

This week in history: June 10-16

10 June 2019

25 years ago: Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman murdered

On June 13, 1994, the wife of former professional football player and movie actor OJ Simpson, Nicole Brown Simpson, was found brutally murdered outside her Brentwood, Los Angeles, home, along with her friend Ron Goldman. The pair had been stabbed to death the night before.

Nicole Brown and Simpson married in 1985 after he retired from football. Their apparently tumultuous marriage was publicized in the press, including documentation of multiple reports of spousal abuse. Friends described their unhealthy relationship as “mutually obsessive” and toxic. The couple divorced in 1992 and briefly reunited before a final separation the following year.

Simpson rose to fame in the 1970s as a professional football player. He secured multiple endorsements and marketing deals from major companies including Hertz, Chevrolet and ABC, making him a celebrity personality and household name in the US.

Even though Simpson was an immediate suspect in the killings, he did not turn himself in. Close friend and defense attorney Robert Kardashian—whose daughters have marketed themselves as celebrities in their own right—read a statement from Simpson to the media five days later on June 17, which many interpreted as a suicide note.

Later the same day, driving with a gun to his head, Simpson became the subject of a low-speed police chase broadcast to some 95 million viewers. After pursuing Simpson for 60 miles along the freeway, including a swarm of media helicopters above the chase with residents lined up along the road holding signs in support of Simpson, he was arrested.

“This extraordinary scene contained the three elements of the affair which stand out more than any other,” *The Bulletin* wrote on the spectacle at the time. “Simpson himself—his marketed image versus the

reality; the enormous fascination that the lives of celebrities, irrespective of their specific talents or specialties, hold for great masses of people; and the media exploitation of this and every other tragedy.

“The more one considers the entire sorry business, the more it becomes evident that the OJ Simpson affair, in all its aspects, could only take place within a diseased society. Whatever official public opinion pretends, social relations in this country have reached a desperate state.”

50 years ago: Georges Pompidou elected as president of France

On June 15, 1969, Georges Pompidou was elected president of France, defeating Alain Poher of the Democratic Centre Party (CD) by 57 to 42 percent. The election followed the resignation of President Charles de Gaulle in late April. De Gaulle stepped down after French voters rejected a constitutional referendum he had proposed.

Pompidou had served as de Gaulle’s prime minister from April 1962 until he resigned in July 1968 in the aftermath of the May-June 1968 political crisis. While having been a loyal supporter of the Union for the New Republic, the Gaullist party, Pompidou had disagreements with de Gaulle over how best to implement their reactionary agenda.

In the first round of the election Pompidou took 44 percent of the vote. The remaining ballots were split between Poher, with 23 percent, and Jacques Duclos of the French Communist Party (PCF) with 21 percent, with four smaller left-wing parties taking the rest. The first round narrowed the field to just Pompidou and Poher, both conservative bourgeois figures.

After the near revolutionary situation in 1968, and the Stalinist betrayal of the working-class revolt, there was mass disappointment with the established left parties, particularly with the Stalinist PCF. The result was division of support among nearly half a dozen “left”

candidates.

French right-wing forces succeeded in unifying their supporters. Launching a campaign of fear, the Gaullists pushed forward with claims of civil war, violence, and a totalitarian regime should a left-wing government come to power.

Pompidou looked to win over “centrist” voters by framing himself as a “liberal Gaullist.” Unlike de Gaulle, Pompidou supported having a close alliance with the United States, Great Britain, and the other major capitalist powers. In addition, thanks to the betrayal of the Stalinists and trade unions during the May-June 1968 general strike, Pompidou sought to present himself as a reformer willing to work with the left as he campaigned for the presidency.

75 years ago: Germany launches V1 weapons

On June 12, 1944, the first 10 German V1 rockets were launched from northern France. Four landed in London, causing six deaths and damaging railways, factories, hospitals and homes.

The V1—V, standing for Vergeltung (retribution)—was a jet-propelled pilotless aircraft 20 feet long, with a range of 200-250 miles, a speed of 470 miles per hour, and a one-ton warhead. The weapon was an attempt by Hitler to overcome Allied air superiority and the disintegration of the German air force. It proved to be very economical and used only 150 gallons of low-grade fuel—an important consideration given Germany’s dwindling fuel resources.

The first launchings were a rushed response to the Allied landings at Normandy on June 6, 1944. A three-day pause followed. Then, in the next two weeks, 2,000 V1s were fired, resulting in 1,600 deaths, 4,500 injuries and 200,000 houses destroyed. Throughout June and into July the launchings of V1s increased and caused more destruction.

But as the summer wore on and the Allied armies pushed deeper into France, the V1 launch sites were overrun and put out of commission. By September, V1 attacks on London were suspended and subsequently aimed at Antwerp and Brussels on the European mainland.

The V1 rocket came too late to affect the course of battle for German imperialism. Had it made its appearance some six months earlier and been used against shipping, troop and supply concentrations along

the coast of England, it could have caused enormous damage and disrupted Allied preparations for the invasion of France.

100 years ago: American troops cross border into Mexico

On June 15, 1919, 3,600 American cavalry and infantry crossed the Santa Fe Bridge from El Paso, Texas, to Ciudad Juarez on the Mexican side of the border in pursuit of the revolutionary army of Pancho Villa.

In what is known as the Third Battle of Juarez, one of the final episodes of the Mexican Revolution of 1910-20, Villa’s troops had taken control of Juarez from the government troops of Venustiano Carranza. The government’s cavalry was able to drive Villa’s men back into the center of Juarez.

American troops came under fire—according to a later American investigation, from Villa’s army—and after the death of a single American soldier, invaded Mexico. Mexican government troops returned to their fort and took no part in the battle that followed.

The Americans advanced into the center of Juarez and the next day began an artillery bombardment of the city’s racetrack where units of Villa’s army had retreated. By 7:00 a.m., the Americans encountered a large group of Villistas southeast of the city and fired on them with artillery, dispersing it.

The American incursion into Juarez marked the end of what is known as the Border War, a series of invasions into Mexican territory preceded by the militarization of the American side of the border beginning in 1910 at the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution. American troops had pursued Pancho Villa on Mexican territory in the Mexican Expedition from March 1916 to February 1917. The Border War led to the construction of the first wall between Mexican and American territory in Nogales, Arizona, in 1918.

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