

Peoples' Charter for Southeast Asia



Explore



Home

Our Board

Opinion

News

Rohingya People

Media

Poetry Corner


About

Featured Opinion

Gulf of Mexico to Gulf of America? Why History Should Count

The Trump Administration changing the Gulf's indigenous name demonstrates the continuing control over political institutions by the descendants of European settler populations – illegal migrants, in today's western parlance – who continue to seek to

erase the actual crimes of their Euro-supremacist ancestors' genocidal theft of that extra-European land - and sea.

 Michael Charney on January 24, 2025

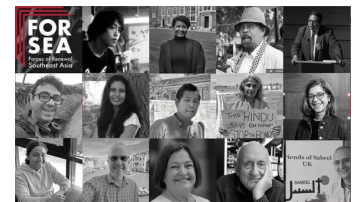
Officially in the U.S., now, the Gulf is now the Gulf of America.

The White House has added to their webpage the full



Michael Wood, "Conquistadors," 2000, BBC

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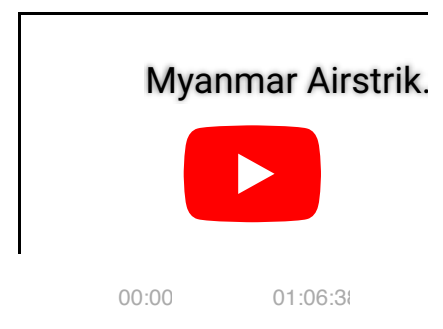
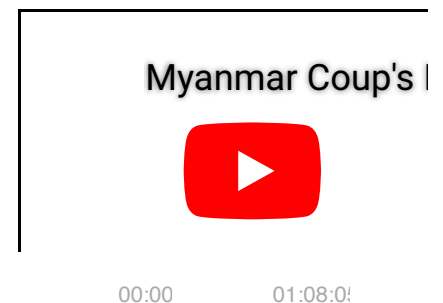
justification for why the Gulf of Mexico ought to be renamed the Gulf of America to explain Trump’s executive order renaming it in this way. Much of this has to do with, first, 1,700 miles of US coastline bordering the Gulf (out of the Gulf’s total of 5,000 miles of coastline) , although much more of the Gulf is bordered by Mexico and, second, the Gulf (including its crude oil and natural gas reserves) being vital to the US economy, which is also true of other countries bordering the Gulf. But overall explicit goal of the move is found in the title of the executive order “Restoring Names that Honor American Greatness” (20 January 2025). Certainly, within the U.S., the president has the right to control how the U.S. officially refers to geographic locations. Worryingly, as we saw in the first Trump term and we have already seen the foreshadowing of what is ahead, a Trump decision is often followed by economic threats to force other countries to come to its way of understanding.

The current case, that of renaming the Gulf as part of a necessary restoration of anything is as ironic as it is offensive. “Restoration” implies victimhood, that the U.S. has had something lost or taken way, that it is on the opposite end of an unfair transaction. This is ironic because the United States was built not as a franchise colony but as a settler colony, from the days of the first English to land in North America.

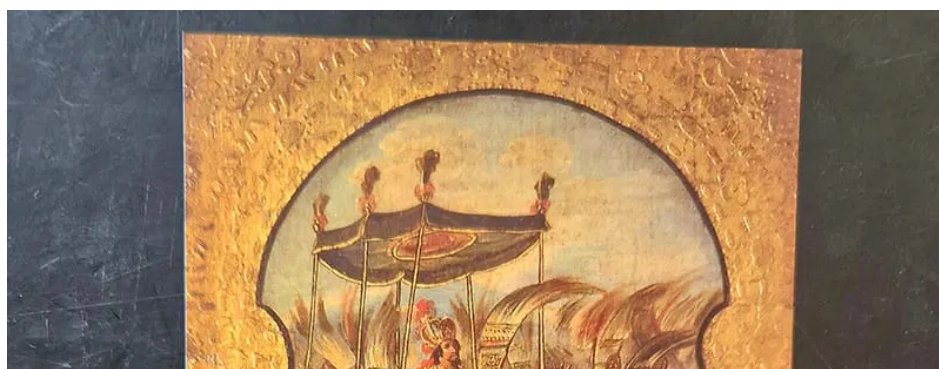
spread of ecological consciousness, and the promotion of a democratic ethos among future generations.

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The territoriality of this settlement was built on the dispossession of the lands from someone else, in many cases native Americans and Mexicans. This was viewed by settlers as justified by the argument that the white settlers could make more profitable use of the land (the introduction of extractive territoriality), on the one hand, and, on the other, like many settler expansions, by the deep belief that the settlers were a chosen people. The settlers took all they surveyed as they were gifted the land by a higher power, politics overlapping settler mentality in the more famous cases of the Great Trek South Africa, Manifest Destiny in the U.S., and Zionism in Israel. The Trump policy of unilaterally asserting authority over how shared geographical features are named (and with it, how ownership is implied) draws upon both the coloniality of the settler state exercising unilateral power over dominated space (and the people in it) and the effort to leverage a very high degree of asymmetrical economic and military power over weaker neighbours. In fact, we might see in the US move relative to the Gulf of MEXICO the Chinese effort to assert ownership over the South China Sea.



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'Everything that has happened since the marvellous discovery of the Americas has been so extraordinary that the whole story remains incredible to anyone who has not experienced it at first hand. Indeed, it seems to overshadow all the deeds of famous people in the past, no matter how heroic, and to silence all talk of other wonders of the world.'

BARTOLOME DE LAS CASAS, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, 1542

Michael Wood, "Conquistadors," 2000, BBC Worldwide Ltd.

The move is also certainly culturally offensive. Mexico was an indigenous name for indigenous land, the valley that was occupied by the Aztec Empire. The Gulf has been known as the Gulf of Mexico for nearly five centuries for this reason, not for colonial political purpose. The name, the Gulf of Mexico, first appeared on European maps from 1569, the Jesuits referred to it as the Gulf of Mexico from the mid-17th century, and it was popularly known as the Gulf of Mexico, on all sides of the Gulf, although apparently the gulf was depicted on some maps as the Gulf of New Spain, which Mexico was called during the colonial period. The name Mexico had nothing to do with state possession (or state greatness). Changing an indigenous name to a national name (one originally derived from an Italian geographer) in this day and age is something that

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anyone teaching the continuing legacy of settler colonialism should add to their course materials (outside of the US of course, where this kind of course/module will possibly be banned as part of the assault on "Wokeism") as proof of this continuing.

Michael Wood, "Conquistadors," 2000, BBC Worldwide Ltd.

Fundamentally, the measure demonstrates the continuing control over political institutions that settler populations continue to exert over extra-European lands, it also seeks to erase the actual crime of the conquest in the first place. What is forgotten by settler America is that a good part of the US that borders it used to be Mexico until a

small population of white settlers (many illegal immigrants of their own day) stole a large part of Mexico and declared it their own (Texas) before it joined the United States. In one of history's great, long-term twists, descendants of these illegal migrants who killed a great many soldiers who were merely defending the borders of Mexico, are now actively supporting the US in kicking out of Texas and other border states at least some of the descendants of the Mexicans who used to own the land. This is the backdrop to the point made by Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo in early January that part of America's gulf coastline ought to be renamed Mexican America.

The famous narrator Alexander Scourby once referred to the dangers of "ignorance in action." But ignorance of injustice, history, and geography have nothing to do with this change, just the arrogance of a large part of a settler population that is clearly unrepentant. Officially in the U.S., now, the Gulf is now the Gulf of America. After Trump's "illegals" are gone from "his people's" side of the border, it will be interesting and very frightening to see where this juggernaut will turn next.

Michael Charney

Banner: Richard Mount and Thomas Page's 1700 map of the Gulf of Mexico, *A Chart of the Bay of Mexico*. [Wikipedia Commons](#)

Backgrounder:

<https://www.vox.com/2015/5/27/8618261/america-maps-truths>

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Posted by Michael Charney

A native of Flint, Michigan, Michael Charney is a full professor at SOAS, the University of London, in the Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy (School of Interdisciplinary Studies) and the School of History, Religions, and Philosophies, where he teaches global security, strategic studies, and Asian military history. He received his PhD from the University of Michigan in 1999 on the subject of the history of the emergence of religious communalism in Rakhine and has published a number of books on military history in Southeast Asia and the political and intellectual history of Myanmar. He was a postdoctoral research fellow at the Centre for Advanced Studies at the (National University of Singapore) where he researched religion and migration, was a project professor at the Institute for Advanced Studies of Asia at the University of Tokyo, and has spent most of the last two decades at SOAS, where he was elected to the Board of Trustees in 2016. He is a regular commentator in the media on events in Myanmar.

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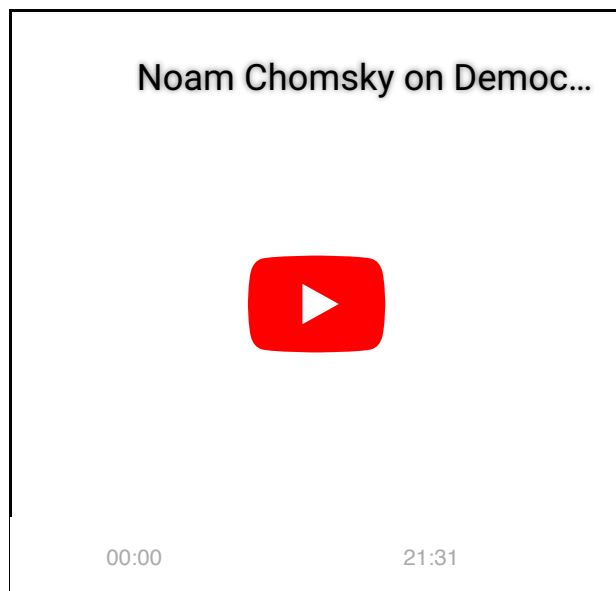


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Black Poet-Scholar El Jones Reads Her Poetry of Resister

January 21, 2025

Noam Chomsky on Democracy



Professor Naom Chomsky speaks to FORSEA. He offers views on democracy, which was recorded for the delegates at the official launch of FORSEA, and the inaugural conference, which took place in Kuala Lumpur, February 16, 2019.

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