rule" that a defendant must submit evidence that would "foreclose the possibility" of plaintiff being able to establish a necessary element of her claim. According to Clark, Celotex allows a moving defendant to prevail without negating an element of the plaintiff's claim only in "the unusual situation . . . where neither party could prove either the affirmative or the negative of an essential element of the claim." The Clark court presumably did not view Adickes as this kind of situation, perhaps because Kress was in a position to prove—with affidavits of the police officers and/or Kress employees—that there had been no conspiracy (although it failed to do so).

This interpretation is also unpersuasive. As an initial matter, the Celotex majority hardly viewed it as a "general rule" that a defendant must submit evidence that would foreclose the possibility of a necessary element of

242. Id. at 606.
243. See id. at 608 (stating Adickes's rule on the moving party's burden and finding that "Celotex did not change the general rule").
244. Id. at 607.
plaintiff's claim.\textsuperscript{245} To the contrary, it stated that \textit{Adickes} should not "be construed to mean that the burden is on the party moving for summary judgment to produce evidence showing the absence of a genuine issue of material fact, even with respect to an issue on which the nonmoving party bears the burden of proof."\textsuperscript{246} Even if Celotex intended to create only a "narrow exception" to the \textit{Adickes} rule,\textsuperscript{247} it is a stretch to infer that this exception applied only when the defendant could not "prove [a] negative"\textsuperscript{248} because the Celotex majority never made any reference to whether Celotex would have been able to prove a lack of exposure with affirmative evidence. And if summary judgment is designed "to isolate and dispose of factually unsupported claims or defenses,"\textsuperscript{249} a convincing showing of an absence of evidence should warrant summary judgment even if the defendant might also have provided affirmative evidence that a factual predicate to the plaintiff's claim is false. Whether a defendant is able to show such an absence of evidence bears no relation to whether the defendant could also have proved the negative of that element, were it so inclined. Finally, it is unclear how the \textit{Clark} court's approach fits with the text of Rule 56.

\textbf{D. Myth-ing in Action: The Lower Courts Interpret Celotex}

\textbf{I. Defendant's Burden}

Lower courts have conflicting views with respect to the scope of the defendant's burden under \textit{Celotex}.\textsuperscript{250} Most courts seem to follow the paper trial myth, imposing virtually no burden on defendants moving for summary judgment.\textsuperscript{251} While courts often give lip service to the proposition that "the

\textsuperscript{245} Id. at 608.
\textsuperscript{247} Supra notes 241–43 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{248} Clark v. Coats & Clark, Inc., 929 F.2d 604, 607 (11th Cir. 1991).
\textsuperscript{249} Celotex, 477 U.S. at 323–24.
\textsuperscript{250} See, e.g., Fitzpatrick v. City of Atlanta, 2 F.3d 1112, 1116 n.2 (11th Cir. 1993) ("[T]here has been some confusion among courts as to the nature of the showing required when the movant seeks to discharge the initial responsibility by demonstrating that there is an absence of evidence to prove a fact necessary to the non-movant's case.").
\textsuperscript{251} E.g., Adler v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., 144 F.3d 664, 671 (10th Cir. 1998) ("[A] movant that will not bear the burden of persuasion at trial need not negate the nonmovant's claim."); Street v. J.C. Bradford & Co., 886 F.2d 1472, 1478 (6th Cir. 1989) ("[T]he movant could challenge the opposing party to 'put up or shut up' on a critical issue. . . . [I]f the respondent did not 'put up' summary judgment was proper."); see also Redish, supra note 8, at 1345 ("Since Celotex, the majority of lower federal courts have wisely read that decision to impose virtually no burden..."
initial burden is on the moving party to show the court 'that there is an absence of evidence to support the non-moving party's case,'" they nearly as often either ignore that burden entirely or presume that the burden is necessarily met as long as there is insufficient trial-quality evidence in the summary judgment record to support plaintiff's claim.253

Some notable lower court decisions, however, either follow the dissenters' myth or impose a more substantial burden on a moving defendant.254 One Sixth Circuit panel, for example, found it improper for the district court to grant summary judgment based on the plaintiff's failure to produce evidence to rebut the defendant's assertion that a particular fact was undisputed.255 The panel reasoned that the defendant, "as the party moving for summary judgment, had the initial burden of production and persuasion on the motion." Judge Fletcher (a former Civil Procedure professor257) authored a Ninth Circuit decision that endorsed the dissenters' myth, concluding that a defendant seeking summary judgment on an absence of evidence theory must "have made reasonable efforts, using the normal tools of discovery, to discover whether the nonmoving party has enough evidence to carry its burden of persuasion at trial."258 Finally, as already mentioned, the Eleventh Circuit's Clark decision held that a defendant must use affirmative evidence negating the existence of

252. Manders v. Okla. ex rel. Dep't of Mental Health, 875 F.2d 263, 264 (10th Cir. 1989) (quoting Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317, 325 (1986)).

253. E.g., id. at 265 (granting summary judgment because "[a] review of the record reveals that plaintiff failed to offer evidence of any conduct by defendant which indicated a continuation of his alleged sexual harassment"). One empirical study undertaken after Celotex indicated that 60% of decisions granting summary judgment for a defendant contained no "discussion of the sufficiency of the defendant's production in support of the summary judgment motion." Issacharoff & Loewenstein, supra note 15, at 92.

254. E.g., Russ v. Int'l Paper Co., 943 F.2d 589, 592 (5th Cir. 1991) ("[B]efore the non-moving party is required to produce evidence in opposition to the motion, the moving party must first satisfy its obligation of demonstrating that there are factual issues warranting trial."); United States v. Four Parcels, 941 F.2d 1428, 1438 n.19 (11th Cir. 1991) ("[T]he moving party must point to specific portions of the record in order to demonstrate that the nonmoving party cannot meet its burden of proof at trial." (citing Celotex, 477 U.S. at 325 (Brennan, J., dissenting))).


256. Id. at 725–26 (citing Celotex, 477 U.S. at 331–32, but failing to note that it was citing Justice Brennan's dissenting opinion).


an essential element, except in the "unusual situation . . . where neither party could prove either the affirmative or the negative of an essential element." 259

2. Plaintiff’s Burden

Lower court opinions also conflict over the plaintiff’s burden, particularly with respect to the materials on which a plaintiff may rely. Most courts seem to follow the paper trial myth on this issue as well, requiring that the plaintiff satisfy its burden with trial-quality evidence. 260 One court explained:

Celotex did not alter the settled law that Rule 56(e) requires the adversary to set forth facts that would be admissible in evidence at trial. Material that is inadmissible will not be considered on a motion for summary judgment because it would not establish a genuine issue of material fact if offered at trial and continuing the action would be useless. 261

Some courts, however, have read Celotex as allowing a plaintiff to demonstrate a genuine issue of fact using materials that fall short of the admissibility standards that would govern at trial. After the Court remanded Celotex, the D.C. Circuit decided that "even if the Hoff letter itself would not be admissible at trial, Mrs. Catrett has gone on to indicate that the substance of the letter is reducible to admissible evidence in the form of trial testimony." 262


260. See, e.g., Garside v. Osco Drug, Inc., 895 F.2d 46, 50 (1st Cir. 1990) ("[A]bsent a showing of admissibility appellant may not rely on hearsay, whether or not embodied in an interrogatory answer, to oppose proper motions for summary judgment."); Canada v. Blain’s Helicopters, Inc., 831 F.2d 920, 923 (9th Cir. 1987) ("It is well settled that unauthenticated documents cannot be considered on a motion for summary judgment."); see also Sallis v. Univ. of Minn., 408 F.3d 470, 474 (8th Cir. 2005) ("The nonmoving party must show by admissible evidence that specific facts remain which create a genuine issue for trial."). One court has stated, apparently inadvertently, that a plaintiff’s own affidavit is not sufficient to create a genuine issue of fact, even if it was based on personal knowledge and set forth facts as would be admissible at trial. See Ashbrook v. Block, 917 F.2d 918, 921 (6th Cir. 1990) (stating that the plaintiff "must employ proof other than his pleadings and own affidavits" to establish the existence of specific triable facts).

261. Duplantis v. Shell Offshore, Inc., 948 F.2d 187, 192 (5th Cir. 1991) (quoting Geiserman v. MacDonald, 893 F.2d 787, 793 (5th Cir. 1990)).

262. Catrett v. Johns-Manville Sales Corp. (Catrett II), 826 F.2d 33, 38 (D.C. Cir. 1987), on remand from Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317 (1986); see also Offshore Aviation v. Transcon Lines, Inc., 831 F.2d 1013, 1015 (11th Cir. 1987) ("The claim by [defendant] that the letter is inadmissible hearsay does not undercut the existence of any material facts the letter may put into question. Consideration of the letter does not turn on admissibility at trial but on availability for review."). But see id. at 1016 (Edmondson, J., concurring) (debating whether Celotex changed the law on admissibility standards for summary judgment purposes). The concurrence argued that:
VI. Dispelling the Myths: An Interpretive Approach to Celotex

In formulating an alternative approach to Celotex, this Article emphasizes values that are traditionally employed when interpreting a case: (1) consistency with prior Supreme Court cases; (2) consistency with the governing textual sources; and (3) coherence with other parts of the opinion and relevancy given the case's factual and procedural posture. This Part considers these values with respect to both the defendant's burden and the plaintiff's burden and proposes a new approach to summary judgment. This Part also explains how this approach reconciles the Celotex majority opinion with Justice White's concurring opinion. Finally, this Part responds to potential critiques of my approach to summary judgment.

A. Reconsidering the Defendant's Burden

With respect to the defendant's summary judgment burden, a principal problem with the prevailing myths is their inability to reconcile Celotex with the result and reasoning of the Court's earlier decision in Adickes. The first step toward a coherent reading of Celotex and Adickes is to heed Martin Louis's pre-Celotex observation that there are two distinct ways for a defendant to show that there is no genuine issue of material fact:

First, through discovery he can obtain a preview of his opponent's evidence on an essential element and contend, in support of his motion, that the evidence is insufficient to discharge the opponent's production burden... Second, by previewing his own proof he can attempt to show the nonexistence of an essential element asserted by the opposing party.264

If "X" is a necessary element of plaintiff's claim, a defendant seeking summary judgment can either (1) show that plaintiff lacks sufficient evidence to prove "X" at trial, or (2) produce evidence showing "not-X" (that is, that "X" is false). Celotex involved the first of these methods, and Adickes involved the second.265 Celotex met its burden of showing that Catrett would lack evidence

263. See supra notes 178-81 and accompanying text (setting forth the basic interpretive principles that guide this Article's analysis).
264. Louis, supra note 159, at 750.
265. Judge Fletcher's decision in Nissan recognized this distinction as well. See Nissan
to prove exposure because it served interrogatories that would be expected to elicit a description or identification of any evidence Catrett might use at trial to establish exposure. When Catrett identified no evidence or witnesses in her answer to these interrogatories, Celotex could persuasively argue, in lockstep with the text of Rule 56(c), that these "answers to interrogatories . . . show that there is no genuine issue" as to whether Mr. Catrett had been exposed to asbestos via a Celotex product.

In Adickes, on the other hand, the defendant did not seek to show that the plaintiff would lack evidence to support a necessary element of her claim. Kress had not served interrogatories similar to the ones that Celotex did—or at least did not rely on them in support of its summary judgment motion. Unlike Celotex, Kress could not point to a Rule 56(c) document that would be expected, but failed, to reveal any evidence that Adickes could use at trial to establish a conspiracy. Instead, Kress relied on various affidavits in an attempt to show "not-X," that is, that there in fact was no conspiracy between Kress and any government official. Thus, Kress used what Martin Louis identified as the second method of showing a lack of a genuine issue of material fact—producing affirmative evidence that a condition necessary for plaintiff to prevail is false. The Supreme Court held simply that Kress's evidence was insufficient because it failed to foreclose the possibility that a police officer was in the store and had reached an agreement with a Kress employee other than the one who had provided a sworn affidavit. In other words, Kress's documents failed to show "not-X."

Fire Ins. Co., Ltd. v. Fritz Cos., Inc., 210 F.3d 1099, 1103–04 (9th Cir. 2000) (concluding that the "tension between Adickes and Celotex" stems from the fact that the cases "dealt with the two different methods by which a moving party can carry its initial burden of production").

266. See Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317, 320 (1986) ("[P]etitioner noted that respondent had failed to identify, in answering interrogatories specifically requesting such information, any witnesses who could testify about the decedent's exposure to petitioner's asbestos products.").

267. Id.

268. See id. at 322 (quoting FED. R. CIV. P. 56(c)) (discussing the Court's understanding of Rule 56(c)).


270. See id. at 153–55 & nn.8–12 (describing the materials submitted by Kress in support of its motion).

271. See id. at 153 (documenting Kress's attempt to show the absence of a conspiracy).

272. See Louis, supra note 159, at 750 ("[B]y previewing his own proof [the moving party] can attempt to show the nonexistence of an essential element asserted by the opposing party.").

This conclusion is consistent with the majority's approach in Celotex. One must simply recognize that the summary judgment record in Celotex contained an important Rule 56(c) document that was missing in Adickes: inadequate answers to interrogatories that would otherwise be expected to identify or describe evidence plaintiff could use at trial. This material allowed Celotex to meet its initial burden by showing an absence of evidence. Kress, on the other hand, could not point to such a document and, therefore, lacked a basis for showing an absence of evidence.

Thus, the best way to reconcile Adickes and Celotex is this: A defendant seeking summary judgment on an absence of evidence theory must use Rule 56(c) documents that would be expected to reveal any evidence supporting the plaintiff's claim, but that failed to do so. To illustrate, imagine what would have happened in Adickes if Kress had conducted the kind of discovery that Celotex did. Suppose that Kress had served interrogatories asking for evidence and witnesses that would support Adickes's conspiracy claim. If Adickes failed to identify any such evidence, Kress could have used that answer to show an absence of evidence.

But suppose that Adickes's answer identified herself as a witness. Because she revealed a witness, her answer to this hypothetical interrogatory alone could not show that there would be an absence of evidence on this issue. Kress would have to take additional steps, such as deposing Adickes, to show an absence of evidence. Recall that Kress did depose Adickes, and her only testimony supporting the existence of a conspiracy was that her student had told her that there was a police officer in the store when they arrived. Because this would be inadmissible hearsay on the issue of whether a police officer was in fact in the store, Kress could rely on the interrogatory response, in combination with the deposition testimony, to show that there would be an absence of evidence.

Finally, suppose that Adickes had identified her student Carolyn Moncure in her answer to the hypothetical interrogatory. Again, the identification of a witness would preclude Kress from relying on the interrogatory answer alone to show an absence of evidence. Kress could then depose the student. Although no such deposition was taken, the student did testify at the trial on Adickes's "custom of the community" claim, which had survived summary judgment. The student testified at trial just as the deposition of Adickes suggested she would: there had been a police officer in the store that day. Assuming that

274. See Adickes, 398 U.S. at 156 n.13 (noting Adickes's deposition testimony that one of her students had seen a police officer enter the store).
275. See id. (quoting the student's testimony).
276. See id. (recounting the student's testimony that "she saw a policeman come into the
the student gave this same testimony in a deposition, Kress might still seek summary judgment of the theory that this testimony is legally insufficient to establish a conspiracy. While the Supreme Court suggested in Adickes that the mere presence of a police officer in the store would suffice to support an inference of a conspiracy between the officer and a Kress employee, this is an arguable proposition. If Kress had used the various discovery tools described above, the interrogatory answers and depositions would have revealed that the only evidence of a conspiracy would be testimony that a police officer was present. At that point, Kress could have argued in its summary judgment motion that such evidence is insufficient to support an inference of a conspiracy and, thus, that there is no genuine issue of material fact.

This still leaves the question of what materials the court should consider in determining whether a defendant has shown an "absence of evidence." According to the dissenters' myth, assessing the defendant's showing requires consideration of any materials that are "already in the record" at the time the defendant filed its motion, including materials that were "overlooked or ignored" by the defendant's motion. In Celotex, Justice Brennan believed that Celotex had overlooked such materials—the two letters and Mr. Catrett's workers' compensation deposition. But the majority opinion indicated that these materials should be examined in connection with the plaintiff's showing, not the defendant's.

Perhaps, as proponents of the dissenters' myth contend, the majority based its approach on its misperception that these materials were not in the record at the time of the motion. Or perhaps the majority's approach could be limited to the special situation in Celotex where a motion is filed, withdrawn, and then renewed (albeit with important modifications). For a number of reasons,
however, the best interpretation of Celotex is that the court should consider only the Rule 56(c) materials that the defendant itself uses to support its contention that there is an "absence of evidence."

First, the Celotex majority equates the defendant's burden with Rule 56(e)'s requirement that the motion be "made and supported as provided in this rule." As a textual matter, then, the most natural reading is to examine whether defendant's motion is "supported" by Rule 56(c) documents showing that there is an absence of evidence to support plaintiff's claim. Second, this approach is consistent with language used elsewhere in Justice Rehnquist's majority opinion. He defines the defendant's "initial responsibility" as "identifying those portions of 'the pleadings, depositions, answers to interrogatories, and admissions on file, together with the affidavits, if any,' which it believes demonstrate the absence of a genuine issue of material fact." If the defendant were required to canvass the entire record, it would never be sufficient merely to identify only "those portions" of Rule 56(c) documents that demonstrate the absence of a genuine issue.

B. Reconsidering the Plaintiff's Burden

With respect to the plaintiff's burden, the most puzzling aspect of Celotex is what materials the court may consider. Justice Rehnquist's majority opinion stated that the plaintiff does not have to use materials that are "in a form that would be admissible at trial." He added, however, that "one would normally expect" the plaintiff to make this showing from depositions, answers to interrogatories, admissions, or affidavits. But when can materials that are not "in a form that would be admissible at trial" constitute a sufficient showing by the plaintiff on an essential element of her case? And under what circumstances may a plaintiff defy the "normal[] expect[ation]" that she make her showing using affidavits, depositions, answers to interrogatories, or admissions?

477 U.S. 317 (1986); Shapiro, supra note 17, at 348–49 (summarizing Celotex's initial motion for summary judgment, filed in September, and noting that Celotex refiled its motion in December, "but this time the focus was quite different"); see also Celotex, 477 U.S. at 319 (stating that Celotex's summary judgment motion "was first filed in September 1981").

284. Celotex, 477 U.S. at 324 (quoting FED. R. CIV. P. 56(c)).
285. Id. at 323 (quoting FED. R. CIV. P. 56(c)).
286. Id. at 324.
287. Id.
288. Id.
289. Id.
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1. When Can a Court Consider Non-Rule 56(c) Documents?

Rule 56(c) sets forth the list of documents that determine whether "there is no genuine issue as to any material fact."\(^{290}\) If we aim to be faithful to the text of Rule 56, the majority's suggestion that there could ever be an exception to the "normal" expectation that a plaintiff use such documents is problematic. The threshold interpretive question is this: when can something that is not a Rule 56(c) document nonetheless merit consideration under Rule 56(c)?

One potential answer is that some materials are the substantial equivalent of the documents enumerated in Rule 56(c). Answers to interrogatories, for example, are properly considered under Rule 56(c).\(^{291}\) The Federal Rules of Civil Procedure relating to discovery create a duty to supplement answers to interrogatories "seasonably," unless the "additional information" has been "made known" to one's opponent either during discovery or in writing.\(^{292}\) In this way, the rules treat certain "information" as tantamount to supplemental interrogatory answers when that information is disclosed to the opposing party. The rules also state that when a party fails to provide such additional information without substantial justification, that party may not use that information.\(^{293}\) This bar applies not only to use at trial, but also to use in connection with "any motion" before the court,\(^{294}\) including a summary judgment motion.\(^{295}\)

Thus, the federal rules deem information to be equivalent to a supplemental answer to an interrogatory if it is provided in a seasonable manner and with substantial justification for the party's failure to provide the

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291. Id.

292. Fed. R. Civ. P. 26(c)(2). This Rule states:
A party is under a duty seasonably to amend a prior response to an interrogatory, request for production, or request for admission if the party learns that the response is in some material respect incomplete or incorrect and if the additional or corrective information has not otherwise been made known to the other parties during the discovery process or in writing.

Id.

293. Fed. R. Civ. P. 37(c)(1). This Rule states:
A party that without substantial justification fails to disclose information required by Rule 26(a) or 26(c)(1), or to amend a prior response to discovery as required by Rule 26(c)(2), is not, unless such failure is harmless, permitted to use as evidence at a trial, at a hearing, or on a motion any witness or information not so disclosed.

Id.

294. Id.

295. See, e.g., Pouls-Minott v. Smith, 388 F.3d 354, 358 (1st Cir. 2004) (stating that Rule 37(c)(1) "can also be applied to motions for summary judgment").
information in its initial answer. When material containing such information satisfies the federal rules in this way, it is reasonable to treat that information as tantamount to "answers to interrogatories" for purposes of Rule 56(c) and, therefore, to consider that information for purposes of a summary judgment motion.  

This reading of Rule 56(c) makes sense in light of the facts facing the Court in Celotex. Among the materials Catrett presented in opposition to Celotex's summary judgment motion were letters from Mr. Catrett's employer's insurer and assistant secretary. These documents contained information relating to the asbestos products Catrett's husband might have handled while on the job. Thus they contained information that could be deemed supplemental answers to Celotex's interrogatories, which had asked Catrett to describe and identify evidence and witnesses relating Mr. Catrett's exposure to any Celotex product.

2. When Can "Inadmissible" Materials Be Considered?

The other issue Celotex left unaddressed is when the court may consider materials even though they are not "in a form that would be admissible at trial." Rule 56 imposes no general standard of admissibility. With respect to affidavits, however, Rule 56(e) requires that they "shall be made on personal knowledge, shall set forth such facts as would be admissible in evidence, and shall show affirmatively that the affiant is competent to testify to the matters stated therein." The text of Rule 56 does not impose this requirement on the other categories of documents listed in Rule 56(c).

Rule 56(e) also provides that when a summary judgment motion "is made and supported as provided in this rule," the responding party may not rest on

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296. See Catrett v. Johns-Manville Sales Corp. (Catrett II), 826 F.2d 33, 38 (D.C. Cir. 1987) (stating that "[t]here can, of course, be no doubt" that a supplemental answer to an interrogatory can be considered because Rule 56(c) "specifically list[s] "answers to interrogatories" (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(c))), on remand from Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317 (1986).


298. See id. at 320 (stating that Rule 56(e) allows a party to oppose a summary judgment motion using any of the evidentiary materials listed in Rule 56(e) except the pleadings themselves).

299. Id.


301. See Fed. R. Civ. P. 56 (failing to impose a requirement that the other documents be in a form admissible at trial).
"mere allegations" in its pleading, but rather "must set forth specific facts showing that there is a genuine issue for trial."\(^{302}\) Although courts and commentators often cite this language when they discuss summary judgment admissibility, this portion of Rule 56(e) actually has nothing to do with whether a particular material may be considered in connection with the plaintiff’s burden. Rather, it goes to the merits of the summary judgment inquiry—whether the record "show[s] that there is no genuine issue" of "material fact."\(^{303}\) To illustrate, suppose a defendant meets its summary judgment burden, and the plaintiff responds solely with allegations in her complaint about the existence of a particular element. Summary judgment should be granted not because Rule 56(e) makes it improper to consider an allegation in her pleading, but because a mere allegation in the plaintiff’s complaint is not sufficient to show that there is a genuine issue of material fact. Moreover, this is consistent with the Celotex majority’s instruction that a sufficient showing by the plaintiff must be able to be "reduced to admissible evidence."\(^{304}\) A mere pleading allegation—absent the identification of a witness to support it—is not reducible to admissible evidence.

Thus, Rule 56 does not impose any admissibility requirement, except for affidavits. Many courts and commentators have assumed, consistent with the paper trial myth, that summary judgment materials are subject to the same admissibility requirements that would apply at trial.\(^{305}\) For example, they have refused to consider testimony in a deposition that would be hearsay if that same testimony were introduced at trial for the truth of the matter asserted.\(^{306}\) Those who support this approach read Justice Rehnquist’s statement as recognizing only that affidavits may be considered for purposes of summary judgment even though affidavit testimony is not "in a form that would be admissible at trial."\(^{307}\) Other summary judgment materials such as depositions and interrogatories, however, would be subject to usual evidentiary standards that would govern at trial.\(^{308}\)

\(^{302}\) FED. R. CIV. P. 56(c).
\(^{303}\) FED. R. CIV. P. 56(e).
\(^{305}\) See supra notes 189–91 and accompanying text (explaining that, under the paper trial myth, a plaintiff’s summary judgment evidence must generally meet the standards for admissibility at trial).
\(^{306}\) See, e.g., Garside v. Osco Drug, Inc., 895 F.2d 46, 50 (1st Cir. 1990) ("Hearsay evidence, inadmissible at trial, cannot be considered on a motion for summary judgment.").
\(^{307}\) See supra note 195 and accompanying text (stating that proponents of this view believe that Justice Rehnquist was "simply recognizing that affidavits may be considered for purpose of summary judgment" even if such testimony is not in admissible form).
\(^{308}\) See supra note 188 and accompanying text (describing the "trial-quality" evidence
The precise basis for importing trial evidentiary standards at the summary judgment phase is unclear. Take hearsay, for example. As one commentator has recognized, testimony that would be hearsay at trial is not necessarily testimony that would be hearsay for purposes of summary judgment. Hearsay is defined as an out-of-court statement offered for the truth of the matter asserted. Materials offered in opposition to summary judgment, however, are not offered to establish the truth of the matter asserted. They are offered to establish a genuine issue of material fact for trial. Suppose plaintiff’s interrogatory answer identifies a witness and states that she anticipates the witness’s testimony will establish "X." That is clearly inadmissible hearsay if the plaintiff seeks to introduce that interrogatory answer at trial to establish "X." But at the summary judgment phase, the plaintiff is not required to prove "X." She is only required to establish that there is a genuine issue for trial.

To conclude that a court may consider particular material in assessing the plaintiff’s showing is not to say that this material is sufficient to meet the plaintiff’s burden. What exactly constitutes a "sufficient showing" by a plaintiff when the defendant meets its burden by showing an "absence of evidence" on a necessary element of plaintiff’s claim? Recall that a defendant seeking summary judgment on an absence-of-evidence theory must be able to point to a Rule 56(c) material that it would expect to identify evidence the plaintiff might use at trial, but either fails to do so or identifies evidence that would be insufficient to carry plaintiff’s burden. Assuming the defendant can do so (as Celotex did), suppose that the plaintiff responded not with trial-quality evidence, but rather with a supplemental answer to an interrogatory identifying and describing witnesses and evidence that would support her claim. Would it still be the case that the Rule 56(c) materials show no genuine issue as to any material fact?

309. See Duane, supra note 198, at 1532 (concluding that assertions made in affidavits submitted on a summary judgment motion are not hearsay).


311. Duane, supra note 198, at 1532; see id. at 1535 ("[A] judge ruling on such a motion is neither permitted nor required to draw any conclusions about what happened in the past—that is, the truth of the matter asserted in the parties’ pleadings and affidavits—but what will happen at a future trial if there is one."").


313. See supra notes 264–73 and accompanying text (explaining the absence-of-evidence theory and classifying Celotex as a case in which the defendant met its burden by demonstrating the plaintiff’s lack of evidence).
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If the plaintiff had provided that information in her original answer to the defendant’s interrogatory, the defendant would not be able to establish an "absence of evidence" sufficient to meet its burden under my reading of Celotex: the Rule 56(c) documents before the court would not show that there is no "genuine issue" of material fact. The question, then, is whether the result should be different simply because the plaintiff identified the witness in a supplemental interrogatory answer. In both situations, the information before the court is exactly the same. To conclude that summary judgment should be granted in the first instance but not in the second would create not only an intuitive inconsistency but also a textual anomaly. We would be requiring courts to conclude that the same materials are enough to create a "genuine issue" in one situation but not in another. If Rule 56(c)'s standard is to have an ascertainable meaning, it should at least yield consistent results when applied to identical records.

Obviously, the plaintiff's response is sufficient only if her materials are "reducible to admissible evidence." 314 So materials that do not indicate that there will be evidentiary support usable at trial would not suffice since they would not indicate a genuine issue for trial. Suppose, for example, that Catrett had produced only Mr. Catrett's deposition from his workers' compensation proceeding. The transcript would not be admissible at trial because Celotex was not a party to the earlier proceeding, 315 and it could not be "reduced to admissible evidence" because Mr. Catrett was deceased by that point in time. This hypothetical showing would be insufficient not because such a deposition is "inadmissible" for purposes of summary judgment, but because it fails to show a "genuine issue" as to the material fact of exposure.

C. The Interpretive Approach: A Summary

The subparts above illustrate how Celotex is best read in light of the interpretive values I have described. This subpart combines these insights and describes the approach to summary judgment that is most consistent with these values. It then explains how summary judgment would operate under this approach.

A defendant who seeks summary judgment on the basis that the plaintiff will lack sufficient evidence to prove her case at trial must be able to point to

314. Celotex, 477 U.S. at 327.
315. See Fed. R. Civ. P. 32(a) (providing that a deposition "may be used against any party who was present or represented at the taking of the deposition or who had reasonable notice thereof").
some Rule 56(c) document that would be expected to contain an identification or description of evidence that the plaintiff could use at trial, but does not. Celotex provides a perfect example of this scenario. Celotex served interrogatories asking the plaintiff not only for an identification of potential witnesses supporting her claim, but also for information about any work Mr. Catrett did with asbestos, including the identity of any specific asbestos product he used. When answers to such interrogatories fail to identify any such witnesses or information, the defendant can argue that these answers show that there is an absence of evidence to support the plaintiff's claim. And when such a Rule 56(c) document does point to evidence that would support the plaintiff's claim, the defendant could use other Rule 56(c) documents to demonstrate that such evidence will in fact be insufficient to meet the plaintiff's burden. The defendant could, for example, obtain affidavits from or take depositions of the witnesses identified by the plaintiff.

When the defendant is able to present Rule 56(c) documents that establish an absence of evidence in this way, it meets its burden. The defendant does not have to cull through the record to determine if other information indicates that evidence may exist to support the plaintiff's claim. Nor, however, may the defendant satisfy its burden simply by pointing to some or even all of the Rule 56(c) materials created up to that point in the litigation and asserting that they do not contain evidence to support a particular element of the plaintiff's claim. That is why Kress could not prevail on an absence-of-evidence theory, even though it deposed Adickes and she could provide no first-hand testimony that a police officer was in the store. While such a deposition is a Rule 56(c) document, it does not "show that there is no genuine issue as to any material fact" unless there is also a Rule 56(c) document indicating that this would be the evidence on which the plaintiff would rely to establish that fact at trial.

If the defendant meets its burden, then courts should grant summary judgment unless the plaintiff is able to meet her burden. Under Celotex, she

316. See Catrett v. Johns-Manville Sales Corp. (Catrett II), 826 F.2d 33, 34 (D.C. Cir. 1987) (noting that Celotex asked for the "type and identity of each such asbestos material with which [Mr. Catrett] had contact"), on remand from Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317 (1986).


318. FED. R. CIV. P. 56(c). A defendant would always have the option, of course, to seek summary judgment by presenting affirmative evidence that a condition necessary for plaintiff to prevail is false. If Kress, for example, had provided affidavits of the police officers that denied being in the store, it could have met its burden that way. Adickes, 398 U.S. at 160.

319. See supra notes 124–30 and accompanying text (describing the plaintiff's burden).
must make "a sufficient showing" with respect to the aspect of her claim that the defendant has challenged.\textsuperscript{320} Her supporting materials must be sufficient to carry her burden of proof at trial "if reduced to admissible evidence."\textsuperscript{321} Assuming that the plaintiff has such materials, she faces a problem at the very outset: The plaintiff may have to excuse her failure to reveal this information in response to the defendant's discovery requests. The rules would require her to demonstrate "substantial justification" for failing "reasonably to amend" her earlier response.\textsuperscript{322} Assuming that she can provide such justification, then the material she presents in support of her motion will be the functional equivalent of a supplement to the Rule 56(c) document that formed the basis of the defendant's summary judgment motion in the first place.\textsuperscript{323} If, as in \textit{Celotex}, the defendant based its motion on an interrogatory answer, then the plaintiff's new information is tantamount to a supplemental interrogatory answer and so may be considered to determine whether the Rule 56(c) materials "show that there is no genuine issue as to any material fact."\textsuperscript{324}

Thus, when a defendant seeks summary judgment on the basis that there is an absence of evidence, the plaintiff does not have to produce trial-quality evidence such as an affidavit from a witness who would be competent to testify at trial or deposition testimony that itself would be admissible at trial. She does, however, need to provide material sufficient to refute the absence of evidence indicated by the defendant's showing. If, for example, the defendant had asked her to identify supporting witnesses and she failed to do so, then her responsive material must identify such witnesses. And she must also justify her failure to disclose that information earlier, or else she may be prevented from using that information under the discovery rules.\textsuperscript{325} In the event that the plaintiff is not able to provide a sufficient response regarding the evidence she

\begin{itemize}
  \item[Fed. R. Civ. P. 26(c)(2)] (describing a party's duty to amend prior discovery responses); Fed. R. Civ. P. 37(c)(1) (stating the penalties for failure to amend a prior discovery response).
  \item[Supra notes 292–96 and accompanying text (discussing Rules 26(e)(2) and 37(c)(1) and concluding that as long as the plaintiff justifies her failure to amend earlier answers, such materials can be treated like Rule 56(c) materials for purposes of summary judgment).
  \item[Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(c); see also supra note 301 and accompanying text (explaining why it is reasonable to treat supplemental answers as equivalent to Rule 56(c) materials).
  \item[Supra note 293–94 and accompanying text (explaining Rule 37(c)(1)).]
\end{itemize}
could use to support her claim at trial, then she may urge the court, under Rule 56(f), to allow her more time for discovery and investigation.\footnote{326}

Under this Article's approach, the defendant will usually have to do some legwork if it wants to obtain summary judgment on an "absence of evidence" theory. For example, the defendant could use interrogatories to elicit an identification or description of the evidence and witnesses that may support the plaintiff's claim. When the plaintiff fails to do so, that alone would show an absence of evidence. A defendant might also meet its burden by pointing to plaintiff's failure to identify witnesses or evidence as part of her Rule 26(a)(1) disclosures.\footnote{327} When the plaintiff does provide information about possible witnesses and evidence, the defendant may either (a) seek summary judgment on the basis that the plaintiff's own response indicates that her evidence will be insufficient to carry her burden at trial,\footnote{328} or (b) seek to create other Rule 56(e) documents showing that the evidence will be insufficient, for example, by taking depositions or obtaining affidavits of the witnesses plaintiff identified.

While this Article's approach imposes more of a burden on the defendant than the paper trial myth,\footnote{329} it also facilitates the discovery process by giving the plaintiff a strong incentive to provide complete information in its disclosures and discovery responses. If she delays, she would give the defendant a basis for seeking summary judgment and would run the risk that the court would not allow previously undisclosed information to be used in

\footnotetext{326}{\textit{Fed. R. Civ. P.} 56(f)}: Should it appear that the party cannot for reasons stated present by affidavit facts essential to justify the party's opposition, the court may refuse the application for judgment or order a continuance to permit affidavits to be obtained or depositions to be taken or discovery to be had.\textit{Id.}

\footnotetext{327}{Although Rule 56(c) does not expressly mention disclosures, the initial disclosures required by Rule 26(a) are commonly viewed as identical to interrogatories. Indeed, the Rules Advisory Committee called them "the functional equivalent of court-ordered interrogatories." \textit{Fed. R. Civ. P. 26} advisory committee's note (1993 amendment). Thus, Rule 56(c)'s reference to interrogatories is sensibly read to allow consideration of Rule 26(a) disclosures.}

\footnotetext{328}{Imagine, for example, that Kress had served interrogatories on Adickes asking her to identify and describe the evidence and witnesses supporting her conspiracy claim. If Adickes had identified only her student Carolyn and described her testimony as being that there was an officer in the store, Kress might have argued for summary judgment on the theory that the mere presence of an officer in the store would not be sufficient to infer a conspiracy. \textit{See supra} notes 277–81 and accompanying text (discussing how Kress might have discharged its burden in hypothetical situations).}

\footnotetext{329}{\textit{See supra} notes 183–86 (explaining that under the paper trial myth, a defendant can meet its initial summary judgment burden by pointing out that the plaintiff has provided no evidence of one or more essential elements of its claim).}
opposition.\textsuperscript{330} Unlike the dissenters' myth,\textsuperscript{331} however, this Article's approach would not impose on the defendant the burden of culling through every piece of material that has changed hands during discovery before seeking summary judgment.\textsuperscript{332} Once the defendant is able to meet its burden, it would be up to the plaintiff to present materials supporting her claim (whether or not those materials are already "in the record"	extsuperscript{333}) and to justify her failure to disclose or describe those materials earlier.

D. Solving the Paradox of Justice White's Concurrence

My reading of the Celotex majority opinion also solves a long-standing riddle. Although Justice White joined the majority opinion, many view his concurrence as endorsing a very different view of summary judgment.\textsuperscript{334} Some have gone so far as to label Justice Rehnquist's opinion a mere "plurality," apparently viewing Justice White's concurrence as so incongruous with Rehnquist's approach that White's critical fifth vote should be disregarded.\textsuperscript{335} In particular, many struggle to reconcile the Rehnquist opinion with White's statements that a defendant cannot simply "move for summary judgment without supporting the motion in any way or with a conclusory assertion that the plaintiff has no evidence to prove his case," and that the plaintiff "need not . . . depose his witnesses or obtain their affidavits to defeat a summary judgment motion asserting only that he has failed to produce any support for his

\textsuperscript{330} See supra notes 297–99 (detailing the risk that a plaintiff creates by delaying her discovery disclosures).

\textsuperscript{331} See supra notes 205–09 and accompanying text (noting that under the dissenters' myth, a defendant seeking to show an absence of evidence must show the inadequacy of any documents or potential witnesses "in the record," even if those materials are hearsay, unsworn statements, or unauthorized documents).

\textsuperscript{332} Jack Friedenthal has criticized this apparent consequence of Justice Brennan's approach. See Friedenthal, supra note 17, at 778 ("Must the moving party comb through all the material available to see if there is something to be refuted even though the responding party has never mentioned it in answers to interrogatories requesting relevant evidence?").


\textsuperscript{334} See, e.g., Redish, supra note 8, at 1344–45 (stating that Justice White rejected a standard under which movants would have no greater burden on summary judgment than they would have at trial, even though the majority opinion he joined appeared to adopt such a standard).

\textsuperscript{335} See supra note 131 (noting that some scholars argue that Justice Rehnquist's opinion was a plurality because of Justice White's separate concurrence).
They find White’s view to be more consistent with Justice Brennan’s dissent than with the Rehnquist opinion.\(^\text{336}\)

On closer analysis, the paradox of Justice White’s concurrence is simply another symptom of the paper trial myth. If one reads the majority opinion as imposing on the plaintiff the burden of producing trial-quality evidence just as she would at trial, then Justice White’s concurrence is irreconcilable with the majority opinion that he joined. But for the reasons set forth above, the paper trial myth is not the best reading of the Celotex majority opinion.\(^\text{338}\) The best interpretation is that a defendant moving for summary judgment on an absence-of-evidence theory must be able to present a Rule 56(c) document that it would expect to reveal evidence that the plaintiff could use at trial but does not.\(^\text{339}\) This view fits quite nicely with Justice White’s understanding that the defendant must still “discharge the burden the Rules place upon him: It is not enough to move for summary judgment without supporting the motion in any way.”\(^\text{340}\)

Rendering the majority opinion to be consistent with Justice White’s concurrence was not one of the interpretive values that animated this Article’s analysis. Indeed, such a value would be controversial as a principle of interpretation. As Justice Blackmun wrote, “the meaning of a majority opinion is to be found within the opinion itself; the gloss that an individual Justice chooses to place upon it is not authoritative.”\(^\text{341}\) This Article’s interpretation of Celotex is based on the majority opinion itself, along with standard legal referents such as past Supreme Court decisions and the governing textual sources. It is a pleasant surprise, however, that this interpretation also reconciles the majority opinion with Justice White’s concurrence.

E. Response to Likely Critiques

This subpart considers possible criticisms of my interpretation of Celotex. It considers three such critiques: (1) this approach is inconsistent with the text of Rule 56(c); (2) this approach would increase the likelihood of abuse by

\(^{336}\) Celotex, 477 U.S. at 328 (White, J., concurring).

\(^{337}\) E.g., Nelken, supra note 8, at 68 (noting that both Justice White’s and Justice Brennan’s opinions emphasized that the initial burden in “absence of evidence” cases is not illusory and made clear that the party relying on the lack of evidence must pursue “leads obtained in discovery”).

\(^{338}\) See supra Part V.A (explaining and critiquing the paper trial myth).

\(^{339}\) See supra Part V.C (presenting a better interpretation of Celotex).

\(^{340}\) Celotex, 477 U.S. at 328 (White, J., concurring).

litigants; and (3) this approach would prevent courts from reaching the merits of summary judgment motions by imposing artificial burdens on moving defendants. The first would challenge this approach from an interpretive standpoint, and the latter two would take issue with its practical consequences.

1. Inconsistent with Rule 56(e)

Opponents of this Article's interpretation might voice a textual objection. Recall Rule 56(e)'s instruction that when a summary judgment motion "is made and supported as provided in this rule," the responding party "must set forth specific facts showing that there is a genuine issue for trial."342 One could argue that by requiring "specific facts," Rule 56(e) intended to require trial-quality evidence, not simply the identification or description of such evidence.

At best, this is one plausible interpretation of an ambiguous provision. The more persuasive reading, however, supports my view. First, a coherent reading of this text must also account for the language used in the first half of Rule 56(e), which requires that affidavits "shall be made on personal knowledge, shall set forth such facts as would be admissible in evidence, and shall show affirmatively that the affiant is competent to testify to the matters stated therein."343 The drafters knew what language to use when they wanted to require trial-quality evidence. For affidavits, the drafters imposed explicit requirements of personal knowledge, competence, and the ability to be admitted at trial if that testimony were provided live. But when describing the general burden to be imposed on nonmovants, the drafters required only "specific facts." Juxtaposed against the language used to define the admissibility of affidavits, the "specific facts" requirement can hardly be read to require trial-quality evidence in all circumstances.

In addition, the full statement of what Rule 56(e) requires of a nonmoving plaintiff includes "specific facts showing that there is a genuine issue for trial."344 Thus, Rule 56(e) is tied to Rule 56(c)'s requirement that summary judgment be entered when there is "no genuine issue as to any material fact."345 As already discussed, the best reading of Celotex from an interpretive standpoint is that a defendant seeking summary judgment based on an "absence of evidence" fails to meet its burden if Rule 56(c) materials or their equivalents show evidence that the plaintiff might use at trial, regardless of whether those

342. FED. R. CIV. P. 56(e).
343. Id.
344. Id.
345. FED. R. CIV. P. 56(c).
materials are in trial-quality form. It follows that such materials present sufficiently "specific facts" to "show[] that there is a genuine issue for trial."

2. Likelihood of Abuse by Litigants

One might argue that this Article's reading of Celotex would be susceptible to abuse, both by plaintiffs and defendants. Imagine that in response to Celotex's interrogatories, Catrett listed a hundred people whom she claimed had knowledge of Mr. Catrett's use of Celotex's asbestos products and whom she planned to call at trial. Under this Article's approach, this would effectively preclude summary judgment on an absence-of-evidence theory unless the defendant takes affidavits or depositions of these witnesses. Imagine that Celotex deposed the first three witnesses on the list, and they all testified that they had never worked for Anning & Johnson, had no idea who Mr. Catrett is, and knew nothing about working with asbestos. Can Celotex seek summary judgment in this situation, or must it first depose the remaining ninety-seven employees?

As an initial matter, Rule 26(g) should adequately deter any plaintiff considering this strategy, because it authorizes sanctions where a party's discovery responses are made without "a reasonable inquiry" or are "interposed for any improper purpose, such as to harass or to cause unnecessary delay or needless increase in the cost of litigation." But even so, the trial court would have the authority to police such abusive behavior under Rule 16, demanding under circumstances like this that the plaintiff present something more akin to trial-quality evidence.

In any event, a defendant can improve its position by seeking via discovery not only the identity of witnesses, but also a description of what the plaintiff anticipates their testimony will be. If the description provided in response appears to be inadequate—for example, it fails to indicate that the key witness has personal knowledge of the relevant facts—then that alone could be a basis for seeking summary judgment. If the plaintiff simply tails her descriptions to avoid summary judgment without conducting a reasonable

346. See supra Part V.C (arguing that the plaintiff is not required to produce trial-quality evidence, but need only provide material sufficient to refute the absence of evidence indicated by the defendant's showing).
inquiry, and this tactic is exposed during the discovery process, the defendant will be in an even stronger position to seek sanctions under Rule 26(g) or other action under Rule 16.

One could also imagine defendants behaving abusively under this Article’s approach. Unlike the dissenters’ myth, this approach would permit a defendant to meet its burden when particular Rule 56(c) documents demonstrate an absence of evidence, even if other information revealed during the course of discovery indicates that such evidence might exist. Does this mean that the defendant can harass the plaintiff by deliberately ignoring new materials and seeking summary judgment anyway?

As other scholars have noted, Rule 11 allows sanctions when the defendant files a summary judgment motion "for any improper purpose, such as to harass." In any event, this Article’s approach would not permit a defendant to obtain summary judgment simply by deliberately ignoring potential sources of evidence in the record. Those other materials are simply assessed in connection with the plaintiff’s burden. And unlike the paper trial myth, the plaintiff will be able to meet this burden in a fairly low-cost way. Rather than being required to convert those materials into trial-quality form, she needs only present the materials and justify why this information had not been provided in the Rule 56(c) documents that formed the basis of the defendant’s motion.

3. Prevents Decisions on the Merits

Martin Redish argued recently that Celotex should be read to impose virtually no burden on a defendant moving for summary judgment. He drew a distinction between "external" and "internal" barriers to summary judgment. External barriers are "procedural restraints on a trial court’s ability to reach the merits of a summary judgment motion." The internal

350. Fed. R. Civ. P. 11(b)(1); see also Redish, supra note 8, at 1346 (noting that Rule 11 requires parties to certify that a claim is not submitted for harassment or other improper purposes); Friedenthal, supra note 17, at 776 ("If one party could, merely by filing an unsupported motion, force an opponent to make a substantial showing, there would be a strong incentive to make such a filing if for no other reason than to harass the other party and raise its costs of litigation.").

351. See Redish, supra note 8, at 1345 (noting that the majority of lower federal courts have wisely interpreted the decision in this way).

352. See id. at 1331 (stating his conclusions regarding the "external" and "internal" barriers to summary judgment determinations).

353. Id. at 1331; see also id. at 1349 ("'External' barriers, as I define them, are those that prevent the court from even reaching the substantive merits of a summary judgment motion.").
barrier is "the standard for decision that a trial court employs once it finally reaches the merits," namely, the plaintiff's obligation to "produce evidence sufficient to convince a rational factfinder . . . that the facts are as she has alleged, and that under the controlling law and those facts she is entitled to relief." Redish criticized Adickes as imposing an unjustified external barrier to considering the merits of a summary judgment motion. He directed the same argument toward Justice Brennan, Martin Louis, and Melissa Nelken, who had argued that a defendant must make reasonable discovery efforts in order to meet its burden under an absence-of-evidence theory. It begs the question, however, to assert that imposing such a burden on a defendant prevents a court from considering "the merits" of a summary judgment motion. According to Rule 56, the merits inquiry for a summary judgment motion is whether the Rule 56(c) documents "show that there is no genuine issue as to any material fact." For the reasons set forth earlier, this does not necessarily transform summary judgment into a paper trial, in which a lack of supporting evidence automatically means that the plaintiff loses. To the contrary, the best understanding is that the movant must use Rule 56(c) documents to "show that there is no genuine issue." Indeed, the party asking a court to take action (that is, to grant summary judgment) typically bears the burden of convincing the court that such action is appropriate.

354. Id. at 1331.

355. Id. at 1349.

356. See id. at 1342–43 ("Because of the artificial barrier to consideration of the merits of Kress's summary judgment motion imposed by the Adickes Court, however, the trial court was unable even to 'peek behind the curtain' to determine exactly what evidence Adickes planned to rely on to establish this essential portion of her case.").

357. Id. at 1347-48 (responding to Justice Brennan, Louis, and Nelken with the observation that "[t]he key point that all of the detractors of Celotex seem to ignore is that use of the procedure set out in Adickes effectively results in a denial of a motion for summary judgment without a court's ever making an inquiry into the actual merits of that motion").

358. See id. at 1347 (explaining their approach); see also Friedenthal, supra note 17, at 776 (questioning an approach to summary judgment that would "shift the entire inquiry from the fundamental question of whether the responding party could possibly meet its burden of proof at trial to the technical, irrelevant question of whether the moving party has met a contrived burden for summary judgment").


360. See supra notes 191–203 (critiquing the paper trial approach).

361. There are rare exceptions to this principle. For example, a party asserting that a federal court has subject matter jurisdiction bears the burden of establishing that jurisdiction, even if she is not the movant. Thus, a plaintiff bears the burden of establishing subject matter jurisdiction even when she is opposing the defendant's motion to dismiss, e.g., Osborn v. United States, 918 F.2d 724, 729–30 (8th Cir. 1990), and a defendant bears the burden of
The facts of Adickes confirm that a lack of trial-quality evidence in the summary judgment record does not necessarily mean a lack of evidence at trial. Redish criticized the Adickes decision because:

If Adickes presented absolutely no admissible evidence to support her essential claim of a conspiracy between Kress and the policemen, Kress—with or without its own affirmative supporting evidence—could have immediately moved for directed verdict, simply pointing out the obvious—the lack of any supporting evidence—and the motion would undoubtedly have been granted.362

This is an excellent observation, one that echoes David Currie’s pre-Celotex response to the Adickes decision.363 But this view mistakenly presumes that the materials Adickes presented in opposing summary judgment were "exactly [the] evidence Adickes planned to rely on" at trial.364 Recall that Adickes testified in her deposition that her student Carolyn Moncure had seen a police officer in the store.365 And in that case, we need not speculate whether the student could so testify or whether Adickes could or planned to call her as a witness. Carolyn Moncure did testify at the trial on Adickes’s custom of the community claim (which had survived summary judgment), and she testified that there had been a police officer in the store that day.366 While one might fault Adickes for not obtaining an affidavit from her student at the summary judgment phase, that overlooks fundamental questions that are central, not peripheral, to "the merits": When is the plaintiff obligated to disclose what her evidence will be? And what form must that disclosure take?

That said, Martin Redish is absolutely correct that an evaluation of summary judgment burdens from a policy standpoint must consider the risk "of [an] unnecessary trial that summary judgment was created to avoid."367 But no approach to summary judgment can eliminate this risk entirely, not even a requirement that the plaintiff produce trial-quality evidence in order to survive summary judgment. It is possible, for example, that the witness on whose affidavit the plaintiff relied to

362. Redish, supra note 8, at 1343.
363. See Currie, supra note 159, at 77–79 (critiquing the Adickes decision and the ambiguity of Rule 56(e)).
364. Redish, supra note 8, at 1343.
366. Id.; see also Kennedy, supra note 8, at 234 n.22 (suggesting that in Adickes, "the Supreme Court was put in a position where it virtually was compelled to reverse because evidence sufficient to sustain count two had been admitted at trial").
avoid summary judgment would give different testimony at trial, or not show up at all. Efforts to reduce the risk of unnecessary trials must therefore be balanced against other considerations.\textsuperscript{368} Allowing defendants to file burden-free summary judgment motions can be costly and unfair to plaintiffs.\textsuperscript{369} And given that in most cases it is in the defendant’s strategic interest to use discovery to obtain a preview of the plaintiff’s case, requiring defendants to do some legwork is not likely to impose costs that they would not incur willingly.

\textit{VII. Conclusion}

While the \textit{Celotex} decision has been the subject of substantial debate and disagreement within the academy and the judiciary, it has yet to be truly interpreted. Rather, the competing approaches to \textit{Celotex} emphasize the policy consequences of alternative readings without considering traditional interpretive values such as consistency with prior precedent, consistency with textual sources, and internal coherence. By taking these values seriously, this Article’s reading of \textit{Celotex} provides cogent answers to the decision’s many ambiguities and offers a reasonable middle ground between the two dominant myths of \textit{Celotex}.

\textit{VIII. Appendix}

The citation counts in the tables below and elsewhere in this Article are based on the number of citations recorded by the Shepard’s citation service as of June 29, 2005. Table 1 lists the top fifteen decisions in terms of federal citations. More federal courts and tribunals have cited these fifteen decisions than any others. Table 2 lists the top thirty cases in terms of federal and state citations. More courts and tribunals (federal and state) have cited these decisions than any others.\textsuperscript{370}

Not surprisingly, nearly all of the decisions qualifying to appear on these tables are from the United States Supreme Court. There are four exceptions: three decisions by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and a Third Circuit

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item See Miller, \textit{supra} note 12, at 1048 (questioning whether “promoting use of summary judgment may be offset by negative effects on other system values, such as accuracy, fairness, the day-in-court principle, and the jury trial right”).
\item See Friedenthal, \textit{supra} note 17, at 777 (noting the painstaking process of establishing a case through circumstantial evidence and the burden placed on the responding party at the pretrial stage); see also Issacharoff & Loewenstein, \textit{supra} note 15, at 103–05 (demonstrating that imposing no burden on moving defendants results in “striking and unambiguous transfer of wealth from plaintiffs to defendants”).
\item Thanks to Jane Morris at Lexis-Nexis for providing citation count information for this Article.
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\end{footnotesize}
SUMMARY JUDGMENT BURDENS

decision on a petition for review of an NLRB ruling. The high citation counts for these four decisions are due to frequent citations by the NLRB.

Table 1: Most Frequently Cited by Federal Courts and Tribunals

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<th>Rank</th>
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<td>Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., 477 U.S. 242 (1986)</td>
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<td>Erie R.R. v. Tompkins, 304 U.S. 64 (1938)</td>
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372. For each of these four decisions, citations by the N.L.R.B. comprise more than 99% of the total citations.
Table 2: Most Frequently Cited By All Courts and Tribunals

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<td>Terry v. Ohio, 392 U.S. 1 (1968)</td>
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<td>Brady v. Maryland, 373 U.S. 83 (1963)</td>
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<td>Chapman v. California, 386 U.S. 18 (1967)</td>
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<td>Int'l Shoe Co. v. Washington, 326 U.S. 310 (1945)</td>
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<td>Standard Dry Wall Prods., Inc., 91 N.L.R.B. 544 (1950)</td>
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<td>Apprendi v. New Jersey, 530 U.S. 466 (2000)</td>
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<td>Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519 (1972)</td>
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<td>Batson v. Kentucky, 476 U.S. 79 (1986)</td>
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<td>Isis Plumbing &amp; Heating Co., 138 N.L.R.B. 716 (1962)</td>
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<td>Standard Dry Wall Products, Inc. v. NLRB, 188 F.2d 362 (3d Cir. 1951)</td>
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