

10-4028-cv(L), 10-4280-cv(CON)  
BIM Intermobiliare SGR v. Grant Thornton LLP

1  
2 **UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS**  
3 **FOR THE SECOND CIRCUIT**  
4

5  
6 August Term, 2011  
7

8 (Argued: November 2, 2011

Decided: July 19, 2012)

9  
10  
11 Docket Nos. 10-4028-cv(L), 10-4280-cv(CON)  
12  
13

14 -----X

15  
16 SANFORD GOULD, Individually, and on  
17 behalf of all others similarly situated, YAN  
18 SUN, BULLDOG CAPITAL  
19 MANAGEMENT LP, KEVIN SHERMAN,  
20 MAX C. MICHAELS, ROBIN KWALBRUN,  
21 ELEANORE REZNICK, FRANK  
22 ZAPPARIELLO, THEODORE S.  
23 GUTOWICZ, DAVID RICH, RICHARD  
24 SULENTIC, ANDRES RIOS,  
25

26 Plaintiffs,

27  
28 -and-

29  
30 BIM INTERMOBILIARE SGR, a wholly-  
31 owned subsidiary of BANCA  
32 INTERMOBILIARE DI INVESTIMENTI E  
33 GESTIONI SPA, ROBERT AHEARN, DRYE  
34 CUSTOM PALLETS, JEFFERSON  
35 INSURANCE COMPANY OF NEW YORK,  
36 ALLIANZ LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY  
37 OF NEW YORK, INTERNATIONAL  
38 REINSURANCE COMPANY, S.A., LIFE  
39 USA, AGF AMÉRIQUE, AGF  
40 HOSPITALIERS, AGF ASSET  
41 MANAGEMENT, FIREMAN'S FUND

1 INSURANCE COMPANY, THE  
2 NORTHERN TRUST COMPANY as trustee  
3 of the FIREMAN’S FUND INSURANCE  
4 COMPANY MASTER RETIREMENT  
5 TRUST and as trustee of the FIREMAN’S  
6 FUND INSURANCE COMPANY MASTER  
7 RETIREMENT SAVINGS TRUST,  
8 ALLIANZ INSURANCE COMPANY,  
9 ALLIANZ LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY  
10 OF NORTH AMERICA, ALLIANZ ASSET  
11 MANAGEMENT NORTH AMERICAN  
12 EQUITY, US ALLIANZ DIVERSIFIED  
13 ANNUITY, US ALLIANZ GROWTH  
14 ANNUITY, US ALLIANZ VARIABLE  
15 INSURANCE PRODUCTS TRUST, AZOA  
16 GROWTH FUND, AZOA DIVERSIFIED  
17 ASSETS FUND, ALLIANZ OF AMERICA,  
18 INC., ALLIANZ CORNHILL INSURANCE  
19 PLC, CORNHILL PENSION NORTH  
20 AMERICAN EQUITY FUND, CORNHILL  
21 LIFE INSURANCE, MERCHANT  
22 INVESTORS ASSURANCE COMPANY  
23 LIMITED, and CORNHILL LIFE NORTH  
24 AMERICAN EQUITY FUND,  
25

26 Plaintiffs-Appellants,

27  
28 v.

29  
30 WINSTAR COMMUNICATIONS, INC.,  
31 WILLIAM J. ROUHANA, JR., RICHARD J.  
32 UHL, NATHAN KANTOR, ROBERT K.  
33 MCGUIRE,  
34

35 Defendants,

36  
37 –and–

38  
39 GRANT THORNTON LLP,  
40

1 Defendant-Appellee.\*

2  
3 ----- X

4  
5  
6 Before: SACK, HALL, and LOHIER, Circuit Judges.

7  
8 Plaintiffs-Appellants appeal from a judgment of the United States District Court for the  
9 Southern District of New York (Daniels, J.) granting the motion for summary judgment of  
10 Defendant-Appellee Grant Thornton LLP (“GT”) and dismissing the Plaintiffs’ claims under  
11 Sections 10(b) and 18 of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934. Those claims related to GT’s  
12 auditing of the financial statements of Winstar Communications, Inc. (“Winstar”). Because  
13 triable questions of fact exist as to (1) whether GT acted with scienter in making alleged  
14 misrepresentations in its audit opinion letter, (2) whether the Plaintiffs purchased Winstar’s stock  
15 in actual reliance on those representations, and (3) whether the Plaintiffs suffered losses as a  
16 result, we VACATE the judgment of the District Court and REMAND for further proceedings.

17  
18 JONATHAN K. LEVINE, Girard Gibbs LLP, New  
19 York, NY (Daniel C. Girard, Girard Gibbs LLP,  
20 San Francisco, CA, on the brief), for Plaintiffs-  
21 Appellants Jefferson Insurance Company of New  
22 York, Allianz Life Insurance Company of New  
23 York, International Reinsurance Company, S.A.,  
24 Life USA, AGF Amérique, AGF Hospitaliers,  
25 Fireman’s Fund Insurance Company, The Northern  
26 Trust Company as trustee of the Fireman’s Fund  
27 Insurance Company Master Retirement Trust and as  
28 trustee of the Fireman’s Fund Insurance Company  
29 Master Retirement Savings Trust, Allianz Insurance  
30 Company, Allianz Life Insurance Company of  
31 North America, Allianz Asset Management North  
32 American Equity, US Allianz Diversified Annuity,  
33 US Allianz Growth Annuity, US Allianz Variable  
34 Insurance Products Trust, AZOA Growth Fund,  
35 AZOA Diversified Assets Fund, Allianz of  
36 America, Inc., AGF Asset Management, Allianz  
37 Cornhill Insurance PLC, Cornhill Pension North  
38 American Equity Fund, Cornhill Life Insurance,  
39 Merchant Investors Assurance Company Ltd., and  
40 Cornhill Life North American Equity Fund.

---

\* The Clerk of the Court is respectfully directed to amend the official caption as set forth above.

1  
2 PATRICK L. ROCCO (Lee S. Shalov, Susan Marlene  
3 Davies, on the brief), Shalov Stone Bonner &  
4 Rocco LLP, New York, NY, for Plaintiffs-  
5 Appellants BIM Intermobiliare SGR, a wholly-  
6 owned subsidiary of Banca Intermobiliare di  
7 Investimenti E Gestioni SpA, Robert Ahearn, and  
8 DRYE Custom Pallets.  
9

10 JAMES L. BERNARD, Stroock & Stroock & Lavan  
11 LLP, New York, NY (Larry K. Elliot, Cohen &  
12 Grigsby P.C., Pittsburgh, PA, on the brief), for  
13 Defendant-Appellee Grant Thornton LLP.  
14

15 LOHIER, Circuit Judge:

16  
17 Plaintiffs-Appellants appeal from a September 2010 judgment of the United States  
18 District Court for the Southern District of New York (Daniels, J.) granting the summary  
19 judgment motion of Defendant-Appellee Grant Thornton LLP (“GT”) and dismissing the  
20 Plaintiffs’ claims arising from GT’s audit of the financial statements of its client, Winstar  
21 Communications, Inc. (“Winstar”). The Plaintiffs claimed that GT committed securities fraud in  
22 violation of Section 10(b) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, 15 U.S.C. § 78j(b) (the “Act”  
23 or the “Exchange Act”), and 17 C.F.R. § 240.10b-5, and made false and misleading statements in  
24 an audit opinion letter in violation of Section 18 of the Act, 15 U.S.C. § 78r. We conclude that  
25 genuine issues of material fact exist as to each of these claims. We therefore VACATE the  
26 District Court’s grant of summary judgment and REMAND for further proceedings.

1 **BACKGROUND**

2 1. Facts

3 Reviewing the District Court’s grant of summary judgment in favor of GT, “we construe  
4 the evidence in the light most favorable to the [Plaintiffs], drawing all reasonable inferences and  
5 resolving all ambiguities in [their] favor.”<sup>1</sup> In re Omnicom Grp., Inc. Sec. Litig., 597 F.3d 501,  
6 504 (2d Cir. 2010) (quotation marks omitted).

7 Winstar was a broadband communications company whose core business was to provide  
8 wireless Internet connectivity to various businesses. GT served as Winstar’s independent auditor  
9 from 1994 until Winstar filed for bankruptcy in April 2001, and GT regarded Winstar as “one of  
10 [its] largest and most important clients.”<sup>2</sup>

11 In 1999, however, the relationship deteriorated. Winstar warned GT that it would likely  
12 terminate the relationship if GT’s performance on unrelated international tax planning and other  
13 accounting matters proved unsatisfactory. In March 1999 at least one member of Winstar’s  
14 board of directors openly urged during a board meeting that the GT partner overseeing the audit  
15 of Winstar be removed from the Winstar account. GT eventually re-staffed the Winstar account  
16 so that the 1999 audit was managed by a partner, Gary Goldman, and a senior manager, Patricia

---

<sup>1</sup> The Plaintiffs fall into two groups. BIM Intermobiliare SGR and other plaintiffs (collectively, the “Lead Plaintiffs”) assert claims under Section 10(b) in a putative class action on behalf of investors who purchased Winstar common stock and bonds between March 10, 2000 and April 2, 2001. Jefferson Insurance Company of New York and twenty-four related entities (collectively, the “Jefferson Plaintiffs”) purchased Winstar common stock from December 1998 to at least February 2001 and bring claims under both Sections 10(b) and 18.

<sup>2</sup> Most of the revenue that GT derived from Winstar was from consulting rather than auditing. In 1999, for example, GT earned \$275,000 for its auditing work for Winstar, compared with over \$2 million in consulting fees.

1 Cummings, neither of whom had previously reviewed or audited the financial records of a  
2 telecommunications company.

3 As relevant to this appeal, GT's audit for 1999 included several "large account"  
4 transactions that Winstar consummated in an attempt to conceal a decrease in revenue associated  
5 with Winstar's core business. Most of the large account transactions involved Lucent  
6 Technologies, Inc. ("Lucent"), Winstar's strategic partner, and all of them were consummated at  
7 the end of Winstar's fiscal quarters in 1999. Together, the transactions accounted for \$114.5  
8 million in revenue, or approximately 26 percent of Winstar's reported 1999 operating revenues  
9 and 32 percent of its "core" revenues that year. At the time, GT considered these transactions to  
10 be "red flags," warranting the accounting firm's "heightened scrutiny."<sup>3</sup> However, GT  
11 ultimately approved Winstar's recognition of revenue in connection with each of these  
12 transactions.

13 We discuss the evidence relating to each category of transaction in turn.

14 A. Questionable Sales

15 The first category of questionable transactions involved a series of six end-of-quarter and  
16 end-of-year transactions, primarily reported as equipment sales, for which there was little  
17 evidence that any goods or services were ordered and delivered. For example, for the third  
18 quarter of 1999 Winstar recognized \$15 million in revenue for the sale of Lucent equipment to  
19 Anixter Brothers, Inc. ("Anixter"), a wire and cable distributor. There were several unusual

---

<sup>3</sup> The Public Company Accounting Oversight Board has recognized that one risk factor indicating potential fraud would be "[s]ignificant, unusual, or highly complex transactions, especially those close to year end, that pose difficult 'substance over form' questions." Joint App. at 3619 (quoting Am. Inst. of Certified Pub. Accountants, Statement on Accounting Standards ("AU") § 316.17 (alterations in original)). Similarly, GT acknowledged that large, end-of-quarter transactions would warrant heightened scrutiny during the audit process.

1 aspects of this sale. First, Anixter ordinarily purchased equipment directly from Lucent, not  
2 Winstar. Second, equipment sales were not part of Winstar's core business of creating and  
3 operating wireless networks. Third, during GT's audit Cummings noted that the Anixter  
4 transaction was "apparently" completed on September 30, 1999, the last day of Winstar's fiscal  
5 quarter, but GT's work papers included no documents reflecting the sale's completion beyond a  
6 purchase order from Winstar to Lucent and an invoice from Lucent to Winstar. Moreover,  
7 neither the purchase order nor the invoice included an itemized list of the goods sold or indicated  
8 the shipping terms, even though the items were to be shipped on September 30, 1999, and  
9 delivered on October 4, 1999.<sup>4</sup> Absent too was any document evidencing Anixter's agreement to  
10 purchase the items. Lastly, not a single employee of Lucent, Winstar, or Anixter who was asked  
11 about the equipment sale could recall it.

12 Five other transactions that were not part of Winstar's core business were consummated  
13 at the end of one of Winstar's fiscal quarters and were barely documented. Winstar nevertheless  
14 recognized a total of \$49.7 million in revenue associated with these five transactions. First,  
15 Winstar recognized \$5 million in revenue in the first quarter of 1999 for a "feasibility study" that  
16 Winstar was scheduled to conduct for Lucent, but which had not been delivered by at least 2000.  
17 Second, Winstar recognized \$21.1 million in revenue in the first and second quarters of 1999 in

---

<sup>4</sup> As stated by the Securities and Exchange Commission ("SEC"), "delivery generally is not considered to have occurred unless the customer has taken title and assumed the risks and rewards of ownership of the products specified in the customer's purchase order or sales agreement. Typically this occurs when a product is delivered to the customer's delivery site (if the terms of the sale are 'FOB destination') or when a product is shipped to the customer (if the terms are 'FOB shipping point')." SEC Staff Accounting Bulletin No. 101: Revenue Recognition in Financial Statements, 17 C.F.R. Part 211, at 6 (Dec. 3, 1999) ("SAB 101"), available at <http://www.sec.gov/interps/account/sab101.htm> (last visited June 28, 2012).

1 connection with the sale of Lucent equipment to Williams Communications, Inc. (“Williams”).  
2 The equipment was shipped by Lucent, not Winstar, on the last business day of the first and  
3 second quarters (March 31, 1999 and June 30, 1999, respectively), with no written agreement.  
4 Third, Winstar recognized \$9.1 million in revenue in the second quarter of 1999 in connection  
5 with the sale of Lucent equipment to VoCall Communications Corporation (“VoCall”) on June  
6 30, 1999. Although the sale was referenced in a series of non-numbered purchase orders, it was  
7 not referenced in any executed, final agreement or shipping document. Fourth, Winstar  
8 recognized \$4.5 million in revenue in the third quarter of 1999 in connection with the sale of  
9 unspecified “WinStar Equipment” to Cignal Global Communications (“Cignal”), which was  
10 contracted for on September 30, 1999, the last day of that quarter. However, GT was unable to  
11 produce a document evidencing that the equipment had been shipped to Cignal during that  
12 quarter. Fifth, Winstar recognized \$10 million in revenue in the fourth quarter of 1999 in  
13 connection with the sale of wireless radio equipment (“radios”) to Lucent under an agreement  
14 dated December 30, 1999. GT endorsed the recognition of revenue even though its work papers  
15 included shipping documents with conflicting dates, no document specified the goods purchased,  
16 and Lucent, not Winstar, was in the business of manufacturing and selling radios. The same  
17 agreement also involved a \$2 million “promotional credit” purchased by Lucent for services that  
18 had not yet been rendered by Winstar. Although GT specifically advised Winstar that  
19 recognizing and recording the amount of the credit as revenue was improper and in violation of



1 generally accepted accounting principles (“GAAP”),<sup>5</sup> Winstar nevertheless recognized the full  
2 \$2 million in revenue.

3 Each of these transactions appears to have violated the provisions of Staff Accounting  
4 Bulletin No. 101 (“SAB 101”), issued by the Securities and Exchange Commission (“SEC”),  
5 which states that four conditions must be satisfied before revenue can be recognized: (1)  
6 “Persuasive evidence of an arrangement [for the sale of goods or services] exists,” (2) “Delivery  
7 has occurred or services have been rendered,” (3) “The seller’s price to the buyer is fixed or  
8 determinable,” and (4) “Collectibility is reasonably assured.” SAB 101 at 3.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> “GAAP [are] those principles recognized by the accounting profession as the conventions, rules, and procedures necessary to define accepted accounting practice at a particular time. [They are] established by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants . . . .” In re Global Crossing, Ltd. Sec. Litig., 322 F. Supp. 2d 319, 325 n.5 (S.D.N.Y. 2004) (quotation marks and citations omitted). “[The] single unified purpose [of GAAP] . . . [is] to increase investor confidence by ensuring transparency and accuracy in financial reporting.” Id. at 339.

<sup>6</sup> The SEC has elaborated upon the delivery requirement as follows:

[D]elivery generally is not considered to have occurred unless the product has been delivered to the customer’s place of business or another site specified by the customer. . . .

. . .

A seller should substantially complete or fulfill the terms specified in the arrangement in order for delivery or performance to have occurred. When applying the substantially complete notion, the staff believes that only inconsequential or perfunctory actions may remain incomplete such that the failure to complete the actions would not result in the customer receiving a refund or rejecting the delivered products or services performed to date.

SAB 101 at 6 (footnotes omitted). In addition, revenue may be recognized in the absence of delivery only if a transaction meets seven requirements, including (1) that “[t]he risks of ownership . . . passed to the buyer”; (2) that “the buyer, not the seller . . . request . . . that the transaction be on a bill and hold basis,” based on a “substantial business purpose” of the buyer; and (3) that the seller not retain “any specific performance obligations such that the earning

1 GT requested that Winstar's counterparties provide additional documentary evidence of  
2 the relevant sales underlying each questionable transaction. By doing so, consistent with SAB  
3 101, GT sought to obtain independent support for Winstar's recognition of revenue for each  
4 transaction – in other words, support from documents that were not generated by Winstar itself.  
5 As of February 10, 2000, GT still had not received responsive documents from four of these  
6 customers. Nonetheless, it issued an audit opinion letter opining that Winstar's 1999 financial  
7 statements accurately reflected its financial condition and complied with GAAP.

8 B. Bifurcated Accounting

9 In connection with at least three other transactions, Winstar employed a bifurcated  
10 accounting scheme that GT ultimately approved prior to its audit of Winstar's financial  
11 statements. Two of these transactions involved leasing or subleasing fiber optic network  
12 capacity in units called indefeasible rights of use ("IRUs"). Winstar accounted for these IRUs  
13 using a dubious bifurcated accounting method, pursuant to which it recognized as much as 94  
14 percent of the revenue from the leases upon execution of the lease, reflecting the cost of optical  
15 equipment ("optronics") that transmitted data over fiber optic cable ("cable" or "fiber"). Winstar  
16 then would recognize the balance of the revenue in later quarters, as payments were received  
17 over the span of the lease, representing the customer's actual use of the network. In other words,  
18 Winstar split the value of the leases so that the revenue associated with the optronics was

---

process is not complete." Id. (footnotes omitted). In its Form 10-K, Winstar stated, "Revenues from equipment sales are recognized when the equipment is delivered to the customer. Professional services revenues are recognized under the percentage of completion method." Joint App. at 538.

1 reported separately from revenue associated with the cable. By employing this accounting  
2 method, Winstar was able to recognize \$30.9 million in revenue up front in 1999.

3 During discovery, a forensic accountant retained by the Plaintiffs opined that the rules of  
4 the Financial Accounting Standards Board and interpretive rules of the SEC prohibited the  
5 division of leases for fiber optic networks because both the cable and the optronics were  
6 essential to the network. Winstar conceded that the fiber and the optronics were not separable,  
7 and that no other company previously had employed this bifurcated method in accounting for  
8 IRUs. Indeed, Winstar specifically advised GT that the bifurcated approach had been criticized  
9 by the accounting firm Deloitte & Touche LLP (“Deloitte”).

10 GT was in any event aware that revenue associated with an IRU contract could be  
11 recognized only if the leased circuit was operational, or “lit,” in the language of the fiber optics  
12 field. In the third and fourth quarters of 1999, however, Winstar had failed to “light” many of its  
13 IRU circuits, a fact that should have precluded the company from recognizing revenue associated  
14 with those IRUs.

15 In the midst of GT’s audit, Winstar sent form letters dated December 30, 1999, and  
16 December 31, 1999, to the counterparties to the two IRU transactions, Wam!Net, Inc. and  
17 Cignal, respectively, to confirm that the IRU circuits had been “deliver[ed]” and “accept[ed].”  
18 A representative of Cignal signed a form letter confirming delivery and acceptance of the  
19 circuits. By contrast, Wam!Net’s Senior Vice President of Finance responded to a letter from  
20 Winstar as follows: “To our knowledge [the circuits] are not currently in place.” A subsequent  
21 amended letter from a different Wam!Net employee, which does not appear in the record but  
22 which Cummings referenced in an email, purported to “accept” the circuits but did not address  
23 the earlier letter response. After receiving the amended letter, GT did not further review whether

1 the circuits were installed and operational. Even though it appears not to have received the  
2 amended letter until after February 11, 2000, GT approved Winstar's recognition of revenue for  
3 the Wam!Net IRU circuit sale on February 10, 2000.

4 While GT appears to have neglected to verify that Wam!Net's IRU circuits were  
5 operational, there was evidence that GT actually knew that the leased Cignal IRU circuits were  
6 inoperative. GT nevertheless approved Winstar's recognition of revenue for the Cignal IRUs in  
7 the third quarter of 1999.

8 Winstar employed a similar bifurcated accounting method in the fourth quarter of 1999  
9 for its sale of radios to Lucent. The agreement between the two companies provided for Winstar  
10 to install the radios, but Winstar recognized revenue for the transaction immediately, upon  
11 delivering them to Lucent.<sup>7</sup> GT expressed doubt that the radios and installation services were  
12 separable,<sup>8</sup> but it nevertheless approved of Winstar's recognition of \$10 million in revenue in  
13 connection with the transaction.

#### 14 C. Round-Trip Transactions

15 Several of the transactions discussed above involved "round-trip" transactions with  
16 Cignal and Wam!Net at a time when the two customers were struggling financially. "Round-  
17 tripping" typically refers to reciprocal agreements, involving the same products or services, that  
18 lack economic substance but permit [both] parties to book revenue and improve their financial  
19 statements." Teachers' Ret. Sys. of LA v. Hunter, 477 F.3d 162, 169 (7th Cir. 2007). The two

---

<sup>7</sup> Winstar also employed a bifurcated accounting method when it recognized \$16.5 million in revenue in connection with a sale of radios to Wam!Net in the fourth quarter of 1999. As with the IRU accounting, it did so contrary to Deloitte's advice but with GT's approval.

<sup>8</sup> GT also expressed serious doubts about whether Lucent had assumed the risks and rewards of ownership of the radios, given the generous terms of a warranty Winstar extended to Lucent.

1 principal round-trip transactions that were the focus of discovery involved a scheme pursuant to  
2 which Winstar overpaid both companies for purportedly unrelated goods and services in  
3 exchange for their purchase of IRUs, equipment, and services from Winstar by the end of  
4 Winstar's third fiscal quarter of 1999 (Cignal), and the end of the fourth quarter of 1999  
5 (Wam!Net).

6 Both round-trip transactions were material to Winstar's financial performance in 1999.  
7 In the larger of the two transactions, Winstar recognized approximately \$39 million in revenue in  
8 the third and fourth quarters of 1999 in connection with sales to Cignal while it paid Cignal  
9 \$29.5 million under a separate agreement during the same time period and an additional \$4.8  
10 million in the first quarter of 2000. Similarly, Winstar recognized \$19.6 million in revenue in  
11 connection with sales to Wam!Net in the fourth quarter of 1999, even as it paid Wam!Net \$25  
12 million in the same quarter for "prepaid marketing" and the lease of a "data service center." In  
13 February 2000 GT questioned the "[a]rms length nature of the [round-trip] transactions." It later  
14 acknowledged that the transactions "raise[d] a concern" within GT "as to whether or not absent  
15 Winstar's payment . . . collectability [sic] was reasonably assured." Nevertheless, GT approved  
16 Winstar's recognition of the full amount of revenue for both transactions.

17 D. The Audit Opinion Letter

18 By letter dated February 10, 2000, GT issued an unqualified audit opinion letter stating  
19 that Winstar's annual Form 10-K report for fiscal year 1999 complied with GAAP and fairly  
20 represented Winstar's financial condition at the end of that year:

21 We have audited the accompanying consolidated balance  
22 sheets of Winstar Communications, Inc. . . .

23 We conducted our audits in accordance with auditing

1 standards generally accepted in the United States. Those standards  
2 require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable  
3 assurance about whether the financial statements are free of material  
4 misstatement. . . . We believe that our audits provide a reasonable  
5 basis for our opinion.

6 In our opinion, the consolidated financial statements referred  
7 to above present fairly, in all material respects, the consolidated  
8 financial position of Winstar Communications, Inc. and Subsidiaries  
9 as of December 31, 1999 . . . in conformity with accounting  
10 principles generally accepted in the United States.

11  
12 Joint App. at 529.

13 E. Investment by the Jefferson Plaintiffs

14 From December 1998 to February 2001, the Jefferson Plaintiffs purchased over \$200  
15 million worth of Winstar stock. The investment portfolios of most of the Jefferson Plaintiffs  
16 were managed by Ronald Clark, the Chief Investment Officer for Allianz of America  
17 (“Allianz”). The remaining entities deferred to Clark to select their investments in United States  
18 securities. Although Clark enjoyed ultimate authority for these investment decisions, he relied  
19 on recommendations from a team of analysts, including Livia Asher, who recommended that  
20 Allianz purchase Winstar stock. Based on Asher’s recommendation, Clark caused Allianz and  
21 the other Jefferson Plaintiffs to invest in Winstar.

22 Clark, it appears, did not personally review Winstar’s financial statements prior to  
23 making the decision to invest in Winstar. Instead, he relied on Asher to review the statements as  
24 part of her job. During discovery, however, Asher acknowledged that she was uncertain of the  
25 date of, or reason for, her recommendation that Allianz purchase Winstar stock. Nor could she  
26 specifically recall reading Winstar’s 1999 Form 10-K report. However, Asher testified that she  
27 “probably flipped through every single page” of the report, based on her practice. She explained,

1 “I can’t imagine any reason why I would not have looked at this, . . . given our position in the  
2 stock and given what I would normally do.” Asher added that she habitually read auditors’  
3 opinion letters included in Forms 10-K to make sure that auditors believed that an issuer’s  
4 reports were “kosher,” but she did not specifically recall reviewing GT’s audit report.

5 F. Winstar’s Decline

6 Winstar’s stock reached a price per share of over \$60 in March 2000. In May 2000  
7 Lucent provided Winstar with financing in the form of a renewed credit facility in the aggregate  
8 amount of \$2 billion. Almost a year later, however, in March 2001, Asensio & Company  
9 (“Asensio”), an investment firm, issued a press release criticizing Winstar’s ability to pay its  
10 debts and explaining that certain measurements of Winstar’s financial performance were  
11 “questionable” due in part to Winstar’s “revenue recognition from non-core businesses and sales  
12 of equipment and services to related parties.” Joint App. at 2412. The same press release  
13 warned that “[a]ny adjustment to Winstar’s aggressive revenue accounting and capitalization of  
14 cash expenditures would negatively and materially impact Winstar’s reported [earnings] and  
15 analyst’s [sic] opinions of its operations.” Id. at 2413. On March 19, 2001, Asensio issued  
16 another press release reporting on Winstar’s “debt collapse,” again criticizing its revenue  
17 accounting practices and noting, “Winstar has recognized revenues that created a slew of  
18 uncollected items . . . . Its revenues include sales to related parties and non-core items such as  
19 equipment sales and installation services.” Id. at 2414.

20 The Asensio press releases preceded a significant downgrade in Winstar’s credit rating  
21 on April 3, 2001. Moreover, on April 16, 2001, Winstar announced that Lucent was cancelling

1 Winstar's credit facility, that Winstar would delay filing its Form 10-K report for 2000, and that  
2 Winstar was considering a reorganization under Chapter 11 of the Bankruptcy Code.

3 By the time of the Asensio press releases, Winstar's revenues and its stock price had  
4 decreased significantly during a marketwide decline in the prices of technology stocks.  
5 However, the press releases, coupled with the subsequent announcements of Winstar's financial  
6 troubles, were followed almost immediately by an additional steep decline in Winstar's stock  
7 price, from over \$10 per share before March 2001 to \$0.14 per share by mid-April 2001. On  
8 April 18, 2001, Winstar filed for bankruptcy.

9 During discovery, an economist retained by the Plaintiffs as an expert witness attributed  
10 the decline in Winstar's stock price to, among other causes, the partial disclosure of Winstar's  
11 alleged fraud by Asensio. The economist calculated that members of the putative class who had  
12 purchased Winstar common stock lost as much as \$974 million, that class members who  
13 purchased Winstar notes lost up to \$197 million, and that the Jefferson Plaintiffs lost over \$96  
14 million by investing in Winstar stock.

## 15 2. Procedural History

16 On April 10, 2001, the Lead Plaintiffs filed a putative class action complaint in the  
17 Southern District of New York against Winstar, GT, Lucent, and certain Winstar executives  
18 alleging securities fraud under Section 10(b) of the Exchange Act, 15 U.S.C. § 78j(b). In  
19 December 2001 the Jefferson Plaintiffs filed a separate complaint in the District Court against  
20 GT, claiming violations of both Section 10(b) and Section 18 of the Exchange Act, 15 U.S.C. §  
21 78r(a).<sup>9</sup> As a result of various settlements among the parties, the claims against GT were all that

---

<sup>9</sup> Although the Defendants filed motions to dismiss in June 2002, the District Court did not rule on them. Similarly, a motion for class certification was filed but never resolved by the District Court.



1 remained by 2008. After discovery, GT moved for summary judgment to dismiss the Plaintiffs'  
2 claims and also moved unsuccessfully to preclude the Plaintiffs' expert loss causation analysis.

3 In September 2010 the District Court granted GT's motion for summary judgment,  
4 concluding that (1) the Plaintiffs had failed to demonstrate that a genuine dispute of material fact  
5 existed as to whether GT acted intentionally or recklessly, as required under Section 10(b) of the  
6 Exchange Act, and (2) the Jefferson Plaintiffs had failed to demonstrate that such a dispute  
7 existed as to whether they actually relied on GT's audit opinion letter, as required under Section  
8 18 of the Exchange Act. In re Winstar Commc'ns Sec. Litig., No. 01 CV 11522 (GBD), 2010  
9 WL 3910322, at \*5-6 (S.D.N.Y. Sept. 29, 2010).

10 This appeal followed.

#### 11 DISCUSSION

12 We review a district court's grant of summary judgment de novo, viewing the evidence in  
13 the light most favorable to the non-moving party and drawing all reasonable inferences and  
14 resolving all ambiguities in its favor. E.g., Grain Traders, Inc. v. Citibank, N.A., 160 F.3d 97,  
15 100 (2d Cir. 1998). We will affirm the judgment "only if there is no genuine dispute as to any  
16 material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law." Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(a).  
17 "There is no genuine issue of material fact where the record taken as a whole could not lead a  
18 rational trier of fact to find for the non-moving party." Durakovic v. Bldg. Servs. 32 BJ Pension  
19 Fund, 609 F.3d 133, 137 (2d Cir. 2010) (quotation marks and brackets omitted). Put another  
20 way, "[a]n issue of fact is genuine if the evidence is such that a reasonable jury could return a  
21 verdict for the nonmoving party." Omnicom, 597 F.3d at 509 (quotation marks omitted).

1 To sustain a claim under Section 10(b) of the Exchange Act and Rule 10b-5, the  
2 Plaintiffs must show “(i) a material misrepresentation or omission; (ii) scienter; (iii) ‘a  
3 connection with the purchase or sale of a security[;]’ (iv) reliance by the plaintiff(s); (v)  
4 economic loss; and (vi) loss causation.” Id. (quoting Dura Pharms., Inc. v. Broudo, 544 U.S.  
5 336, 341-42 (2005)).

6 1. Scienter

7 Plaintiffs may satisfy the scienter requirement by producing “evidence of conscious  
8 misbehavior or recklessness.” See ECA, Local 134 IBEW Joint Pension Trust of Chicago v. JP  
9 Morgan Chase Co., 553 F.3d 187, 198 (2d Cir. 2009). Scienter based on conscious misbehavior,  
10 in turn, requires a showing of “deliberate illegal behavior,” Novak v. Kasaks, 216 F.3d 300, 308  
11 (2d Cir. 2000), a standard met “when it is clear that a scheme, viewed broadly, is necessarily  
12 going to injure,” AUSA Life Ins. Co. v. Ernst & Young, 206 F.3d 202, 221 (2d Cir. 2000)  
13 (alterations omitted).

14 In AUSA Life, we applied this standard to representations by the accounting firm Ernst  
15 & Young (“E & Y”), which, as plaintiffs allege with respect to GT, “consistently noticed,  
16 protested, and then acquiesced in” the financial misrepresentations of an audit client under  
17 pressure from the client’s management. Id. at 205. We held that by issuing an unqualified audit  
18 report despite its knowledge of accounting improprieties by the client, E & Y “intentionally  
19 engaged in manipulative conduct,” id. at 221 (quotation marks omitted), in violation of Section  
20 10(b). We explained that

21 E & Y is not an accounting dilettante. It knows well that its opinions  
22 and certifications are afforded great weight, and it must have known

1 that its financial certifications with regard to [its client] would be  
2 compelling to the investors. . . . [I]t is sufficient [for the purposes of  
3 showing scienter] for a plaintiff to allege and prove that a defendant  
4 could have foreseen the consequences of his actions but forged ahead  
5 nonetheless . . . .  
6

7 Id.; see also SEC v. KPMG LLP, 412 F. Supp. 2d 349, 379 (S.D.N.Y. 2006) (triable issue as to  
8 conscious fraud existed when accountant was “[a]ware of [the client’s] earnings pressures” but  
9 allowed aggressive accounting policies “without any serious study to determine that these  
10 unusual, indeed unique, accounting treatments would result in financial statements that fairly  
11 represented [the client’s] financial condition”).

12 Scienter based on recklessness may be demonstrated where a defendant has engaged in  
13 conduct that was “highly unreasonable, representing an extreme departure from the standards of  
14 ordinary care . . . to the extent that the danger was either known to the defendant or so obvious  
15 that the defendant must have been aware of it.” Rothman v. Gregor, 220 F.3d 81, 90 (2d Cir.  
16 2000) (quotation marks omitted). Recklessness may be established where a defendant “failed to  
17 review or check information that [it] had a duty to monitor, or ignored obvious signs of fraud.”  
18 Novak, 216 F.3d at 308.

19 The District Court concluded that Winstar engaged in “dubious accounting practices,”  
20 that “[m]uch of the supporting documentation that Winstar supplied to GT was a mere  
21 contrivance meant to paper the transactions and create the appearance of legitimacy,” and that  
22 GT “failed to uncover the accounting fraud being perpetuated by the Winstar defendants.”  
23 Winstar, 2010 WL 3910322, at \*3, \*5. GT does not seriously dispute these conclusions, which  
24 are in any event supported by the record before us. The District Court concluded, however, that

1 the evidence demonstrated only that GT was “performing its role as [Winstar’s] independent  
2 auditor” and fell short of demonstrating scienter in the form of either conscious misbehavior or  
3 recklessness. Id. at \*3. We disagree.

4 Some evidence supports the Plaintiffs’ contention that GT consciously ignored Winstar’s  
5 fraud when it approved Winstar’s recognition of revenue for the suspicious 1999 transactions.  
6 This evidence goes beyond a mere failure to uncover the accounting fraud and, in general, relates  
7 to (1) Winstar’s recognition of revenue for the sale of equipment or services without sufficient  
8 indicia of delivery, (2) its recognition of all revenue associated with the incomplete sale of  
9 telecommunications systems, and (3) its recognition of revenue for sales of IRUs, equipment,  
10 and services to financially unstable companies to whom Winstar paid back large sums under  
11 separate contractual obligations.

12 There is also evidence that GT failed to confirm Winstar’s representations regarding  
13 these transactions or to retain and review documents evidencing each transaction. Indeed, an  
14 expert forensic accountant retained by the Plaintiffs testified that GT’s failure to exercise due  
15 professional care, gather reliable documents, and issue an adverse opinion in this regard  
16 represented a violation of Generally Accepted Accounting Standards (“GAAS”)<sup>10</sup> with regard to  
17 all of the challenged transactions. Furthermore, the record evidence supports a conclusion that  
18 GT knew, even under the terms of Winstar’s bifurcated accounting method – a method that had

---

<sup>10</sup> Under GAAS, a central “objective of the independent auditor’s engagement is to obtain sufficient competent evidential matter to provide him with a reasonable basis for forming an opinion.” Joint App. at 3604 (quoting AU § 9326). “Gathering and objectively evaluating audit evidence requires the auditor to consider the competency and sufficiency of the evidence. . . . [P]rofessional skepticism should be exercised throughout the audit process,” and requires the employment of “a questioning mind” in the “gathering and objective evaluation of evidence,” including with regard to representations by management. Id. at 3589-90 (quoting AU §§ 230.07-08).

1 been criticized by Deloitte but reviewed and approved, with skepticism, by GT – that revenue  
2 could not be properly recognized for IRUs unless the leased circuits were operational. During  
3 discovery, Cummings acknowledged that GT knew the circuits for the Cignal IRUs were not  
4 operational. Under these circumstances, GT’s approval of Winstar’s recognition of revenue for  
5 the nonfunctional circuits presents a genuine issue of material fact as to whether GT acted with  
6 the requisite scienter under Section 10(b).

7 We point to the IRU transactions only as one example of a transaction that suggests that  
8 GT acted with scienter. Triable issues regarding GT’s scienter exist for the other questionable  
9 transactions as well. Broadly speaking, there was admissible evidence that in the course of its  
10 audit GT learned of and advised against the use of indisputably deceptive accounting schemes,  
11 but eventually acquiesced in the schemes by issuing an unqualified audit opinion. See AUSA  
12 Life, 206 F.3d at 221. Based on this record, we cannot conclude that this and the other evidence  
13 adduced by the Plaintiffs was insufficient to raise a genuine issue of material fact about whether,  
14 in issuing an unqualified audit opinion letter, GT “agreed to [Winstar’s] accounting abuses,  
15 knowing . . . that [investors] and others would be receiving and relying upon the manipulated  
16 financial reports.” Id. At this stage, the Plaintiffs have proffered enough facts constituting  
17 evidence of conscious misbehavior or recklessness to survive summary judgment.

18 We note that in granting summary judgment in GT’s favor, the District Court placed  
19 particular emphasis on the magnitude of GT’s audit work, both in time spent and documents  
20 reviewed. For example, it noted that GT “spent 1,928 hours of professional time,” assembled  
21 working papers spanning 3,000 pages, and reviewed “copies of contracts, Winstar business  
22 plan[s], press releases, board minutes,” and memos prepared by Winstar and GT addressing

1 accounting issues. Winstar, 2010 WL 3910322, at \*2. The number of hours spent on an audit  
2 cannot, standing alone, immunize an accountant from charges that it has violated the securities  
3 laws. Here, the Plaintiffs adduced evidence that, notwithstanding the magnitude of its audit, GT  
4 repeatedly failed to scrutinize serious signs of fraud by an important client, including: (1)  
5 significant end-of-quarter transactions;<sup>11</sup> (2) the absence of documents confirming the goods or  
6 services ordered by Winstar customers, the fact of delivery, or the existence of an underlying  
7 agreement; (3) the repeated failure of Winstar or its clients timely to provide supporting  
8 documentation requested by GT; (4) Winstar's transactions outside its core business; and (5)  
9 round-trip transactions in which revenues were subsequently offset by Winstar's payments to  
10 financially unstable customers under unrelated contractual obligations.

11 In short, regardless of the hours GT spent or the number of documents it reviewed in the  
12 course of its 1999 audit of Winstar, a jury reasonably could determine that the audit was so  
13 deficient as to be "highly unreasonable, representing an extreme departure from the standards of  
14 ordinary care . . . to the extent that the danger was either known to [GT] or so obvious that [GT]  
15 must have been aware of it." Rothman, 220 F.3d at 90 (quotation marks omitted).

---

<sup>11</sup> Here, only GT's February 10, 2000 audit opinion letter regarding Winstar's Form 10-K for fiscal year 1999 forms the basis for its liability under Section 10(b). Winstar's quarterly financial reports for 1999, no matter how involved GT was in their formulation, cannot serve as independent grounds for Section 10(b) liability for GT because, unlike with the Form 10-K, GT never made any public statements vouching for their accuracy. See McAdams v. McCord, 584 F.3d 1111, 1114 & n.2 (8th Cir. 2009). That GT was involved in their formulation at best would give rise to aiding and abetting liability under Section 10(b), as to which there is no private cause of action. See Central Bank of Denver, N.A. v. First Interstate Bank of Denver, N.A., 511 U.S. 164, 177 (1994). The end-of-quarter transactions are nevertheless relevant to the issue of GT's scienter because they should have raised red flags for GT as to whether they were genuine and could be reported on Winstar's end-of-year filing for fiscal year 1999. Indeed, evidence in the record, including email communications between GT employees, suggests that GT remained troubled by many of these transactions around the time it filed its audit opinion letter.

1           2. Reliance

2           Section 18 of the Exchange Act, 15 U.S.C. § 78r(a), requires actual rather than  
3 constructive reliance upon a materially false or misleading statement by one who has purchased  
4 or sold a security. Heit v. Weitzen, 402 F.2d 909, 916 (2d Cir. 1968). The District Court  
5 concluded that the Jefferson Plaintiffs failed to show reliance because they could not  
6 demonstrate that they or their representatives “actually saw Winstar’s 1999 Form 10-K filing,  
7 much less read the included independent accountant report of GT.” Winstar, 2010 WL 3910322,  
8 at \*6. Even assuming that such “eyeball” reliance is the sort of actual reliance required by our  
9 precedents, the District Court’s conclusion somewhat understates the record evidence on this  
10 score. Ronald Clark and Livia Asher worked on behalf of the Jefferson Plaintiffs. Although  
11 Asher was unable to recall specifically that she reviewed GT’s audit opinion letter, there was  
12 evidence that she actively reviewed such letters as a matter of practice in deciding whether to  
13 recommend certain stocks. At this stage of the proceedings, Asher’s testimony is enough; from  
14 that evidence, a jury reasonably could infer that she actually reviewed the relevant documents.  
15 See, e.g., Fed. R. Evid. 406. Accordingly, we conclude that the District Court erred in granting  
16 summary judgment in GT’s favor on the Jefferson Plaintiffs’ Section 18 claims.

17           3. Causation

18           GT argues in the alternative that the District Court’s grant of summary judgment should  
19 be affirmed because the Plaintiffs failed to show loss causation. We have described loss  
20 causation as “the causal link between the alleged misconduct and the economic harm ultimately  
21 suffered by the plaintiff.” Emergent Capital Inv. Mgmt., LLC v. Stonepath Grp., Inc., 343 F.3d  
22 189, 197 (2d Cir. 2003). Among other things, the misconduct must be a “substantial factor in the

1 sequence of responsible causation.” AUSA Life, 206 F.3d at 215 (quotation marks omitted).  
2 With these principles in mind, however, we have also warned that “if the loss was caused by an  
3 intervening event, like a general fall in the price of Internet stocks, the chain of causation will  
4 not have been established[, b]ut such is a matter of proof at trial.” Emergent Capital, 343 F.3d at  
5 197; see also AUSA Life, 206 F.3d at 214-15 (“[W]hen the plaintiff’s loss coincides with a  
6 marketwide phenomenon causing comparable losses to other investors, the prospect that the  
7 plaintiff’s loss was caused by the fraud decreases.”).

8 Relying largely on the deposition testimony of an expert witness economist, the Plaintiffs  
9 argue that they have adduced proof of loss causation in the form of the press releases from  
10 Asensio and Winstar’s April 2001 announcements, which publicly exposed Winstar’s substantial  
11 financial weaknesses and together suggested for the first time that Winstar had engaged in  
12 improper revenue recognition practices for a period of time that included 1999. Although a  
13 much closer call, a jury could reasonably infer based on the expert testimony and other evidence  
14 that the precipitous decline in Winstar’s stock price in 2001 was attributable in part to the  
15 alleged fraud.

16 GT counters that any decline in Winstar’s stock price that was not caused by broader  
17 market trends resulted not from the alleged fraud but from Lucent’s cancellation of its credit  
18 facility. This may be true for a portion of the collapse in Winstar’s stock price. There is support  
19 as well for the argument that the downgrade in Winstar’s credit rating resulted in a substantial  
20 decline in the stock price. But these facts, if established, hardly foreclose the reasonable  
21 inference that some part of the decline was substantially caused by the disclosures about the  
22 fraud itself. We therefore conclude that a jury reasonably could find the requisite “causal link



1 between [Winstar's] alleged misconduct and the economic harm ultimately suffered" by the  
2 Plaintiffs. See Emergent Capital, 343 F.3d at 197.

3 **CONCLUSION**

4 We have considered GT's other arguments, and we conclude that they are without merit.  
5 For the foregoing reasons, we VACATE the District Court's grant of summary judgment, and we  
6 REMAND for further proceedings.