NOTE: Where it is feasible, a syllabus (headnote) will be released, as is being done in connection with this case, at the time the opinion is issued. The syllabus constitutes no part of the opinion of the Court but has been prepared by the Reporter of Decisions for the convenience of the reader. See *United States* v. *Detroit Lumber Co.,* 200 U. S. 321, 337.

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

Syllabus

ST. MARY'S HONOR CENTER ET AL. *v.* HICKS

CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE EIGHTH CIRCUIT

No. 92–602. Argued April 20, 1993—Decided June 25, 1993

Petitioner halfway house employed respondent Hicks as a correctional officer and later a shift commander. After being demoted and ultimately discharged, Hicks filed suit, alleging that these actions had been taken because of his race in violation of, *inter alia,* §703(a)(1) of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Adhering to the allocation of the burden of production and the order for the presentation of proof in Title VII discriminatory-treatment cases that was established in *McDonnell Douglas Corp.* v. *Green,* 411 U. S. 792, the District Court found that Hicks had established, by a preponderance of the evidence, a prima facie case of racial discrimination; that petitioners had rebutted that presumption by introducing evidence of two legitimate, nondiscriminatory reasons for their actions; and that petitioners' reasons were pretextual. It nonetheless held that Hicks had failed to carry his ultimate burden of proving that the adverse actions were racially motivated. In setting aside this determination, the Court of Appeals held that Hicks was entitled to judgment as a matter of law once he proved that all of petitioners' proffered reasons were pretextual.

Held: The trier of fact's rejection of an employer's asserted reasons for its actions does not entitle a plaintiff to judgment as a matter of law. Pp. 2–22.

(a) Under *McDonnell Douglas,* once Hicks established, by a preponderance of the evidence, a prima facie case of discrimination, *Texas Dept. of Community Affairs* v. *Burdine,* 450 U. S. 248, 252–253, a presumption arose that petitioners unlawfully discriminated against him, *id.,* at 254, requiring judgment in his favor unless petitioners came forward with an explanation. This presumption placed upon petitioners the burden of producing evidence that the adverse actions were

taken for legitimate, nondiscriminatory reasons, which, *if believed by the trier of fact,* would support a finding that unlawful discrimination did not cause their actions. *Id.,* at 254–255, and n. 8. However, as in the case of all presumptions, see Fed. Rule Evid. 301, the ultimate burden of persuasion remained at all times with Hicks, *id.,* at 253. The Court of Appeals erred when it concluded that the trier of fact's disbelief of petitioners' proffered reasons placed petitioners in the same position as if they had remained silent in the face of Hicks' prima facie case of racial discrimination. Petitioners' production of evidence of nondiscriminatory reasons, whether ultimately persuasive or not, satisfied their burden of production and rebutted the presumption of intentional discrimination. The *McDonnell Douglas* framework then became irrelevant, and the trier of fact was required to decide the ultimate question of fact: whether Hicks had proven that petitioners intentionally discriminated against him because of his race. Compelling judgment for Hicks would disregard the fundamental principle of Rule 301 that a presumption does not shift the burden of proof, and would ignore the admonition that the Title VII plaintiff at all times bears the ultimate burden of persuasion. Pp. 2–9.

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(b) This Court has no authority to impose liability upon an employer for alleged discriminatory employment practices unless the factfinder determines that the employer has unlawfully discriminated. Nor may the Court substitute for that required finding the much different and much lesser finding that the employer's explanation of its action was not believable. Any doubt created by a dictum in *Burdine* that falsity of the employer's explanation is alone enough to sustain a plaintiff's case was eliminated by *United States Postal Service Bd. of Governors* v. *Aikens,* 460 U. S. 711, 714. Pp. 9–17.

(c) The concerns of the dissent and respondent that this decision will produce dire practical consequences are unfounded. Pp. 17–22.

970 F. 2d 487, reversed and remanded.

SCALIA, J., delivered the opinion of the Court, in which REHNQUIST, C. J., and O'CONNOR, KENNEDY, and THOMAS, JJ., joined. SOUTER, J., filed a dissenting opinion, in which WHITE, BLACKMUN, and STEVENS, JJ., joined.