

From March 2025 Voter

The Gulf of America, Press Bans, and Nineteen Eighty-Four

On February 21, the Associated Press (AP) filed a complaint against the U.S. government for banning the not-for-profit news organization from access to the Oval Office, Air Force One, and White House press events unless it changes its preferred name for the body of water south of our continent to “Gulf of America.” The AP is a 180-year-old nonpartisan news organization, widely trusted by news outlets across the nation and the world as a reliable source of objective and factual reporting. The AP explained its preference for “Gulf of Mexico” despite President Trump’s executive order changing the name to “Gulf of America”:



Trump signs Executive Order 14172 on January 20, 2025.

The Associated Press will refer to [the Gulf] by its original name while acknowledging the new name Trump has chosen. As a global news agency that disseminates news around the world, the AP must ensure that place names and geography are easily recognizable to all audiences.

The [AP’s complaint](#) describes events leading up to the ban, in part, as follows:

7. On February 14, the White House made its ban of the AP indefinite, announcing on X (formerly Twitter) that, because the AP had not complied with its demand to use the name Gulf of America, AP journalists would be banned from “access to limited spaces. . . .” To date, the AP’s reporters and photographers remain banned from the Oval Office, Air Force One, and other locations open not only to pool members, but also to a larger group of journalists with White House press credentials.

8. In an email to the AP on February 18, 2025, White House Chief of Staff Susan Wiles explained “why we arrived in this point.” Wiles wrote that the White House was targeting the AP because its Stylebook “is used by many as a standard for writing and editing,” and that it “advises journalists, scholars and classrooms around our country.” Wiles finished her email by noting, “we remain hopeful that the name of the [Gulf] will be appropriately reflected in the Stylebook where American audiences are concerned,” implying that the AP could change its guidance as to American audiences to resolve the issue and restore its access.

9. President Trump has since doubled down on his Administration’s targeting of the AP, saying, “[w]e’re going to keep them out until such time that they agree that it’s the Gulf of America” and that the AP “has been very, very wrong on the election, on Trump and the treatment of Trump.”

Evidently, the AP’s transgressions have extended beyond its style choices to include its [“treatment of Trump” and MAGA Republicans](#). One wonders whether the renaming of the Gulf was simply the opening salvo in an effort to muzzle the press and limit presidential access to media willing to comply with the administration’s political agenda. On February 25, the White House announced that it would take control of which news outlets have access to the presidential press pool.

The First Amendment states that *Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press*. Blocking access to White House press events limits the ability of hundreds of news organizations to report reliable information about Executive actions. The Trump administration’s maneuvers to control the media constitute a direct attack on freedom of speech and the free press. (Or are we about to hear a “textual” argument on First Amendment language that, since *Congress* did not impose the ban, it falls within constitutional bounds? Katie bar the door.)

As an editor, I am offended by the use of language itself to harness thought and control its expression. The issue is not limited to geographic names—witness the application of *radical anti-American indoctrination* to the teaching of Black history, *dictator* to Ukraine’s democratically elected president Volodymyr Zelenskyy, or *violent criminal aliens* to undocumented persons lost in our broken immigration system. Language is a form of thought exchange by virtue of terms whose meanings we agree on; undermining the meanings of words by applying them inaccurately is a technique of mind control.

In George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the Party operative O’Brien tortures the protagonist, Winston, finally wearing down his resistance until Winston actually believes he sees five fingers when O’Brien is showing him only four:

O’Brien held up the fingers of his left hand, with the thumb concealed.

“There are five fingers there. Do you see five fingers?”

“Yes.”

And he did see them, for a fleeting instant, before the scenery of his mind changed. He saw five fingers, and there was no deformity . . . a moment—he did not know how long, thirty seconds, perhaps—of luminous certainty, when each new suggestion of O’Brien’s had filled up a patch of emptiness and become absolute truth, and when two and two could have been three as easily as five, if that were what was needed. . . .

“You see now,” said O’Brien, “that it is at any rate possible.”

“Yes,” said Winston.

This is the trope most familiar to those of us who read the novel in high school. But in Orwell’s dystopian state, a more insidious means of thought control has emerged: the state language, Newspeak, which restructures grammar and simplifies vocabulary in order to limit communication, restrict self-expression, eliminate free will, and ultimately delete entire concepts from the language:

How could you have a slogan like Freedom is Slavery when the concept of freedom has been abolished? The whole climate of thought will be different. In fact, there will be no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking—not needing to think.

In the world of the novel, language functions to induce conformity, facilitate *doublethink* (the ability to hold contradictory beliefs), and ultimately erase all forms of resistance. Critical thinking becomes *crimethink* (thought crime). We have seen this play out recently: Words are banned or replaced (e.g., *special military operation* vs. *invasion*, *alien criminal* vs. *undocumented immigrant*), redefined and weaponized (e.g., *woke*), or flagged as suspect, including such [“problematic” terms](#) as *equity*, *gender*, *transgender*, *nonbinary*, *pregnant people*, *antiracist*, *hate speech*, *multicultural*, and *oppression*.

Whether we call it the Gulf of Mexico or the Gulf of America seems trivial, but regulating language to control our news organizations is monumental. Left without reliable information, “it’s hard to know what to believe,” as one of my relatives recently said to me. Capitulation of our beliefs, our rights, and our will to fight for them soon follows.

Please don’t give up. Keep picking up the phone and [contacting your representative](#). Educate yourself. Sign petitions. Donate. Demand town halls and attend them. If you can, participate in demonstrations. [Click here for more ideas](#). You may believe there is no point, but that’s exactly what the autocrats want you to believe.

—Chris Moose, Editor, the *Voter*

This article was written in the week leading up to February 25, 2025. On February 28, the New York Times Editorial Board published "[The MAGA War on Speech,](https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/28/opinion/free-speech-trump-maga.html?unlocked_article_code=1.0U4.ej_r.SNPwfabJFAfa&smid=url-share)" detailing the extreme measures the Trump administration has already invoked to suppress free speech. You can read or listen to it here: https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/28/opinion/free-speech-trump-maga.html?unlocked_article_code=1.0U4.ej_r.SNPwfabJFAfa&smid=url-share.