

This Week in History: November 16-22

16 November 2009

This Week in History provides brief synopses of important historical events whose anniversaries fall this week.

25 Years Ago | 50 Years Ago | 75 Years Ago | 100 Years Ago

25 years ago: "Baby Fae," who received baboon heart transplant, dies

Stephanie Fae Beauclair, known to the world as "Baby Fae," dies on November 16, 1984, two weeks after an initially successful operation to replace her failing heart with that of a baboon.

Baby Fae was born premature on October 14, in Barstow, California, with a fatal condition known as hypoplastic left heart syndrome. Fae's mother, Teresa, took her home for the few weeks the infant had been given to live, when she learned of the pioneering work of Dr. Leonard Bailey. Bailey had experimented with cross-species transplantation.

On October 26, Bailey successfully transplanted a baboon heart into Fae, an astonishing medical and scientific achievement. The baby was in good health for two weeks, when her organs began to falter. She ultimately dies of kidney failure.

The experimental operation was sensationalized by the media and widely condemned on moral grounds, from the Vatican to People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). Fae's mother keeps her burial secret out of fear that a funeral will attract protests from animal rights activists.

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50 years ago: Algerian rebel government names prisoners peace envoys

Algeria's Tunisia-based rebel government on November 20, 1959 names five prisoners of France, including Mohammed Ben Bella, as envoys for peace discussions. French President Charles de Gaulle rejects the request.

France is in its sixth year of a dirty colonial war against the Algerian nationalist independence movement, the FLN.

It is de Gaulle who requested the talks which, he promised, would include discussion of a national election on self-determination. "I am speaking, of course, of those who are fighting," De Gaulle says in response to the request that the prisoners be accepted as envoys. "I am not speaking of those who are out of the fight."

Privately, de Gaulle declares "so much the worse for them...There will be pacification not by a negotiated cease fire, but because the firing will cease for lack of combatants."

The five had been imprisoned by the French government since 1956, when the plane they were flying in from Morocco to Tunis was ordered down by France in Algiers.

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75 years ago: Roosevelt administration plans works programs to create jobs

With unemployment in the US at nearly 22 percent in 1934, the Roosevelt administration indicates its intention to expand major public works projects in order to provide jobs.

Harold Ickes, secretary of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), says that he believes the administration will seek \$5 to \$6 billion for a new round of public works, and that this could provide jobs for up to 3.5 million men, and indirectly as many as 8 million others. The WPA speculates that this might end unemployment in the US.

Ickes says that several hundred thousand men could be put to work immediately by removing highway grade crossings over railroad tracks. Ickes also says that rural electrification, such as that underway by the Tennessee Valley Authority, should be advanced.

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100 years ago: United States moves to depose Zelaya

On November 18, 1909 the US administration of William Howard Taft sends war ships to the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua as it prepares to depose the regime of President José Santos Zelaya.

The immediate cause of the intervention is Nicaragua's execution of two US mercenaries working with rebel forces intent on overthrowing Zelaya. The two Americans confessed to mining Nicaraguan harbors.

Washington's moves against Zelaya have deeper roots, however. The Zelaya presidency and dictatorship (1893-1909) has adopted certain nationalist measures, including forcing the British out of the Mosquito Coast. Zelaya intervened militarily in the pro-American regime in Honduras, broached the reformation of the United States of Central America, and discussed with Germany and Japan the construction of a canal connecting the Caribbean to the Pacific Ocean via Lake Managua to rival the American-controlled Panama Canal.

The US used the killing of the mercenaries to increase its naval and Marine presence in the region. It now openly recognizes Nicaragua's rebel forces and their blockade of the nation's ports.

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