Expanding Stare Decisis: The Role of Precedent in the Unfolding Dialectic of Brady v. Maryland

Colin Starger
University of Baltimore School of Law, cstarger@ubalt.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.law.ubalt.edu/all_fac

Part of the Constitutional Law Commons, Jurisprudence Commons, and the Supreme Court of the United States Commons

Recommended Citation
EXPANDING STARE DECISIS: 
THE ROLE OF PRECEDENT IN 
THE UNFOLDING DIALECTIC OF 
BRADY V. MARYLAND 

Colin Starger* 

Does stare decisis constrain the expansion of constitutional doctrine? Does existing precedent preclude the Supreme Court from expanding a criminal defendant’s right to exculpatory evidence? While commentators frequently clash on when stare decisis should prevent the Court from overruling its own precedents, the question of when fidelity to precedent should inhibit doctrinal expansion is surprisingly undertheorized. This Article begins to fill this gap through an in-depth case study of stare decisis and the expansion of criminal due process doctrine.

The Article analyzes the longstanding constitutional dialectic between procedural and substantive schools of criminal due process. Focus is on Brady v. Maryland—the Court’s landmark 1963 decision that requires prosecutors to disclose favorable evidence to criminal defendants. Last Term, Justice Scalia argued in his Connick v. Thompson concurrence that Brady’s scope does not extend to prosecutorial disclosure of untested evidence that could prove innocence. Though coherent, Justice Scalia’s argument depends on a particularly formal approach to stare decisis and a procedural view of due process. His argument against expanding Brady can be contested by what I term a “justificatory” approach to stare decisis and a competing substantive view of due process. This recent conflict between

* Assistant Professor of Law, University of Baltimore School of Law; Acting Assistant Professor, NYU Law School 2007–2010. J.D. Columbia Law School, 2002. This Article was produced with the support of a University of Baltimore Summer Research Fellowship.

The opinion maps in this Article were created using custom software implementing the author’s information design. I am indebted to Darren Kumasawa who engineered the software architecture.

I am grateful for the insightful comments of Michael Gerhardt, Brandon Garrett, CJ Peters, Garrett Epps, Jennifer Laurin, Michael Burger, and Dave Jaros on draft versions of this Article. Thanks also to members of faculty workshops at the University of Baltimore for their generous feedback. All errors are, of course, my own.
formal and justificatory stare decisis approaches and competing due process schools reflects a deeper metadoctrinal pattern.

Based on a close reading of over a century of caselaw, this Article demonstrates how successful justificatory stare decisis arguments have facilitated expansion of criminal due process while formal stare decisis arguments have constrained doctrinal growth. Building on prior work, I illustrate the Brady dialectic and its relationship to stare decisis through graphical “opinion maps” that chart rival lines of majority, concurring, and dissenting opinions. Mapping this key due process territory offers insight on the deeper conflict between substance and procedure in due process jurisprudence as well as a generalizable method for studying the impact of stare decisis on constitutional adjudication.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. **INTRODUCTION** ........................................................................... 80

II. **STARE DECISIS, *BRADY*, AND THE RIGHT TO UNTESTED EVIDENCE** ................................................................. 88
   A. A Taxonomy of Stare Decisis .................................................. 90
   B. The *Brady* Rule and the Right to Untested Evidence ........ 97

III. **DUE PROCESS ROOTS: COMPETING *BRADY* ANCESTRIES 1868–1963** ............................................................... 106
   A. Explanation of Mapping Schema ........................................... 107
   B. *Brady’s* Ancestry: Rise of the Substantive School .......... 110
   C. *Brady*: Contested Birth of a Discovery Right ................. 121

   A. Debating Materiality: *Brady* to *Bagley* 1963–1985 ....... 128
   B. Fact Controversies: *Bagley* to *Cain* 1985–2012 .......... 144

V. **THE MAJESTIC CONCEPTION OF *BRADY*** ........................................... 154

VI. **CONCLUSION** ......................................................................... 159

**APPENDIX: *BRADY* DIALECTIC 1868–2012** ............................... 162
I. INTRODUCTION

Despite his fervent assertions of innocence, John Thompson faced execution for murder. One month before his appointed date to die, defense investigators uncovered a laboratory report withheld by prosecutors in Orleans Parish before Thompson’s 1985 trial. Based on the report, Thompson conducted forensic blood testing that first exonerated him of an armed robbery and then led to his acquittal of the capital murder charges. Prosecutor suppression of the laboratory report had nearly cost Thompson his life, so upon his release, he sued the Orleans Parish District Attorney for violating his constitutional rights. A federal jury awarded him $14 million in damages. After the Fifth Circuit upheld the verdict, the Supreme Court—by a 5–4 margin—took it away. The apparent callousness of the majority’s decision in Connick v. Thompson grabbed headlines and provoked sharp dissent.

Behind these compelling facts lies a rather technical legal issue. Thompson had filed suit under the federal civil rights statute, 42 U.S.C. § 1983. He argued that the District Attorney bore responsibility for the suppressed laboratory report because he had failed to properly train Orleans Parish prosecutors in the law of Brady v. Maryland—the Supreme Court’s landmark 1963 decision that requires prosecutors to disclose favorable evidence before trial. In an opinion by Justice Thomas, the majority held that the single

2. Id. The laboratory report revealed that prosecutors had ordered testing on pants splattered with the blood of the perpetrator of an armed robbery blamed on Thompson. The real perpetrator had type B blood. Prosecutors never disclosed the report nor existence of the pants to Thompson. Neither did they order forensic testing of Thompson’s blood.
3. Id. at 1356–57. Thompson had type O blood, proving he was not the armed robber. With the robbery conviction vacated, Thompson was finally able to testify in his own defense to the murder charges and demonstrate to his jury’s satisfaction that another man had committed the crime.
4. Id. at 1357.
5. Id.
6. Id. at 1358, 1366 (rev’g 578 F.3d 293 (5th Cir. 2009)).
9. See Thompson, 131 S. Ct. at 1355 (citing Brady v. Maryland, 373 U.S. 83, 83 (1963)).
Brady violation that occurred in Thompson’s case—suppression of the lab report—did not provide an adequate basis for failure-to-train liability under § 1983. In dissent, Justice Ginsburg vociferously disputed the single-Brady-violation characterization of the trial record and argued that the jury had concluded that “conceded, long-concealed prosecutorial transgressions were neither isolated nor atypical.”

While commentators have naturally focused on Thompson’s effect upon civil rights law, this focus overlooks a potentially more explosive consequence on criminal due process doctrine. In his separate concurrence, Justice Scalia mounted an attack that purported to transcend Thompson’s failure-to-train posture and address prosecutors’ primary constitutional obligations under Brady v. Maryland. Here Justice Scalia zeroed in on the dissent’s assertion—uncontested by the parties in the case—that Brady requires the State to disclose “physical evidence that, which if tested, could establish the innocence of the person who is charged.” Justice Scalia railed against this asserted Brady obligation “as a sub silentio expansion of the substantive law of Brady.” Justice Scalia then proclaimed, “If any of our cases establishes such an obligation, I have never read it, and the dissent does not cite it,” and he concluded that any “right to untested evidence” lies at the “very frontier of our Brady jurisprudence.”

The implications of Justice Scalia’s claim are deadly serious. Taken literally, his logic dictates that John Thompson never had a right to discover the evidence that saved him from the gallows. This should trigger serious due process concerns. Though not as

10. Id. at 1356–66.
11. Id. at 1370 (Ginsburg, J., dissenting).
12. Id. at 1368–69 (Scalia, J., concurring) (citing id. at 1380, n.13 (Ginsburg, J., dissenting) (quoting Transcript of Oral Argument at 34, Thompson, 131 S. Ct. 1350 (2011) (No. 09-571))).
13. Id. at 1369 (Scalia, J., concurring).
14. Id.
15. Though Justice Scalia did not argue against Thompson’s exoneration, he clearly did argue that Brady doctrine imposes no obligation upon prosecutors to disclose evidence—like the suppressed lab report in Thompson’s case—“whose inculpatory or exculpatory character is unknown.” Thompson, 131 S. Ct. at 1369 (Scalia, J., concurring). While Justice Scalia apparently conceded that Assistant District Attorney Gerry Deegan committed a Brady violation, see id., the fact remains that Deegan only ever suppressed potentially exculpatory evidence. Justice Scalia’s doctrinal analysis, thus, logically holds that Deegan did not violate Brady.
robust as commentators had hoped,16 Brady remains the flagship constitutional doctrine for putting evidence of innocence into the hands of criminal defendants.17 Excessively limiting Brady threatens to make the Constitution irrelevant to the ongoing “innocence revolution”18—a revolution heralded by the advent of forensic DNA testing of evidence.19 The Court has already held that due process does not guarantee convicted defendants access to postconviction DNA testing.20 If Justice Scalia is right about Brady, due process may not even afford criminal defendants the right to access potentially exculpatory DNA evidence before trial.

Yet Justice Scalia may not be right. Indeed, I suggest that his objection to recognizing a right to untested evidence rests upon an entirely contestable interpretation of due process doctrine backed by an entirely contestable theory of stare decisis. Doctrinally, Justice Scalia’s assessment of Brady’s reach elevates a narrow procedural interpretation of due process above a viable, competing, and broader substantive due process alternative. Less obviously, Justice Scalia

16. Professor Sundby captured the widely held attitude of many commentators when he memorably called Brady a “fallen superhero.” See Scott E. Sundby, Fallen Superheroes and Constitutional Mirages: The Tale of Brady v. Maryland, 33 McGeorge L. Rev. 643 (2002); see also Daniel S. Medwed, Brady’s Bunch of Flaws, 67 Wash. & Lee L. Rev. 1533, 1535–36 (2010) (arguing that Brady doctrine has failed to live up to the ideals of the original decision).

17. No other constitutional doctrine has forced the Court to deal with innocence issues as squarely as Brady has. While the Court has steadfastly declined to decide whether the Constitution protects freestanding claims of actual innocence, see House v. Bell, 547 U.S. 518, 554–55 (2006) (declining to resolve freestanding innocence question left open by Herrera v. Collins, 506 U.S. 390 (1993)), the Court’s Brady cases have featured free-ranging discussions about innocence issues, including the ethical obligations of prosecutors to seek to protect the innocent. See, e.g., Cone v. Bell, 556 U.S. 449, 470 n.15 (2009). Commentators have recognized the continuing importance of Brady to innocence. See generally Ellen Yaroshefsky, Foreword—New Perspectives on Brady and Other Disclosure Obligations: What Really Works?, 31 Cardozo L. Rev. 1943, 1943–59 (2010) (introducing a symposium on Brady largely concerned with ways to protect innocence).


backs his argument by assuming a particularly formalistic theory of stare decisis vis-à-vis the evolution of doctrine. He does this even though a less formal—what I shall call a justificatory—approach to stare decisis is also viable. The right to untested evidence illegitimately expands Brady doctrine only under Justice Scalia’s procedural and formal account. Under an alternative substantive and justificatory account, the right already exists comfortably within Brady’s borders. In short, the coherence of Justice Scalia’s claim, that the right to untested evidence lies “at the very frontier of our Brady jurisprudence,” depends entirely on how you map the due process territory.

This Article thus undertakes a novel survey of Brady’s contested territory. Following the cartographic metaphor, due process doctrine is realized through a series of graphical “opinion maps” of Brady’s due process origins and progeny. The concept and method animating these maps are both dialectic. Conceptually, the maps in this Article show how due process doctrine evolves as an unfolding argument between competing schools of jurisprudential thought. Methodologically, the maps are created by plotting citations between competing majority, concurring, and dissenting opinions in Brady cases. The result is a picture of precedent that visualizes the rival “lines of opinions” in the opposing procedural and substantive due process schools. Over the long history of this due process dialectic, majority control of the Court has shifted back and forth between these schools. By tracing these ancestral paths, I connect Justice


22. In its long and storied history, “dialectics” has acquired many different senses. See generally Nicholas Rescher, Dialectics: A Classical Approach to Inquiry 119–74 (2007) (tracing the multiple and evolving meanings of “dialectic” from early Greek to modern times). In this Article, I employ the concept of dialectic to describe the ontological mechanism by which Supreme Court doctrine evolves. My dialectical method charts the competing lines of majority, concurring, and dissenting opinions and derives from the formal disputational structure of Supreme Court argument.

23. While direct citation provides the primary means for connecting opinions, I sometimes place opinions in rival lines based on more nuanced hermeneutic connections. These connections are justified by explicit argument. See infra Part III.A (elaborating on the mapping method).
Scalia’s argument in *Thompson* to the teachings of the now-dominant procedural school.

By charting the competing schools’ shifting fortunes, this Article seeks to explain how key substantive or procedural arguments prevailed in the due process dialectic. This rhetorical inquiry requires attention to a surprisingly undertheorized problem surrounding the operation of stare decisis in constitutional adjudication.\(^{24}\) The problem is directly raised by Justice Scalia’s accusation from *Thompson* that recognizing a right to untested evidence would work a “*sub silentio* expansion” of *Brady* doctrine. Despite echoing the more familiar charge of *sub silentio* overruling, Justice Scalia’s formulation inverts the usual direction of critique.\(^{25}\) Rather than decrying covert attacks on constitutional precedent, Justice Scalia objects to surreptitiously giving *Brady’s* precedent too much life. This raises the metadoctrinal question of exactly how to differentiate legitimate from illegitimate expansions of constitutional rules. While the Court and legal commentators alike have long clashed over when stare decisis should prevent the Court from overruling controversial precedents, the question of how stare decisis should constrain doctrinal expansion has received no sustained attention.\(^{26}\) This Article begins to fill this gap through its in-depth

---


case study of stare decisis and the expansion of criminal due process doctrine.

This Article’s Brady-mapping project and stare decisis case study are inextricably intertwined. The two strands fuse because the doctrinal dialectic implicated by Brady has turned on debates over whether to expand or contract—as opposed to overrule—prior precedent. At the time of the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, protections for criminal defendants were profoundly weaker than they are today. The maps herein first tell the story of how a series of due process extensions eventually culminated in the Court’s 1963 creation in Brady of a freestanding criminal discovery right. These doctrinal innovations were often hotly contested, but formal stare decisis objections to expanding precedent were unable to command majority support. However, the due process territory changed between Brady and 1985’s United States v. Bagley. In Bagley, formal stare decisis arguments prevailed over justificatory counterarguments and effectively contracted Brady’s scope. Since 1985, Bagley’s materiality standard has become entrenched, and the Court’s Brady debates have largely turned into disputes over how to apply facts in particular cases. Nonetheless, key questions about Brady’s scope remain.

decisions to overrule (or not) prior precedent. For the most recent salvo in this debate, compare Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, 130 S. Ct. 876, 919–22 (2010) (Roberts, C.J., concurring) (supporting the Court’s overruling of Austin), with id. at 938–42 (Stevens, J., dissenting) (stating that overturning precedent requires more than “a significant justification, beyond the preferences of five Justices”). Professor Farber has also noted a gap in the literature regarding what it means to follow (as opposed to overrule) precedent. See Daniel A. Farber, The Rule of Law and the Law of Precedents, 90 MINN. L. REV. 1173, 1198–99 (2006).

27. See infra Part III.
29. See infra Part IV.B (analyzing era from Bagley until this Term’s case in Smith v. Cain, 132 S. Ct. 627 (2012)).
30. In addition to the right-to-untested-evidence question raised by Thompson, the Court also has left open whether prosecutors have an obligation to disclose evidence of innocence to defendants during the pretrial plea negotiation stage. See United States v. Ruiz, 536 U.S. 622, 622–23, 631, 633 (2002) (upholding a “fast-track plea” bargain that contained waiver of Brady right to disclosure of impeachment material but where government agreed to disclose information “establishing factual innocence”). The courts are also divided on Brady’s pretrial scope and application. Compare United States v. Sudikoff, 36 F. Supp. 2d 1196, 1206 (C.D. Cal. 1999) (granting discovery under Brady), with United States v. Coppa, 267 F.3d 132, 146 (2d Cir. 2001) (holding that Brady did not compel “immediate disclosure of all exculpatory and impeachment material”). In a recent article, Michael Serota argues that cases following Sudikoff fall afoul of vertical stare decisis. See Serota, supra note 24, at 429. However, authority is divided precisely because the Court has not spoken clearly. Cf. United States v. Bagley, 473 U.S. 667, 700
Based on a close reading of over a century of caselaw, this Article thus demonstrates how successful justificatory stare decisis arguments have facilitated expansion of criminal due process while formal stare decisis arguments have constrained doctrinal growth. Beyond its Brady insight, this Article offers new perspective on the deeper conflicts between substance and procedure in due process jurisprudence as well as a generalizable method for studying the dialectics of stare decisis in constitutional adjudication.

Though its primary thrust is descriptive, this Article also has a normative take-away. I ultimately critique the currently dominant formal and procedural view that Brady is a mere means to achieve a fair trial. Drawing on an older tradition, I advocate instead a substantive conception of Brady as a constitutional bulwark for protecting the ends of justice and argue that the fundamental concern with innocence that drove the creation of Brady’s right should guide the doctrine in this era of DNA exonerations.

This Article’s argument proceeds as follows:

Part II develops the stare decisis frame of the inquiry. After discussing conventional understandings of stare decisis as a constraint on overruling, I propose new categories to describe precedential constraint on doctrinal expansion. Here I explain the difference between formal and justificatory views of stare decisis. Applying these terms to Thompson, I show how Justice Scalia’s attack on the due process legitimacy of a right to untested evidence rests upon a particularly formal view of Brady precedent.

Parts III and IV constitute the heart of the Brady-mapping project. This survey details the dialectic between the procedural and substantive due process schools. Part III’s map covers the years from 1868 until Brady was decided in 1963. Part IV has two maps. The first charts the debate from Brady until 1985’s seminal Bagley decision; the second surveys the dialectic from Bagley until the present.

The broad stare decisis narrative of Part III begins after the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment. Early Court majorities generally rejected due process challenges to state criminal

(As explained in dissenting opinion by Justice Marshall, interpreting Bagley as imposing on prosecutors the burden to disclose evidence pursuant to a standard that virtually defies definition).
convictions so long as state procedures appeared to provide procedural fairness. However, a dissenting school advocated using due process to conduct substantive inquiries into whether miscarriages of justice had occurred. After considering a series of racially and politically charged controversies, the substantive school wrestled majority control of the Court and expanded the due process territory. This expansion culminated in Justice William Douglas’s 1963 opinion for the Court in *Brady* and was made possible by a justificatory approach to prior precedent.

Part IV begins with the debates from *Brady* to *Bagley*. As I show, Justice Harry Blackmun’s opinion in *Bagley* secured a major victory for the school advocating a procedural understanding of *Brady* based on a formal view of stare decisis. Justice Thurgood Marshall’s *Bagley* dissent remains the classic articulation of a substantive alternative based on a justificatory attitude toward precedent. In the post-*Bagley* years, stare decisis concerns took a backseat in the mainline dialectic as battles over *Brady*’s legal meaning largely gave way to disputes over the application of facts. However, unsettled legal questions over *Brady*’s scope remain.

Part V considers these unsettled legal questions and makes my normative case for the best path forward. Although *Brady* itself is practically immune from overruling and deserves recognition as a “super-precedent,” formal interpretations of *Brady* unnecessarily limit its reach in the DNA era. Taking inspiration from Justice Thurgood Marshall, I call for a return to the “majestic conception” of *Brady* doctrine animated by a substantive due process protection-of-innocence principle.

---


In my conclusion, I briefly reflect on the implications of this case study for future doctrinal and metadoctrinal scholarship on expanding stare decisis.

II. STARE DECISIS, BRADY, AND THE RIGHT TO UNTESTED EVIDENCE

Philip Bobbitt has famously identified “doctrinal argument” as an archetypical modality of constitutional argument. A “modality of argument” is essentially a coherent discursive way of addressing constitutional disputes. Argument modalities proceed under their own self-contained logics and come with their own set of adjudicative principles. In the case of doctrinal argument, the relevant modal logic concerns how to “apply[] the rules generated by precedent.” A preeminent adjudicative principle in doctrinal argument is stare decisis.

Consider how rules generated by precedent—the substantive holdings in cases—differ from the stare decisis adjudicative principle about precedent. Rules generated by precedent define the specific boundaries of a given doctrine; they are first-order doctrinal rules. The principle of stare decisis applies across doctrinal boundaries; it is a second-order metadoctrinal principle. Critically, constitutional disputes can involve arguments over doctrinal rules and metadoctrinal principles. Opponents can contest both what relevant

---


34. See Bobbitt, Is Law Politics, supra note 33, at 1255 (describing argumentative modalities as “how assertions are determined to be correct”).

35. The idea of a modality’s “self-contained logic” might be more fruitfully conceived as its essential logos. See Colin Starger, The DNA of an Argument: A Case Study in Legal Logos, 99 J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY 1045, 1054–55 (2009) (describing logos as “a mode of proof”). Because argument modalities have separate and distinct logos, conflicts between modalities are essentially “incommensurable.” See id. at 1080–81 (applying Thomas Kuhn’s theory of incommensurability to conflicting argument logos); see also Bobbitt, Is Law Politics, supra note 33, at 1244 (criticizing Mark Tushnet for failing to come to terms with “the modal perspective” that makes a single theory of the Constitution impossible).


37. Stare decisis is a relatively recent doctrine. For an older but still excellent historical account of its emergence, see E.M. Wise, The Doctrine of Stare Decisis, 21 WAYNE L. REV. 1043 (1974).
precedent is and how it should be applied on a given record, and/or they can argue over whether stare decisis requires that a particular precedent be followed, overruled, expanded, or contracted.

By definition, Supreme Court doctrinal arguments involve first-order disputes over doctrinal rules generated by prior Court opinions. Though the Court decides some doctrinal arguments unanimously, other times majority, concurrence, and dissent split. When splits occur, competing Court opinions may invoke different prior majorities, concurring, or dissenting opinions to support their perspective on doctrinal rules. Those prior opinions, in turn, may have invoked the authority of even earlier competing opinions. For certain highly contentious constitutional concepts—such as “due process” or “equal protection” or the power to “regulate commerce”—this argument over doctrine may persist for generations. When this occurs, competing lines of opinions effectively cohere into distinctive intellectual traditions. Rival traditions may be regarded as competing doctrinal schools.

When doctrinal schools clash, first-order fights over doctrinal rules often involve a second-order dialectic over stare decisis. The metadoctrinal debate may be explicit or implicit, but the application of stare decisis is itself often contested. Scholarly debate on stare decisis has traditionally focused on whether and when it is permissible for the Court to overrule its own prior interpretations of the Constitution. A related yet distinct controversy arises when all members of the Court accept a constitutional precedent’s validity but disagree over whether the accepted precedent’s scope should be expanded. This far less mooted stare decisis question is directly

38. In the October 2010 Term, 48 percent of the Court’s merits opinions were unanimous. See Stat Pack-October Term 2010, SCOTUSBLOG (June 28, 2011), http://sblog.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/SB_votesplit_OT10_final.pdf. By comparison, 20 percent of merits opinions had 5-4 splits. Id. Over the previous five terms, the average was 41 percent unanimous and 22 percent 5-4. Id.

39. The connection between doctrine and schools of thought is inherent. As Professor Goodrich reminds us, the English word “doctrine” literally derives from the Latin doctrina, meaning “teaching” and corresponding to the word disciplina, meaning “learning.” PETER GOODRICH, READING THE LAW 136 (1986) (“Doctrine consists of the truths handed down by educators—by priests, judges, politicians, scholars and so on—all of whom are experts in the classics, custodians of ancient truths which are preserved for and presented to their contemporary audiences.”).

40. See supra note 26 and accompanying text.
raised by Justice Scalia's accusation of *sub silentio* expansion in *Thompson.*

In this Part, I develop a vocabulary for describing the rhetorical positions that may be taken in debates over stare decisis and then apply it to the *Brady* debate in *Thompson.* Part II.A first discusses the difference between strict and lax conceptions of stare decisis in the overruling context and then proposes a distinction between formal and justificatory approaches to expanding precedential scope. Part II.B applies this frame to *Thompson* and shows how Justice Scalia's charge that any right to untested evidence exists at the frontier of the Court's *Brady* jurisprudence exemplifies a particularly formal view of stare decisis.

**A. A Taxonomy of Stare Decisis**

American jurists have long recognized that the Supreme Court has the power to overrule its own prior decisions. Yet just how bound the Court should be by its own prior interpretations of the Constitution remains controversial. A strict view of stare decisis generally advocates for adherence to precedent and against overruling. By contrast, a lax view accepts overruling more easily and deemphasizes strict adherence to precedent. These competing positions represent poles on a spectrum concerning the constraining force of precedent. In other words, for any given constitutional doctrine, one may adopt a stricter or more lax view of the force of stare decisis's command. These competing positions have also been described as strong and weak views of precedent.

The canonical articulation of the lax view of constitutional stare decisis originates in Justice Louis Brandeis's dissent in *Coronado Oil*:

---

41. See Solum, *supra* note 26, at 156 n.3.

42. See Gerhardt, *supra* note 26, at 47–68. Professor Solum has described essentially the same split as between formalist/neoformalist views (taking strict or strong positions on stare decisis) and Realist/instrumentalist views (adopting lax or weak positions). See Solum, *supra* note 26, at 186–88.

Stare decisis is not, like the rule of res judicata, a universal inexorable command. Stare decisis is usually the wise policy, because in most matters it is more important that the applicable rule of law be settled than that it be settled right. This is commonly true even where the error is a matter of serious concern, provided correction can be had by legislation. But in cases involving the Federal Constitution, where correction through legislative action is practically impossible, this court has often overruled its earlier decisions.44

Under Justice Brandeis's view, the Court should abandon its constitutional precedent when doing so comports with “the lessons of experience and the force of better reasoning.”45 As an empirical matter, Justice Brandeis was undoubtedly correct that the Court has many times overruled its constitutional precedents.46 Indeed, the Court has discarded its own precedents more than 200 times in its history.47

While the empirical reality of overruling is undeniable, opinions about the practice's wisdom differ. Some jurists and scholars promote a strict view of constitutional stare decisis.48 The best-known articulation of this perspective comes in the joint opinion in Planned Parenthood v. Casey,49 the case that famously declined to overrule Roe v. Wade.50 The Casey plurality saw overruling as appropriate only in narrow circumstances such as when a constitutional rule

---

44. Coronado Oil, 285 U.S. at 405–07 (Brandeis, J., dissenting) (internal citations omitted).
45. Id. at 407–08.
46. Justice Brandeis provided extensive proof of this proposition in his dense and scholarly footnotes. See id. at 406–10 nn.1–5.
47. In an exceptionally valuable study, Professor Gerhardt has documented all of the Court's overrulings from 1789 through 2004 and found that the Court has expressly overruled 208 precedents and sub silentio overruled 24 precedents. See GERHARDT, supra note 26, at 9, 35.
48. As of the early 2000s, it seemed as if the Court as a whole had embraced the stricter view of stare decisis. See generally Lee, supra note 43, at 581–88 (noting that the Court has changed its “overruling rhetoric” and increased the weight given to considerations of stare decisis). However, Citizens United suggests that this strong view no longer clearly commands majority support. Compare Citizens United v. Fed. Election Comm'n, 130 S. Ct. 876, 919–22 (2010) (Roberts, C.J., concurring), with id. at 938–42 (Stevens, J., dissenting).
50. Id. at 855 (aff'g Roe v. Wade, 410 U.S. 113 (1973)).
has proven to be intolerable simply in defying practical workability . . . [or when] related principles of law have so far developed as to have left the old rule no more than a remnant of abandoned doctrine[,] or [when] facts have so changed . . . as to have robbed the old rule of significant application or justification.\footnote{51}

Absent special justification, the strict view of constitutional stare decisis thus directs the Court to follow its own precedent even if it believes that precedent was wrongly decided based on weak or flawed reasoning.\footnote{52}

Lax and strict approaches to overruling thus essentially differ on the relevance granted to a constitutional case's underlying reasoning. Whereas a lax view counts poor reasoning as justification for abandoning precedent, a strict view places little stock in the \textit{ab initio} force of a case's reasoning and focuses instead on reliance on the rule of law handed down by precedent. In a more basic sense, a lax view of stare decisis authorizes change in doctrine through overruling while a strict view promotes stability in doctrine through affirming.

Although coherent arguments can be marshaled in favor of both lax and strict views as a general rule-of-law matter, I do not wish to rehearse those arguments here.\footnote{53} Rather, I want to stress the rhetorical connection between general stare decisis arguments about overruling and the particular doctrinal debates in which these arguments arise. Despite its metadoctrinal status, Supreme Court Justices do not invoke stare decisis with perfect consistency across doctrinal contexts.\footnote{54} This is no cynical observation about hypocrisy

\footnote{51. \textit{See id.} at 854–55 (citations omitted).}


\footnote{53. The fine exchange between Professors Fallon and Paulsen well captures the general points in favor of strict or lax approaches. \textit{Compare Fallon, supra note 26} (stating that "stare decisis is not a constitutional requirement, but rather a judicial policy judgment"), \textit{with Paulsen, supra note 26} (arguing that stare decisis does not lack constitutional stature).}

\footnote{54. The Court's split over abortion and same-sex intercourse provides an obvious example. In \textit{Casey}, socially liberal justices urged a strong view of stare decisis to affirm \textit{Roe v. Wade}, while conservatives urged overruling. \textit{Compare Casey}, 505 U.S. at 854–55 (joint opinion of Justices O'Connor, Kennedy, Souter), \textit{with id.} at 999 (Scalia, J., dissenting). In \textit{Lawrence v. Texas}, 539 U.S. 558, 577 (2003), the script flipped as liberal justices adopted a weak stare decisis
on the Court. Indeed, it would be unfair and absurd to expect any jurist to universally commit to always supporting doctrinal change or to always supporting doctrinal stability. Context matters immensely. Within the continuum between strict and lax general attitudes toward precedent, there is legitimate room for persuasion about the wisdom of overruling any given doctrine. Stare decisis provides a useful rhetorical framework for expressing these particular doctrinal arguments.

The stare decisis rhetorical framework changes when the debate shifts from the context of doctrinal overruling to that of doctrinal expansion. This is because the stare decisis question itself changes from challenging a precedent's basic legitimacy to broadening its scope of application. Does stare decisis require that the Court follow the literal "law" laid down in a previous case, or does it permit the Court to follow the "spirit" of that law and extend its reach? General jurisprudential attitudes toward this interpretative question also vary along a spectrum that leaves room for argument in particular cases. Instead of strict to lax, I classify the spectrum of arguments concerning expanding the scope of precedent as moving from formal to justificatory.

The key distinction underlying formal versus justificatory arguments is that between the "rule of law" announced in a case and its supporting "justification." In the literature, the conceptual categories of "rule of law" and "justification" assume many synonyms. Thus, a "rule of law" may be variously referred to as a rule, law, standard, test, or proposition. Though they have different shades of meaning, all of these words express the kind of abstract generalization associated with the major premise of arguments—

position and conservatives urged fidelity to Bowers v. Hardwick, 478 U.S. 186 (1986), which had upheld the prohibition on homosexual sodomy. Compare Lawrence, 539 U.S. at 577 (2003) (Kennedy, J., for the Court), with id. at 586-87 (Scalia, J., dissenting).

55. There is, of course, a long-standing debate over whether rules or standards make better laws. See Kathleen M. Sullivan, The Supreme Court, 1991 Term—Foreword: The Justices of Rules and Standards, 106 HARV. L. REV. 22 (1992) (classic account of this debate). The dispute's intensity should not obscure the fact that rules and standards both state abstract "laws." Though standards tend to be more open and underdetermined than rules, standards and rules both play the "major premise" role in argument. I thus respectfully disagree with Professor Farber's characterization of debates over applying precedent as essentially tracking the debate between rules and standards. See Farber, supra note 26, at 1199. Instead, I see the split as between rules and justifications.
what philosopher Stephen Toulmin has called the “inference warrant” or “warrant” for an argument. Next, the “justification” for a rule tracks Toulmin’s concept of the “backing” for a warrant. Other commonly used words expressing the concept of justification include rationale, grounds, purpose, goal, spirit, or policy. The justification for a rule is essentially what “stands behind” that rule and compels its acceptance.

Although the distinction between rule and justification is philosophically sound, the concepts are frequently conflated in practice. When lawyers and jurists refer to a case’s holding or its ratio decidendi, it is often unclear whether they are referring to the precedent’s rule of law alone or to its rule and justification together. Conceptual sloppiness is partially to blame as inference warrants are easily confused with the backings for those warrants. However, controversy also stems from a fundamental disagreement on whether holding ought to include a precedent’s rule alone or its rule and justification together. Attitudes toward holding can also vary along the continuum between formal and justificatory. This explains why stare decisis arguments over expanding a precedent’s scope also play out as arguments over what actually constitutes a precedent’s holding. I call the competing poles in the approaches to stare decisis formal and justificatory.

Under a formal approach to stare decisis, it is a case’s rule of law alone that binds subsequent courts. On this view, therefore, the rule alone constitutes a case’s holding and ratio decidendi. I call this approach “formal” because it refuses to look behind the formal command of the rule. The formal view consequently regards a law’s

---


57. See id. at 96. Backing provides “assurances, without which . . . warrants themselves would possess neither authority nor currency.” Id.

58. Once again, the different shades of meaning in these words should not obscure their essentially similar rhetorical function in argument. Thus, even though “spirit” appears to look back and “goal” appears to look forward, both words signify argumentative reasons to presently interpret a rule one way or another.

59. The same sloppiness plagued philosophers as far back to Aristotle. Indeed, Stephen Toulmin’s work was groundbreaking for its specific articulation of how Aristotle’s syllogism conflated in its concept of a major premise the categories of warrant and backing. See TOULMIN, supra note 56, at 100–05. The conceptual clarity offered by Toulmin’s argumentative scheme is underappreciated in the legal academy.
spirit or purpose as nonbinding dictum. This reflects what Professor Schauer calls an "entrenched" view of rules. If a new situation arises in which application of a rule potentially conflicts with the rule's underlying justification, the entrenched view requires that the rule should be followed rather than its justification. A formal view of stare decisis similarly places a premium on literal rules in case holdings and places less value on the putative rationale behind such holdings.

By contrast, then, a justificatory approach to interpreting stare decisis views the command of a case's rule primarily through the lens of its underlying rationale. The justificatory perspective regards a precedent's holding as encompassing both the literal law set down and the purpose animating that law. It is not formal in that it accepts that a spirit stands behind a formal rule. In situations of conflict between literal rule and underlying justification, this view takes the opposite tack to the entrenched response and favors animating policy over the formal rule. Form thus follows purpose. Under this justificatory scheme, the generalization represented by the rule is not so firmly entrenched as to require strict adherence.

Once again, coherent arguments can be marshaled in favor of both formal and justificatory views as a general rule-of-law matter. But once again, I do not wish to rehearse those arguments so much as stress the rhetorical connection between general stare decisis arguments about doctrinal expansion and the particular doctrinal debates in which they arise. Within the continuum between formal and justificatory attitudes, there is legitimate room for persuasion about what stare decisis requires in a particular case. Formal arguments stress rules while justificatory arguments stress the backing for rules. The basic hypothesis vis-à-vis doctrinal expansion is that justificatory approaches will generally provide stronger

60. In his defense of "neoformalism," Professor Solum explicitly argues that a formal view of stare decisis can consider the purpose of a rule. See Solum, supra note 26, at 172. However, Solum implicitly concedes that formalists are less inclined to look at purpose than what he calls instrumentalists or realists. Id. In terms of a spectrum of positions then, it remains the case even under Solum's framework that the more formal one's approach to rules, the less likely purpose will come into play.

61. See generally FREDERICK SCHAUER, PLAYING BY THE RULES 42–52 (Tony Honore et al. eds., 1991) (arguing that under an entrenchment model of rules, generalizations control decisions even in those cases in which the generalization failed to serve its underlying justification).

62. See id. at 51.
arguments for expanding a rule’s scope while formal arguments will better support constraining expansion.

The salience of these admittedly abstract distinctions and the tenability of my hypothesis will become clear when applied to Brady and due process jurisprudence. However, before turning to our case study, I must address a potential objection. The objection is that my distinction between formal and justificatory interpretations of precedent improperly assumes that it is possible to discern the semantic content of the “rule of law” in any given case. This is fair enough. Given how justices write opinions, identifying the precise rules announced in Supreme Court cases often presents difficulties that simply do not arise when identifying the rules stated in acts of Congress.63

Although I concede the general difficulty in precisely articulating the rules of cases, it is not always impossible. Indeed, some cases are written in a way that makes identifying the “canonical formulation” of their rules rather easy.64 As it happens, this is precisely the case with Brady v. Maryland. For reasons explored below, identifying the relevant rule from Brady is uncontroversial—it has an easily identified canonical formulation. Indeed, I call this formulation “the Brady Rule.” Precisely because Brady does not suffer from the interpretative difficulties sometimes associated with identifying precedent rules, it is perfectly suited to frame a case study into the dynamics of formal versus justificatory arguments for expanding precedent.

---

63. Professor Sinclair has adjudged this difficulty as fatally undermining any rule-based conception of precedent. See Sinclair, supra note 31, at 385–86. However, I see Brady as providing a compelling enough counterexample to make plausible the project of looking for rules in at least some cases.

64. See Larry Alexander, Constrained by Precedent, 63 S. CAL. L. REV. 1, 27 (1989) (arguing that while not all cases have discernable rules, some do). On the canonical formulation of rules, see generally SCHAUER, supra note 61, at 68–72 (discussing the distinction between canonically formulated rules and rules without canonically inscribed formulations); Alexander, supra, at 17–19 (listing canonical formulation as one condition that the rule model must meet). If a rule has a canonical formulation, there is by definition no interpretative dispute over its semantic content.
B. The Brady Rule and the Right to Untested Evidence

Among practicing criminal lawyers and judges, *Brady* signifies more than just a single Supreme Court case. It stands for the entire realm of criminal procedure doctrine that deals with the prosecutorial obligation to disclose exculpatory evidence. As a textual matter, the original *Brady* case and its progeny all interpret the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Justice William Douglas's 1963 opinion for the Court announced its core holding in bold and decisive language:

> We now hold that the suppression by the prosecution of evidence favorable to an accused upon request violates due process where the evidence is material either to guilt or to punishment, irrespective of the good faith or bad faith of the prosecution.  

This is the exact formulation of what I call the *Brady* Rule. The *Brady* Rule states a constitutional operative proposition about due process. In essence, the *Brady* Rule created a right to discovery in criminal cases. Doctrinal expansion controversies in *Brady* concern just how broadly or narrowly the discovery right should apply.

Recall from the introduction that Justice Scalia protested in *Thompson* against recognizing a right to untested evidence on the grounds that it would impermissibly expand the substantive law of *Brady*. I maintain that Justice Scalia's accusation rests upon a particularly formal approach to constitutional stare decisis. Though Justice Scalia did not state it this way, his formal logic for limiting the scope of the *Brady* Rule unfolds like this: *Taken literally, the Brady Rule applies only to "evidence favorable to an accused." Untested forensic evidence cannot be classified as "favorable to an accused" as its exculpatory value is unknown. Indeed, testing could show the evidence to be inculpatory and thus it is also potentially*

---

66. Throughout this Article, I also refer to the *Brady* Rule simply as "the Rule."
unfavorable. Reading favorability out of the Rule to cover evidence that is only potentially exculpatory would expand Brady past recognizable borders. Under this formal view, the analysis would not continue to consider Brady's underlying due process justification.

This formal perspective thus reads the Brady Rule almost as a textualist would read a statute. As mentioned, Justice Scalia did not actually articulate this precise perspective in Thompson. However, before rehearsing Justice Scalia's actual (and still very formal) argument, I want to explore the formal idea that the Brady Rule represents the "canonical formulation" of the operative due process proposition.

As written, the Brady Rule is indeed particularly amenable to literal interpretation. Consider first the Rule's prefatory "[w]e now hold" phrase. This wording obviously aims to remove any doubt as to whether the announced rule constitutes holding or dictum. Next, consider the level of abstraction. The Rule is self-consciously general as it does not mention the particular litigants, facts, or outcome of the controversy before it. Yet the Rule is also usefully specific in naming the relevant actors (prosecution, accused) and prohibited action (suppression of favorable evidence). In sum, the purely linguistic formulation of the Brady Rule has canonical qualities.

Opinion language alone cannot suffice to make Brady's operative due process proposition canonical. What really matters to canonicity is on-the-ground interpretative practice. By this measure, the Court has certainly behaved as if the Brady Rule were canonical. Practically every significant Brady decision directly quotes all or part of Justice Douglas's original Brady Rule in its analysis. 69 This practice of invoking Justice Douglas's precise formulation spans decades and continues even in cases not directly in the Brady line. 70

---


70. I consider as indirect Brady decisions those cases that conduct analysis of access-to-evidence issues under the Sixth Amendment as well as under the Due Process Clause. See, e.g.,
Moreover, quoting the Rule is often a vital step in the Court’s analysis. Major *Brady*-line cases effectively interrogate this single sentence and create doctrine by elaborating upon the meaning of its component phrases.

Three quick examples demonstrate this formal notion of *Brady* doctrine as a systematic elaboration upon the *Brady* Rule’s component phrases. First, in *Giglio v. United States*, the Court essentially read the Rule’s phrase “evidence favorable to an accused” to include impeachment material. Second, in *United States v. Bagley*, the Court explicitly interpreted the Rule’s key phrase “material to guilt or punishment” and found that “evidence is material only if there is a reasonable probability that, had the evidence been disclosed to the defense, the result of the proceeding would have been different.” And finally, in *Kyles v. Whitley*, the Court held that individual prosecutors have “a duty to learn of any favorable evidence known to the others acting on the government’s behalf....” This holding clarified that the Rule’s injunction against “suppression ... by the prosecution” effectively prohibited the police from suppressing exculpatory evidence.

Though the Court has never claimed to read the *Brady* Rule “like a statute,” the relationship between the Rule’s specific text and the holdings in these cases certainly resembles the relationship between congressional law and Court precedent interpreting statutes. On a formal view, *Giglio, Bagley,* and *Kyles* do no more than implement the *Brady* Rule’s operative language. Interpretation must—first and foremost—be consistent with the Rule’s plain

---

71. 405 U.S. 150 (1972).
72. See id. at 150, 155 (finding prosecutors violated due process when they failed to disclose that a government witness had secured a cooperation agreement in exchange for his testimony).
73. *Bagley*, 473 U.S. at 682.
75. Id. at 437.
76. Id.; see also Youngblood v. West Virginia, 547 U.S. 867, 869–70 (2006) (citing *Kyles* for the proposition that “Brady suppression occurs when the government fails to turn over even evidence that is ‘known only to police investigators and not to the prosecutor’”) (internal citations omitted).
77. Under Berman’s framework, *Giglio, Bagley,* and *Kyles* would thus be examples of “decision rules” implementing *Brady*’s constitutional operative proposition. See Berman, *supra* note 67, at 50–51; cf. Laurin, *supra* note 67, at 1019 (describing *Brady*’s materiality requirement as “a classic decision rule inquiry”).
meaning. Since the Brady Rule only applies to “evidence favorable to an accused,” Justice Scalia’s argument in Thompson thus makes formal sense. Untested evidence is not actually favorable—only potentially so. Testing evidence could theoretically prove that it is inculpatory, in which case it would actually become “unfavorable to the accused.” If the Brady Rule’s plain language alone controlled, Justice Scalia’s formal tack would seem strong.

Yet despite its surface appeal, the realities of interpretative practice undermine a highly formal explanation of the Brady line. First, reconsider Kyles, which read the Rule’s phrase “suppression . . . by the prosecution” to also proscribe suppression by the police. Since the police and prosecution are not the same, this reading is at least contestable. Nevertheless, a formal account of Kyles remains plausible given the direct relationship between prosecution and police. However, no similarly plausible formal reading explains United States v. Agurs. In Agurs, the Court held that, even in absence of any defense request for Brady material, prosecutors have an affirmative duty to disclose evidence that is “clearly supportive of a claim of innocence.” This strains against the plain text of the Rule, which only prohibits “suppression . . . upon request” of the defense. The Agurs Court thus read the “upon request” condition right out of the Brady Rule.

Though formally problematic, Agurs’s removal of the “upon request” condition from the Rule makes perfect sense under a justificatory view of precedent. On a justificatory account, purpose trumps form. Agurs’s argument logic proceeds like this: Since one purpose of the Brady Rule is to protect innocence, the Rule should not be read to defeat this purpose. Suppressing evidence “clearly supportive of an innocence claim” only because the defense failed to request it goes against the spirit of the Rule. Therefore, the

79. Kyles, 514 U.S. at 437.
80. Both institutions are arguably species of the same “state prosecution” genus.
82. See id. at 107, 110.
83. The government advanced this precise argument in its Agurs briefing. See infra note 260 and accompanying text.
84. Justice Stevens, author of the Agurs opinion, later admitted as much. See infra note 299.
prohibition of "suppression . . . upon request" will be read to also prohibit suppression without a request.

Agurs's justificatory logic could apply to the right-to-untested-evidence debate. Though the Brady Rule formally applies to evidence "favorable to the accused," enlarging its scope to cover untested evidence would arguably further the Rule's purpose of protecting innocence. After all, once untested evidence was tested, it led to John Thompson's exoneration. This raises a question for Justice Scalia—if Agurs could read "upon request" out of the Rule, why not similarly read away the formal requirement that evidence be "favorable"? In response, Justice Scalia might fairly assert that though the Court could read away the Brady Rule's favorability requirement, the germane fact is that Court has not so held until this point. This imagined answer closely echoes Justice Scalia's actual observation in Thompson that "[i]f any of our cases establishes such an obligation [to disclose untested evidence], I have never read it, and the dissent does not cite it."85

As I have stressed, Justice Scalia did not make a quasi-textualist argument about the Brady Rule in Thompson. His logic is formal but does not actually rest on textual exegesis of the Brady Rule. Nonetheless, the textual account of Brady doctrine helps contextualize the still-formal nature of Justice Scalia's actual charge of sub silentio expansion in Thompson. A formal reading demonstrates how Justice Scalia effectively anchored his argument in the literal favorability requirement of the Brady Rule. A formal account also helps elucidate Justice Scalia's otherwise confusing appeal to precedent in his actual Thompson argument.

After observing that no case affirmatively established a right to untested evidence, Justice Scalia argued that one case—Arizona v. Youngblood86—"appears to say just the opposite."87 As Justice Scalia correctly noted, Youngblood held that "unless a criminal defendant can show bad faith on the part of the police, failure to preserve potentially useful evidence does not constitute a denial of due process

87. Thompson, 131 S. Ct. at 1369 (Scalia, J., concurring).
of law." Justice Scalia then quoted the *Youngblood* Court's observation that

[Youngblood] makes the good or bad faith of the State irrelevant when the State fails to disclose to the defendant material exculpatory evidence . . . [but] the Due Process Clause requires a different result when we deal with the failure of the State to preserve evidentiary material of which no more can be said than that it could have been subjected to tests, the results of which might have exonerated the defendant.  

Justice Scalia then concluded that "[p]erhaps one day we will recognize a distinction between good-faith failures to preserve [potentially exculpatory evidence] and good-faith failures to turn such evidence over to the defense. But until we do so, a failure to train prosecutors to observe that distinction cannot constitute deliberate indifference."  

The logic of Justice Scalia's substantive claim about *Brady* appears to be this—since *Youngblood* prohibits only bad faith destruction of potentially exculpatory evidence, *Brady*'s "irrespective of the good or bad faith" language means that the Rule cannot also apply to potentially exculpatory evidence. This reasoning is somewhat muddled but seems to rest on formal distinctions regarding potentially exculpatory evidence that were made in *Youngblood* but not in *Brady*.  

Justice Scalia's invocation of *Youngblood* is potentially shocking since the case denied relief to a man later proved innocent by DNA testing. Citing *Youngblood* in an opinion suggesting that prosecutors have no obligation to disclose potentially exculpatory forensic evidence seems callous in the extreme. Moreover, Justice Scalia's citation to the case is puzzling as a doctrinal matter since it ignores seemingly key language in Chief Justice Rehnquist's majority opinion. The context for the Chief Justice's analysis was

88. Id. (quoting *Youngblood*, 488 U.S. at 58) (emphasis added).
89. Id. (quoting *Youngblood*, 488 U.S. at 57).
90. Id.
91. Justice Scalia's argument drifts here. He initially invokes *Youngblood* for the proposition that no substantive right to untested evidence exists under *Brady*, but he then phrases his conclusion in terms of civil liability for failure-to-train.
Larry Youngblood's claim that police had failed to properly preserve semen evidence that could have proved him innocent of child molestation. Chief Justice Rehnquist began by quoting Agurs and the Brady Rule. He then wrote:

There is no question but that the State complied with Brady and Agurs here. The State disclosed relevant police reports to respondent. The State provided respondent’s expert with the laboratory reports and notes prepared by the police criminologist, and respondent’s expert had access to the swab and to the clothing.

If respondent is to prevail on federal constitutional grounds, then, it must be because of some constitutional duty over and above that imposed by cases such as Brady and Agurs. In this passage, Chief Justice Rehnquist plainly characterizes the State's disclosure of the laboratory reports and granting of access to untested evidence as "compl[yi]ng with Brady." This arguably supports the proposition that prosecutors do have a Brady obligation to disclose the existence of material untested evidence.

If Youngblood at least implies that Brady requires disclosure of untested evidence, why in his Thompson concurrence did Justice Scalia cite the case for the precise opposite proposition? I suggest this move is best understood as evincing a formal approach to constitutional precedent. A formal reading of Youngblood essentially dismisses Chief Justice Rehnquist's discussion of compliance with Brady as irrelevant dicta. Justice Scalia finds Youngblood's holding in the two sentences he quotes and ignores everything else. The ratio decidendi reduces to this text and does not include underlying justification. In this way, Justice Scalia approaches the Youngblood Rule in much the same way as he approaches the Brady Rule—as an entrenched generalization that requires little inquiry beyond its plain language.

93. See Youngblood, 488 U.S. at 52–55.
94. Id. at 55–56.
95. Id.
96. Of course, an alternative explanation of Justice Scalia's reading of Youngblood is possible. This explanation would characterize Justice Scalia's reading as essentially dishonest rather than formal/textualist. Ultimately, Justice Scalia's subjective intent in making his argument does not matter for my analysis. I am interested in understanding and answering the best
Of course, Justice Scalia’s formal argument is entirely contestable. Unfortunately, the *Thompson* dissenter did not tender a justificatory response about the purpose or spirit of *Brady* being the protection of innocence.97 In Part V below, I advance the response the dissent might have made. However, I must concede up front that the purpose of *Brady* is itself contested. Only the substantive due process school credits *Brady* with a strong innocence-protecting purpose. Followers of the competing procedural school see the purpose of *Brady* as limited to ensuring fairness at trial. It remains subject to debate whether recognition of a right to untested evidence is necessary to effectuate the purpose of the *Brady* Rule.

A complete understanding of the right-to-untested-evidence controversy—or of other contested expansions of *Brady*’s scope—thus requires more than the observation that Justice Scalia’s argument is formal. It also requires an analysis of the deeper doctrinal dialectic between procedural and substantive schools. Parts III and IV below undertake this analysis by mapping *Brady*’s origins and progeny. Part III’s analysis of *Brady*’s origins reveals that followers of the early substantive school continually expanded due process precedent via justificatory arguments. Part IV’s analysis of *Brady*’s progeny shows how the procedural school eventually seized control of the doctrine while deploying formal stare decisis arguments. While I have stressed that the persuasive strength of stare decisis arguments depends on doctrinal context, these following Parts demonstrate how metadoctrinal stare decisis argumentation itself helps constitute context.

Before turning to Part III, a lurking criticism needs to be confronted. This criticism suggests that Justice Scalia’s substantive *Brady* argument in *Thompson* has minimal relevance or importance to *Brady* doctrine. After all, Justice Scalia’s argument came in a concurring rather than majority opinion, and *Thompson* was a civil rather than criminal case. One might therefore conclude that Justice

97. Rather, as Justice Scalia sarcastically observed, the dissenters relied on the concession by Connick’s counsel that a *Brady* violation had occurred. Connick v. Thompson, 131 S. Ct. 1350, 1369 n.5 (2011) (Scalia, J., concurring) (“Given the effort the dissent has expended persuading us that Connick’s understanding of *Brady* is profoundly misguided, its newfound trust in his expertise on the subject is, to say the least, surprising.”).
Scalia's opinion does not state "the law" and thus should not cause concern. Despite its superficial appeal, I argue that this criticism misunderstands the real dynamics of doctrinal evolution.

First, the fact that Justice Scalia advanced his argument in a concurrence hardly means it could not influence Brady's future development. As shown below, concurring opinions—including Justice White's concurrence in Brady itself—have already affected the course of Brady doctrine just as they have influenced other areas of jurisprudence.98 Moreover, dissenting opinions—which have even less claim to "the law"—have also impacted the development of Brady and other due process doctrines.99 Majority, concurring, and dissenting opinions all play a role in the dialectic and cannot be lightly ignored.

Second, the fact that Thompson is a civil case also does not preclude its influence over Brady criminal doctrine. As Professor Laurin has demonstrated, the course of constitutional criminal doctrine can shift because of "borrowing" from civil law.100 And indeed, I show below how Brady doctrine has already been dramatically affected by borrowing from disparate areas of criminal law.101 Once again, Justice Scalia's substantive Brady analysis cannot be dismissed simply because Thompson more directly concerned failure-to-train liability.

As shown in the next two Parts, the evolution of due process doctrine is complex and can be influenced by what appear to be unlikely sources. To fully understand the potential significance of

98. Justice White's Brady concurrence called for a limit on constitutionalizing discovery and inspired the modern procedural school. See infra Part IV and Figure 2. Justice Fortas's concurrence in Giles v. Maryland, 386 U.S. 66 (1967), similarly inspired the substantive school. See infra Part IV and Figure 2. Outside of Brady, the canonical example of an influential concurrence over constitutional law is Justice Jackson's opinion in Youngstown Sheet & Tube Co. v. Sawyer, 343 U.S. 579, 634 (1952) (Jackson, J., concurring). See Epstein & Jacobi, supra note 31, at 60 n.85.
99. Justice Holmes's dissent in Frank v. Magnum, 237 U.S. 309 (1915), is an important root in Brady's family tree. See infra Part III and Figure 1. Justice Harlan's dissent in Giles is a key ancestor of Bagley. See infra Part IV and Figure 2. For an analysis of dissenting opinions' influence over economic liberty and incorporation due process doctrine, see Starger, Exile on Main Street, supra note 21.
101. See infra note 289 and accompanying text (describing role of borrowing in justifying Bagley).
Justice Scalia’s Thompson concurrence, we must therefore turn to the central task of mapping the competing lines in the Brady dialectic.

III. DUE PROCESS ROOTS: COMPETING BRADY ANCESTRIES 1868–1963

Is the Brady Rule a creature of procedural or substantive due process? For good or ill, there is no simple or uncontroversial answer to this question. On the one hand, as Professor Israel has noted, Brady announced a “free-standing due process right.”102 Israel’s classification derives from the complete absence of any reference to criminal discovery in the Constitution or its amendments. Like rights to abortion or same-sex intercourse, Brady’s discovery right is unenumerated and thus a substantive creation of the Court. On the other hand, the Brady Rule imposes a disclosure obligation on prosecutors that is inextricably bound with criminal procedure. In this way, the Brady Rule provides a procedural guarantee that trials will not occur without allowing defendants access to exculpatory evidence. Brady arguably shares procedural and substantive due process qualities. Perhaps because of such difficulties, the Court itself has never directly spoken on Brady’s proper doctrinal classification.103

Regardless of classification, Brady is a Court creation. No serious jurist or scholar has ever claimed that the Brady Rule derives from an original public understanding of the meaning of “due process” in 1791 or 1868.104 And yet, though clearly a product of Warren Court activism, Brady has also never faced any noteworthy


103. In United States v. Ruiz, Justice Breyer did analyze a Brady question using a procedural due process balancing test. See United States v. Ruiz, 536 U.S. 622, 631 (2002) (citing Ake v. Oklahoma, 470 U.S. 68, 77 (1985)). This citation led Professor Avery to conclude that Brady was a Mathews procedural due process right. See Michael Avery, Paying for Silence: The Liability of Police Officers Under Section 1983 for Suppressing Exculpatory Evidence, 13 TEMP. POL. & CIV. RTS. L. REV. 1, 26–27 (2003) (explaining how the Ake test is identical to the classic procedural due process test under Mathews v. Eldridge, 424 U.S. 319 (1976)). However, Mathews’s applicability to Brady was rejected by a more recent opinion by Chief Justice Roberts. See Dist. Attorney’s Office v. Osborne, 129 S. Ct. 2308, 2332, n.3 (2009) (Stevens, J., dissenting) (noting Chief Justice Roberts’s rejection of the Mathews test). No Court opinion has formally declared Brady a procedural or substantive due process right.

104. These dates correspond to the ratification of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments, respectively.
originalist critique. This is because the right to criminal discovery derived from *Brady* fundamentally differs from the other Court-created rights typically targeted by originalist theorists. Unlike rights to abortion or same-sex intercourse, no moral tradition is offended by *Brady*'s substantive concern with innocence. And unlike more controversial procedural protections the Court has read into the Constitution—the exclusionary rule and *Miranda* warnings stand as obvious examples—*Brady* does not ever exclude evidence of guilt to frustrate truth-seeking in criminal trials.

Yet the absence of originalist critique should not obscure *Brady*'s contested origins and development. After all, ours is an adversarial system of criminal justice and the *Brady* Rule favors criminal defendants. In broad strokes, those who sympathize with the criminal-defense bar favor an expansive substantive conception of *Brady*, while those sympathetic to the prosecution understand *Brady* as a limited procedural mechanism. This Part maps the emergence of the competing procedural and substantive due process schools and analyzes the history culminating in *Brady*. Part III.A presents the opinion map for this Part and briefly explains the general schema. Part III.B breaks down the due process dialectic prior to *Brady*, while Part III.C analyzes *Brady* itself.

A. Explanation of Mapping Schema

Figure 1 below charts *Brady*'s due process roots. Each triangle on the map represents a Court opinion; the case name appears above the opinion and its author's name appears below. The opinion's year is shown on the X-axis while the number of votes it received is on the Y-axis; all points above the dashed line are thus majority opinions. Opinion triangles point either up or down. In Figure 1, all the triangles pointing up are blue and represent opinions that found a due process right favoring criminal defendants (or, if written in dissent, that would have found a due process right). These opinions are the direct ancestors of *Brady*—what I call the substantive school. Red triangles pointing down represent opinions denying the existence of a due process right. This is thus the weak due process right line—later associated with the procedural school opposing *Brady*'s expansion. Figure 1 thus shows how the procedural school
went from controlling the majority in *Hurtado* and *Frank* to sounding in dissent in *Moore* and *Brady*.

![Diagram of Due Process Roots](image)

**Figure 1**

Arrows connect opinions and form lines of authority. Solid arrows mean the later opinion directly cited the earlier one to support the relevant due process proposition. For example, the arrow pointing from Justice Douglas’s majority opinion in *Brady* back to the per curiam decision in *Mooney* is solid because *Brady* explicitly justified its ruling as “an extension of *Mooney v. Holohan.*” Dotted arrows indicate a more subtle hermeneutic connection that I argue exists between opinions, despite the absence of formal citation.

When dotted arrows join opinions, I provide argument to justify the link. Thus, the dotted arrow connecting Justice White’s concurrence in *Brady* back to Justice McReynolds’s dissent in *Moore* requires justification because Justice White did not explicitly cite *Moore* in his opinion.106

Taken as a whole, the map graphs the fortunes of competing doctrinal schools. The schools exist in familial lines of opinions. Subsequent opinions descend from earlier ones and share lineage and heritage. (To emphasize the importance of such familial connections, an opinion triangle grows in size as the number of citations to it increases.) The genealogical metaphor suggested by this depiction echoes the common practice of referring to “lines” of cases or to a leading case “and its progeny.” However, this depiction refines the usual metaphor by mapping the relationships between opinions rather than between cases. Opinions have authors, which, unlike faceless attribution to “the Court,” directly implies personal agency and the ideological commitments of individuals.107

Before specifically analyzing Figure 1, I want to emphasize that none of the opinion maps presented herein purport to chart every single relevant opinion from the period in question. The maps are not the territory. The point of the opinion maps is not to provide utterly exhaustive detail so much as to chart the main competing substantive and procedural due process lines. To deploy another analogy, Figures 1–3 are like maps of constellations. From a sparkling universe of opinions, I draw lines between what I see as the brightest stars. Like constellations, the real power in the connections drawn lies less in the raw images than in the stories it allows the observer to tell.

---

106. This argument is presented in Part III.C, infra.

107. Though ideological commitment forms a key part of the story, this does not mean that the history of *Brady* doctrine neatly reduces to a contest between “liberal” and “conservative” schools. Modern “liberal” and “conservative” categories did not coalesce until the middle of the twentieth century. See, e.g., Andrew D. Martin & Kevin M. Quinn, *Dynamic Ideal Point Estimation via Markov Chain Monte Carlo for the U.S. Supreme Court, 1953–1999*, 10 POL. ANALYSIS 134 (2002) (examining attitudinalist scoring of liberal and conservative judicial leanings beginning in 1953). By contrast, “due process” is an ancient idea whose meaning has been contested since the Magna Carta. In particular, the personal ideological commitments of post–Civil War Justices do not neatly align with our modern conceptions of liberal or conservative.
B. Brady’s Ancestry:  
Rise of the Substantive School

The basic story of Brady’s contested due process origins is set out in Figure 1. The earliest data point is the Fourteenth Amendment. Of course, the Amendment’s “nor shall any state deprive any person of life [or] liberty . . . without due process of law” takes its due process language from the Fifth Amendment and applies it against the States.108 Although this language provides a textual basis for the doctrine that follows, the text itself has played no meaningful role in the criminal due process dialectic. For the most part, the competing lines clash over proper interpretations of prior due process caselaw. The mode of constitutional argumentation is thus quintessentially doctrinal.

The competing opinion lines in Figure 1 thus reveal the import of this map. Opinions in the blue line are Brady’s direct predecessors. In chronological order, the opinions in this line are Frank v. Magnum (Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes dissenting, 1915);109 Moore v. Dempsey (Justice Holmes for the Court, 1923),110 Mooney v. Holohan (per curiam, 1935);111 Pyle v. Kansas (Justice Frank Murphy for the Court, 1942);112 Napue v. Illinois (Chief Justice Earl Warren for the Court, 1959);113 and Brady v. Maryland (Justice William Douglas for the Court, 1963).114 Opinions in the red

108. See U.S. CONST. amend V (declaring that in the context of criminal cases, no person “shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law” without referencing the “depriver”). The Bill of Rights did not originally apply against the States. See Barron ex rel. Tiernan v. Mayor of Baltimore, 32 U.S. 243, 247 (1833). Since federal criminal law was very underdeveloped prior to the Civil War, the Court had effectively no criminal due process jurisprudence before it was called on to interpret the Fourteenth Amendment.
109. Frank v. Magnum, 237 U.S. 309 (1915). Frank was a 7–2 decision. Justice Mahlon Pitney delivered the opinion of the Court. Id. at 324. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. wrote a dissent joined by Justice Charles Evans Hughes. Id. at 345 (Holmes, J., dissenting).
110. Moore v. Dempsey, 261 U.S. 86 (1923). Moore was a 7–2 decision. Justice Holmes delivered the opinion of the Court. Id. at 87. Justice James McReynolds wrote a dissent in which Justice George Sutherland concurred. Id. at 92, 102 (McReynolds, J., dissenting).
111. Mooney v. Holohan, 294 U.S. 103 (1935). Mooney was a 9–0 decision delivered per curiam with no dissents. Id. at 109.
112. Pyle v. Kansas, 317 U.S. 213 (1942). Pyle was a 9–0 decision. Justice Frank Murphy delivered the opinion of the Court. Id. at 213.
114. Brady v. Maryland, 373 U.S. 83 (1963). Brady was a 6–1–2 decision. Justice William Douglas wrote the opinion for the Court. Id. at 84. Justice Byron White wrote a separate opinion.
line represent the competing tradition that opposed the due process expansion leading to Brady. In order, these opinions are Hurtado v. California (Justice Stanley Matthews for the Court, 1884); Frank v. Magnum (Justice Mahlon Pitney for the Court, 1915); Moore v. Dempsey (Justice James McReynolds dissenting, 1923); and Brady v. Maryland (Justice Byron White concurring, 1963).

The earliest opinion in this dialectic is Justice Matthews’s 1884 opinion for the Court in Hurtado. This case represented the Court’s first major ruling on what due process requires of the criminal process. For present purposes, Justice Matthews’s opinion is most significant for articulating the baseline rule that criminal due process requires that a defendant be given notice and the opportunity to be heard. “Notice and opportunity to be heard” captures the essentially procedural conception of due process that initially held sway over the Court’s jurisprudence. Under this conception, a state’s criminal procedure comports with due process so long as it provides notice and opportunity—unless it otherwise falls afoul of “fundamental principles of liberty and justice which lie at the base of all our civil and political institutions.” In Hurtado, Justice Matthews applied this rule and found that California’s capital prosecution of Joseph Hurtado without grand jury indictment comported with due process.

While Hurtado provides the procedural baseline, the competing substantive view does not really enter the dialectic until 1915’s Frank. Frank was the first in a series of racially and politically
charged cases reviewed by the Court—Moore and Mooney followed. In all these cases, the State provided the defendant notice and opportunity to be heard, but the question was whether a miscarriage of justice occurred despite formal procedural protections. The emerging substantive school advocated looking behind procedural form to the substance of justice.

The question of substantive justice loomed large when Leo Frank asked the Court to issue writ of habeas corpus. To many, Frank was a victim of great injustice. He stood convicted of the capital rape-murder of Mary Phagan, a thirteen-year-old employee of his at the National Pencil Factory in Atlanta, Georgia. Critically, Frank was a Jew and Phagan a Christian. Frank’s case caused tumult in the South as sensational newspaper coverage fanned anti-Semitic flames. Before the Court, Frank argued that his trial had been conducted under a threat of mob violence and that mob domination had denied him due process of law.

The Court ruled against Frank. Writing for a seven-Justice majority, Justice Pitney invoked Hurtado for the proposition that a criminal prosecution in the courts of a State ... conducted according to the settled course of judicial proceedings as established by the law of the State, so long as it includes notice, and a hearing, or an opportunity to be heard, before a court of competent jurisdiction, according to established modes of procedure, is “due process” in the constitutional sense.

121. The Anti-Defamation League was actually founded in 1913 as a direct response to the Frank trial. See Georgia Pardons Lynching Victim, ADL’s First Case, L.A. TIMES, Mar. 12, 1986, at A11.


124. ld.


126. ld. at 326 (citing Hurtado v. California, 110 U.S. 516, 535 (1884)). Justice Pitney cited other cases for this proposition here as well. It deserves mention that Frank’s case involved important questions of federal habeas jurisdiction. Most of the cases Justice Pitney cites in his opinion serve as authority justifying his habeas ruling. Hurtado is the most important due process case he cites. For a discussion focused on the technical habeas aspects of Frank, see generally Freedman, supra note 122.
Under the “notice and opportunity to be heard” rule, Frank had received due process. This is because Frank’s claim about mob domination had been heard and rejected by the appellate and supreme courts of Georgia. These subsequent courts conducted their review “under circumstances wholly apart from the atmosphere of the trial, and free from any suggestion of mob domination.” Justice Pitney flinched at extending due process to “impair the power of the States to repress and punish crime.”

Justice Holmes dissented and gave first voice to the substantive perspective that due process inquiries cannot end with notice and opportunity. Relying on his own considerable authority, rather than any prior caselaw, Justice Holmes wrote:

Whatever disagreement there may be as to the scope of the phrase “due process of law,” there can be no doubt that it embraces the fundamental conception of a fair trial, with opportunity to be heard. Mob law does not become due process of law by securing the assent of a terrorized jury. We are not speaking of mere disorder, or mere irregularities in procedure, but a case where the processes of justice are actually subverted.

Justice Holmes quickly dismissed Justice Pitney’s worries that exercising federal habeas jurisdiction would violate the principle of comity and impair the State’s authority to punish the guilty. Instead, Justice Holmes appealed to “the supremacy of the law and of the Federal Constitution.” Closing in strong moral language, Justice Holmes declared it “our duty... to declare lynch law as little valid when practiced by a regularly drawn jury as when administered by one elected by a mob intent on death.”

Frank thus presents side by side the nascent doctrinal philosophies of competing due process schools. Justice Pitney looked to the established forms of procedure and judged the whole state

---

127. Frank, 237 U.S. at 312-16 (reviewing procedural history).
128. Id. at 333.
129. Id. at 337.
130. Id. at 347 (Holmes, J., dissenting).
131. Id. at 349.
132. Id. at 350.
apparatus as formally sound. Justice Holmes advocated piercing the form and independently assessing whether substantive justice was done. To be sure, the dispute did not involve a wholly categorical disagreement on what due process required. Justice Holmes did not argue that the federal courts were free to second-guess state-court judgments that met formal procedural requirements. He stressed instead the particular gravity of the allegations in Frank’s case. For his part, Justice Pitney agreed that “if a trial is in fact dominated by a mob . . . so that there is an actual interference with the course of justice, there is . . . a departure from due process of law in the proper sense of that term.” However, he emphasized that Georgia had a sound corrective process, which had in fact previously granted new trials when mob violence rendered trials unfair.

While only Justice Pitney’s majority opinion formally assumed stare decisis status, Justice Holmes’s dissent turned out to be more influential in the doctrine. To understand why, it is first important to realize that Justice Holmes correctly apprehended the vicious reality of mob violence in Frank’s case. After losing in the Supreme Court, Frank’s lawyers managed to persuade Georgia’s governor to commute Frank’s death sentence to life. Outraged anti-Semitic mobs subsequently exploded into violence around the state. A month later, a party led by eminent citizens abducted Frank from jail and then lynched him in Mary Phagan’s hometown. The horror of this injustice is compounded by the fact that Frank was almost certainly innocent. This factual context informed the legal redemption of Justice Holmes’s Frank dissent in Moore.

133. Id. at 345 (majority opinion) (“In all of these proceedings the State, through its courts, has retained jurisdiction over him, has accorded to him the fullest right and opportunity to be heard according to the established modes of procedure . . . .”).

134. Id. at 346 (Holmes, J., dissenting) (“[H]abeas corpus cuts through all form and goes to the very tissue of the structure. It comes in from the outside, not in subordination to the proceedings, and although every form may have been preserved opens the inquiry whether they have been more than an empty shell.”).

135. Id. at 349 (majority opinion).

136. Id. at 335. Depending on how draft opinions were circulated, this concession may have been made in direct response to Justice Holmes’s sharp dissent.

137. Id. (citing Collier v. State, 42 S.E. 226 (1902); Myers v. State, 25 S.E. 252 (1895)).


139. Id.

140. Id. at 1497.

141. The only uncertainty derives from the fact that there is no one hundred percent conclusive evidence of innocence such as a DNA test. In 1983, the Georgia Board of Pardons and
Decided in 1923, Moore was another Court encounter with mob justice.\textsuperscript{142} This time the violence arose out of a massive race riot that occurred in 1919 in Phillips County, Arkansas.\textsuperscript{143} The riot lasted days, and rampaging whites killed between 200 and 250 African Americans.\textsuperscript{144} Four whites were also killed in the violence before federal troops restored order.\textsuperscript{145} In the aftermath, a series of grand jury indictments and hasty trials resulted in seventy-nine convictions of black men for the murder of whites.\textsuperscript{146} Twelve men received death sentences.\textsuperscript{147} After a complicated path through Arkansas and federal courts, seven defendants who were all convicted of murdering the same man—Clinton Lee—ended up in a consolidated case before the Court in Moore.\textsuperscript{148}

Now writing for a seven-Justice majority, Justice Holmes found that the defendants' allegations of mob violence and intimidation stated a valid due process claim. Justice Holmes agreed with the appellants that “although [the original proceedings were] a trial in form, [they] were only a form, and . . . the appellants were hurried to a conviction under the pressure of a mob.”\textsuperscript{149} For the proposition that this empty form violated due process, Justice Holmes cited no cases at all except for Frank.\textsuperscript{150} Here Justice Holmes seized upon Justice Pitney's begrudging dictum from Frank that a trial dominated by a mob would violate due process if it caused an “actual interference with the course of justice.”\textsuperscript{151} In dissent, Justice McReynolds strongly objected to Justice Holmes's reading. He accused the Moore majority of putting the real Frank doctrine aside and adopting “the views expressed by the minority of the Court in that cause.”\textsuperscript{152} To
back up his claim, Justice McReynolds quoted seven complete paragraphs from *Frank* that put Justice Pitney's mob-domination quote in its original context.\(^{153}\)

Though Justice Holmes technically quoted the *Frank* majority, his reasoning in *Moore* directly resonated with his prior dissent. In *Moore*, Justice Holmes once again viewed due process as demanding an inquiry into the ends of justice rather than a polite review of the means:

> [I]f the case is that the whole proceeding is a mask—that counsel, jury and judge were swept to the fatal end by an irresistible wave of public passion, and that the State Courts failed to correct the wrong, neither perfection in the machinery for correction nor the possibility that the trial court and counsel saw no other way of avoiding an immediate outbreak of the mob can prevent this Court from securing to the petitioners their constitutional rights.\(^{154}\)

On the other hand, Justice McReynolds's dissent echoed the central themes of the *Frank* majority—the importance of deferring to state criminal processes, confidence in the integrity of state-court review, and suspicion of defendants' claims.

These relationships between arguments explain why Figure 1 shows a dotted arrow pointing back from Holmes's majority opinion in *Moore* to his dissent in *Frank*.\(^{155}\) Though not explicitly linked by textual citation (Justice Holmes did not cite his *Frank* dissent in *Moore*), the opinions share a deeper hermeneutic connection. Beyond a common author, they also advance the same tradition—advocating a strong substantive role for due process. *Moore* marks the first case in which freestanding due process found majority approval.\(^{156}\) It also marks the beginning of the substantive due process school's rise.

This doctrinal changing of the guard necessarily involved a lax approach to stare decisis. In truth, McReynolds accurately captured Justice Holmes's disregard for *Frank*, and it is fair to say that *Moore* effectively overruled *Frank sub silentio*. Of course, Justice Holmes's

---

\(^{153}\) Id. at 94–96 (quoting *Frank* en bloc).

\(^{154}\) Id. at 86, 91 (majority opinion).

\(^{155}\) Since Justice McReynolds did directly cite the *Moore* majority, Figure 1's arrow connecting Justice McReynolds's opinion back to Justice Pitney's *Moore* opinion is solid.

\(^{156}\) Cf. Israel, supra note 102, at 374 (arguing *Moore* was the first case in which the Court found a due process violation that did not involve a parallel violation of a specific guarantee).
lax approach made sense given the *Frank* debacle and the contemporary realities of endemic racism and unchecked lynching. It also comes as no surprise that Justice Holmes delivered the stare decisis blow. After all, he is the author of that most famous aphorism critiquing slavish adherence to precedent—"It is revolting to have no better reason for a rule of law than that so it was laid down in the time of Henry IV."\(^{157}\)

After *Moore*, the doctrinal question became how far the new substantive due process rule would reach. *Moore* showed that mob domination defeated due process even if notice and opportunity to be heard were formally present. The effective scope of the rule was subsequently extended in a string of unanimous cases—*Mooney, Pyle, and Napue*—that ultimately led to *Brady* and the creation of a due process right to discovery in criminal cases. During this period of expansion, the procedural school fell out of favor. This process began in *Mooney*.

The Supreme Court’s 1935 per curiam opinion in *Mooney* is the most prominent single ancestor of *Brady*. Though its significance to due process is great, the opinion played a minor role in Tom Mooney’s long odyssey to prove his innocence. A militant-left labor radical, Mooney was arrested in 1916 on a mass-murder charge arising out of the bombing of a pro-war rally in San Francisco that killed nine people.\(^ {158}\) Mooney’s subsequent conviction likely rested upon false and perjured testimony.\(^ {159}\) At the time, Mooney’s case became an international cause célèbre for the radical left. Strictly speaking, Mooney did not win relief in the Supreme Court.\(^ {160}\) However, after decades of mass demonstrations and protracted court battles, Governor Cuthbert Olson finally granted Mooney a full pardon on innocence grounds in 1939.\(^ {161}\)

---

158. See Rebecca Roiphe, *Lawyering at the Extremes: The Representation of Tom Mooney, 1916–1939*, 77 FORDHAM L. REV. 1731, 1731 (2009). Mooney had previously been acquitted of transporting explosives for the purpose of destroying the electrical transmission lines. Because of his radical politics and penchant for explosives, Mooney became the primary suspect for the San Francisco bombing despite the absence of any real evidence indicating guilt. *Id.* at 1738.
159. *Id.* at 1740–44 (discussing evidence).
160. The per curiam opinion denied Mooney leave to file a habeas petition and Mooney was forced to return to California courts for ultimately unsuccessful litigation. See *Mooney v. Holohan*, 294 U.S. 103, 115 (1935); Roiphe, *supra* note 158, at 1753 n.110, 1754–56.
Mooney is significant for our stare decisis study because it expanded due process doctrine to prohibit state subornation of perjury. In so doing, the Court publically rejected the intensely procedural arguments of the California Attorney General (AG). In his brief to the Court, the AG argued that Mooney’s “assertions relate not to the process of law followed in the petitioner’s case but relate to the credibility of the evidence produced against petitioner and to the good faith of the prosecuting attorney.” 162 Relying on Frank and Hurtado, the AG asserted that due process merely required that the defendant be given “notice, and a hearing, or an opportunity to be heard.”163 He then protested that petitioner would persuade this court to change the accepted meaning of the word “process” and to so broaden it as to include that which has never been regarded as process by any court in the history of our country. He would have the meaning of the due process clause expanded into a guarantee against the presentation of false evidence. 164 Notably, the AG’s protest against expansion of the scope of due process is grounded in a formal stare decisis argument. Since Mooney undeniably had notice and opportunity in state courts, the AG characterized his quest for due process relief as unsupported by precedent. 165

Of course, the AG’s formal reading of due process doctrine was contestable. After summarizing the AG’s due process arguments, the Supreme Court’s per curiam opinion bluntly rejected them: “We are unable to approve this narrow view of the requirement of due process.”166 The requirement of due process, the Court wrote, cannot be deemed to be satisfied by mere notice and hearing if a State has contrived a conviction through the pretense of a trial which in truth is but used as a means of depriving a defendant of liberty through a deliberate deception of court

163. Id. at 4 (quoting Frank v. Magnum, 237 U.S. 309 (1915) (citing Hurtado v. California, 110 U.S. 516, 535 (1884))).
164. Id. at 17.
165. Id. at 6–7, 16–17.
166. Mooney, 294 U.S. at 112 (emphasis added).
and jury by the presentation of testimony known to be perjured. Such a contrivance by a State to procure the conviction and imprisonment of a defendant is as inconsistent with the rudimentary demands of justice as is the obtaining of a like result by intimidation.\textsuperscript{167}

As authority for its substantive conception of due process, the Court cited \textit{Frank} and \textit{Moore}.\textsuperscript{168} However, the \textit{Mooney} Court did not quote any formal rule from \textit{Frank} or \textit{Moore} and apply it to the case before it. Rather, it analogized to mob intimidation and invoked the "rudimentary demands of justice."\textsuperscript{169} This was an essentially justificatory reading of stare decisis.

\textit{Mooney}'s due process principle effectively authorized federal review of the good faith of prosecuting attorneys. When prosecutors acted in bad faith by suborning perjury, they reduced procedural protections to an empty form. Notice and hearing alone cannot protect against bad faith deception and perjured testimony. To protect the ends rather than the means of justice, \textit{Mooney} read a substantive due process principle into the doctrine. \textit{Mooney}'s principle was easily applied in the final two cases before \textit{Brady} itself—\textit{Pyle} and \textit{Napue}.

In \textit{Pyle}, the Court reviewed a pro se habeas petition on a state murder charge.\textsuperscript{170} On behalf of a unanimous Court, Justice Murphy noted that allegations of perjury as well as the "deliberate suppression ... of evidence favorable to [defendant]" stated a viable due process claim.\textsuperscript{171} For this proposition, Justice Murphy cited \textit{Mooney} alone.\textsuperscript{172} Even though \textit{Mooney} itself had no language about "deliberate suppression of evidence," the \textit{Pyle} Court apparently found deliberate suppression inconsistent with \textit{Mooney}'s spirit. In

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{167} \textit{Id.}
  \item \textsuperscript{168} \textit{Id.} at 113 (citing \textit{Moore v. Dempsey}, 261 U.S. 89, 90–91 (1923); \textit{Frank}, 237 U.S. at 335).
  \item \textsuperscript{169} \textit{Id.} at 112.
  \item \textsuperscript{170} \textit{Pyle v. Kansas}, 317 U.S. 213, 214 (1942). \textit{Pyle}'s pro se petition named three witnesses who he claimed were forced either to lie or not testify by the prosecution. \textit{Pyle} also claimed that evidence at a later trial held after his direct appeal contained evidence that exonerated him. \textit{Id.}
  \item \textsuperscript{171} \textit{Id.} at 215–16. The Court found that \textit{Pyle}'s claims, if proved, would state a violation of constitutional rights. Ultimately, the Court remanded the case back to the Kansas Supreme Court. \textit{Id.}
  \item \textsuperscript{172} \textit{Id.} at 216 (citing \textit{Mooney}, 294 U.S. 103).
\end{itemize}
short, the Court once again adopted a justificatory view of stare decisis.

This pattern continued with the Court’s 1959 opinion in *Napue*.\textsuperscript{173} In this murder prosecution, the State’s principal eyewitness falsely testified that he had received no deals in exchange for his testimony.\textsuperscript{174} Writing for another unanimous Court, Chief Justice Warren found that this use of false testimony violated due process.\textsuperscript{175} To back his argument, Chief Justice Warren first cited *Mooney* and *Pyle* for the “established” principle that due process prohibits “conviction[s] obtained through use of false evidence, known to be such by representatives of the State.”\textsuperscript{176} However, Chief Justice Warren had to argue further since the false testimony in *Mooney* and *Pyle* went directly to guilt or innocence, whereas the *Napue* false testimony only impeached witness credibility. Chief Justice Warren simply observed that the *Mooney-Pyle* principle “does not cease to apply merely because the false testimony goes only to the credibility of the witness.”\textsuperscript{177} Here, Chief Justice Warren flatly rejected a formal interpretation of prior precedent and effectively expanded the due process rule.

This brings us to *Brady*’s brink. Since 1923, the Court had steadily expanded the scope of due process to prohibit mob-dominated trials, subornation of perjury, and deliberate suppression of favorable evidence. These opinions all expressed substantive due process concern with the ends of justice and rejected a purely “notice and opportunity to be heard” procedural view. This expansion was backed by lax (in the case of *Moore*’s effective overruling of *Frank*) and then justificatory interpretations of stare decisis. However, all of the opinions in this line essentially dealt with situations in which state actors had proceeded in bad faith. Such bad-faith actions rendered formal procedural protections substantively impotent and led to injustice. Whether due process offered substantive protection for criminal defendants when bad faith was not implicated was not a question considered by the Court until *Brady*.

\textsuperscript{174} Id. at 266–67. The witness had in fact received a plea deal for his cooperation. Id.
\textsuperscript{175} Id. at 272.
\textsuperscript{176} Id. at 269 (citing, inter alia, *Mooney* and *Pyle*).
\textsuperscript{177} Id.
Though the Court did not do so, John Brady’s story could be read to reveal bad faith on the part of state authorities. Brady and his codefendant Donald Boblit faced charges for the robbery and murder by strangulation of William Brooks.178 Brady and Boblit each confessed participating in the crime to police but blamed the other for actually killing Brooks.179 The State tried the men separately and sought the death penalty for each. Prior to Brady’s trial, his counsel requested to view the records of Boblit’s confessions.180 Prosecutors withheld one confession in which Boblit admitted to strangling Brooks.181 At trial, Brady admitted his participation in the robbery but insisted that Boblit alone killed Brooks.182 On this basis, Brady’s counsel argued that his client should be spared capital punishment.183 Without corroboration of Brady’s story, the jury returned a death sentence. When the State subsequently tried Boblit, Boblit attempted to pin the murder on Brady.184 At this point, prosecutors sought to impeach Boblit by brazenly introducing the very same confession they had previously withheld from Brady.185 The jury in Boblit’s trial found him guilty and sentenced him to die.186

Years later, Brady learned of Boblit’s suppressed confession and filed a postconviction appeal.187 After the trial court denied relief, the Maryland Court of Appeals reversed and ordered a new punishment-phase trial for Brady.188 In its opinion, the court found that the State “knew in advance” of Brady’s trial strategy and that “there was a duty on the State to produce the confession of Boblit that he did the actual strangling or at least to inform counsel for the accused of its

183. Id.
184. Brady, 154 A.2d at 435.
185. Brady, 174 A.2d at 169. However, since this confession was not signed by Boblit, the presiding judge did not admit it into evidence. Id.
186. Brady, 154 A.2d at 434.
187. See Bibas, supra note 180, at 134.
188. See Brady, 174 A.2d at 172.
existence." In language closely anticipating the eventual Brady Rule, the court then stated: "the suppression or withholding by the State, of material evidence exculpatory to an accused is a violation of due process . . . . It is none the less a denial of due process if the withholding of material evidence is without guile." The Maryland court's suggestion that prosecutors suppressed evidence "without guile" is puzzling. Consider the following proposition: Boblit strangled Brooks. At Brady's trial, the prosecution did not want the jury to believe this proposition and so withheld evidence supporting it. At Boblit's trial, the prosecution now wanted the jury to believe the exact same proposition and so sought to prove it using the evidence it had previously withheld. Through suppression and incompatible positions about the identity of the true killer, the prosecution sent two men to the gallows. One might well ask—how is this not bad faith? In the end, the Court never confronted this question since the parties did not dispute it. 191

Brady made no bad-faith accusations and prosecutors certainly did not advance a good-faith defense. 192 This lack of debate helps initially explain how the Court's arguably radical extension of Mooney's bad-faith principle to good-faith situations escaped direct comment.

In any event, the Supreme Court affirmed the Court of Appeals. 193 In his majority opinion, Justice Douglas wrote for six members of the Court and proclaimed that the court below had "state[d] the correct constitutional rule." 194 Justice Douglas then frankly stated: "This ruling is an extension of Mooney." 195 Next,

189. Id. at 169.
190. Id.
191. Two potential good-faith explanations are possible—though weak. First, admissibility issues surrounding Boblit's confession possibly led prosecutors to believe disclosure to the defense was pointless. See Brady, 174 A.2d at 170. Alternatively, prosecutors may have believed that both Boblit and Brady shared complete culpability for the murder and so employed cynical tactics to reach a result they thought just—the death penalty for both.
192. See generally Brief for Petitioner, Brady v. Maryland, 373 U.S. 83 (1963) (No. 490), 1962 WL 115267 [hereinafter Brady Petitioner's Brief] (stating no bad-faith accusations against prosecutors). And for its part, the State did not try to defend its actions as undertaken in good faith. See generally Brief for Respondent, Brady v. Maryland, 373 U.S. 83 (1963) (No. 490), 1963 WL 105617 [hereinafter Brady Respondent's Brief] (offering no defense on the part of the State that actions were taken in good faith).
194. Id. at 86.
195. Id. (emphasis added).
Justice Douglas recounted developments since *Mooney*, noting both how courts had interpreted *Pyle* to forbid “‘suppression of evidence favorable’ to the accused”\(^\text{196}\) and how *Napue* itself had “extended the test formulated in *Mooney*” to prohibit the state from allowing false evidence to go uncorrected.\(^\text{197}\) With this pattern of extending precedent established, Justice Douglas formally announced the now-familiar *Brady* Rule. To recall it once more, this Rule held that suppression of favorable evidence by the prosecution when requested by the defense violated due process, “irrespective of the good faith or bad faith of the prosecution.”\(^\text{198}\)

The highly justificatory thrust of Justice Douglas’s approach to stare decisis is apparent. Certainly, his assertion that the *Brady* Rule was a simple “extension of *Mooney*” is vulnerable to formal charges of impermissibly expanding then-existing due process jurisprudence. After all, it is quite a leap to infer an affirmative duty to disclose exculpatory evidence from cases that imposed a negative prohibition on suborning perjury or allowing lies to stand uncorrected. It similarly stretches analogy to find a constitutional basis for regulating discovery in cases that erected due process protections against mob justice. In short, it is a radical move to find precedent for the irrespective-of-good-or-bad-faith command of *Brady* in the tied-to-bad-faith history of its ancestral cases.

Although Justice Douglas’s radical move was indeed contested, this specific stare decisis critique was not raised. On the key due process issue, Justice Byron White’s separate concurring opinion functioned as the dissent.\(^\text{199}\) Justice White railed against the central innovation of *Brady*—“cast[ing] in constitutional form a broad rule of criminal discovery.”\(^\text{200}\) He advocated leaving the task of creating discovery rules “to the rule-making or legislative process after full consideration by legislators, bench, and bar.”\(^\text{201}\) As noted, Justice White did not back his argument by accusing the Court of

\(^{196}\) *Id.* at 87 (quoting United States *ex rel.* Almeida v. Baldi, 195 F.2d 815, 820 (3d Cir. 1952)).
\(^{197}\) *Id.* (emphasis added) (quoting *Napue* v. Illinois, 360 U.S. 264, 269 (1959)).
\(^{198}\) *Id.*
\(^{199}\) *Id.*
\(^{200}\) *Id.*
\(^{201}\) *Id.*
improperly stretching prior precedent. However, he did attempt to stifle Brady's doctrinal influence through a different kind of formal stare decisis argument. Specifically, Justice White boldly argued that the Brady Rule was nonbinding dictum.202

Justice White's formal reasoning proceeded from the observation that the Maryland Court of Appeals opinion—which was affirmed by the Court in Brady—had invoked due process without explicitly citing either the Maryland or federal constitutions.203 Since both constitutions had due process clauses, Justice White noted that it was impossible to know whether the lower court's due process language stated a proposition of state or federal law, which rendered "the [federal] due process discussion by the Court... wholly advisory."204 On this formal reading, the now-famous Brady Rule had no precedential value.205 Though it seems quixotic in light of actual doctrinal developments, it is worth noting that Justice White's argument was formally reasonable. Indeed, Justice Douglas's due process discussion was not logically necessary to affirm the lower court, and, under a formal view of precedent, only those statements that are logically necessary to a court's decision constitute its holding.206

Of course, one reason that Justice White's formal stare decisis reasoning did not prevail is that it patently ignored Justice Douglas's unequivocal "[w]e now hold" prefatory language. Another reason is that his formal critique had little persuasive traction at that stage of the doctrinal discourse. In the forty years prior to Brady, the Court had steadily expanded due process and rejected formal readings of precedent.207 Brady unquestionably represented an even more radical leap forward, but it had momentum behind it. As with Justice Holmes's aggressive expansion of due process in Moore, it is unsurprising that Justice Douglas paid little heed to formal stare

202. Id.
203. Id. at 91.
204. Id. at 92.
205. In his separate dissent, Justice Harlan agreed with Justice White that there was "no necessity for deciding in this case the broad due process questions with which the Court deals." Id. at 92 n.1 (Harlan, J., dissenting).
206. See Dorf, supra note 24, at 2041 (quoting Rupert Cross & J.W. Harris, PRECEDENT IN ENGLISH LAW 72 (4th ed. 1991) ("The ratio decidendi of a case is any rule of law expressly or impliedly treated by the judge as a necessary step in reaching his conclusion . . . .").
207. See supra Part III.A-B.
decisis in *Brady*. After all, Justice Douglas had written a law review article fourteen years earlier in which he proclaimed that stare decisis had only a “tenuous” place in constitutional law.\(^{208}\) “So far as constitutional law is concerned,” wrote the future author of *Brady*, “stare decisis must give way before the dynamic component of history.”\(^{209}\)

Ultimately, this “dynamic component of history” is what justified Justice Douglas’s radical doctrinal move in *Brady* and shielded it from any frontal attack on its precedential legitimacy. As I see it, the explanation for the comparatively muted critique of *Brady*, despite the opinion’s tenuous link to prior precedent, lies in shifting historical paradigms of criminal prosecution and in the fundamentally intuitive appeal of the *Brady* Rule.

From the time of the Founding through the mid-twentieth century, criminal trials were deeply adversarial affairs.\(^{210}\) In theory, juries found truth by weighing the competing cases advanced by the prosecution and defense. Each side sought victory in a sporting contest whose fairness was guaranteed by judges enforcing neutral rules. This early paradigm is known as the sporting theory of justice. By the time of *Mooney*, support for the sporting paradigm was waning but still had its adherents. In his *Mooney* brief, the California Attorney General unabashedly stated that the “function of the prosecuting attorney is to prosecute, to act as an accuser, to be a partisan, to present the evidence on one side of the case.”\(^{211}\) Due process, he reasoned, only demanded an “impartial [court] between the accuser and the accused” and could never be violated by a conviction obtained through perjury unless “the trial judge or trial jurors were parties to the alleged fraud.”\(^{212}\) Under the sporting paradigm, this was a credible argument. Yet the *Mooney* Court implicitly rejected this “narrow view of the requirement of due


\(^{209}\) Id. at 737.

\(^{210}\) See Bibas, supra note 180, at 131 (citing John H. Langbein, *The Origins of Adversary Criminal Trial* (2003)).

\(^{211}\) See Mooney AG’s Brief, supra note 162, at 20.

\(^{212}\) Id. at 21.
process.” In *Brady*, Justice Douglas finally and explicitly rejected the “sporting theory of justice.”

Under the new paradigm, the prosecution’s ethical obligation became seeking justice rather than victory. With a new paradigm came new intuitions. By 1963, mandating the disclosure of exculpatory evidence gained an intuitive appeal that it lacked at the time of the Founding and passage of the Fourteenth Amendment. In *Brady* itself, everyone on all sides accepted that Boblit’s confession should not have been withheld. The new intuition signaled that what it meant to “play by the rules” in American criminal prosecutions had forever changed. The fundamental proposition that the prosecution had *some* duty to disclose evidence of innocence made sense. Because of this, limiting due process to the formal rules already in place made less sense. Advancing the reasoning of *Mooney* mattered more than fidelity to its formal rule.

However, the emergence of a new paradigm did not spell the end of the dialectic between substantive and procedural due process schools. In many ways, Justice Douglas’s *Brady* opinion represents the apogee of the substantive school’s influence over freestanding criminal due process doctrine. While no dissenting opinions questioned the doctrinal expansions in *Mooney*, *Pyle*, and *Napue*, Justice White did argue against constitutionalizing discovery in *Brady*. In his opinion, Justice White rested his objection on pragmatic grounds rather than previous doctrine. However, I suggest that his argument effectively picked up procedural due process themes previously championed by Justices Matthews in *Hurtado*, Pitney in *Frank*, and McReynolds in *Moore*. For this reason, Figure 1 connects Justice White’s opinion to those earlier procedural opinions with a dotted arrow. Justice White’s basic stance in *Brady* expressed both a confidence in the integrity of state-court criminal processes and misgivings at federal-court intervention in those processes. This stance resonates with the earlier procedural due process tradition.

---


215. This benefited John Brady. After the Supreme Court handed down its decision, prosecutors never sought another death sentence for Brady and he was quietly paroled from prison eighteen years later. See Bibas, *supra* note 180, at 137.
The next Part explores how the substance/procedure dialectic unfolded after *Brady*. Even though Justice White’s particular stare decisis objections to *Brady* failed, his procedural critique gained traction as objections mounted to recognizing too broad a constitutional right to discovery. As the desire to halt expansion spread, we see the re-emergence of more formal stare decisis argumentation in due process doctrine.

**IV. DEFINING THE FRONTIER: **
*Brady Battles* 1963–2012

Does *Brady* guarantee fair process or substantive justice? Justice Douglas’s original *Brady* opinion cited both concerns when explaining the principle behind the new Rule:

The principle... is not punishment of society for misdeeds of a prosecutor but avoidance of an unfair trial to the accused. Society wins not only when the guilty are convicted but when criminal trials are fair; our system of the administration of justice suffers when any accused is treated unfairly. An inscription on the walls of the Department of Justice states the proposition candidly for the federal domain: “The United States wins its point whenever justice is done its citizens in the courts.”216

This passage suggests twin justifications for the *Brady* Rule. The first justification is fairness. This is a procedural justification, grounding the *Brady* Rule in a constitutional commitment to fair administration of justice irrespective of an accused’s guilt or innocence. The second justification is justice. This concern transcends procedural fairness and finds backing for the Rule in substantively just results. Under this second justification, *Brady* stands for a constitutional commitment to protecting innocence and apprehending the guilty.

This Part surveys the post-*Brady* battles over the scope and application of the *Brady* Rule. These battles contested which of *Brady*’s twin justifications should dominate understanding of the due process doctrine. While the substantive school pushed for a broad discovery right, the procedural school sought to limit the

prosecutorial duty to disclose. Unsurprisingly, the substantive school backed its doctrinal arguments by appealing to Brady's substantive justification as a guarantee of justice. Likewise, the procedural school backed its arguments by characterizing Brady as a limited procedural mechanism for ensuring fairness at trial.

The nearly five decades of debate since Brady divide into two basic eras. Part IV.A explores the first era, which extends from 1963 until the Court handed down United States v. Bagley in 1985. During this era, the primary focus was on the reach of Brady's central materiality requirement. As shown, Bagley represented a major victory for the procedural school, one that was enacted through a highly formal stare decisis argumentation.

In the post-Bagley years, stare decisis concerns took a backseat in the mainline dialectic as battles over Brady's legal meaning largely gave way to disputes over the application of facts. Part IV.B explores the period after Bagley until the present day. Although the procedural view of Brady is now dominant, this subpart shows how Brady has become so entrenched in due process doctrine that it may rightly be called "super-precedent."

A. Debating Materiality: Brady to Bagley 1963–1985

After Brady, the competing schools primarily debated the scope of due process discovery and whether prosecutorial suppression could ever be deemed constitutionally harmless. These debates largely turned on interpretations of Brady's materiality requirement. The subpart shows how the procedural tradition eventually consolidated its hold over the doctrine in Bagley.
Figure 2 maps the competing schools from Brady until Bagley. As before, the blue line represents the substantive Brady school. These opinions all affirmed the due process right and afforded relief to the defendant (or, if written in dissent, would have affirmed the due process right and afforded relief). In chronological order, the opinions in this line are Brady (Justice Douglas for the Court, 1963),\(^{217}\) Giles v. Maryland (Justice Abe Fortas concurring, 1967),\(^{218}\)

217. Id. at 84.
218. Giles v. Maryland, 386 U.S. 66, 96 (1967) (Fortas, J., concurring). Giles was a 3–2–4 decision. Justice William Brennan, Jr. announced the judgment of the Court in an opinion joined...

Once again, the red line represents the competing procedural school. The opinions all denied due process relief to the defendant (or, if written in dissent, would not have afforded due process relief). In chronological order, the opinions in this line are Brady (Justice White concurring, 1963); Giles (Justice John Marshall Harlan II dissenting, 1967); Moore v. Illinois (Justice Harry Blackmun for the Court, 1972);222 Agurs (Justice John Paul Stevens for the Court, 1976); and Bagley (Justice Blackmun for the Court, 1985).223

Since it is technically not part of the Brady line, Strickland v. Washington (Justice Sandra Day O'Connor for the Court, 1984)224 is

by Chief Justice Earl Warren and Justice Douglas. Id. at 67. Justice White concurred in judgment and wrote an opinion. Id. at 82 (White, J., concurring). Justice Abe Fortas did the same. Id. at 96 (Fortas, J., concurring). Justice John Marshall Harlan II dissented in an opinion joined by Justices Hugo Black, Tom Clark, and Potter Stewart. Id. at 102 (Harlan, J., dissenting).

219. Giglio v. United States, 405 U.S. 150 (1972). Giglio was a 7-0 decision. Chief Justice Warren Burger delivered the opinion of the Court. Id. Justices Lewis Powell and William Rehnquist took no part in the consideration or the decision of the case. Id. at 155.


222. Moore v. Illinois, 408 U.S. 786 (1972). Moore was a 5-4 decision. Justice Harry Blackmun delivered the opinion of the Court. Id. at 787. Justice Marshall concurred in part and dissented in part and was joined by Justices Douglas, Stewart, and Powell. Id. at 800 (Marshall, J., dissenting).

223. Bagley, 473 U.S. at 668 (opinion of Blackmun, J.). Since Justice Blackmun advanced the critical due process proposition regarding materiality under Brady in Part III of his opinion, technically this triangle should be represented as only getting two votes. However, this would be misleading, since three other justices explicitly endorsed his materiality test. See id. at 685 (White, J., concurring in part and concurring in judgment).

224. Strickland v. Washington, 466 U.S. 668 (1984). Strickland was an 8-1 decision. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor delivered the opinion of the Court. Id. at 671. Justice William J. Brennan joined the Court's opinion but dissented in judgment based on his view that the death penalty is
represented as an orange circle. As explained below, Strickland did play an important "borrowing role" in restricting the meaning of Brady materiality.225

The post-Brady dialectic began with Giles. It provides an apt starting point since the exchange between Justice Fortas and Justice Harlan provides a blueprint for a debate that has continued for decades. Decided in 1967, the case concerned the rape convictions of brothers James and John Giles.226 At trial, the Giles brothers offered a consent defense and argued that the victim had fabricated her rape allegations.227 Prosecutors suppressed information affecting the victim's credibility before trial.228 After their conviction, the brothers sought Brady relief.229 The Court ultimately sent the case back to state court to consider new evidence disclosed for the first time during the Supreme Court litigation.230 Justice Brennan wrote the plurality opinion in which he declined to examine potential issues about the scope of the prosecution's constitutional duty to disclose.231

Where Justice Brennan ducked the question, Justices Harlan and Fortas pointedly sparred over Brady. Justice Fortas initiated the argument in his concurring opinion. Confronting the objection that the suppressed revelations about the victim may not have been admissible at the Giles' trial, Justice Fortas wrote:

I do not agree that the State may be excused from its duty to disclose material facts known to it prior to trial solely because of a conclusion that they would not be admissible at trial. The State's obligation is not to convict, but to see that, so far as possible, truth emerges. This is also
the ultimate statement of its responsibility to provide a fair trial under the Due Process Clause.... No respectable interest of the State is served by its concealment of information which is material, generously conceived, to the case, including all possible defenses. 232

By positing the search for truth as "the ultimate statement" of the due process obligation, Justice Fortas grounded the Brady Rule in a commitment to substantive justice. 233 By calling for a generous conception of materiality, he also advocated a justificatory approach to interpreting Brady's precedent. 234

In dissent, Justice Harlan mounted a rear-guard attack on Brady. Justice Harlan first characterized Justice Fortas's "generously conceived" materiality standard as a marked departure from the formal due process tradition of Mooney and Napue. 235 Since Justice Fortas's materiality standard implicitly invoked Brady, Justice Harlan explicitly dismissed the Brady Rule as "dicta" and cited Justice White's Brady concurrence as authority for this proposition. 236 Going further, Justice Harlan then proposed the Mooney-Napue rules against suborning perjury or permitting false testimony to go uncorrected as the outer limit of prosecutorial due process obligations. 237 Justice Harlan warned that Justice Fortas's reading of Brady would result "in the imposition upon the States through the Constitution of broad discovery rules," and that "[t]hose rules would entirely alter the character and balance of our present systems of criminal justice." 238 Under Justice Harlan's view, discovery regulation was simply beyond the scope of legitimate due process precedent. His argument thus adopted a formal stare decisis stance.

232. Id. at 98 (Fortas, J., concurring).
233. Id.
234. Id.
235. Id. at 96–102.
236. Id. at 116 (Harlan, J., dissenting) ("This standard would demand markedly broader disclosures than this Court has ever held the Fourteenth Amendment to require.").
237. Id. at 116–17 n.9 (Harlan, J., dissenting) ("I cannot agree that this Court in Brady extended Mooney in any fashion." (quoting Brady v. Maryland 373 U.S. 83, 92 (1963) (White, J., concurring))).
238. Id. at 117 ("Nor, in my view, does the Constitution demand more" (discussing Mooney and Napue)).
As it turns out, Justice Harlan’s dissent in Giles was the last Supreme Court opinion that ever characterized the Brady Rule as dictum. Yet in subsequent battles over the Rule’s scope, Justice Harlan’s Giles opinion continued to exert influence over the procedural school. As shown in Figure 2, Justice Blackmun’s Bagley opinion cited back to Justice Harlan’s Giles dissent—just as Justice Harlan had cited back to Justice White’s Brady concurrence.239 Even though Brady became accepted as legitimate precedent, Justice Harlan’s warning that broad discovery rules would undermine prosecutors’ adversarial role inspired the procedural school to limit Brady. What’s more, adherents to the procedural school followed Justice Harlan in using formal appeals to stare decisis.240

After Giles, though, the substantive school arguably still commanded the doctrine. However, 1972’s Giglio represents the last unequivocal victory for that school. John Giglio’s conviction stemmed from federal forgery charges.241 At trial, an informant testified against Giglio and denied under vigorous cross-examination that he had an immunity deal.242 The prosecution knew his testimony was false.243 This was classic uncorrected perjury, and the Court unanimously held for Giglio.244 Chief Justice Burger’s opinion made clear that nondisclosure of evidence affecting credibility fell under the Brady Rule.245 Since the informant’s credibility was potentially “determinative of [Giglio’s] guilt or innocence,” reversal of the conviction was necessary to comport with the “rudimentary demands of justice.”246 In granting relief for the defendant, Giglio thus emphasized substantive justice and a systemic commitment to truth.

Where Giglio lacked controversy, Moore provoked it. Coincidentally, the 1972 Moore case saw the procedural school notch its first significant victory since the substantive school

239. Justice Blackmun’s majority opinion in Moore also implicitly adopted Justice Harlan’s procedural reasoning. See infra note 293 and accompanying text.

240. See infra note 250 and accompanying text.


242. Id. at 151–52.

243. Id. at 152–53.

244. Although there were no dissenters, two Justices did not participate in the case. See supra note 219. Thus, Figure 2 shows Justice Burger’s opinion as getting seven votes.

245. Giglio, 405 U.S. at 153–54 (discussing Brady and finding that Brady’s materiality requirement applied in the case).

246. Id. at 153 (quoting Mooney v. Holohan, 294 U.S. 103, 112 (1935)).
assumed majority control in the 1923 Moore case. The facts were simple enough. Lyman Moore stood convicted of a barroom-shooting murder, and evidence emerged posttrial that cast doubt on an eyewitness who pegged Moore as the shooter. Writing for a five-Judge majority, Justice Blackmun concluded that the suppressed evidence was not "material" under Brady. Though Justice Blackmun professed to "adhere to the principles of Brady," he also emphasized that there is "no constitutional requirement that the prosecution make a complete and detailed accounting to the defense of all police investigatory work on a case. Here, Justice Blackmun implicitly followed the position Justice Harlan urged in his Giles dissent—emphasizing constitutional limits on prosecutors' discovery obligations and denying Brady relief.

Just as Justice Blackmun made his debut for the procedural school, Moore saw Justice Thurgood Marshall enter the Brady fray for the first time in the dissent. Although the two Justices would later clash mightily with their interpretations of Brady's precedent in Bagley, their Moore debate requires little attention since both opinions focused on facts rather than law. The opinions reached opposite conclusions about the materiality of the suppressed evidence in Moore, but neither jurist articulated a clear standard for this vital term. The real significance of their exchange is that it made clear that Brady battles could turn on the meaning of

248. Id. at 797–98. Moore won some relief since his case was decided on the same day as Furman v. Georgia, 408 U.S. 238 (1972), which famously held the death penalty unconstitutional. Id. Since Moore had been sentenced to death, the Court also ruled that his death sentence could not be imposed. See Moore, 408 U.S. at 800.
249. Moore, 408 U.S. at 798, 795.
250. Because the connection is implicit, the arrow connecting the opinions in Figure 2 is dotted. Of course, I recognize that Justice Blackmun in Moore departed from Justice Harlan's strict position that the Brady Rule was dictum. At the same time, the deeper hermeneutic connection between the two jurists is evident from Justice Blackmun's subsequent citation in Bagley to Justice Harlan's Giles dissent for the proposition that Brady represents a limited procedural departure from an otherwise adversarial system. See infra notes 293–294.
251. See Moore, 408 U.S. at 800–08 (Marshall, J., dissenting). It is on account of its relative poverty as a source for legal analysis that I do not include Justice Marshall's Moore dissent in Figure 2.
252. Compare Moore, 408 U.S. at 797 ("We conclude, in light of all the evidence, that Sanders' misidentification of Moore as Slick was not material to the issue of guilt."), with id. at 806 n.4 (Marshall, J., dissenting) ("The materiality of the undisclosed evidence in this case cannot be seriously doubted.").
“materiality.” How to define materiality would in turn depend on competing understandings of Brady’s justification and the proper approach to stare decisis. The fight over materiality ultimately played out over two key cases—Agurs in 1976 and Bagley in 1985.

Justice Stevens’s majority opinion in Agurs uncomfortably occupies a liminal space between substantive and procedural due process conceptions of Brady. This is because the opinion simultaneously expanded and contracted the Brady Rule’s scope.253 The story behind this doctrinal ambiguity begins with a tryst in a cheap motel.254 After hearing screams, motel employees barged into the room of erstwhile lovers James Sewell and Linda Agurs who were struggling over a bowie knife. After Sewell died from stab wounds, Agurs faced murder charges.255 At trial, Agurs asserted self-defense to no avail.256 Months after her conviction, Agurs’s counsel discovered that Sewell had twice pleaded guilty to assault with a deadly weapon—a knife.257 Agurs sought Brady relief, and the case found its way to the Court, which granted certiorari to decide “whether the prosecutor had[ ] any constitutional duty to volunteer exculpatory matter to the defense, and if so, what standard of materiality gives rise to that duty.”258

The government pointed out to the Court that Agurs had never requested Sewell’s criminal record and argued that, therefore, no Brady duty to disclose had existed.259 This was a formal argument based on the Brady Rule’s “upon request” condition—language the government insisted should be read literally.260 Writing for a seven-Justice majority, Justice Stevens rejected this formal argument without ever directly addressing it. Instead, Justice Stevens proclaimed that an affirmative duty to disclose existed in situations

253. Since the majority denied relief to the criminal defendant, its representative triangle in Figure 2 is red and points down. Conversely, Figure 2 represents Justice Marshall’s dissent in Agurs with a blue upward-pointing triangle because Justice Marshall would have granted relied under his unambiguously substantive perspective. 254. United States v. Agurs, 427 U.S. 97, 98 (1976). 255. Id. at 99–100. 256. Id. at 100. 257. Id. at 100–01. 258. Id. at 107. 259. Id. at 101. 260. See Brief for the United States, United States v. Agurs, 427 U.S. 97 (1976) (No. 75-491), 1976 WL 181371 at *24–26. In its argument, the government identified additional phrases in Brady and Moore that indicated that the defense had to request evidence. Id.
in which the "evidence is obviously of such substantial value to the
defense that elementary fairness requires it to be disclosed even
without a specific request." To back this proposition, Justice Stevens
invoked classic substantive due process justifications for Brady
including the sovereign’s interest in protecting innocence and
seeing that "justice shall be done." In sum, Justice Stevens
ostensibly expanded the scope of the Brady Rule using a justificatory
approach to stare decisis grounded in a substantive conception of due
process.

Yet the outcome in Agurs belies any conclusion that the case
represents a victory for the substantive school. Justice Stevens denied
relief to Linda Agurs based on a narrow new materiality test. To
be fair, Justice Stevens’s opinion actually suggested that Brady had
three different materiality tests. The first two tests covered Mooney-
like situations where suppressed evidence reveals knowing use of
perjured testimony and Brady-like situations where suppression
occurred despite a specific defense request for evidence. Only
the third test covered no-request situations like the one presented by
Agurs’s case. Here Justice Stevens said that suppressed evidence
was material only “if the omitted evidence creates a reasonable doubt
that did not otherwise exist” when “evaluated in the context of the
entire record.” According to Justice Stevens, this test struck a
delicate balance by being less demanding on defendants than
traditional newly-discovered-evidence tests but more demanding
than customary harmless-error review.

Yet Justice Stevens’s claims to balance were undermined by the
test’s stated goal of protecting prosecutors. Justice Stevens explicitly
set the materiality bar high enough to insulate prosecutors from

261. Agurs, 427 U.S. at 110.
262. Id. at 110–11 (quoting Berger v. United States, 295 U.S. 78, 88 (1935)).
263. See id. at 112–14.
264. Id. at 103–04.
265. Id. at 106–07.
266. Id. at 112.
267. The stricter newly-discovered-evidence standard required defendants to show that “the
newly discovered evidence probably would have resulted in acquittal.” Id. at 111 & n.19. By
contrast, under harmless-error review, once constitutional error is found, the reviewing judge
must set aside the verdict unless his “conviction is sure that the error did not influence the jury, or
had but very slight effect.” Id. at 112 (quoting Kotteakos v. United States, 328 U.S. 750, 764
(1946) (internal quotation marks omitted)).
having to deliver their entire files to defense counsel. This shows the influence of the procedural due process school. Indeed, Justice Stevens tellingly cited Justice Blackmun’s Moore opinion and call to limit procedural obligations when he justified this new materiality test. And of course, the result in Agurs seemed to show that the new test tipped the scales in favor of prosecutors. Under the test, Justice Stevens found that nondisclosure of Sewell’s previous knife assault charges did not create a reasonable doubt that did not otherwise exist. Despite the clear relevance of the knife charges to Agurs’s self-defense theory, Justice Stevens’s opinion forgave the nondisclosure and thus hinted that the obligation to disclose may never have existed.

Justice Marshall dissented and sharply criticized the Court’s attempted balancing act. Though it properly recognized an affirmative duty to disclose, Justice Marshall argued, “the Court so narrowly defines the category of ‘material’ evidence embraced by the duty as to deprive it of all meaningful content.” Justice Marshall insisted that the majority’s new rule undermined Brady’s substantive commitments. The rule was “completely at odds with the overriding interest in assuring that evidence tending to show innocence is brought to the jury’s attention.” This was because the rule creates little, if any, incentive for the prosecutor conscientiously to determine whether his files contain evidence helpful to the defense. Indeed, the rule reinforces the natural tendency of the prosecutor to overlook evidence favorable to the defense, and creates an incentive for the prosecutor to resolve close questions of disclosure in favor of concealment.

Rather than accepting the Court’s “harsh standard,” Justice Marshall advocated a test that required vacatur “[i]f there is a significant chance that the withheld evidence, developed by skilled counsel, would have induced a reasonable doubt in the minds of

268. Id. at 111.
269. Id. at 109 (quoting Moore v. Illinois, 408 U.S. 786, 795 (1972)).
270. See id. at 114.
271. Id. at 114 (Marshall, J., dissenting).
272. Id. at 117.
273. Id.
enough jurors to avoid a conviction." To back his argument in favor of an expansive *Brady* right, Justice Marshall cited Justice Fortas’s *Giles* concurrence, the inspiration for the substantive due process school.

In retrospect, Justice Stevens likely regretted his failure to hear Justice Marshall’s critique in *Agurs*. Though Justice Stevens apparently intended it, his *Agurs* opinion did not plainly announce itself as an expansion of *Brady* in the upfront manner that *Brady* had announced itself as an extension of *Mooney*. Instead, Justice Stevens’s opinion waivered in emphasis between substantive and procedural conceptions of *Brady* and expressed a general concern with constitutionalizing discovery. This left a rhetorical flank open, which the procedural *Brady* school successfully attacked in 1985’s *United States v. Bagley*. After decades of expansion driven by concern for substantive justice, *Bagley* saw the school that interpreted *Brady* as a purely procedural guarantee firmly seize control of the doctrine and start to contract the due process territory.

Justice Blackmun authored the procedural school’s winning *Bagley* opinion and relied upon a peculiarly formal approach to stare decisis. To understand his opinion, it is important to realize that Hugh Bagley’s case involved a specific request for *Brady* material that went ignored by the prosecution. In particular, Bagley had requested records of government deals with informants who testified

---

274. Id. at 119. Justice Marshall took this standard from “the prevailing view in the federal courts.” Id. at 118–19 & n.5. In particular, Justice Marshall seemed taken by Judge Friendly’s analysis about the correct standard. See id. at 119 n.6.

275. See id. at 118–19.

276. See id. at 120 (discussing *Giles v. Maryland*, 386 U.S. 66, 100 (1967) (Fortas, J., concurring)).

277. Justice Stevens expressed his intent in his *Bagley* dissent. See infra note 296 and accompanying text.


against him in a federal "drugs and guns" prosecution.\(^{280}\) Pretrial, the
government claimed no deals existed, but postconviction
investigations revealed that the informants had been paid.\(^{281}\) The key
legal question before the Court was how to interpret Brady's
materiality requirement.\(^{282}\) In Bagley, six justices endorsed the now
governing materiality test—"evidence is material only if there is a
probability that, had the evidence been disclosed to the defense, the
result of the proceeding would have been different"—and reversed
Bagley's victory below.\(^{283}\)

Adopting a single test for materiality in Brady necessarily meant
jettisoning Agurs's three-tiered materiality framework. In his opinion
for the Court, Justice Blackmun acknowledged Agurs's three-tiered
analysis but concluded that Agurs's no-request standard was
"sufficiently flexible to cover the 'no request,' 'general request,' and
'specific request' cases" of prosecutorial suppression.\(^{284}\) Justice
Blackmun thus summarily collapsed Agurs's differentiated
materiality tests into a single test.\(^{285}\) Crucially, Justice Blackmun
offered no independent stare decisis analysis for this move. He did
not criticize the Agurs's framework as incorrect, illogical, or
unworkable. Instead, Justice Blackmun reasoned from a simple
premise concerning recent Court precedent that cited Agurs:

[T]he Court has relied on and reformulated the Agurs
standard for the materiality of undisclosed evidence in two
subsequent cases arising outside the Brady context. In
neither case did the Court's discussion of the Agurs

\(^{280}\) Id.
\(^{281}\) Id. at 671–72.
\(^{282}\) The Ninth Circuit had actually granted relief to Bagley on a combined
Brady/Confrontation Clause theory. See Bagley v. Lumpkin, 719 F.2d 1462, 1464 (9th Cir. 1983).
However, the Court quickly rejected the relevance of the confrontation argument and this aspect
of the Court's decision provoked no dissent. See Bagley, 473 U.S. at 676–77.
\(^{283}\) See Bagley, 473 U.S. at 682, 684 (White, J., concurring in part). Since the Ninth Circuit
had decided the case on inapposite grounds, see supra note 282, the Court remanded Bagley's
case back to the Ninth Circuit to determine "whether there is a reasonable probability that, had the
inducement offered by the Government to O'Connor and Mitchell been disclosed to the defense,
the result of the trial would have been different." Bagley, 473 U.S. at 684.
\(^{284}\) Id. at 682 (opinion of Blackmun, J.); see also id. at 685 (White, J., concurring in part)
(agreeing that the standard is "sufficiently flexible").
\(^{285}\) More precisely, Bagley collapsed the "no request" and "specific request" materiality
standards and left the standard for the first Agurs situation (regarding perjury) untouched. See
Kyles v. Whitley, 514 U.S. 419, 433 (1995) (noting that Bagley "abandoned the distinction
between the second and third Agurs circumstances . . . ").
standard distinguish among the three situations described in Agurs. 286

After briefly quoting the two cases (United States v. Valenzuela-Bernal 287 and Strickland v. Washington), Justice Blackmun concluded that “the Strickland formulation of the Agurs test for materiality [is] sufficiently flexible [enough] to cover [all Brady situations].” 288 Based solely on these two cites, Justice Blackmun abandoned the Agurs framework.

In citing Strickland to justify reinterpretting Agurs, Justice Blackmun effectively “borrowed” from disparate areas of constitutional law in order to justify subjecting all Brady claims to a strict harmless-error requirement. 289 (Figure 2 thus represents this borrowing move by showing Strickland as a yellow circle distinct from the red or blue triangles in the main Brady lines.) This borrowing move ironically paired lax and formal approaches to stare decisis. On the one hand, Justice Blackmun’s borrowing facilitated a lax overruling of Agurs’s framework. On the other, this overruling was accomplished through a highly formal reading of constitutional precedent.

The formal logic of Justice Blackmun’s borrowing move was this: given that the Court did not differentiate between the three situations when it cited Agurs outside the Brady context, therefore the Agurs differentiation no longer has a place inside the Brady context. This argument literally removes text from context and then rejects context as irrelevant. 290 Thus, while Strickland did indeed characterize Agurs as mandating a single test for materiality of suppressed evidence, the context was Sixth Amendment ineffective-assistance-of-counsel claims. 291 In this context of failure by defense

---


288. Id. at 682 (citing Strickland, 466 U.S. at 694).


291. See Strickland, 466 U.S. at 694 (discussing United States v. Agurs, 427 U.S. 97, 104 (1976)).
counsel—not suppression by the prosecution—the *Strickland* Court had no reason to discuss the finer points of *Agurs*’s framework.\textsuperscript{292} Yet Justice Blackmun noted the formal description of *Agurs* and used that form to effectively overrule *Agurs* without any justification.

Justice Blackmun’s stare decisis reasoning was entirely contestable at the time. Yet the *Agurs* dissenter (Justices Stevens and Marshall) failed to object loudly on stare decisis grounds. Before exploring the reasons and consequences of the dissenter’s rhetorical strategy, a final observation about Justice Blackmun’s opinion is in order. As authority for the proposition that *Brady* represented a “limited departure from the pure adversary system,” Justice Blackmun cited his own *Moore* opinion as well as Justice Harlan’s *Giles* dissent.\textsuperscript{293} The citation to Justice Harlan’s dissent reveals Justice Blackmun’s fundamental allegiance to the older procedural due process school that always objected to broad discovery obligations. Per Justice Blackmun, *Brady* did not “displace the adversary system as the primary means by which truth is uncovered, but [exists] to ensure that a miscarriage of justice does not occur.”\textsuperscript{294} True to his school, Justice Blackmun suggested that *Brady* did not embrace a direct commitment to finding truth so much as provide a limited procedural mechanism to prevent systemic failure.

Despite *Bagley*’s frontal attack on *Agurs*’s constitutional authority, Justice Stevens in his dissent did not make any overt appeals to stare decisis. This omission is explained by Justice Stevens’s surprising rereading of his old *Agurs* opinion. According to Justice Stevens, the “question in *Agurs* was whether the *Brady* rule should be extended to cover a case in which there had been neither perjury nor a specific request.”\textsuperscript{295} Justice Stevens then contended that *Agurs* had actually held that the *Brady* Rule did not apply in the no-

\textsuperscript{292} *Valenzuela-Bernal* also concerned Sixth Amendment issues (confrontation). While this case at least implicated government culpability (it concerned deportation of witnesses potentially helpful to the defense), Chief Justice Rehnquist used *Agurs* as only one example of the many areas of constitutional law where some showing of materiality or prejudice is required. See *Valenzuela-Bernal*, 458 U.S. at 867–71. In this context, the Court still had no need to discuss the finer points of the *Agurs* framework.

\textsuperscript{293} See *Bagley*, 473 U.S. at 675 & nn.6–7 (citing, inter alia, *Moore v. Illinois*, 408 U.S. 786, 795 (1972); *Giles v. Maryland*, 386 U.S. 66, 117 (1967) (Harlan, J., dissenting)).

\textsuperscript{294} Id. at 675.

\textsuperscript{295} Id. at 711 (Stevens, J., dissenting) (emphasis in original).
request situation and so created a brand-new constitutional rule. Justice Stevens finally faulted Bagley for applying the Agurs no-request rule to a pure Brady Rule situation in which the government "failed to disclose favorable evidence . . . clearly responsive to the defendant’s specific request." Note how this interpretation of Agurs concedes that the government’s textualist argument in Agurs had merit. Though unanswered in Agurs, Justice Stevens replied in Bagley to the old textualist objection by asserting that Agurs had deliberately expanded the frontiers of Brady jurisprudence.

Justice Stevens’s revisionist interpretation of Agurs is disputable. Yet the hermeneutic merits of his interpretation matter less than its implications for our stare decisis case study. Bagley may have abandoned Agurs’s framework, but Justice Stevens now admitted that Agurs departed from the Brady Rule. Justice Stevens, therefore, could not mount a strong formal critique of Justice Blackmun’s fidelity to constitutional precedent. Neither could Justice Stevens persuasively argue that Justice Blackmun failed to adhere to Agurs’s underlying reasoning. On the one hand, Agurs had justified its voluntary-disclosure obligation based on Brady’s substantive commitment to truth. On the other, Agurs justified ratcheting up harmless-error inquires in Brady cases based on a procedural due process commitment to limiting discovery. The balance between these rationales was always precarious, and the result in Agurs suggested that Justice Stevens had actually tipped the scales in favor of the procedural school. The end result in Bagley—denying relief to the convict—thus followed Agurs.

As he had done in Agurs, Justice Marshall also dissented in Bagley. However, Justice Marshall saw no stare decisis problem

296. Id. at 709 ("Our holding in Agurs was that the Brady rule applies in two of the situations, but not in the third [no request].").
297. Id. at 712–13.
298. Compare supra note 260 (describing the government’s argument in Agurs), with Bagley, 474 U.S. at 710 n.1 (Stevens, J., dissenting) ("As written, the Brady rule states that the Due Process Clause is violated when favorable evidence is not turned over "upon request.").
299. In Agurs, Justice Stevens stated that “the rule of Brady . . . arguably applies in three quite different situations.” United States v. Agurs, 427 U.S. 97, 103 (1976). The no-request situation was the third situation “in which the Brady rule arguably applies.” Id. at 107. Justice Stevens never explicitly rejected this “arguable application,” nor did he explicitly state that Agurs was an extension of Brady. Thus, the proposition that Agurs announced a brand-new rule rather than applied Brady is dubious. Justice Stevens may have subjective insight on authorial intent, but that counts for little in Supreme Court hermeneutics.
between Agurs and Bagley and indeed condemned the Court for “adhering to the view articulated in Agurs.” Even though the materiality framework changed, Justice Marshall saw Agurs and Bagley as equivalent in spirit. His justificatory attitude thus inhibited any formal or strict critique of Bagley’s overruling move. Furthermore, the only doctrinal authority apparently recognized in his Bagley dissent was that of his prior dissent in Agurs. Building on themes he introduced in Agurs, Justice Marshall advocated for the “return [of] the original theory and promise of Brady.”

The thrust of Justice Marshall’s substantive due process argument proceeded from the “fundamental premise” that “the purpose of a trial is as much the acquittal of an innocent person as it is the conviction of a guilty one.” To support this foundational doctrinal premise, Justice Marshall inevitably cited Justice Fortas’s concurrence in Giles. Justice Marshall then offered a panoply of prudential arguments as to why the new Bagley test “legitimiz[ed] the non-disclosure of clearly favorable evidence” and tempted prosecutors “to play the odds” and withhold favorable evidence on the “chance that [the] evidence will later turn out not to have been potentially dispositive” in the eyes of reviewing courts. He rested this judgment on an empirical observation:

Almost a decade of lower court practice with Agurs convinces me that courts and prosecutors have come to pay “too much deference to the federal common law policy of discouraging discovery in criminal cases, and too little regard to due process of law for defendants.”

Justice Marshall’s reference to a “federal common law policy of discouraging discovery” suggests that Agurs had already persuaded members of the federal judiciary to join the ranks of the procedural Brady school. Justice Marshall wanted to buck this trend, and his

301. See id. at 704, 706 (citing Agurs, 427 U.S. at 119–20 (Marshall, J., dissenting) (arguing that normal constitutional-error test should apply to Brady violations)). Justice Marshall cited his Agurs dissent five separate times in Bagley.
302. Id. at 702.
303. Id. at 692 (quoting In re Kapatos, 208 F. Supp. 883, 888 (S.D.N.Y. 1962) (internal citations omitted)).
304. Id. (citing Giles v. Maryland, 386 U.S. 66, 98 (1967) (Fortas, J., concurring)).
305. Id. at 701.
306. Id. at 702 (quoting United States v. Oxman, 740 F. 2d 1298, 1310–11 (3d Cir. 1984)).
Bagley dissent set out a manifesto for his substantive view of the doctrine.

Unfortunately for the strong Brady tradition, no Supreme Court jurist since Justice Marshall has defended the substantive school with similar passion or learning. The next subpart tells the story of how Bagley’s narrow materiality standard became entrenched in the doctrine through repeated citations in Brady cases—by both majority and dissenting opinions—from 1985 until the present. While reviewing that narrative, it is important to bear in mind how Justice Stevens’s betwixt-and-between Agurs opinion helped facilitate Justice Blackmun’s Bagley triumph. Justice Stevens did not commit to a substantive conception of Brady in Agurs and did not forthrightly present Agurs as an extension of Brady based on a justificatory approach to stare decisis. This opened up a rhetorical space in the doctrinal discourse for Blackmun to urge a strongly procedural Brady view backed by a formal borrowing move from a disparate area of constitutional doctrine. In sum, the lack of a clear and committed doctrinal or metadoctrinal basis for Agurs undermined its persuasive impact over the dialectic.

B. Fact Controversies:
Bagley to Cain 1985–2012

Despite Justices Marshall and Stevens’s objections, Bagley settled the materiality question. For better or for worse, Justice Blackmun’s reasonable-probability-of-a-different-outcome test stuck. Since 1985, the competing sides in Brady debates have accepted the Bagley test and fought instead over how the test applies on given sets of facts. Though Justices have still disagreed mightily on just outcomes for particular defendants, disagreements have mostly turned on questions of fact rather than law. This subpart briefly surveys these fact-intensive conflicts from Bagley until this Term’s hot-off-the-presses Smith v. Cain307 case.

As this survey shows, the factual nature of most contemporary Brady disputes signals two interrelated shifts in the debate. First, acceptance of Bagley by both majority and dissenting opinions in this era reveals how deeply entrenched the Brady Rule has become in due

process doctrine. Though disputed in 1963, Brady's constitutional authority is now beyond cavil—it is super-precedent. At the same time, the price of Bagley's acceptance has been a weakening of the substantive conception of Brady. Inheritors of the substantive school have not championed the tradition of Justices Marshall, Fortas, and Douglas. Instead they have generally acquiesced in understanding Brady as a limited procedural means to ensure a fair trial. As a consequence, formal readings of the Brady Rule are more viable today than in earlier stages of the dialectic.
Figure 3 completes the map of Brady's territory. As previously, blue upward-facing triangles represent opinions that granted relief on Brady grounds (or, if written in dissent, that would have granted due process relief). These are the inheritors of the substantive Brady tradition. In chronological order, the opinions in this line are Kyles v. Whitley (Justice David Souter for the Court, 1995); Strickler v. Greene (Justice Souter concurring in part and dissenting in part, 1999); Banks v. Dretke (Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg for the Court, 2004); Cone v. Bell (Justice Stevens for the Court, 2009) and Smith v. Cain (Chief Justice Roberts for the Court, 2012). The red triangles facing down represent opinions that denied relief on Brady grounds (or, if written in dissent, that would have denied due process relief). These opinions carried on the weak, procedural Brady tradition. In chronological order, the opinions in this line are Bagley (Justice Blackmun for the Court, 1985); Kyles (Justice Scalia dissenting, 1995); Strickler (Justice Stevens for the Court, 1999); Banks (Justice Clarence dissenting, 2004); Cone (Chief Justice Roberts concurring; Justice Thomas dissenting, 2009); and Cain (Justice Thomas dissenting, 2012).


309. Strickler v. Greene, 527 U.S. 263, 296 (1999) (Souter, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part). Strickler was a 7–2 decision. Justice Stevens delivered the opinion of the Court. Id. at 265. Justice Thomas joined Parts I and IV of this opinion. Id. Justice Kennedy joined Part II of Justice Souter's dissent. Id.

310. Banks v. Dretke, 540 U.S. 668 (2004). Banks was a 7–2 decision. Justice Ginsburg delivered the opinion of the Court. Id. at 674. Justice Thomas filed an opinion joined by Justice Scalia concurring in part and dissenting in part. Id. at 706 (Thomas, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part). The part to which Justice Thomas dissented specifically concerned Brady. See id.

311. Cone v. Bell, 556 U.S. 449 (2009). Cone was a 5–2–2 decision. Justice Stevens delivered the opinion of the Court. Id. at 450. Chief Justice Roberts filed an opinion concurring in judgment. Id. at 476 (Roberts, C.J., concurring). Justice Alito filed an opinion concurring in part and dissenting in part. Id. at 478 (Alito, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part). Justice Thomas filed a dissenting opinion and was joined by Justice Scalia. Id. at 486 (Thomas, J., dissenting).

312. Smith v. Cain, 132 S. Ct. 627 (2012). Cain was an 8–1 decision. Chief Justice Roberts delivered the opinion of the Court. Id. at 629. Justice Thomas dissented. Id. at 631 (Thomas, J., dissenting).
Kyles is the first mainline Brady case decided after Bagley, and it exemplifies the fact-bound nature of debates in this modern period. A trial court sentenced Curtis Lee Kyles to death in 1984 for a robbery—murder in New Orleans.313 The Brady issue concerned undisclosed evidence that cast doubt on the credibility of a key informant.314 Writing for a five-Justice majority, Justice Souter held that Kyles deserved a new trial.315 Though this relief counts as a victory for the strong Brady school, Justice Souter’s opinion marks a shift in the substantive tradition. In his opinion, Justice Souter identified three “prominent case[s] on the way to current Brady law”—Brady itself, Agurs, and Bagley.316 He referred only to the majority opinions in those cases and did not cite to the Marshall or Stevens dissents. Nor did Justice Souter invoke Justice Fortas’s concurrence in Giles. In short, Justice Souter did not champion the old substantive school. Rather, by embracing Bagley, he articulated a new-school vision of Brady that legitimized a more procedural perspective.

In dissent, Justice Scalia did not object to Justice Souter’s legal analysis.317 Instead, he objected to the propriety of the Court’s factual review and to its particular conclusions.318 Justice Scalia’s

313. Kyles, 514 U.S. at 422–23.
314. See id. at 424–28 (describing the investigation). The informant’s nickname was “Beanie.” His real name was Joseph Wallace, though he gave police other names. See id. at 424. At trial, Kyles argued that Beanie had actually killed the victim and was now framing him for the murder. Id. at 429. During collateral review, counsel discovered the police had not disclosed multiple items of evidence that casted doubt on Beanie’s credibility and motives. See id. at 431. The Court listed seven categories of allegedly undisclosed evidence. Id. at 428–29.
315. Id. at 421–22.
316. Id. at 432–34.
317. This might initially seem surprising since Kyles did involve one important legal question—whether Brady’s scope extended to “evidence known only to police investigators and not to the prosecutor.” Id. at 438. During litigation below, the State had taken the formal position that Brady did not apply to the police. However, at oral argument, counsel for the State apparently conceded that the police did have a duty to disclose. Id. at 438 n.11. Justice Souter thus did not contradict the State’s ultimate position when he extended Brady to require disclosure of exculpatory evidence possessed by the police. Though Justice Scalia dissented, he took no issue with this legal point. Even though no previous Brady-line case had recognized a police duty to disclose, Justice Scalia apparently agreed that existing precedent justified recognition of this duty. This shows that even Justice Scalia’s formalism has limits—the analogy between police and prosecutors seemed fundamentally sound.
318. However, Justices Souter and Scalia battled over the law governing habeas review of capital cases. Compare id. at 422 & n.1, with id. at 456–57 (Scalia, J., dissenting) (illustrating disagreement over the scope of deference to be given to the lower court’s evidentiary review decisions in capital cases).
opening line perfectly captures his procedural approach to due process:

In a sensible system of criminal justice, wrongful conviction is avoided by establishing, at the trial level, lines of procedural legality that leave ample margins of safety (for example, the requirement that guilt be proved beyond a reasonable doubt)—not by providing recurrent and repetitive appellate review of whether the facts in the record show those lines to have been narrowly crossed.\textsuperscript{319}

From this premise, Justice Scalia decried the \textit{Kyles} majority’s very consideration of “a fact-bound claim of error rejected by every court, state and federal, that previously heard it.”\textsuperscript{320} Court review was inappropriate in “an intensely fact-specific case in which the court below unquestionably applied the correct rule of law.”\textsuperscript{321} Moreover, Justice Scalia continued, “the Court... get[s] the facts wrong.”\textsuperscript{322} The remainder of Justice Scalia’s dissent countered Justice Souter’s lengthy analysis of evidence supporting Kyles’s innocence with his own lengthy analysis indicating Kyles’s guilt.\textsuperscript{323}

The primacy of facts in the debate between Justices Souter and Scalia in \textit{Kyles} stands in stark contrast to the primacy of law in \textit{Bagley}’s contest between Justices Blackmun, Marshall, and Stevens. Factual primacy signals a settling of the legal doctrine. Figure 3 illustrates this settling process, as both Justice Souter’s and Justice Scalia’s opinions point back to Justice Blackmun’s \textit{Bagley} opinion. This congruence shows how they agree on prior tradition. It also shows the strength of the procedural view over the modern doctrine.

The doctrinal settling process continued in \textit{Strickler v. Greene}. This case concerned Tommy Strickler’s capital conviction for kidnapping and murder.\textsuperscript{324} The suppressed \textit{Brady} material at issue impeached the testimony of a prosecution witness.\textsuperscript{325} Writing for a

\textsuperscript{319} \textit{Id.} at 456 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
\textsuperscript{320} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{321} \textit{Id.} at 460.
\textsuperscript{322} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{323} \textit{Compare id.} at 441–54 (majority opinion), with \textit{id.} at 464–75 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
\textsuperscript{325} \textit{Id.} The witness testified to seeing the abduction. At trial, she described it as a horrifying event implicating Strickler as a ringleader. The undisclosed materials made the event seem far less dramatic.
seven-Justice majority, Justice Stevens anchored his legal analysis in *Kyles* but, based on the facts, held that the suppressed evidence was not “material” under *Brady*. Justice Stevens thus denied relief to Strickler—a weak *Brady* outcome—but affirmed the authority of Justice Souter’s new-school *Brady* opinion in *Kyles*. As it happens, Justice Souter dissented in *Strickler*—yet he explicitly noted that “I look at this case much as the Court does” and agreed with the majority’s characterization of the *Brady* Rule. Indeed, Justice Souter recognized that he applied “the same standard to the same record” and cited back to his *Kyles* opinion for that standard. For the second case in a row, majority and dissent agreed on the law.

This agreement heralds an important synthesis in the *Brady* dialectic. After years of competing theses and antitheses about the *Brady* Rule’s materiality requirement, the Bagley-*Kyles*-Strickler interpretation of the *Brady* Rule became entrenched in constitutional discourse. Since these cases all interpret the *Brady* Rule’s statement of due process (as opposed to directly interpreting the Due Process Clause), the entrenchment of Bagley-*Kyles*-Strickler represents a second-order entrenchment of the *Brady* Rule itself. I suggest that such second-order entrenchment signals that *Brady* has become “super-precedent.” When antagonistic doctrinal schools agree not only on the rule stated by a constitutional precedent but also on second-order rules for implementing the precedent, overruling has become unthinkable. In the decades after 1963, disputes over the proper application of the *Brady* Rule increasingly assumed the prior legitimacy of the Rule. With Bagley-*Kyles*-Strickler, the prior legitimacy of the Rule settled a layer deeper into the very tissue of constitutional discourse.

---

326. See *id.* at 280–82 (citing *Kyles* v. Whitley, 514 U.S. 419 (1995)). Justice Stevens specifically noted that his opinion “[did] not modify *Brady*” and rejected any suggestion that he announced a “new rule.” *Id.* at 289 n.35. While no justice on the Court disagreed with Justice Stevens, it should be noted that the Fourth Circuit had apparently misunderstood the *Brady* Rule. See *id.* at 290 (noting that the “standard used by that court was incorrect”). In other words, though the Court saw the doctrine as settled, lower courts were not yet all on the same page.

327. *Id.* at 296 (Souter, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part). Justice Souter supplemented the majority’s legal analysis with a fascinating scholarly exposition of the “circuitous path by which the Court came to adopt ‘reasonable probability’ of a different result as the rule of *Brady* materiality.” See *id.* at 300.

328. *Id.* at 302.
Yet the *Brady* dialectic did not end just because *Brady* became super-precedent. Rather, the locus of controversy shifted from the formulation of legal rules to the application of legal rules. Debates came to turn on facts rather than law. The factual-dispute pattern seen in *Kyles* and *Strickler* continued in our final three mainline cases—*Banks*, *Cone*, and *Cain*. In all three cases, the majority and dissent agreed on the proper legal test for materiality. In all three cases, the convict won some *Brady* relief with Justice Thomas dissenting on interpretation of the facts in the record. While these outcomes might seem to indicate that the substantive *Brady* school now controls the Court, the reality is not so simple. The fact-bound majority opinions did not advance a strong substantive conception of *Brady* doctrine but rather advanced a more procedural understanding of the Rule that is consistent with *Bagley*.

In 2004’s *Banks v. Dretke*, Justice Ginsburg gestured at the older substantive school perspective. The case involved suppressed impeachment evidence, and once again majority and dissent agreed on the materiality test. Writing for a seven-Justice majority, Justice Ginsburg found the suppression undermined confidence in the verdict, and she stressed the prosecutorial obligation to seek truth and “refrain from [using] improper methods to secure a conviction.” In dissent, Justice Thomas responded, “Although I find it to be a very close question, I cannot conclude that nondisclosure of [the prosecution witnesses’] informant status was prejudicial under *Kyles*.” Sparks did not fly in *Banks*—the two sides just interpreted the record differently.

329. Justice Scalia joined Justice Thomas’s dissents in *Banks* and *Cone*, but not in *Cain*. Although dotted arrows mostly connect Justice Thomas’s opinions to each other, I suggest they are linked as part of the same tradition. See *infra* note 348.


331. *Id.* at 696 (majority opinion) (quoting *Berger v. United States*, 295 U.S. 78, 88 (1935)) (internal quotation marks omitted). See *id.* at 702–03. Justice Ginsburg’s emphasis on truth-seeking came in response to the State’s rather misguided argument that, under *Brady*, “the prosecution can lie and conceal and the prisoner still has the burden to . . . discover the evidence.” *Id.* at 696 (quoting Transcript of Oral Arg. at 35, *Banks*, 540 U.S. 668 (No. 02-8286)) (internal quotation marks omitted).

332. *Id.* at 706 (Thomas, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part). With the question of prosecutorial intentions indirectly raised by Justice Ginsburg’s opinion, Justice Thomas stressed in his dissent that prosecutors had not “knowingly failed to turn over evidence . . . in violation of *Brady*.” *Id.* at 709–10 (emphasis in original).
2009's *Cone v. Bell* featured a more revealing exchange between the competing schools in their post-*Bagley* form. Gary Cone's *Brady* claim involved suppressed evidence of his serious drug addiction that could have mitigated juror assessment of his culpability for a double murder. In the five-Justice majority opinion, Justice Stevens closely reviewed the trial record and concluded that Cone had a viable *Brady* claim under the *Bagley-Kyles-Strickler-Banks* materiality standard. In dissent, Justice Thomas basically agreed with the materiality test but disagreed wholeheartedly on inferences of the record. While this follows the essential factual-dispute pattern, *Cone* did break new ground in a long-simmering debate over the constitutional relevance of prosecutorial ethics. In a footnote to his opinion, Justice Stevens stated: "Although the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, as interpreted by *Brady*, only mandates the disclosure of material evidence, the obligation to disclose evidence favorable to the defense may arise more broadly under a prosecutor's ethical or statutory obligations." For this proposition, Justice Stevens cited to *Kyles* and ABA rules and standards. He then continued, observing that "the prudent prosecutor will err on the side of transparency, resolving doubtful questions in favor of disclosure." For this latter proposition, Justice Stevens invoked his long-since-forgotten *Bagley* dissent.

334. See *id.* at 469–70 (citing *Banks*, 540 U.S. 668, 698–99; *Strickler v. Greene*, 527 U.S. 263, 290 (1999); *Kyles v. Whiteley*, 514 U.S. 419, 435 (1995)); see also *id.* at 475 (concluding after record review that the suppressed evidence "may well have been material to the jury's assessment of the proper punishment").
335. Justice Thomas actually accused the majority of misstating the *Kyles* standard. See *id.* at 490–91 (Thomas, J., dissenting). However, the quibble with Justice Stevens's phrasing is unpersuasive—especially in light of Chief Justice Roberts's concurrence. See *id.* at 477 (Roberts, C.J., concurring). Cf. *Strickler*, 527 U.S. at 298–300 (Souter, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part) (analyzing potential sources of confusion in phrasing of materiality standard). Once again, the real dispute in *Cone* concerned the record. See *Cone*, 556 U.S. at 498–500 (Thomas, J., dissenting) (concluding that "record as a whole" does not indicate that *Brady* material would have changed sentence).
336. *Cone*, 556 U.S. at 470 n.15.
337. *Id.* (citing *Kyles*, 514 U.S. at 437; *STANDARDS FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROSECUTION FUNCTION AND DEFENSE FUNCTION § 3–3.11(a) (1993); MODEL RULES OF PROF'L CONDUCT R 3.8(d) (2008)).
338. *Id.* (citing United States v. Bagley, 473 U.S. 667, 667, 711 n.4 (1985) (Stevens, J., dissenting)).
The significance of Justice Stevens’s footnote was not lost on Chief Justice Roberts. The Chief Justice concurred in judgment but did not join Justice Stevens’s opinion. In the main, Chief Justice Roberts saw “no reason to quarrel with the Court’s ruling on the Brady claim” since it ordered the court below to conduct “a fact-specific determination . . . under the established legal standard.” However, Chief Justice Roberts wrote separately to make clear that the lower courts should analyze the issue under the constitutional standards we have set forth, not under whatever standards the American Bar Association may have established. The ABA standards are wholly irrelevant to the disposition of this case, and the majority’s passing citation of them should not be taken to suggest otherwise.

Here, Chief Justice Roberts adeptly fired a preemptive shot against any sub silentio expansion of Brady. Chief Justice Roberts objected to any bootstrapping of ethical obligations into Brady’s constitutional jurisprudence. In answer to Justice Stevens’s citation to his Bagley dissent, Chief Justice Roberts gamely cited to Justice Scalia’s dissent in Kyles. Though he voted with the new “strong” school majority, Chief Justice Roberts made clear in his concurrence that he will carry on the traditions of the competing procedural due process school.

Indeed, the Court’s 2011 Term decision in Smith v. Cain proves this point. The case involved Juan Smith’s conviction for killing five people during an armed robbery. Police suppressed pretrial statements by the crime’s only eyewitness that would have cast doubt on his identification of Smith at trial. Writing for an eight-Justice majority, Chief Justice Roberts held that the undisclosed evidence undermined confidence in Smith’s conviction. Although Chief Justice Roberts cited to the rules of Cone, Kyles, and Brady, he failed to quote any of the language from these opinions concerning

339. See id. at 477 (Roberts, C.J., concurring).
340. Id. at 477–78.
341. See id. at 477 (citing Kyles v. Whitley, 514 U.S. 419 (1995) (Scalia, J., dissenting)).
343. The witness had repeatedly told police he could not identify who had done the killing. At trial, he was equally vehement in his identification of Smith. See id. at 630.
344. Id.
innocence, truth, or seeking justice. On the other hand, he did invoke language from *Agurs* limiting the application of the *Brady* Rule in eyewitness impeachment cases when “the State’s other evidence is strong enough.” In sum, Chief Justice Roberts’s terse opinion offered a formal account of *Brady* untethered to any substantive concern for justice and emphasized limits on this rule. Though technically a *Brady* victory, his opinion advances a procedural perspective.

In contrast to Chief Justice Roberts’s bloodless opinion, Justice Thomas issued a long and passionate dissent. Citing to Justice Scalia’s dissent in *Kyles*, Justice Thomas wrote, “When, as in this case, the Court departs from its usual practice of declining to review alleged misapplications of settled law to particular facts . . . the Court should at least consider all of the facts.” As in *Banks* and *Cone*, Justice Thomas agreed on the materiality test but concluded that the majority got its facts all wrong. Justice Thomas’s citation to Justice Scalia’s *Kyles* dissent is revealing in that Chief Justice Roberts also cited to that opinion in his *Cone* concurrence. Justice Scalia’s *Kyles* dissent now stands as a classic articulation of the proceduralist view of *Brady*.

While the inheritors of the substantive and procedural *Brady* traditions now agree on the materiality test, the reasonable-probability-of-a-different outcome inquiry inherently turns on fact-bound questions. The competing assessments of the facts in *Kyles*, *Strickler*, *Banks*, *Cone*, and *Cain* may be attributable to ideological differences among Supreme Court Justices. As Professor Dan Kahan has shown in his path-breaking work, modern psychological research suggests that judicial fact-finding is deeply susceptible to the

---

346. *Id.* (citing *Cone* v. Bell, 556 U.S. 449, 469–70 (2009); *Kyles*, 514 U.S. at 434; and *Brady* v. Maryland, 373 U.S. 83, 87 (1963)).
347. *Id.* (citing United States v. *Agurs*, 427 U.S. 97, 112–13 n.21 (1976)).
348. *Id.* at 640 (Thomas, J., dissenting) (citation omitted) (citing *Kyles*, 514 U.S. at 456 (Scalia, J., dissenting). Justice Thomas’s citation here ultimately justifies my decision in Figure 3 to link his dissents in *Cain*, *Cone*, and *Banks* to each other and back to Justice Scalia’s *Kyles* dissent. Not only do Justice Thomas’s opinions share the same author, they are thematically identical in their focus on facts and reading of them as upholding state prosecution.
phenomena of motivated reasoning and cultural cognition. A Justice’s ideological worldview can easily affect how she sees the record before her. Although most—but not all—Justices agreed on the results in Strickler, Banks, and Cain, the readings of the facts were very hotly contested along ideological lines in Kyles and Cone. I suggest this will be the dominant pattern for Brady cases going forward—unless the debate shifts back to one about the scope of law rather than application of facts.

With the procedural school’s ascendancy after Bagley, the Brady Rule has generally been strictly interpreted, and its scope has not been seriously expanded. The more time has passed, the more Brady’s due process boundaries have seemed fixed. Thus, in Connick v. Thompson, Justice Scalia was able to claim with some authority that the right to untested evidence existed at the frontier of Brady jurisprudence. His formal reading of the Brady Rule’s “favorability” requirement resonates with the procedural approach to Brady that has been dominant since Bagley. Of course, the foregoing analysis has also shown that Justice Scalia’s view of Brady’s borders—and the formal approach to stare decisis on which it depends—is not the only way of reading the history of due process jurisprudence. In the following Part, I present a normative argument against Justice Scalia’s formal approach.

V. THE MAJESTIC CONCEPTION OF BRADY

Eighteen years after Justice Marshall’s retirement in 1991, the Supreme Court decided District Attorney’s Office v. Osborne. The case concerned William Osborne’s quest to access forensic DNA evidence that he maintained would prove his innocence of rape. Prosecutors possessed semen and hair evidence but refused to allow Osborne to test it. Osborne sued under federal civil rights law and prevailed in lower courts on the theory that Brady authorized

---

350. See generally Dan M. Kahan, Foreword: Neutral Principles and Motivated Reasoning, 125 HARV. L. REV. 1 (2011); Dan M. Kahan, The Cognitively Illiberal State, 60 STAN. L. REV. 115 (2007) (questioning theories of constitutional neutrality in light of cognitive studies that reveal individuals are predisposed to mold their perceptions of policy-relevant facts to their own group commitments).


352. Osborne, 129 S. Ct. at 2314.

353. Id.
postconviction access to evidence. Before the Court, prosecutors conceded that DNA testing could prove Osborne's innocence but disputed that Osborne had a constitutional right to access evidence.

Writing for a five-Justice majority, Chief Justice Roberts agreed with the prosecutors and denied Osborne relief. Chief Justice Roberts's Brady analysis was decidedly brief. In his view, Brady was a "trial right," plain and simple. Given that Osborne had been convicted, he was no longer cloaked in the presumption of innocence and no longer had the same due process liberty interests. Since "nothing in our precedents" suggested that Brady applied postconviction, Chief Justice Roberts concluded that "Brady [was] the wrong framework," Q.E.D.

Like Justice Scalia's claim about untested evidence in Thompson, Chief Justice Roberts's procedural due process perspective of Brady precedents was entirely contestable and dependent upon a formal approach to stare decisis. Yet as in Thompson, no justice sitting in 2009 offered a full-throated defense of the old substantive school backed by a justificatory approach to stare decisis. In my view, the failure is regrettable.

This Part presents a doctrinal Brady argument in favor of recognizing a right to access to untested forensic evidence—whether


355. See Osborne, 129 S. Ct. at 2336–38 (Stevens, J., dissenting) (noting the State's concession that testing would provide conclusive confirmation of Osborne's guilt or revelation of his innocence).

356. See id. at 2320–22 (majority opinion) (denying existence of freestanding substantive right to postconviction DNA testing).

357. Id. at 2319–20.

358. Id. at 2320.

359. Id. at 2319–20.

360. Entirely confident in this proof, Chief Justice Roberts said nothing more about Brady.

361. In his dissent, Justice Stevens did suggest that "the concerns with fundamental fairness that motivated our decision in [Brady] are equally present when convicted persons such as Osborne seek access to dispositive DNA evidence." Id. at 2335 (Stevens, J., dissenting). However, Justice Stevens also conceded that "Brady does not directly provide for a postconviction right to such evidence." Id. While lamentable, this concession is not surprising given Justice Stevens's opinions in Agurs and Strickler. See Strickler v. Greene, 527 U.S. 263 (1999); United States v. Agurs, 427 U.S. 97 (1976).

362. In the interests of full disclosure, I was part of the Innocence Project team representing Osborne in his DNA-access litigation.
in the pretrial context at issue in Thompson or in the postconviction setting from Osborne. This argument is rooted in the old substantive due process tradition of Brady and a justificatory attitude toward stare decisis. Here, I take particular inspiration from the insightful dissents by Justice Marshall that set out a majestic conception of Brady. Ultimately, I argue that even though the procedural school now dominates the doctrine, remembering Justice Marshall’s majestic conception and reintroducing it into the constitutional conversation can positively influence the future dialectic.

The argument here begins with concession. A formal interpretation of the Brady Rule does not support a right to untested evidence. Untested evidence is not “favorable” under the Rule since testing could ultimately inculpate defendants and confirm guilt. Moreover, since the Rule only prohibits suppression of evidence favorable “to an accused,” it also does not formally apply after trial when defendants have become “convicted” rather than “accused.” It is thus granted that recognizing a Brady right to untested evidence would formally expand due process precedent. Finally, I concede that the formal stare decisis interpretation is coherent and leads to a result consistent with a procedural understanding of Brady as a limited procedural means to ensure a fair trial.

While conceding the coherence of the formal and procedural take, I respond that an equally coherent justificatory and substantive understanding of Brady precedent is possible—and normatively preferable at this dynamic moment in history. As this Article’s survey has shown, the substantive school has long recognized that due process also stands for a constitutional commitment to seek truth and protect innocence. Sometimes recognition of these deep commitments requires looking beyond current forms of procedure directly to the ends of justice. When the time is right, a justificatory stare decisis approach is necessary.

Thus, Justice Holmes showed a willingness to expand due process precedent beyond “notice and opportunity to be heard” forms in order to confront mob intimidation in the Frank and Moore cases. The Mooney Court expanded the mob-domination principle to prohibit prosecutorial subornation of perjury. In Brady itself, Justice Douglas expanded the due process principle prohibiting bad-faith prosecutorial actions to also cover good-faith nondisclosure of
favorable evidence. Since *Brady*, *Agurs* expanded the Rule’s scope to require disclosure in absence of a specific defense request, and *Kyles* extended the prohibition on prosecutorial suppression to police. None of these expansions perfectly fit with formal readings of prior precedent. All required a justificatory attitude toward stare decisis.

Only empty allegiance to form prevents recognition of the right to untested evidence under *Brady*. Prosecutors in *Osborne* admitted that postconviction DNA testing could potentially prove William Osborne’s innocence but denied him access to testing anyway. This reeks of bad faith, and Chief Justice Roberts’s refusal to recognize a *Brady* right in this context comes off as arid formalism. Similarly, Justice Scalia’s invocation of *Youngblood* in his *Thompson* concurrence blithely ignores that the Court denied relief to a man later proved innocent by DNA testing. If ever a case’s subsequent history called for questioning whether procedural means adequately protected substantive ends, *Youngblood* is it. *Youngblood* demonstrates the need for due process expansion rather than the wisdom of formally limiting it.

Now, procedural due process proponents could respond to this by granting the wisdom of finding a pretrial right to access untested evidence but standing firm against applying *Brady postconviction*. After all, pretrial DNA access potentially implicates procedural concerns for trial fairness whereas postconviction access does not. Though it does require a bigger expansion to recognize *Brady*’s postconviction applicability, I suggest doctrinal authority exists for this move. Specifically, the authority is Justice Marshall.

As already seen in his *Agurs* and *Bagley* dissents, Justice Marshall embraced a strong substantive conception of *Brady* as a bulwark protection of innocence. Though neither of those opinions confronted the postconviction question, Justice Marshall did analyze

---

363. One of *Youngblood*’s doctrinal ironies is that it saw Justice Blackmun—normally a stalwart of the procedural *Brady* school—dissent. In that prescient dissent, Justice Blackmun recognized that there was “a distinct possibility... that a proper test would have exonerated” Youngblood. *Arizona v. Youngblood*, 488 U.S. 51, 68 (1988) (Blackmun, J., dissenting). Justice Blackmun was right and Justice Scalia should have recognized this.

364. Of course, recognizing this would contradict Justice Scalia’s *Thompson* argument. Yet I suspect that many ardent procedural due process adherents would accept this. The formalism of Justice Scalia’s opinion is extreme.
the issue in a pair of overlooked dissents. Both opinions concerned Ronald Monroe, who maintained his innocence of capital murder. Six months after his conviction, police discovered information implicating another man in the murder yet never disclosed this exculpatory evidence to Monroe. Luckily, Monroe’s own investigators later uncovered the evidence and Monroe won an execution stay. Despite finding Monroe’s “due process rights under Brady had been violated,” the federal habeas court remanded Monroe’s case to state court to determine the suppressed evidence’s materiality. Monroe unsuccessfully sought Supreme Court review of this order. Dissenting from the denial of certiorari, Justice Marshall urged review to clarify “the scope of a defendant’s rights under Brady . . . during the period following his conviction.”

In his dissent, Justice Marshall made the case for Brady’s postconviction applicability. He began by explaining the backing for Brady’s warrant: “The message of Brady and its progeny is that a trial is not a mere ‘sporting event’; it is a quest for truth.” This quest for truth “may not terminate with a defendant’s conviction.” Justice Marshall then pointed to newly discovered evidence statutes, which demonstrate that “the sovereign has decided that justice will be best served by qualifying the finality of a conviction.” Permitting the State to avoid newly-discovered-evidence proceedings by “suppressing the very evidence that would enable a defendant to trigger such proceedings” defeated justice. In the end, Justice Marshall argued that the court below had “trivialize[d] the constitutional right recognized in Brady and its progeny[,]” and castigated the Court for standing by “in the face of the dilution of the due process rights of an individual who may not even be guilty.”

367. Id. at 1146–47
368. Id. at 1147–48 (discussing the district court’s ruling).
369. Id. at 1151.
370. Id. at 1145.
371. Id. at 1148.
372. Id.
373. Id. The statutes were Louisiana state statutes.
374. Id. at 1149.
375. Id. at 1150–51.
Justice Marshall’s analysis perfectly encapsulates the justificatory logic of the substantive Brady school. Ronald Monroe’s personal story may have faded from memory, but Justice Marshall’s teachings should not be forgotten. It matters little that Justice Marshall wrote in dissent. Dissents by Justice Holmes in Frank and Justice Harlan in Giles inspired the substantive and procedural schools respectively and eventually influenced the course of the due process doctrine. Justice Scalia’s Kyles dissent currently guides the procedural school. What matters more is that Justice Marshall’s majestic conception—stressing the primacy of truth and substantive justice—once again be heard in the constitutional conversation.

As this Article has shown, Brady doctrine has evolved through a dialectic between substantive and procedural due process perspectives. Though the procedural view now dominates, the doctrine is not forever lost. It was once inconceivable that criminal defendants would have any right to discovery—it is now deep constitutional intuition and super-precedent. In this current era of high-profile DNA exonerations, constitutional intuitions could again change. Prosecutorial withholding of potentially exculpatory untested evidence could become a relic of an unenlightened past. If this is to happen, however, the substantive argument needs to be pressed and responded to. The formal command of stare decisis needs to be challenged as unfaithful to the spirit of Brady’s due process context.

VI. CONCLUSION

In this Article, I have mapped the unfolding dialectic of Brady doctrine. The dialectic has pitted two lines of opinions against each other. The line embracing procedural understanding of due process has adopted a formal attitude toward stare decisis. The competing line, committed to a more substantive view of due process, has relied upon a justificatory understanding of precedent. The maps have illustrated the rise and decline of the substantive school and

explained how the procedural view came to dominate current doctrine. Doctrinal movement has occurred through arguments about stare decisis. While expansion of due process precedent was a past norm, the doctrine settled after *Bagley* and formal boundaries appeared more fixed. *Brady* debates since *Bagley* have largely turned into disputes over facts rather than law. Yet some debates over scope remain. In the last Part, I considered the question of a *Brady* right to untested evidence. Invoking the majestic substantive tradition, I argued for doctrinal expansion to recognize the right in order to keep up with evolving norms of justice.

While the *Brady* dialectic illuminates the tension between procedural means and substantive ends in criminal prosecutions, the metadoctrinal implications of this case study extend beyond due process. I suggest that competing formal and justificatory conceptions of stare decisis can affect the expansion of constitutional doctrine more generally. Just as due process today looks a far cry from what it did in 1868, so too have other areas of constitutional doctrine changed radically since the Republic’s founding and subsequent civil war. While overrulings undoubtedly account for many of the changes, doctrinal expansion has also played a vital role in transforming the constitutional landscape. For example, both Eighth Amendment\(^\text{377}\) and First Amendment\(^\text{378}\) jurisprudence have recently experienced significant doctrinal expansion that necessarily strained formal readings of prior precedent. Scholarly attention to the competing formal or justificatory attitudes toward prior precedent might help illuminate the dialectics by which these and other hotly contested doctrines assumed their current boundaries.

In the end, I hope to have demonstrated the methodological utility of mapping contested Supreme Court doctrine. By carefully

---


tracing back competing lines of citation advocated in majority, dissenting, and concurring opinions, it becomes possible to identify the most prominent teachers and texts of competing doctrinal schools. These schools represent continuous jurisprudential traditions. Though the vocabularies and assumptions of these conflicting traditions change over time, charting their genealogies demonstrates a deeper continuity connecting today’s doctrinal dialectics to great debates of the past. For scholars and teachers, this method can enrich our picture of how argument shapes doctrine. For advocates and participants in the debate, this kind of close study reveals what it really means to stay true to your school.