

# The Inquiry.



Winter 2024

# Letter from the Editors

Dearest readers,

Glorious spring is upon us, and The Inquiry presents to you an overdue winter issue. We apologize for the delay. Our masthead confronted a range of unexpected variables putting this together, but we did not wish to rush the process in producing what is in your hands.

This issue presents writers across all backgrounds. Contrary to purely informative articles, the personalities of our authors accompanies and completes the argument. We ask you to hark closely to each narrators' convictions, narratives, and delightful quips. Every one of them sets forth distinct takes that will, we hope, sway your musings between opposite viewpoints until you arrive at your own.

We selected pertinent topics that might confront stances you hold near and dear. For every sentence that satisfyingly affirms your beliefs, perhaps venture to the other side and dabble in discomfort. Yes, we aspire to implicate your straightforward “agrees”, “disagrees”, or simply “I don't knows” in nuance and skepticism; we aim to ignite curiosity that absorbs, captivates, and fascinates. Here's one last suggestion—browse this with someone and chat over coffee, lunch, or dinner. We anticipate an animated and intriguing conversation!

This letter could go drag on, but we will waste no more time keeping you on this page. Go ahead, yes! Flip over and dive in!

Your Co-Editors in Chief,  
Katherine Chong'25 & Carter Linardos'24

# Does it set a bad precedent for Donald Trump to be excluded from state primary elections?

Pro: *Jason Cao* 

On December 19th, 2023, the Colorado Supreme Court issued a 4-3 per curiam decision in *Anderson v. Griswold*, disqualifying former President Donald J. Trump from the primary ballot. Trump has since appealed, and the Supreme Court has granted a writ of certiorari, with oral arguments scheduled for February 8th, 2024. The legal case to disqualify Trump revolves around Section 3 of the 14th Amendment, which bars officials who engaged in insurrection from holding future office. Passed during the Reconstruction Era, Section 3 was originally designed to prevent Confederate leaders from regaining power. The legal question today is whether that applies to Donald Trump and his involvement in the January 6th Insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

I believe that excluding Trump from the primary ballot does set a bad precedent for our nation. I will present my contention through examining both the legal issues surrounding his disqualification, and the practical implications of such a legal decision. The case for disqualification is simply too novel in its theory, too unprecedented in its application, and too great in its practical impact on society. A decision barring Trump would deepen the sectional division and internal strife that plagues our nation.

First, there are many unresolved legal questions in the Trump case that affect the ruling of the case. Overcoming all such factors would set multiple dangerous legal precedents that greatly impact future constitutional interpretations.

## 1. Whether Donald Trump is an officer of the United States

Under Section 3 of the 14th Amendment, insurrectionists who held these enumerated offices—member of Congress, officer of the United States, member of any State legislature, or an executive or judicial officer of any State—may be barred from holding future office. Notably, however, this list does not specifically mention the President. Proponents of barring former President Trump from office contend that the presidency fits under the catch-all phrase of “officer of the United States.” While this may appear to be an issue of semantics, Steven Calabresi, a noted legal scholar and professor, has contended that the Insurrection Clause does not apply to Trump as he was not an “officer of the United States.” An expansive reading of the word “officer” enlarges the purview of the courts to the detriment of the textualist tradition.

## 2. Whether Section 3 is self-executing or requires legislative action

Congress passed Sections 14 and 15 of the Enforcement Act of 1870 during Reconstruction enabling federal prosecutors to enforce disqualification by issuing a writ of quo warranto. These provisions were repealed in 1948. Without federal legislation, it is unclear whether courts can unilaterally disqualify Trump from office.

## 3. Whether Trump must be convicted

The Supreme Court is a court of law, not a court of facts. Before the facts are ascertained about whether Trump actually “engaged in insurrection,” it is imprudent for the Supreme Court to rule directly on the matter of disqualification. Declaring Trump as an insurrectionist prior to a criminal conviction sets a bad precedent by curtailing due process for the accused.

## 4. Whether Section 3 applies to primaries

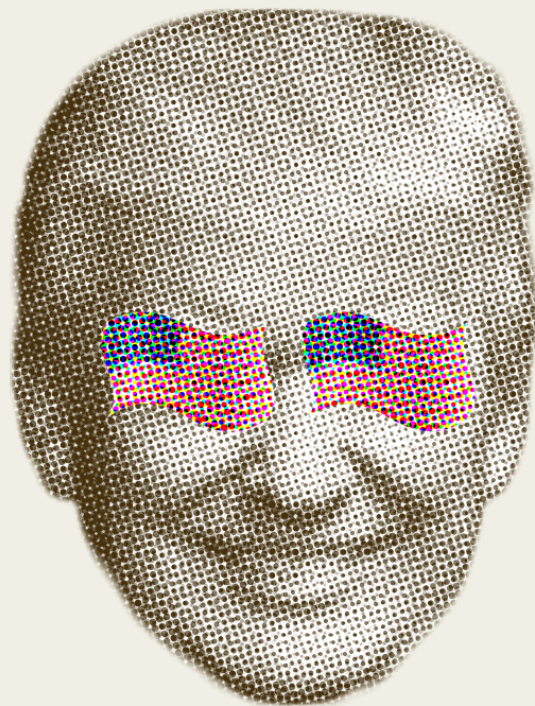
Primary ballots only determine party nomination, which does not directly affect who would take office. Expanding the purview of Section 3 to include primaries, which were not part of the political process during the Reconstruction Era, over-extends the scope of Section 3.

While the case for disqualification remains relatively strong, these legal issues must all be answered in a broad Supreme Court ruling to bar Trump from primary ballots. The contested political nature of the case, and its many legal ambiguities, makes a sweeping Supreme Court ruling a particularly imprudent decision. If the President is an officer, Section 3 is self-executing, and insurrection is defined broadly, the courts and the states would have a radically expanded ability to choose who goes on the ballot and who doesn't. This sets U.S. Constitutional Law into uncharted territory.

More significantly, barring Trump from the ballot would have immense negative impacts on American society. First, disqualifying Trump feeds directly into the MAGA narrative that Donald Trump is persecuted by the government and media, all of which are dominated by “elites.” The overwhelmingly negative coverage of Trump on mainstream media has already drawn much criticism from the right. While concerns of media bias are noteworthy, many Trump supporters have extended such issues into the realm of conspiracy theories, alleging a “deep state” which controls all governmental affairs. If the former President was to be barred from the ballot, then his followers would see this as further indication of the system working against their savior. Once this narrative is repeated among MAGA circles, it is not difficult to imagine another insurrection, or at least, heightened partisan division and weakened faith in democracy.

More importantly, the precedent established by the court would encourage partisan retaliations and potentially destroy our democratic political system. In Colorado, the State Supreme Court issued the decision, while in Maine, the Secretary of State made the unilateral call to bar Trump from the ballot. If these actions were endorsed by the Supreme Court, then it would encourage any state which opposes a political candidate to utilize the same tactic. In fact, officials in many conservative states like Texas, Florida, and Missouri have already floated the possibility of excluding Biden from the ballot on the grounds that the border crisis amounted to giving “aid or comfort to the enemies.” The ambiguity of what constitutes an insurrection would promote partisan retaliations and devastate our election system. If state officials could simply interpret Section 3 of the 14th Amendment at will, we would lose our right to elect our preferred candidates on a fair ballot.

Make no mistake: I fully believe that Donald Trump is an insurrectionist unfit to be President of the United States. However, the question at hand is not what I think, but whether courts and states who think so can act unilaterally without legislative action or criminal conviction. Allowing such actions would set a dangerous precedent, spark civil unrest, and promote partisan retaliation. To protect our democracy, the Supreme Court should unanimously reverse Colorado’s decision, and the voters should have the chance to defeat Trump through the ballot box.



# Does it set a bad precedent for Donald Trump to be excluded from state primary elections?

Con: *Francesca Howard* 

In America, we have rules for a reason: don't cut the line, don't wear socks with sandals, and definitely don't double dip. It's just common sense. These rules keep things fair and friendly. In the same spirit, excluding Donald Trump from state primaries is a simple consequence for breaching seemingly simple rules. We need to draw a clear line when it comes to the conduct we expect from our leaders. The fact is that excluding Donald Trump from state primaries does not set a bad precedent—it sets a boundary and a standard. It's a pragmatic and necessary move, and in all honesty, probably a good one for our national blood pressure. Excluding Donald Trump from state primary elections is essential because it will ensure fairness in the electoral process, maintain some semblance of the rule of law, give the Republican Party a chance to refresh its image beyond gaudy MAGA hats, and hopefully pave the way for a leader who's more about leading than tweeting - because let's face it, we've had enough of Trump's outlandish, misleading, and juvenile tweets.

First and foremost, Donald Trump's actions and unfounded claims of election fraud blatantly violate the ethical standards expected of public figures. In the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election, Trump and his legal team filed dozens of lawsuits across several states, alleging voter fraud. However, these lawsuits were dismissed and withdrawn due to insufficient evidence. In fact, numerous courts, even those with conservative judges appointed by Trump himself, found no evidence of fraud or irregularities that could have impacted the election outcome. Trump's persistent promotion and incessant tweeting of these false claims compromised voter trust. According to a poll conducted by Pew Research Center, more than 70% of Republicans expressed doubt about the fairness of the election results in the weeks following the November 2020 election. This means that more than 70% of Republican voters are misinformed, and that is nobody's fault but Trump's. His continuous dissemination of baseless conspiracy theories regarding the integrity of the electoral process chips away at the very democratic principles upon which the nation was founded. His last-ditch attempts at clutching his relevancy incite division among the populace – division we don't need. The following year, this escalated in the January 6th violent insurrection at the Capitol. During a rally held just hours before the attack, Trump repeated false claims of a stolen election and urged his supporters to 'fight like hell' to overturn the election results. Not long after, a mob of his supporters stormed the Capitol, resulting in the deaths of five people and the injury of dozens more.

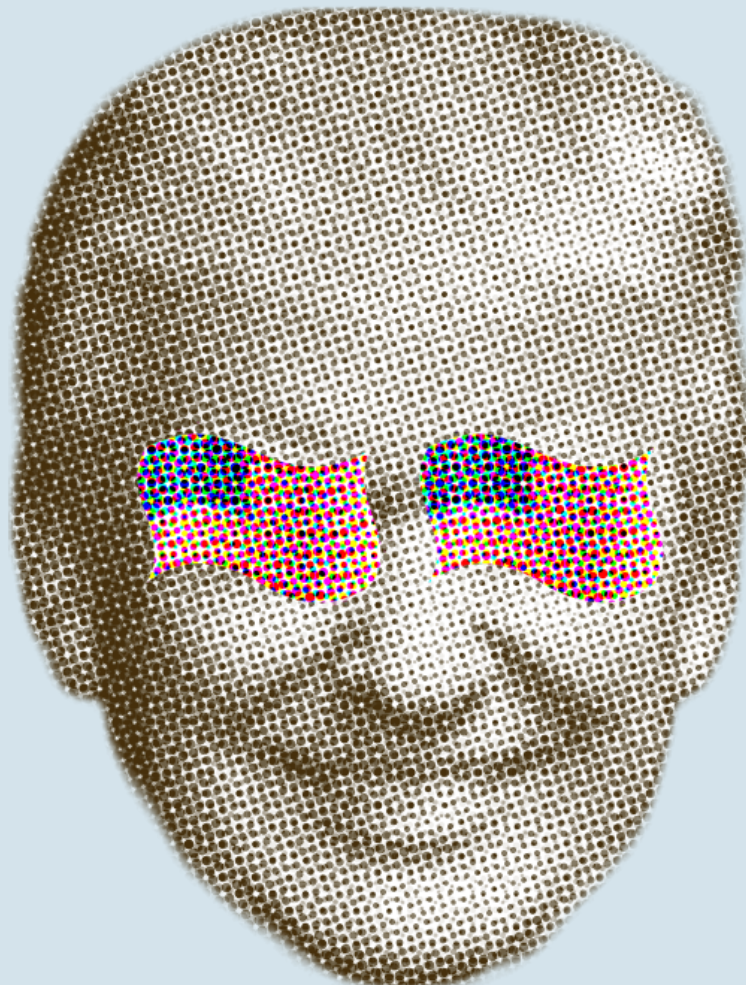
The attack also caused significant damage to the Capitol building, with estimates suggesting millions of dollars in repair costs. Trump's reckless and inflammatory behavior only shows his disregard for the rule of law. The 14th Amendment of the Constitution states that any former official who engages in insurrection against the United States government is ineligible to hold elected office. Why is Trump any exception? The 14th Amendment is "self-executing," meaning Congress doesn't have to pass a law declaring something an insurrection for it to apply. Rather, it holds for anyone who betrays their oaths to the Constitution, something Trump has indubitably done. Allowing him to participate in primaries condones this behavior. It risks repeating past atrocities. Who's to say that Trump will concede to an unfavorable result in the coming election? What's to stop another January 6th? His exclusion will assert that such conduct is unacceptable and will not be tolerated, regardless of his political influence or past position. That Americans are not sore losers. That we can accept defeat. That we have more maturity than a 7-year-old. How can we trust a leader who has failed us repeatedly—a leader who has a reputation for his instability—a leader who has not, cannot, and most definitely will not lead? It's simple: we can't. To do so would go against our very nature. Americans are all about fair play. It's in our DNA, from backyard baseball games to presidential elections. It's not just about who's playing the game; it's about how the game is played. Nobody likes a bad sport. Think of it this way: in any sport, if a player keeps breaking the rules, there comes a point where they're benched. Excluding Donald Trump from state primary elections says loud and clear that in America, no mogul, no magnate, no money-hungry cheat is above the rules. Actions have consequences, and it's about time we, and Donald Trump, start realizing that. Play by the rules, or don't play at all.

But my stance on this topic—my unwavering support for states intervening with his ability to run for office—does not rest upon my political beliefs. Let me be clear: this is not a partisan issue; it's an American issue. Donald Trump's continued candidacy is not only a detriment to opposing factions but even to the party to which he claims allegiance. The exclusion of Donald Trump from state primary elections is crucial for the viability of the Republican Party. His presence in the primaries hampers the party's evolution and appeal to a broader electorate. Numbers of young supporters of the Republican Party are dwindling due to dissatisfaction with its association with controversial figures like Trump and an increasing desire for more inclusive and forward-looking policies – and leaders. Trump's controversial and often divisive rhetoric damages the Republican's image altogether. He and the party have become one, and it's about time we separate them. By continuing to associate with him, the party risks alienating moderate and independent voters. No presidential candidate can win without independents. Trump has lost and likely will lose to Biden again if the two are head-to-head later in the race. Excluding Trump would allow the party to rebrand, gain more traction, and possibly secure a win in future elections.

On a broader note, Trump's unconventional political style is inherently divisive, exacerbating existing societal divisions and fueling polarization. His presence in the primaries perpetuates this, hindering progress toward national unity and productive political discourse. The Republican Party, by excluding him, can make politics as a whole less adversarial. They must prioritize the long-term health of American democracy and their own future. Republicans don't need Trump to run again, and in all likelihood, it would be a disservice to their agenda.

Moreover, every year Trump is president is a year someone else – someone better – is not. This is why more and more former Trump supporters are shifting their sights towards alternatives like Ron Desantis, Niki Haley, and Vivek Ramaswamy. Americans are hungry. We are sick and tired of erratic, incompetent presidents. Of spectacles when all we want is substance. Of laughingstocks in place of leaders. Of voting for the lesser of two evils when we could just vote for good. Americans are tired of Trump and his antics. We need a reawakening of national identity. We need something to unite us. Something to look towards. Something and someone. In the words of the man himself, let's "Make America Great Again," but this time, let's do it without Trump.

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# Should Claudine Gay have had to resign?

Pro: *Alexandros Antonopoulos* 

Following the Hamas-led violence against Israel and its subsequent retaliation, several Harvard student groups released a joint statement holding the Israeli regime “entirely responsible” and condemning Israel’s government for the “annihilation of Palestinians.” Two days later and on behalf of Harvard’s leadership, Harvard President Claudine Gay denounced the “terrorist atrocities perpetrated by Hamas” and reaffirmed that campus student groups did not represent the views of the university. Major donors reacted by protesting the messaging of Gay’s response and threatening to cut ties with the school. One month later, Gay (along with Liz Magill of UPenn and Sally Kornbluth of MIT) were summoned before Congress to testify on disciplinary responses to anti-semitism at their respective universities. Gay responded to questions about the possible anti-Semitism of pro-Palestinian chants by saying that Harvard embraced a “commitment to free expression even of views that are objectionable, offensive, hateful.” Facing subsequent backlash, Gay apologized in an interview with the Harvard Crimson, clarifying Harvard’s commitment to combating anti-Semitism. At around the same time, conservative activists and groups led and levied accusations of plagiarism against President Gay. Finally, on January 2, 2024, Gay resigned in the face of the plagiarism allegations and the scandal surrounding her handling of Harvard’s response to the October 7th attack.

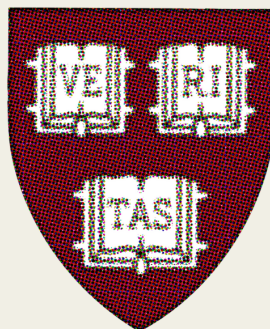
Concerns over academic integrity were not the sole focus for many vocal advocates of Gay’s resignation, and those who target her plagiarism do so with questionable intent. Just four days after Gay’s December 5th Congressional hearing, the conservative Washington Free Beacon published accusations against Gay, alleging that she had failed to properly cite and credit multiple authors in several of her academic works. It is difficult to disentangle such charged assertions from the racism conservative figures such as Bill Ackman perpetuated towards her from the beginning of her tenure (he accused Gay of plagiarism and in the same social media post, said she was hired “only to fulfill diversity requirements”). Christopher Rufo, a prominent conservative backing the plagiarism accusations, posted “SCALPED” on X (formerly Twitter) following Gay’s resignation, referencing a horrific method of execution and trophy-taking commonly committed during colonization of the Americas.

Many of Claudine Gay's critics undoubtedly raised their concerns in bad faith, weaponizing academic integrity to divest her support and cast doubt on her ability to assume her position. However, even as calls for her resignation were not motivated by the right reasons, Gay did plagiarize.

Harvard's independent investigation did not find evidence that Gay deliberately claimed the work of others as her own; however, the panel concluded that nine of the twenty-five allegations claiming that Gay "paraphrased or reproduced the language of others without quotation marks and without sufficient and clear crediting of sources" held merit. In other words, Gay's improper citations and accreditations constitute violations of academic integrity at most high-level academic institutions including Harvard (and Choate). The university's own policy states that "students must take great care to distinguish their own ideas and language from information derived from sources," and "whenever ideas or facts are derived from a student's reading and research, the sources must be properly cited." Gay failed to hold herself to the same academic standard as the students of her university, and that offense alone sufficiently justifies the call for her resignation.

Another reason that justifies Gay's firing is that she failed to adequately represent the voice of the school community, a responsibility she bore as president. It is her duty to her position and the school that she chose her words in the closest alignment with Harvard's stances—but when Gay was asked during the hearing if calls for Jewish genocide would violate the University's policies, she responded that it would depend on the context. A suitable university president should possess the tact and awareness to deliver the right message on national television. Instead, Gay's elusive responses in the face of an almost intuitive question of morality left a number of students and faculty on Harvard's campus disappointed, confused, and in fear for their safety.

Claudine Gay's resignation was necessary. Even if her opponents castigated and denounced her out of blatant racism and bigotry, she floundered leading and representing the school in a critical hour and repeatedly committed plagiarism that a normal Harvard student could be expelled for.



# Should Claudine Gay have had to resign?

Con: *Fiona Fu* 

Four days after the disastrous December 5 congressional hearing about anti-semitism on college campuses, Liz Magill, president of the University of Pennsylvania, resigned. On January 2, after weeks of resistance against calls for her resignation and amid a wave of plagiarism allegations, Claudine Gay, president of Harvard University, also resigned. While she must bear the responsibility of shouldering her comments at the hearing (saying that whether or not “calling for the genocide of Jews” violated Harvard’s rules of bullying and harassment “depended on the context”) and the inadequate crediting in much of her academic work, Dr. Gay is equally a victim of circumstance and identity politics, set up for failure from the beginning of her tenure and a scapegoat for a host of other issues.

I would’ve imagined that the House Committee on Education and the Workforce would choose a more diverse panel from different types of institutions to testify for an issue about college campuses: public and private, from different geographic areas, and better-representative of the range of higher-educational institutions in the United States. Instead, the Republican-led committee invited the presidents of three elite private institutions in the Northeast – all of whom happened to be relatively new, female presidents. In the rising issue of antisemitism on college campuses, Harvard, UPenn, and MIT are not alone, nor have they experienced the worst cases of antisemitism. Jewish students at Cooper Union were forced to shelter in a library as pro-Palestinian demonstrators banged on the walls of the building, and at least two students were assaulted at pro-Palestinian protest near Tulane University. The homogeneity of both the schools and the presidents representing them at the congressional hearing raises questions about the criteria of the committee, and what they actually wanted to get out of it. Representative Elise Stefanik’s gloating “TWO DOWN,” on X, formerly Twitter, after Dr. Gay’s resignation, as well as her comments about the deliberate phrasing of her questioning to intentionally corner the university presidents, only reveals that she and the committee were out for blood from the beginning.

In Dr. Gay’s case in particular, it is easy to forget that her comments did not represent only herself, but the entire institution of Harvard.

She did not walk into that hearing blind: William Lee, who was a member of the Harvard Corporation until 2022, had given her guidance ahead of the hearing, while crisis communications experts were allegedly sidelined in the process.

In addition, all three of the presidents had worked with the law firm WilmerHale to prepare for their testimonies. Of the three, only Sally Kornbluth of MIT, who is Jewish, still keeps her job. Dr. Gay's legalistic, indirect, and rather jarring responses are as much the responsibility of Harvard as they are her own, and it is clear that Harvard's legal team either grossly misread the situation or failed to prepare her appropriately. Only, as the face of Harvard, Dr. Gay was the one that took the fall.

But the roots for this fall were much deeper than that. From the beginning of her tenure, conservative critics have circled her as the face of the so-called "DEI bureaucracy." It is likely that she faced harsh criticism from both within and outside the institution and had her credentials doubted over and over again. Some also believe questions about her academic integrity should have been raised long before she was considered for presidency at Harvard. While I in no way wish to defend her plagiarism, I do believe the criticism she faced for it was exponentially magnified. Some academics, such as former Bucknell University president Brian Mitchell and associate professor of political science at the University of Kentucky D. Stephen Voss, whom she was actually accused of plagiarizing from, have called what she did as simply "academic sloppiness" and "wholly inconsequential." This is because what she has been accused of copying is the language and phrasing of other scholars, but not any big ideas. In addition, her work has been peer-reviewed, both in her doctoral dissertation and the subsequent articles she wrote for academic journals. While this does not excuse what she did, it illuminates that these mistakes should have been caught during the review processes of her work, long before someone like the conservative activist Christopher Rufo, who led the charge against Dr. Gay, could use it as fuel to an ever-growing media fire.

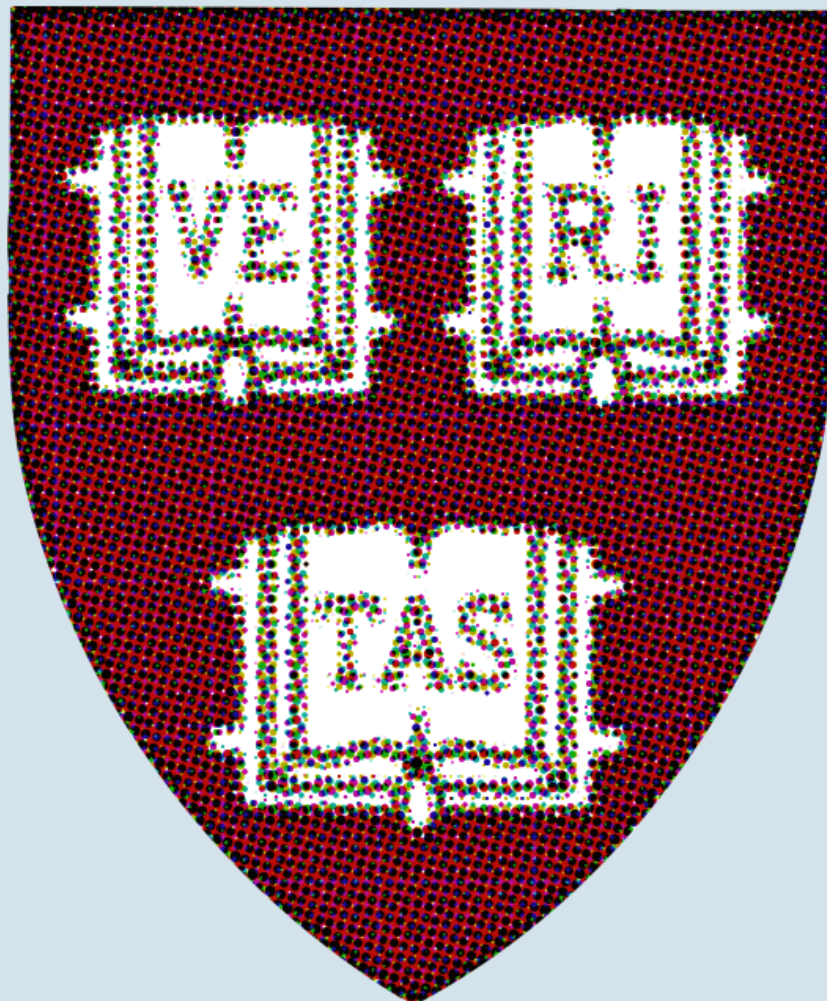
Most telling of the fact that the campaign against Dr. Gay was about more than her congressional hearing comments and plagiarism accusations was what happened in the aftermath of these events. "This is the beginning of the end for DEI in America's institutions," Mr. Rufo said after Dr. Gay's resignation. "Our robust Congressional investigation will continue to move forward to expose the rot in our most 'prestigious' higher education institutions," Ms. Stefanik echoed. The fact of the matter is that Dr. Gay's identity as a Black woman, and the first Black president of Harvard, is inextricable from her downfall. Soon after the announcement of her resignation, the term "affirmative action" began trending on X, and internet users piled onto the argument that Dr. Gay was simply a DEI or "affirmative action hire" that was never qualified for the job.

In an op-ed to The New York Times, Dr. Gay wrote that she had been “called the N-word more times than [she] cares to count,” further evidence that race played a role in the attacks against her.

Perhaps Dr. Gay wasn't qualified to be Harvard's president. Perhaps the catastrophic six-month tenure she had, the shortest in Harvard's history and marred by controversy after controversy, is evidence of her inept leadership.

But it is also undeniable that Dr. Gay was the convenient target for a greater conservative backlash in a culture war that has been waged over the past few years. Beyond the simplified facade of the events that led to her undoing is the complicated reality that there were many more factors at play in the game than anyone could have imagined, and Dr. Gay lost that game.

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# Is it time for Choate to abolish grades?

Pro: *Francesca Howard* 

If you are reading this, you are likely a student (or have been at some point) who experienced the highs and lows of academic grading: the sense of accomplishment from a well-earned 'A' and the facepalm disappointment of a suboptimal score. Sure, if you did not do well on a test, maybe you could have studied harder. Maybe that would change something—but maybe it would not. Because that moment of frustration, that muttering under your breath about how school is unfair, that feeling that grades seem arbitrary, are sentiments shared by many. There is a problem with education nowadays. A problem that chips away at the souls of students. A problem that undermines the very point of educational institutions. The problem is not how students are taught—it is how they are assessed on what they have learned. It is time we start facing the truth: Choate has a grading problem.

The first facet of grading I take issue with is simple: its failure to accurately reflect a student's competence or intellect. We tend to see someone's grade point average (GPA) as an indicator of how smart they are, but so much nuance falls outside of a single number. Students are not digits. They are not letters. They are not a test to be marked up, stamped, and stickered. They are people with a wide array of talents and skill sets, some of which our grading system does not bring to light. Students are athletes. They are musicians. They are artists. They are creative, critical-thinking, and emotionally intelligent beings. Students, believe it or not, are human. However, these qualities often go unrecognized and unnurtured in an environment that prioritizes memorization and regurgitation of information. Choate's simplistic grading system (like many of its peer schools) robs students of their individuality and humanity; it goes against the very purpose of education itself: to produce well-rounded and critical thinkers, not scoring machines.

The flaws of the system are no secret: students are catching on. Yale researchers in 2020 found that 75% of surveyed students despise school. This and the fact that schools overwhelmingly employ a standardized grading system are inextricably linked. It is no wonder students dread the day grades are released. This has nothing to do with school or Choate, but with the inaccurate assessment of the student body.

There is also no denying that grades have an immense impact on mental health. When years of hard work boil down to an average on a transcript, it is hard not to hyper-fixate on grades and equate them to self-worth and identity. Thus, when grades fluctuate, we snap. Look at the aggregate data: A 2019 report by the Pew Research Center found that 70% of 13 to 17-year-olds surveyed believe anxiety and depression are major problems among their peers. The pressure to get superb grades was identified as the leading factor contributing to these mental health issues, with 88% of the teenagers feeling either “a lot” or “some” pressure about grades. The causal relationship is clear. As a student myself, I can testify to this. Every week, I find myself consoling a friend devastated over a poor grade.

Numerous people have complained to me time and time again, saying “My grades are my future...my grades are what make me me.” But they are mistaken, and I will tell you what I told them. Our grades can more so reflect the grading patterns of our teachers rather than the comparative quality of our work. Standardizing grades is something Choate students have been calling for a while now, to no avail. For different blocks of the same-leveled courses, a paper could earn a breezy A+ in some classes and an A- in others. No matter what grading system Choate opts for, subjectivity will always exist. However, letter grades and GPA just seem to exacerbate the unfairness.

What might be worse than inaccuracy is that letter grades stamp out students’ intrinsic motivation for learning. An A is something you work towards not because you want to learn but because you have to. A student who signed up for a class they were excited about but experiences the conditioning of letter grades can end up completing assignments just to earn points. In other words, the extrinsic motivation of grades replaces genuine academic interests. Grades can further lead to academic aversion. Students shy away from intellectually stimulating challenges for fear of risking their GPA. It’s the difference between taking a course you’re interested in, writing about a topic you’re passionate about, or participating in class discussions versus playing it safe and opting out. Perhaps a student wishes to spend time on a project that they love but instead do the bare minimum to get an A because they will earn a better GPA by spreading effort out among all courses.

This is a problem. This problem is our wake-up call. Education has failed us, it is up to us to rectify these wrongs. The paradigm is shifting. More and more institutions are adopting modern, innovative, and fair approaches to grading. Whether it be through narrative evaluations or other holistic assessments, those who assume that traditional grading is the sole method for evaluation are mistaken. There are better alternatives. Choate has long been recognized as a pioneer in educational innovation.

We have always been at the forefront of progressive movements—always championing education for the sake of education itself. So when we ponder the question of whether Choate should abolish grades, the more important question should be: who are we in this story? Do we want to be the leaders or the laggards? I prefer the former. Now is the time for Choate to do what it does best: evolve. It is time to abolish grades, not only for the sake of Choate students but for the integrity of the school and its mission.

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# Is it time for Choate to abolish grades?

Con: *Harper Marsden-Uren* 

The education system is ever-evolving; constant innovations are being made to radically change the way we look at teaching and, by extension, learning. The legitimacy of grades has been called into question by many arguing for more holistic methods of assessing students. My opposition claims that grades themselves rip students of their individuality and creativity. These grandiose statements are not byproducts of an unhealthy system, but an unhealthy reflection of our perceptions of the system. Grades are not the culprit of our exacerbating mental health— what we do with them is. Grades are imperative for motivating students and holding them accountable, allowing clear and standardized communication of performance, and preparing students for work-life challenges.

My opposition opens with an analogy: the pride of receiving an ‘A’ and the disappointment of receiving an ‘F.’ She touts this disappointment as proof of fallacies of the grading system, but I implore the reader: shouldn’t receiving an ‘F’ instead be a student’s wake-up call? At one of the most well-respected educational institutions in America, students at Choate should strive for greatness instead of settling for the bare minimum. The disappointment or shame that comes with receiving a poor grade acts as a motivation to push us even further. Choate is an institution that encourages academic rigor; by abolishing grades, students will lose the motivation to perform and excel without a clear end goal. If students can pass without enthusiasm or effort, many will scrape by with the bare minimum. Even worse, those who do so and others who invest significant amounts of time to learn as much as possible will receive identical recognition on their transcript: “pass.” At a rigorous and competitive place like Choate, establishing a stratified framework for success is imperative to acknowledging students who go above and beyond. Rather than just a pass or fail system, with differentiated grades, students intrinsically choose to work harder and put in more effort. In the opposition’s utopian world, everyone is motivated by themselves and only for themselves, but this simply is not the case. Letter grades benefit the Choate student body because they act as that precise extrinsic motivator rewarding or holding students accountable for their efforts.

Secondly, grades are clear communications of one's performance from teachers to students. Of course, written evaluations are all well and good, but they are not mutually exclusive in a world with grades—in our current letter grade system (and especially for humanities classes), many teachers release marks with comments. A few sentences always accompany report cards. The quantitative and qualitative aspects work in concert with one another, and the system with comments as the sole source of feedback has obvious problems. We've all been there—a teacher's comments could be the most mellifluous, beautifully written paragraph you've ever seen. But then you ask yourself: what are they actually saying? Often, a letter grade provides a more accurate, helpful snapshot of a student's performance. It gives a sense of where the student places in a class and what they must improve upon. For instance, if someone is graded with a rubric, they can review feedback for each criterion and directly observe strengths and areas to work on. Furthermore, grades can mitigate the subjectivity of language; "good" or "ok" for different teachers might mean very different things, but an A is an A and a C is a C. Removing this easily accessible evaluation of a student's abilities leads to more difficult and ambiguous reflections of a student's performance.

Finally, grades create a neat segue into work-life challenges. In the professional sphere, workers are evaluated on their performance. Understanding letter grades prepares students for the unforgiving realities of work. As previously discussed, grades condition time management and efficiency—this translates into meeting deadlines and predetermined criteria for excellence in the future. Choate often details how they want to create well-rounded individuals who are prepared for the world beyond. If we coddle students by abolishing the dominant criteria in which we evaluate adults throughout the nation (and frankly, the world), how will Choate students thrive as they move on with their lives? To be well-equipped for the workforce is to master the game: to delegate time among tasks of different importance (completion grade vs. tests), to collaborate with individuals under the same stakes (single grade group projects), to balance dips with peaks in performance (grade-point average), and the list goes on... If we wish the best for our graduates in the long run, then grades must remain.

Despite the stress that weighs on you at this moment, I implore you, dear reader, to recognize that grades are imperative for a Choate education. They push you to be the best version of yourself, communicate what you need to focus on, and prepare you for the outside world.



# The 2023-24 Masthead

## Co-Editors-in-Chief:

Katherine Chong 25'  
Carter Linardos 24'

## Managing Editor:

Will Collasanto 24'

## Copy Editors:

Aisling Putnam 24'  
Judah Brecher 25'  
Kevin Lawlor 25'  
Harper Marsden-Uren 26'

## Graphics Editor:

Dana Chung 26'

## Layout Editor:

Nikki Primiani 27'

# Does it set a bad precedent for Donald Trump to be excluded from state primary elections?



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## The Inquiry Winter 2024

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### 1. Whether

Under Section 3 of the Insurrection Clause, which enumerates certain enumerated offices, members of Congress, and officers of any State legislature, individuals who are barred from holding those offices are specifically mentioned. The Insurrection Clause does not specifically mention the President, and Donald Trump from office contends that he is not an “officer of the United States.” While this may be an issue of semantics, Steven Calabresi, a noted legal scholar and professor, has contended that the Insurrection Clause does not apply to Trump as he was not an “officer of the United States.” An expansive reading of the word “officer” enlarges the purview of the courts to the detriment of the textualist tradition.