

This week in history: April 7-13

6 April 2025

25 years ago: Nazi revisionist historian David Irving loses libel case in the UK

On April 11, the high court in London ruled against British historian David Irving in his libel case against Deborah Lipstadt, professor of Modern Jewish and Holocaust Studies at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Irving accused Lipstadt and publisher Penguin Books of conspiring to permanently damage his career as an historian.

Irving had attempted to whitewash Nazi crimes in the interests of Hitler's political rehabilitation, promoting the denial of the Holocaust, the extermination of the Jews at Nazi concentration camps. He also argued that Hitler was either unaware of the genocidal "Final Solution" or actively opposed its implementation.

Lipstadt, in her 1993 book *Denying the Holocaust—the Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*, branded Irving a "right-wing writer of historical works" and "one of the most dangerous spokespersons for holocaust denial." She went on to say that Irving "bends" historical evidence "until it conforms with his ideological leanings and political agenda. A man who is convinced that Britain's great decline was accelerated by its decision to go to war with Germany, he is most facile at taking accurate information and shaping it to confirm his conclusions."

Lipstadt's defense team called on professionals in the field of European, German and Modern History. Richard Evans, for example, historian and professor at Cambridge University, scrutinized Irving's books, documents, citations, and methods for years. He argued on the stand that, "if we mean by historian someone who is concerned to discover the truth about the past, and to give as accurate a representation of it as possible, then Irving is not a historian." One of the most egregious examples he cited was the deliberate utilization of forged documents to buttress Irving's revisionist arguments.

In the end, Judge Charles Gray called Irving "a racist, an anti-Semite, an active Holocaust denier, who associates with right-wing extremists." In terms of the responsibilities of a professional historian, the judge said "Irving has for his own ideological reasons persistently and deliberately

misrepresented and manipulated historical evidence" and his arguments "have a distinct air of unreality about them".

While the case made its way through the court system, an extradition warrant from Germany accused Irving of racial incitement for a speech given at a neo-Nazi Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands event.

50 years ago: Final major battle of Vietnam War

On April 9, 1975, the Battle of Xuan Loc began, marking the last major military effort by the US-backed South Vietnamese regime to stave off defeat in the Vietnam War. The loss by the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) underscored the total dependence of the Saigon government on direct American military intervention, which had been withdrawn as a result of the Paris Peace Accords.

Situated 40 miles northeast of Saigon, Xuan Loc was designated by South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu as the linchpin of the capital city's defense. Thieu committed nearly half of his remaining forces—roughly 12,000 troops, including the elite 18th Division and airborne brigades—to hold the town. The ARVN command pinned their hopes on wedging themselves into a prolonged stand that might force negotiations or last long enough to petition the US for military support.

Troops of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) and the National Liberation Front (NLF), bolstered by tanks and heavy artillery, launched their assault on Xuan Loc on April 9. Entrenched ARVN troops initially resisted, repelling frontal attacks and even staging localized counter-offensives. But by April 12, the PAVN had encircled Xuan Loc and cut off supply lines to Saigon.

Rather than engage in an all-out siege, PAVN commanders recognized they had trapped all the remaining significant military forces of the puppet regime in one city. They decided to simply wait until the ARVN ran out of supplies and even ordered several divisions to bypass the town entirely, advancing instead toward Bien Hoa Air Base to prepare for the final capture of Saigon. Isolated and deprived

of reinforcements, the ARVN garrison at Xuan Loc collapsed by April 21.

Over the course of a month, the PAVN had achieved a string of decisive victories across South Vietnam. Cities such as Hue, Da Nang, and Qui Nhon fell in rapid succession, as demoralized ARVN units retreated or disintegrated under the revolutionary forces' relentless advance.

Washington provided no direct military aid during this critical phase. US imperialism had suffered major setbacks in the recent period, including in Vietnam, in the Middle East during the Yom Kippur War, and as a result of the political crisis of the Watergate scandal that forced President Richard Nixon to resign. His unelected successor, Gerald Ford, rejected redeploying US troops to Vietnam to save the collapsing puppet regime, as it would risk massive political upheaval at home.

The fall of Xuan Loc shattered the last illusions of the Saigon regime's viability. With revolutionary forces closing in from multiple directions—including the Mekong Delta and Long An Province—panic gripped the capital. President Thieu resigned on April 21 and fled the country, while US officials scrambled to evacuate remaining personnel. On April 30, PAVN tanks would breach the gates of Saigon's Independence Palace, finally ending the war.

75 years ago: Truman administration issues program for Cold War militarization

On April 7, 1950, the United States National Security Council (NSC) presented its NSC-68 document to President Harry S. Truman. The document, officially titled "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," outlined a program for the vast expansion of US military capabilities during the opening years of the Cold War.

NSC-68 was drafted in immediate response to criticisms of Truman that he was not sufficiently responding to the "spread of Communism in Asia," as one Republican senator charged. US imperialism had been dealt a severe blow by the 1949 Chinese Revolution, which saw the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) establish the People's Republic of China after overthrowing the US-backed regime of Chiang Kai-shek. This, combined with the first successful detonation of an atomic weapon by the Soviet Union, led Secretary of State Dean Acheson to order a review of the US national security strategy.

The document was primarily drafted by Paul Nitze, Director of Policy Planning within Truman's State Department. Nitze was an advocate for the "rollback" strategy of US imperialism, which argued that the overthrow of the USSR was necessary to counter the threat it posed to US imperialist ambitions. It was this conception that was behind many of the proposals of NSC-68, which came to

form the basis for decades of US military interventions against the Soviet Union and its proxies throughout the Cold War.

By contrast, Nitze's predecessor, George Kennan, had been an advocate for the "containment" strategy, arguing that US foreign policy towards the Soviet Union should consist primarily of economic measures such as the Marshall Plan, rather than overt military force. The policy of "containment" had received pushback from elements within Truman's administration. Some argued that it was not nearly aggressive enough to maintain the dominant position that US imperialism had secured after World War II.

100 years: F. Scott Fitzgerald publishes *The Great Gatsby*

On April 10, 1925, Charles Scribner's Sons published F. Scott Fitzgerald's third novel, *The Great Gatsby*, considered by many readers to be one of the finest and most significant American novels.

By 1925 Fitzgerald was already a successful author, having published two novels, *This Side of Paradise* (1920) and *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), which were both critical and commercial successes, as well as numerous short stories. Fitzgerald wrote most of the novel in France after he had spent 1922 and 1923 living in Great Neck, Long Island, where he encountered, not for the first time, the life and sentiments of the very richest Americans.

The Great Gatsby, however, sold poorly in its first year—only 20,000 copies by October—and did not become well known to the public until the Second World War when the Council on Books in Wartime sent copies to American soldiers serving overseas.

Since that time the book has become a staple of high-school and college curricula, although there have been repeated attempts to ban it from school libraries by far right and Christian fundamentalist groups because of its supposedly profane language and references to sex.



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