



★ **An Atlas of Extinct Countries**

Gideon Defoe

Europa Editions (Jun 8, 2021)

Hardcover \$26.00 (256pp)

978-1-60945-680-1

Gideon Defoe analyzes, memorializes, and lampoons world history in *An Atlas of Extinct Countries*.

Defoe writes that all countries depend on myths to justify their existence and inspire loyalty in their people. Even after a country dissolves or is eradicated, its myths remain. He sifts through such lies to find the truth—or at least, as much of the truth as can be known—examining dead countries from all over the world, how they came to be, why they are no longer around, and their legacies.

While countries cease to exist for many reasons (though much of the time, Defoe states, it is England's fault), hubris often plays a role, as with the Republic of Sonora, founded by an American who invaded northern Mexico with a ragtag army of fifty. Some ends come about through honest mistakes, as with the Republic of Cospaia, created after a pope and his creditors misread a map. And then there are countries like Poyais, which never existed at all; it was invented for its creator's profit. Defoe gives each nation its due. Snarky footnotes enhance the text, sharing everything from biographical details to a recipe for beef jerky.

Whether they lasted mere minutes or many centuries, each nation featured played a role in the development of its region and its people. Often fun and sarcastic, the book adopts a more serious tone when acknowledging the effects of colonialism around the globe. The tragedies of the Congo Free State and the Quilombo of Palmares are sobering reminders of the human toll of conquest. The would-be nation builders in this book are greedy and entitled—and, just sometimes, so absurd that they become darkly humorous.

Both educational and entertaining, *An Atlas of Extinct Countries* is an irreverent look at the history of defunct nations and the larger-than-life personalities behind them.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (July / August 2021)

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