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Source Exploration Essay
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A Biography Unknown: Author of a Well-Cited Report on Kristallnacht

David H. Buffum (1885 - 1941), the U.S. consul stationed in Leipzig, Germany from 1934 to 1940, wrote an appalling, vivid report of the horrific violence towards Jewish people that occurred all over Germany in November of 1938, commonly known as Kristallnacht. On November 9th in the early morning, S.S. men and Storm Troopers smashed windows of Jewish businesses, burned synagogues, and looted several apartments and homes. Buffum notes that, in addition to physical violence, large numbers of Jewish men were transported to concentration camps.

- From David H. Buffum, "Antisemitic Onslaught in Germany as Seen from Leipzig," doc. L-202, in Office of the United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), 7:1037-41¹

Samuel Honaker (1887 - 1966), a U.S. consul stationed in Stuttgart, Germany, also delivered a heart-wrenching report of the horrors of Kristallnacht in a letter to the U.S. ambassador in Berlin, Hugh R. Wilson.² Honaker began his report on November 12th, explaining the atrocities he witnessed Jews experience in this Nazi wave of terror. Like Buffum, he explains the sudden arrests of Jewish men, tragically separated from their wives and children and doomed to head to the concentration camps. Floods of Jews came to the U.S. consulate office in desperate hope of finding a means to leave Germany. Aside from the human brutality, Honaker describes the burning of nearly every synagogue in the area and the destruction of all Jewish businesses. He includes a detailed list of those stores affected, giving both their name and the type of business operation.

- Source of original text: American Consul Samuel Honaker's description of Anti-Semitic persecution and *Kristallnacht* and its aftereffects in the Stuttgart region (November 12 and November 15, 1938), State Central Decimal File (CDF) 862.4015/2002, Records of the Department of State in the National Archives, Record Group 59; reprinted in John Mendelsohn, ed., *The Holocaust: Selected Documents in Eighteen Volumes*. Vol. 3, New York: Garland, 1982, pp. 176-89.³

¹ Moeller, Robert G. "Report on Kristallnacht." *The Nazi State and German Society: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2010. 105-109.

² Biographical information on Honaker can be found at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sam_Honaker.

³ Breitman, R. (ed.). (n.d.). "American Consul Samuel Honaker's Description of Anti-Semitic Persecution and Kristallnacht and its Aftereffects in the Stuttgart Region (November 12 and November 15, 1938)." Retrieved from http://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1525

The goal of this source exploration was to learn more about David H. Buffum, the author of a well cited report on the events of Kristallnacht. It appeared there was no information on Buffum available online until I began to search into an alternate German consul, Samuel Honaker, who also wrote a compelling report on Kristallnacht. Upon finding that Honaker was named in a Register of the Department of State from 1941, as cited on his wikipedia page, I was able to find information on Buffum's life. I was intrigued that numerous sources cite Buffum's report without looking further into who he was, and nobody had taken the time to create a Wikipedia page on him. I then delved into the two reports to discover their similarities and differences and find a possible reason why there was so much more biographical information readily available on Honaker than Buffum.

In comparing the two similar reports on the events of Kristallnacht, it is notable that both are often cited in books, articles, and journals in the following decades. Both are cited with the same relative frequency, even though there is very limited information regarding Buffum's background. Honaker, on the other hand, has a dedicated wikipedia page and is referenced in various reports before being a consul in Stuttgart. It would be more logical if Honaker was more frequently cited due to the wealth of biographical background easily acquired about him. Buffum's report, however, was included as evidence in the Nuremberg trials, which perhaps lent it a level of credibility, regardless of the fact that little is known about the author. While Buffum's report generally received more exposure to the public, it was Honaker's report, and not Buffum's, which was included on the GHDI website. The GHDI website, short for German History in Documents and Images, is a wide database of primary source material covering Germany from the 1500s to present day. As both sources are eyewitness reports, it is possible that background knowledge on the author is not significant because no expertise is necessary to qualify as a proper eyewitness.

Another point of comparison between the two reports is the length of the excerpted passages, as cited in books and other sources. Buffum's original report, as published in 1938 by the American consulate, is 16 pages long. Honaker's letter from 1938 is roughly 4 pages long. However, neither is cited in its entirety, excluding in source collections. In the Nuremberg Trials, only 5 pages of Buffum's report was included as evidence. In most books, a sentence long quotation or paragraph is quoted in an effort to capture, from a firsthand perspective, what the events of Kristallnacht were truly like. It is difficult to pinpoint in which source collection authors who cited Buffum found their quotations. Citing an eyewitness of such an incredible event as Kristallnacht provides some verisimilitude to what seems unbelievable today. As an author trying to convey a point to readers, the use of a direct source from the event provides stronger evidence than a mere summary.

With the alarming amount of information the United States knew of the inhumanity and abuse occurring in Nazi Germany from consuls, it is shocking that no action was taken to provide relief or prevent further injustice. While the U.S. did take in some refugees, many were refused or turned away, such as the famous MS St. Louis whose Jewish passengers were then fated to concentration camps upon returning to Germany. The U.S. provided some aid to the

Allies before formally joining the war in 1941, but it is perplexing that President Roosevelt or Congress did not propose to intervene in the human rights violations in Germany. If I were to expand this project further, I'd explore the American public reaction to events in Nazi Germany as reported from consuls and other officials abroad.

Annotated Bibliography in Chronological Order on Buffum:

- Buffum, D. H. (1938). *Anti-semitic Onslaught in Germany as Seen from Leipzig*. American Consulate.

Buffum's entire 16 page piece was published in 1938 and there are two copies, one at Harvard University and one at Harvard College Library. An excerpt from this publication was used for evidence in the Nuremberg Trials in 1946.

- *Register of the Department of State*. (1941). Washington: Government Printing Office.

Providing detailed information of his early life, where he was stationed, and when he died, the register of the Department of the State held Buffum's entire military record. A screenshot of his record in the register is included here. ([google books snippet](#))

Buffum, David Harry.—b. Dorchester, Mass., Sept. 15, 1895; Phillips Exeter; Yale 1914–17; U. S. Army 1917–19; newspaper reporter 1919–23; app. clk. in Am. consulate at Danzig July 1923; at Leghorn Feb. 7, 1928; v.c. at Leghorn Mar. 19, 1928; at Palermo Dec. 23, 1929; For. Ser. officer unclass., v.c. of career, and sec. in the Diplo. Ser. Aug. 16, 1930; v.c. at Palermo Aug. 30, 1930; at Leipzig Nov. 22, 1934; class eight, cons., and cons. at Leipzig Oct. 1, 1935; class seven May 1, 1938; cons. at Trieste Apr. 19, 1940; to the Dept. Jan. 25, 1941; died in Baltimore May 9, 1941.

- United States., Office of Chief of Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality. (1946). *Nuremberg International Military Trials: Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* (Vol. 7, pp. 1037-1041). Washington D.C.: U.S. G.P.O.

David Buffum's report on the night of Kristallnacht is published as evidence in the International Nuremberg Trials. In this instance, his piece was truncated to 5 pages, but in other sources it has varying page lengths. Unable to receive a scan of the full length version as published by the American consulate, comparing what was left out in the Nuremberg Trial evidence to the full version is not feasible. However, I can compare what is in the trials (pp. 1037-41) to Moeller's excerpt. Moeller utilizes the full excerpt that is provided in the trials apart from a few introductory sentences and a few sentences removed from one paragraph on pp. 107 replaced by ellipses. The removed sentences from the trial say, "It is stated upon authority believed to be reliable, that most of the evening was employed in drawing up lists of fated victims. Several persons known to this office were aware at 9 P.M. on the evening of November 9, 1938 that the "spontaneous" outrage was scheduled for that night sometime after midnight and several of such persons interviewed, stayed up purposely to witness it"(pp. 1039). Moeller likely removed such sentences because they are essentially summarized in the sentence right before which says that "The whole lamentable affair was organized in such a sinister fashion, as to lend credence to the theory that the execution of it had involved studied preparation."

A pdf of vol. VII is available at this link: https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/NT_Nazi_conspiracy.html.

- Noakes, J., & Pridham, G. (1984). *Nazism 1919-1945: State, Economy and Society 1933-39*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press. Vol. 2, pp. 554-556.

This excerpt of Buffum's work is only about 2 pages long, in which the authors have plucked the most horrific scenes depicted to emphasize their point of the extreme violence against Jewish people on that night. This excerpt is the same as Moeller's, except the opening paragraph of the report was removed which provides background information on the event that pertains specifically to Leipzig. If Noakes and Pridham wished to focus on the details of Kristallnacht, the details involving Leipzig are irrelevant.

- Gilbert, M. (1985). *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War* (pp. 70). New York, NY: Henry Holt.

Gilbert's book only references Buffum with a few short paraphrases and quotations clipped from his report to describe the destruction of the synagogues and other Jewish sites in the city.

The destruction of the synagogues led the Nazis to call that night the *Kristallnacht*, or 'night of broken glass': words chosen deliberately to mock and belittle. From Leipzig, the United States Consul, David H. Buffum, reported that the three main synagogues, set on fire simultaneously, 'were irreparably gutted by flames'. At the Jewish cemetery in Leipzig the Nazis practised 'tactics which approached the ghoulish', uprooting tombstones and violating graves. In the city itself, Buffum reported, 'Having demolished dwellings and hurled most of the effects to the streets, the insatiably sadistic perpetrators threw many of the trembling inmates into a small stream that flows through the Zoological Park, commanding horrified spectators to spit at them, defile them with mud and jeer at their plight.'¹⁰

- Deem, J. M. (2012). *Kristallnacht: The Nazi Terror that Began the Holocaust* (pp. 13). Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow.

Buffum's report is used here as primary evidence of the events that occurred on the night of Kristallnacht. In the image below, the quotation taken from Buffum is drastically abbreviated from the source used in the Nuremberg Trials. Honaker's report, discussed further down in this source exploration, is also included in this book.

In one of the Jewish [neighborhoods] an eighteen year old boy was hurled from a three story window to land with both legs broken on a street littered with burning beds and other household furniture and effects from his family's and other apartments. . . . Three synagogues in Leipzig were fired simultaneously by incendiary bombs and all sacred objects and records desecrated or destroyed, in most instances hurled through the windows and burned in the streets. . . .¹⁵

- Niewyk, D. L., & Nicosia, F. R. (2012). *The Columbia Guide to the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press.

In explaining a larger history of Nazi Germany, this book also uses Buffum's report to describe the events of Kristallnacht. Buffum's report is only referenced for a few sentences to add an explicit account of the night. Page numbers are not available online, but the excerpt can be found in the "Excluding the "Racially Inferior", 1933-1939 section of the Historical Overview Chapter.

- Blumenthal, W. M. (2015). *From Exile to Washington: A Memoir of Leadership in the Twentieth Century*. New York, NY: The Overlook Press, Peter Mayer.

This personal memoir, uses Buffum's report to detail the events of Kristallnacht in Blumenthal's timeline of events in Germany. Buffum's report is not even given a full paragraph, but a single sentence to describe the general American view towards the ongoing events in Germany.

were actually murdered. The American consul in Leipzig, David Buffum, described the pogroms as the carefully organized work of Nazi fanatics: "Having demolished dwellings and hurled most of the movable effects onto the streets, the insatiably sadistic perpetrators threw many of the trembling inmates into a small stream that flows through the Zoological Park, commanding horrified spectators to spit at them, defile them with mud and jeer at their plight.... The slightest manifestation of sympathy evoked a positive fury on the part of the perpetrators, and the crowd was powerless to do anything but turn horror-stricken eyes from the scene of

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abuse, or leave the vicinity."² Soon thereafter Jews were excluded by law from every conceivable area of German life,

- Bartrop, P. R., & Dickerman, M. (2017). *The Holocaust: An Encyclopedia and Document Collection* (Vol. 1) (pp. 1180). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

This document collection, found in Google Books, has a larger section of Buffum's report than most. However, as a document collection similar to Moeller's, it is logical that a larger section of the report would be provided as compared to a textbook which is making a larger point. Honaker's report, discussed further down in this source exploration, is also included in this source collection. This source includes about half the text of the report that Moeller does.

Annotated Bibliography in Chronological Order on Honaker:

- *Register of the Department of State*. (1943). Washington: Government Printing Office.
Honaker's military record was found in the register of the Department of the State, giving detailed information of his early life, where he was stationed, and when he died. He is found in registers dating back as early as 1915 and as late as 1941.

Honaker, Samuel William.—b. Tampa, Fla., Mar. 14, 1887; Bingham Sch.; U. of Va., A.B., A.M.; app. clk. in Am. consulate gen. at Rio de Janeiro Mar. 1913; dep. cons. gen. at Rio de Janeiro July 19, 1913; v.c. at Rio de Janeiro Feb. 6, 1915; aide, 2d Pan Am. Scientific Cong., Washington, 1915-16; at Johannesburg Jan. 18, 1916; cons. of class eight Feb. 19, 1918; on detail at Johannesburg; class six Sept. 5, 1919; detailed to Lourenço Marques Mar. 7, 1921; class five Nov. 21, 1921; to the Dept. May 6, 1922; class four Mar. 1, 1923; detailed to Kingston, Jamaica, Dec. 24, 1923; to Teheran June 23, 1924; For. Ser. officer of class five July 1, 1924; class four Sept. 20, 1924; cons. at Smyrna Oct. 30, 1924; to the Dept. Nov. 19, 1926; cons. at Port au Prince July 12, 1927; at Berne Sept. 12, 1929; class three Aug. 15, 1930; cons. gen. Dec. 17, 1931; cons. gen. at Glasgow Dec. 22, 1931; at Stuttgart June 20, 1934; sec. in the Diplo. Ser. Aug. 17, 1937; class two Mar. 1, 1939; to the Dept. Jan. 31, 1941; cons. gen. at Istanbul July 17, 1941; to the Dept. Oct. 20, 1942; retired Oct. 31, 1943 under the provisions of the act of Feb. 23, 1931, as amended; married.

- Rider, F. (Ed.). (1919). *The Current Business Cyclopedia: Business Digest* (Vol. 5). USA: Arrow Publishing Corporation

Found on Google Books, this is a business encyclopedia, a detailed digest from January to June of 1919, describing how well American goods were selling in various parts of the world. Honaker is responsible for a report of British South Africa, where he was acting as vice consul in Rhodesia and Johannesburg.

- Carmody, F. J. (Ed.). (1922). *The Minute Book* (Vol. 1). San Francisco, CA: California Almond Growers Exchange.

Found on Google Books, this minute book references Honaker while he was a consul in Turkey, where he gave reports on almond production there.

- *American Foreign Service Journal* (11th ed., Vol. 13). (1936). Washington D.C.: American Foreign Service Association.

Both David H. Buffum and Samuel Honaker's photos are located in this journal of American



foreign service representatives.

- Truman, H. (n.d.). Harry S. Truman to Samuel Honaker, with related material, January 5, 1939. Truman Papers, Senate and Vice-Presidential Papers. Immigration Cases: Richter, Rabbi Karl. [Letter written January 5, 1939 to Mr. Honaker].

This letter is from Harry Truman, during his time as a senator before his presidency, to Mr. Honaker in Stuttgart, regarding the issue of immigration to America and a rabbi receiving an affidavit. This letter, easily found via Google from trumanlibrary.org, shows Honaker's involvement as a consul in Germany and lends credibility to him as a source, whereas no additional documents from Buffum's time as a consul are easily found.

- John Mendelsohn, ed., *The Holocaust: Selected Documents in Eighteen Volumes*. Vol. 3, New York: Garland, 1982, pp. 176-89.

This book was cited in 1988 in the journal of Holocaust remembrance of Kristallnacht as the source of the excerpts from Buffum and Honaker.

- *Night of Pogroms: "Kristallnacht," November 9-10, 1938*. (1988). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council.

This journal of Holocaust remembrance of Kristallnacht includes both very short excerpts from David H. Buffum and Samuel Honaker as notable reports from American diplomats. Both excerpts were said to be found in John Mendelsohn, ed., *The Holocaust: Selected Documents in Eighteen Volumes*. Vol. 3, New York: Garland, 1982, pp. 176-89.