



The “Racial Animus” Gambit

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Among the deflections littering former Harvard President Claudine Gay’s [resignation letter](#) is the claim that major criticisms of her conduct are “fueled by racial animus.”

The controversies have made Gay, a black woman, very visible. She may have been subjected to racial attacks in emails or on somebody’s blog. I haven’t seen reports of such. It’s possible.

But her letter makes it seem as if she feels all of it, all the criticisms of her understanding of policies regarding the treatment of Jews on campus and criticisms of her own treatment of the words of others in her published work, were “fueled by racial animus.”

If only blacks alone were ever charged with ambiguity about antisemitism or committing plagiarism, the implication might be at least superficially plausible.

But it’s not.

Yesterday, I discussed the considerations that properly affect campus speech policies (“[The Resignation](#)”).

Here let me note, first, that scholars of all hues and sexes have been plausibly accused of plagiarism. Example: [historian Doris Kearns Goodwin](#), white woman. Male example: [Steven Ambrose](#).

And, second, that Harvard’s [backing and filling](#) and [own animus](#) in response to documented charges of plagiarism have converted the matter from a problem mostly for Claudine Gay personally to a problem for Harvard as an institution. By violating its own policies for dealing with the charges and by attacking the messenger, Harvard seemed to be saying that standards of scholarship like “Don’t plagiarize” don’t matter.

But they do.

This is Common Sense. I’m Paul Jacob.