

At State Dept., a Typeface Falls Victim in the War Against Woke

Secretary of State Marco Rubio called the Biden-era move to the sans serif typeface “wasteful,” casting the return to Times New Roman as part of a push to stamp out diversity efforts.



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Reporting from Washington

Dec. 9, 2025

Secretary of State Marco Rubio waded into the surprisingly fraught politics of typefaces on Tuesday with an order halting the State Department’s official use of Calibri, reversing a 2023 Biden-era directive that Mr. Rubio called a “wasteful” sop to diversity.

While mostly framed as a matter of clarity and formality in presentation, Mr. Rubio’s directive to all diplomatic posts around the world blamed “radical” diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility programs for what he said was a misguided and ineffective switch from the serif typeface Times New Roman to sans serif Calibri in official department paperwork.

In an “Action Request” memo obtained by The New York Times, Mr. Rubio said that switching back to the use of Times New Roman would “restore decorum and professionalism to the department’s written work.” Calibri is “informal” when compared to serif typefaces like Times New Roman, the order said, and “clashes” with the department’s official letterhead.

Times New Roman Calibri

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Designers choosing a typeface and font in recent decades have focused more on accessibility. The New York Times; LucasFonts

A State Department official confirmed the document's authenticity.

Mr. Rubio's directive, under the subject line "Return to Tradition: Times New Roman 14-Point Font Required for All Department Paper," served as the latest attempt by the Trump administration to stamp out remnants of diversity initiatives across the federal government.

Then-Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken ordered the 2023 typeface shift on the recommendation of the State Department's office of diversity and inclusion, which Mr. Rubio has since abolished. The change was meant to improve accessibility for readers with disabilities, such as low vision and dyslexia, and people who use assistive technologies, such as screen readers.

Calibri, sometimes described as soft and modern, is typically considered more accessible for people with reading challenges thanks to its simpler shapes and wider spacing, which make its letters easier to distinguish. Mr. Blinken's move was applauded by accessibility advocates.

But Mr. Rubio's order rejected the grounds for the switch. The change, he allowed, "was not among the department's most illegal, immoral, radical or wasteful instances of D.E.I.A.," the acronym for diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. But Mr. Rubio called it a failure by

its own standards, saying that “accessibility-based document remediation cases” at the department had not declined.

“Switching to Calibri achieved nothing except the degradation of the department’s official correspondence,” Mr. Rubio said. He noted that Times New Roman had been the department’s official typeface for nearly 20 years until the 2023 change. (Before 2004, the State Department used Courier New.)

Echoing President Trump’s call for classical style in federal architecture, Mr. Rubio’s order cited the origins of serif typefaces in Roman antiquity. Those typefaces, which are used by The New York Times, include small strokes at the edges of many characters.

Admirers say those flourishes make letters look more elegant and make them easier to distinguish from one another, even though they can also create a sense of clutter.

Serif typefaces are “generally perceived to connote tradition, formality and ceremony,” Mr. Rubio’s order said, adding that they were used by the White House, Supreme Court and other state and federal government entities, as well as in the script on the side of Air Force One.

Many diplomats are unhappy with changes Mr. Rubio has made to the department’s structure and leadership, and have reported badly damaged morale within their ranks. But the Biden administration’s move to Calibri prompted some grumbling from some traditionalists who preferred Times New Roman. Mr. Blinken also changed the standard font size, from 14-point to 15-point, requiring extra keystrokes that some diplomats found annoying.

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