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The Sweep and Force of Section Three
172 U. PA. L. REV. (forthcoming 2024)
William Baude & Michael Stokes Paulsen

Abstract: Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment forbids holding office by former office holders who then participate in insurrection or rebellion. Because of a range of misperceptions and mistaken assumptions, Section Three’s full legal consequences have not been appreciated or enforced. This article corrects those mistakes by setting forth the full sweep and force of Section Three.

First, Section Three remains an enforceable part of the Constitution, not limited to the Civil War, and not effectively repealed by nineteenth century amnesty legislation. *Second*, Section Three is self-executing, operating as an immediate disqualification from office, without the need for additional action by Congress. It can and should be enforced by every official, state or federal, who judges qualifications. *Third*, to the extent of any conflict with prior constitutional rules, Section Three repeals, supersedes, or simply satisfies them. This includes the rules against bills of attainder or ex post facto laws, the Due Process Clause, and even the free speech principles of the First Amendment. *Fourth*, Section Three covers a broad range of conduct against the authority of the constitutional order, including many instances of indirect participation or support as “aid or comfort.” It covers a broad range of former offices, including the Presidency. And in particular, it disqualifies former President Donald Trump, and potentially many others, because of their participation in the attempted overthrow of the 2020 presidential election.

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Introduction

“Section 3 has long since faded into history.”
- Eric Foner¹

Reports of Section Three’s demise are greatly exaggerated. It turns out that Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment remains of direct and dramatic relevance today—a vital, fully operative rule of constitutional law with potentially far-reaching contemporary real-world consequences. Section Three remains in legal force, and has a broad substantive sweep.

Here is what it says:

No person shall be a Senator or Representative in Congress, or elector of President and Vice President, or hold any office, civil or military, under the United States, or under any State, who, having previously taken an oath, as a member of Congress, or as an officer of the United States, or as a member of any State legislature, or as an executive or judicial officer of any State, to support the Constitution of the United States, shall have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same, or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof. But Congress may by a vote of two-thirds of each House, remove such disability.²

This section of the Fourteenth Amendment was designed to address a particular historical situation and acute problem arising in the aftermath of the Civil War.

* Harry Kalven, Jr. Professor of Law, University of Chicago Law School.

** Distinguished University Chair and Professor of Law, University of St. Thomas Law School. We thank Frank Bowman, Steve Calabresi, Josh Chafetz, John Harrison, Ed Hartnett, Daniel Hemel, Brian Kalt, Myles Lynch, Gerard Magliocca, Michael McConnell, Derek Muller, Farah Peterson, Eric Posner, Micah Quigley, Richard Re, Michael L. Rosin, Stephen Sachs, Greg Sisk, Seth Barrett Tillman, and workshop participants at the University of Chicago Law School and University of St. Thomas Law School for helpful comments on the first draft of this article, T.J. Bowman, Nicole Catlin, Connie Gong, Sarah Leitner, James Marmaduke, Matt Phillips, and Georgios Sarris for valuable research assistance, and countless others for discussions about these issues—though not all of them gave aid or comfort to our conclusions.

¹ Eric Foner, *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution* 85 (2019).

² U.S. Const. art. XIV, sec. 3.

States in the South had purported (unconstitutionally³ secede from the Union; they had purported to form the (so-called) “Confederate States of America” in rebellion against the authority of the U.S. Constitution; and they had waged a bloody four-year war of rebellion against the United States. Yet even after the rebellion had been defeated, Southern States had audaciously sent to Congress, to serve as U.S. Senators and Representatives, men who had notoriously violated previously sworn oaths to support the U.S. Constitution by subsequently engaging in or supporting secession, rebellion, and civil war against the authority of the United States (to say nothing of those now serving again in their state governments). **The former Confederates** who arrived in Washington included⁴ four Confederate generals, four colonels, several Confederate congressmen and members of Confederate state legislatures, and even the vice president of the Confederacy, Alexander Stephens.”⁴

The Congress that proposed the Fourteenth Amendment rightly regarded the situation as outrageous—not only morally, but practically. If former Confederates held the levers of federal and state government power, effective “reconstruction” of the political order and any hope of extending the full and equal protection of the laws to the newly freed former slaves would be at an end. Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment responded to that outrage, enacting a sweeping disqualification from state and federal office of those who had, as legislators or officers in the federal or state government prior to the War, sworn required oaths of loyalty to the United States Constitution and subsequently engaged in “insurrection or rebellion” against the U.S. constitutional authority or given “aid or comfort” to **its enemies**. Only a two-thirds majority vote of both houses of Congress could remove that sweeping disqualification.

Fast-forward a century and a half. The events surrounding efforts to overturn the result of the presidential election of 2020 have sparked renewed scholarly, judicial, and political interest in Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment.⁵ The core events are familiar to all—the dishonest attempts to set aside valid state election results with false claims of voter fraud; the attempted subversion of the constitutional processes for States’ selection of electors for President and Vice President; the efforts to have the Vice President unconstitutionally claim a power to refuse to count electoral votes certified and submitted by several States; the efforts of Members of Congress to assert a similar power to reject votes lawfully cast⁶ by electors; the fomenting

³ See *infra* note 231 and sources cited there.

⁴ Akhil Reed Amar, *America’s Constitution: A Biography* 377 (2005); see also Eric L. McKittrick, Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction 176-179 (1960); Allen C. Guelzo, *Reconstruction: A Concise History* 25 (2018).

⁵ The most important scholarly articles (to which we are deeply indebted) are Gerard N. Magliocca, *Amnesty and Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment*, 36 *Const. Comment.* 87 (2021); Myles S. Lynch, *Disloyalty and Disqualification: Reconstructing Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment*, 30 *William & Mary Bill of Rights J.* 153 (2021), both of which were written before the events of January 6, and Daniel J. Hemel, *Disqualifying Insurrectionists and Rebels: A How-to Guide*, *Lawfare* (Jan. 19, 2021), available at <https://www.lawfareblog.com/disqualifying-insurrectionists-and-rebels-how-guide>.

and **immediate incitement of a mob to attempt to forcibly prevent Congress's and the Vice President's counting of such lawfully cast votes—all in an attempt to prevent the defeated incumbent President, Donald Trump, from losing power in accordance with the Constitution.**

This was undoubtedly a serious assault on the American constitutional order. Not since the Civil War has there been so serious a threat to the foundations of the American constitutional republic. It takes little imagination to describe the efforts to maintain Trump in office, notwithstanding his defeat, as an attempted political coup d'état. These actions culminated in the incitement and execution of a violent uprising at the Capitol on January 6, 2021—an “insurrection” aimed at preventing Congress and the incumbent Vice President from performing their constitutional responsibilities to count the votes for President and Vice President in the 2020 election. Several of the people involved in these events—most notably the defeated President, Donald Trump—had previously taken oaths to support the Constitution. If they engaged in or gave aid and comfort to an insurrection against the constitutional government, Section Three would appear to bar them from holding office again.

As legal officials and citizens generally have begun to confront the application of Section Three, they have foundered on the most fundamental questions. How does Section Three's disqualification apply—*does* it apply—to those who planned, supported, encouraged, assisted, incited, or otherwise participated in the events surrounding the attempted overturning of the presidential election of 2020? Does Section Three's century-and-a-half old disqualification, designed for the aftermath of the Civil War, even remain legally operative in the first place? If so, what must be done to enforce Section Three? Does it require implementing legislation or criminal trials (or impeachments) before its disqualification kicks in? How does Section Three interact with the rest of the constitutional order—are its subjects protected by constitutional principles of attainder, anti-retroactivity, due process and free speech? And if Section Three *does* apply—to *what and to whom*? What actions count as having “engaged in insurrection or rebellion” against the Constitution of the United States or having “given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof”? Which officials are covered by Section Three's exclusions?

This article attempts to answer these questions. It makes four key points (or clusters of points):

First. Section Three remains legally operative. It is no less part of the Constitution than the other provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment. It is not a dead letter. The Constitution is a binding, authoritative written text, not a collection of specific historical purposes and intentions. Where the text applies, it applies. Its legal force is not limited to the immediate problem or purpose that prompted its enactment. Section Three is not limited to the circumstances of the Civil War and Reconstruction, even if the meaning of its terms may be illuminated by that experience and history.

Nor has Section Three somehow been “repealed” by Congress’s two major nineteenth-century statutes granting amnesty to those covered by Section Three. This is not because it would be *impossible* for a constitutional provision to expire by its terms after a period of time, or upon the occurrence of a particular event, or upon action taken by future actors. Article I, Section 9, for example, created a constitutional prohibition of most congressional regulation of the international slave trade for a period of twenty years—but its prohibition then vanished in 1808. Section Three, however, does not work that way. It imposes a general, prospective, rule of disqualification, which Congress may remove by two-thirds vote of both houses only once it has occurred. Section Three is prospective; Congressional amnesty is retrospective.

Second. Section Three is legally self-executing. That is, Section Three’s disqualification is constitutionally automatic whenever its terms are satisfied. Section Three requires no legislation or adjudication to be legally effective. It is enacted by the enactment of the Fourteenth Amendment. Its disqualification, where triggered, just *is*. It follows that Section Three’s disqualification may and should be followed and carried out by all whose duties are affected by it. In many cases, Section Three will give rise to **justiciable** controversies in the courts. In others it will be enforceable by state and federal officials. But no prior judicial decision, and no implementing legislation, is required for Section Three to be carried out by officials sworn to uphold the Constitution whose duties present the occasion for applying Section Three’s commands. Section Three is ready for use.

While Section Three’s requirements *could* be made the subject of enforcement legislation by Congress, under its general power under Section Five of the Fourteenth Amendment “to enforce” the provisions of the amendment, no such legislation is constitutionally *required* as a prerequisite to Section Three doing what Section Three itself does. Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase’s circuit court opinion to the contrary, *In re Griffin*,⁶ is simply wrong on this point—full of sleight of hand, motivated reasoning, and self-defeating maneuvers—as we will explain at length. *In re Griffin* should be hooted down the pages of history, purged from our constitutional understanding of Section Three.

Third. Section Three supersedes (or satisfies) earlier-enacted constitutional provisions to the extent of any supposed conflict between them. Section Three, at the time it was adopted as part of the Constitution, imposed a disqualification from office based on an individual’s past conduct. Even if imposition of such a disability might otherwise, if done by statute, have been a forbidden Ex Post Facto law or Bill of Attainder, Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment constitutionally supersedes any prior provision conflicting with its terms.

⁶ 11 F. Cas. 7, 22-27 (C.C.D. Va. 1869) (No. 5,815).

This principle extends to a more unsettling point. To the extent Section Three's disqualification for having "engaged in insurrection or rebellion" or giving "aid or comfort" to "the enemies" might turn out to be in tension with the First Amendment's protection of freedom of speech, Section Three supersedes the First Amendment to the extent of any true conflict. To be sure, the proper construction of Section Three's terms ("insurrection," "rebellion," "aid or comfort," "enemies") will leave much speech and advocacy completely free. But in the cases where it does not, the terms of Section Three, not the constructions of the First Amendment, decide where the line is.

This leads to the article's fourth and final group of points:

Fourth. Section Three's disqualification is sweeping in its terms. It disqualifies from future office-holding persons who "*engaged in*"—an expansive and encompassing term connoting many forms of participation in or active support of—a broad swath of activity covered by the terms "*insurrection or rebellion*" or the giving of "*aid or comfort*" to "*enemies*" of the nation or its constitutional order. It applies to a broad swath of civilian, military, and legislative office holders who swore oaths of fidelity to the Constitution, and it disqualifies such persons from holding in the future any of an extraordinarily broad swath of public offices. Taking Section Three seriously, on its own terms, means taking seriously the enormous sweep of the disqualification it creates. And, we will argue, taking Section Three seriously means that its constitutional disqualifications from future state and federal officeholding extend to participants in the attempted overturning of the presidential election of 2020, including former President Donald Trump and others. The substantive terms of Section Three's prohibition are not themselves difficult or inscrutable (even if there might be questions of application at the outer edges of the text's meaning). But they are potentially breathtaking in their straightforward consequences.

In what follows, we develop each of these four core points at length.

Section Three remains a valid, prospective, enforceable, self-executing, broad, and relevant part of our Constitution. It falls to us to fulfill our duties to it. These include the duties of legislative bodies, state and federal election officials, executive officers, and perhaps others to take up the Constitution, including Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment, and wield it faithfully and forcefully against its enemies. Taking Section Three seriously means excluding from present or future office those who sought to subvert lawful government authority under the Constitution in the aftermath of the 2020 election by engaging in *insurrection or rebellion* or giving aid or comfort to *enemies of* the lawful constitutional order.

I. Section Three is Legally Operative Today

A. The Generality and Presumptive Perpetuity of Constitutional Language

The first step in our argument is an easy one, but perhaps not immediately obvious to everyone: Section Three’s disqualification remains an operative rule of the Constitution. The reason this might not be obvious, at least to the uninitiated, is that Section Three plainly was designed for a specific historical situation—the circumstances of Reconstruction following the end of the Civil War. The implication, in the eyes of some, might be that that historical situation limits the scope of the provision’s operation. We think any such inference badly mistaken. Section Three was prompted by historical circumstances, but that does not in any way detract from its enduring force.

To be sure, Section Three clearly bears the hallmarks of its historical context. It is, for one thing, a *radical* rule. The sheer sweep of the disqualification from offices that it imposed on former Southern officeholders-turned-rebels was dramatic. Its operation was hugely disruptive of antebellum patterns of elite political leadership, apparently indifferent to inconvenience, and seemingly rather *punitive* in its consequences. Section Three is harsh. It is categorical. It is insistent. It seems to have been deliberately designed to turn the prior Southern political order upside down. As Eric Foner puts it, “Section 3 aimed to promote a sweeping transformation of Southern public life.”⁷

In these respects, the disqualification reflects and embodies the distinctive political impulses of the so-called Radical Republican Congress that proposed the Fourteenth Amendment in 1866. If its disqualification had radical policy consequences for the South, so be it.⁸ It was more important to strip insurrectionists and rebels of governing power completely, to remake Southern political society thoroughly, and to prevent Southern backsliding from the full consequences of Union victory entirely, than to be concerned about such things as seeming harshness, impracticality, or disruptiveness. Section Three is very much a creation and creature of its day.

Yet it is (or should be) basic constitutional law that it is the *enduring text* of the Constitution that supplies the governing rule, not the ostensible “purpose” or specific historical situation for which the text was written. Constitutional provisions, written into our fundamental law, live beyond the circumstances that prompted their adoption. And many such constitutional provisions are written in broad, or general, terms that obviously extend beyond the specific situation or situations that led to their enactment. Sometimes this is by design: the text’s drafters wrote a general rule, applicable to a broad class of circumstances, as a more general, “neutral,” way of addressing a class of situations of which the specific problem motivating the writing of the text might be just one instance. The thinking might be that if the principle giving rise to the text is a correct one, it should be correct in like circumstances, not just the one situation that provoked the rule’s adoption. And sometimes a text’s breadth and

⁷ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction, 1863-1877*, at 260 (1988).

⁸ Mark Graber, *Punish Treason, Reward Loyalty: The Forgotten Fourteenth Amendment*, Volume 1 (2023, University Press of Kansas).

generality might *not* reflect conscious design: the text’s drafters wrote a general rule that unintentionally went further than the problem they had in mind. Put colloquially, the text sometimes “overshoots” its drafters’ intended purposes. (A text might undershoot the problem its framers had in mind to address, too—or achieve only part of its intended purpose, perhaps because of political compromise.)

The reason does not really matter. It is the *rule* as drafted and enacted in the written text that counts, whether it goes further than the purposes supposed to have inspired its adoption, or even whether it falls short of fully achieving those purposes. While evidence of intention, usage, purpose, and political context can assist in *ascertaining* the meaning of the enactment, it is that objective meaning that constitutes the law, not the ostensible purposes or motivations that supposedly lay behind it. This is “originalism,” our system’s basic method for interpreting the Constitution and its amendments.⁹

Consider, for example, Section One of the same Fourteenth Amendment. As a matter of historical purpose, the specific mischief the framers of Section One had in mind was the enactment of “Black Codes” in Southern States that discriminated against the newly freed former slaves. But the words chosen by the drafters to enact the rule embodied in the text command, in general terms, that no state shall abridge the “privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States” nor deny to any “person” within its jurisdiction the “equal protection of the laws”—rules not cast in racial terms at all, let alone limited to the immediate situation of former enslaved persons. The rules enacted apply to all persons irrespective of race. So it was entirely plausible for lawyers to argue that Section One also barred the same kind of discrimination against women citizens that it barred against black citizens. It doesn’t matter that the draftsmen of the amendment might not have had women “in mind” if women are covered by the meaning of the words they actually wrote and ratified.¹⁰ Similarly, it was entirely plausible to argue that Section One went so far as to ban racially segregated schools.¹¹ The answers to each of these questions turn on the objective, original

⁹ See Vasan Kesavan & Michael Stokes Paulsen, *The Interpretive Force of the Constitution’s Secret Drafting History*, 91 *Geo. L. J.* 1113, 1124-1148 (2004); Michael Stokes Paulsen, *Does the Constitution Prescribe Rules for Its Own Interpretation?* 103 *Nw. U. L. Rev.* 857, 872-883 (2009); William Baude & Stephen Sachs, *The Misunderstood Eleventh Amendment*, 169 *U. Pa. L. Rev.* 609, 624-625 (2021); William Baude & Stephen Sachs, *Grounding Originalism*, 113 *Nw. U. L. Rev.* 1455, 1456-1460 (2019). For purposes of this article, we can bracket any differences in emphasis between Paulsen’s objective-original-meaning originalism and Baude’s original-law originalism.

¹⁰ We have used such examples before. Paulsen, *Rules for Its Own*, *supra* note 9, at 901-902; Michael Stokes Paulsen, *The Text, the Whole Text, and Nothing but the Text, So Help Me God: Un-Writing Amar’s Unwritten Constitution*, 81 *U. Chi. L. Rev.* 1385, 1421 n. 68 (2014); William Baude, Jud Campbell, & Stephen Sachs, *General Law and the Fourteenth Amendment*, 76 *Stan. L. Rev.* at 67-68 (forthcoming 2024).

¹¹ We have used this example before, too. Michael Stokes Paulsen, *Lemon Is Dead*, 43 *Case W. Res. L. Rev.* 795, 839-840 (1993); William Baude, *Is Originalism Our Law?*, 115 *Colum. L. Rev.* 2349, 2380-2381 (2015). See also Baude, Campbell, & Sachs, *supra* note 10, at 66.

meaning of “privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States” and “equal protection of the laws,” not whether the 1866 Congress and subsequent ratifiers had thought through the possible radical implications of their own work. If the *meaning* of the Fourteenth Amendment’s terms forbade racially discriminatory classifications of any and all kinds, as a matter of the rules of late-1860s language and usage, it doesn’t matter one way or the other whether it was intended or expected that governments could enforce certain types of racial discrimination, like enforced racial segregation. The rule as adopted might overshoot the purposes, expectations, or desires of those who voted for it. But the rule is the rule; the text’s meaning is the text’s meaning.

Thus, if the framers and ratifiers of the Fourteenth Amendment enacted a *general rule* in Section Three—a disqualification from future officeholding keyed to having taken an oath to the Constitution and subsequently engaging in insurrection or rebellion against the United States—rather than a provision that by its terms applied only to the case of former Civil War secessionists and Confederate officials and officers,¹² it is the general rule that matters. That the rule had a particular political purpose behind it as a matter of history might be an aid to correct interpretation of the language supplying that rule. (We will make such an argument below, concerning the meaning, in context, of the phrase “insurrection or rebellion.”)¹³ But in the end the question is what rule was enacted. If Section Three’s rule fell short somehow, missing some folks its drafters might have meant to ensnare, those persons are not ensnared. The text might (or might not) be thought deficient in this regard—as having failed to fulfill its full purpose. But the text means what it says. Similarly, if the rule supplied by the objective meaning of the text runs right on past the specific historical purpose for which it was enacted and embraces as well *other* insurrectionists, rebels, and aiders and comforters of enemies, that rule must be given full legal effect as part of the Constitution. The rule’s overbreadth in terms of its perceived purpose, and even its inconvenience as a consequence of such overbreadth, are beside the point.¹⁴

¹² Indeed, for what it is worth, the legislative history of Section Three confirms that this is what the authors of the Fourteenth Amendment did. Earlier drafts had limited the Section’s application to the “late insurrection.” Later versions dropped this limitation and generalized Section Three’s application to “insurrection” and “rebellion.” See Cong. Globe, 39th Cong., 1st Sess., at 2767-68, 2770 2869, 2921; see also Mark A. Graber, *Rewarding Loyalty (?) and Punishing Treason Through Disenfranchisement and Bans on Officeholding: Section 3*, at 3-4 (unpublished chapter, forthcoming in *The Forgotten Fourteenth Amendment*, Volume 2, University Press of Kansas) (documenting this development).

¹³ *Infra* Part IV.A.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Michael Stokes Paulsen, *Is Lloyd Bentsen Unconstitutional?* 46 *Stanford L. Rev.* 907, 908-909 (1994) (making this point about the disqualification of some senators and representatives from eligibility for certain appointed offices posed by the Emoluments Clause of Article I, § 6, cl. 2); William Baude, *The 2023 Scalia Lecture: Beyond Textualism?*, 46 *Harv. J. L. & Pub. Pol’y* (forthcoming 2023) (“Sometimes rules go beyond their reasons; a rule can be overbroad compared to the reasons for enacting it. And sometimes rules are underbroad; a rule cannot quite do all the things that you might want to do given the reasons for enacting the rule. Textualism recognizes that when the judge enforces the law, the law’s rule might sometimes be different from what the people who enacted the law would have wanted had they thought about the situation.”). For an extended discussion of the abuse of arguments

Finally, we take it as almost too obvious to require stating that constitutional provisions have indefinite life unless and until repealed or amended by subsequent constitutional enactments. The fact that an unrepealed, unamended provision of law is “old” does not in any way weaken its legal force. The First Amendment is old too, as is the entire original Constitution. But both remain in force. This is true even if the purpose for which a constitutional provision was originally written has ceased to be relevant, or even if the constitutional provision at issue might be thought in today’s society to be something of an anachronism.¹⁵ There are, of course, some self-identified living constitutionalists who deny this point—who think that old texts have a legal shelf life and lose their potency over time, as “the interest in sovereignty fades.”¹⁶ But in our view, this just shows what is wrong with such living constitutionalism.¹⁷ The Constitution is not a spice cabinet.

All of this might seem to belabor the obvious. Few interpreters of Section Three explicitly deny that it continues to govern new insurrections and rebellions.¹⁸ But sometimes we wonder if this kind of denial is sneaking in to people’s intuitions—subtly infecting and distorting the actual interpretation of Section Three. So let us start from the right first principles: Section Three remains constitutionally fully in force, as alive as the day it was enacted.

B. Has Congress Removed the Disability for Everyone for All Time? (And Could It Do So If It Wanted To?)

But what about this? The second sentence of Section Three provides that Congress “may by vote of two-thirds of each House, remove such disability.”¹⁹ Just as the first sentence’s disqualification is not limited specifically to the Civil War, neither is Congress’s power to grant amnesty. Thus, Congress can, by the requisite vote, remove any disqualification that exists by virtue of the operation of Section Three. But just exactly how far does that power reach? Could Congress, by two-thirds majorities, essentially extinguish the legally operative effect of Section Three *entirely*, by removing the disability imposed by Section Three generally, prospectively, and universally? Put

from inconvenience, see *infra* Part II.C.2.a (discussing Chief Justice Chase’s appalling opinion in *Griffin’s Case*).

¹⁵ Michael Stokes Paulsen, *Dirty Harry and the Real Constitution*, 64 U. Chi. L. Rev. 1457, 1486-1490 (1997) (discussing privilege against self-incrimination).

¹⁶ David A. Strauss, *The Supreme Court, 2014 Term—Foreword: Does the Constitution Mean What It Says?*, 129 Harv. L. Rev. 1, 58 (2015); see also Adam M. Samaha, *Originalism’s Expiration Date*, 30 Cardozo L. Rev. 1295 (2008).

¹⁷ See Baude & Sachs, *Grounding*, *supra* note 9, at 1487 (responding to Strauss).

¹⁸ For a rare example, see an argument made and rejected by the House during the exclusion of Victor Berger. 6 Clarence Cannon, *Cannon’s Precedents of the House of Representatives* 55 (1935) (“It was also seriously contended by counsel that section 3 of the fourteenth amendment was an outgrowth of the Civil War and that such a provision cannot possibly apply to the present case”).

¹⁹ U.S. Const. amdt. XIV, sec. 3.

more vividly: Can Congress, by two-thirds vote of each house, essentially “explode” Section Three—render it inoperative in the future, for all time?

These questions turn out not to be completely hypothetical. In two statutes enacted in the late nineteenth century, Congress might arguably have done this. One statute (from 1872) removed “from all persons whomsoever”—except designated categories of individuals—all “political disabilities imposed” by Section Three.²⁰ Another (from 1898) further removed “the disability imposed by section three of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States heretofore incurred.”²¹ And indeed, in a recent case (brought by then-Representative Madison Cawthorn) a federal judge relied on these statutes to conclude that Section Three was now legally dead.²² Is that right? Do these statutes—*can* these statutes—grant amnesty to all insurrectionists, past, present *and future*?²³

No. While the argument is not entirely bonkers, it does not withstand more serious scrutiny. It is wrong on both statutory and constitutional grounds. Consider the statutes first. Neither one purports to rescind Section Three’s operative rule for all time. They do not pretend to explode the first sentence of the constitutional provision.

Begin with the 1872 act. In 1872, after a period of case-by-case consideration of amnesty requests, Congress, as mentioned above, enacted a general statute removing disqualification from a broad description of persons embraced by Section Three’s prohibition. As Professor Magliocca recounts, the statute reflected a mixture of motives: genuine mercy and magnanimity; the practical consequences of Section Three in the South; the burdens and biases of case-by-case consideration of private bills; the politics of a presidential election year; and the general but regrettable retreat from aggressive Congressional Reconstruction.²⁴ But what is most important is what it says. The statute reads, in full:

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled (two-thirds of each house concurring therein), That all political disabilities imposed by the third section of the fourteenth article of amendments of the Constitution of the United States are hereby removed from all persons whomsoever, except Senators and Representatives of the thirty-sixth and thirty-

²⁰ Act of May 22, 1872, ch. 193, 17 Stat. 142.

²¹ Act of June 6, 1898, ch. 389, 30 Stat. 432.

²² Cawthorn v. Circosta, 590 F. Supp. 3d 873, 889-892 (E.D. N.C. 2022) rev’d sub nom **Cawthorn v. Amalfi**, 35 F. 4th 245 (4th Cir. 2022). This argument, too, was made and rejected by the House during the exclusion of Victor Berger. 6 **Cannon**, supra note 18, at 55.

²³ The power in general of Congress by two-thirds vote of each House to remove Section Three’s disability and the history of its exercise are the central themes of Professor Gerard Magliocca’s excellent article, cited supra note 5.

²⁴ See generally Magliocca, *Amnesty*, supra note 5, at 112-120.

seventh Congresses, officers in the judicial, military, and naval service of the United States, heads of departments, and foreign ministers of the United States.²⁵

The key words are “imposed” and “[hereby] removed.” The words of the 1872 statute are used in the past tense: the statute *removed* disqualifications *imposed* by the Fourteenth Amendment—that is, disabilities that had already become legally effective. That is simply the natural reading, and the natural implication, of the language employed.

Indeed, this is almost exactly what the Fourth Circuit recently said in reversing the district court’s decision in the *Cawthorn* case: Congress in 1872 employed “the past-tense version” of the verb “impose,” thus “indicating its intent to lift only those disabilities that had by then been ‘imposed.’”²⁶ Moreover, the Fourth Circuit continued: “[t]he operative clause’s principal verb—‘removed’—reinforces this conclusion. In the mid-nineteenth century, as today, that word generally connoted taking away something that already exists rather than forestalling something yet to come.”²⁷

By contrast, the district court had faulted Congress for not being more explicit: Congress “could have limited the Act to remove Section 3’s disabilities from ‘persons currently subject to the disabilities’ or ‘persons against whom the disabilities were lodged’ at the time (i.e., the ‘Confederates’) but did not do so.”²⁸ Therefore, the district court concluded, by the “plain language of Section 3 and the 1872 Act, Congress removed *all* of Section 3’s disabilities from *all* persons whomsoever who were not explicitly excepted.”²⁹ With all due respect, the district court appears to have been simply hoodwinked by the (for lack of a better word) *feel* of the “all persons whomsoever” language and completely missed the other language that made clear the statute’s past tense.

What about the 1898 statute? Does it yield a different result? On the cusp of the Spanish-American War, at a moment of seeming national unity and perhaps a desire to put aside old sectional grievances (and, one might add more cynically, at a time of rising Jim Crow sentiment)³⁰—Congress enacted another general disqualification-removal statute. This one removed the disqualification for *everybody*, without exception. Its language is even more laconic:

²⁵ Act of May 22, 1872, ch. 193, 17 Stat. 142.

²⁶ *Cawthorn v. Amalfi*, 35 F. 4th 245, 258 (4th Cir. 2022).

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Cawthorn v. Circosta*, 590 F. Supp. 3d 873, 891 (E.D. N.C. 2022) rev’d sub nom *Carthorn v. Amalfi*, 35 F. 4th 245 (4th Cir. 2022).

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ See, e.g., *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896); *Cummings v. Richmond County Bd. of Ed.* 175 U.S. 528 (1899). See also Michael Stokes Paulsen & Luke Paulsen, *The Constitution: An Introduction* 195-201 (2015).

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the disability imposed by section three of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States heretofore incurred is hereby removed.*³¹

In one sense, that's about as categorical, across-the-board a disqualification-removal as one can imagine: *the disability imposed by section three is hereby removed*. Period. No exceptions. But here it is also even clearer that the 1898 act is backward-looking. Like the 1872 act, the 1898 act uses past-tense language: a disability (already) "imposed" is now being "removed" from its prior legal existence. What's more, the 1898 **act** says that the Section Three disqualification being removed was one "*heretofore incurred*." That is unmistakably backward-looking, past-occurrence language.

What might otherwise—that is, but for the clarity of the "heretofore incurred" language—give the 1898 act the *feel* of a now-and-ever-shalt-be removal, eliminating all future Section Three disqualification as well as any and all extant ones, is the Act's reference to "*the disability*" imposed by Section Three. This singular reference might be taken to suggest that Section Three's disqualification was thought a one-time-only, single-shot, Civil War era occurrence.³² If Section Three was good for one rebellion only, then repealing it in the past tense repeals all that there is. But of course, as we have argued, Section Three is not limited to one rebellion only, and so far as we can tell even the Fifty-fifth Congress did not think that it was³³ (nor would it matter if they did).

In any event, though these statutes do not even purport to sunset Section Three for the future, they do prompt us to consider the interesting question of Congress's constitutional power: *What if they did* purport to sunset Section Three for the future? Is Congress's constitutional power to remove Section Three's disqualification general and prospective, letting it remove Section Three's disqualification once and for all, including for future situations? We think not.

To be clear, we don't think there's anything inherently unthinkable or absurd about the idea of an "exploding" or otherwise defeasible constitutional provision. Legal drafters might sometimes want to provide for an expiration event or expiration

³¹ Act of June 6, 1898, ch. 389, 30 Stat. 432.

³² For instance, the D.C. Circuit's recess-appointments opinion in *Noel Canning v. NLRB*, 705 F.3d 490, 500 (D.C. Cir. 2013) *aff'd* only on alternate grounds, 134 S.Ct. 2550 (2014), leaned heavily on "this difference between the word choice 'recess' and 'the Recess,'" arguing that "[a]s a matter of cold, unadorned logic, it makes no sense to [say] that when the Framers said 'the Recess,' what they really meant was 'a recess.' This is not an insignificant distinction. In the end it makes all the difference." *Id.* But a majority of the Supreme Court did not share this view of the text. *NLRB v. Noel Canning*, 134 S.Ct. 2550, 2561 (2014).

³³ For the brief legislative history of the 1898 act, see 31 Cong. Rec. 5367-5419 (1898).

date, even in an enduring Constitution. Article I's Slave Importation Clause, protecting the international slave trade, exploded after twenty years.³⁴ So too the initial allocation of representatives to states is written in to the text of the Constitution, even though it was then exploded by the subsequent census.³⁵ Other provisions of the Constitution set baseline rules that Congress has power to modify. Article I, section 4 does that with respect to state legislative power over congressional elections: "Congress may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations."³⁶ Article III, section 2 does that with respect to the Supreme Court's appellate jurisdiction, setting a default rule subject to "such Exceptions, and under such Regulations as the Congress shall make."³⁷ The Twentieth Amendment, in Section 2, sets a default date of Congress's annual meeting.³⁸

There's no reason why the framers of the Fourteenth Amendment could not have similarly drafted Section Three to provide for the provision's own extinction after a supermajority vote of Congress.³⁹ But that is simply not what Section Three says. The second sentence of Section Three is not a grant of power to explode, or amend, the *content of the rule* stated in the first sentence. It is a grant of power to remove the *consequences of the rule's operation*.

To see this, break down Section Three into its component parts: Section Three has two sentences. The first one describes at length the disqualification for those who have taken a covered oath and engaged in insurrection or related conduct. Of course, **those two things must actually *have happened* for the rule of Section Three's first sentence to be triggered—for a disqualification to have come into legal effect.**

³⁴ U.S. Const. art. I, §9, cl. 1. ("The Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the Year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a Tax or duty may be imposed on such Importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each Person.") For a scathing critique of the substance and purpose of this proviso, see, e.g., Paulsen & Paulsen, *supra* note 30, at 81-83.

³⁵ U.S. Const. art. I, § 2, cl.3.

³⁶ U.S. Const. art. I, § 4.

³⁷ U.S. Const. art. III, § 2, cl. 2.

³⁸ U.S. Const. amend. XX, §2.

³⁹ We thus part ways with Professor Magliocca here. Magliocca argues (in addition to versions of the points we make above) that Section Three's second sentence cannot be read as authorizing Congress to remove future disabilities because this "would mean that Congress basically repealed Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1872. But Congress cannot repeal a part of the Constitution by itself: only a constitutional amendment can do that." Gerard N. Magliocca, *The January 6th Insurrectionists Do Not Have Amnesty*, JURIST – Academic Commentary, April 13, 2022, <https://www.jurist.org/commentary/2022/04/gerard-magliocca-january-6-insurrectionists/>. See also *Greene v. Raffensperger*, 599 F. Supp. 3d 1283, 1314 (N.D. Ga. 2022) ("Congress has no power whatever to repeal a provision of the Constitution by a mere **statute**") (quoting 6 **Cannon**, *supra* note **18**, at **55**).

This strikes us as not quite right: *If* Section Three *in fact* authorized prospective removal of disqualifications arising from future acts of insurrection, a statute doing so would not be *repealing* a constitutional provision but exercising a power *conferred by* that constitutional provision—a power to terminate the provision's ongoing legal effect.

^xThe second sentence (the “But” sentence) then gives Congress the power to “remove such disability.” (“*But Congress may by a vote of two-thirds of each House, remove such disability.*”) The “But” sentence explicitly cross-references the first. Thus, the most natural reading of the two sentences in relation to each other is that the second sentence confers an exceptions power that only comes into existence when the conditions specified in the first sentence have occurred. And to belabor the point a moment further, the word “Remove” means (and meant at the time, according to 1864 dictionaries) to displace or take away something that already exists.⁴⁰ This confirms that Congress’s removal power therefore only comes into being when a legal disqualification has vested by virtue of the operation of Section Three’s first sentence.

Section Three’s first sentence is written as a general and prospective rule, not limited to the specific instance of the Civil War. Section Three’s second sentence is written as a continuing power to grant relief from disabilities *already imposed* by the operation of the first sentence. The power to remove an extant legal disability is not a power to rescind the legal rule that creates that disability. Thus, not only has Congress never purported to sunset Section Three, it lacks the power to do so by Section Three’s own terms.

* * *

All of this is, we submit, basic. But it is also foundational. Section Three remains legally operative as part of the U.S. Constitution. Its rule of disqualification is general, not limited to the Civil War era. It states a rule of law embodied in the written constitutional text as permanent fundamental law. It possesses prospective force and applies to new situations: wherever the rule applies, the rule applies. And while Congress comprehensively relieved insurrectionists of the disability of disqualifications incurred prior to 1898, it did not (and could not) erase Section Three from the Constitution. Section Three remains *in force*.

Is anything more required, then, before this provision of the Constitution can (and must) be given effect by U.S. political actors whose powers and duties are such as to call for application of Section Three as a rule of law? Put somewhat differently: Is Section Three a self-executing rule of constitutional law, complete in itself? Or does Section Three require implementing legislation by Congress or some other further legal or administrative action before it has legal force? We take up that question next.

⁴⁰ Dr. Webster’s Complete Dictionary of the English Language 1116 (Chauncy A. Goodrich and Noah Porter, eds. 1864) (defining “remove” as “To cause to change place; to move away from the position occupied; to displace”) (quoted in *Cawthorn v. Amalfi*, 35 F. 4th 245, 258 (4th Cir. 2022)).

II. Section Three is Legally Self-Executing

Our second point is colossally important—a major sticking point for some. But it is a point we think should be obvious: *Section Three is self-executing*. That is, its disqualifications from office are constitutionally automatic whenever its conditions for disqualification are met. Nothing more needs to be done in order for Section Three’s prohibitions to be legally effective. Section Three requires no implementing legislation by Congress. Its commands are enacted into law by the enactment of the Fourteenth Amendment. Where Section Three’s legal rule of constitutional disqualification is satisfied, an affected prospective officeholder *is* disqualified. Automatically. Legally.

In the years immediately after the Fourteenth Amendment was adopted this seemingly obvious reading of Section Three was deemed inconvenient, rejected in the highest quarters, and has since faded from view. We thus give the point considerable attention here. Our analysis here is organized in three steps. First, we take Section Three itself, and explain why it has direct legal effect. Second, we discuss how this legal effect can and must be recognized by all persons and institutions who have the occasion to apply it in the performance of their duties—election officials, state and federal administrators, legislatures, courts. Third, we consider at some length the leading counterargument to our view: the 1869 opinion written by Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase as a circuit court judge in *Griffin’s Case*. Even if the result in that case is defensible—which is far from clear, and raises grave **separation-of-powers** problems of its own—its argument against self-execution is so wrong as to prove our case. Section Three is legally self-executing as operative constitutional law.

A. Section Three as Automatic Legal Disqualification

Before we consider Section Three itself, consider the Constitution as a whole. Though too many constitutional law teachers and casebooks begin their study of the Constitution with questions of judicial review, and cases like *Marbury*,⁴¹ in doing so they put the cart before the horse. The horse is the Constitution, which is itself the “supreme law of the land.”⁴² Our system is one of constitutional supremacy, not judicial supremacy or legislative supremacy. As a general matter, this means that it is the Constitution which states the law, and it is the job of government officials to apply it, not the other way around.

This general truth is no less true of Section Three. Section Three’s language is language of automatic legal effect: “*No person shall be*” directly enacts the officeholding bar it describes where its rule is satisfied. It lays down a rule by saying what shall

⁴¹ But not ours! See Paulsen, McConnell, Bray and Baude, *The Constitution of the United States* (5th ed. 2022).

⁴² U.S. Const. art. VI.

be.⁴³ It does not *grant a power* to Congress (or any other body) to enact or effectuate a rule of disqualification. It enacts the rule itself. Section Three directly adopts a constitutional rule of disqualification from office.

This should be no surprise, as the same thing is true of the Constitution's other rules of disqualification from office. A person who has not attained to the age of thirty-five is not qualified to be President of the United States. This disqualification is automatic. The Constitution's rule is self-executing. "*No person . . . shall be eligible*" to be President who does not satisfy the age requirement.⁴⁴ The disqualification requires no further legislation or other action, by anybody, to be operative. The disqualification simply *is*. So too for Article II's citizenship and length-of-residency eligibility prerequisites for the office of President. And so too for the constitutional qualifications—age, citizenship, state inhabitancy—for members of the House and Senate: "*No Person shall be*" a Representative who does not meet Article I, section 2's requirements.⁴⁵ "*No Person shall be*" a U.S. Senator who does not meet Article I, section 3's requirements.⁴⁶ These restrictions on eligibility are legally binding simply by virtue of their presence in the Constitution.

The language of Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment parallels, even duplicates, the language used in these other provisions to express other constitutional disqualifications from officeholding.⁴⁷ None of these disqualifications requires any further legal action or legislation to be operative. Where a constitutional legal disqualification exists, it simply exists. It is a binding rule of constitutional law.

Again, this kind of binding rule should be no surprise. The Thirteenth Amendment's ban on slavery, enacted a few years earlier, works the same way. Immediately upon adoption of the amendment, slavery was legally extinguished as a matter of constitutional law. "*Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude . . . shall exist . . .*," the Thirteenth Amendment provides.⁴⁸ The institution of slavery was *immediately, legally, constitutionally gone*.⁴⁹ The Thirteenth Amendment contains a separate section granting Congress the power to enforce the prohibition of slavery.⁵⁰ But that enforcement power scarcely means that the ban on slavery contained in Section One was *inoperative unless and until* Congress passed legislation making it operative. Such a

⁴³ We have borrowed this felicitous phrasing from John Harrison. Cf. John Harrison, *The Power of Congress to Limit the Jurisdiction of the Federal Courts and the Text of Article III*, 84 U. Chi. L. Rev. 203, 211 (1997) ("The Vesting Clause is a self-executing enactment; it lays down rules by saying what shall be.")

⁴⁴ U.S. Const. art. II, §2, cl. 5 (emphasis added).

⁴⁵ U.S. Const. art. I, §2, cl. 2(emphasis added).

⁴⁶ U.S. Const. art. I, §3, cl. 3 (emphasis added).

⁴⁷ See Josh Chafetz, *Democracy's Privileged Few* 168 (2007).

⁴⁸ U.S. Const. amend. XIII §1 (emphasis added).

⁴⁹ See Alexander Tsesis, *The Thirteenth Amendment and American Freedom: A Legal History* 48–53 (2004) (documenting reactions of persons learning of their freedom immediately after ratification).

⁵⁰ U.S. Const. amend. XIII §2 ("Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.").

position would be ridiculous. The power to enforce adds to the substantive prohibition—it is not a subtraction from or suspension of it.

And of course, the same is true elsewhere in the Fourteenth Amendment too. We take it as obvious that Section One is self-executing. Section One of the Fourteenth Amendment, like Section Three states directly operative rules of constitutional law: “No state shall,” in Section One, and “No person shall” in Section Three.⁵¹ Both of these provisions are subject to additional enforcement legislation by Congress under Section Five. Yet it is common ground that Section One is self-executing. Nobody thinks (for example) that the prohibitions of Section One are *inoperative* unless and until Congress enacts legislation pursuant to its Section Five legislative power to bring them to life.

In each instance, Congress certainly *can* enact legislation “to enforce” the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments’ commands, pursuant to their grants of legislative power.⁵² Doing so can unlock additional procedural mechanisms, additional deference by courts to Congress’s view of the law, and so on. The Civil Rights Act of 1866, the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871 and more were designed to enforce Section One of the Thirteenth and Section One of the Fourteenth Amendment. But, to repeat, the existence of an enforcement power does not mean that the Amendment’s specific legal commands lack any independent, self-executing force.⁵³

So too, Congress in fact enacted implementing legislation in 1870 to enforce Section Three, authorizing *quo warranto* civil suits brought by the United States to remove state officials unconstitutionally holding office in violation of Section Three and imposing criminal penalties for knowing violations of Section Three.⁵⁴ But Congress’s choice to trigger additional procedural mechanisms and federal jurisdiction

⁵¹ U.S. Const. amdt XIV, sec. 1, 3. Nothing here turns on it, but Section Four of the Fourteenth Amendment, which repudiates rebel and slave debts while guaranteeing the legal obligation of the national debt, also seems to be self-executing. Section Two, which alters Article I, section 2’s rule for how Representatives “shall be apportioned,” presents a more complicated case. Its rule is immediately operative, like the rest of the Fourteenth Amendment, but its rule operates by changing an apportionment process undertaken by Congress. In practice, Congress has ignored it, see Michael Rosin, *The Five-Fifths Rule and the Unconstitutional Presidential Election of 1916*, 46 Hist. Meth. 57 (2013); Amar, *America’s Constitution*, supra note 4, at 395; see also email from John Harrison to Akhil Reed Amar, quoted in *id.* at 611 n. 96, and it is hard to see how anybody else can realistically enforce it.

⁵² U.S. Const. amdt. XIII, sec. 2; amdt. XIV, sec. 5.

⁵³ Indeed, Section One was added to an early draft of the Fourteenth Amendment precisely to ensure that state Black Codes would be unenforceable even if there were no federal legislation saying so. Baude, Campbell, & Sachs, supra note 10, at 30-31, 63-64.

⁵⁴ Act of May 31, 1870 (First Ku Klux Klan Act), ch. 114 §§14, 15, 16 Stat. 140, 143. **The criminal prohibition in Section 15 of the Act was repealed in the 1909 codification of the penal code, 35 Stat. 1088, 1153, § 341 (1909), and the quo warranto provision in Section 14 was repealed during the 1948 positive law codifications of Title 28 of the U.S. Code, see Act of June 25, 1948, ch. 646, § 39; see also Lynch, supra note 5, at 206 n. 365. Neither of these codifications was thought to make a substantive change by repealing these provisions, see generally William W. Barron, *The Judicial Code*, 8 F.R.D. 439 (1949); see also *The United States Compiled Statutes*, Title XIX, page 4459 (1916), which were**

for Section Three cases does not mean that there was no constitutional prohibition before Congress acted.⁵⁵ Congress *enforced* Section Three’s prohibition. Congress was not the one to give it *legal effect*. Section Three was effective law all along.

Section Three is also noticeably *different* from other constitutional provisions that deal with misbehavior—provisions that are not self-executing in the same way. Article III, for instance, describes the offense of treason:

Treason against the United States, shall consist only in levying war against them, or in adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort. No person shall be convicted of treason unless on the testimony of two witnesses to the same overt act, or on confession in open court.

The Congress shall have power to declare the punishment of treason, but no attainder of treason shall work corruption of blood, or forfeiture except during the life of the person attainted.⁵⁶

Note the contrast. The Treason Clause defines an *offense* (“Treason . . . shall consist”) but it does not itself convict anybody of treason. Section Three, by contrast, enacts its own disqualification (“No person shall be”). It acts on persons, not offenses. This is driven home by the Treason Clause’s specific procedures and powers: “[C]onvict[ions] of treason” require two witnesses or a public confession; and “Congress shall have power to declare the punishment of treason.” Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment, by **contrast enacts its standard and imposes its consequences all at once.**

Similarly, the Constitution’s impeachment provisions say that those who are impeached “shall be removed from Office.”⁵⁷ But the Constitution does not itself impeach anybody. Instead, it specifies that somebody else—the House and Senate—must do the impeaching.⁵⁸ Again, Section Three’s contrast is glaring. The framers of Section Three had the treason clause and impeachment clauses at hand and chose a

thought obsolete by then. The repeals therefore certainly did not reflect a decision to preempt or preclude any *other* existing remedies for Section Three.

⁵⁵ Professor Magliocca concurs. Magliocca, *Amnesty*, supra note 5, at 106 & n.101 (noting that “enacting enforcement legislation does not imply that legislation is required” and that the existence of Section Five of the Fourteenth Amendment does not imply that the other sections are not self-executing). Indeed, this is especially so because Congress may have been responding to the decision in *Griffin’s Case* (wrongly) holding that such legislation was required for Section Three to have operative legal effect. See infra Part II.C.

⁵⁶ U. S. Const. art. III, sec. 3.

⁵⁷ U.S. Const. art. II, sec. 4.

⁵⁸ U.S. Const. art I, sec. 3 & sec. 4.

noticeably different path.⁵⁹ Section Three does not call for treason *trials* or the *impeachment* of **insurrections and rebels**. It directly imposes an across-the-board disqualification and involves Congress only if Congress wishes to *end it*.

Section Three’s constitutional disqualification, where applicable, just *is*. It stands on its own as a constitutional rule of law, having come into legal force “as Part of this Constitution,” along with the rest of the Fourteenth Amendment, “when ratified” as a constitutional amendment.⁶⁰ It immediately became “supreme Law of the Land.”⁶¹ Its rule took immediate effect. Section Three is, in that sense, legally self-executing.

Is there any serious textual argument to the contrary? We will address Chief Justice Chase’s conclusion in *Griffin’s Case* in a moment. But we suspect that resistance to this point often comes instead from some misdirected intuitions. One is *the problem of supposed difficulty*. It seems easy, perhaps, to apply the constitutional qualifications of age and citizenship.⁶² It is pretty obvious what these are and obvious what they demand that we do. But who exactly is disqualified by Section Three is, at least to initial appearances, a more difficult, complicated, and fact-specific question. It is a more difficult question of law because we must plumb the meanings of “insurrection” and “rebellion” and so on—and these meanings are not quite as self-evident as “thirty-five years of age” (at least until this article is widely read and accepted). And it is more difficult in practice, because even once we know what the terms of Section Three *mean*, we must know what exactly every prior-oath-sworn official *did*.

⁵⁹ Indeed, for what it is worth, the legislative history supports this understanding. Section Three’s opponents criticized the proposal for its immediate consequences on former Confederates, and its proponents seemed to share the same understanding. For opponents, see Cong. Globe 39th Cong., 1st Sess., at 2900 (Senator Doolittle) (amendment “will have the effect of putting a new punishment, not prescribed by the laws, upon all those persons who are embraced within its provisions”); *id.* at 2916 (Senator Doolittle); *id.* at 2940 (Senator Hendricks) (complaining about immediate consequences); for proponents, see *id.* at 2919 (Senator Willey) (defending the amendment’s immediate effect because those affected had already “forfeited” their claim to participate in government “by their past conduct”); *id.* (they lost their “citizenship rights when they committed treason”); Cong. Globe 39th Cong., 1st Sess., App., at 228 (Senator Defrees); Cong. Globe, 39th Cong., 1st Sess. at 3036 (Senator Henderson) (defending the immediate effect of Section Three against the charge that it is a bill of attainder or ex post facto law); see generally *infra* Part III.A-B. See also Graber, *supra* note 12, at 26-27, 35-37 (documenting all of these discussions).

⁶⁰ U.S. Const. art. V.

⁶¹ U.S. Const. art. VI, cl. 2.

⁶² See Gerard N. Magliocca, *Background as Foreground: Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment and January 6th*, at 14 n.42 (Mar. 2, 2023), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4306094 (“Section Three was unprecedented in the sense that prior restrictions on serving in office were bright-line rules (age and citizenship, for example) instead of standards”). On the other hand, the Constitution’s *inhabitancy* requirement, has proved far from simple in practice. See Jack Maskell, Congressional Research Service, *Qualifications of Members of Congress* (Jan 15, 2015) at 13-18, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R41946.pdf>. And there has been recent litigation about the requirement that the President be a “natural born citizen” as well. See Derek T. Muller, “*Natural Born*” *Disputes in the 2016 Election*, 85 *Fordham L. Rev.* 1097 (2016).

Not all participation in insurrection or rebellion is open and notorious. More difficult it may be, to interpret and apply the disqualification of Section Three than the disqualifications of age, citizenship, and residency. But the fact of difficulty is a non sequitur. The fact that it might be hard for us to know today what a legal rule means (or how it applies) does not mean that it is not the legal rule.⁶³ The Constitution says what it says and we must try to apply it as best we can. To start by asking what is easy for us, and then to assume that the Constitution must mean something that makes our lives easy, is as fallacious as drawing the curve before gathering the data points.⁶⁴

Resistance might also come from *the problem of enforcement*. The Constitution is generally self-executing law, but still, somebody has to enforce it. Somebody has to read it, understand it, and ensure that our practices conform to its commands. (Many somebodies, actually, as we discuss shortly.) This is true, but again it is a non-sequitur. It is true that government officials must enforce the Constitution, and who does this and how they do it are important questions, maybe the central questions of constitutional law. But the meaning of the Constitution *comes first*. Officials must enforce the Constitution because it is law; it is wrong to think that it only becomes law if they decide to enforce it. Section Three has legal force already.

B. Who (All) Can (Must) Faithfully Apply and Enforce Section Three?

As we just said, even though Section Three is a self-executing, immediately applicable constitutional legal rule, someone needs to do the actual applying of that rule to particular situations where its application is called for. Section Three's constitutional disqualification exists of its own force as an abstract matter. But someone needs to bring that legal rule to bear in a concrete situation as a practical matter.

Who has the power and duty to do this? We think the answer is: anybody who possesses legal authority (under relevant state or federal law) to decide whether somebody is eligible for office. This might mean different political or judicial actors, depending on the office involved, and depending on the relevant state or federal law. But in principle: Section Three's disqualification rule may and must be followed—applied, honored, obeyed, enforced, carried out—by anyone whose job it is to figure out whether someone is legally qualified to office, just as with any of the Constitution's other qualifications.

⁶³ Christopher R. Green, *Constitutional Truthmakers*, 32 Notre Dame J. L. Ethics & Pub Pol'y 497, 511-512 (2018).

⁶⁴ Cf. Michael Stokes Paulsen, *Lemon Is Dead*, 43 Case W. Res. L. Rev. 795, 839 (1993) (mocking constitutional interpretation that engages in “the legal equivalent of the method my lab partner and I used in high school chemistry: first draw the desired curve; then plot the data; if time permits, do the experiment”); Stephen E. Sachs, *Originalism: Standard and Procedure*, 135 Harv. L. Rev. 777 (2022).

These actors might include (for example): state election officials; other state executive or administrative officials; state legislatures and governors; the two houses of Congress; the President and subordinate executive branch officers; state and federal judges deciding cases where such legal rules apply; even electors for the offices of president and vice president. We will discuss in detail some of these examples presently. But two points are important to keep clear at the outset: First, all of these bodies or entities may possess, within their sphere, the power and duty to apply Section Three as governing law. Second, their authority to do so exists as a function of the powers they otherwise possess. No action is necessary to “activate” Section Three as a prerequisite to its application as law by bodies or persons whose responsibilities call for its application. The Constitution’s qualification and disqualification rules exist and possess legal force in their own right, which is what *makes* them applicable and enforceable by a variety of officials in a variety of contexts.

Consider some illustrations:

1. Seeking Office

- a. by election

Anybody who seeks office will at some point need to show that they are entitled to hold that office. At every point that this occurs, Section Three governs. So, for instance, *state or local election boards, and state Secretaries of State*, may possess state-law authority to make at least initial determinations as to eligibility of candidates for elected office in that state or representing that state in Congress (as authorized by Article I, section 4 of the Constitution)—and, thus, whether or not such candidates shall be placed on a primary or general election ballot.⁶⁵ Those state bodies or officers are obliged, often by oath—sometimes by oath mandated by the U.S. Constitution—to act consistently with the requirements of the Constitution in the discharge of their duties.⁶⁶ Accordingly, such state actors can and must apply Section Three’s disquali-

⁶⁵ To be sure, the centralized, government-administered ballot did not come to American until the late Nineteenth Century and so of course states are not constitutionally required to run elections in this way. But if they do, Section Three governs how they carry out their duties.

⁶⁶ U.S. Const. art. VI, cl.2 (“This Constitution ... shall be the supreme Law of the Land”). See also U.S. Const. art. VI, cl.3 (“The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution.”). The nature of the Constitution as supreme, binding law is of course fundamental to the argument for “judicial review,” as it is likewise fundamental to the argument for the obligation of all government officials to adhere to the law supplied by the Constitution and give its commands priority over any other source of law or legal duty. See generally Michael Stokes Paulsen, *The Irrepressible Myth of Marbury*, 101 Mich. L. Rev. 2706 (2003); see also William Baude, *Severability First Principles*, 109 Va. L. Rev. 1, 5-9 (2023).

fication in carrying out their state-law responsibilities—just as they possess the authority and duty to comply with and enforce the Constitution’s other qualification-for-office requirements.⁶⁷

For an example of how this process is supposed to work, consider how the state of Georgia entertained a Section Three challenge to the qualifications of Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene under Georgia law. A state administrative law judge took evidence about Representative Greene’s involvement in the events of January 6, 2021.⁶⁸ The judge proceeded under the theory that if January 6 was a constitutional “insurrection,” and if Representative Greene had been part of it, she would be barred from office.⁶⁹ But it concluded that the challengers had failed to meet their burden of proof under state law: “In short, even assuming, *arguendo*, that the Invasion was an insurrection, Challengers presented no persuasive evidence Rep. Greene took any action—direct physical efforts, contribution of personal services or capital, issuance of directives or marching orders, transmissions of intelligence, or even statements of encouragement—in furtherance thereof on or after January 3, 2021.”⁷⁰ Secretary of State Brad Raffensberger issued a final decision ratifying the hearing officer’s proposed findings that day.⁷¹

Such determinations about ballot eligibility may also be subject to *further judicial review*. In *state courts*, these procedures will of course depend on what review is available under state law. Similarly, *federal courts* might well possess jurisdiction, subject to the usual federal jurisdiction doctrines (such as standing, ripeness, mootness, and abstention), to decide cases of candidate eligibility. Continuing the example, Representative Greene did file a federal lawsuit attempting to enjoin the then-pending state proceedings (mentioned above), and the district court concluded that the case was justiciable and that *Younger* abstention did not apply, but that Greene’s claims failed on the merits.⁷² While Greene’s appeal to the Eleventh Circuit was pending, she prevailed in the state proceedings, so the case was dismissed as moot.⁷³ The

⁶⁷ We note that the determination by state officials that a candidate for election to the U.S. Congress is *not* disqualified—and may be elected—does not bind the respective houses of Congress, in the exercise of their independent Article I, section 5, powers to act as “Judge” of the “Elections, Returns, and Qualifications of its own Members” and refuse to seat prospective members it judges to be constitutionally disqualified by Section Three or other constitutional limitation. See also *infra* n. 96 and accompanying text.

⁶⁸ Initial Decision, *Rowan v. Greene*, No. 2222-582-OSAH-SECSTATE-CE-57-Beaudrot (Georgia Office of State Administrative Hearings, May 6, 2022).

⁶⁹ *Id.* at 5-6.

⁷⁰ *Id.* at 15. The January 3, 2021 cut-off is because that is the date that Representative Greene first took a constitutional oath. The Court also specifically rejected the argument that a Newsmax appearance on January 5, 2021, should be interpreted as a “coded message from Rep. Greene to her co-conspirators to go forward with a previously planned incursion into the Capitol.” *Id.* at 16.

⁷¹ Final Decision, *Rowan v. Greene*, No. 2222-582-OSAH-SECSTATE-CE-57-Beaudrot (Georgia Office of the Secretary of State, May 6, 2022).

⁷² *Greene v. Raffensperger*, 599 F. Supp. 3d 1283, 1320 (N.D. Ga. 2022).

⁷³ *Greene v. Sec’y of State for Georgia*, 52 F.4th 907, 909-910 (11th Cir. 2022).

details, of course, will vary from case to case. But where any of these tribunals has jurisdiction they too obviously have the power and duty to apply Section Three as the supreme law of the land.

This is not to say that states *must* provide any *particular* procedure for bringing a challenge to ballot eligibility qualification or grant a cause of action to particular private individuals to bring such challenges. For instance, in a recent suit seeking to disqualify Arizona Representative Mark Finchem and U.S. Representatives Paul Gosar and Andy Biggs from the 2022 primary ballot, the Arizona Supreme Court concluded that state law did not provide a private cause of action for a disqualification challenge.⁷⁴ In principle, that could well be right. Whether to provide a cause of action in such cases is largely a question of state law. Section Three slots in to existing powers and procedures without mandating or micromanaging them.

That said, the Arizona Supreme Court’s muddled reasoning in the Finchem-Gosar-Biggs case necessitates a few clarifying points. First, state law *can* enforce Section Three, and the Fourteenth Amendment does not place any particular presumption against doing so. Unfortunately, the Arizona Supreme Court suggested otherwise, writing that “Section 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment appears to expressly delegate to Congress the authority to devise the method to enforce the Disqualification Clause . . . which suggests that A.R.S. 16-351(B) does not provide a private right of action to invoke the Disqualification Clause against the Candidates.”⁷⁵ This inference is mistaken—Congress’s power to enforce federal law, including constitutional law, is not exclusive of the states, and states regularly enforce federal law including constitutional law in their own courts.⁷⁶

Second, in some circumstances state law not only *can* but *must* enforce Section Three. Under the rule of *Testa v. Katt*,⁷⁷ where a state does open its courts to a cause of action, it must apply federal law evenhandedly to that cause of action. As the unanimous Court put it: “[T]he Constitution and the laws passed pursuant to it are the supreme laws of the land, binding alike upon states, courts, and the people, ‘any-thing

⁷⁴ Hansen v. Finchem, No. CV-22-0099-AP/EL, 2022 WL 1468157 (Ariz. Supreme Ct. May 9, 2022) (nonprecedential disposition).

⁷⁵ Id. at *1. The court did not cite any authority for this interpretation, but its argument does echo a fallacious argument made by Chief Justice Chase in Griffin’s Case, which we discuss at greater length presently. See *infra* Part II.C.2.d. The Arizona Supreme Court also made the additional suggestion that Article I, Section 5 gave Congress “exclusive authority to determine whether to enforce the Disqualification Clause against its prospective members,” *id.* We are skeptical of this point as well, see *infra* n. 96 and accompanying text, but in any event it would have only applied to *federal* representatives Gosar and Biggs, not the lead defendant, *state* representative Finchem. The individual houses of Congress of course have no Article I, Section 5 power, exclusive or otherwise, to determine the membership of state legislatures.

⁷⁶ See, e.g., Tafflin v. Levitt, 493 U.S. 455, 458-460 (1990); *id.* at 469- 470 (Scalia, J., concurring); see also Thomas Koenig & Christopher D. Moore, *Of State Remedies and Federal Rights* (May 29, 2023) https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4462807.

⁷⁷ 330 U.S. 386 (1947).

in the Constitution or Laws of any State to the contrary notwithstanding.”⁷⁸ And thus “the policy of the federal Act is the prevailing policy in every state.”⁷⁹ A state cannot treat federal obligations the way it can treat foreign ones.

The Arizona Supreme Court’s decision unfortunately can be read to suggest otherwise. The court cryptically wrote that the state “statute’s scope is limited to challenges based upon ‘qualifications . . . as prescribed by law,’ and does not include the Disqualification Clause, a legal proscription from holding office.”⁸⁰ If the court meant to distinguish federal constitutional qualifications from state statutes, it seems to have violated *Testa*. If the court meant that Section Three’s disqualification is not a “qualification,” that seems nonsensical. And if it meant something else, it is hard to figure out what.

In any event, the real question is what procedure is available for determining whether a candidate is qualified to office. That is basically a question of state law, and the correct procedures will likely vary from state to state. But the courts owe state law a full and fair reading, not one slanted by reticence to acknowledge the life in Section Three.

b. by appointment

Now let us turn to appointments. Just as with elected office, anybody who must decide whether an appointee is qualified must comply with Section Three. Traditionally this includes at a minimum whoever nominated the officer.⁸¹ Thus governors, presidents, and other nominating authorities can and should—indeed, constitutionally must—*decline to nominate and appoint to state or federal offices persons who are constitutionally disqualified by Section Three*. And likewise, where nominating authority is subject to additional confirmation—by a state senate, the U.S. Senate, or any other body—that body presumably can and should, constitutionally must, decline to consent to the appointment of such constitutionally disqualified nominees.⁸²

⁷⁸ Id. at 391 (quoting U.S. Const. Art VI, sec. 2).

⁷⁹ Id. at 393. To be sure, *Testa* and especially subsequent cases expanding it have been subject to powerful criticisms as a matter of original meaning, see Ann Woolhandler & Michael G. Collins, *State Jurisdictional Independence and Federal Supremacy*, 72 Fla. L. Rev. 73, 78-83, 97-105 (2020); *Haywood v. Drown*, 556 U.S. 729, 742-67 (2009) (Thomas, J., dissenting). We bracket those criticisms here.

⁸⁰ *Hansen v. Finchem*, No. CV-22-0099-AP/EL, 2022 WL 1468157, at *1 (Ariz. Supreme Ct. May 9, 2022) (nonprecedential disposition).

⁸¹ For instance, both President George Washington and President Franklin Roosevelt felt obligated to consider whether their Supreme Court nominees (Patterson and Black, respectively) were constitutionally disqualified by Article I, sec. 6. See William Baude, *The Unconstitutionality of Justice Black*, 98 Tex. L. Rev. 327, 330, 333-334, 355-356 (2019).

⁸² See Michael Stokes Paulsen, *Is Lloyd Bentsen Unconstitutional?* 46 Stanford L. Rev. 907, 914-918 (1994) (discussing constitutional responsibility of political branches to enforce constitutional disqualifications from office irrespective of whether they give rise to a judicial case or controversy, and bemoaning the failure of all to enforce the Emoluments Clause); see also Baude, *Black*, supra note 81, at 355-356 (similar); see also Michael Stokes Paulsen, *Straightening Out The Confirmation Mess*, 105

In other words, the election and appointment systems, from top to bottom, frequently make decisions about a candidate's eligibility for office. All of those decisions are legally bound by Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment; and all persons *making* such decisions are correspondingly bound to faithfully interpret, enforce, and apply Section Three.

2. Holding Office

What about those who *already hold* office—either because Section Three was not attended to before they gained office, or because their disqualifying conduct happened later?⁸³

Once again, the answer turns in part on what procedures are available under other law. State officials can be subject to a variety of remedies for unlawfully holding office. They might (or might not) be subject to removal, as a matter of state law, by a private suit *quo warranto*, by the authority of another executive or judicial officer or administrative board, or perhaps even by the state legislature exercising powers of impeachment or recall. In addition, it is possible that the salaries of such rightfully-disqualified officials—and the legal eligibility of such persons for those salaries—might be subject to the authority and determination of some other state official.

We submit that all such officials—administrators, executives, legislatures—possessing legal authority concerning such matters likewise possess the authority (and duty) to interpret, apply, and enforce Section Three's disqualification in the course of exercising that legal authority. And once again: if such determinations are judicially reviewable under state law, the courts likewise possess the authority and duty to interpret, apply, and enforce Section Three.⁸⁴

For an example of how this process is supposed to work consider how the state of New Mexico removed commissioner Couy Griffin from state office.⁸⁵ Griffin was an elected commissioner for Otero County, New Mexico, who promoted, assisted, and

Yale L.J. 549, 562-570 (1995) (noting parallel constitutional structural argument for obligation of both the President and the Senate to exercise independent faithful constitutional interpretive judgment in the course of carrying out their respective powers with respect to appointment); Charles L. Black, Jr., *A Note on Senatorial Consideration of Supreme Court Nominees*, 79 Yale L.J. 657, 658-660 (1970) (similar).

⁸³ Or because Section Three was not yet *adopted as law* when they were appointed to office but became operative and disqualified them subsequently. This was the situation presented in *Griffin's Case*, discussed presently. See *infra* at II.C.

⁸⁴ Of course, federal courts, too, might possess jurisdiction, subject to the usual rules and conditions, to decide such lawsuits just as they will for state determinations of election candidate eligibility. See *supra* notes 72-73 and accompanying text. And when doing so, they have the authority and duty to interpret, apply, and enforce Section Three.

⁸⁵ *New Mexico ex rel. White v. Griffin*, 2022 WL 4295619, D-101-CV-2022-00473 (1st. Dist. Santa Fe County, Sep. 6, 2022).

ultimately joined in the January 6 insurrection against the Capitol. A group of New Mexico citizens filed a *quo warranto* action against Griffin under New Mexico law, seeking his removal from office. The New Mexico district court took evidence, received legal arguments, and then concluded that Griffin was disqualified under Section Three. More precisely, and quite correctly, it held that Griffin had been disqualified since the day of the January 6 insurrection, and ordered his immediate ejection from office, and permanently enjoined him from seeking or holding any other covered position.⁸⁶

As a matter of state procedure, the court concluded that the New Mexico *quo warranto* statute was a remedy for ejecting unlawful office holders.⁸⁷ It also concluded that *quo warranto* could be sought by any citizen of New Mexico, without any further showing of injury, because the New Mexico courts are not bound by the same “standing” limitations as the federal courts are. As a matter of federal law, the court had no trouble concluding that the events of January 6, 2021 were a constitutional “insurrection.” And it had no trouble concluding that Griffin had engaged in that insurrection, both by “voluntarily aid[ing] the insurrectionists’ cause by helping to mobilize and incite” the crowd, and by joining in the invasion of the Capitol itself, even though Griffin himself did not commit a violent act.⁸⁸ The New Mexico county court correctly recognized both its power and its duty to interpret and apply Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment.

The same general principle applies to the situations of those who hold federal office. Again, anyone who possesses legal power to decide whether such a person can and should hold (or continue to hold) the office in question must apply Section Three’s disqualification in doing so.⁸⁹ Here, the specific federal constitutional rules for tenure and removal present some interesting complications, which we address shortly.

⁸⁶ *Id.* at 46. The New Mexico Supreme Court dismissed Griffin’s appeal on procedural grounds. NO. S-1-SC-39571 (N.M. Sup. Ct. Nov. 15, 2022). Meanwhile, the federal courts concluded that they lacked federal jurisdiction over two related claims by Griffin: an attempt to remove the state action to federal court, *State ex rel. White v. Griffin*, 2022 WL 1707187 (D.N.M. May 27, 2022) (denying removal because of plaintiffs’ lack of Article III standing) and a separate parallel suit attempting to enjoin the state proceedings, *Griffin v. White*, 2022 WL 2315980 (D.N.M. June 28, 2022) (finding lack of standing, lack of ripeness, and invoking *Pullman* abstention).

⁸⁷ *New Mexico ex rel. White v. Griffin*, 2022 WL 4295619, D-101-CV-2022-00473, at 24-25 (1st. Dist. Santa Fe County, Sep. 6, 2022).

⁸⁸ *Id.* at 35-38.

⁸⁹ The availability of a federal *quo warranto* action is curiously codified in the D.C. Code, §§ 16-3501-02. Courts have generally construed this statute quite narrowly, holding that only the Attorney General may bring a *quo warranto* against a public official, and that he has broad discretion not to do so. See *Andrade v. Lauer*, 729 F.2d 1475, 1498 (D.C. Cir. 1984); *Drake v. Obama*, 664 F.3d 774, 784-785 (9th Cir. 2011); *SW Gen., Inc. v. N.L.R.B.*, 796 F.3d 67, 81 (D.C. Cir. 2015), *aff’d*, 580 U.S. 288 (2017). The Third Circuit recently dismissed a Section Three *quo warranto* against former state senator Doug Mastriano on this ground. *Hill v. Mastriano*, No. 22-2464, 2022 WL 16707073, at *2 (3d Cir. Nov. 4, 2022). See also *Hill v. Perry*, No. 22-2465, 2023 WL 3336648, at *1 (3d Cir. May 10, 2023) (dismissing similar suits by same plaintiff against Rick Saccone and Scott Perry).

But in general: wherever anyone possesses the constitutional authority or duty to remove others from office for legal reasons, they can and should remove those barred by Section Three. Presidents—and subordinate executive officers acting at the president’s direction—should remove from office executive officers, civil and military, who are constitutionally disqualified by Section Three. Likewise, the House of Representatives should impeach, and the Senate convict and thereby remove from office, civil executive officers who become constitutionally disqualified by Section Three.⁹⁰

Finally and additionally, what happens if all of the above fails? Somebody disqualified by Section Three is given office and nobody removes that person from office. What then? Here too there will often still be additional procedures to enforce Section Three. These procedures mirror those available to enforce the Appointments Clause and other constitutional law of appointments. A litigant can move to disqualify a judge whose appointment is improper.⁹¹ A regulated entity can challenge the actions of an executive official who holds office improperly.⁹² Those who cannot constitutionally hold office cannot constitutionally exercise government power, so the subjects of that power can challenge their acts as *ultra vires*. While there may be some limits to the available relief in some kinds of suits under the “de facto officer doctrine,” (more on which shortly), in many cases the courts will be called on to decide if an action is *ultra vires*. Section Three governs those cases.

3. Special Situations

A few federal constitutional offices raise special cases, where the Constitution itself speaks to official tenure or qualifications.

First consider Congress. Each house of Congress has two specific powers with respect to its own membership in which Section Three might come into play. First, each house has power to “Judge of the Elections, Returns, and Qualifications” of “its own Members.”⁹³ Since one of those qualifications is non-disqualification under Section Three, each house can and must judge whether Section Three forbids the seating of a member. This judgment is conclusive, and it operates as a crucial constitutional

⁹⁰ An officeholder who has engaged in insurrection or rebellion or given aid or comfort to enemies of the United States has surely committed a “high Crime or Misdemeanor” within the meaning of Article II, section 4’s description of the scope of the impeachment and removal power. See generally Michael Stokes Paulsen, *To End a (Republican) Presidency*, 132 Harv. L. Rev. 689, 698-702 (2018). Note that military officers are not subject to impeachment; they are subject instead to the President’s removal authority as Commander in Chief. Whether Congress could supplement that authority through appropriate legislation is an interesting question. See Zachary Price, *Congress’s Power Over Military Offices*, 99 Tex. L. Rev. 291 (2021).

⁹¹ *Nguyen v. United States*, 539 U.S. 69, 77–79, 81–82 (2003); Baude, *Black*, supra note 81, at 346-47.

⁹² *Buckley v. Valeo*, 424 U.S. 1, 8–9 (1976) (per curiam); *Morrison v. Olson*, 487 U.S. 654, 668 (1988); *Free Enter. Fund v. Pub. Co. Accounting Oversight Bd.*, 561 U.S. 477, 487–88 (2010); *NLRB v. Noel Canning*, 134 S. Ct. 2550, 2557 (2014); see also Baude, *Severability*, supra note 66, at 36-37.

⁹³ U.S. Const. art. I, sec. 5, cl. 1.

backstop for each house. No state or group of voters can force upon the House or Senate a Member it judges to be constitutionally disqualified. Indeed, even federal courts could not properly do so. While the Supreme Court has held, in *Powell v. McCormack*,⁹⁴ that Congress cannot *create new* “Qualifications” and that the federal courts have the power to stop it from doing so, neither *Powell* nor first principles allow a federal court to second-guess each house’s judgment about whether the *existing, constitutional*, qualifications have been satisfied.⁹⁵

Some have argued that each house’s judging power also preempts other early stages of the election process. The argument is that states and state election law have no power to *exclude a candidate* for Congress because they are constitutionally ineligible to office—that instead the state must allow the voters to send up the ineligible candidate, so as not to prejudge the possibility that the House or Senate will find them eligible.⁹⁶ With respect, we do not agree with this argument. As a logical matter, each house’s right to judge whether an elected candidate can hold office does not give it the power to force states to elect that candidate (or allow them to be elected) in the first place. And as a textual matter, state legislatures have the power to regulate the “manner” of elections, which includes ballot eligibility.⁹⁷ In our view, the better interpretation is that Section Three can be relevant to *both* the state’s power to regulate the manner of elections and each house’s power to judge the results of those elections.

⁹⁴ 395 U.S. 486 (1969).

⁹⁵ See *Powell*, 395 U.S. at 520 n. 41 (reserving the possibility that Section Three disqualification is a qualification); see also P. Allan Dionisopoulos, *A Commentary on the Constitutional Issues in the Powell and Related Cases*, 17 J. Pub. L. 103, 114-115 (1968) (cited in *id.* at n.41) (arguing that it is); *Powell*, 395 U.S. at 521 n.42 (noting that “federal courts might still be barred by the political question doctrine from reviewing the House’s factual determination that a member did not meet one of the standing qualifications”). We emphasize that questions of interpretation and application of Section Three are not *in general* “political questions” that cannot be decided by federal courts, simply because they have political consequences. Where the Constitution supplies a rule, and the rule’s application is *not* committed by the text of the Constitution to the judgment of one of the political branches, the courts are not disabled from deciding a case based on that rule. We simply think that the provision committing to each house the power to be the “Judge” of the “Elections, Returns, and Qualifications” of its own Members does not permit judicial review of determinations of each house that properly fall within these constitutional categories.

⁹⁶ See Derek T. Muller, *Scrutinizing Federal Electoral Qualifications*, 90 Ind. L.J. 559, 594-598 (2015); see also *Cawthorn v. Amalfi*, 35 F.4th 245, 267-273, 282-284 (4th Cir. 2022) (Richardson, J., concurring); *Greene v. Sec’y of State for Georgia*, 52 F.4th 907, 912-916 (11th Cir. 2022) (Branch, J., concurring).

⁹⁷ U.S. Const. art. I, sec. 4. The same Clause also gives Congress the power to “make or alter” such regulations by legislation if it wishes. Two relatively recent Supreme Court cases have invalidated state ballot eligibility rules for members of Congress that attempted to impose congressional term **limits**, *U.S. Term Limits, Inc. v. Thornton*, 514 U.S. 779 (1995); *Cook v. Gralike*, 531 U.S. 510 (2001), and Judge Richardson relies on these cases to argue that states cannot judge the qualifications of congressional candidates, *Cawthorn*, 35 F.4th at 273-275 (Richardson, J., concurring). Putting aside whether these cases are correct as an original matter, we think they further support our view. The Court rejected term-limit-ballot-access restrictions because they were an attempt to impose a qualification *not contained in the Constitution*. E.g., *U.S. Term Limits*, 514 U.S. at 784, 787-788, 806-815. It

The second relevant power each house possesses with respect to its own Members concerns Members already sitting in Congress. Each house also has power to “determine the Rules of its Proceedings, punish its Members for disorderly Behaviour, and, with the Concurrence of two thirds, expel a Member.”⁹⁸ So in addition to the initial power to exclude under Section Three, each house could potentially proceed through the expulsion power instead, by two-thirds vote.⁹⁹ As with the power to exclude, the power to expel, where exercised within the scope of the power conferred exclusively on each house, is committed to that house’s discretion.

Additionally, Article I’s Speech and Debate Clause provides that “for any Speech or Debate in either House,” members of Congress “shall not be questioned in any other Place.”¹⁰⁰ This means that to the extent that the conduct that violates Section Three was a member of Congress’s official statements or legislative actions,¹⁰¹ each house’s powers of exclusion and expulsion are necessarily the sole mechanism for enforcing Section Three.

Federal judges hold their offices during “good Behaviour.”¹⁰² What if a sitting federal judge or even a Supreme Court justice has engaged in insurrection or rebellion or given aid or comfort to the nation’s enemies?¹⁰³ As a matter of *substance* this is easy. Whether regarded as simply a violation of the Article III tenure condition of “good Behaviour” or as satisfying the impeachment standard of “high Crimes and Misdemeanors,”¹⁰⁴ conduct meeting Section Three’s standard disqualifies a federal judge from office.

As a matter of procedure the question is trickier. The conventional wisdom is that Article III allows good behavior to be judged only through the procedure of impeachment by Congress. An alternative view, with some support in the history, is

follows that ballot access rules that follow the qualifications contained in the Constitution could be treated differently.

⁹⁸ U.S. Const. art. I, sec. 5, cl. 2.

⁹⁹ There is some debate whether Congress can expel a member for conduct that occurred before being elected. See Chafetz, *Democracy’s Privileged Few*, supra note 47, at 210-212 (recounting arguments on both sides but arguing that it can); Jack Maskell, Congressional Research Service, *Expulsion, Censure, Reprimand, and Fine: Legislative Discipline in the House of Representatives 4-7* (2016) <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/RL31382.pdf> (same). At all events, however, continuing to hold office when forbidden to do so by Section Three is ongoing conduct that would seem independently to justify expulsion in the here-and-now.

¹⁰⁰ U.S. Const. art. I, sec. 6, cl. 1.

¹⁰¹ As we elaborate later, we think it is quite rare that such conduct could violate Section Three, even on its own terms.

¹⁰² U.S. Const. art. III.






















¹⁰³ Cf. *Ex parte Milligan*, 71 U.S. 2, 141 (1866) (Chase, C.J., concurring in the judgment) (“In Indiana, the judges and officers of the courts were loyal to the government. But it might have been otherwise. In times of rebellion and civil war, it may often happen, indeed, that judges and marshals will be in active sympathy with the rebels, and courts their most efficient allies.”).


¹⁰⁴ See supra note 90.


that Congress could provide other procedures for adjudicating misbehavior (as for instance in the 1791 Crimes Act, which purported to require the immediate removal of any federal official convicted of bribery or other crimes).¹⁰⁵ Whichever is the answer, the procedures and criteria for judging judges can and must apply Section Three.

Finally, what about the top of the ticket? What if the President or a presidential candidate (or likewise for Vice President) is constitutionally disqualified?¹⁰⁶ Who has the power and duty to enforce Section Three's legal prohibition? Again, the answer depends on whether the supposedly disqualified individual is seeking election to office or already holds it. In the case of a *candidate*, state election officials and state election law will frequently judge that candidate's ballot eligibility, applying Section Three as described above, and subject to the usual avenues of judicial review. That eligibility question can be a part of a state's Article II election for electors just as much as any other state election.¹⁰⁷ Put simply: a state secretary of state (for example) might well possess state-law authority to determine candidate eligibility for federal elective offices—President and Vice President, U.S. Representatives, U.S. Senators—selected directly or indirectly via state elections; and among those relevant eligibility criteria is whether a candidate is disqualified from the office he or she seeks by Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Additionally, presidential electors have the power (and therefore perhaps the responsibility as well) to enforce Section Three.¹⁰⁸ In perhaps half the states, the question is more complicated, because state laws purport to *bind* the electors in various ways to vote for their party's candidate rather than making their own determination, and the Supreme Court has recently upheld such laws.¹⁰⁹ But even working

                     Sakrishna Prakash & Steven D. Smith, *How to Remove A Federal Judge*, 116 Yale L.J. 72 (2006). In the interests of full disclosure, one of us was the student lead editor when this piece was published, and continues to think it is probably right, notwithstanding the counterarguments in James E. Pfander, *Removing Federal Judges*, 74 U. Chi. L. Rev. 1227 (2007). The other of us adheres to the traditional view. Michael Stokes Paulsen, *Checking the Court*, 10 NYU J. L. & Liberty 18, 76-77 (2016).

 ¹⁰⁶ We are assuming for now that the Presidency and Vice Presidency are covered by Section Three's language as an "office, civil or military, under the United States." We think that assumption is correct, and we will return to it in Part IV.B.

 ¹⁰⁷ See Hemel, *How-to Guide*, supra note 5; *Lindsay v. Bowen*, 750 F.3d 1061 (9th Cir. 2014) (upholding state exclusion from presidential primary ballot of twenty-seven-year-old candidate constitutionally disqualified on grounds of age); *Hassan v. Colorado*, 495 Fed. App'x 947, 948 (10th Cir. 2012) (Gorsuch, J.) (upholding state exclusion from presidential election ballot of naturalized citizen constitutionally disqualified from office by Natural Born Citizen Clause of Article II); see also Muller, *Scrutinizing*, supra note 96, at 599-608; see also Muller, *Natural Born*, supra note 62, at 1100-1106. This is standard practice and law even though the President and Vice President are only indirect candidates, with their electors as direct candidates.

¹⁰⁸ See Muller, *Scrutinizing*, supra note 96, at 579-580.

¹⁰⁹ *Chiafalo v. Washington*, 591 U.S. ____ (2020); see also Muller, supra note 96, at 580. We bracket the serious possibility that *Chiafalo* was wrongly decided. See, e.g., Mike Rappaport, *The Originalist Disaster in Chiafalo*, Law & Liberty (Aug. 7, 2020), <https://lawliberty.org/the-originalist-disaster-in->

within that paradigm, states and their legislatures have their own duties to uphold the Constitution. That means they have a responsibility to arrange that their electors do not elect a constitutionally disqualified candidate, which should be reflected in their laws.

If the voters and presidential electors do select a disqualified candidate for the Presidency, we do not believe that Congress (or the Vice President) have the power to reject that candidate when the votes are counted in joint session. Whatever the extent of Congress's and the Vice President's authority to count the electoral votes, or determine the authenticity of submitted votes—i.e., was this the act of the electors of the state?—we do not believe that they have the authority to evaluate the decisions or actions of the electors themselves.¹¹⁰ So if a properly selected elector submits a vote for a constitutionally disqualified individual it should still be *counted*.

Still, once those votes are counted, a disqualified candidate *does not become president*, even if he has the most votes. This is made explicit by the (self-executing) command of Section Three of the Twentieth Amendment, which sets the constitutional terms of a President's term. It states that at “the time fixed for the beginning of [the President's] term,” “if the President elect shall have failed to qualify, then the Vice President elect shall act as President until a President shall have qualified.”¹¹¹ The language thus specifically confirms the possibility of a failure to qualify, and specifies the consequences of that failure. If the President-elect is covered by Section Three, he cannot become President—unless Congress chooses (by supermajority votes) to remove Section Three's disability.

Once the President has taken office, the Constitution provides two paths for involuntary removal from office: impeachment for “high Crimes and Misdemeanors” and removal for being “unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office” under the procedure of the Twenty-fifth Amendment. The impeachment route is straightforward. As we have discussed, an insurrection against the United States is a paradigm example of a high crime or misdemeanor. On the other hand, it is less clear whether being *legally disqualified* from holding office makes the would-be President “unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office” within the meaning of the Twenty-fifth Amendment. (Structurally, the Twenty-fifth Amendment appears to relate to Article II, Section 1, paragraph 6, which deals with Presidential succession, rather than Article II, Section 1, paragraph 5, which deals with eligibility.) But in

chiafalo/; Michael Stokes Paulsen, *The Constitutional Power of the Electoral College*, Public Discourse (Nov. 21, 2016), <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2016/11/18283/>.

¹¹⁰ We take no position on many further details of this issue, including the relative interplay of the Electoral Count Reform Act, Pub.L. 117-328, Div. P, Title I, § 109(a) (Dec. 29, 2022) 136 Stat. 5238-5239, codified in relevant part at 3 U.S.C. 15(b) & (d)(2)(B)(ii), possible constitutional challenges to it, see Vasanth Kesavan, *Is the Electoral Count Act Unconstitutional?*, 80 N.C. L. Rev. 1653, 1805 (2002); see also John Harrison, *Nobody for President*, 16 J.L. & Pol. 699 (2000), interpretations of it, but see Derek T. Muller, *Electoral Votes Regularly Given*, 55 Ga. L. Rev. 1529, 1538 (2021), or the like.

¹¹¹ U.S. Const. amdt. XX, sec. 3. Cf. Muller, *Regularly Given*, *supra* note 110, at 1538 n.42.

any event the Twenty-fifth Amendment question will usually be unimportant in practice, because it requires a two thirds vote of both houses, and the Vice President and many cabinet officials, and so it will usually be significantly easier to use the impeachment process instead.¹¹²

* * *

Tying together all of these different procedures and possibilities: consider briefly (and not-so-hypothetically) a violent insurrection on the seat of government, by a mob joined or given aid or comfort by various government officials, from a state representative or commissioner to a U.S. Senator to the President himself.¹¹³ From the moment of their participation in the insurrection, those officials would be *legally* ineligible to hold their offices, thanks to Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment. How this would play out *practically* might vary across them. As the state official returned home, he would immediately be subject to state law procedures such as a quo warranto suit.¹¹⁴ He might be removed by such a suit,¹¹⁵ or might well choose to resign instead.¹¹⁶ The Senator might choose to brazen it out, counting on the difficulty in getting together a two-thirds vote to expel him. But if he sought re-election the Senate could and should exclude him by a mere majority vote. As for the hypothetical President, by right he ought to be immediately subject to impeachment and conviction by Congress, and perhaps also a Twenty-fifth Amendment declaration by the Vice President and supported by the cabinet. Even if those things did not happen, if he sought re-election, state election officials around the country would be bound by Section Three in deciding whether to put him on the ballot, even in the primary.

And of course, some of these matters would no doubt promptly find their way into the courts as well. Continuing the example of the presidential candidate, if state officials excluded him from ballot eligibility, he would likely be able to sue in state or federal court to challenge state officials' determination of ineligibility. And if he was *not* excluded by state officials, voters (at least in some states) might possess the legal right to challenge his eligibility. Either way, such a challenge would present a classic legal case or controversy. It is not difficult to imagine such suit being resolved by courts. Indeed, given the magnitude of the question and its consequences, it is not

¹¹² Brian Kalt, *Unable: The Law, Politics, and Limits of Section 4 of the Twenty-Fifth Amendment* (2019).

¹¹³ See infra Part IV.C. for further discussion.

¹¹⁴ For two relevant examples, see NMSA. 1978, sec. 44-3; W.V. Code sec. 53-2-1. In West Virginia, such a claim may be brought “[w]hensoever the Attorney General or prosecuting attorney of any county is satisfied that a cause exists therefor he may, at his own instance, or at the relation of any person interested.” Id. 53-2-2. For illustrative applications, see *State ex rel. Zickefoose v. West*, 145 W. Va. 498, 545 (1960); *Wells v. Miller*, 237 W. Va. 731 (2016).

¹¹⁵ *New Mexico ex rel. White v. Griffin*, 2022 WL 4295619, D-101-CV-2022-00473 (1st. Dist. Santa Fe County, Sep. 6, 2022).

¹¹⁶ Resignation letter from West Virginia Delegate Derrick Evans to Governor Jim Justice (Jan. 9, 2021), available at <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/20447012/derrick-evans-resignation-letter.pdf>.

difficult to imagine such an important case making its way quickly to the U.S. Supreme Court. It would then become the province and duty of the Court to determine and apply the meaning of Section Three.

Section Three thus functions as a sort of constitutional immune system, mobilizing every official charged with constitutional application to keep those who have fundamentally betrayed the constitutional order from keeping or reassuming power.

C. *The Problem of Griffin's Case*

A small problem with our view that Section Three is self-executing and immediately operative is that the Chief Justice of the United States said the opposite, almost immediately after the Fourteenth Amendment was adopted. This was the opinion in *Griffin's Case* by Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase, sitting as Circuit Justice in 1869, in one of the first cases to interpret any part of the Amendment. In *Griffin's Case*, Chief Justice Chase concluded that Section Three is inoperative unless and until Congress passes implementing legislation to carry it into effect.¹¹⁷ This precedent continues to cast a shadow over Section Three today.¹¹⁸

But there is a simple response to this small problem. *Griffin's Case* is just wrong. It is possible—possible—that its *result* is correct on an alternate ground, under the so-called de facto officer doctrine, which we will discuss. But Chase's legal reasoning that the Fourteenth Amendment is not self-executing is unsustainable. Indeed, the more one pulls at his opinion, the more it unravels. We examine it in some detail.¹¹⁹

1. Background

Caesar Griffin, a black man, was charged in a Virginia state court with the crime of shooting with the intent to kill. Griffin was tried, convicted, and sentenced to prison. He made no claim that the statute under which he was tried was unconstitutional; nor that he had been subjected to discrimination because of his race; nor that the composition of the jury was improper. As Chase put it: Griffin made “no allegation that the trial was not fairly conducted, or that any discrimination was made against him, either in indictment, trial, or sentence, on account of his color.”¹²⁰ Nor did Griffin allege that the presiding judge—Judge Hugh W. Sheffey—“did not

¹¹⁷ *In re Griffin* (“Griffin’s Case”), 11 F. Cas. 7 (C.C.D.Va. 1869) (No. 5,815) (Chase 364).

¹¹⁸ See, e.g., Josh Blackman and S. B. Tillman, Opinion, “Only the Feds Could Disqualify Madison Cawthorn and Marjorie Taylor Greene,” *The New York Times*, (Apr. 20, 2022); Tom Ginsburg, Aziz Huq, & David Landau, *The Law of Democratic Disqualification*, 111 *Calif. L. Rev.* at 16, 51 (forthcoming 2023) at <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3938600>.

¹¹⁹ For other criticism of Griffin’s Case, insightful as always, see Magliocca, *Amnesty*, *supra* note 5, at 102-108; Magliocca, *Foreground*, *supra* note 62, at 9-14.

¹²⁰ 11 F. Cas. at 22.

conduct the trial with fairness and uprightness.¹²¹ Griffin raised just one challenge to the validity of his conviction: that Judge Sheffey (or, one might say, *so-called* Judge Sheffey)¹²² was legally disqualified by Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment from serving.

The facts relevant to Judge Sheffey were not disputed either. He had taken the oath: Before the Civil War, Hugh Sheffey had been a member of the Virginia state legislature, as far back as 1849. And he had “engaged in” rebellion: After Virginia purported to secede from the Union, Sheffey continued to serve as a member of Virginia’s secessionist legislature. In that role, in 1862, he “voted for measures to sustain the so-called Confederate States in their war against the United States.”¹²³ Thus “it is admitted,” wrote Chase, that Judge Sheffey “was one of the persons to whom the prohibition to hold office pronounced by the amendment applied.”¹²⁴

Griffin had petitioned the U.S. district judge, Judge John Underwood, for a writ of habeas corpus challenging the lawfulness of his custody, which Judge Underwood granted.¹²⁵ The sheriff appealed to the circuit court, which was held by Chase as circuit justice.¹²⁶

¹²¹ *Id.* at 22.

¹²² Cf. Will Baude, The deadly serious accusation of being a “so-called judge,” *Volokh Conspiracy*, Wash. Post. (Feb. 4, 2017), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2017/02/04/the-deadly-serious-accusation-of-being-a-so-called-judge/> (“[T]o call him a ‘so-called’ judge is to hint that he is not really a judge, that he lacks judicial power. It is just a hint, but it flirts with a deadly serious issue”).

¹²³ 11 F. Cas. at 22.

¹²⁴ *Id.* at 23.

¹²⁵ See Opinion of Judge Underwood in Edward McPherson, *The Political History of the United States of America During the Period of Reconstruction* (from April 15, 1865, to July 15, 1870), at 462-466 (1875). We are indebted to Myles Lynch for locating this source.

¹²⁶ The procedural posture of this and several related cases are extremely confusing and reflect background machinations by both Judge Underwood and Chief Justice Chase: At the time, habeas was apparently available from the district court, or “at chambers,” or from the circuit court. If Judge Underwood issued the writ from the district court or at chambers, he could be reviewed by the circuit court, which would include Chief Justice Chase. But if Chief Justice Chase was not present, Judge Underwood could also sit alone as the circuit court. And thanks to a recent statute designed to strip jurisdiction over the anti-Reconstruction suit of *Ex parte McCardle*, there would be no appeal if Judge Underwood sat as the circuit court. Underwood took this, the unreviewable route, in another habeas case like Griffin’s brought by Sally Anderson. Chief Justice Chase then wrote to Underwood with a veiled threat, floating the possibility that a recent statute could be interpreted to deprive Underwood of his ability to hold the circuit court at that time, and encouraging Underwood to hear the cases in the district court or at chambers so that Chase could review him. Underwood obliged. Meanwhile, Virginia also sought an original writ in the Supreme Court to put a stop to Underwood’s Section Three docket. The Supreme Court ordered all of the proceedings stayed, and then let Chase go down to the circuit to clean things up, taking no action on the writ. See Charles Fairman, *Reconstruction and Reunion* at 601-607; Letter from Chase to Underwood (Nov. 19, 1868) in 5 *The Salmon P. Chase Papers* 285-286 (1998); Letter from Chase to Underwood (Jan. 14, 1869) in *id.* at 292-293.

This background is briefly alluded to in the synopsis in *Griffin’s Case* which explains that “[a] motion was then made by James Lyons, Esq. in the supreme court of the United States for a writ of prohibition against the district judge, to restrain him from further exercise of such power. The supreme

2. Chase on Section Three

Chase reversed. Here is how he framed the problem: Everybody agreed that Sheffey had been lawfully appointed as a state judge in February 1866, while Virginia was controlled by military reconstruction and the Fourteenth Amendment did not exist.¹²⁷ The question was whether ratification of Section Three kicked him out. As Chase put it: “whether upon a sound construction of the amendment, it must be regarded as operating directly, without any intermediate proceeding whatever, upon all persons within the category of prohibition, and as depriving them at once, and absolutely, of all official authority and power.”¹²⁸

Chase said no, rejecting this as a “literal construction”¹²⁹ of Section Three. There is a lot going on in this opinion. Chase included a number of makeweight arguments and asides on topics such as the legal history of West Virginia.¹³⁰ But his core argument was that surely Section Three cannot mean what it says: It would have bad consequences, can’t possibly have been intended by the ratifiers, and would violate the spirit of the Constitution. As we will explain, these arguments are bad ones. Chase then supplemented them with a shocking claim of a secret Supreme Court ruling in favor of an alternative approach—which was both generally improper, but also further impeached Chase’s interpretation of Section Three. All in all, *Griffin’s Case* is a case study in how *not* to go about the enterprise of faithful constitutional interpretation.

court advised on the motion, and never announced any conclusion, but shortly afterward the chief justice opened the circuit court at Richmond, and immediately called up the appeal in *Griffin’s Case*. This statement is necessary for a full understanding of the pregnancy of the chief justice’s statement that “the supreme court agreed with him as to the decision he rendered in this case.” *Griffin’s Case*, 11 F. Cas. at 7-8. But really, these circumstances are extraordinary. We take them up again below.

¹²⁷ *Id.* at 23.

¹²⁸ *Id.* at 18.

¹²⁹ *Id.* at 24.

¹³⁰ Chase summarized the intriguing legal history of this Virginia government: When Virginia, by act of its legislature in 1861, purported to secede from the Union, loyal Unionists assembled in convention in Wheeling to organize a new state government. Congress and the Lincoln administration recognized the Wheeling government as the lawful government of Virginia. The Wheeling *Virginia* government then gave its consent to the creation of a new Wheeling-based state of *West Virginia*, after which the (Wheeling) Virginia government-in-exile relocated to Alexandria, just across the river from Washington, to serve as the loyal, Union-recognized government of all of what remained as “Virginia.” After Lee’s surrender at Appomattox, Chase’s opinion notes, the “government recognized by the United States was transferred from Alexandria to Richmond” and “became in fact what it was before in law, the government of the whole state.” *Id.* at 18. Judge Sheffey was appointed under the authority of this government. (For the full story – and full formalist legal defense – of the validity of the legal fiction of “Virginia” giving its consent to the creation of a breakaway state of West Virginia, see Vasani Kesavan and Michael Stokes Paulsen, *Is West Virginia Unconstitutional?* 90 Calif. L. Rev. 291 (2002) For an argument that this aside was actually relevant to Chase’s argument, see Magliocca, *Foreground*, supra note 62, at 10 n.30, discussed infra note 157.)

a. “The argument from inconveniences, great as these”

The core of Chase’s argument was that if Section Three were an immediately operative, self-executing constitutional rule of disqualification, it would have inconvenient consequences in the Reconstruction South. “In the examination of questions of this sort,” Chase wrote, “great attention is properly paid to the argument from inconvenience.”¹³¹ And here “the argument from inconveniences” was “great” in Chase’s estimation—it was “of no light weight.”¹³²

In several incompletely reconstructed Southern governments, many offices were in fact held by former oath-breaking rebels.¹³³ If Section Three were automatically operative, it would have immediately barred all such men from office. (Indeed.) Yet, Chase argued, many such disqualified persons in fact had *not* vacated their offices but instead continued to exercise authority under those offices notwithstanding the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment. To give Section Three immediate effect would thus upset the apple cart in a fairly major way. “No sentence, no judgment, no decree, no acknowledgement of a deed, no record of a deed, no sheriff’s or commissioner’s sale—in short no official act—is of the least validity.”¹³⁴ Chase found this unthinkable: “It is impossible to measure the evils which such a construction would add to the calamities which have already fallen upon the people of these [Southern] states.”¹³⁵

Chase went on: not only did Section Three impose great “inconveniences” and “calamities,” it was unfairly punitive—ungraciously ousting once-lawfully-appointed officers from their offices—and ostensibly inconsistent with the “spirit” of prior constitutional principles, concerning due process, bills of attainder and *ex post facto* laws.¹³⁶ And besides, the specific remedy sought—vacating Griffin’s conviction—*only* worked mischief, because it did not even seek the literal removal of Judge Sheffey from office. Put these things together and you have Chase’s interpretive driver: “Surely,” Chase continued, “a construction which fails to accomplish the main purpose of the amendment, and yet necessarily works the mischief and inconveniences which have been described, and is repugnant to the first principles of justice and right embodied in other provisions of the constitution, is not to be favored, if any other reasonable construction can be found.”¹³⁷

¹³¹ 11 F. Cas. at 24.

¹³² *Id.* at 25.

¹³³ Chase also suggested that the problem was not completely limited to the Southern governments. *Id.* at 25 (observing that “[i]t is well known that many persons, engaged in the late Rebellion, have emigrated to states which adhered to the national government . . .” and that “it is not to be doubted that not a few among them” had previously taken a covered oath, and that “[p]robably some of these persons” had subsequently been elected to office).

¹³⁴ *Id.* at 25. Of course, Chase would undercut this conclusion later in the opinion. See *infra* Part II.C.

¹³⁵ 11 F. Cas. at 25.

¹³⁶ More on this point presently, Part II.C.2.c, and again Part III.

¹³⁷ 11 F. Cas. at 26.

Chase tried to funnel these policy arguments into a rule of constitutional construction: “the argument from inconvenience.”¹³⁸ This argument “it is true, can not prevail over plain words or clear reason,” Chase acknowledged.¹³⁹ “But, on the other hand,” he wrote, “a construction which must necessarily occasion great public and private mischief, must never be preferred to a construction which will occasion neither, or neither in so great a degree, unless the terms of the instrument absolutely require such preference.”¹⁴⁰

This is not an unreasonable principle, as interpretive canons go. When confronted with two plausible interpretations of genuinely *ambiguous, unclear* text, one of which would produce manifestly jarring results, the less jarring interpretation is more likely the correct one. As James Madison said in his famous speech against the national bank: “Where a meaning is clear, the consequences, whatever they may be, are to be admitted—where doubtful, it is fairly triable by its consequences.”¹⁴¹ Or as Chief Justice Marshall said in *United States v. Fisher*: “where great inconvenience will result from a particular construction, that construction is to be avoided, unless the meaning of the legislature be plain; in which case it must be obeyed.”¹⁴² But Chase’s canon was noticeably more aggressive: The supposedly more disruptive reading must “*never be preferred*” unless the text’s terms “*absolutely require*” such preference.¹⁴³ That is putting not just a thumb on the scale, but a whole hand.

But that is not the real problem with Chase’s analysis. The real problem was how Chase applied these principles to Section Three.

First, Chase was too quick—far too quick—to dismiss the “literal” reading of the “terms of the instrument” as meaning exactly what they seem to say. As discussed above, the language of Section Three’s prohibition on office holding is clear and direct; it is hardly doubtful at all. It takes considerable effort to impute any ambiguity to the text and Chase’s opinion does not even undertake that effort. Instead, the opinion assumes its own conclusion—that the text’s language is somehow insufficiently clear to justify applying the “literal” meaning of its words. Indeed, even on Chase’s own hyper-strict standard, the words of Section Three *do* “absolutely require” the conclusion that it, on its own, disqualifies covered rebels from office.

Second, Chase was too ready—far too ready—to find that following the (“literal”) language of the document would produce (what *Chase* considered to be) great “inconveniences” or “mischief”—indeed, increase “calamities” already visited upon

¹³⁸ Id. at 24.

¹³⁹ Id. at 24.

¹⁴⁰ Id. at 24.

¹⁴¹ James Madison, Speech on Feb. 2, 1791, reprinted in Legislative and Documentary History of the Bank of the United States 39, 40 (photo. reprint 2008)

¹⁴² *United States v. Fisher*, 2 Cranch (6 U.S.) 358, 386 (1805)

¹⁴³ 11 F. Cas. at 24 (emphasis added).

the South. Chase emphasized the breadth of Section Three's language: it applied in all the states, not just the former Confederacy (so?); it applied beyond the context of Civil War but included aiding enemies in a foreign war (so?); it would apply in terms to immediately disqualify men for acts done long ago, for example in the Mexican War (so?); it would apply "to all persons in the category" and "for all time, present and future" (so?). And, taken seriously, this broad rule would, as noted, "annul all official acts" performed by disqualified officers, including judges. (Would it?)

For Chase, all this seemed to border on the shocking—a parade of horribles demanding the search for an alternative construction of Section Three. But why? Because it might have a broad effect? Because it adopted a new rule of constitutional law superseding prior law? Because it would have removed immediately a substantial number of former-oath-swearing-officeholders-turned-rebels from positions of power? Because it could have the effect of invalidating their unauthorized, lawless actions? Chase's parade of horribles assumes, without argument, the correctness of his own apparent policy prejudices.¹⁴⁴

Now Chase did attempt to groom these prejudices into more plausible legal arguments, which we will get to in a moment. But because these arguments from inconvenience are the heart of Chase's opinion, and because we still see these kinds of arguments repeated today, we pause to emphasize that this is not how judging is supposed to work, even if it too often does.

Chase's construe-to-avoid-the-force-of-constitutional-language-whose-policy-consequences-you-dislike approach to constitutional interpretation is simply wrong. Judges do not get to rewrite constitutional provisions they find objectionable on policy grounds. Relatedly, judges do not get to make up new provisions of law in order to devise policy "solutions" to texts they don't like. Chase's opinion imposed, as a solution to textual literalism and its real and imagined policy inconveniences, a different kind of constitutional provision, one more like the Impeachment Clause and the Treason Clause. Put bluntly, Chase made up law that was not there in order to change law that was there but that he did not like.

b. The argument from "the intention of the people"

In places, Chase raises the inconvenience argument as an inquiry into the "intent" of the Framers: "What was the intention of the people of the United States in adopting the fourteenth amendment? What is the true scope and purpose of the prohibition to hold office contained in the third section?"¹⁴⁵ This at least sounds kind of

¹⁴⁴ As Judge Underwood had put it: "Whatever inconvenience may result from the maintenance of the Constitution and the laws, I think the experience of the last few years shows that much greater inconvenience comes from attempting their overthrow." Opinion of Judge Underwood, *supra* note 125, at 465.

¹⁴⁵ 11 F.Cas. at 24.

like the question a judge should be asking—the original meaning of the constitutional provision adopted by We The People and binding on those who interpret it. But in fact it conceals still more sleight of hand. ❌❌❌❌❌

First and foremost, Chase’s framing of the interpretive question commits a classic blunder: swapping in original intent for original meaning. In our constitutional system, law is made by *enacting* texts, not by searching for the *unenacted* wishes of lawmakers.¹⁴⁶ And whatever evidence Chase might have that the consequences of Section Three were *unintended* by some of those who voted for it, he had no evidence that these consequences were *not entailed* by what they voted for.

Second, however dubious it is to look to original intent over original meaning generally, it is especially dicey to do so in the case of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Fourteenth Amendment was ratified in unusual, exigent circumstances. In Congress, the Amendment represented a compromise between different Republican factions, some much more radical than the others. And in the states, where ratification made it law, the Amendment depended on the ratification votes of the southern states, who were pressured—some might say “coerced”—to ratify the Amendment as the price of regaining their representation in Congress.¹⁴⁷ Even if one accepts this process as lawful (which we do) it is obvious that it means one must cast a skeptical eye on stories about the supposed “intent” of those who ratified it, especially in the South. It may well be that some of the ratifiers had their fingers crossed behind their backs and *intended* to give the Amendment as little effect and as little quarter as they could get away with. But so what? What matters is what they *did*, in one of the highest-stakes moments of constitutional law making in American history. By diminishing the plain scope of the Amendment’s text, Chase was succumbing to this kind of anti-constitutional subversion.

Third and finally, all of Chase’s evidence of this supposed intent just boils down to the inconvenience argument we have just discussed. And as discussed above, this is why one must be especially careful with judges who invoke the supposed “intent” of a written text. When meaning is uncertain, it is permissible to give a slight edge to the interpretation that is more likely to match what its authors were trying to do. ❌

¹⁴⁶ See supra notes 9-14, sources cited there, and accompanying text.

¹⁴⁷ See generally, John Harrison, The Lawfulness of the Reconstruction Amendments, 68 U. Chi. L. Rev. 375, 461 (2001). For arguments that Congress’s requiring states’ ratification as condition of restored representation was entirely lawful and appropriate, see id; Kesavan & Paulsen, *West Virginia*, supra note 130, at 329; Amar, *America’s Constitution*, supra note 4, at 364-380, see especially id. at 376-378. There is a different argument for ratification, the “loyal denominator” theory, in which the southern states were unnecessary for ratification. See Christopher R. Green, *Loyal Denominatorism and the Fourteenth Amendment: Normative Defense and Implications*, 13 Duke J. Const. L. & Pub. Pol’y 167, 168 (2017); Christopher R. Green, *The History of the Loyal Denominator*, 79 La. L. Rev. 47, 48 (2018). One of us has rejected this theory in prior writing, Michael Stokes Paulsen, *A General Theory of Article V: The Constitutional Lessons of the Twenty-Seventh Amendment*, 103 Yale L.J. 677, 709 (1993); see also Amar, supra note 4, at 378-380, and the other of us is inclined in the same direction.

But it is easy for a judge to use this principle as an excuse for reading into the text his own views of what the law should be. *After all, the authors of the provision were reasonable people, trying to do reasonable things, and, I, the judge, am also reasonable, so surely if I don't like this result, they wouldn't have liked this result, and therefore it must not be the result.* To write it down this way would give up the game, but it is too easy to think it. Chase's use of original intent is makeweight at best, and a trick at worst.

c. The argument that Section Three should not be read to depart from the "spirit" of prior constitutional law

The "inconveniences" and "calamities" that, surely, were not intended by the authors of the Fourteenth Amendment were Chase's main arguments. But he had a bit more to say. There was "another principle, which in determining the construction of this amendment, is entitled to equal consideration."

Of two constructions, either of which is warranted by the words of an amendment of a public act, that is to be preferred which best harmonizes the amendment with the general terms and spirit of the act amended. This principle forbids a construction of the amendment, not clearly required by its terms, which will bring it into conflict or discord with the other provisions of the constitution.¹⁴⁸

What was the supposed conflict between Section Three and the rest of the Constitution? Chase fretted that Section Three was a penal enactment, imposing punishment without trial on secessionists, and thus in tension with the spirit of earlier provisions on bills of attainder, ex post facto laws, and due process:

Now it is undoubted that those provisions of the constitution which deny to the legislature power to deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law, or to pass a bill of attainder or an ex post facto, are inconsistent in their spirit and general purpose with a provision which, at once and without trial, deprives a whole class of persons of offices held by them, for cause, however grave. It is true that no limit can be imposed on the people when exercising their sovereign power in amending their own constitution of government. But it is a necessary presumption that the people in the exercise of that power, seek to confirm and improve, rather than to weaken and impair the general spirit of the constitution.¹⁴⁹

Thus, Chase concluded, Section Three should not be read as accomplishing disqualification of its own force.

¹⁴⁸ 11 F.Cas. at 25.

¹⁴⁹ *Id.* at 26.

Now once again, the interpretive rule Chase is formulating here is not totally crazy. But it is a warped version of the real thing. As we discuss at length in the next part: It is true that repeals by implication are disfavored, and this principle applies to constitutional law. But at the same time, constitutional amendments change things, and when an amendment is inconsistent with prior constitutional rules, ultimately it is the amendment that controls. If a new provision fairly can be harmonized with prior law—where there is no true conflict—the provisions should be read **harmoniously**.¹⁵⁰ But where new language in fact changes old law, by clear terms or necessary logical effect, the greater error is to deny such change out of undue attachment to the former legal regime.

This greater error is exactly what Chase did. Chase leaned very heavily—too heavily—on the rule against implied repeals, ratcheting it up to “*forbid[]*” readings of a text “not *clearly* required” by its terms, that would “*bring it into conflict or discord*” with other provisions of the Constitution.¹⁵¹ Each leaning is wrong. Repeals by implication may be *disfavored*; but repeals, made in terms or by necessary logical implication, are not presumptively *forbidden*. Nor does new language changing old provisions require such extraordinary clarity as Chase would have it. The true question is whether the language and logic of a new provision really does present a conflict with prior law. And the idea that constitutional amendments should presumptively be read so as not to change the Constitution (!)—that they should be construed to avoid *conflict* or even mere *disaccord* with prior constitutional law—is indefensible. *Of course* constitutional amendments change prior constitutional law. That is their purpose and function. Now, that doesn’t warrant reading them to change more than they really do. But a presumption that constitutional amendments should be read to change as little as possible makes no sense.

Finally, this part of Chase’s argument took a puzzling turn that is worth noting. In one of many strange asides, Chase noted the possibility that Section Three had *implicitly repealed the Treason Clause*: “in the judgment of some enlightened jurists, the legal effect” of Section Three’s imposition of a new prohibition on officeholding for rebels and insurrectionists “was to remit all other punishments” for treason.¹⁵² If anything this seemed to *hurt* Chase’s argument against self-execution, because it emphasized that Section Three *could* change the pre-existing constitutional rules. And at the same time this supposedly enlightened argument was also bonkers. The enactment of a constitutional rule of disqualification from office does not remotely suggest a supersession or repeal of criminal-law punishment for treason. And if it did it would have the perverse effect of leaving Confederates who had *not* previously

¹⁵⁰ See *infra*, Part III.

¹⁵¹ 11 F. Cas. at 25 (emphasis added).

¹⁵² *Id.* at 26.

taken a constitutional oath subject to the death penalty, while previous office holders avoided all criminal punishment except the officeholding ban. ❌❌❌❌❌

So why did Chase bring it up? Who were these “enlightened jurists” who imagined such a thing? The answer is . . . Chase himself! He had asserted precisely this wacky construction of Section Three’s effect on the criminal penalty for treason—and quietly suggested the argument to defense counsel—in the federal criminal treason prosecution of Jefferson Davis just two years earlier.¹⁵⁴ Even Davis’s lawyers had been puzzled by the argument, and wondered if it was some sort of trick, and it seems likely that Chase had complex political motivations in proposing it at the time.¹⁵⁵ This argument was tendentious then, and weirdly irrelevant in *Griffin’s Case*. But it is a helpful reminder that Chief Justice Chase was not shooting straight in his applications of Section Three.

d. The argument from the Section Five enforcement power

Having flailed to avoid the natural reading of Section Three, Chase finally offered his alternative, “reasonable construction”:

For in the very nature of things, it must be ascertained what particular individuals are embraced by the definition, before any sentence of exclusion can be made to operate. To accomplish this ascertainment and ensure effective results, proceedings, evidence, decisions, and enforcement of decisions, more or less formal, are indispensable; and these can only be provided by Congress. Now, the necessity of this is recognized by the amendment itself, in its fifth and final section, which declares that ‘congress shall have power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provision[s] of this article.’ [sic] ... The fifth section qualifies the third to the same extent as it would if the whole amendment consisted of these two sections.¹⁵⁶

Section Five “qualifies” Section Three. Of course, this proves too much. Taken seriously, it would suggest that Section Five likewise “qualifies” Section One and renders its commands—birthright citizenship, privileges or immunities, due process, and equal protection—inoperative until enforced by congressional legislation. It would imply that Section One had no self-executing legal effect, which has never been the law. It also proves too little. It is true, perhaps, that carrying a legal prohibition into

¹⁵³ See *Case of Davis*, 7 F. Cas. 63, 92, 95 (C.C.D. Va. 1867).

¹⁵⁴ *Id.* See Magliocca, *Amnesty*, supra note 5, at 100-102; Cynthia Nicoletti, *Secession on Trial: The Treason Prosecution of Jefferson Davis* 293-300 (2017).

¹⁵⁵ Nicoletti suggests—and she is not making this up—that either Chase was gunning for the Democratic nomination for President, or that this was a bank shot to get southern whites to accept the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment, by arranging for the Amendment to benefit them. *Id.* at 293-296.

¹⁵⁶ 11 F. Cas. at 26.

practical effect in actual situations frequently will involve, necessarily, actions by persons and institutions charged with applying that prohibition as law in the course of performing their assigned duties. But as noted above there is no reason why “proceedings” and “decisions” and “enforcement” with respect to Section Three’s commands may not be conducted and carried out by these various state and federal actors, exercising their usual authority with respect to such matters.¹⁵⁷ It is simply not true that “these can only be provided by Congress.” Congress *can* provide them. But so can many others. Indeed, that is just what Judge Underwood was trying to accomplish in *Griffin’s Case*, until Chase stopped him.

Chase’s tendentious construction of Section Three has gone on to a surprisingly serious career as a precedent. But it simply does not hold up as an original matter. But that is not even the weirdest thing about *Griffin’s Case*.

3. *Griffin’s* Self-Defeating and Highly Irregular Dictum

Chase concluded his discussion of Section Three this way: “After the most careful consideration, therefore, I find myself constrained to the conclusion that Hugh W. Sheffey had not been removed from the office of judge at the time of the trial and sentence of the petitioner; and that the sentence of the circuit court of Rockbridge county was lawful.”¹⁵⁸

By Chase’s logic, such as it was, that should have been the final line of his opinion. But strangely, Chase was not actually done. He then launched into the weirdest part of his opinion, a sort of half-dictum, half-advisory opinion that cast further doubt on all that had come before:

In this view of the case, it becomes unnecessary to determine the question relating to the effect of the sentence of a judge de facto, exercising the office with the color, but without the substance of right. It is proper to say, however, that I should have no difficulty in sustaining the custody of the sheriff under sentence of a court held by such a judge. . . .

This subject received the consideration of the judges of the supreme court at the last term, with reference to this and kindred cases in this district, and I am authorized to say that they unanimously concur in

¹⁵⁷ Magliocca also suggests that in the specific situation in *Griffin’s Case*, state law may have been “unavailable for enforcement” of Section Three because “Virginia was an unreconstructed state and thus lacked the ordinary powers of a state” and “because Virginia did not yet recognize the Fourteenth Amendment’s legitimacy” – in contrast with states such as North Carolina. Magliocca, *Foreground*, *supra* note 62, at 10 n.30. We are not sure whether this is giving Chase too much credit or not, but regardless, these points would obviously not hold today, where state law is fully available in every state of the union.

¹⁵⁸ 11 F. Cas. at 27.

the opinion that a person convicted by a judge de facto acting under color of office, though not de jure, and detained in custody in pursuance of his sentence, can not be properly discharged upon habeas corpus.¹⁵⁹

What is going on here? Chase describes an alternate ground for the case—“a judge de facto acting under color of office,” which we would now call the “de facto officer doctrine”—explains that it is unnecessary to decide it, but then also explains that he would “have no difficulty” resolving the case on that alternate ground, and also that the rest of the Supreme Court agrees with him. It is hard to make sense of this part of Chase’s opinion, but the more one digs in to it the more dubious the whole opinion becomes.

First of all, notice that what Chase says here fatally undercuts his earlier arguments about Section Three. The heart of Chase’s argument was that a self-executing Section Three would have calamitous consequences that could not possibly have been intended. But here Chase says that even an illegally appointed officer can be a “de facto” officer whose acts are treated as valid for purposes of a habeas claim. If Chase believed this claim about the de facto officer doctrine, then his earlier claim about the consequences was overblown. The de facto officer doctrine would limit or eliminate the supposedly calamitous consequences and allow Section Three to be given its more natural interpretation in other situations. On its own terms, then, this dictum is colossally self-defeating.¹⁶⁰

Indeed, if Chase’s extensive dictum about Section Three made it “unnecessary” to resolve the de facto officer doctrine, the same was equally true in reverse. Accepting Chase’s conclusion about the de facto officer doctrine would have made his erroneous disquisition on Section Three completely unnecessary. The criticisms sometimes levelled against the chief justices who wrote the famous (or infamous) opinions in *Marbury v. Madison*, and *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, for having reached out to decide, gratuitously, unnecessarily, and improperly, grand questions of constitutional law,¹⁶¹ fall far more heavily upon the head of Chief Justice Chase for his opinion in *Griffin’s Case*.

Even stranger, Chase represented that the full Supreme Court unanimously agreed with him that on the de facto officer question. “This subject received the consideration of the judges of the supreme court at the last term,” Chase asserted, “with

¹⁵⁹ 11 F. Cas. at 27.

¹⁶⁰ Accord, Magliocca, *Foreground*, supra note 62, at 11 n.25.

¹⁶¹ See, e.g., Letter from Thomas Jefferson to William Johnson (June 12, 1823) (“This practice of Judge Marshall, of travelling out of his case to prescribe what the law would be in a moot case not before the court, is very irregular and very censurable.”) <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-3562>; Michael Stokes Paulsen, *The Worst Constitutional Decision of All Time*, 78 Notre Dame L. Rev. 995, 1011-12 & n.39 (2003); Baude, Judgment Power, 96 Geo. L.J. 1807, 1823-24 (2008).

reference to this and kindred cases in this district.”¹⁶² The full Court had apparently decided the de facto officer question, in secret, without having announced the fact in any case decision or written opinion,¹⁶³ in some form of advisory preemptive appellate jurisdiction!?

To be sure, judicial norms were looser back then, but the whole thing was highly irregular even by the standards of the day. Charles Fairman, whose account *defends* the whole affair as an urgent workaround to stop Judge Underwood, nonetheless acknowledges that “[i]t was most unusual to hear a Justice on circuit declare that he was authorized to announce the opinion of the Justices of the Supreme Court on a matter pending in the Circuit Court.”¹⁶⁴ Fairman further acknowledges technical problems with this maneuver, because the only issue in front of the full Court was an original writ of prohibition in *Ex Parte State of Virginia*, where the Court had granted a stay despite manifest procedural flaws.¹⁶⁵ Somehow the Court’s non-ruling in a dubious vehicle became a second-hand advisory opinion on a legal question of great importance. The criticisms levelled today at the shenanigans allegedly perpetrated on the Supreme Court’s “shadow docket,”¹⁶⁶ fall much more heavily and justifiably on the heads of the Reconstruction justices.

And to return to this point once more, even if we accept this whole problematic advisory opinion, it simultaneously undermines the other part of Chase’s decision—his interpretation of Section Three. As Chase described it, there were two alternative ways to resolve the case—one massive constitutional question, and the other a more modest procedural question. Chase claimed that the whole Supreme Court had authorized him to issue a secondhand advisory opinion on the procedural question, an opinion adequate to resolve the Judge Underwood situation. But Chase ignored his colleagues’ apparent preference and resolved the case on massive constitutional grounds instead—grounds that he did *not* claim were endorsed by the rest of the Court. Is there any justification for his doing so other than a personal power grab?

All of this is without taking a view on the merits of the de facto officer question. This, we think, is not as obvious as Chase (and apparently his colleagues) made it out

¹⁶² 11 F. Cas. at 27.

¹⁶³ The Court’s one recorded public statement on the matter was a statement from Justice Nelson in the original writ of prohibition case, *Ex Parte State of Virginia*, that Chief Justice Chase had “informed the court that before the pending motion for prohibition was made, he signified to the district judge his dissent” and that Chase was going to “direct that this division of opinion . . . be certified to this court.” *Ex parte State of Virginia No. 11*, 1868 WL 10951, 19 L. Ed. 153 (1868); Fairman, *supra* note 126, at 606. That statement did not state the Court’s view on the division, and seemed to anticipate that the Justices would deliberate on the issue *later* in the more ordinary course – not deputize the Chief Justice to go deliver some secret verdict in their stead.

¹⁶⁴ Fairman, *supra* note 126, at 607.

¹⁶⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶⁶ Stephen Vladeck, *The Shadow Docket: How the Supreme Court Uses Stealth Rulings to Amass Power and Undermine the Republic* (2023); William Baude, *Foreword: The Supreme Court’s Shadow Docket*, 9 N.Y.U. J. L. & Lib. 1 (2015).

to be. True, American and English history was full of many statements about the valid acts of “de facto” officers and even specifically judges.¹⁶⁷ But many of these statements could not be taken to their logical extreme in our constitutional system, and indeed, at the founding the Supreme Court had refused to accept the actions of several de facto judges in the saga surrounding *Hayburn’s Case*.¹⁶⁸

How to reconcile these principles is a difficult question. One possibility, stated in some of the cases, is that an unlawful, but de facto, officer’s acts can be questioned directly, and on direct review, but not “collaterally.”¹⁶⁹ On this possibility, maybe the de facto officer doctrine was a defense to claims like habeas—the procedural vehicle in *Griffin’s Case*—because habeas was a collateral attack.¹⁷⁰ Habeas could not be used as a substitute for a writ of error, where the challenge would have been properly raised.

But another possibility is that the de facto officer doctrine protects only technical and ordinary legal defects in an officer’s appointment, not *fundamental inability to exercise power*, as when that power is forbidden by the Constitution.¹⁷¹ On this possibility, Judge Sheffey’s acts were inherently void, and thus everything he did fell outside of his court’s jurisdiction.¹⁷² The de facto officer arguments in *Griffin’s Case*—and thus the correct legal fate of Caesar Griffin—turn on these technicalities.¹⁷³ Indeed, these technicalities were argued by the parties and they were the main subject

¹⁶⁷ For many citations, see *Griffin’s Case*, 11 F. Cas. at 18-21 (argument of counsel). For more, see also Reply and Response Brief for the United States, Financial Oversight and Management Board for Puerto Rico v. Aurelius (Nos. 18-1334, 18-1475, 18-1496, 18-1514, 18-1512) at 27-47; and *Calcutt v. Fed. Deposit Ins. Corp.*, 37 F.4th 293, 342-45 (6th Cir. 2022) (Murphy, J., dissenting).

¹⁶⁸ Baude, Severability, *supra* note 66, at 12 (discussing Yale Todd).

¹⁶⁹ For statements like this, see *Ball v. United States*, 140 U.S. 118, 128-129 (1891) (“was judge de facto if not de jure, and his acts as such are not open to collateral attack.”); see also Note, *The De Facto Officer Doctrine*, 63 Colum. L. Rev. 909, 910, 919 (1963); but see *id.* at 910 & n. 9 (suggesting that a suit is collateral whenever the officer “is not a party,” including on “writ of error”).

¹⁷⁰ All three cases cited by Chase in *Griffin’s Case*, 11 F. Cas. at 27, can be characterized this way. *Taylor v. Skrine*, 5 S.C.L. 516, 3 Brev. 516 (1815) deals with a writ of execution and observes that “no objections were made to his authority at the time the decree was given.” *State v. Bloom*, 17 Wis. 521 (1863) relies entirely on *In re Boyle* 9 Wis. 264 (1859) which is a habeas case holding that the “right to hold the offices cannot be inquired into in a collateral proceeding of this kind,” *id.* at 267. And *People v. Bangs*, 24 Ill. 184., 187 (1860) distinguishes a “direct proceeding” from one where the doctrine applied.

¹⁷¹ For statements like this, see *McDowell v. United States*, 159 U.S. 596, 598 (1895) (“presents a mere matter of statutory construction It involves no trespass upon the executive power of appointment.”); see also Note, *The De Facto Officer Doctrine*, at 918 (discussing *Glidden Co. v. Zdanok*, 370 U.S. 530 (1962)).

¹⁷² But see *In re Boyle*, cited *supra* note 170 (distinguishing “the jurisdiction of the court, which may always be inquired into; it is an inquiry into the right of the judge to hold his office, which is a question entirely distinct from that of the jurisdiction of the court over the offence”).

¹⁷³ In the Supreme Court’s most recent de facto officer doctrine case, *Ryder v. United States*, 515 U.S. 177 (1995), it split the difference, holding the doctrine inapplicable because the case was on direct

of Judge Underwood’s opinion below.¹⁷⁴ Chief Justice Chase could have turned his considerable powers to them, had he not been busy knee-capping the Fourteenth Amendment instead.

* * *

There is little to be said in defense of *Griffin’s Case*, but much to be learned from it. The very weakness of its arguments; the obviously result-oriented nature of its legal analysis; and the inconsistency of its conclusion with Section Three’s language, end up confirming the core conclusion in this section: Section Three’s disqualification of designated persons from office is a self-executing constitutional command that requires nothing more to have immediate legal force.

III. Section Three Supersedes, Qualifies, or Satisfies Prior Constitutional Provisions

Our third proposition is logically and methodologically straightforward but perhaps unsettling in some of its implications: *Section Three trumps the earlier parts of the Constitution—to the extent there is a true conflict between them.*

As noted above, one of Chief Justice Chase’s arguments against enforcing Section Three was that it conflicted (he thought) with prior constitutional norms—of due process, prospectivity, fairness, and so on.¹⁷⁵ Even for those who do not put the claim in so many words, we suspect that they might share a similar intuition—there is something about Section Three, taken seriously, that seems harsh, unforgiving, undemocratic, unAmerican (?), even . . . unconstitutional(!?). If so, it might seem to follow that somebody (judges?) should tame Section Three.

This is an understandable instinct. But it is wrong: dead wrong. We think the conflict with prior constitutional rules is overstated—more *feel* than real. But to the extent the conflict is real, Section Three wins the face-off.

Constitutional amendments change the Constitution. It thus should be unsurprising—indeed, it is in the very nature of constitutional amendments—that such new provisions, when added to the Constitution, supersede, displace, qualify, adjust, correct, or simply must be considered to satisfy earlier constitutional rules, to the extent of any actual conflict between them. Simply put: *a constitutional amendment*

review *and* the challenge was constitutional. In the more recent case of *Financial Oversight and Management Board for Puerto Rico v. Aurelius*, 140 S. Ct. 1649, 1666 (2020), it avoided the issue because it found the appointments lawful.

¹⁷⁴ See Opinion of Judge Underwood, *supra* note 125, at 463-466.

¹⁷⁵ See *supra* Part III.C.2.c.; see also Ginsburg, Huq, & Landau, *supra* note 118, at 18 (suggesting that a self-executing interpretation, “while in harmony with the original operation of Section 3, raises due process and perhaps bill of attainder concerns” and for that reason an “alternative, more plausible construction gives Congress authority to determine how Section 3 is enforced”).

supersedes prior law precisely to the extent that it departs from the prior rules. This general maxim of interpretation applies to Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment the same as it applies to any other constitutional amendment provision. If the original textual meaning of Section Three’s terms, understood in their natural sense and accounting for any terms of art or specialized usages of words, departs from or alters prior constitutional understandings, that new constitutional language must be given full effect and priority over earlier provisions.

These basic principles of conflicting legal provisions were astutely captured by Alexander Hamilton, writing as *Publius* in *The Federalist* Number 78. “It not uncommonly happens that there are two statutes existing at one time, clashing in whole or in part with each other and neither of them containing any repealing clause or expression,” Hamilton wrote. When this occurs, the courts must determine the “meaning and operation” of the two provisions.

Hamilton articulated two principles for doing so, which work as a complementary pair. “So far as they can, by fair construction, be reconciled to each other, reason and law conspire to dictate that this should be done”—there’s the first of the pair, but Hamilton’s sentence does not end there, but instead pauses only ever-so-briefly, with a semi-colon, before proceeding to the second rule of the pair: “where this is impracticable, it becomes a matter of necessity to give effect to one in exclusion of the other. The rule which has obtained in the courts for determining their relative validity is that the last in order of time shall be preferred to the first.” This was, Hamilton continued, “a mere rule of construction,” but it was an appropriate one, “consonant to truth and propriety,” consistently recognized by courts as interpreters of law: that, as “between the interfering acts of an *equal* authority that which was the last indication of its will should have the preference.”¹⁷⁶

Hamilton went on, more famously, to explain that a different interpretive principle governed the interfering acts of a superior and a subordinate authority—and proceeded to derive the proposition customarily called “judicial review.”¹⁷⁷ But that is not the interpretive question here. Here, the key point is precisely Hamilton’s lead-in proposition: that, as between “interfering” acts of equal legal stature—the paradigm being two statutes, adopted by the same legislature, at different times—the last in time prevails to the extent of any true, irreconcilable conflict. As with statutes adopted by the same legislative authority at different times, so with constitutional provisions adopted by the same authority at different times and possessing the same

¹⁷⁶ See *The Federalist* No. 78 (I. Kramnick ed. 1987) at 439 (Hamilton). These rules were well-established in American and English law. Caleb Nelson, *Preemption*, 86 Va. L. Rev. 225, 235-244 (2000)

¹⁷⁷ See *The Federalist* No. 78, *supra* note 176, at 439-440 (Hamilton) (“But in regard to the interfering acts of a superior and subordinate authority of an original and derivative power, the nature and reason of the thing indicate the converse of that rule as proper to be followed. They teach us that the prior act of a superior ought to be preferred to the subsequent act of an inferior and subordinate authority; and that accordingly whenever a particular statute contravenes the Constitution, it will be the duty of the judicial tribunals to adhere to the latter and disregard the former.”)

legal status: By the terms of Article V, constitutional amendments are “valid to all Intents and Purposes, as Part of this Constitution,” when adopted.¹⁷⁸ Thus, where We, the People, have adopted a new constitutional text “interfering” with or departing from prior constitutional provisions, the last-in-time enacted prevails to the extent of any conflict. That is the interpretive principle that governs the relationship between new constitutional language and old language from which it departs.

Actual constitutional examples of these principles abound. The entire Bill of Rights in a sense qualifies, or limits, the original Constitution’s grant of enumerated powers—to the extent of a conflict between those powers and the subsequently enumerated rights.¹⁷⁹ Likewise, the Eleventh Amendment qualifies Article III’s extension of the federal judicial power to various cases and controversies. To the extent the Eleventh Amendment changes what Article III may originally have provided, the amendment supersedes that prior law.¹⁸⁰

Much of the time, new amendments can be harmonized with what came before them. Section Five of the Fourteenth Amendment’s grant of “power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article”¹⁸¹ does not preempt, for example, the Due Process Clause or the Cruel or Unusual Punishments Clause. It does not allow Congress to punish civil rights violations through summary tortures without trial. Similarly, Section Five does not preempt the Veto Clause; it can and should be read together with Article I, to require “appropriate legislation” to go through the pre-existing lawmaking process.¹⁸² A new amendment does not ignore the legal system that it amends.

On the other hand, other parts of the Reconstruction Amendments did conflict sharply with prior constitutional norms, and they displaced them precisely to that extent. Consider the Thirteenth Amendment’s ban on slavery—a dramatic and particularly obvious illustration of the point that new constitutional language supersedes and repudiates old constitutional language, to the extent of any conflict. The Thirteenth Amendment’s abolition of slavery implicitly but necessarily overrides and extinguishes the Fugitive Slave Clause and any other provision of the original Constitution that protected the institution of slavery to the full logical extent of inconsistency with the amendment’s flat ban. Similarly, Section *Two* of the Fourteenth Amendment supersedes and displaces the Constitution’s original apportionment

¹⁷⁸ U.S. Const. art. V.

¹⁷⁹ On the relationship between rights and powers, see William Baude, *Rethinking the Federal Eminent Domain Power*, 122 *Yale L.J.* 1738, 1821-1822 (2013); Jud Campbell, *The Invention of First Amendment Federalism*, 97 *Tex. L. Rev.* 517, 561-67 (2019).

¹⁸⁰ Baude & Sachs, *Eleventh Amendment*, supra note 9, at 624-25; cf. *Hans v. Louisiana*, 134 U.S. 1, 21 (1890) (Harlan, J., concurring).

¹⁸¹ U.S. Const. amdt XIV, sec. 5.

¹⁸² See William Baude, *Sovereign Immunity and the Constitutional Text*, 103 *Va. L. Rev.* 1, 19 (2017) (offering the examples in this paragraph).

rules including the notorious Three-fifths Clause.¹⁸³ Because the two rules conflict in substance, the amendment prevails over the Constitution’s original language.

Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment is in the same family. In most respects, Section Three can be easily harmonized with other parts of the Constitution, such as Article I’s Speech or Debate Clause, Article I and II’s impeachment provisions, Article II’s process of presidential selection, Article III’s requirement of a case or controversy, and so on. As we have discussed, Section Three’s new constitutional qualification for office is enforced in the same way as other constitutional qualifications for office, and is easily reconciled with existing constitutional rules.

But there are a few constitutional provisions that have been alleged to conflict with Section Three. If and when this is the case, just as *any* later-enacted constitutional provision supersedes or modifies an earlier-enacted constitutional provisions with which the new provision conflicts, Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment logically qualifies and, where the language so compels the conclusion, overrides prior constitutional rules.¹⁸⁴

Thus, we think all this follows: *To the extent of any inconsistency between them*, Section Three overrides any limitations otherwise imposed by the Bill of Attainder Clause. *To the extent of any inconsistency between them*, Section Three also overrides limitations imposed by the Ex post Facto Clause. *To the extent of any inconsistency between them*, Section Three likewise overrides—or simply satisfies—prior constitutional requirements of due process of law.

Finally—and this example might present more difficult questions—*to the extent of any inconsistency between them*, Section Three overrides, supersedes, or satisfies the free speech principles reflected in the First Amendment. That is: Whatever the

¹⁸³ See U.S. Const. amdt. XIV, sec. 2; U.S. Const. art. I, sec. 3. By itself, the Thirteenth Amendment also already rendered the Three-fifths Clause a null set. Section Two then dealt with the injustice of letting the South claim a massive increase in political power for its disenfranchised black population.

¹⁸⁴ Indeed, for what it is worth, the legislative history supports this conclusion as well. Opponents of Section Three characterized it as directly imposing retroactive punishment, thus contradicting principles of due process and principles against bills of attainder and ex post facto laws. Cong. Globe, 39th Cong. 1st Sess. at 2915 (Sen. Doolittle) (complaining that Section Three was an “ex post facto provision, a bill of attainder”); id. at 2890 (Sen. Cowen) (bill of attainder); id. at App 241 (Sen. Davis) (Section Three “is in the nature of both a bill of attainder and an ex post facto law”); id. at 2940 (Sen. Hendricks) (ex post facto); id. at 2916; see also id. at 2467 (Rep. Boyer) (criticizing earlier version of Section Three as “a bill of attainder or ex post facto law”). These charges were generally premised on the view – with which proponents of the amendment evidently agreed, see id. at 3036 (Sen. Henderson) – that Section Three would preempt these earlier rules to the extent of a direct conflict. Though at one point Senator Davis did make the wild suggestion that Section Three might itself exceed Congress’s power to propose amendments to the Constitution. Id. at App. 241 (“The framers of the Constitution did not intend to invest, and have not in fact conferred on Congress the power to initiate alterations of it which would revolutionize the Government formed by it”); see also id. at 3146. See also Graber, *supra* note 12, at 26-31, 36-37 (documenting this history).

correct meaning of Section Three as applied to conspiracies, attempts, incitements, and advocacy that meet the description of “engag[ing] in insurrection or rebellion” or of giving of “aid or comfort” to enemies of the constitutional government of the United States, the constitutional meaning of Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment modifies or qualifies what otherwise might have been thought the dictates of the First Amendment.

In the end, we think that these various prior provisions can mostly be read harmoniously with Section Three. Reason and common sense suggest they should be read consistently with one another to the extent fairly possible; and it is, for the most part, fairly possible to do so. But to the legitimate extent of any conflict or tension, Section Three controls over the Bill of Attainder Clause, the Ex Post Facto Clause, the Due Process Clause, and the First Amendment.

The first three are easy.

A. *Bills of Attainder*

A bill of attainder is the legislative infliction of punishment on specific people without a trial.¹⁸⁵ It is a violation of both the separation of powers and individual rights because it short-circuits the normal adjudication of guilt or innocence. But Section Three is neither a bill nor an attainder. It is not a “bill”—that is, an enactment of the *legislature*. Rather, it is an enactment of The People as supreme constitutional law. And it is not an “attainder” either—in that it is not at all clear that it inflicts *punishment*, because disqualification from office is not necessarily or exclusively a form of punishment. For instance, the Twenty-second Amendment is surely not inflicting a “punishment” when it precludes the President from running for a third term.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, Section Three does not inflict it on specified persons or groups, but rather on anybody who has committed a described course of conduct.

To be sure, Supreme Court precedent has read the Bill of Attainder Clauses more broadly, both in a pair of 20th-century “red scare” cases¹⁸⁷ and perhaps more relevantly in a pair of immediate post-Civil War-era loyalty cases: In *Cummings v. Missouri*¹⁸⁸ and *Ex Parte Garland*,¹⁸⁹ the Supreme Court invalidated state and federal oath requirements that required an “Ironclad Oath” from anybody holding a range of positions, both public and private. That oath was really a *past*-loyalty-requirement, requiring people to swear that they had not supported the confederacy or

¹⁸⁵ See generally Anthony Dick, *The Substance of Punishment Under the Bill of Attainder Clause*, 63 Stan. L. Rev. 1177 (2011).

¹⁸⁶ U.S. Const. amdt. XXII. But see *Cummings v. Missouri*, 71 U.S. 277, 320 (1866) (“Disqualification from office may be punishment, as in cases of conviction upon impeachment.”).

¹⁸⁷ *United States v. Brown*, 381 U.S. 437 (1965); *United States v. Lovett*, 328 U.S. 303 (1946).

¹⁸⁸ 71 U.S. 277 (1866).

¹⁸⁹ 71 U.S. 333 (1866).

the like.¹⁹⁰ The Court concluded that these requirements were effectively bills of attainder—and also ex post facto laws—and held them unconstitutional.

Even if one takes these precedents at face value it does not follow that Section Three would similarly be a bill of attainder. First, the “Ironclad Oath” laws had a broader scope than Section Three: *Garland* dealt with bar membership, and concluded that “exclusion from any of the professions or any of the ordinary avocations of life for past conduct can be regarded in no other light than as punishment for such conduct.”¹⁹¹ Similarly, the plaintiff in *Cummings* was a Catholic priest forbidden from preaching.¹⁹² Neither case dealt with a more focused exclusion from *constitutional office*. Indeed, the majority opinion emphasized this fact, explicitly noting that neither case involved qualifications for public office.¹⁹³ Second, because both cases focused on the retroactive effect of the laws,¹⁹⁴ neither case’s reasoning would seem applicable to Section Three in post-Civil-War insurrections and rebellions—which of course are the only insurrections and rebellions to which Section Three still **applies**.¹⁹⁵

And in any event we doubt that one should take these precedents at face value. First of all, if we had to take sides, we might well be inclined to say that *Garland* at least may have been wrong, for reasons stated in dissent by Justice Miller (joined by three other justices, including, perhaps somewhat ironically given his later position in *Griffin*, Chief Justice Chase).¹⁹⁶ Second, and more fundamentally, if constitutional amendments can change the Constitution, *a fortiori* they can change judicial *interpretations* (and misinterpretations) of the Constitution. That is of course what Section One of the Fourteenth Amendment famously did with respect to *Dred Scott*, what the Eleventh Amendment did with respect to *Chisholm*, and so on.¹⁹⁷ In short, the Court’s interpretation of the Bill of Attainder Clause was a stretch, and regardless, it does not stretch far enough to change or limit the meaning of Section Three.

B. Ex Post Facto Laws

¹⁹⁰ For much more detailed discussion of the federal “Ironclad Oath” see *infra* Part IV.A.4.b.i.

¹⁹¹ *Garland*, 71 U.S. at 377.

¹⁹² *Cummings*, 71 U.S. at 319.

¹⁹³ *Garland*, 71 U.S. at 378.

¹⁹⁴ *Cummings*, 71 U.S. at 327 (“They are aimed at past acts, and not future acts.”); *Garland*, at 377 (“In the exclusion which the statute adjudges it imposes a punishment for some of the acts specified which were not punishable at the time they were committed”).

¹⁹⁵ See *supra* Part I.B.

¹⁹⁶ *Garland*, 71 U.S. at 382. *Cummings* presents a trickier case, as it might involve complicating questions of state power to interfere with religious liberty and church autonomy (albeit before ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment) and an especially weak case for the relevance of past loyalty to engaging in religious occupation.

¹⁹⁷ For a somewhat lighthearted explication of this principle – and a serious treatment of certain of its implications, see Michael Stokes Paulsen, *Can a Constitutional Amendment Overrule a Supreme Court Decision?* 24 *Const. Comm.* 285 (2007).

Article I also forbids both the state and federal governments from enacting an “Ex Post Facto” law.¹⁹⁸ An *ex post facto* law is generally thought to mean a legislative enactment that makes a past act *criminal* even though it was lawful at the time it was done. Once again, Section Three does not meet this description, being neither a legislative enactment (but rather a new constitutional provision) nor a legislative enactment defining a criminal offense.¹⁹⁹ True, as applied to actions done before 1868, Section Three has retroactive (non-criminal) constitutional legal effect. But as applied to actions done after 1868, the idea that Section Three might depart even from the “spirit” of the ban on ex post facto laws makes precious little sense.

So Section Three no longer produces any conflict—if it ever did—with the Ex Post Facto Clauses or with any Ex Post Facto Spirit that might be supposed to lurk behind them. And even if it did, Section Three would supersede both prior law and lurking spirit.

Indeed, we have this on especially good authority, as this very question has been asked and answered in the past. The Eleventh Amendment, as noted above, had the effect of cutting off jurisdiction previously recognized by *Chisholm v. Georgia’s* interpretation of Article III. In *Hollingsworth v. Virginia*, the Court then confronted the question whether the Amendment was retroactive, cutting off suits pending when the Amendment became law. The plaintiffs argued in the U.S. Supreme Court against retroactivity, because “[t]he spirit of the constitution,” forbade “the mischief of an ex post facto Constitution.”²⁰⁰ Indeed, this argument mirrored precisely the arguments for narrow construction we have seen above: “It is true, that an amendment to the Constitution cannot be controuled by those provisions; and if the words were explicit and positive, to produce the retrospective effect contended for, they must prevail. But the words are doubtful; and, therefore, they ought to be so construed, as to conform to the general principle of the Constitution.”²⁰¹ But the Supreme Court disagreed *emphatically*—unanimously ruling the very next day that the Amendment applied retroactively, by necessary implication.²⁰² As with the Eleventh, so too for the Fourteenth: Had the Supreme Court ever been called upon to consider the question, the right answer surely is that the Fourteenth Amendment’s rules immediately governed upon ratification and applied “retroactively” to prior actions covered by the revised constitutional rules.

¹⁹⁸ U.S. Const. art. I, §§9 & 10.

¹⁹⁹ To be sure, there are revisionist arguments that the Ex Post Facto clause itself extends to retroactive civil laws too. See *Eastern Enterprises v. Apfel*, 524 U.S. 498, 538-39 (1998) (Thomas, J., concurring). And as with bills of attainder, in the wake of the Civil War the Supreme Court held that Ironclad Oath requirements were ex post facto laws as well. *Cummings*, 71 U.S. at 326-332; *Garland*, 71 U.S. at 377-368. But as discussed in the text, even these principles do not ensnare Section Three going forward, on a non-ex-post-facto basis

²⁰⁰ 3 U.S. at 378-80 (arguments of counsel).

²⁰¹ *Id.*

²⁰² *Id.* at 382. See Baude & Sachs, *Eleventh Amendment*, supra note 9, at 626-627.

C. Due Process of Law

The Constitution also forbids the deprivation of “life, liberty, or property without due process of law,” which in many circumstances requires judicial process. Does Section Three’s self-executing legal disqualification from office present any incompatibility with this requirement? Again, we think the two sets of provisions readily reconciled by giving the Due Process Clause no more than its due.

First of all, it is far from clear that the right to hold public office is a form of life, liberty, or property. It is a public privilege, a public trust, to be vested with the power of the people. And though it is a closer case, the same thing may be true even for those who already hold office at the moment that Section Three disqualifies them. Due process protects *private* vested rights from public deprivation. It does not protect *public* rights.²⁰³ It has been argued that in England, offices *were* understood as vested rights of property, and occasionally early American courts said so as well.²⁰⁴ But that was not the better rule in America. Treating offices as property did not fit well with republican principles,²⁰⁵ and by 1900 the Supreme Court could rightly state: “The decisions are numerous to the effect that public offices are mere agencies or trusts, and not property as such.”²⁰⁶

In any event, even if it were otherwise, and those who held offices were deprived of property by Section Three, what would follow? Nothing. Section Three would prevail. Consider once again the Thirteenth Amendment, which *did* directly interfere with private property rights—the right recognized in southern states to hold other humans in bondage. The Thirteenth Amendment instantly, self-executingly, eliminated those property rights, due process notwithstanding.²⁰⁷ So too would Section Three.

Principles of due process might also animate a different objection—that imposing such harsh consequences on individual wrongdoing simply ought to involve fair notice and an opportunity to be heard. Perhaps this instinct motivates the argument against self-execution, as in *Griffin’s Case*. But in our view this objection is sufficiently answered by the terms of Section Three itself. Perhaps the reason that Section

²⁰³ Caleb Nelson, *Adjudication in the Political Branches*, 107 Colum. L. Rev. 559, 565-593 (2007); William Baude, *Adjudication Outside Article III*, 133 Harv. L. Rev. 1511, 1540-1547 (2020).

²⁰⁴ Jed Shugerman, *Freehold Offices vs. “Despotic Displacement”: Why “Executive Power” Did Not Include Removal* (July 25, 2023), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4521119; *Hoke v. Henderson*, 15 NC 1 (1833).

²⁰⁵ See Jane Manners & Lev Menand, *The Three Permissions*, 121 Colum. L. Rev. 1, 20 (2021) (“In revolutionary America, the idea of offices as property was roundly rejected”); Saikrishna Prakash, *Removal and Tenure in Office*, 92 Va. L. Rev. 1779, 1824 n. 157 (2006) (“A more republican conception of government meant a more republican conception of offices.”).

²⁰⁶ *Taylor & Marshall v. Beckham*, 178 U.S. 548 (1900).

²⁰⁷ See *supra* notes 48-50 and accompanying text.

Three only applies to holding office and not voting, and only applies to prior office-holders, who have previously sworn a constitutional oath—indeed, these limitations are the only ways in which Section Three’s scope was appreciably narrowed during the drafting process—is that we can expect once and future officials and oath-takers to be on particularly strong notice about the basic rules of the constitutional order. Section Three does not ensnare garden-variety crime or miscreance. It ensnares offenses against the authority of the system by those who have been and seek to be part of that system.

Similarly, so long as Section Three is applied through the established and customary procedures for determining qualifications for office, many due process objections would seem to disappear. As discussed above, in many scenarios, Section Three’s disqualification would be enforced through administrative hearings, quo warrant suits, state and federal judicial review, congressional adjudications, and so on. Anybody who wishes to argue that his conduct is not covered by the substantive sweep of Section Three is free to litigate that point through all relevant channels.²⁰⁸ Section Three is therefore not in conflict with any requirements of fair notice or an opportunity to be heard.

D. The Ominous Question: Section Three and the First Amendment

With respect to the Constitution’s provisions on bills of attainder, ex post facto laws, and due process, the harmonization of Section Three with prior constitutional law is easy and relatively unproblematic. There is little conflict between the two provisions, and to the extent there is, Section Three is plain enough that it must prevail. The interaction of Section Three with the First Amendment presents a more interesting, even troubling, question. Does Section Three partially revoke the right to political dissent?

This question begets more questions: What exactly is the relationship between Section Three’s language imposing disqualification for having “*engaged in insurrection or rebellion*” and the First Amendment’s protections of the freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and petition? Likewise, what is the relationship between the disqualification for having given “*aid or comfort*” to enemies of the United States and the First Amendment? As we have argued, Section Three in principle *can* supersede, qualify, or modify (or be deemed to “satisfy”) prior constitutional requirements, rendering the provisions of the First Amendment essentially without independent constitutional force as limitations on the scope of Section Three. But how might the prior and important constitutional principles of the First Amendment affect the proper understanding of *Section Three’s meaning and scope*? What exactly *does* Section Three effectuate, in relation to the First Amendment? Where do the usual protections of the First Amendment leave off and the legal disabilities imposed by Section Three take over, as a matter of the proper understanding of Section Three?

²⁰⁸ See generally *supra* Part II.B.

There are, crudely, three possible ways of describing the relationship. The first is to find Section Three (implicitly) *limited by* the First Amendment. The second is, in contrast, to view Section Three as properly understood as carving out a zone of *exception to, supersession of, or satisfaction of* First Amendment principles. The third, which we believe correct, lies somewhere in the middle: Section Three should be construed, to the extent fairly possible, *consistently with* the free speech principles memorialized in the First Amendment. But to the extent of a true conflict between them, Section Three must control.

To consider a not-so-hypothetical example, suppose that an officeholder covered by Section Three gives a speech to an assembled crowd encouraging them to engage in rebellious or insurrectionary conduct. (And suppose further that the crowd accepts the encouragement, rebelling against members of Congress carrying out a constitutional duty at the seat of government.) We will return to this example²⁰⁹ but for now we consider: *how do we judge such an example?* Is this *only* a question of the constitutional definition of “engage in insurrection” and “aid or comfort”—of whether an encouraging speech to an insurrectionary crowd is covered by those terms? Or is it *also* a question of whether that speech is protected by freedom of speech, and under modern doctrine, that would mean the very stringent test of *Brandenburg v. Ohio*?²¹⁰ Or is it somehow both?

To a large extent, we think the conflicts between Section Three and free speech can be minimized—as Hamilton would counsel.²¹¹ First, even under modern doctrine, free speech does not protect several categories of speech that overlap with Section Three. Second, Section Three’s terms will not often reach pure speech.

To elaborate on the first point: Modern First Amendment doctrine leaves the government free to punish actual *conspiracy* and *solicitation*, direct *incitement*, and *material support* of unlawful activities such as insurrection, rebellion, and treason. (There are serious questions about how much modern First Amendment doctrine has exceeded the original protections of freedom of speech and freedom of the press, which we will largely put aside, but the point is that these exceptions are recognized even on today’s liberal understandings.²¹²)

²⁰⁹ See *infra* Part IV.C.2.

²¹⁰ 395 U.S. 444 (1969).

²¹¹ Federalist No. 78, *supra* note 149. “So far as they can, by fair construction, be reconciled to each other, reason and law conspire to dictate that this should be *done*.”)

²¹² For what it is worth, we do not in general dispute many aspects of modern First Amendment doctrine, which we believe often captures the original meaning of freedom of speech and freedom of the press, as applied to modern circumstances. See generally Michael Stokes Paulsen, *Scouts, Families, and Schools*, 85 Minn. L. Rev. 1917, 1919-1922 (2001). To get a sense of how one might construct a truly marvelous proof of this, which this margin is too narrow to contain, see for starters, Adam Griffin, *First Amendment Originalism: The Original Law and A Theory of Legal Change as Applied to The Freedom of Speech and of The Press*, 17 First Amend. L. Rev. 91 (2019); Jud Campbell, *Natural Rights*

The First Amendment has long been held not to protect conspiracy to commit a crime or direct solicitation of unlawful activity, because this is “speech integral to criminal conduct.”²¹³ And while one must use some caution about unduly expanding this category, conspiracy and solicitation are at its core.²¹⁴ Thus, efforts to steal elections, to pressure state officials to manufacture votes, to pressure other officials (like the Vice President) to violate their constitutional duties in service of a constitutional coup—would all be unprotected by the First Amendment. To the extent those efforts are swept up by Section Three, there would be no conflict.

More familiar may be the modern line of cases concerning “incitement.” Over the course of the twentieth century, judicial doctrine increasingly gave greater protection to speech that could be seen as generally inciting unlawful activity, recognizing that earlier doctrine (such as the famous “clear and present danger” test) had too readily permitted suppression of disfavored political views. The modern rule, stated in *Brandenburg v. Ohio* in 1969, excludes from First Amendment protection only advocacy or expressive conduct (i) “directed to” (ii) triggering or inciting (iii) “imminent” lawless action (presumably including acts of insurrection or rebellion) and (iv) “likely” to produce such action.²¹⁵ That is a fairly strict standard, but not one that is impossible to satisfy. Importantly, it does leave open—even under the generous terms of modern First Amendment law—the prospect that some acts of advocacy and expression supporting insurrection or rebellion are simply unprotected by the First Amendment in any event, so that Section Three does not even need to have amended or superseded the First Amendment in order for its terms to be given their full legal effect.

The Supreme Court’s relatively recent decision in *Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project*²¹⁶ recognized a further and more controversial limitation on subversive speech: it can be forbidden where it provides “material support” to a foreign organization engaged in or committed to terrorist violence against the nation. The Court concluded that because the “interest in combating terrorism is an urgent objective of the highest order,” the Congress could forbid even *speech*—such as teaching and training—assisting such organizations, and even though the speech did not *directly*

and the First Amendment, 117 Yale L. J. 246 (2017); Jud Campbell, *The Emergence of Neutrality*, 131 Yale L. J. 861 (2022). (We will cease further digression on this point.)

²¹³ United States v. Hansen, 599 U.S. ___, at 18-19 (2023); United States v. Williams, 553 U.S. 285, 297 (2008); Giboney v. New Ice Storage, 336 U.S. 490 (1949); Eugene Volokh, *The “Speech Integral to Criminal Conduct” Exception*, 101 Cornell L. Rev. 981, 989-993, 1007-1008 (2016).

²¹⁴ Volokh, *supra* note 213, at 1011-1015.

²¹⁵ 395 U.S. at 447. This standard is elaborated in *Hess v. Indiana*, 414 U.S. 105, 108-109 (1973); *NAACP v. Claiborne Hardware*, 458 U.S. 886 (1982). Additionally, *Bond v. Floyd*, 385 U.S. 116 (1966) rejected the idea that there is a lower First Amendment standard of incitement when a state legislature is excluding an elected member under state law, *id.* at 132-135; see also *Communist Party of Indiana v. Whitcomb*, 414 U.S. 441, 449 (1974) (same principle applies to ballot access).

²¹⁶ 561 U.S. 1 (2010).

further terrorist conduct. While this decision is hedged by multiple limiting principles,²¹⁷ it illustrates another set of circumstances where the First Amendment would create no conflict with potential applications of Section Three.

In sum, while modern First Amendment doctrine is quite generous in its protection of speech, in many cases it would produce no conflict with the coverage of Section Three. We will elaborate on the second point—the scope of Section Three itself—more fully in Part IV, but for now suffice it to say that the occasions will be rare where *speech alone* is what qualifies one as having “engaged in insurrection” or provided “aid or comfort” to enemies.

That said, we will concede that the conflict between free speech and Section Three cannot be denied entirely. Consider the Civil War example of Clement Vallandigham, who was arrested and imprisoned by the military on the theory that “he was laboring, with some effect, to prevent the raising of troops; to encourage desertions from the army; and to leave the Rebellion without an adequate military force to suppress it,”—that he was “warring upon the Military.”²¹⁸ It is conceivable (though we do not prejudge the point) that Vallandigham’s anti-military efforts could be covered by Section Three. And yet it is also quite plausible that his efforts would be protected by free speech.

Or for a sharper example, even more on point, consider the case of Representative-elect John Y. Brown, who was excluded from the Fortieth Congress on the grounds that he had given aid and comfort to the Confederacy by writing to the Louisville Courier promising to resist the Union army “unto the death” and stating that anybody who volunteered for the Union army “ought and I believe will be shot down before he leaves the State.”²¹⁹ This exclusion was part of the backdrop of Section Three’s enactment and likely the kind of thing Section Three was intended to cover. But, argues one scholar of the incident, this pre-Section Three exclusion “was entirely unconstitutional” and “plainly violative of the First Amendment.”²²⁰ If that was so before Section Three’s enactment, does Section Three make it otherwise?²²¹

Finally and perhaps most explosively, consider the 1919 exclusion of socialist newspaper editor Victor Berger from the House. Berger was denounced by members of the House for having given “aid and comfort to the enemies of this country during

²¹⁷ The Court emphasized that “only material support coordinated with or under the direction of a designated foreign terrorist organization” was banned; “independent advocacy” was “not covered.” Id. at 31-32. Additionally, the law only applied to *foreign* organizations.

²¹⁸ President Abraham Lincoln to Erastus Corning and others (June 12, 1863), in Abraham Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings, 1859-1965*, at 454, 459 (Don Fehrenbacher, ed. 1989). See *infra* notes 269-277 and accompanying text.

²¹⁹ See *infra* notes 270-278, and 343-348 and accompanying text.

²²⁰ Lynch, *supra* note 5, at 197-198.

²²¹ See Lynch, *supra* note 5, at 198 (“Had Section 3 been ratified by this point, these concerns would be assuaged.”)

this Great War,” and excluded in part on that basis.²²² (Indeed, Berger had also been convicted and sentenced under the Espionage Act, though the charges were overturned by the Supreme Court on grounds of judicial bias.)²²³ Another scholar of the incident writes that “Under a good reading of the First Amendment, Berger’s speeches and writings could not have been seditious; however under the interpretation prevailing at the time, they probably were.”²²⁴ What should we make of such an incident?

In the end, in a case where free speech principles conflict with the best original understanding of “engaged in insurrection” or “aid or comfort,” we think that free speech principles must give way. We stress that we do not think that all or even most disloyal speech will rise to the level of triggering Section Three’s disqualifications.²²⁵ But where it does, where “it becomes a matter of necessity to give effect to one in exclusion of the other,” it is the more recent Fourteenth Amendment that “shall be preferred” to the earlier rule.²²⁶

For those (like us) who value First Amendment liberties of speech, press, assembly, religion, and the right to dissent generally, might Section Three therefore be thought a little dangerous? Might Section Three, in the wrong hands or applied improperly, be used to suppress dissent in the name of excluding insurrectionists from office? Perhaps. We do not shy away from the point. But the supposed danger of a constitutional provision is not really an argument against its meaning. And the potential abuse of a constitutional power, privilege, or disqualification is not really a good legal argument against its existence. Section Three’s exclusion could be thought to pose a danger; but insurrection and rebellion are dangers too—all too real dangers, as recent events have shown. Where exactly that line is drawn by the Constitution, and the extent to which that line changes the prior rules of the First Amendment, are ultimately questions of the meaning of Section Three’s general terms triggering disqualification from future office—“insurrection,” “rebellion,” “engaged in,” “given aid or comfort to”—and of who all is included under Section Three’s ban. To that set of important questions we turn next.

IV. Section Three’s Substantive Disqualification is Sweeping

²²² Chafetz, *supra* note 47, at 190; Lynch, *supra* note 5, at 211-213; 6 Cannon, *supra* note 18, at 52-63.

²²³ *Berger v. United States*, 255 U.S. 22 (1921). During the initial exclusion, when Berger’s conviction was on appeal, the House Committee announced “that it would not be governed by the action of the judge and jury at the Chicago trial,” but would review the evidence and legal questions for itself. 6 Cannon, *supra* note 18, at 54. But curiously, after the convictions were reversed the House allowed Berger to sit in the sixty-eighth through seventieth Congresses. Lynch, *supra* note 5, at 213.

²²⁴ Chafetz, *supra* note 47, at 191.

²²⁵ In our view, for instance, the exclusion of Victor Berger went too far—not because the First Amendment makes an exception to Section Three, but because Berger’s advocacy did not satisfy the original meaning of Section Three. See *infra* note 359.

²²⁶ Federalist No. 78, *supra* note 176, at 439.

We come at last to the heart of the beast: the substance of Section Three’s prohibition. We begin (in Subpart A) with the most interesting and important set of issues—the types of misconduct that trigger Section Three. What deeds (and words?) amount to having “engaged in” “insurrection” or “rebellion” against the lawful authority of the Constitution and the system of government it establishes? What acts (or words?) amount to having given “aid or comfort” to “enemies” of lawful government under the Constitution?

These terms to some extent bear a *range* of meaning and fair construction. The events they describe are often exceptional and to some extent unique. Still, some applications will be clear and virtually indisputable, falling within the terms’ core meaning—the center of the interpretive bullseye, so to speak. Such scenarios so clearly fall within Section Three that they may be said to be contained within the opposite of a safe harbor—a “sure shipwreck,”²²⁷ to borrow Susan Morse’s phrase—of unquestionably disqualifying conduct falling within the core of Section Three’s meaning: for example, **declaring unilateral** secession from lawful constitutional government; or the taking up of arms against government (as in the waging of the Civil War). At the other end of the continuum, there will be situations that clearly lie in a safe harbor outside the legitimate range of meaning of Section Three’s terms—ordinary expression of political dissent as well as even ordinary law violations. In between these markers, there is a zone of reasonable, fair construction of *allowable* interpretation and application in which government officials may make judgments that must be conceded to be within the range of what the Constitution permits—and where the decisions and actions of government officials exercising their constitutional powers consequently cannot be considered *unlawful* and thereby subject to judicial invalidation. Within that fair range of meaning, different interpreters legitimately can reach differing conclusions, all in accordance with the Constitution. We address all of these questions in subpart A.

We then turn more briefly (in subpart B) to the questions of *what prior-office-holding, oath-taking categories of persons*—persons who then subsequently engaged in insurrection or rebellion—*are covered* by Section Three’s ban and (a similar but distinct question) *what future offices are constitutionally barred to such persons*. We conclude that Section Three’s disqualification is sweeping, both in the substantive conduct that triggers such disqualification and in the office-holders and offices to which it applies. In particular, contrary to one recent revisionist view, we believe it applies to the Presidency.

Finally (in Subpart C) we will consider the attempted overthrow of the 2020 Presidential election. Did the incumbent president’s willful, deliberate refusal to accept the outcome of the lawful constitutional election resulting in his defeat for re-election and, instead, his (and others’) attempt to overthrow constitutional election results and install or maintain himself in office, by force, by fraud or by attempted de

²²⁷ Susan Morse, *Safe Harbors, Sure Shipwrecks*, 49 U.C. Davis L. Rev. 1385 (2016).

facto political coup d'état against the regime of lawful constitutional government, constitute engaging in “insurrection or rebellion against the Constitution of the United States”? We think the answer is *yes*.

Whether called a “rebellion,” an attempted coup d'état seeking to displace lawful government authority under the Constitution, or an “insurrection,” instigating, inciting and encouraging a mob to engage in acts of forcible violence directed against the ability of Congress and the Vice President to carry out their constitutional duties—and then refusing to intervene—such conduct is covered by Section Three, and is disqualifying. If those are indeed the facts concerning Donald Trump’s (and others’) efforts to overthrow the election—and we think they are—such conduct triggers the disqualification rule of Section Three.

Whether other federal and state officeholders—members of Congress, state legislators, past or present state and federal executive and judicial officers—engaged in conduct constituting “insurrection” or “rebellion” (including meaningful action in deliberate furtherance of an attempted coup against lawful constitutional government), or gave “aid or comfort” (approval, encouragement, support) to **enemies** might sometimes involve more difficult questions of fact and judgment. But they are the questions Section Three compels us to ask, and to answer. Where such evaluations and judgments have been made by actors exercising legitimate authority to make them (as discussed in Part II) and fall within the fair range of Section Three’s meaning, those judgments are entitled to full legal effect.

A. Section Three’s Disqualifying Conduct: “Insurrection or Rebellion”; “Engaged In”; “Aid or Comfort” to “Enemies”

What is the proper, original public meaning of “insurrection” and “rebellion” as used in Section Three? Of having “engaged in” such conduct? Of having given “aid or comfort” to “enemies”?

Because the terms are capacious and the evidence is sprawling, we will start by proposing our working definitions for these terms. We then show how they are largely consistent with standard sources for discerning the meaning of constitutional text: contemporaneous definitions of these terms; usage elsewhere in the Constitution; and contemporaneous public, political, and legal usage of the terms. This last category, which is especially instructive, includes usages from President Lincoln, legislation adopted by the Civil War Congress (both the 1862 “Ironclad” oath and the Second Confiscation Act), and the significant mid-Civil-War decision of the Supreme Court in *The Prize Cases*. We also consider, albeit in somewhat more abbreviated fashion, statutes and usages leading up to the Civil War, including the Insurrection Act of 1795 as amended, and an important series of exclusions from Congress itself, as well as the relevant legislative history of Section Three, and a few scattered post-enactment applications of Section Three itself.

1. Working definitions

We begin by offering working definitions of the terms *insurrection* and *rebellion* and of what might constitute “engaging in” such conduct or giving “aid or comfort” to **enemies under Section Three**.

Insurrection is best understood as *concerted, forcible resistance to the authority of government to execute the laws in at least some significant respect*. The term “insurrection” connotes something more than mere ordinary lawbreaking. It suggests an affirmative contest with, and active resistance to, the *authority* of the government. It is in that sense more than just organized resistance *to the laws*—more than just a protest, even one involving civil disobedience. Rather, it is organized resistance *to the government*. Insurrection is also more than mere “protest” in that it implies some element of *forcible* resistance. It is something more than a mere spontaneous, disorganized “riot.”²²⁸ Insurrection suggests at least some degree of coordinated, concerted action. The term also implies something more than acts of solitary individuals: to qualify as an insurrection the acts in question must involve some form of collective action, even if not an advance plan.

At the same time, *insurrection* may fall short of outright *rebellion*—even as the terms overlap and might bleed into each other—in that an insurrection might not seek to overturn, overthrow, or displace the government itself, in whole or in part (as a rebellion does). As the Supreme Court put it in *The Prize Cases*, in 1863: “Insurrection against a government may or may not culminate in an organized rebellion.”²²⁹

Rebellion is thus closely related to insurrection, but perhaps not quite identical in meaning. A rebellion is arguably broader in its reach than an insurrection: *rebellion* implies an effort to *overturn or displace lawful government authority by unlawful means*. (In the case of secession, or a declaration of independence, the rebellion is an effort to free those engaged in rebellion from the authority of the existing lawful government.) Rebellion is something beyond mere resistance to government authority in a particular instance or set of instances. A rebellion seeks to *replace* the existing regime, not just resist its law-executing authority. Rebellion involves repudiation, to some degree or another, of the regime’s authority, legitimacy, or validity. It is a challenge, direct or indirect, *to the regime itself*. The South’s attempted *secession* was a species of rebellion—an attempt to overturn the authority of the Constitution and government of the United States by the states asserting the right to secede. Likewise, an attempted coup d’etat is arguably also a species of rebellion—an effort to *displace, replace, upend, or overthrow the existing lawful regime and substitute different authority in its stead*.

²²⁸ 10 Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution 1296 (Statement of Madison) (“A riot did not come within the legal definition of an insurrection”).

²²⁹ 2 Black (67 U.S.) 635, 667 (1863).

The term *rebellion* can also imply a competing claim to legitimacy. “Rebellion” thus seems to carry a stronger political-claim-of-right valence than does “insurrection.”²³⁰ Crucially, however, the fact that an insurrection or rebellion claims political or moral legitimacy—as the American Revolution did; indeed, as the South’s secession did—does not make it any the less an *insurrection* or *rebellion*. The fact that an attempted coup d’etat, or declaration of independence, or secession, is claimed to be a “vindication” or “restoration” of rightful governmental authority—or asserted to be a pre-emptive effort to thwart some *other* person’s or group’s alleged wrongful assertion of authority—does not immunize such action from the legal characterization of rebellion against the regime. If somebody in fact participates in an attempt to overthrow the government, it makes no difference that he might think himself in the right for doing so, see himself as an agent for *preserving* lawful government, or view his acts and intention not as “rebellion” but restoration. Mistake of law is no defense to a coup d’etat. The South offered a variety of constitutional legal theories in defense of the supposed lawfulness of secession as an act for the vindication of its believed rights.²³¹ That did not make its acts of rebellion any less acts of rebellion.

As to the overlap and distinction between insurrection and rebellion our working definition is more tentative. It is possible that a rebellion is simply a special case of an insurrection, in the way that a square is a special case of a rectangle. But it is also possible that the term rebellion is not necessarily limited to regime change by

²³⁰ Though it is possible that this connotation is anachronistic. See *infra* note 252.

²³¹ For important accounts and discussion of Southern arguments for the constitutional propriety and validity of secession, on a variety of asserted grounds, see James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* 234-236 (1988) (summarizing Southern constitutional and political theories); Daniel Farber, *Lincoln’s Constitution* 57-91 (2003) (emphasizing arguments of states’ rights to interposition, nullification, and secession generally); Michael Stokes Paulsen, *Lincoln and Judicial Authority*, 83 *Notre Dame L. Rev.* 1227, 1270-1277 (2008) (setting forth Southern leaders’ constitutional arguments that Lincoln’s stance against the *Dred Scott* decision, against judicial supremacy, and against extension of slavery violated the judicially settled constitutional rights of slaveholding persons and states); Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Concept of a Perpetual Union*, 65 *J. Am. Hist.* 5-53 (June 1978) (providing detailed history of constitutional and political arguments over the nature of Union and the validity of secession); David P. Currie, *The Constitution in Congress: Descent into the Maelstrom 1829-1861*, at 228-237 (2005) (discussing and evaluating the constitutional arguments for and against the validity of secession). For the case against the constitutionality of secession, see generally 2 *Abraham Lincoln, Speeches & Writings, 1859-1865: Speeches, Letters, Miscellaneous Writings, Presidential Messages & Proclamations*, at 217-218 (First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1861); *id.* at 254-258, 260-261 (Message to Congress, July 4, 1861); see also Michael Stokes Paulsen, *The Civil War as Constitutional Interpretation*, 71 *U Chi. L. Rev.* 691, 703-715 (2004) (reviewing Daniel Farber, *Lincoln’s Constitution*) (distilling and building on Lincoln’s arguments); Kesavan & Paulsen, *West Virginia*, *supra* note 130, at 303-311 (same). For further background, see generally William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay 1776-1854* (1990), and for a comprehensive exposition of the Southern view, see Alexander M. Stephens, *A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States; Its Causes, Character, Conduct and Results* (1867). **As a clarification: we use the term “secession” here and throughout this article to refer to unilateral secession without the consent of the federal government, as in the Civil War, and do not discuss ways the federal government might lawfully consent to the independence of a state or territory.**

force—and thus may occupy some ground not covered by the word “insurrection” (which, we have suggested, must be forcible). There are such things as “bloodless coups”: actions that effectively displace or upend the prior constitutional order without shots being fired, but that nonetheless are in unlawful defiance or repudiation of the existing legal order.²³²

To illustrate this hypothesized distinction between insurrection and rebellion: Imagine that the Southern attack on Fort Sumter in April 1861 had preceded any declared right to secession. The attack would have been an act of *insurrection*—an exercise of concerted, forcible defiance of the authority of the Union government—but not necessarily outright *rebellion*. Conversely, the ordinances of secession adopted by state conventions in the South in 1860 and 1861²³³ preceded (mostly) any acts of actual forcible resistance to the authority of the United States to execute the laws. The secession ordinances might still immediately constitute acts of “rebellion,” even before any accompanying violence. In short: Sumter without secession would have still been insurrection. Secession without Sumter was already rebellion. Put the two events together—acts of forcible insurrection and declarations of avowed rebellion frequently travel in pairs (as they obviously did with the Civil War)—and it becomes difficult to distinguish “insurrection” from “rebellion.” The overlap of the two terms in theory becomes complete in practice.

In the end, however, we do not wish to make too much of the ways in which the terms differ in shades of color and in their implication. The coverage of the terms overlaps substantially. Sometimes, the terms, occupying much of the same ground, seem capable of being used almost interchangeably. Indeed, the bigger picture point for understanding Section Three is that “insurrection” and “rebellion,” in tandem, cover pretty much the entire terrain of large-scale unlawful resistance to government authority.

So much for our working definitions of “insurrection” and “rebellion.” What does it mean to have “engaged in” such conduct? We believe one has “engaged” in

²³² Indeed, one might characterize the process of adoption of the U.S. Constitution, replacing the regime of the Articles of Confederation, as a peaceful political coup d’etat – an act of “rebellion” if judged by the pre-existing law, but morally and politically justified by the failure of the prior regime and Lockean notions of self-governance, and subsequently legalized by its own success. See generally Paulsen & Paulsen, *supra* note 30, at 3-8, 17-20; Stephen E. Sachs, *Originalism as a Theory of Legal Change*, 38 Harv. J. L. & Pub Pol’y 818, 821, 844, 850 (2015). **But cf. Akhil Reed Amar, *The Words that Made Us: America's Constitutional Conversation 1760-1840*, at 164-165 (2021) (emphasizing the states’ retention of sovereignty under the Articles and the idea that states might thus properly exit that regime, legally, on the theory that the Articles had become a breached treaty).**

²³³ The seceding states adopted their secession resolutions by state “conventions,” purporting to parallel the process by which the states ratified the Constitution. See McPherson, *supra* note ²³¹ at 234-284 (describing secession actions of ²³en states that purported to secede from the Union). The secession ordinances of the South were self-consciously styled after the Declaration of Independence, which was obviously an act of formal legal rebellion.

insurrection or rebellion when one has been *actively involved in the planning or execution of intentional acts of insurrection or rebellion*; or when one has *knowingly provided active, meaningful, voluntary, direct support for, material assistance to, or specific encouragement of* such actions. Such planning, participation, support, assistance, or encouragement may be in the form of either words or deeds, as long as the person who has “engaged in” such activities embraced the objectives of the insurrection or rebellion in question and did things that contributed in a meaningful way to advancing those objectives.²³⁴ (There is obvious overlap here with the closely related concept of having given “aid or comfort” to the nation’s enemies, which we discuss presently.)

Of course, there are also important limits to how far the concept of having “engaged in” insurrection or rebellion extends. Mere passive acquiescence, resigned acceptance, silence, or inaction is not typically enough to have “engaged in” insurrection or rebellion. An exception to this limitation might exist where a person possesses an affirmative duty to speak or act. Further, mere abstract advocacy of, or theorizing concerning, the desirability of insurrection or rebellion, without more, is not the same as actually *engaging* in it. We think this is true even though the First Amendment does not formally constrain Section Three: it is simply the best understanding of Section Three’s terms.

Then there is the related question of what constitutes having given “*aid or comfort*” to “*the enemies thereof*.” This reads as a separate, independent ground for disqualification: Section Three is triggered by having engaged in insurrection or rebellion “*or*” having given aid or comfort to enemies. This language, of course, closely echoes the earlier constitutional language of the Treason Clause.²³⁵

In many cases, giving “aid or comfort” to enemies will be similar to the kind of conduct that counts as having “engaged in” insurrection or rebellion through intentional, active assistance. If there is a difference, it is that the term “aid or comfort” reinforces and emphasizes Section Three’s coverage of *indirect* but material assistance. Such material assistance—possibly including expression supporting, encouraging, counseling, or promoting the enemy—might more naturally fall into Section

²³⁴ This working definition of having “engaged in” wrongful activity resembles familiar common law understandings of accomplice liability in the area of criminal law, which typically resulted from the combination of (1) *assistance* to unlawful conduct (with “assistance” including uttering words of encouragement to, or agreeing not to interfere with, such conduct) and (2) the *intention to further* such unlawful conduct). Federal criminal law today is to similar effect. 18 U.S.C. § 2(a) (2012) (“Whoever commits an offense against the United States or aids, abets, counsels, commands, induces or procures its commission, is punishable as a principal.”). We think it is also generally supported by background mens rea principles. See William Baude & Stephen Sachs, *The Law of Interpretation*, 130 Harv. L. Rev. 1079, 1108 (2017). That said, the *context* of the Civil War also suggests one important limitation: *there is no mistake-of-rebellion defense*. See text accompanying infra note 425.

²³⁵ U.S. Const. art. III, § 3, cl. 1 (“Treason against the United States, shall consist only in levying war against them, or in adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort.”)

Three's "aid or comfort" language, even where it might be debatable whether to characterize such conduct as directly "engag[ing] in" insurrection or rebellion.

Additionally, while Section Three uses some language paralleling that contained in the Treason Clause, Section Three is by no means limited to the constitutional crime of treason. "Insurrection" and "rebellion" are their own things, distinct from "treason." While some acts of insurrection and rebellion might *also* constitute treason they need not do so in order to be encompassed within Section Three. So even if "aid or comfort" in Section Three connotes the same type of assistance-and-embrace principles as "Aid and Comfort" in Article III's Treason Clause,²³⁶ the relevant conduct to which such assistance is given might well differ. (And, as noted earlier, it is plain that Section Three requires no prior criminal-law conviction, for treason or any other defined crime, as a prerequisite for its disqualification to apply.)

Finally, aid or comfort to whom? "[T]he enemies thereof." **Before the Civil War, some might have limited the term "enemies" to those owing allegiance to a foreign power,²³⁷ but that is not plausibly true of Section Three. Rather, Section Three covers enemies both foreign and domestic. That now-familiar phrase ("enemies foreign and domestic") comes from the "Ironclad Oath," written into law in 1862, in the midst of the Civil War,²³⁸ and it seems clear from the political context of Section Three that it likewise treats domestic enemies as enemies. Indeed, it is almost unthinkable that Confederate rebels would not have been thought "enemies" in the sense employed by the text.**

What is less clear is how to define the foreign and domestic enemies covered by Section Three. The most straightforward option, which strikes us as the more likely one, is that "enemies" essentially cross-references the domestic rebels and insurrectionists just described earlier in the sentence (as well as more traditional foreign enemies, of course). On this straightforward reading, Section Three would cover a domestic officeholder who directly engages in insurrection or rebellion, or who gives aid or comfort to others who do so (or, of course, one who gives aid or comfort to foreign enemies). This straightforward reading is also consistent with the operation of another 1862 statute, the Second Confiscation Act.²³⁹ That said, we cannot rule out another narrower possibility, that "enemies" is limited to those with whom the US are effectively at war, and thus excludes insurrections and rebellions that do not rise to the level of a civil war.²⁴⁰ This would create a more complicated two-track system

²³⁶ See *infra* note 258.

²³⁷ See Lynch, *supra* note 5, at 174 (discussing *United States v. Greathouse*, 26 F. Cas. 18, 22 (C.C.N.D. Cal. 1863) (No. 15,254)).

²³⁸ See *infra* Part IV.A.4.b.i.

²³⁹ See *infra* Part IV.A.4.b.ii.

²⁴⁰ See Lynch, *supra* note 5, at 173-178 for more discussion.

where Section Three covers all insurrections and rebellions, as well as “aid or comfort” to a more limited set of insurrections and rebellions. While it strikes us as less likely, we cannot definitively rule it out.²⁴¹

Our sense of the whole—of Section Three’s substantive terms triggering disqualification for those who have engaged in the conduct described—is that Section Three is quite sweeping, using overlapping terms to cover several different characterizations of major collective resistance to the authority of government under the Constitution. Whether it be called “insurrection” or “rebellion”; and whether a covered individual is thought to have “engaged in” such activity or given “aid or comfort” to “enemies,” Section Three’s disqualification is triggered. The language is not unlimited, to be sure. But the broad and overlapping terms are not intended to be hospitable to loopholes or artful, narrow, technical evasions.

Finally, let us reiterate one consequence of Section Three’s breadth and capaciousness. Because Section Three’s terms possess a range of meaning, both a determinate core and a fuzzier periphery, we need a second-order rule concerning the authority of decisionmakers to act on the basis of fair interpretations of indefinite terms. We think that the general rule of our constitutional order is that political officials may take actions premised on fair interpretations of indefinite terms, and that when they do so, their actions cannot rightly be held “unconstitutional” by the courts, precisely because they fit within the fair range afforded by the Constitution. Where the Constitution admits of a range of choice, political authorities may exercise choices within that range.

This is foundational to our constitutional law.²⁴² It is the premise of judicial review as set forth in *Marbury v. Madison*, which justifies setting aside the acts of

What is the referent of “enemies thereof”? Does “thereof” refer to enemies of the *United States* or enemies of the *Constitution of the United States*? We think this replicates the question of what “*the same*” refers to, earlier in the sentence, and presents the same issue of minor and seemingly inconsequential ambiguity. (Does “insurrection or rebellion *against the same*” refer to insurrection or rebellion against “*the United States*”?). On balance, we think that it probably makes little practical difference: rebellion against the United States and rebellion against the Constitution of the United States will often amount to the same thing; either one is capable of being considered an instance of the **other**. Whatever the answer, it should be the same for both—“against the same” and “thereof” refer to the same thing. **Our best guess is that it is “the United States.”**

²⁴² See, e.g., Paulsen, *Rules for Its Own*, supra note 9, at 858 (arguing that where constitutional language states a general principle, “actions of government that fall within the scope of judgment or discretion admitted by the breadth with which that principle is expressed do not violate the Constitution, and are thus allowable”); Michael Stokes Paulsen, *A Government of Adequate Powers*, 31 Harv. J.L. & Pub. Pol’y 991, 995 (2008) (arguing that “textual imprecision or generality often admits of a range of choices” and that the correct constitutional answer in such circumstances “is that the legislature must be permitted to choose from options within that range”; thus, “the more indeterminate or under-determinate the range of a constitutional provision, the broader the duty of the courts to defer to what the legislature has enacted”); Kesavan & Paulsen, *Secret Drafting History*, supra note 9, at 1129-30 n.54 (2003); Michael Stokes Paulsen, *The Most Dangerous Branch: Executive Power to Say What the Law*

other branches only because, and only to the extent to, they deviate from the Constitution's meaning. It is classically illustrated by the Court's reasoning in *M'Culloch v. Maryland*,²⁴³ which upheld Congress's power to create the Bank of the United States because a generation of political actors had acted within the fair range of meaning of constitutionally granted powers.

And this principle means, as a practical matter, that the breadth of Section Three's broad terms cannot be ignored, or artificially limited, by judicial construction. Where those charged with responsibilities that involve applying Section Three's terms have given that language its full legitimate sweep, that breadth must be honored.

We now canvass—perhaps too briefly and yet at too great a length—some of the evidence supporting these working definitions.

2. Contemporaneous Dictionary Definitions

As we have said, the task of ascertaining true constitutional meaning consists of seeking out the *objective, original* meaning of the words and phrases of the text: that is, the meaning Section Three's terms and structure would have had in the legal system at the time. A starting point for such an inquiry—though not the ending point—is to look at contemporaneous dictionary definitions. (We think that evidence of contemporaneous political and legal usage of words and phrases contained in the constitutional text is actually quite often stronger evidence of original, objective linguistic meaning: it can serve as a kind of operational, practical concordance that may “define” terms more precisely in their application than can a cold dictionary definition.)

Nineteenth century dictionaries contain definitions of “insurrection” and “rebellion” that substantially corroborate our working definitions. Webster defined “insurrection” as “[a] rising against civil or political authority; the open and active opposition of a number of persons to the execution of law in a city or state.”²⁴⁴ Rebellion was “[a]n open and avowed renunciation of the authority of the government to which one owes allegiance.”²⁴⁵

²⁴³ 17 U.S. (4 Wheat.) 316 (1819); *Is*, 83 Geo. L.J. 217, 333 (1994); Baude & Sachs, Law of Interpretation, *supra* note 234, at 1120 (describing “the presumption of constitutionality” as a rule of unwritten law); William Baude, *Constitutional Liquidation*, 71 Stan. L. Rev. 1, 35-36, 44 (2019). Again, we bracket any differences in emphasis between our respective views of the adjudication of ambiguities.

²⁴⁴ 1 Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language* 111 (1828, photoreprint 1993) (“Insurrection”); see also Dr. Webster's Complete Dictionary of the English Language 702 (Chauncy A. Goodrich and Noah Porter, eds. 1864) (similar); 1 John Boag, *A Popular and Complete English Dictionary* 727 (1850) (similar).

²⁴⁵ 2 Webster (1828), *supra* note 244, at 51 (“Rebellion”); see also Webster's (Porter 1864), *supra* note 244, at 1094 (similar); 2 Boag, *supra* note 244, at 319 (similar).

Importantly, Webster also noted several distinctions between these and other terms. In defining rebellion, he distinguished an insurrection as “a rising in opposition to a particular act or law, without a design to renounce wholly all subjection to the government,” while a rebellion was a more categorical “attempt to overthrow the government, to establish a different one or to place the country under another **jurisdiction**.”²⁴⁶ And in defining insurrection, Webster noted that insurrection is “equivalent to sedition, except that sedition expresses a less extensive rising of citizens.”²⁴⁷ This suggests a spectrum from sedition (not covered by Section Three) to insurrection to rebellion (both covered).

At the same time, Webster also conceded some overlap in these terms, writing that “[i]nsurrection may be, but is not necessarily, rebellion”²⁴⁸ and that despite these technical distinctions, “[i]nsurrection is however used with latitude as to comprehend either sedition or rebellion.”²⁴⁹ **This suggests a great deal of potential breadth and overlap in these terms.**

Along similar lines, a prominent mid-century legal dictionary, John Bouvier’s Law Dictionary in its 1868 edition, contains detailed definitions of *insurrection*, *rebellion*, and *aid and comfort*. “INSURRECTION” was defined simply as “[a] rebellion of citizens or subjects of a country against its government.”²⁵⁰ “REBELLION” is correspondingly defined: “The taking up arms traitorously against the government. *The forcible opposition and resistance to the laws and process lawfully issued.*”²⁵¹ Bouvier’s thus treated “insurrection” and “rebellion” as nearly interchangeable terms, both involving some degree of concerted and forcible opposition to the authority of the lawfully constituted government but not clearly distinguishing between them.²⁵²

²⁴⁶ 2 Webster (1828), supra note 244, at 51 (“Rebellion”); see also 1 Boag, supra note 244, at 727; 2 id. at 319 (similar).

²⁴⁷ 1 Webster (1828), supra note 244, at 111 (“Insurrection”). For comparison, Webster defined “Sedition” as: “A factious commotion of the people, or a tumultuous assembly of men rising in opposition to law or the administration of justice, and in disturbance of the public peace. Sedition is a rising or commotion of less extent than an insurrection, and both are less than rebellion . . .” 2 Webster (1828), supra note 244, at 66 (“Sedition”).

²⁴⁸ 2 Webster (1828), supra note 244, at 51 (“Rebellion”); see also 2 Boag, supra note 244, at 319 (similar).

²⁴⁹ 1 Webster (1828), supra note 244, at 111. Daniel Hemel argues that “Webster’s definition of ‘insurrection’ seems implausibly broad for Section 3 purposes.” See Hemel, How-to Guide, supra note 5.

²⁵⁰ “Insurrection” in 1 John Bouvier. A Law Dictionary, Adapted to the Constitution and Laws of the United States of America, and of the Several States of the American Union 729-730 (Philadelphia, G.W. Childs, 12th ed., rev. and enl. 1868).

²⁵¹ “Rebellion” in 2 Bouvier (1868), supra note 250, at 415 (emphasis added).

²⁵² See also Joseph Worcester, A Dictionary of the English Language 764, 1190 (1860) (generally equating insurrection and rebellion). Elsewhere in this edition, Bouvier drew a distinction in connotation between “REBEL” and “INSURGENT,” suggesting that “rebel is always understood in a bad sense, as one who unjustly opposes the constituted authorities; insurgent may be one who justly opposes the

Bouvier's dictionary also offers an instructive definition of "AID AND COMFORT" as "[h]elp, support, assistance, counsel, encouragement." The entry adds this discussion, noting the lack of U.S. judicial interpretation at the time but a generally accepted English background understanding of the term:

The constitution of the United States, art. 3, s. 3, declares that adhering to the enemies of the United States, giving them aid and comfort, shall be treason. These words, as they are to be understood in the constitution, have not received a full judicial discussion. They import, however, help, support, assistance, countenance, encouragement. The word *aid*, which occurs in the stat. Westm. 1, c.14, is explained by Lord Coke (2 Inst. 182) as comprehending all persons counselling, abetting, plotting, assenting, consenting, and encouraging to do the act ...²⁵³

This tends to confirm our broad construction of "aid or comfort" as encompassing many kinds of intentional support, akin to the common law.

3. Intratextualism

In some cases, the Constitution can also serve as its own internal dictionary. The meaning of a constitutional term in one part of the document can inform its meaning in another, either because of the complete (or near) copying of one constitutional text by another or by virtue of subtle contrast, refinement, or qualification in a term's usage. (Professor Akhil Amar has dubbed this method of interpretation "Intratextualism.")²⁵⁴ Chief Justice Marshall, for example, famously employed this method in *M'Culloch v. Maryland* as part of his argument for the constitutionality of Congress's chartering of a Bank of the United States.²⁵⁵

tyranny of constitute authorities," and thus that "[t]he colonists who opposed the tyranny of the English government were insurgents, not rebels." "Insurgent" and "Rebel" in 1 Bouvier (1868), supra note 250, at 729; 2 id. at 415.

In a much later edition, Bouvier's drew a distinction between *insurrection* and *rebellion* as two different varieties of "actual and open resistance to [government] authority." *Insurrection* was "an actual uprising against the government" while *rebellion* "goes beyond insurrection in aim" and attempts actually to overthrow the government authority in question. "Insurrection" and "Rebellion," in 2 Bouvier's Law Dictionary & Concise Enycl. (Rawles Rev., 1897). Lynch misstates the date of this edition as 1867, and thus mistakenly cites it as "contemporarily authoritative." Lynch, supra note 5, at 167 n. 80.

²⁵³ "Aid and Comfort" in 1 Bouvier (1868), supra note 250, at 107.

²⁵⁴ Akhil Reed Amar, *Intratextualism*, 112 Harv. L. Rev. 747, 748 (1999).

²⁵⁵ *M'Culloch*, 17 U.S. at 413-414. In construing the scope of the legislative power conferred by the Necessary and Proper Clause, Marshall noted how the word "necessary" was used differently, and subjected to different qualifications, in other parts of the Constitution and found that those differences were useful in interpreting the clause at hand. For discussion of the prominence of intratextual and structural-logic, whole-text arguments in some of Chief Justice Marshall's most significant Supreme Court opinions, including *Marbury* and *M'Culloch*, see Paulsen, *Marbury*, supra note 66, at 2711; see also Michael Stokes Paulsen, *The Plausibility of Personhood*, 74 Ohio St. L. J. 13, 33 n. 72 (2013).

Might the Constitution’s other usages of terms that also appear in Section Three serve as such markers of meaning for “insurrection” and “rebellion,” and “aid or comfort” to enemies, as those terms are used in Section Three? A quick canvass suggests only limited help.

The word “insurrection” appears in the Militia Clause of Article I, Section 8 of the original Constitution: Congress is given the enumerated power to “provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress *Insurrections* and repel Invasions.”²⁵⁶ The word “rebellion” appears in the Writ Suspension Clause of Article I, Section 9: “The Privilege of the Writ of Habeas Corpus shall not be suspended, unless when in Cases of *Rebellion* or invasion the public Safety may require it.”²⁵⁷ In neither instance, however, does the context suggest any particular definition or explication of the term. They are thus of little direct assistance to the task of unpacking the meaning of Section Three.

As noted, the language in Section Three’s alternative trigger—the giving of “aid and comfort” to enemies—borrows the nearly identical language of the Treason Clause of Article III. But once again, the similar language in Article III is not self-defining. Nor was there an established, settled, authoritative judicial interpretation of this language that might have been understood specifically to define “aid and comfort” as a constitutional term-of-art at the time of the framing of the Fourteenth Amendment.²⁵⁸ Moreover, in the 1860s, the pairing of “aid” and/or “comfort” had be-

²⁵⁶ U.S. Const. art. I, §8 cl. 15.

²⁵⁷ U.S. Const. art. I, §9 cl. 2.

²⁵⁸ Perhaps the most notable U.S. treason case to date was *Ex parte Bollman*, in which Chief Justice Marshall delivered an opinion for the Court granting habeas to two of the co-conspirators in Aaron Burr’s plot to seize Spanish territory in the American (then-)southwest and attempt to form his own independent nation. *Ex parte Bollman*, 8 U.S. (4 Cranch) 75 (1807). The opinion combined a relatively narrow construction of the substantive crime of treason (in part because of Article III’s text (“only in levying war”)) with a relatively broad construction of complicity. Thus on one hand: “However flagitious may be the crime of conspiring to subvert by force the government of our country, such conspiracy is not treason,” *id.* at 126, but on the other hand, “if war be actually levied, that is, if a body of men be actually assembled for the purpose of effecting by force a treasonable purpose, all those who perform any part, however minute, or however remote from the scene of action, and who are actually leagued in the general conspiracy, are to be considered as traitors.” *Id.* *Ex parte Bollman* was an early and prominent legal landmark supporting some key propositions that would have been familiar to lawyers during the Civil War era: first, that there are such things as conspiracies and plots to “overturn the government,” in whole or in part, that though they might not qualify as treason, remain great and culpable legal wrongs; second, that the crime of treason specifically requires showing the existence of an armed assembly to employ force for a treasonable purpose; third, that one may be said to have engaged in (or provided “aid and comfort” to) treason where one is in league with the conspiracy and done any act, large or small, or played “any part,” however remote, to further that plot. Whether or not *Bollman*’s construction was sufficiently established to be read in to Section Three itself, it was cited occasionally in the 1860s Congress. See, e.g., 37th Congress 2nd Session Cong. Globe 414 (1862)

come ubiquitous in legal and public discourse as a general allegation of improper assistance, making it still less clear that it was perfectly coterminous with the law of the Treason Clause.²⁵⁹

Finally, the words “insurrection” and “rebellion” also appear elsewhere in the Fourteenth Amendment itself, but again in ways that give little external light on Section Three. A person’s “participation in *rebellion*” is specified in Section Two as an allowable ground for denying the right to vote that does not trigger a reduction in a state’s representation as a consequence.²⁶⁰ Section Four of the amendment prohibits payment of debts or obligations “incurred in aid of *insurrection* or *rebellion*.”²⁶¹ These neighboring sections use slightly different phrases for the behavior they cover (“participation” and “engaged in”; “aid or comfort” and “in aid of”), but it is difficult to say if the variations are meaningful.

4. Contemporaneous Public, Political, Legal Usage

Perhaps the best evidence of the public meaning of the terms “insurrection,” “rebellion,” and “engaging in,” as they came to be used in Section Three, consists of their common and frequent public, political, and legal usage in the 1860s—the years immediately surrounding the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment—by a variety of actors: by President Abraham Lincoln, in prominent speeches, messages, public letters, and proclamations; by Congress, in major acts of legislation; and by the Supreme Court, in the landmark decision in *The Prize Cases*. The consistent pattern of usage was to treat the actions of the South as being, legally, “insurrection” or “rebellion.” A wide range of actions supportive of secession appears to have constituted “engaging in” or giving “aid or comfort” to rebellion or insurrection.

This leads us to what we think an obvious “sure shipwreck”²⁶² for understanding Section Three’s terms. Whatever else “insurrection or rebellion” might embrace, they certainly embrace the cluster of actions with which Section Three was, historically, immediately and directly concerned: first, the attempted *secession* from the authority of the U.S. Constitution—the effort to displace the lawful authority of the United States in favor of the supposedly “seceded” state governments and their confederation into the “Confederate States of America”; and second, engaging in forcible resistance to the authority of the United States to execute the laws of the United States—armed resistance to the Constitution, specifically in the shape of waging civil war against the nation. Conduct participating in, advancing, supporting, or assisting

(statement of Sen. Sumner) (citing *Bollman* passage quoted above during the proceedings to expel Senator Jesse Bright for writing a letter to Jefferson Davis).

²⁵⁹ See Harold Holzer, *Lincoln and the Power of the Press: The War for Public Opinion* 361 (2014) (referring to the phrase “aid and comfort to the enemy” (by the press) as “that catch-basin phrase again.”).

²⁶⁰ U.S. Const. amdt. XIV, sec. 2.

²⁶¹ U.S. Const. amdt. XIV, sec. 4.

²⁶² Morse, *supra* note 227.

either secession or armed resistance to U.S. authority constituted “engaging in” or giving “aid or comfort to” the Union’s enemies. Section Three encompasses *all* such actions in support of secession and civil war as included within its substantive trigger.

a. President Lincoln

An extremely important contemporaneous source for understanding the public constitutional meaning of “insurrection” and “rebellion” in 1860s public discourse is President Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln looms large in the public understanding of the day concerning the meaning of those terms. Lincoln consistently characterized secession and the Civil War as acts of *insurrection* or *rebellion*, avoiding wherever possible treating “secession” as if it were a separate legal category. Secession, for Lincoln, was a Southern euphemism for rebellion and treason. The Confederacy had no valid legal existence: what was going on with the Civil War was properly called insurrection and rebellion—the lawless attempt to overthrow the constitutional processes of the United States and displace lawful government with unlawful governments.

Lincoln was insistent and relentless—and very public and prominent—on this point, consistently so, across a range of contexts. For instance, the Civil War was emphatically *not*, in Lincoln’s view, a “war” between the United States and another sovereign.²⁶³ It was not subject to Congress’s Article I, section 8, *clause 11* power to “declare War,” but was rather an illegal *rebellion*—a “giant insurrection”—to be suppressed by executive authority pursuant to Congress’s Article I, section 8, *clause 15* power to “provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions.”²⁶⁴

Consider just a few prominent and illustrative statements: In his First Inaugural Address, on March 4, 1861, Lincoln, after setting forth arguments that “no State upon its own mere motion can lawfully get out of the Union,” concluded that “acts of violence within any State or States against the authority of the United States” are “*insurrectionary or revolutionary, according to circumstances.*”²⁶⁵ Following the attack on Fort Sumter, Lincoln’s April 15, 1861 proclamation calling forth the militia

²⁶³ On Lincoln’s understanding of secession as unconstitutional and his resulting conception of the Civil War as, legally, a situation of insurrection or rebellion (not declared war) see sources cited in note 231. That does not exclude the existence of full constitutional Commander in Chief Clause powers in the situation of actual civil war, however. Michael Stokes Paulsen, *The Emancipation Proclamation and the Commander in Chief Power*, 40 Georgia L. Rev. 807, 814-823 (2006).

²⁶⁴ Compare U.S. Const. art. I, §8, cl. 11 (Declare War Clause) with U.S. Const. art. I, §8, cl. 15 (power “to provide for calling forth” the Militia for law execution and to suppress insurrections). Congress’s exercise of this power – the Insurrection Acts of 1795 and 1807 – is discussed *infra* Part IV.A.5.a.

²⁶⁵ Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural Address (March 4, 1861), IV Complete Works of Lincoln (“CWL”) 262, 265.

similarly characterized the attack as fitting the statutory definition of *insurrection*.²⁶⁶ And in his July 4, 1861 Message to Congress, Lincoln labelled the South's purported secession a "*giant insurrection*" and, vividly, as "*rebellion ... sugar coated*." The "so-called 'Confederate States'" had formed an "*insurrectionary government*."²⁶⁷ In the same July 4 Message, Lincoln used the nature of secession as *rebellion* to justify suspension of the writ of habeas corpus as authorized by the terms of Article I, section 9, clause 2 of the Constitution, which used exactly that language of "rebellion."²⁶⁸ Lincoln's use of terms was significant and pulled no punches: efforts to displace lawful government authority with unlawful government—no matter how labelled by their perpetrators, no matter how deluded participants might be as to the lawfulness or propriety of their actions—were *insurrectionary*; such declarations and actions constituted *rebellion*.

Two years later, at the height of the war, Lincoln returned to the characterization of the South's actions as "rebellion" (and the constitutional question of power to suspend habeas corpus) in a notable incident testing the limit of Union military suppression of anti-war and disloyal speech. In a June 12, 1863 public letter, nominally addressed to Erastus Corning, Lincoln defended the military arrest of former Ohio Congressman Clement Vallandigham, a notorious racist and prominent "Copperhead" pro-South, anti-Union northerner, who had made a public speech vehemently condemning the Emancipation Proclamation and the propriety of the Union's war effort.

Lincoln distinguished law enforcement arrests from detentions in cases of *rebellion*. Wrote Lincoln: "Ours is a case of *Rebellion*—so called by the resolutions before me—in fact, a clear, flagrant, and gigantic case of *Rebellion*." And that, Lincoln concluded, was what allowed suspension of habeas corpus.²⁶⁹ In the course of his argument, Lincoln described rebellion as "*sudden and extensive uprisings against the government*."²⁷⁰ This is a useful description that supports our working definition: Rebellion is an "uprising." It is something more than mere protest. It is, often, "sudden." It is "extensive." It is directed "against the government." *Rebellion* is something more than ordinary law violation and that is why it is treated differently by the Constitution.

How did Vallandigham's actions associate him with the rebellion? Lincoln made a forceful case that even pure speech might constitute assistance to rebellion—if it were advocacy producing direct, material effects benefitting the rebel enemy

²⁶⁶ Abraham Lincoln, Proclamation Calling Militia and Convening Congress (April 15, 1861), IV CWL 331, 332.

²⁶⁷ Abraham Lincoln, Message to Congress in Special Session (July 4, 1861), IV CWL 421, 427-428, 432-437.

²⁶⁸ Id. at 429-431 (emphasis added).

²⁶⁹ U.S. Const. art. I, §9, cl. 2.

²⁷⁰ Abraham Lincoln, To Erastus Corning and Others (June 12, 1863), VI CWL 260, 264 (emphasis added).

cause, by tangibly harming the military authority engaged in trying to suppress that rebellion. In the Corning Letter, Lincoln wrote that, “under cover of ‘Liberty of speech,’ ‘Liberty of the press,’ and ‘Habeas corpus,’” rebel sympathizers “hoped to keep on foot amongst us a most efficient corps of spies, informers, suppliers, and aiders and abettors of their cause in a thousand ways.”²⁷¹ Claims of freedom of speech could *improperly* furnish a shield or cloak for wrongful conduct; they supplied “cover” for, and thus assisted, rebellion and insurrection.

Lincoln expanded these arguments in yet more arresting ways. He suggested that, in some circumstances, a person’s refusal to speak out *against* rebellion might be tacit support *for* such rebellion: a “man who stands by and says nothing, when the peril of his government is discussed, can not be misunderstood. If not hindered, he is sure to help the enemy.” He also hinted at regret that he had not earlier arrested prominent oath-breaking officers now “occupying the very highest places in the rebel war service,” such as John Breckinridge, Robert E. Lee, Joseph Johnston, and John Magruder: “I think the time not unlikely to come when I shall be blamed for having made too few arrests rather than too many.”²⁷² Lincoln’s position seems clear, if perhaps a bit unsettling: claims of freedom of speech did *not* invariably prevail over the imperative constitutional necessity of suppressing rebellion; where words fueled insurrection, or thwarted its suppression, or signaled disloyalty, the speaker was aiding the enemy. Such expression was not necessarily privileged.

This is not exactly an expansive conception of First Amendment rights. Lincoln fully recognized the difficulties with his stance. He did not ignore the tension between his conclusions and peacetime free speech principles but argued that the tension could be reconciled.²⁷³ In a colorful metaphor, Lincoln ventured:

I can no more be persuaded that the Government can constitutionally take no strong measures in time of rebellion, because it can be shown that the same could not be lawfully taken in time of peace, than I can be persuaded that a particular drug is not good medicine for a sick man, because it can be shown not to be good food for a well one. Nor am I able to appreciate the danger apprehended by the meeting that the American people will, by means of military arrests during the Rebellion, lose the

²⁷¹ Id. at 263.

²⁷² Id. at 265.

²⁷³ In several respects, Lincoln anticipated later judicial free speech doctrines and decisions, such as those distinguishing pure speech from speech linked to prohibited *conduct*; recognizing limits on speech posing a danger of inciting to crime or lawlessness; recognizing “compelling interest” overrides in exceptional circumstances, including for reasons of national security or military secrecy; finding that government’s motives and purposes for a particular action may matter to its lawfulness; and noting where an incidental limitation on expression leaves open alternative channels for expression of the same message. See Paulsen, *Civil War*, *supra* note 231, at 698-702 & n.23 (noting how Lincoln anticipated many of the issues and exceptions contemplated by later judicial doctrine concerning the First Amendment’s freedom of speech).

right of Public Discussion, the Liberty of Speech and the Press, the Law of Evidence, Trial by Jury, and Habeas Corpus, throughout the indefinite peaceful future, which I trust lies before them, any more than I am able to believe that a man could contract so strong an appetite for emetics during temporary illness as to persist in feeding upon them during the remainder of his healthful life.²⁷⁴

Lincoln also stressed a distinction between speech directed at criticism of the government's political policy—fully protected by the freedom of speech—and expression more or less directly aimed at harming the military's recruitment and war effort. If Vallandigham had been arrested merely because he was “damaging the political prospects of the administration” or “the personal interests of the general,” that would be one thing, Lincoln observed. “[I]f there was no other reason for the arrest, then I concede that the arrest was wrong.” But as Lincoln understood it, the arrest “was made for a very different reason”—that Vallandigham was “laboring, with some effect, to prevent the raising of troops, to encourage desertions from the army, and to leave the rebellion without an adequate military force to suppress it.” Vallandigham was, in short, “warring upon the military.” He who “dissuades one man from volunteering, or induces one soldier to desert, weakens the Union cause as much as he who kills a union soldier in battle.” Desertion was punishable by death, of course. In a famous line, Lincoln asked, rhetorically “Must I shoot a simple-minded soldier boy who deserts, while I must not touch a hair of a wiley agitator who induces him to desert?”²⁷⁵ Lincoln's answer was no: “I think that in such a case, to silence the agitator, and save the boy, is not only constitutional, but, withal a great mercy.”²⁷⁶

Lincoln continued: “If I be wrong on this question of constitutional power,” he added, “my error lies in believing that certain proceedings are constitutional when, in cases of rebellion or Invasion, the public Safety requires them, which would not be constitutional when, in absence of rebellion or invasion, the public Safety does not require them -- in other words, that the constitution is not in it's application in all respects the same, in cases of Rebellion or invasion, involving the public Safety, as it is in times of profound peace and public security.”²⁷⁷

Lincoln thus embraced the view that material assistance to insurrection or rebellion could in some cases take the form of effective advocacy of unlawful conduct that, if engaged in by substantial numbers, would materially advance the rebel cause or harm the military prospects of the Union. The fact that such assistance to rebellion came in the form of words did not furnish any constitutional privilege to such action.

²⁷⁴ Letter to Corning (June 12, 1863), VI CWL at 267. (*Emetics* referred to a medicine or substance used to induce vomiting.)

²⁷⁵ Letter to Corning, VI CWL at 266.

²⁷⁶ *Id.* at 266-67.

²⁷⁷ *Id.* at 267.

Where rebellion threatens public safety or public security, the Constitution permits restriction on advocacy furthering, supporting, or assisting such rebellion.

To be sure, one might well conclude that Lincoln went too far in his arguments in the Corning Letter or in some of his actions during the war. That is an interesting and difficult question—and not our point here. Our point is that Lincoln’s view was a prominently expressed contemporaneous understanding—and on the issues of insurrection, rebellion, and complicity, it was consistent with his longstanding and oft-repeated views. This does not directly answer the question whether or to what extent such thinking specifically informed general public understanding of Section Three. But Lincoln’s thinking, articulated in such a public context, may well have informed the potential reach of the terms “insurrection or rebellion,” and what constitutes engaging in or aiding such conduct, as those terms came to be employed in Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment.

At all events, Lincoln made clear and prominent the position that declaring secession, engaging in forcible opposition to the constitutional authority of the Union, and materially assisting others in such conduct, *all* constituted forms of support for and participation in “insurrection” or “rebellion.” And this stance continued throughout the war, even as the nation began to look to the war’s conclusion and to questions of the post-war status of persons who had participated in that rebellion—questions at the core of Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment.²⁷⁸

b. Congress

President Lincoln was not the only public figure grappling with concepts of insurrection and rebellion during the Civil War. Similar themes can be found in the statements and actions of Congress and the Supreme Court.

Start with Congress: We think two specific enactments of Congress during the Civil War are especially probative of the understandings of “insurrection” and “rebellion” and of what conduct was publicly understood to constitute having “engaged in” or given assistance to rebellion. First, there is the so-called “Ironclad Oath,” adopted

²⁷⁸ Lincoln’s characterization of Southern secession as *rebellion* continued throughout the war. His December 8, 1863 Message to Congress referred to the Confederacy as “the rebellion.” Annual Message to Congress (Dec. 8, 1863), VII CWL at 51 In his accompanying offer of amnesty and pardon, in the Amnesty Proclamation of December 8, 1863, Lincoln referred, repeatedly, to the “rebellion” that “now exists whereby the loyal State governments of several States have for a long time been subverted” (id. at 53), to “said rebellion and treason” (id. at 54), to “said rebellion” (id.) and to persons who had provided “aid” to the “rebellion” in various forms. Interestingly, Lincoln *excepted* from his offer of forgiveness – in language that would seem to presage the similar terms of Section Three – “all who have left judicial stations under the United States to aid the rebellion” and “all who resigned commissions in the army or navy in the United States, and afterwards aided the rebellion.” Id. at 55. Lincoln also left to the respective houses of Congress the exclusive judgment “whether members sent to Congress from any State shall be admitted to seats.”

on July 2, 1862 as the oath one must be able to swear in order to hold federal office.²⁷⁹ Second, there is the “Second Confiscation Act,” adopted that same month, on July 17, 1862, to authorize legal forfeitures of property and slaves, and also to enforce disqualifications from federal office, by persons who had engaged in specified activities constituting “rebellion” or “insurrection.”²⁸⁰ These two enactments, and their implementation to exclude former insurrectionists and rebels from future office, say much about the terms they employed.

i. The Ironclad Oath

Congress adopted The Ironclad Oath in the thick of the Civil War and it was required of most federal officeholders from 1862 to 1884.²⁸¹ The text of the Oath sets forth the types of misconduct regarded as disqualifying an individual from eligibility for federal office because he had been engaged in supporting the rebellion—an inquiry very closely parallel to that contained in Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment, proposed by Congress just a few years later.

The Ironclad Oath required that prospective officeholders swear or affirm that they *had not done any of several things*. In that sense it did not function like a traditional oath of office—a promise of future behavior—but much more like a disqualification for past misbehavior.²⁸² It did indirectly what Section Three was soon to do directly. That makes the Ironclad Oath’s list of never-have-I-evers particularly instructive. Here’s the oath, with its most-relevant-to-Section-Three features and phrases italicized (and with bracketed numbers inserted):

I . . . do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I have never [1] *voluntarily borne arms against* the United States since I have been a citizen thereof; that I have [2] *voluntarily given no aid, countenance, counsel, or encouragement to persons engaged* in armed hostility thereto; that I have [3] *neither sought nor accepted nor attempted to exercise the functions of any office whatever*, under any authority or pretended authority in hostility to the United States; that I have [4] *not yielded a*

²⁷⁹ 12 Stat. 502.

²⁸⁰ 12 Stat. 589 (1862). 12 Stat. 627 (1862).

²⁸¹ 23 Stat. 21 (1884). There was an important exception. In 1868, Congress provided that anybody who had received amnesty from two-thirds of each house of Congress under Section Three was exempt from the Ironclad Oath and need only swear future loyalty, 15 Stat. 85 (1868), and in 1871 it added that anybody “who is not rendered ineligible to office by the provisions of the fourteenth amendment to the Constitution” yet would otherwise “not be able on account of his participation in the late rebellion to take” the Ironclad Oath, could take the forward-looking oath instead, 16 Stat. 412 (1871). These two provisions effectively equated the Ironclad Oath to Section Three from 1871 on.

²⁸² For this reason, Lincoln famously wrote: “On principle I dislike an oath which requires a man to swear he *has* not done wrong. It rejects the Christian principle of forgiveness on terms of repentance. I think it is enough if the man does no wrong *hereafter*.” Endorsement of Abraham Lincoln in Letter from R.M. Edwards to Edwin Stanton, February 5, 1864, 7 Lincoln Papers 169.

voluntary support to any pretended government, authority, power or constitution within the United States, hostile or inimical thereto.

While not using the words *insurrection* or *rebellion*, the Ironclad Oath's list of never-have-I-ever's would seem strongly suggestive of how Section Three's triggering language likely would have been understood in public usage at the time. The Ironclad Oath is not a *definition* of Section Three's constitutional terms, of course. But it would appear an apt descriptive *specification* of the kinds of misconduct included within those terms. Under the oath, disqualifying behavior included: (1) fighting against the United States; (2) aiding or encouraging such armed hostility; (3) accepting office under a hostile authority (or "pretended authority"); and—a highly evocative phrase—(4) "yield[ing]" one's "voluntary support" to "*any pretended government, authority, power or constitution . . . hostile or inimical*" to the United States.

The content of this oath's requirement establishes a useful, historically prominent marker for the scope of Section Three: What the Ironclad Oath understood to be disqualifying for federal office, Section Three likely embraced as constitutionally disqualifying conduct for the far broader sweep of offices to which it extended. 🚫🚫🚫

ii. The Second Confiscation Act

Barely more than two weeks after adopting the Ironclad Oath, the Civil War Congress enacted what is popularly called the "Second Confiscation Act." Its full title spoke explicitly in terms of insurrection and rebellion: "*An Act to suppress Insurrection, to punish Treason and Rebellion, to seize and confiscate the Property of Rebels, and for other Purposes.*"²⁸⁴

This Second Confiscation Act was a very prominent piece of legislation. It imposed sweeping penalties, forfeitures, and disqualifications on anybody who had engaged in or assisted the rebellion.²⁸⁵ The Second Confiscation Act was long and vigorously debated in Congress, much discussed in the press and in public discourse, objected to by many on constitutional grounds, and nearly vetoed by President **Lincoln**.²⁸⁶ Enactment of the Second Confiscation Act gave rise to very public pressure

²⁸³ The extensive overlap between the meaning of the Ironclad Oath and the Section Three disqualification is confirmed by Congress's own interpretation and application of the oath to its own members, during and after the enactment of Section Three. These applications are detailed *infra* Part IV.A.5.b.

²⁸⁴ 12 Stat. 589 (1862). See also 12 Stat. 627 (1862) ("explanatory" joint resolution).

²⁸⁵ An earlier act had provided for forfeiture more specifically of property or slaves actually *used* in service of rebellion. 12 Stat. 319 (Aug. 6, 1861).

²⁸⁶ See generally David P. Currie, *The Civil War Congress*, 73 U. Chi. L. Rev. 1131, 1185-1195 (2006). Among many noteworthy twists and turns in the road to enactment, President Lincoln came close to vetoing the bill, preparing a veto message with his objections and signing the bill only after Congress passed an "explanatory" joint resolution (which Lincoln signed together with the bill). Lincoln *nonetheless* appended his original draft veto message setting forth his objections. For discussion of the constitutional objections of Lincoln and others to various aspects of the bill, and his unusual course of

on President Lincoln to take aggressive action against slavery in rebel states—pressure that helped spur Lincoln to issue his Emancipation Proclamation as an executive military order. The Second Confiscation Act was a big deal.²⁸⁷

The Act itself was a complicated and somewhat confusing hodgepodge of distinct provisions, combining property confiscation, emancipation, a new federal crime, and disqualification from office. But the terms it used are especially evocative, visiting legal consequences on persons who “engaged in,” “incite[d],” “set on foot,” or “assist[ed]” “rebellion” or “insurrection” or who had “given aid or comfort” to rebellion or done acts “aiding and abetting” rebellion. The Act is practically a glossary of the terms used in Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment proposed by Congress just four years later.

Specifically: Section 2 made it a new crime, distinct from treason, to “incite, set on foot, assist, or engage in any rebellion or insurrection against the authority of the United States or the laws thereof” or to “give aid or comfort thereto” or to “engage in, or give aid and comfort to,” any “existing rebellion or insurrection.”²⁸⁸ It is worth pausing to parse the linguistic resemblances to Section Three, and the ways in which like terms are used and explained. Following Lincoln, secession and civil war are equated with “rebellion or insurrection.” Those terms are described as involving acts “against

action in signing it but nonetheless appending his objections, see *id.* at 1193-1194; Burrus M. Carnahan, *Act of Justice: Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation and the Law of War* 105-106 (2007) (noting Lincoln’s initial concern that the act would violate Article III’s limitations on the punishment for treason and the objections of others that the act was a bill of attainder); Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* 215-217 (2010). For Lincoln’s July 17, 1862 message to Congress, detailing his objections, see V Complete Works of Lincoln 328-331.

²⁸⁷ A month after the Act had been adopted, Horace Greeley published a scathing editorial titled “The Prayer of Twenty Millions,” in which he demanded that Lincoln “EXECUTE THE LAWS” faithfully with specific reference to the Second Confiscation Act. Greeley condemned Lincoln’s “mistaken deference to Rebel Slavery” and his failure to rebuke his generals for having “habitually disregarded” the Confiscation Act. Lincoln replied to Greeley, equally prominently, within days, in a famous public letter dated August 22, 1862, published in a rival newspaper and “widely reprinted,” defending his course of action. V Complete Works of Lincoln 388-389; see Holzer, *supra* note 259, at 400-401. One month later, Lincoln issued his Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation of September 22, 1862, in which he noted and quoted provisions of the Second Confiscation Act (without invoking the statute as actual *authority* for his proclamation). V Complete Works of Lincoln at 434-435 (stating that “attention is hereby called to” provisions of the act but relying for authority on his powers as executive and military Commander in Chief). See also Foner, *Fiery Trial*, *supra* note 286, at 215 (noting that “the Second Confiscation Act embodied a major shift in national policy”).

²⁸⁸ 12 Stat. 589, 590. (emphasis added). Section 2 provided penalties for conviction, which included confiscation of slaves. A modified version of this provision remains a crime today, and continues to incorporate the Confiscation Act’s disqualification from *federal* office, *id.*, as well. 18 U.S.C. §2383 (“Whoever incites, sets on foot, assists, or engages in any rebellion or insurrection against the authority of the United States or the laws thereof, or gives aid or comfort thereto, shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than ten years, or both; and shall be incapable of holding any office under the United States.”). Needless to say, a prosecution under Section 2383 of Title 18 is neither a prerequisite to nor preclusive of the self-executing application of Section Three of the Constitution.

the authority of the United States, or the laws thereof” (a formulation closely conforming to our working definitions). Section 2 imposes criminal liability on persons who “incite” such acts; who “set on foot” such acts; who “assist” such acts; who in any other way “engage in” such conduct; or who “give aid and comfort to” such conduct. All of these terms have close parallels in Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Section 3 of the Act then imposed a sweeping *disqualification from future officeholding*—a kind of proto-Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment: “every person guilty of either of the offences described in this act shall be forever incapable and disqualified to hold any office under the United States.”²⁸⁹ Section 5 directed the President to seize rebel property belonging to a long list of confederate officers *plus* anyone in a loyal state who “shall hereafter *assist and give aid and comfort to such rebellion*.”²⁹⁰ Officeholding in a rebel government or military was *per se* blameworthy participation; but general giving of assistance or aid or comfort also qualified as participation in rebellion. Section 6 provided a further authorization for seizure of the property of any person not already mentioned who, “being *engaged in armed rebellion* against the government of the United States, or *aiding* or abetting such *rebellion*,” and, after sixty days’ notice issued by the President, did not “cease to *aid, countenance, and abet such rebellion*, and return to his allegiance to the United States.”²⁹¹ Section 7 and Section 8 provided for *in rem* proceedings against property “found to have belonged to a person *engaged in rebellion*, or who has given *aid or comfort thereto*,” in which case it “shall be condemned as *enemies’* property.”²⁹² And Section 9 famously emancipated slaves of persons “who shall hereafter be *engaged in rebellion*” against the Union or who “shall *in any way give aid or comfort thereto*.”²⁹³ Throughout these sections, one can see the recurrent use of terms and concepts, and synonyms for such terms, that would reappear in Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment: “engaged in,” “rebellion,” “aid or comfort,” “abet,” “countenance,” “enemies.”

Unlike the Ironclad Oath, the Second Confiscation Act did not give rise to many opportunities for immediate application and further interpretation. In part, this was simply due to the exigencies and realities of Civil War at the time. For example, the civil forfeiture provisions contemplated *in rem* judicial proceedings against persons in the district where property was located. At the time, such property was often located in areas of rebel control. Often, the federal courts were not even functioning *those areas*.²⁹⁴ Similarly, as a practical matter, criminal prosecutions of rebels for

²⁸⁹ 12 Stat. 589, 590.

²⁹⁰ *Id.* (emphasis added.)

²⁹¹ *Id.* at 591.

²⁹² *Id.*

²⁹³ *Id.*

²⁹⁴ See McPherson, *supra* note 231, at 500 (noting confusing aspects of the Second Confiscation Act and the requirement of “*in rem* proceedings by district courts that were of course not functioning in the rebellious states”); Foner, *Fiery Trial*, *supra* note 286, at 215 (“For most property, [the Act] established a cumbersome judicial process that helps to explain why little land was actually seized and sold

treason and insurrection had to await Union military success. (And after success came, President Andrew Johnson ultimately pardoned a great many offenders.)²⁹⁵ The Lincoln administration, focused on other matters, showed little interest in bringing legal actions to enforce the Act's specific policies. The administration, according to one scholar, "chose not to implement the law vigorously."²⁹⁶ Attorney General Bates "exerted no more than a minimal effort to make the first and second confiscation acts work."²⁹⁷ And the Act's section authorizing limited military emancipation section was rapidly overtaken—superseded in practical effect—by President Lincoln's far more comprehensive Emancipation Proclamation, issued pursuant to his constitutional Commander in Chief power.

But in some ways the lack of enforcement cases is beside our point here, which concerns the Act's prominence in national discussions and its pervasive use of terms, phrases, and concepts—rebellion, insurrection, engage in, aid or comfort—that would reappear in only slightly different form in Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment. Like the Ironclad Oath, the Second Confiscation Act employed terminology nearly identical to that employed in Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment. The usage of the terms in this landmark legislation we think helps explicate the meaning, in public legal context, of the language in the amendment. In the context of 1860s public legal usage, engaging in or giving aid or comfort to rebellion and insurrection extended to a broad range of activity advancing or furthering efforts to unlawfully upend the lawful operation of the U.S. constitutional regime. This strongly supports the conclusion that Section Three's terms can fairly be read quite expansively, as embracing a broad range of conduct directed against the authority of government under the Constitution.

c. The Supreme Court's decision in *The Prize Cases*

The most important constitutional decision of the U.S. Supreme Court during the Civil War was *The Prize Cases*.²⁹⁸ There, the majority upheld the constitutionality of Lincoln's unilateral military order, made very early in the Civil War, imposing a blockade on Southern ports. In a truly landmark decision, the Supreme Court held that the President's war powers (including the power to impose a blockade) were triggered immediately, as soon as the South's rebellion took the form of organized military resistance to the authority of the U.S. government. The President's power to

under its provisions." See also Silvana R. Siddali, *From Property to Person: Slavery and the Confiscation Acts, 1861-1862*, at 238 (2005) (remarking that "[t]he confiscation bill that finally emerged was neither sweeping nor enforceable" though opining that "if the law had not been hobbled by its own internal inconsistencies, it might have affected the lives and property of a large majority of southerners.").

²⁹⁵ See Eric L. McKittrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* 141-152 (1960).

²⁹⁶ John Syrett, *The Civil War Confiscation Acts: Failing to Reconstruct the South* 55 (2005).

²⁹⁷ *Id.* at 72; see also James G. Randall, *Constitutional Problems Under Lincoln* 288-292 (1926) (describing minimal enforcement of the Second Confiscation Act).

²⁹⁸ 67 U.S. (2 Black) 635 (1863).

wage civil war against rebel forces derived from his delegated statutory power to employ force to suppress *rebellion*, the Court held. A congressional declaration of war was neither a prerequisite nor legally appropriate for this type of use of force: “This greatest of civil wars was not gradually developed by popular commotion, tumultuous assemblies, or local unorganized insurrections” but “sprung forth suddenly ... in the full panoply of *war*. The President was bound to meet it in the shape it presented itself, without waiting for Congress to baptize it with a name.”²⁹⁹

The Court’s decision in *The Prize Cases* is today regarded as the leading judicial exposition of the Constitution’s allocation of war powers. At the time, the case had other hugely consequential implications: the principles set forth in the decision essentially endorsed in advance (but of course without addressing the question directly) Lincoln’s constitutional justification for the Emancipation Proclamation, which he had issued earlier that year.³⁰⁰ The decision of *The Prize Cases* was a very big deal indeed.

Of special interest for our purposes is the Court’s usage and explanation—in a highly prominent legal context—of the terms *insurrection* and *rebellion*, and their relationship to war and the war powers of the national government: “*Insurrection* against a government may or may not culminate in an organized *rebellion*, but a civil war always begins by *insurrection* against the lawful authority of the Government,” the majority said.³⁰¹ A civil war “becomes such by its accidents—the number, power, and organization of the persons who originate and carry it on.”³⁰² Where a rebellion has come to possess certain military characteristics, the “party in rebellion” might come to be treated as a belligerent for law-of-war purposes, even though a domestic rebellion stands on different constitutional legal ground than war with a foreign nation. “It is not the less a civil war, with belligerent parties in hostile array, because it may be called an ‘*insurrection*’ by one side, and the insurgents be considered as rebels or traitors.”³⁰³

In a nutshell: insurrection or rebellion were forms of active resistance to the lawful authority of the government. An *insurrection* might be something short of outright *rebellion*. But an insurrection against government authority sometimes grows into full-on “rebellion.” A *rebellion*, in turn, need not take the form of civil war in order to be a rebellion. But sometimes it does. At all events, *rebellion* seems its own distinct, more general legal concept of repudiation or attempted overthrow of the lawful constitutional regime by unlawful means.

²⁹⁹ *Id.* at 668-669; see also Stephen I. Vladeck, *Emergency Power and the Militia Acts*, 114 *Yale L. J.* 149, 177-180 (2004).

³⁰⁰ Paulsen, *Emancipation*, *supra* 263, at 814-823.

³⁰¹ 67 U.S. at 666 (emphasis added).

³⁰² *Id.* at 666

³⁰³ *Id.* at 668.

The Prize Cases also held that persons engaged in insurrection or rebellion could be treated as “enemies” (as well as traitors) for legal purposes. Further, the war power, such as imposition of a blockade, could lawfully affect the legal property rights of persons engaged in “commerce” that “supplies” rebels or insurrectionists—and could do so irrespective of the supposed loyalties of the property owner. Even “neutral” powers’ shipping could be seized when it violated a blockade: “Whether property be liable to capture as ‘enemies’ property’ does not in any manner depend on the personal allegiance of the owner. ‘It is the illegal traffic that stamps it as ‘enemies’ property.’”³⁰⁴

The Prize Cases’ treatment of the concepts of insurrection and rebellion, of who constituted “enemies,” and of what actions constituted support for rebellion, would have been very much part of the legal culture of the day and provides important legal background as to how these terms would have been understood at the time of the drafting of Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment, just a few years later. *Insurrection* and *rebellion* involve varying degrees of concerted resistance to “the lawful authority of the Government,” with insurrection being the arguably somewhat lesser form and rebellion the somewhat greater. A rebellion or insurrection need not involve acts tantamount to levying war. (War is *sometimes* a feature of rebellion but does not define it.) The Civil War was an *outgrowth* of insurrection or rebellion. But the fundamental act of rebellion remains the attempt to displace the lawful authority of government by unlawful means. And those who give material assistance to the enemy may also suffer legal consequences.

We find the overall evidence of prominent 1860s political and legal usage of the same concepts and language as would soon be employed by Section Three—“insurrection,” “rebellion,” and what it meant to “engage in” or provide “aid or comfort” to **enemies—highly** probative of Section Three’s original public meaning. President Lincoln, repeatedly and insistently; Congress, pointedly and consistently; and the Supreme Court, decisively, used these terms in connection with secession, forcible resistance to the legal authority of the Constitution, and participation to varying degrees in efforts to overthrow, subvert, or undermine the authority of lawful government. These usages were public, prominent, *legal*, and essentially undisputed within the Union. While the specific circumstances of secession and civil war gave rise to these formulations, they did not define or limit the terms’ meanings, which were more

³⁰⁴ Id. at 674 (quoting 3 Wash. C.C.R. 183). That said, the Court also cautioned that “‘enemies’ property” was “a technical phrase peculiar to prize courts, and depends upon principles of public policy, as distinguished from the common law.” Id. at 674. The point that, in a military context, property could be treated as “enemies’ property” irrespective of the allegiance of the owner was important to the lawfulness of the Emancipation Proclamation: even though Lincoln’s proclamation purported to free the slaves of *all* persons in rebel-controlled territory – including slaves held by persons claiming to be loyal to the Union – such “property” constituted a resource assisting or supplying the rebellion and thus could be declared seized, confiscated, and liberated as a matter of the military law of war. See Paulsen, *Emancipation*, supra note 263. See generally John Fabian Witt, *Lincoln’s Code* (2012).

general. Secession, and civil war, were *species* of insurrection and rebellion—organized, group resistance to the authority of government to execute the laws and attempts to substitute an unlawful legal regime for the lawful, constitutional one. But insurrection and rebellion were the broader categories. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that these 1860s Civil War usages of terms carried over into the meaning of Section Three.

5. Other Extant Statutory Sources and Notorious Examples

a. The Insurrection Acts (and Insurrections Generally)

What about the Insurrection Acts themselves—the statutes that comprised the statutory authority supporting Lincoln’s use of military force to suppress secession? These statutes implemented Congress’s power “To provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions” as well as its other war powers over the army and navy. The central statute was enacted in 1795 (superseding a similar enactment in 1792) and was amended in 1807 and 1861. These statutes—the conduct they were understood to reach; the forms and degree of opposition to government authority that were believed to trigger the statutes’ application; and the circumstances in which they had been invoked and applied in the past—also would have been part of the background understanding of the term “insurrection” as it came to be incorporated into Section Three.

The 1795 act explicitly recited that it was enacted in part to carry into execution the power to “suppress insurrections.” But it also applied to repel invasions and to enforce federal law. Together, these were the three circumstances where Congress had the power to provide for calling out the militia.³⁰⁵ Section One of the Act allowed the President to call forth the militia “whenever the United States shall be invaded, or be in imminent danger of invasion from any foreign nation or Indian tribe,” as well as, upon request of state authorities, “in case of an insurrection in any state against the government thereof.”³⁰⁶ Section Two allowed the President to call forth the militia “whenever the laws of the United States shall be opposed, or the execution thereof obstructed, in any state, by combinations too powerful to be suppressed by the ordinary course of judicial proceedings, or by the powers vested in the marshals by this act.”³⁰⁷ Section Two encompasses insurrections against the United States.³⁰⁸ (Section One specifically deals only with insurrections against a state government.)

In 1807, Congress supplemented this power with the power to call out the army and navy in similar circumstances: “in all cases of insurrection, or obstruction to the

³⁰⁵ U.S. Const. art. I, sec. 8, cl. 15.

³⁰⁶ 2 Stat. 424 (1795), sec. 1.

³⁰⁷ *Id.* sec. 2. (emphasis added).

³⁰⁸ That said, because Section Two is supported by *both* Congress’s power to “suppress Insurrections” *and* its power “to execute the Laws of the Union,” U.S. Const. art. I, sec. 8, cl. 15. it could encompass instances of law enforcement that do not rise to the level of a constitutional “insurrection.”

laws, either of the United States, or of any individual state or territory, where it is lawful for the President of the United States to call forth the militia for the purpose of suppressing such insurrection, or of causing the laws to be duly executed, it shall be lawful for him to employ, for the same purposes, such part of the land or naval force of the United States as shall be judged necessary ...” The 1807 act thus carried forward and repeated the 1795 act’s understanding of insurrection.³⁰⁹

Finally, on July 29, 1861, Congress amended the trigger again to specifically describe “*rebellion*.” It allowed the President to call forth the militia “whenever, by reason of unlawful obstructions, combinations, or assemblages of persons, or rebellion against the authority of the Government of the United States, it shall become impracticable, in the judgment of the President of the United States, to enforce, by the ordinary course of judicial proceedings, the laws of the United States . . .”³¹⁰

The various versions of the Insurrection Act illustrate a common theme: insurrection is more than ordinary law violation; it entails “combinations” or “assemblages,”³¹¹ acting together, to “oppose[s]” or “obstruct” the ability of government to “execute” the law, in numbers “too powerful” to be suppressed by the usual means of law enforcement.³¹¹

Moreover, several famous instances in which this statutory authority had been (or might have been) invoked provide additional informative context for understanding “insurrection” or “rebellion.” Consider just a few.

The “Whiskey Rebellion” was one famous such instance. In 1794, acting under the 1792 predecessor statute, President George Washington personally led militia forces into western Pennsylvania to suppress a large uprising against the government spurred by resistance to the enactment of a federal tax on distilleries. Notably, the Whiskey Rebellion involved armed mobs, organized and employed for the purposes of intimidating and threatening federal officers, keeping them from performing their

³⁰⁹ 2 Stat. 443 (1807).

³¹⁰ 12 Stat. 281 (1861).

³¹¹ Myles Lynch has written that there can exist no insurrection within the meaning of the Insurrection Acts unless the President *proclaims* that an insurrection exists and, further, that as a consequence, there can exist no insurrection or rebellion within the meaning of Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment unless the President proclaims that such an insurrection exists. Lynch, *supra* note 5, at 168, 214-215. This seems plainly wrong. If the Insurrection Act defines insurrection, it is defined as concerted and powerful obstruction of the execution of the laws by government. It is no part of this definition that an insurrection exists only if the President declares it to exist. The President’s proclamation is a statutory prerequisite to the use of military force, *not* part of the definition of insurrection. The President can use force if he proclaims that there is an insurrection; but it is not an insurrection only because he proclaims it one.

duties under the law, and preventing others from assuming federal office (or inducing them to renounce their authority).³¹²

We believe the “Whiskey Rebellion” would have been regarded in the nineteenth century as a classic illustration of what was meant by the terms insurrection and rebellion.³¹³ Indeed, by the time of the drafting of Section Three, it seems to have been regularly referred to in precisely those terms.³¹⁴ In commonplace usage, as well as in political, and legal discourse, the Whiskey Rebellion was a familiar illustration of an “insurrection” or “rebellion.”

“Fries Rebellion,” in 1799, was another well-known anti-tax revolt, this time in eastern Pennsylvania.³¹⁵ President John Adams invoked the 1795 Act to suppress the “insurrection,” as he called it,³¹⁶ which had involved threats, intimidation, and violence directed at federal tax assessors by organized bands of persons designed to prevent the assessors from performing their duties, and further such acts directed against the ability of the government to arrest tax resisters. In at least one instance, armed opponents of the government successfully freed prisoners from federal custody. The Adams administration’s suppression of the insurrection led to widely publicized treason prosecutions³¹⁷ of leaders and instigators of the unlawful resistance, including John Fries. As with the Whiskey Rebellion, Fries Rebellion was characterized by



³¹² See generally Elkins & McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism* 461-474 (1993) (detailing actions of organized resistance, intimidation, and threats preventing federal officials from performing their duties – including tarring and feathering, whipping, surrounding of officials’ homes by armed mobs, and kidnapping and coerced repudiation of federal authority); see also Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* 468-478 (2004) (similar); Robert W. Coakley, *The Role of Federal Military Forces in Domestic Disorders, 1789-1878*, at 43-68 (1988) (documenting the resistance and military response).

³¹³ To be sure, one scholar of the Acts suggests that “[i]t may have been dubious whether actions of the Whiskey Rebellion farmers truly rose to the level of insurrection,” and that Washington may have treated it as law-obstruction rather than insurrection. Vladeck, at 161 n. 46; see also Coakley, *supra* note 312, at 67 (suggesting that to “characterize the . . . affair as a ‘riot’ and the participants as ‘rioters’” is “far closer to the truth”). But later sources called it at least an insurrection, see *infra* note 314, and this goes to show that an “insurrection” in the legal sense did not necessarily have to rise to the level of an attempt to take over or displace the government.

³¹⁴ See 1 Francis Wharton, *State Trials of the United States during the Administrations of Washington and Adams* 102-184 (1849) (describing “The Trials of the Western Insurgents”); Townsend Ward, *The Insurrection of the Year 1794, in the western counties of Pennsylvania* (J.B. Lippincott 1858); H.M. Brackenridge, *History of the western insurrection in western Pennsylvania: commonly called the whiskey insurrection* (W.S. Haven, 1859).

³¹⁵ Coakley, *supra* note 312, 69-77.

³¹⁶ John Adams, *Proclamation on Insurrection in Pennsylvania*, 12 March 1799, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-3377>.

³¹⁷ These prosecutions also occasioned a widely-cited jury charge from Circuit Justice Chase, in which he repeatedly discussed “insurrection,” describing it as a “rising of any body of the people” and arguing that it qualified as treason because “an insurrection to resist or prevent, by force, the execution of any statute of the United States, has a direct tendency to dissolve all the bands of society, to destroy all order and all laws, and also all security for the lives, liberties and property of the citizens of the United States.” *Case of Fries*, 9 F. Cas. 924, 930 (C.C.D. Pa. 1800). See also 1 Wharton, *supra* note 314, at 458-609 (describing these proceedings as “The Trial of the Northampton Insurgents”).

concerted acts of forcible interference with federal officials' ability to perform their duties under law.³¹⁸

Nat Turner's Rebellion, a violent slave revolt in 1831, did not lead to a presidential invocation of the Insurrection Act.³¹⁹ But it surely would have been a classic illustration of at least an "insurrection" and perhaps even a "*rebellion*"—a concerted uprising seeking forcibly to overturn the legal order and thwart government's ability to execute the law. A published report of Turner's own account called it both an **insurrection**³²⁰ and in one instance an "open rebellion."³²¹ This example, too, likely would have formed part of the background understanding of the terms insurrection or rebellion at the time they were employed in Section Three.

More broadly, slavery and anti-slavery produced other prominent incidents that would have been classed as small or large insurrections against government—instances that went beyond individual instances of legal disobedience, or of resistance to the laws themselves, and rose to the level of active, concerted, unlawful resistance to the *authority* of government to execute the laws. Specifically, revolt against the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 sometimes took the form of slave liberation in open defiance of government authority. For example, in Boston in 1850 and 1851, a local vigilance committee invoked "the 'higher law' doctrine" to openly harbor freed slaves to the point that President Millard Fillmore "threatened to send in federal troops."³²² In Christiana, Pennsylvania in 1851, a Quaker community took up arms (!) to defend fugitive slaves, shooting several slaveowners who had arrived from nearby Maryland. This was denounced as an "act of insurrection," and this time President Fillmore did call out federal troops.³²³ In Wisconsin in 1859, resistance to federal authority became so widespread as to prefigure the coming of the Civil War.³²⁴ And of course John

³¹⁸ As with the Whiskey Rebellion, these events show that an "insurrection" in the legal sense did not necessarily have to rise to the level of an attempt to take over or displace the government. See Elkins & McKittrick at 696-700 (questioning "whether the circumstances really called for military force of any kind").

³¹⁹ Federal troops were used to suppress this and other slave rebellions, but "without following the legal procedures laid down in the statutes of 1795 and 1807." Coakley, *supra* note 312, at 92-94. Coakley suggests that this the failure to go through the Insurrection Acts reflected "the universal dread of slave revolts" at the time and the fact that "[t]he slaves had no political constituency." *Id.* at 94.

³²⁰ See The Confessions of Nat Turner, The Leader of the Late Insurrection in Southampton, VA, as fully and voluntarily made to Thomas R. Gray, at 3, 5, 7, 20, 22 (1831) (calling it "insurrection"); see also Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Nat Turner's Insurrection, 8 *Atlantic Monthly* 173 (1861)

³²¹ See Turner, *supra* note 320, at 3 ("The late *insurrection* . . . is the first instance in our history of an open *rebellion* of the slaves") (emphases added).

³²² See McPherson, *supra* note 231, at 81-84; Cf. Coakley, *supra* note 312, at 130-131 (noting debate about whether this disturbance in Boston was sufficiently great to trigger the insurrection acts).

³²³ McPherson, *supra* note 231, at 84-85. See also Thomas Slaughter, *Bloody Dawn: The Christian Riot and Racial Violence in the Antebellum North* (1991); and cf. *id.* at ix ("The line between riot and rebellion was shifting during the antebellum period.").

³²⁴ See generally H. Robert Baker, *The Rescue of Joshua Glover: A Fugitive Slave, the Constitution, and the Coming of the Civil War* (2006) (describing resistance, in the mid-to-late 1850s, in Wisconsin to federal legal authority to execute the Fugitive Slave Act).

Brown's fateful raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859 was an explicit act of insurrection and rebellion: a quixotic and **ill-prepared** attempt to foment a massive slave insurrection and to overthrow the power of proslavery governments in the South.³²⁵ These rebels and insurrectionists were fighting *deeply unjust* laws, but there is no question that they committed many acts of *insurrection* nonetheless. Rebellion for a good cause is still rebellion.

Another prominently identified insurrection or rebellion would have been Dorr's Rebellion, in Rhode Island, in 1841-1842 which led to the Supreme Court's 1849 decision in *Luther v. Borden*.³²⁶ There, a cabal claiming to constitute the new, lawful government of Rhode Island engaged in forcible resistance to and sought to overturn the authority of the prior, lawful state government (the "charter" government that traced its authority to Rhode Island's original colonial charter). The federal government did not invoke the Insurrection Act to intervene, but it well might have. When the Supreme Court ultimately adjudicated the case—through the vehicle of a trespass suit by a member of one faction, against members of the other—the Court held that the question of which government constituted the lawful government of the state was a political question committed to the judgment of Congress and the President and that the judiciary lacked authority to interfere with the political branches' actions (and inactions), which had tacitly supported the charter government. The practical result of the decision—relevant to our inquiry—was that the losing side in the struggle (the faction headed by Mr. Dorr) legally could be treated by the prevailing side (the charter government) as having engaged in "*insurrection*" against the **rightful state government. The Court noted, and seemingly accepted, the charter government's characterization of plaintiff and others having "assembled in arms . . . for the purpose of overthrowing the government by military force"**³²⁷ **and as having attempted "to assert the authority of [the Dorr government] by force,"**³²⁸ **as amounting to having "engaged in the insurrection."**³²⁹ **The Court also referred to the government's actions as having been designed to suppress that "insurrection."**³³⁰ **The Court appeared to equate with "insurrection" the Dorr group's attempts to displace or supersede the existing government and forcibly assert its own claimed authority as a replacement.**

Finally, several notable invocations of the Insurrection Act occurred during the period of Reconstruction during the presidency of Ulysses S. Grant.³³¹ **While these**

✖✖✖✖✖✖✖✖✖✖ person, supra note 231, 92-208. Federal troops helped suppress this insurrection and rebellion too. See Coakley, supra note 312, at 193 ("This intervention was, as in the case of Nat Turner's Rebellion, an emergency measure undertaken without the usual formalities.")

³²⁶ *Luther v. Borden*, 58 U.S. (7 How.) 1 (1849). On Dorr's Rebellion generally and the federal response, see Coakley, supra note 312, at 119-127.

³²⁷ *Luther*, 58 U.S. (7 How.) at 8.

³²⁸ *Id.* at 37.

³²⁹ *Id.* at 46.

³³⁰ *Id.* at 45.

³³¹ **By this time, the Act had been amended yet again. See 17 Stat. 13, 14-15 (1871), §§ 3-4.**

events occurred *after* ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment (and thus could not have formed any part of the subjective understanding of the drafters and ratifiers of the meaning of Section Three), they nonetheless deserve mention as roughly contemporaneous evidence of the objective meaning of “insurrection” as displayed by important usage within a few years of adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment. Briefly summarized: In South Carolina in 1871, Grant twice invoked the Insurrection Act (as well as suspending habeas corpus, among other actions) to secure order in dealing with the Ku Klux Klan.³³² In Louisiana, in 1872, a contested gubernatorial election spawned efforts by white supremacists to overthrow the elected pro-Reconstruction Republican government, culminating in the infamous “Colfax Massacre” of April 13, 1873, in which a white mob attacked and massacred perhaps 150 black citizens who had been defending a courthouse in Colfax, Louisiana and, more broadly, the Reconstruction Republican government. President Grant invoked the Insurrection Act as authority to suppress the insurrection that sought to overturn the election result.³³³ Later, in 1874, Grant again invoked the Insurrection Act in Louisiana, this time to suppress a white supremacist coup d’etat that had overthrown the Republican governor by force.³³⁴ Federal troops reinstated the lawful government, but the insurrectionists established a rival state government that effectively controlled much of Louisiana outside of the capital—New Orleans at the time. (The conflict lasted until 1877, when Reconstruction was abandoned by the national government and white supremacists took full control of the state.) In Mississippi, in 1874, white supremacists fabricated criminal charges against the newly elected black sheriff, Peter Crosby, and deposed him by mob action.³³⁵ Black citizens organizing an effort to reinstate Crosby were attacked by white mobs, resulting in the massacre of as many as 300 black citizens. Again, President Grant invoked the Insurrection Act and sent federal troops to reinstate Crosby and prevent further violence. Also in 1874, in Arkansas, Grant invoked the Insurrection Act to quell violence in an ongoing dispute over the 1872 gubernatorial election results.³³⁶ And in 1876, in South Carolina, Grant invoked the Insurrection Act to protect the gubernatorial election process from white supremacist groups.³³⁷ Common to each of these instances during the Grant administration was

³³² Ulysses S. Grant, Proclamation No. 197, Law and Order in the State of South Carolina (Mar. 24, 1871); <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=70253>; Ulysses S. Grant, Proclamation No. 200, Law and Order in the State of South Carolina (Oct. 12, 1871); for background see Michael Bahar, *The Presidential Intervention Principle: The Domestic Use of the Military and the Power of the Several States*, 5 Harv. Nat’l Sec. J. 537, 613-14 (2014); Lou Falkner Williams, *The Great South Carolina Ku Klux Klan Trials, 1871-1872*, at 39-49 (1996).

³³³ Ulysses S. Grant, Proclamation No. 213, Law and Order in the State of Louisiana (May 22, 1873) <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=70364>

³³⁴ Ulysses S. Grant, Proclamation No. 220, Law and Order in the State of Louisiana (Sept. 15, 1874) <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=70422>

³³⁵ Ulysses S. Grant, Proclamation No. 223, Law and Order in the State of Mississippi (Dec. 21, 1874), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=70459>.



³³⁶ Ulysses S. Grant, Proclamation No. 218, Law and Order in the State of Arkansas (May 15, 1874) <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=70420>.

³³⁷ Ulysses S. Grant, Proclamation No. 232, Law and Order in the State of South Carolina (Oct. 17, 1876) <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=70542>.

the idea that concerted efforts to overturn lawful popular election results by mob action, force, violence, and intimidation constituted “insurrection” against government.

It is difficult to evaluate precisely the probative force of all of these incidents, and application of federal authority to suppress “insurrections,” for understanding Section Three. But they were unquestionably part of the picture, contributing to the background for understanding Section Three’s terms. They were very much part of a common historical vocabulary of “insurrection” and “rebellion” and culpable participation in the same, familiar to those who drafted and ratified the Fourteenth Amendment: The Whiskey Rebellion, **Shays’** Rebellion, Nat Turner’s Rebellion, Dorr’s Rebellion, the insurrections against the Fugitive Slave Act in the 1850s, John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry in 1859—all of these incidents would have informed the general understanding of what constitutes “insurrection or rebellion” and what actions amount to having “engaged in” or **perhaps** given “aid or comfort” to such uprisings. They all tend to support our working definitions of Section Three’s terms. Even President Grant’s post-1868 invocations of the Insurrection Act, to combat attempts to overthrow election results or displace lawful state authority, may shine some interpretive light backward on Section Three’s meaning. If an uprising of similar nature to these events were to occur, it seems to us that it likely would have been understood as an insurrection or rebellion within the coverage of Section Three.

b. The Congressional Exclusion Debates

As noted above, the federal Ironclad Oath adopted during the Civil War closely paralleled the requirements and consequences of Section Three. These parallels are drawn more sharply by a series of cases where both houses of Congress enforced the oath to exclude their own prospective members from being seated. As one scholar has   put it, these debates “were littered with relevant concepts, and we can judge the Fortieth Congress’s reception to those similar arguments as indicative of their expectations as to Section 3’s application.”³³⁸ Moreover, several of these proceedings occurred right around the time of the proposal and ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment. In some cases after the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified, Congress applied Section Three itself, further demonstrating continuity and overlap with the Ironclad Oath.

The familiar source compiling the houses’ debates on such matters of internal administration is *Hinds’ Precedents*, which we rely on here.³³⁹

³³⁸ Lynch, *supra* note 5, at 196. Lynch ably and accurately describes the most important such cases. See *id.* at 196-201, 207-210. We find little or nothing to disagree with in his account and analysis of these disputes and are indebted to Lynch’s research and analysis.

³³⁹ See generally 1 Asher C. Hinds, *Hinds’ Precedents of the House of Representatives of the United States*, ch. 14, pp. 431-486 (1907).

First, Kentucky: In 1867, Kentucky submitted eight members-elect to the House, seven of whom were challenged as ineligible on the ground that they had given aid or comfort to the Confederacy, during the Civil War. The Committee on Elections concluded that “no person who has been engaged in armed hostility to the Government of the United States, or who has given aid and comfort to its enemies during the late rebellion,” ought to be sworn or seated.³⁴⁰ A subsequent report determined that such charges needed to be “proved by clear and satisfactory testimony” and establish more than mere lack of active support for the Union or passive sympathy for the rebellion but that “the claimant has by act or speech given aid or countenance to the rebellion.”³⁴¹ Such acts or speech need not rise to the level of constitutional treason, but they “must have been so overt and public, and must have been done or said under such circumstances, as fairly to show that they were actually designed to, and in their nature tended to, forward the cause of the rebellion.”³⁴²

On this standard, the committee found that four of the challenged members-elect were not proved to have either “engaged in armed hostility” to the Government or provided “aid or comfort” to its adversaries. These four were admitted to their seats. Three others—John Y. Brown, John D. Young, and Lawrence Trimble—posed more serious difficulty, however. The House ultimately refused to seat either Brown or Young but admitted Trimble. The facts of these cases are instructive explorations of the boundaries between free speech and “aid or comfort.”

The House addressed the John Y. Brown case first. “This election case,” *Hinds*’ reports, was “the first of its kind since the formation of the Constitution, and recognized by the House as of the highest importance.”³⁴³ It also involved an incident of pure speech as disqualifying a member-elect from office: John Y. Brown had explicitly embraced and advocated violent resistance to the Union in Kentucky. Indeed, he had gone so far as to urge the shooting of any man who volunteered for service in Union forces. Brown’s disqualifying conduct consisted solely of such acts of speech. The committee relied on a letter Brown had written to the *Louisville Courier* in 1861 in which Brown had gone to great lengths to affirm his support for the rebellion in unequivocal terms:

Editors Louisville Courier:

My attention has been called to the following paragraph, which appeared in your paper of this date:

“JOHN YOUNG BROWN’S POSITION.— This gentleman, in reply to some searching interrogatories put to him by Governor Helm,

³⁴⁰ Id. §448 at 442.

³⁴¹ Id. at 443 (emphasis added).

³⁴² Id.

³⁴³ Id. at 445.

said, in reference to the call of the President for four regiments of volunteers to march against the South—

I would not send one solitary man to aid that Government, and those who volunteer should be shot down in their tracks.”

This ambiguous report of my remarks has, I find, been misunderstood by some who have read it, who construe my language to apply to the *government of the Confederate States!* What I did say was this:

“Not one man or one dollar will Kentucky furnish *Lincoln* to aid *him* in his *unholy war against the South*. If this *northern army* shall attempt to cross our borders, *we will resist it unto the death*; and if one man shall be found in our Commonwealth to volunteer to join them *he ought* and I believe will be *shot down before he leaves the State*.”

This was not said in reply to any question propounded by ex-Governor Helm, as you have stated, and is no more than *I frequently uttered public and privately* prior to my debate with him.

Respectfully,

JOHN YOUNG BROWN.³⁴⁴

The House concluded, on the strength of this letter alone, that Brown had supported the rebellion and therefore voted to exclude him. This became a precedent for the House’s subsequent actions in other cases. The standard applied—whether the facts, “proved by clear and satisfactory testimony,” showed that an individual had, by an “act or speech ... overt and public ... done or said under such circumstances, as fairly to show that they were actually designed to, and in their nature tended to, forward the cause of the rebellion”—had been satisfied by Brown’s letter. ❌❌❌❌❌

Similarly, in March 1868, the House excluded John D. Young under this standard. Young’s case also involved speech. The Young case involved numerous expressions of support and sympathy for the South and against the Union, and the committee explicitly took the position “that ‘aid and comfort’ may be given to an enemy by words of encouragement, or the expression of an opinion” by a person (like Young, a county judge) in an “influential position.”³⁴⁶ But Young’s case was overdetermined, because there was also testimony that Young had provided material assistance to Confederate troops, by giving them food and provisions and assisting in the capture by Confederate troops of a Union soldier. According to the committee, Young’s “expressions and admissions” of sympathy for the enemy, “taken in connection with the open acts of ‘aid and comfort to the enemies of the United States,’” established that he could not “honestly and truly take the oath,”³⁴⁷ and the full House agreed. ❌❌

³⁴⁴ Quoted in *id.* at §449, p. 445.

³⁴⁵ *Id.* at §449, pp. 443, 448.

³⁴⁶ *Id.* at §451, p. 452 (quoting House Report 40-29 (1868)) (emphasis added).

³⁴⁷ *Id.* at §451, p. 452 (quoting House Report 40-29 (1868)) (emphasis added).

The contrasting case of Lawrence Trimble, however, showed that mere political opposition did not establish disloyalty. Aside from some overly vague allegations that he had traded with the enemy, the core of the case against Trimble were his political speeches. Trimble had been the *Union* candidate for Congress in 1861 and “made Union speeches in that canvass throughout the district.” Trimble opposed Lincoln’s war policies after the Emancipation Proclamation, asserting that the North was waging “an abolition war” and reportedly was opposed to “voting any more men or money to aid in carrying it on.” These views and statements, however, were not materially different from other members’ statements in Congress opposing the administration’s policy. The committee (and House) considered Trimble’s “loyalty unquestioned” and found no case for disqualifying him.³⁴⁸

Next consider Tennessee: Tennessee supplied two interesting membership cases, one in the House and one in the Senate. Both involved undoubtedly *pro-Union* men who nonetheless had held state office under Tennessee’s secessionist regime and sworn oaths under it, while seemingly using their positions to support Union interests and resist the secession government. This presented a distinct problem under the Ironclad Oath, which required its swearer to disaffirm that he had ever accepted or exercised office under a pretended government hostile to the United States. What to do? In each case—Senator-elect David Patterson, who had served as a state court judge in the eastern region of Tennessee during the Confederate regime; and Representative-elect R.R. Butler, who had retained his seat in the state legislature during secession, while opposing it—the respective house ultimately admitted the applicant to his seat and permitted him to take a modified oath omitting the never-held-office-under-a-hostile-regime sentence. ❗❗❗❗

A potentially broad understanding of “aid or comfort” also surfaced in the exclusion of Maryland Senator-elect Philip Thomas in 1867.³⁵⁰ What had Thomas done to support the South in its rebellion? Apparently, he had *permitted* his minor son, a member of his household, to join the Confederate army, and given his son \$100 on the way out the door. The Senate debated whether Thomas had done anything more by way of counsel or encouragement of his son’s taking up arms against the United States and it is not clear how the senators evaluated such evidence. Some seemed to have thought Thomas’s treatment of his son disqualifying. Others focused instead on allegations that Thomas had resigned as President Buchanan’s Treasury Secretary because he disagreed with the President’s decision to send federal reinforcements to ❗❗

³⁴⁸ Id. at §453, p. 459. ❗❗

³⁴⁹ Id. at §453, 455, pp. 459-461, 462-465. In Butler’s case, two-thirds of both houses voted him amnesty. Id. at 464-465. In Patterson’s case, the Senate tried to pass a bill altering the oath for Patterson, but the House tabled it, id. at 46, but perhaps that is okay, if application of the Ironclad Oath, to members of Congress, is a function of each house’s *separate* power to make rules governing its proceedings. U.S. Const. art. I §5. ❗

³⁵⁰ Hinds’ at §§457, 458 at pp. 465-470.

Charleston Harbor.³⁵¹ Either theory of Thomas's exclusion suggests that "aid or comfort" to rebellion was understood to sweep broadly and possibly include conduct of a somewhat more passive or quiescent nature—*allowing* one's son to become a rebel soldier, under circumstances where such permission (and financial assistance) might have been withheld; opposing, or resisting, measures to suppress insurrection and defend national institutions and personnel, and resigning office in protest against such measures.

Cases like these continued in the House and Senate after Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment had taken effect. By this point, the basic principles were more established, and the cases were sometimes more factbound or less illuminating, but they further confirm the continuity between Section Three and the Ironclad Oath, and illustrate the understanding of Section Three very shortly after its adoption.

To recount them very briefly: In 1868, John Christy had received the most votes for Congress in Georgia's sixth district, but the House committee found that Christy, by his own admission, had given "aid, countenance, counsel, and encouragement" to persons in armed hostility against the Union and therefore, "in accordance with the precedent in the case of John Y. Brown," was disqualified by the Ironclad Oath, and he was not seated.³⁵² In 1869, the House sat John Rice from Kentucky despite a divided House committee's conclusion that he was disqualified by Section Three.³⁵³ The pages of the *Congressional Globe* reveal a debate about whether Rice had in fact joined the Confederate Army, which turned on the dubious credibility of two witnesses.³⁵⁴ In 1870, the House allowed Representative George Booker of Virginia to keep his seat, despite subsequent charges that he had directly supported the militia of the rebel government in his role as justice of the peace. But Booker made an apparently persuasive case that he had been loyal all along, even as he worked within the Confederacy, and as a practical matter he had already been seated. For one reason or the other, the House ultimately voted to table the issue, leaving Booker in office.³⁵⁵ Also in 1870, the House allowed Representative Lewis McKenzie of Virginia to sit, despite various votes he had taken as a member of the Virginia house of

³⁵¹ Hinds' at §459, pp. 470 (reporting that Senator Sumner withdrew a resolution focused on Thomas's son "it being urged that Mr. Thomas's conduct as a Cabinet officer in 1860 afforded more certain grounds for action."). See also Cong. Globe 40th Cong. 2nd Sess. at 1260-1262 (Feb. 19, 1868).

³⁵² Hinds' at §459, pp. 470-472. Interestingly, the Governor of Georgia had concluded that Christy was disqualified under Section Three while the House committee relied on the Ironclad Oath "independently of any question as to ineligibility under the fourteenth amendment," *id.*

³⁵³ Hinds' at §460, pp. 472-473.

³⁵⁴ *Congressional Globe*, 41st Cong. 2nd Sess. pp. 5442-5447 (July 11, 1870). Rice had also been in the Kentucky legislature and voted for a resolution against the coercion of the southern states; but everybody agreed this was not enough to count as aid or comfort, because it was only in January 1861: "No war exist[ed] at the time" and it was before "the policy of the Government had been announced." *Id.* at 5443 (Butler); see also *id.* at 5445 (Garfield). Nor could Rice be excluded solely because of his politics. See *id.* at 5445 ("[T]his man was a Democrat. That is a political sin, but it is not a crime under the law. He is a Democrat yet. I think he is very wrong in being that, but yet it is not a crime.") (Logan).

³⁵⁵ Hinds' at §461, pp. 474-475.

delegates in 1861—votes pledging Virginia’s commitment to “unite her destiny with the slaveholding States of the South” should attempts to reconcile differences between North and South fail, supporting Virginia’s willingness to fight, and to provision Virginia fighters. Because all of these votes occurred *before* voter ratification of Virginia’s secession ordinance on May 23, 1861, and because McKenzie remained “an outspoken Union man” after secession and throughout the war, the House concluded he had neither engaged in rebellion nor given it aid or comfort.

Finally, in 1871, the Senate declined to seat Senator-elect Zebulon Vance from North Carolina.³⁵⁶ The exclusion of Vance was a particularly easy case. After serving in Congress, he had led Confederate troops in battle against the Union and then became the wartime governor of Confederate-regime North Carolina.³⁵⁷ If anyone had engaged in rebellion and given aid or comfort to the Union’s enemies, it was Vance. He was clearly barred by both Section Three and by the Ironclad Oath. He could be seated only if Congress chose to exercise amnesty, which it did not do until later.³⁵⁸

These congressional seating challenges suggest some rough lines as to what Congress thought was “aid or comfort” to the Confederacy. On one hand, direct material support for the rebel cause—providing supplies or working with enemy forces—was clearly aid or comfort. On the other hand, disfavored political beliefs and pre-war political stances were clearly not. In between lay contested territory. But there was no bright line, for instance, protecting all speech or political activity. In some situations, speech alone *could* be disqualifying. A sufficiently clear and unequivocal statement of disloyalty in the form of proposed active resistance to Union authority or encouragement to violence against Union forces appears generally to have been thought disqualifying. Voluntarily holding confederate office or advocating resistance to the Union also could be enough to disqualify. We do not suggest these individual applications—many of which were contested and complicated—are strictly binding. But they provide useful concrete evidence for how parts of Section Three may well have been understood and thought to work.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁶ See generally Hinds’ at §463, pp. 478-486.

³⁵⁷ See generally Richard E. Yates, *Zebulon B. Vance: as War Governor of North Carolina*, 1862-1865, 3 J. Southern Hist. 43 (1937).

³⁵⁸ Vance ultimately had the last laugh. Vance was excluded from the 1872 amnesty statute because he had served in the thirty-sixth Congress, Act of May 22, 1872, ch. 193, 17 Stat. 142; <https://bioguide.congress.gov/search/bio/V000021>. Cf. Franklin Ray Shirley, *Zebulon Vance, Tarheel Spokesman* 71 & 152 n. 36 (1962) (claiming that Vance had been waiting for the 1872 amnesty until his opponent Abbott had somehow engineered the amendment to the 1872 act that excluded Vance), but Congress then passed a private bill granting him individual amnesty. 17 Stat. 691 (June 10, 1872). Thanks to Gerard Magliocca for this source. Vance subsequently returned to the North Carolina governorship, and then to the Senate until his death in 1884. Magliocca, *Amnesty*, supra note 5, at 111 n.

³⁵⁹ 26.

Finally, though it occurred long after this period, there has been one additional congressional exclusion under Section Three: the 1919 exclusion of socialist newspaper editor Victor Berger from the House. See supra notes 222-224 and accompanying text. The Berger episode of course has no probative value about the original meaning of Section Three, since it occurred more than 50 years after Section

6. Legislative History

There is only a little fruit to be gleaned from the legislative history of the Fourteenth Amendment—the records of the proposing Congress’s debates over its various provisions and of state ratification debates. The Fourteenth Amendment’s legislative history is famously voluminous, and Section Three—like the other “forgotten” sections of the Amendment (Section Two and Section Four)—was much more salient to the debates then than it is to today.³⁶⁰ As briefly noted above, the legislative history supports the key propositions we have advanced earlier in this article—that Section Three was designed to be general and prospective, and *not* limited to the situation of the Civil War and Reconstruction; that Section Three’s disqualification was seen by proponents and opponents alike to be self-executing and automatic; and that Section Three was understood to supersede (or satisfy) prior constitutional limitations.³⁶¹

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, however, we have found relatively few interpretive insights about the scope of *conduct* triggering disqualification under Section Three. What evidence there is generally confirms the understanding that the provision would have sweeping consequences: there appears to have been substantial agreement—by both opponents and proponents—that the provision would cover a broad range of activity supporting or assisting the South’s efforts to throw off the authority of the Union and the Constitution. The original proposal would have excluded all such persons from *voting*, not just officeholding and, further, would not have been limited in its coverage to former oath-swearing federal and state officeholders. However, the language concerning *what conduct triggered* disfranchisement (and, as later revised, disqualification from officeholding) was carried forward throughout the discussion. Opponents of what eventually became Section Three thought the range of what was included in disability-triggering conduct (that is, when one might be said to have “engaged in” insurrection or rebellion or given “aid or comfort” to it) was hugely broad in its reach, sweeping in nearly everybody in the rebel South—and viewed the proposal as regrettable on account of such breadth. Significantly, proponents of the amendment did not disagree with its opponents concerning the breadth of the description of disability-triggering conduct. The proponents simply thought such breadth appropriate, necessary, and valuable.³⁶²

As things proceeded, Congress narrowed the provision in two specific respects. Congress backed away from complete disfranchisement to disqualification from holding office. And relatedly, it narrowed Section Three to cover only those who had sworn a prior oath of loyalty to the U.S. Constitution as federal or state officeholders. Rather

Three was enacted. In our view, the House’s decision was mistaken—an overzealous reading of the law, the facts, or both.

³⁶⁰ See generally Graber, Volume 1, *supra* note 8.

³⁶¹ See *supra* notes 12, 59, & 184.

³⁶² See generally Graber Section Three manuscript, *supra* note 12.

than disenfranchising pretty much the entire white South, it would disqualify from future office those who had held constitutional office and then rebelled.

But what did *not* change was the broad description of the *conduct* that triggered disfranchisement (in the earlier proposal) or disqualification from office (in the proposal eventually agreed to).³⁶³ As noted, there is not a great deal of explication of what this conduct was, exactly. But the overall tenor of the debates over what became Section Three suggest that all meaningful *connection with, support for, or aid to* the Confederacy—officeholding, military service (whether voluntary or not), political support or endorsement, provision of material assistance to rebellion or rebel forces—was regarded by the proposing Congress as covered. The legislative history of Section Three—such as it is—supports a broad understanding of the prohibition contained in its language.

7. Early Applications of Section Three

A final set of evidence comes from the handful of cases applying Section Three shortly after its adoption. Once again, because these examples come *after* the provision was adopted, they do not provide *direct* evidence of its original public meaning, but they still can be informative.³⁶⁴ Section Three came up in a range of procedural and institutional situations; each of these situations further confirms Section Three's broad substantive sweep.³⁶⁵

For instance, the 1867 Military Reconstruction Act—which imposed provisional governments on the southern states until they obtained readmission to representation in Congress by enacting new, republican, Reconstruction-compliant constitutions—directly incorporated Section Three of the proposed (but not yet ratified) Fourteenth Amendment as a restriction on those governments. Persons disqualified

✖ Congress also rejected a series of proposed amendments to Section Three that would have narrowed or limited the conduct or persons to which the language would apply – e.g., only to persons who joined the Confederacy while still holding prior office under the U.S. Constitution; only to persons who had sworn oaths to the Constitution since 1851; only to persons who had not received presidential pardons; and only to persons who had *voluntarily* served the confederacy. Republican defenders of Section Three successfully opposed these proposed limitations on Section Three's scope, arguing that limiting the ban to persons who still held office under the Constitution when they joined the Confederacy would indulge the pretext that *resignation* from office *before* engaging in or assisting rebellion absolved one of any prior duty of loyalty to the United States Constitution. Cong. Globe, 39th Cong. 1st Sess. p. 2770 (statement of Sen. Howard). Republicans likewise rejected the proposed limitation to persons who had “voluntarily” assisted or participated in rebellion, because it would raise unnecessary and difficult proof problems and permit spurious claims of involuntary participation. Indeed, one senator noted that Alexander Stephens, Vice President of the Confederacy, had testified before the Joint Committee on Reconstruction that he “never entered into the rebellion voluntarily”! Cong. Globe, 39th Cong., 1st Sess. p. 2918 (statement of Sen. Willey).

³⁶⁴ See, e.g., Baude, *Liquidation*, supra note 242, at 61-62; Paulsen, *Most Dangerous*, supra note 242, at 293, 303.

³⁶⁵ Additionally, some of Congress's application of the Ironclad Oath to its own members also entailed the application of Section Three, see supra Part IV.A.5.b.

under Section Three could not hold office under the provisional governments, nor could they serve in—or even vote for those who would serve in—the state’s constitutional convention.³⁶⁶

Andrew Johnson’s attorney general, Henry Stanbery, published a two-part opinion in 1867 setting forth his interpretation of the Act and thus, indirectly, of Section Three.³⁶⁷ Stanbery’s opinion is explicitly slanted toward a narrow construction of Section Three, because of his concerns that it would be punitive and *ex post facto* in this context.³⁶⁸ Even so, Stanbery’s opinion found Section Three’s definition of what constituted participation in rebellion to be quite broad:

“*All those who*, in legislative or other official capacity, were engaged in the furtherance of the common unlawful purpose, or persons who, in their individual capacity, have done *any overt act* for the purpose of promoting the rebellion, may well be said, in the meaning of this law, to have engaged in rebellion.”³⁶⁹

As to individuals, Stanbery also reiterated several times that *any* voluntary support, even if not violent, was covered and culpable. He found “it to be clear, that in the sense of this law persons may have engaged in rebellion without having actually levied war or taken arms,”³⁷⁰ and added that “wherever an act is done voluntarily in aid of the rebel cause . . . it must work disqualification under this law.”³⁷¹

Subsequent cases took even broader positions. For instance, in the 1869 decision of *Worthy v. Barrett*, the North Carolina Supreme Court concluded that a state sheriff was disqualified under Section Three for holding basically the same office as a sheriff when his state was in rebellion. The court’s reasoning on this issue was succinct but clear:

What will amount to having engaged in the rebellion?

(1st.) Holding any of these offices under the Confederate government.

³⁶⁶ An Act to provide for the more efficient Government of the Rebel States, 14 Stat. 428, 429, sec. 5-6 (March 2., 1867).

³⁶⁷ Henry Stanbery, *The Reconstruction Acts*, 12 Op. Att’y Gen. 141 (1867); Henry Stanbery, *The Reconstruction Acts*, 12 Op. Att’y Gen. 182 (1867).

³⁶⁸ 12 Op. Att’y Gen. at 159-160. But see *supra* Part III.A-B (explaining why the constitutional *ex post facto* and attainer principles do not apply to Section Three, *especially* as applied to new insurrections and rebellions).

³⁶⁹ *Id.* at 161-162 (emphasis added)

³⁷⁰ *Id.* at 161.

³⁷¹ *Id.* at 165.

2d Voluntarily aiding the rebellion, by personal service, or by contributions, other than charitable, of any thing that was useful or necessary in the Confederate service.³⁷²

That is, the North Carolina Supreme Court embraced Stanberry's view that almost any voluntary assistance to the rebel cause was a form of engaging in rebellion, but *also* held that holding any office, even an ordinary non-military office far from the front lines, was a form of engaging in rebellion covered by Section Three.³⁷³

Shortly after this—and shortly after Chief Justice Chase's unsound and unfortunate decision in *Griffin's Case* had held that Section Three required congressional legislation in order to be put into operation – Congress enacted federal procedures to directly enforce Section Three in federal court. The 1870 Enforcement Act, also known as the First Ku Klux Klan Act, authorized district attorneys of the United States to bring *quo warranto* actions to remove officials holding office “contrary to the provisions of the third section of the fourteenth article of amendment of the Constitution” and to bring criminal prosecutions against person who “shall hereafter knowingly accept or hold” office in violation of Section Three.³⁷⁴ In proceedings brought under both enforcement sections of the Act, in the short period between 1870 and 1872, the scope of Section Three's prohibition was interpreted broadly. (Recall that in 1872 Congress removed Section Three's disqualification as to most former rebels.)



Consider first a notable criminal prosecution under the 1870 Act. In North Carolina again, this time in federal court, the government brought criminal charges against Amos Powell, for accepting an appointment as county sheriff despite being covered by Section Three.³⁷⁵ Powell's alleged act of rebellion was having “furnished a substitute for himself to the Confederate army,” and Powell's defense was that this was involuntary, because he was about to be involuntarily conscripted himself.³⁷⁶ This gave the federal court, through Judge Hugh Lennox Bond, occasion to instruct the jury on the relevance of voluntariness to Section Three:

[T]he word “engage” implies, and was intended to imply, a voluntary effort to assist the Insurrection or Rebellion, and to bring it to a successful termination; and unless you find the defendant did that, with which he is charged, voluntarily, and not by compulsion, he is not guilty of the indictment. *But it is not every appearance of force nor timid fear* that will

³⁷² *Worthy v. Barrett*, 63 N.C. 199, 203 (1869). The court also applied the *Worthy* rule to the even easier case of a county attorney who “took part in th[e] rebellion by serving in the Confederate army, voluntarily.” *In Re Tate*, 63 N.C. 308 (1869).

³⁷³ By contrast, Stanberry had concluded that officers who “discharged official duties not incident to war, but in the preservation of order and the administration of law, are not to be considered as thereby engaging in rebellion.” 12 Op. Att’y Gen. 162.

³⁷⁴ 16 Stat. 140, 142-143, sections 14 & 15. See *supra* note 54.


³⁷⁵ *United States v. Powell*, 27 F. Cas. 605 (C.C.D.N.C 1871).

³⁷⁶ *Id.* at 607.



excuse such actual participation in the Rebellion or Insurrection. Defendant's conduct must have been prompted by a well grounded fear of great bodily harm and the result of force, which the defendant was neither able to escape nor resist. And further, *the defendant's action must spring from his want of sympathy with the insurrectionary movement, and not from his repugnance to being in an army, merely.*³⁷⁷

In other words, only great duress *and* pure heart would be a defense if one's conduct otherwise provided material support to the rebellion. Section Three's disqualification for having "engaged" in insurrection covered a wide swath of voluntary participatory acts supporting or assisting rebellion, some bordering on near-passive acquiescence.

Meanwhile, in Tennessee, the U.S. Attorney brought dozens of federal enforcement actions, including against three members of the Tennessee Supreme Court.³⁷⁸ Many of those charged were *unquestionably* covered by Section Three because they had fought in the Civil War, for the Confederacy. But some were charged for more remote participation. For instance, Thomas Nelson, one of the Tennessee Justices, had been a unionist during the war, and indeed at one point a *prisoner* of the Confederacy. His participation in the rebellion appears to have been limited to being elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Tennessee, after Tennessee's purported secession, and traveling to Washington to attempt to represent the state in **Con-****gress.**³⁷⁹ While these Section Three claims were never adjudicated, the fact that they were brought in the first place is consistent with the broad sweep of Section Three.³⁸⁰

The other scattered discussion of Section Three we have found are more ambiguous, but still consistent with these broad interpretations of Section Three's substantive disqualification—broad interpretations of insurrection, rebellion, "engaged in," and so on. Recall, for instance, that in *Griffin's Case*, it was essentially taken as given that Judge Hugh Sheffey would be disqualified by Section Three (if it applied) because he was "a member of the legislature of Virginia in 1862 during the late Rebellion, and as such voted for measures to sustain the so-called Confederate States in their war against the United States."³⁸¹ Other cases are consistent with similarly

³⁷⁷ Id. Additionally, Powell had served as a justice of the peace under the Confederate government, but the federal court held this not to qualify, for reasons similar to those articulated by Attorney General Stanberry. Id.

³⁷⁸ Sam D. Elliott, *When the United States Attorney Sued to Remove Half the Tennessee Supreme Court: The Quo Warranto Cases of 1870*, 49 Tenn. B.J. 20 (2013); see also Magliocca, *Amnesty*, supra note 5, at 109-110.

³⁷⁹ For one fawning account of Nelson, see Oliver P. Temple, *Notable Men of Tennessee From 1833 to 1875*, at 166-215 (1912).

³⁸⁰ Justice Nelson resigned while these actions were pending, and the rest of the actions were abandoned with the passage of the 1872 Amnesty Act and a change in the federal attitude towards Section Three. Elliott, supra note 378.

³⁸¹ *In re Griffin*, 11 F. Cas. 7, 22 (C.C.D.Va. 1869).

broad assumptions.³⁸² We have found none that took a substantially *narrower* view of Section Three, and even if some exist, they would seem to be the minority and inferior construction.

The application of Section Three immediately after its enactment is consistent with what the text, structure, context, and history of Section Three all tell us: to have “engage[d] in insurrection and rebellion,” or given “aid or comfort” to “enemies” was understood to embrace an incredibly broad sweep of voluntary conduct that provides support, material assistance, or specific encouragement to such actions.


In the end, **the sum total of** evidence concerning the original textual meaning of Section Three—contemporaneous dictionary definitions; parallel constitutional use of the same or similar language; the inferences that fairly may be drawn from the legislative history of Section Three’s drafting; the especially strong evidence from 1860s Civil War era political and legal usage of nearly the precise same terms (in prominent presidential statements, congressional enactments and their implementation, and a landmark Supreme Court constitutional decision employing the same terms); the general legal backdrop of eighteenth century Insurrection Acts and the myriad and familiar historical incidents of “insurrection” and “rebellion” to which they applied; and finally early practice enforcing Section Three—points in **a consistent** direction: toward a broad understanding of what constitutes insurrection and rebellion and a **remarkably** broad understanding of what types of conduct constitute engaging **in or perhaps** giving aid or comfort to such movements.

B. What Prior Officeholders are Covered? What Future Offices are Barred?

The next step in the analysis of Section Three is rather more tedious than difficult. But it is important to get it right: Holders of *what prior offices or positions* are covered by Section Three’s disqualification from future office if they engaged in *insurrection or rebellion*? And from *what future offices or positions* are they thereby disqualified? The text of Section Three takes up these points in reverse order (and so we shall too) and uses slightly different language for each category.

First, the offices or positions *from which a disqualified person is barred*:

No person shall be a Senator or Representative in Congress, or an elector of President and Vice President, or hold any office, civil or military, under the United States or under any State ...³⁸³

 Sands v. Commonwealth, 62 Va. (21 Gratt.) 871, 873, 885–87 (1872). There is reason to think there were hundreds of other Section Three actions brought during this time period, but few records of the specifics of the cases. Magliocca, *Amnesty*, supra note 5, at 109-110.

³⁸³ U.S. Const. amdt. XIV, sec. 3.

Second, the offices or positions *previously held*, and for which an oath to the Constitution was taken, that trigger Section Three’s disqualification:

... who, having previously taken an oath as a member of Congress, or as an officer of the United States, or as a member of any State legislature, or as an executive or judicial officer of any State, to support the Constitution of the United States ... ³⁸⁴

We begin with a few observations.

First, the language of these provisions should be read in as straightforward and common-sense a manner as possible. The text must be read precisely, of course, but also sensibly, naturally and in context, without artifice or ingenious invention unwarranted by that context. Some constitutional provisions embody precise terms of art that must be attended to. But a reading that renders the document a “secret code” loaded with hidden meanings discernible only by a select priesthood of illuminati is generally an unlikely one.³⁸⁵ Keep this in mind as we proceed: we think readers should be wary of any interpretation of Section Three that would impute to the text a hyper-technical set of hidden distinctions not fully warranted by the language. Where the simplest and most plausible explanation of minor textual differences is merely stylistic or accidental variation, that explanation should not lightly be cast aside.

Second, it appears that the list of disqualification-triggering offices tracks closely, but not identically, the listing of positions for which the original Constitution imposed an oath requirement. Article VI of the Constitution dictates that “Senators and Representatives . . . Members of the several State legislatures, and all executive and judicial officers, both of the United States and of the several states, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution.”³⁸⁶ Article II, overlapping this general oath mandate, prescribes a specific oath for the President, who swears both that he will “faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States” and

³⁸⁴ *Id.*

³⁸⁵ See Michael Stokes Paulsen, *Captain James T. Kirk and the Enterprise of Constitutional Interpretation: Some Modest Proposals from the Twenty-third Century*, 59 Albany L. Rev. 671, 674-76 (1995). For instance, consider the story, passed down from Albert Gallatin to Max Farrand to William Treanor, that Gouverneur Morris slyly attempted to replace a comma with a semicolon in Article I in order to convert the “General Welfare” Clause from a limitation on the tax power into a freestanding power of regulation. William Michael Treanor, *The Case of the Dishonest Scrivener: Gouverneur Morris and the Creation of the Federalist Constitution*, 120 Mich. L. Rev. 1, 20-24 (2021). Putting aside whether this story is really true, David S. Schwartz, *Framing the Framers: A Commentary on Treanor’s Gouverneur Morris as Dishonest Scrivener*, 120 Mich. L. Rev. 51, 69-73 (2022), a sensible approach to constitutional interpretation should obviously resist such antics. Even if Morris had succeeded in smuggling in the semi-colon, that maneuver should not be decisive in interpreting the Clause. See Kesavan & Paulsen, *West Virginia*, supra note 130, at 338-339 & n. 151.

³⁸⁶ U.S. Const. art. VI, cl.3.

“to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.”³⁸⁷

Section Three’s listing of triggering positions largely tracks the substance (and to some extent even the sequence) of the all-offices-legislative-executive-judicial-federal-and-state oath mandates. Section Three’s list of positions from which a covered person is disqualified *builds* on this list. All positions that trigger disqualification are disqualified-from. In addition, the disqualified-from list includes, notably, presidential electors, who are not listed in the Constitution as persons required to swear an oath to the Constitution. The wording also appears designed to clarify that the ban extends to “military” offices—including state military offices—whether or not they would be considered “executive” offices under state law or Article VI. Thus, in general: If the original Constitution required an oath for a position, Section Three treats having held such a position as the trigger for Section Three’s application. And if a person who once held any such position is disqualified under Section Three for engaging in or supporting insurrection, that person is barred (absent congressional relief) from holding any of those same positions plus disqualified from being an elector for President and Vice President. That seems to be the basic structure of the provision.

Our third observation is related. It appears to us that the text’s overall project of office-listing, in both clauses, was designed to be *reasonably comprehensive*, covering the waterfront: both taking care not to accidentally leave out anything considered important—including *everybody* who was constitutionally required to have sworn an oath—and *adding* positions where appropriate, as with adding the category of electors to the list of positions from which a covered person is disqualified.

With these principles in mind, it appears to us that the two clauses—describing what past positions trigger disqualification and what future positions fall within the scope of that disqualification—can and should be read, together, in a straightforward manner. First, as to the persons to whom the provision *applies* (the second, “triggering” clause): Section Three’s disqualification attaches to persons who previously swore an oath to support the Constitution as:

- [i] a “*member*” of Congress, or as
- [ii] an “*officer of*” the United States, or as
- [iii] a “*member*” of any State legislature, or as
- [iv] an “*executive or judicial officer of*” any State.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁷ U.S. Const. art. II, §1, cl. 8. On the Presidential Oath Clause generally, see Michael Stokes Paulsen, *The Constitution of Necessity*, 79 Notre Dame L. Rev. 1257, 1260-1267 (2004); on “to the best of my Ability,” see William Baude, *Signing Unconstitutional Laws*, 86 Ind. L.J. 303, 310 (2011).

³⁸⁸ U.S. Const. amdt. XIV, sec. 3.

These four categories are then closely paralleled (with differences noted) in the description of offices from which covered persons are *excluded* (the first clause). Covered insurrectionists, rebels, and aid-and-comforters are disqualified from being:

- [i] “a *Senator or Representative*” in Congress (paralleling “*member*,” a seemingly purely stylistic variation) or
- [ii] an *elector* for President or Vice President (a new exclusion from a position that is not an oath-required triggering position); or
- [iii] holding “*any office, civil or military*,” “under” either federal or state government (paralleling “*officer*” of the United States or of any State, respectively, in the second and fourth triggering categories above—with the noted clarification of the inclusion of “*military*” officers).

The description “civil” office, in the disqualified-from list seems designed to embrace the categories of “executive or judicial” officer in the triggering list. Though somewhat more awkward, we think an elected office in a state legislature also qualifies as a “civil” office within the language and design of Section Three, reading the word “office” in this context in an ordinary, non-technical sense.³⁸⁹

The overall result is a broad list of disqualification-triggering positions covering essentially every major federal or state legislative, executive, and judicial office; and a list of barred-from positions embracing all of the above plus electors for **president and vice president (and clarifying “military”)**. **The legislative positions in question are the relevant *elected* offices—*members* of the legislature, whether a state legislature or the federal Congress—and do not embrace unelected staff positions. The executive positions embrace anyone in the executive branches of federal or state government who holds an “office” within that branch.**

To be sure, there might be ancillary questions concerning what federal executive and judicial positions qualify as an “office,” held by an “officer”—as opposed to non-officer, non-“office”-holding employees. That is: exactly *how far down* the organizational chart does the list of triggering and disqualified-from positions go?³⁹⁰ Like-


³⁸⁹ Hemel, *How-to Guide*, supra note 5 (setting forth arguments why state legislative offices are included within the general catch-all category of excluded-from “civil” offices.); contra John Randolph Tucker, *General Amnesty*, 126 N. Am. Rev. 53, 54 (1878). None of this in our view affects the question whether a Member of Congress may properly be designated as an “Officer” to whom the duties of the office of President may devolve upon presidential and vice-presidential death, resignation, or inability, which turns on different considerations. Compare Akhil Reed Amar & Vikram David Amar, *Is the Presidential Succession Law Constitutional?*, 48 Stan. L. Rev. 113 (1995) with John F. Manning, *Not Proved: Some Lingering Questions About Legislative Succession to the Presidency*, 48 Stan. L. Rev. 141 (1995).

³⁹⁰ Serious scholarship has explored those questions with respect to the Appointments Clause. Jennifer L. Mascott, *Who Are “Officers of the United States”?*, 70 Stan. L. Rev. 443 (2018). We do not address that somewhat peripheral question here, but leave such issues for another day.

wise, for the federal judicial branch, Article III judges and justices are plainly covered. (Other officers in the judicial branch, such as the clerks in *Ex Parte Hennen*,³⁹¹ are presumably covered as well—as well as perhaps bankruptcy judges, magistrate judges and the like.)³⁹² Non-office-holding employees, again, would not be covered. And of course there might be similar residual questions as to what *state* government positions constitute state executive “office” held by “officers” (thus, perhaps, the special need for designation “military,” to be sure state military positions are included), and what state judicial-branch positions constitute a judicial office. But in the main, the description of who all is covered by Section Three and what offices such person, if disqualified, is excluded from holding strikes us as fairly straightforward.

The only challenge anyone has raised concerning this general description is the argument by professors Josh Blackman and Seth Tillman that a person who has served as President (and the same argument is made as to Vice President), while *perhaps* having held an *office* “under” the United States, is not properly classified as an “*officer of*” the United States.³⁹³ On this view, disqualified persons might be *barred from being* President or Vice President—the authors are somewhat non-committal about this³⁹⁴—but *having been* President or Vice President, and engaged in insurrection or rebellion, does not trigger disqualification of an individual from anything! On this argument, the President and Vice President—alone among constitutional oath-takers—are exempt from Section Three’s **consequences.**

We do not buy it, for many reasons: First, it adopts precisely the type of “secret code” hidden-meanings hermeneutic we think should be viewed extremely skeptically. Moreover, the code has a facially implausible consequence: an insurrectionist *President* is not covered by Section Three’s disqualification (though nearly every other federal or state officeholder is); the President is (perhaps?) a disqualified-*from* office but not a disqualification-*triggering* office. This makes little sense.³⁹⁵

 U.S. 230, 258 (1839) (“[T]hat a clerk is one of the inferior officers contemplated by [the **Appointments** Clause] cannot be questioned”). To be clear, *Hennen* dealt with the clerk of court, not what we would now call a term judicial law clerk.

³⁹² That said, to the extent that one maintains that magistrate judges and bankruptcy judges cannot lawfully exercise judicial power or executive power of their own, see William Baude, *Adjudication Outside Article III* 133 Harv. L. Rev. 1511, 1554-56, 1574-75 (2020), one might question whether they are truly “officers” at all. Again, we leave this issue for another day.

³⁹³ Josh Blackman & Seth Barrett Tillman, *Is The President An “Officer of the United States” For Purposes of Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment?*, 15 N.Y.U. J. L. & Liberty 1 (2021).

³⁹⁴ See, e.g., *id.* at 6, 17, 21.

³⁹⁵ To be sure, faithful readings of the Constitution sometimes yield counterintuitive outcomes. See Michael Stokes Paulsen, *Someone Should Have Told Spiro Agnew*, 14 Const. Comm. 245 (1997); (suggesting the possibility that a straightforward reading of the constitutional text yields the “stupid” — and surely inadvertent — result that the Vice President would be the presiding officer over his own impeachment trial in the Senate and that this is a result to be rectified); Baude & Sachs, *Grounding*, *supra* note 9, at 1468. But that does not mean we should close our eyes to plausibility and common sense, *especially* when the proposed textual reading is such a stretch. See also Paulsen, *supra*, *Nothing But the Text*, *supra* note 10, at 1439-1440 (noting cautions concerning use of the “absurdity” canon to

Second (and relatedly), the argument rather implausibly splits linguistic hairs. No one denies that the President is an executive branch officer holding executive office. At the risk of belaboring the obvious: Article II refers to the “office” of President innumerable times. It specifies the length of term for which the President “holds his Office,” certain minimum qualifications for eligibility “to that Office,” what happens upon the President’s removal “from Office,” or inability to discharge “the Powers and Duties of said Office,” and the oath he shall take before entering “on the Execution of his Office.”³⁹⁶ If the Presidency is not an office, nothing is.

So the argument must rely instead on the fine parsing of prepositional phrases. The President (perhaps?) holds an “office *under*” the United States but is not an “officer *of*” the United States? This seems to defy textual common sense. Far more sensible and straightforward to conclude, we think, that the officeholder holding the office of President is an officer “*of*” the United States who holds office *under* the authority of the United States. The minor textual difference between the triggering clause (“officer of”) and the positions-disqualified clause (“office under”)—a choice between prepositions—appears to be of no significant substantive consequence in Section Three, much as other minor textual variations in or among constitutional provisions often do not support differences in meaning.³⁹⁷ Indeed, one far simpler and more straightforward explanation for the Constitution’s use of “office under” and “officer of” in Section Three and elsewhere is that “office” and “officer” simply take different prepositions: the Constitution uses “of” when referring to an *officer* and “under” when referring to an *office*.

Finally, even if a plausible argument can be constructed that the difference might have once been thought capable of sustaining a term-of-art distinction with respect to different prepositional phrases in the original Constitution—surmounting the presumption against “secret code” interpretation—there is no evidence of such a distinction *in Section Three* and little logic to such a distinction either.³⁹⁸

deny plain textual meaning, but noting how the canon is a sometimes useful tool in discerning actual textual meaning.).

³⁹⁶ See generally U.S. Const. Art. II.

³⁹⁷ For instance, consider the differently phrased, but seemingly identical enforcement clauses of the Reconstruction Amendments. U.S. Const. amdt. XIII, sec. 2 (“Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.”); id. amdt. XIC, sec. 5 (“The Congress shall have power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.”); id. amdt. XV, sec. 2 (“The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.”). Or consider the Constitution’s “gratuitous (one could also say strange) punctuation marks.” Kesavan & Paulsen, *West Virginia*, supra note 130, at 348 (giving examples).

³⁹⁸ One of us has previously complimented Tillman’s prior scholarship that attempts to prove such a systematic term-of-art/secret code in the original Constitution. William Baude, *Constitutional Officers: A Very Close Reading*, JOTWELL (Jul. 28, 2016) <https://conlaw.jotwell.com/constitutional-officers-a-very-close-reading/>. But the very pieces of evidence that are most arresting in that context also confirm extensive linguistic drift or changing understandings in the decades after the founding. Compare id. (foreign gifts to Washington) with Seth Barrett Tillman, *The Original Public Meaning of the Foreign*

Third, a variant of the Blackman-Tillman argument was explicitly made and explicitly refuted in the congressional debates proposing Section Three. Senator Reverdy Johnson of Maryland charged that the language employed was defective because the offices of President and Vice President had inadvertently been omitted from Section Three. The amendment “does not go far enough,” Johnson averred.³⁹⁹ “I do not see but that any one of these gentlemen may be elected President or Vice President of the United States, and why did you omit to exclude them?”⁴⁰⁰ Johnson was complaining that these two officers *should* be included in Section Three and there was no good reason to omit them. Whereupon Senator Morrill of **Maine** interrupted: “Let me call the Senator’s attention to the words ‘or hold any office, civil or military, under the United States.’”⁴⁰¹ Senator Johnson promptly, and somewhat sheepishly, retreated: “Perhaps I am wrong as to the exclusion from the presidency; no doubt I am; but I was misled by noticing the special exclusion in the case of Senators and Representatives.”⁴⁰²

The Blackman-Tillman argument is not *quite* the same, but it is the mirror image of Johnson’s concern. Johnson’s inquiry was whether a covered, insurrectionist nonetheless might become president. The Blackman-Tillman argument is that an insurrectionist president is not an “officer of” the United States whose prior position triggers Section Three’s restrictions on future office. The Johnson-Morrill colloquy does not specifically address that reverse-image argument. But it certainly suggests that the framers of Section Three were not parsing it as a secret code with facially implausible consequences. The question whether Section Three applied to former Presidents and Vice Presidents does not appear to have been raised again, by **any-one**.⁴⁰³ Nor did anybody else involved in drafting or ratifying Section Three suggest that the mirror-image question would be any different. Subject to all the usual reservations about the use of legislative history (and legislative silence) in determining

Emoluments Clause: A Reply to Professor Zephyr Teachout, 107 Nw. U.L. Rev. Colloquy 180, 190 (2013) (contrary practice by Presidents Van Buren, Tyler, and Jackson); compare Baude, *supra* this note (Hamilton’s list) with Seth Barrett Tillman, *The Reports of My Death Were Greatly Exaggerated*, at 20-21 https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3037107 (describing a scrivener’s “condensed” version of this document likely made “circa 1830” that may reflect a different understanding of the constitutional terms); cf. Blackman & Tillman, *supra* note 393, at 24-31 (acknowledging, and arguing against, the possibility of linguistic drift). In other words, such secret code (if any) turns out to have been written in disappearing ink.

³⁹⁹ Cong. Globe, 39th Cong., 1st sess. at 2899 (1866)

⁴⁰⁰ *Id.*

⁴⁰¹ *Id.*

⁴⁰² *Id.*

⁴⁰³ Former President John Tyler of Virginia subsequently sided with the Confederacy and was elected to the Confederate **Congress** (but died before assuming office). And former Vice President John Breckinridge subsequently served as a Confederate general and, later, as Confederate Secretary of War. See Blackman & Tillman, *supra* note 393, at 45-46 (acknowledging this). While Tyler and Breckinridge had served in other disqualification-triggering posts, if the text really had failed to include the offices of President and Vice President as triggering disqualification these incidents would have shown that to be a glaring and dangerous omission.

textual meaning, this further confirms the more natural reading. The only time anything like the question was raised, the point was answered by a proponent of Section Three, clearly and unequivocally, and the questioning Senator accepted the answer as correct.

Fourth and finally, in an additional piece of prepositional jujitsu, Blackman and Tillman tellingly equivocate about whether the President holds “office under” the United States as well. (If he does, Section Three stops covered insurrectionists from becoming President, and if not, not.) Blackman and Tillman do not *deny* this possibility, but they do not *confirm* it either. The difficulty for them is that both answers show the implausibility of their position.

If Blackman and Tillman maintain that the President does *not* hold “office under” the United States, then they must fly in the face of the directly on point discussion between Senators Johnson and Morrill. They must claim to understand Section Three better than its framers. This seems unlikely. But if they confirm that the President *does* hold “office under” the United States, then they must maintain a sharp and crucial distinction between “office under” and “officer of.” As Mark Graber has observed, this distinction was *also* contradicted by Section Three’s framers: “[T]he members of the Congress who framed Section 3 of the 14th Amendment often indicated—and sometimes explicitly stated—that all persons who held office ‘under the United States’ were officers ‘of the United States.’ During the debates over Section 3, no representative or senator alluded to the existence of a distinction between ‘of’ and ‘under’. Representatives and senators often described the president as having an ‘office under the United States’ and being an ‘officer of the United States.’”⁴⁰⁴ If a secret code was really at work, it was an extraordinarily well-kept secret. The implausibility of both horns of the Blackman-Tillman straddle demonstrates the implausibility of their position.

In short, the ordinary sense of the text; the structure and logic of its provisions; the evident design to be comprehensive; the text’s many references to the office of the Presidency as an “office”; the seeming absurdity of the prospect of exclusion of the offices of President and Vice President from triggering the disqualification fashioned

⁴⁰⁴ Mark Graber *Disqualification From Office: Donald Trump v. the 39th Congress*, Lawfare (Feb. 24, 2023). Professor Graber notes further that a “unanimous House select committee report issued barely a month after Congress sent the 14th Amendment to the states concluded that ‘a little consideration of this matter will show that ‘officers of’ and ‘officers under’ the United States are ‘indiscriminately used in the Constitution.’” In addition, “[t]he most comprehensive study of state ratification . . . does not point to a single example of any journalist or participant in a state convention who distinguished between ‘officers under’ and ‘officers of’ or who otherwise thought a president who participated in an insurrection could not be disqualified under Section 3.” John Vlahoplus, *Insurrection, Disqualification, and the Presidency*, 13 *Brit. J. Am. Legal Stud.* (forthcoming), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4440157; see also Lynch, *supra* note 5, at 158-160 (collecting authorities supporting the same point); Magliocca, *Foreground*, *supra* note 62, at 16 n. 48 (“My research . . . shows that President Andrew Johnson repeatedly referred to himself as “the chief executive officer of the United States”).

by the Radical Reconstruction Congress that drafted the Fourteenth Amendment; the fact that the only legislative debate over the language discussing whether Section Three inadvertently omitted the offices of President and Vice President rejected any such suggestion; and the fact that no one ever suggested that the “under/of” difference meant the presidency was not a covered office triggering Section Three, all convince us that the natural conclusion is the correct one: Section Three includes in its coverage, or “triggering” language, insurrectionists who once served as President and Vice President. And Section Three excludes disqualified insurrectionists from subsequently holding the office of either President or Vice President.

C. The Attempted Overthrow of the 2020 Presidential Election

We come finally to the urgent question of the day: How does Section Three apply to the events of 2020-2021—the efforts by Donald Trump (and others) to overthrow the results of the 2020 presidential election and install Trump as president for another term, despite his loss to Joseph Biden?

Consider the overall package of events: the dishonest attempts to set aside valid state election results with false claims of voter fraud; the attempted subversion of the constitutional processes for states’ selection of electors for President and Vice President; the efforts to have the Vice President unconstitutionally claim a power to refuse to count electoral votes certified and submitted by several states; the efforts of Members of Congress to reject votes lawfully cast by electors; and, finally, the fomenting and incitement of a mob that attempted to forcibly prevent Congress’s and the Vice President’s counting of such lawfully cast votes, culminating in a violent and deadly assault on the Capitol (and Congress and the Vice President) on January 6, 2021.



Taken as a whole, these actions represented an effort to prevent the lawful, regular, termination of President Trump’s term of office in accordance with the Constitution. They were an attempt to unlawfully overturn or thwart the lawful outcome of a presidential election and to install, instead, the election *loser* as president. They constituted a serious attempt to overturn the American constitutional order. Does Section Three cover this conduct? Did these events constitute “insurrection” or “rebellion” within the meaning of the Constitution? And if so, who all might be said to have “engaged in” that conduct, or **perhaps** given “aid or comfort” to those who did? We will consider those questions in turn.

1. The Question of Coverage: Insurrection and Rebellion

We begin with the general legal question whether the attempted overturning of the result of the 2020 presidential election is covered by Section Three in any **re-**

spect. Do such efforts, in part or in whole, qualify as insurrection or rebellion, disqualifying prior-oath-swearing persons who participated in such acts from future office? In our view, based on all the foregoing analysis, the answer is *yes*.

There are multiple arguments for how Section Three would apply to the events of 2020-2021, but let us first focus on the events of January 6, 2021.⁴⁰⁵ These include first the cluster of actions taken in assembling, encouraging, charging, and inciting an armed (in part) mob, producing the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol, Congress, and the Vice President. For some, importantly including Trump, these acts would also include subsequent deliberate *inaction* against the January 6 attack—by persons with duties and capacity to act to suppress, halt, or quell the insurrection in progress—that effectively facilitated, permitted, aided, and encouraged such insurrectionary violence.

Overall, it seems to us to be quite clear that the specific series of events leading up to and culminating in the January 6, 2021 attack qualifies as an insurrection within the meaning of Section Three: “concerted, forcible resistance to the authority of government to execute the laws in at least some significant respect.”⁴⁰⁶ The large group of people who descended upon, entered, and occupied the U.S. Capitol building used force to prevent a key step in the constitutional transfer of power. The group was in part coordinated, not merely a riot.⁴⁰⁷ Some members of the group were armed,⁴⁰⁸ and many used force to breach the Capitol, to overpower law enforcement there, and to effectuate their unlawful aim.⁴⁰⁹

Furthermore, it seems that, as a whole, the group’s goal—to the extent the group had a specific objective in mind—was to disrupt the constitutional transfer of power, by disrupting a necessary formal step in the constitutional process.⁴¹⁰ The invasion of the Capitol on January 6 was not simply a violation of the law (though it was that of course). It was not merely a protest of a particular legal measure, but a forcible prevention and disruption of it. And it was not the disruption of *just any* legal measure, but of one that was itself central to the allocation of authority under our Constitution. If this is a fair description of what happened on January 6, then that

⁴⁰⁵ In describing these events, we rely generally here and throughout on the public record assembled by the House January 6th Committee. Final Report, Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol, H.R. 117-000 (117th Cong., 2nd Sess.). Of course, to the extent that a potentially disqualified officer wished to prove that this public record was inaccurate or incomplete as relevant to them, they could attempt to do so in the relevant proceedings and to the relevant decisionmaker. See generally *supra* Part II.B.

⁴⁰⁶ *Supra* Part IV.A.1. The fact that President Trump may have supported the insurrection, see *infra* II.C.2.b, does not change this. In our system the President is not “the government,” and especially not when Congress is carrying out a constitutionally mandated role in supervising the transfer of power.

⁴⁰⁷ See, e.g., January 6 Report, *supra* note 405, at 499-502, 530-531.

⁴⁰⁸ *Id.* at 640-642.

⁴⁰⁹ *Id.* at 646-647, 651-659.

⁴¹⁰ *Id.* at 502-510, 521-530.

day was something quite different from more common acts of protest, even disruptive protest. January 6 was an *insurrection*.

To be sure, the events of January 6 itself—the attack on Congress and the Capitol—did not remotely rival in overall magnitude, or in sheer carnage, the experience of the U.S. Civil War, where more than 600,000 people died. Still, considered as discrete events, it is notable that more people died, and many more were injured, as a result of the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol than died or suffered injuries as a result of the attack on Fort Sumter. The events of January 6 match, in their essential elements—concerted resistance to federal authority, serious attempts to frustrate execution of national law, attacks on government officials and facilities, intimidation and violence—and arguably exceeded in their seriousness, the events of the Whiskey Rebellion, Fries’ Rebellion, and other more limited historical insurrections. And at all events, it is less the magnitude or degree of disruption occasioned by an insurrection than whether it fits within the broad meaning of Section Three, as illuminated by evidence of its original meaning and historical understandings. As the *Prize Cases* teach, not every insurrection or rebellion ripens into a full-fledged war.⁴¹¹ Most of the time, the authority of the state can nip it in the bud. But it is still an insurrection.⁴¹²

Our assessment of the events of January 6, specifically, as an “insurrection” confirms the judgment made by public authorities: An act of Congress, to “award four congressional gold medals to the United States Capitol Police and those who protected the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021,”⁴¹³ found that the events of January 6 constituted an insurrection. The text of the act contains an official finding: “On January 6, 2021, a mob of *insurrectionists* forced its way into the U.S. Capitol building and congressional office buildings and engaged in acts of vandalism, looting, and violently attacked Capitol Police officers.”⁴¹⁴ Another finding noted the historic magni-

⁴¹¹ See supra Part IV.A.4.c.

⁴¹² What about other disruptive, disorderly, even violent protests during the same **time period**? For instance, the many such events that erupted during the summer of 2020 in the wake of the police killing of George Floyd? So far as we can tell, none of these were covered by Section Three. Of course mere protest is not insurrection. Some of these protests devolved into riots, but even a riot is not necessarily an insurrection. And even if some of them went further, amounted to “concerted, forcible resistance to the authority of government to execute the laws in at least some significant respect,” and met the definition of insurrection, they would seem to be insurrections against the *state* governments, not the United States, and thus outside the scope of Section Three. But of course if there were **any** other insurrections against the United States, Section Three applies to them all.

⁴¹³ Pub. Law. 117-32 (Aug. 5, 2021), 135 Stat. 322.

⁴¹⁴ Id. sec. 1(1). In the state Section Three proceedings against Marjorie Taylor Greene, supra notes 68-73 and accompanying text, the hearing officer cited this statute to conclude “Congress has characterized the Invasion as an insurrection.” Initial Decision, *Rowan v. Greene*, No. 2222-582-OSAH-SEC-STATE-CE-57-Beaudrot, at 9-10 (Georgia Office of State Administrative Hearings, May 6, 2022). The hearing officer found it unnecessary to decide for himself, however, “Whether the Invasion of January 6 amounted to an insurrection.” Id. at 18.

tude and symbolic importance of the insurrection against democracy: “The desecration of the U.S. Capitol, which is the temple of American Democracy, and the violence targeting Congress are horrors that will forever stain our Nation’s history.”⁴¹⁵ The impeachment charges brought against President Trump as a result of January 6 were equally explicit in concluding that the events of January 6 constituted an insurrection. A majority of the House of Representatives approved (232 to 197) an article of impeachment charging then-President Trump with “incitement of insurrection” for the events of January 6th.⁴¹⁶ The Senate’s vote to convict Trump of this charge, while falling short of the two-thirds majority required by the Constitution’s impeachment process, constituted a substantial majority (57 to 43) of the Senate endorsing the House’s charge and characterization. Majorities of both houses of Congress thus determined—at least twice—that January 6th *was* an insurrection; and in the impeachment proceedings majorities of both houses determined that Trump was responsible for having incited that insurrection.⁴¹⁷

Finally, there is an additional possibility that we should see the events of January 6, 2021, as just one part of a broader “rebellion” against constitutional government, much like secession—actions seeking unlawfully to *displace* or *replace* the authority of lawful constitutional government and substitute a constitutionally unauthorized governmental authority in its stead.

We acknowledge that applying the term “rebellion” to the events of 2020-2021 goes beyond the Civil War era dictionaries. The attempt to overturn the 2020 election was neither an “*open and avowed renunciation of the authority of the government,*” as Webster would have it, nor (outside of the insurrection of January 6) “*the taking up of arms*” or “*forcible opposition*” as Bouvier would have it.⁴¹⁸ It is not a perfect fit.

Nonetheless, consider the argument that the term “rebellion” could be used more broadly to describe a coup d’etat seeking to overthrow the constitutional order—including a so-called “bloodless” coup d’etat (where no force is used) and a successful “self-coup” of the bloodless variety⁴¹⁹ (where the existing unlawful regime commands such force that it need not be used). Consider the following chain of logical steps: 1. A military coup d’etat upending lawful government by use of force surely qualifies,

⁴¹⁵ Pub. Law. 117-32, sec. 1(4).

⁴¹⁶ H. Res. 24 (117th Cong., 1st Sess. Jan 25, 2021).

⁴¹⁷ For what it is worth, other scholars have also agreed that January 6th was an insurrection. See Magliocca, *Foreground*, supra note 62, at 23 n.65; Vlahoplus, supra note 404, at 1; Farah Peterson, *Our Constitutionalism of Force*, 122 Colum. L. Rev. 1539, 1622-25 (2022); see also Hemel, *How-to Guide*, supra note 5; Mark A. Graber, *Treason, Insurrection, and Disqualification: From the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 to Jan. 6, 2021*, Lawfare (Sep. 26, 2022) at <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/treason-insurrection-and-disqualification-fugitive-slave-act-1850-jan-6-2021>.

⁴¹⁸ See supra Part IV.A.2.

⁴¹⁹ See generally Daniel J. Hemel, *Self-Coup and The Constitution*, 37 Const. Comm. (forthcoming 2023).

constitutionally, as a “rebellion.” It is literally an effort unlawfully to overthrow constitutional government, by force. 2. It follows that a military coup d’etat upending lawful government by *show or threat* of force should be treated the same way, even though force was not *used*. 3. A military coup d’etat by the *existing* regime—a “self-coup,” would seem, legally, to be the same thing. In such a case the regime does not *seize* power, by show or threat of force; it *retains* power by show or threat of force. But it is logically identical to situations #1 and #2. 4. A “bloodless” self-coup against the lawful regime, where no force is used because none is needed, should be treated the same as #3. Indeed, it seems fair to say that situation #4 is merely an instance of situation #3. 5. The same self-coup attempt, but that styles itself as not renouncing but instead as restoring or maintaining, the constitutional regime—but that in truth seeks to overthrow or defeat that regime—logically should be treated the same as #4. If one accepts this chain of reasoning, one might then fairly conclude that the entirety of the course of conduct attempting dishonestly and unlawfully to overthrow the 2020-2021 election constituted a “rebellion,” even though this might stretch somewhat the dictionary definitions of the term.⁴²⁰

Calling the events of 2020 and 2021 “insurrection” or potentially even “rebellion” might seem to some exaggerated or hyperbolic. It is not. It is simply being legally precise and not shying away from difficult or upsetting consequences that flow from legal precision. We believe it is important to call the events of 2020 and 2021 by their true legal names, their *right* names, unshielded by artful euphemism.⁴²¹

2. The Question of Participation: “Engaged in” and “Aid or Comfort”

This brings us to the rubber-hits-the-road question: *Who all, by virtue of their personal, voluntary conduct, can be said to have “engaged in” insurrection or rebellion in connection with the efforts to overthrow the result of the presidential election of 2020 and unlawfully maintain Donald Trump in office as President of the United States? Additionally, perhaps, who might be said to have provided “aid or comfort” to those insurrectionists and rebels?*

As detailed at great—perhaps excruciating—length above, “engaged in” under Section Three is properly understood to embrace a broad range of willful participatory

⁴²⁰ In similar fashion, we note that—at least at first—the purported “secession” of a state from the Union was *not* universally acknowledged to be itself an act constituting “rebellion” as a legal matter. It too did not fit perfectly the standard dictionary definition (unless and until force was used or threatened). But the logic of the matter led Lincoln—and Congress, and the Supreme Court—to conclude that secession, in practical and legal terms, *was* a species of “rebellion” and legally to be treated as such. See *supra* Part IV.A.4. As set forth in the text, the same logic suggests that conduct tantamount to an attempted coup d’etat (including attempting to maintain a defeated incumbent president in office, dishonestly and unlawfully) may fairly be characterized, legally, as “insurrection or rebellion.”

⁴²¹ For the sake of completeness, we add that we think the events of 2020-2021 probably do *not* rise to the level of “treason” or “levying war” against the United States, though of course it is possible that further investigation will reveal truly treasonous conduct that is not yet on the public record.

conduct. This includes, certainly, deliberate acts in the nature of planning, promoting, encouraging, counseling, supporting, materially assisting, advancing, or facilitating activity or plots that can fairly be characterized, legally, as “insurrection” or “rebellion.” And, as noted, in certain circumstances it might well include *inaction* supporting insurrection. Finally, giving “aid or comfort” arguably expands the range of acts of participation, support, and encouragement that qualify as triggering Section Three’s disqualification.⁴²²

Who, then, engaged in such behavior?

a. General Principles Concerning Culpable Participation

Some applications of Section Three are factually straightforward. Others might involve potentially more difficult questions of fact and proof concerning the degree and nature of an individual’s voluntary and intentional participation in (i) the overall plot and concrete efforts to overthrow the election and install Trump as president re-elect; (ii) the assembly, instigation, and incitement of a mob to attack the Capitol on January 6, 2021 to prevent certification of the election outcome; or (iii) the willful failure to take action to suppress the attack on Congress while it was in progress.

As discussed in Part II, above, judgments concerning the application of the legal standards of Section Three to specific individuals may and must be made by a variety of public actors—all those whose responsibilities call for application of the Constitution’s criteria for eligibility to hold office. The ultimate judgment will rest with different actors and institutions in different circumstances: sometimes by state election officials; sometimes by presidential electors; sometimes by state and federal executive branch officials; sometimes by the respective houses of Congress or by state legislatures. In many cases, the judgment ultimately will fall to state and federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court. Everybody in such positions is bound to apply Section Three faithfully and enforce its commands rigorously.

That said, from our interpretation of Section Three’s broad sweep, it is clear that at least two purported factual defenses are simply immaterial:

First, it is no defense that an individual might claim that his or her conduct does not constitute having engaged in or supported “insurrection” or “rebellion” because the election *was in fact stolen*—that is, that Trump in fact won the election—making it legitimate to “stop the steal.” The problem is that the premise is simply false. Decisionmakers can and should act on the well settled factual understanding that Joe Biden won, and Donald Trump lost, the election of 2020.⁴²³

⁴²² See generally *supra* Part IV.A.

⁴²³ See not only the January 6 Report, *supra* note 405, but also John Danforth, Benjamin Ginsburg, Thomas B. Griffith, David Hoppe, J. Michael Luttig, Michael W. McConnell, Theodore B. Olson &

Second, it likewise is no defense that an individual *believed* (even if mistakenly) that the election had in fact been stolen, or believed that their insurrectionary conduct was somehow lawful. That one may have been deluded or deceived by disinformation does not excuse acts of insurrection or rebellion. And as the South's secession and the resulting Civil War illustrate, a bogus and unsuccessful constitutional theory does not excuse them either. In other words, there is no *mistake-of-insurrection* defense to Section Three.⁴²⁴ Acts intentionally done as part of what is *in fact* and *in law* insurrection or rebellion are covered, irrespective of an individual's wrong subjective belief that no such insurrection or rebellion occurred, or the reasons for such wrong belief.⁴²⁵

b. Section Three Disqualifies Donald Trump from Future Office

The most politically explosive application of Section Three to the events of January 6, is at the same time the most straightforward. In our view, on the basis of the public record, former President Donald J. Trump is constitutionally disqualified from again being President (or holding any other covered office) because of his role in the attempted overthrow of the 2020 election and the events leading to the January 6 attack.

The case for disqualification is strong. There is abundant evidence that Trump deliberately set out to overturn the result of the 2020 presidential election result, calling it "stolen" and "rigged";⁴²⁶ that Trump (with the assistance of others) pursued numerous schemes to effectuate this objective; that among these were efforts to alter the vote counts of several states by force, by fraud, or by intended intimidation of state election officials,⁴²⁷ to pressure or persuade state legislatures and/or courts unlawfully to overturn state election results,⁴²⁸ to assemble and induce others to submit bogus slates of competing state electors,⁴²⁹ to persuade or pressure Congress to refuse to count electors' votes submitted by several states,⁴³⁰ and finally, to pressure **the**

Gordon H. Smith, *Lost, Not Stolen: The Conservative Case that Trump Lost and Biden Won the 2020 Presidential Election (2022)*, <https://lostnotstolen.org>.

⁴²⁴ This is consistent with principles of mens rea that distinguish knowledge of what one is doing from knowledge of the proper legal characterization of what one is doing. See, e.g., *Counterman v. Colorado*, 600 U.S. ___, at 4 n.2 (2023).

⁴²⁵ Now what if the shoe were on the other foot? What if Trump had somehow succeeded in unlawfully holding apparent office after January 20, 2021? Would comparable actions by Biden supporters have constituted "insurrection"? We think not. *The true facts matter*. A rebellion against lawful government is rebellion, but acts of counter-insurgency against an attempted coup d'état are not.

⁴²⁶ And not that it matters, see *supra* Part IV.C.2.a, but it also appears that Trump knew that these accusations were false. See January 6 Report, *supra* note 405, 100-01, 103-04, 203, 213, 789.

⁴²⁷ *Id.* at 202-203, 263-265; see also *id.* at 223-231.

⁴²⁸ *Id.* at 296-300.

⁴²⁹ *Id.* at 341-354.

⁴³⁰ *Id.* at 431.

Vice President unconstitutionally to overturn state election results in his role of presiding over the counting of electors' votes.⁴³¹

Leading up to January 6, Trump repeatedly solicited, suborned, and pressured Vice President Mike Pence to prevent the counting of the electoral votes in favor of President-elect Biden.⁴³² Not only that: Trump assembled a large crowd to march on the Capitol and intimidate Congress and the Vice President into complying with his wishes and thereby prevent the official counting of the votes of electors confirming Trump's defeat. Trump had announced on Twitter a protest to be held on January 6, 2021: "Big protest in D.C. on January 6th. Be there, will be wild!"⁴³³ According to testimony amassed by the House's January 6th Commission, Trump's supporters interpreted this as a call to arms, sometimes literally.⁴³⁴

Then there are the events of January 6 specifically. When January 6 arrived, Trump delivered an incendiary address at the White House Ellipse to the crowd of supporters he had effectively summoned to the Capitol to oppose what he had been calling the "steal" of the election. Trump reiterated his false claim that he had in fact won the election—"we won this election and we won it by a landslide"—but that the Democrats and the media had "stolen" the election and "rigged" a false outcome. "They rigged it like they've never rigged an election before," he charged. "Make no mistake, this election was stolen from you, from me and from the country. ... This [is] the most corrupt election in the history, maybe of the world." The crowd was "gathered together in the heart of our nation's capital for one very, very basic and simple reason: To save our democracy." Trump called on the crowd to march on the Capitol. "Our country has had enough. We will not take it anymore and that's what this is all about. ... We will stop the steal." He urged the assembled mass of thousands, some of whom Trump knew to be armed, to "fight like hell, and if you don't fight like hell you're not going to have a country anymore."⁴³⁵

Some might quibble that the speech is ambiguous.⁴³⁶ Not all of Trump's rambling address called literally for the crowd to "fight." Some of his statements were

⁴³¹ Id. at 441-458.

⁴³² Id. at 441-458.

⁴³³ Quoted in id. at 499.

⁴³⁴ Id. at 499-540.

⁴³⁵ For the quotations in this paragraph, see "Transcript of Trump's Speech at Rally Before US Capitol Riot," Associated Press, (Jan. 13, 2021), available at <https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-joe-biden-donald-trumpcapitol-siege-media-e79eb5164613d6718e9f4502eb471f27>. See also id. ("And again, most people would stand there at 9 o'clock in the evening and say, 'I want to thank you very much,' and they go off to some other life. But I said something is wrong here, something is really wrong, can't have happened, and we fight. We fight like hell, and if you don't fight like hell you're not going to have a country anymore.").

⁴³⁶ See Michael Conklin, *Capital Offense: Is Donald Trump Guilty of Inciting a Riot at the Capital?*, 15 U. St. Thomas J.L. & Pub. Pol'y 483 (2022); see also Alan Z. Rozenshtein & Jed Handelsman Shugerman, *January 6, Ambiguously Inciting Speech, and the Overt-Acts Rule*, 37 Const. Comm. at 2-3, 20-21 (forthcoming 2023).

ambiguous and at one point he remarked that the crowd would be marching “peacefully and patriotically.”⁴³⁷ He never *directly* and literally called for attacking the Capitol or the Vice President. Much of what might be thought incitement to lawlessness was innuendo. Nonetheless, the general and specific message was that the election had been stolen; that a constitutional fraud of colossal proportions and cataclysmic consequence was in the process of being perpetrated on the nation; that the crowd needed to take “strong” and direct action to protect the country; and that *immediate* action was necessary to prevent Vice President Pence and Congress from ratifying the unconstitutional election of an illegitimate president and doing irreparable damage to the nation.

These ambiguities have given rise to a debate about whether Trump’s speech did or did not cross the strict incitement threshold of *Brandenburg v. Ohio*.⁴³⁸ It could well be that it did cross the line: Trump had deliberately assembled the mob of supporters, steeled them to action, knew that they were ready to take immediate action, and directed them to take it.⁴³⁹ But the most important thing is that the *Brandenburg* question is beside the point. Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment does not enact the legal standard of *Brandenburg v. Ohio*. It enacts the **standards of participation in and support for “insurrection or rebellion,”** and it **qualifies, modifies, or simply satisfies the First Amendment to the extent of any conflict between these constitutional principles.**⁴⁴⁰ First Amendment or no, the speech was part of Trump’s participation in and support for the insurrection.

Finally, as events unfolded and the violence began, Trump maintained silence—and indeed deliberate indifference bordering on tacit encouragement—for what had by that time clearly become a forcible insurrection. For three hours after learning that his supporters had **attacked the Capitol,** Trump took no action to urge them to leave, despite being begged to do so by his advisors and despite having a constitutional duty to take care that the laws be faithfully executed.⁴⁴¹ During this same period, while the insurrection was in progress and after the Capitol had been breached, he again condemned Vice President Pence for not “hav[ing] the courage to do what should have been done to protect our Country and our Constitution,”⁴⁴² a statement that the January 6th Commission concluded was “a statement that could

⁴³⁷ Transcript, *supra* note 435.

⁴³⁸ 395 U.S. 444 (1969); compare Conklin, *supra* note 436, with Alexander Tsesis, *Incitement to Insurrection and the First Amendment*, 57 Wake Forest L. Rev. 971 (2022); see also Rozenshtein & Shugerman, *supra* note 436, at 3 n.3 (citing these and other sources and describing this disagreement).

⁴³⁹ As Rozenshtein and Shugerman also emphasize, “Trump’s speech was accompanied by several overt acts in furtherance of inciting an attack against the Capitol,” which they argue takes it outside of the *Brandenburg* framework for that reason. Rozenshtein & Shugerman, *supra* note 436, at 38.

⁴⁴⁰ See *supra* Part III.D (arguing that Section Three is not limited by the free speech principles of the First Amendment).

⁴⁴¹ January 6 Report, *supra* note 405, at 577-606.

⁴⁴² Donald J. Trump, Tweets of January 6, 2021, available at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/tweets-january-6-2021>

only further enrage the mob” and that in fact apparently did so.⁴⁴³ Once Trump finally *did*—after several hours and with great reluctance—direct his supporters to leave the Capitol, they quickly dispersed.⁴⁴⁴

This culpable inaction—failing to intervene to stop an insurrection in progress, declining to act to arrest a violent uprising, despite having both the capacity and responsibility to intervene—is another crucial part of Trump’s responsibility for the January 6 insurrection. Section Three reaches a broad range of conduct providing meaningful assistance to or support for acts of insurrection or rebellion performed by others, even quite passively.⁴⁴⁵ Sitting by and doing nothing—declining to act to arrest a violent uprising, despite possessing the material capacity and legal responsibility to intervene—might qualify. Additionally and equally important, Trump’s deliberate inaction renders his January 6 speech much more incriminating in hindsight, because it makes it even less plausible (if it was ever plausible) that the crowd’s reaction was all a big mistake or misunderstanding.

Taking these events as a whole, and judging them under the standard of Section Three, it is unquestionably fair to say that Trump “engaged in” the January 6 insurrection through both his actions and his inaction. Officials—administrators, courts, legislators—whose responsibilities call upon them to apply Section Three properly and lawfully may, indeed must, take action within their powers to preclude Trump from holding future office,

Moreover, if one accepts the broader argument that the entire campaign to overthrow the results of the 2020 election was a form of constitutional rebellion,⁴⁴⁶ then Trump’s complicity is even more obvious—as the leader, motive force, and chief attempted perpetrator of that rebellion. Indeed, it would not be going too far to say that Trump, having previously sworn a constitutionally required oath to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States knowingly attempted to execute what, had it succeeded, would have amounted to a political coup d’etat against the Constitution and its system of elections and overturn the results of the constitutional process, in order to maintain himself in office as President contrary to law. If that itself constitutes “rebellion” against the Constitution, Trump’s overall

⁴⁴³ January 6 Report, supra note 406, at 577.

⁴⁴⁴ Even as he urged peace in a video to the insurrectionists (“we can’t play into the hands of these people. We have to have peace”) he continued to express affection for them (“So go home. We love you. You’re very special.”) and to reiterate that the “election was stolen from us.” Donald J. Trump, Videotaped Remarks During the Insurrection at the United States Capitol, at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/videotaped-remarks-during-the-insurrection-the-united-states-capitol>. Later that night he tweeted: “These are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously & viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly & unfairly treated for so long. Go home with love & in peace. Remember this day forever!” Trump Tweets, supra note 442.

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. notes 350-351 and accompanying text (describing the exclusion of Senator-elect Phillip Thomas).

⁴⁴⁶ See supra notes 418, 420 and accompanying text.

course of conduct disqualifies him under Section Three, even apart from the specific incitement to storm the Capitol on January 6.

The bottom line is that Donald Trump “engaged in” “insurrection or rebellion” and gave “aid or comfort” to others engaging in such conduct, within the original meaning of those terms as employed in Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment. If the public record is accurate, the case is not even close. He is no longer eligible to the office of Presidency, or any other state or federal office covered by the Constitution. All who are committed to the Constitution should take note and say so.

c. Beyond Trump

Donald Trump is at the top of the list of Section Three disqualifications, but the list does not end with him. The public record to date shows many others who are or may be connected to either the insurrection of January 6 or to a possible broader rebellion. These include government lawyers, executive branch officials, state officeholders, and even members of Congress. It is not for us to definitively say who all these may be—that, as we have said, is ultimately the responsibility and judgment of all those whose public duties call upon them to apply the Constitution’s provisions concerning officeholder qualifications. But to see why this responsibility is urgent, consider the following categories:

Consider first those who marched with—who rose up with—the January 6 mob itself. Some of these folks, such as Couy Griffin of New Mexico, and Derrick Evans of West Virginia, have already been stripped of or resigned from their state offices. Section Three contemplates. They present the easiest case of “engag[ing] in . . . insurrection.” Open and shut.

But many more cases follow. Consider those who were not part of the uprising itself, but who provided planning, encouragement, assistance, or other material support to those who rose up on January 6. Recent proceedings against U.S. Representatives Biggs, Gosar, and Greene, for instance, raise this as a serious possibility. Pennsylvania State Senator Doug Mastriano—who is also a retired military officer and recent gubernatorial candidate—is said to have transported busloads of people to what became the insurrection and “was near the Capitol during the attack.” Former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani worked extensively to overturn the election, and likewise riled the mob at the Ellipse on January 6. Trump Chief of

⁴⁴⁷ See supra notes 85-88, 114-116 and accompanying text.

⁴⁴⁸ See supra notes 68-80 and accompanying text.

⁴⁴⁹ January 6 Report, supra note 405, at 294. Such a claim was brought against Mastriano in federal court but dismissed on jurisdictional grounds. See supra note 89.

⁴⁵⁰ January 6 Report, supra note 405, at 536, 577, 581, 593-594, 608; <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/rudy-giuliani-speech-transcript-at-trumps-washington-d-c-rally-wants-trial-by-combat>

Staff (and former legislator) Mark Meadows planned and organized parts of the January 6 rally and apparently also “directed that [Giuliani] be allowed to speak” to the crowd.⁴⁵¹ These current and former officeholders are also subject to serious challenge under Section Three.

And if one entertains the argument that the entire course of conduct to overthrow the 2020 election was a broader rebellion,⁴⁵² the list just grows longer and longer. According to the public record: Former National Security Advisor General Michael Flynn proposed a plan to seize voting machines, invalidate election results, and rerun the vote in swing states won by Biden.⁴⁵³ Would-be Trump electors (some of whom came from state political offices covered by Section Three) met on December 14 even in states where Biden’s electors had been chosen, thus laying the groundwork for Trump’s schemes.⁴⁵⁴ Assistant Attorney General Jeffrey Clark sought to use the power and authority of the Department of Justice to fraudulently upend state election results.⁴⁵⁵ At least one member of Congress pressed for the removal of more senior Department of Justice officials who opposed Clark’s scheme, and lobbied for the appointment of Clark as Acting Attorney General, thus providing aid or comfort.⁴⁵⁶ These officials, too, would be subject to challenge.

We could go on, but we have made the point: *All* persons who betrayed their earlier constitutional oaths by subsequently engaging in conduct (in any of a number of forms) directed at overthrowing the result of a lawful presidential election or supporting an attack on Congress and the Capitol, should face serious inquiry under Section Three. If they try to hold, retain, re-obtain, or seek public office, their eligibility for such positions should be stringently scrutinized. That inquiry should be conducted by every relevant level of government, from state election officials to the halls of Congress, to the courts throughout the country. In many cases we may not yet even know the full extent of the participation and support for acts of insurrection or rebellion in 2020-2021. But we must find out.

Taking Section Three seriously as part of our nation’s operative, ongoing fundamental law means that such inquiries are constitutionally necessary. Indeed, they are constitutionally *required*. Taking Section Three seriously, as binding constitutional law, means faithfully ascertaining and fearlessly applying the objective, original meaning of its words and phrases, understood in their historical context, whether we like that meaning or not, and tirelessly following the logic of the text’s meaning to its fair conclusions. The upshot of doing so, we think—the consequence of adhering to constitutional principle—may well be the disqualification from public office of a

⁴⁵¹ January 6 Report, *supra* note 405, at 533, 535-536.

⁴⁵² See *supra* notes 418, 420 and accompanying text.

⁴⁵³ January 6 Report, *supra* note 405, 222.

⁴⁵⁴ January 6 Report, *supra* note 405, at 352-353. Several of these would-be electors previously held state and local offices, and so are covered by Section Three.

⁴⁵⁵ January 6 Report, *supra* note 405, at 50.

⁴⁵⁶ *Id.* at 50 (discussing actions of Pennsylvania U.S. Representative Scott Perry).

great many more individuals than is generally recognized. In many cases, the inquiry has not yet begun. It is past time to start the reckoning.

Conclusion

Despite its long slumber, Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment is alive and in force. It remains fully legally operative. It is constitutionally self-executing—that is, its command is automatically effective, directly enacted by the Constitution itself. And it is sweeping: It sweeps over earlier and inconsistent constitutional provisions. It sweeps in a broad range of conduct attacking the authority of the United States. And it sweeps in a broad category of former oath-swearing officeholders turned insurrectionists or aiders and comforters of insurrection or rebellion. It is enforceable by anybody whose duties provide occasion for judging legal eligibility for office. Indeed, each of these actors has a *duty* to faithfully apply Section Three. All possess legitimate constitutional interpretive authority to construe and apply this constitutional prohibition, many of them independently of other actors, including courts.

All of this has obvious, important, and immediate legal implications.

We the People should honor and vigorously enforce this important provision of our Constitution. It should not be allowed to become a dead letter from disuse. Its purpose, while inspired by specific historical events, is one of general and continuing importance. The idea that men and women who swore an oath to support the Constitution as government officials, but who betrayed that oath by engaging in or abetting acts of insurrection or rebellion against the United States, should be disqualified from important positions of government power in the future (unless forgiven by supermajorities of both houses of Congress) remains a valid, valuable, and we think vital precept. Disqualifying candidates and **officials** from office is not something to be done lightly, but Section Three was not enacted lightly. Section Three remains part of our Constitution, part of our nation's fundamental law. If we honor the Constitution, we must honor Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment.

That means that those who possess the power and duty to apply and enforce Section Three have a constitutional responsibility to do so, fairly but vigorously. If state election boards or secretaries of state determine that a candidate for state elective office or a candidate seeking to represent that state in Congress is *constitutionally disqualified* from holding that office, those state authorities should exercise the state-law powers they possess to remove ineligible candidates from the ballot. If the House or Senate determines that a person elected to serve as a member of such body is *constitutionally disqualified* from holding such a position, they should refuse to seat or expel that person. And if a candidate for President, or an already-elected President, is *constitutionally disqualified* from office by Section Three, then that disqualification should be enforced by state election officials, by electors, by Congress

through the impeachment process, and by the Vice-President, cabinet and, Congress in carrying out the Twenty-fifth Amendment. In any and all these situations, and more, where the enforcement of Section Three's constitutional disqualifications is properly presented to the judiciary in a case over which a court possesses jurisdiction, it is the constitutional duty, province, and responsibility of federal and state judges exercising the judicial power to faithfully apply and enforce Section Three according to its terms.

No official should shrink from these duties. It would be wrong – indeed, arguably itself a breach of one's constitutional oath of office—to abandon one's responsibilities of faithful interpretation, application, and enforcement of Section Three. It is wrong to shrink on the pretext that some other officials may or should exercise *their* authority—as if one's own constitutional obligations cease to exist if others fail to act. And it is wrong to shrink from observing, and enforcing, the Constitution's commands on the premise that doing so might be unpopular in some quarters, or fuel political anger, or resentment, or opposition, or retaliation. The Constitution is not optional and Section Three is not an optional part of the Constitution.

Importantly, it is also wrong to shrink from applying Section Three on grounds of “democracy,” whether on the premise that Section Three should be ignored or narrowly construed because it limits who voters may choose, or on the premise that only the voters should enforce Section Three. It is true, as we have said, that limiting democratic choice is not something to be done lightly, but it is something the Constitution does, and for serious reasons.⁴⁵⁷ The Constitution cannot be overruled or disregarded by ordinary election results. (And we note that there is particular irony in invoking democracy to shrink from applying Section Three to the insurrectionists of 2020-2021, who refused to abide by election results and instead sought to overthrow them.)⁴⁵⁸

Finally, we believe it would be wrong for courts to refuse to decide cases, otherwise lawfully within their jurisdiction, concerning Section Three on the pretense that such matters are “political questions.” Outside of certain exercises of power to exclude, expel, or impeach and try, committed to each House's judgment, Section Three is enforceable by the judiciary *as well as* by other officials.⁴⁵⁹ Section Three's terms embody rules and standards, enforceable as any other constitutional provision

⁴⁵⁷ See Magliocca, *Foreground*, supra note 62, at 14-24 (arguing at length that “the democracy canon is a seductive but mistaken way of reading Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment,” and that it “elevates a background constitutional principle in a way that is inconsistent with the text, purpose, and history of Section Three”).

⁴⁵⁸ See William Baude, *The Real Enemies of Democracy*, 109 Cal. L. Rev. 2407, 2418-20 (2021) (“The real enemies of democracy, at a more fundamental level, are those who try to ignore the rules of the game after they have already lost it. This past election, that means the real enemies of democracy were President Donald Trump and those who fought for him.”).

⁴⁵⁹ Supra note 95.

is enforceable. There is no freestanding judicial power to abstain from enforcing the Constitution whenever doing so might be difficult or controversial.

We think that if these constitutional duties are taken seriously, there is a list of candidates and officials who must face judgment under Section Three. Former president Donald Trump is at the top of that list, but he is not the end of it. As we have said, it is not for us to say who all is disqualified by virtue of Section Three's constitutional rule. That is the duty and responsibility of many officials, administrators, legislators, and judges throughout the country. Where they are called on to decide eligibility to office, they are called on to enforce Section Three, applying the Constitution's legal standard to the facts before them in a given instance. Our point is to emphasize Section Three's continuing force, and broad sweep.

At all events, if a President or former President of the United States; a current or former officer of the federal executive branch; a Member or former Member of Congress; a current or former state legislator or state executive official; or a current or former federal or state court judge, planned, supported, assisted, encouraged, endorsed, or aided in a material way those who engaged in the insurrection of January 6, or otherwise knowingly and willfully participated in a broader rebellion against the constitutional system, such persons are constitutionally disqualified from office. In such situations, Section Three's constitutional disqualifications can, should, and must be carried out.