

Why did kristallnacht take place essay



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(a) A historian studying Kristallnacht would probably find both sources useful, though in different ways. Source A describes that because Goebbels was 'out of favour with Hitler' at this point in 1934, launching the attack on Synagogues and Jewish shops would 'win back Hitler's support'. Source B is an extract from a secret report prepared by the Nazi Party Supreme Court after the events of Kristallnacht. This source talks about how the uprising had been initiated by the public where Jewish shops and synagogues had been demolished.

The source explains how Goebbels told the party on the evening of 9th November that there had been 'anti-Jewish' demonstrations. 'Fritz Hesse' who was a journalist that worked for the Nazis wrote source A. Hesse infers that Goebbels planned Kristallnacht, and the SA executed the events of Kristallnacht on his orders, so it was not a spontaneous attack. Whilst Hitler was not part of the actual plan, he was nevertheless delighted by the events. Hesse wrote his account in 1934, and this is a summary produced of this, obviously at a later date by an historian.

Hesse recollected this account, roughly sixteen years after the evening. This could have affected Hesse's account in two ways. In sixteen years he may have forgotten, or misjudged some events that took place on the evening. Also within those sixteen years his views of the events may have changed which may have led him to invent his own details. Although Hesse was a journalist, making his report more reliable as his job was to report an accurate overview of the events.

Also, a significant point to make in regard to what the historian has done is that it is a 'summary' of Hesse's account, and some important information may have been excluded from the source, or details could have been lost or altered. Though this is relatively unlikely, as it is an historian who produced this summary and would therefore have no reason for changing the reasoning behind the account. Therefore the only question is the reliability of Hesse's original account. Hesse worked for the Nazis, and therefore could have been present when this meeting happened, making it a primary source. It was written after the war, so he would have been uncensored and without repercussions, as he didn't have to be scared of being sent to a concentration camp. Although Hesse could have been distancing himself from the Nazis, by showing Hitler and the Nazis in a very bad light.

Goebbels knew that an anti-Semitic attack would please Hitler, which is backed up in the source; 'there was no doubting Hitler's approval'. It is true that Goebbels was 'out of favour with Hitler' at this point, as he had had a public affair with a rebellious film star, and Hitler was not happy. All power derived from Hitler, so it is believable that Goebbels would want to win back his favour. Source B is an extract from a secret report prepared by the Nazi Party Supreme Court after the events of Kristallnacht.

This source talks about how the uprising had been initiated by the public where Jewish shops and synagogues had been demolished. The source explains how Dr Goebbels told the party on the evening of 9 November that there had been 'anti-Jewish' demonstrations. It had apparently been decided that 'such demonstrations were not to be organised by the party, but neither were they to be discouraged if they started spontaneously'.

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Therefore saying that it was a spontaneous attack. Source B is from a 'secret' report; meaning that it was for only Nazi eyes.

Therefore meaning that the Nazis had no reason to lie in it, as it was not being presented to the public. This makes it seem more reliable. However, in looking at what had happened, it seems that Goebbels 'encouraged a nationwide press campaign to help "stir" trouble'. Also, at a dinner to commemorate the Munich Putsch, Goebbels 'called for von Rath's death to be avenged'.

These pieces of evidence do point towards riots conducted by Goebbels. It may have been, as stated in source A, that Goebbels was out of favour with Hitler and that he was trying to win back support from his leader. Overall, source B is very useful to show how the Nazi party wanted the perception of events to seem, but on balance Source A is more useful in order to know the true course of events. (b) Source C is an account by David Buffman, the American Consul in Leipzig.

Buffman was an American diplomat- his job was to be the eyes and ears of America in order to give America an impression of what was going on in Germany. Along with the fact that the account was written at the time- making it a primary source, this makes it a very reliable, as he would have no reason to lie because he was American and was therefore safe from the wrath of the Nazis' censorship. He reaccounts that the Nazi press described Kristallnacht as 'a spontaneous wave of anger', though contradicting this by saying; 'the local crowds were obviously horrified by the Nazis' acts', thus suggesting that it was not a spontaneous attack on the Jews. Buffman

describes to us what the Nazi press claims as the origin of the shattering of shop windows as ‘ a spontaneous wave of anger, as a result of the cowardly Jewish murder of Von Roth in Paris. ‘ Ernst von Roth was an official for the German Embassy in Paris and the Jewish man shot him dead on the basis of revenge for the mistreatment of his parents by the Nazis.

Buffman goes on to say that the local people were ‘ obviously horrified by the Nazis’ acts’; he is obviously accusing the Nazis of committing vile acts of vandalism and murder, which he conveys by using the general public’s apparent views. Buffman then discloses how ‘ one reliable source’ told him that the violence was committed by SS men and Stormtroopers ‘ not in uniform’; and that there had been ‘ no attempts made to put out the fires’ of the Jewish burning buildings. This supports his original opinion that this was not a spontaneous attack, as the SS men and Stormtroopers had already ‘ been provided with hammers, axes and fire bombs’ before it even started. The source is completely challenging the Nazis’, making them out to look immoral and corrupt. Buffman also clearly completely opposes the acts when he claims that; ‘ The slightest sign of sympathy for the Jews from the public caused fury among the Nazis’. Buffman is suggesting in this source that Kristallnacht was planned, but the Nazis’ are pretending it is spontaneous, which he conveys by claiming that the troops were ‘ not in uniform’.

The ‘ transportation to concentration camps of male German Jews’ would obviously have been planned beforehand- backing up Buffman’s point that this was not a spontaneous attack. Source C gives the impression that Kristallnacht was not a spontaneous attack on the Jews, although the Nazis’ wanted the public to think so, in order to prevent themselves seeming

corrupt or 'hideous'. This suggests conspiracy, as the public were kept in the dark from the truth about the real reasons of Kristallnacht, which was a massive landmark in their own history. (c) Source D is stating that acts of terror against Jews were already being committed even before Kristallnacht; 'notices reading 'Jews not wanted' appeared in various shops and cinemas'. The events written about in Source D describe the situation before and leading up to Kristallnacht and give the impression that there had been unrest building up amongst the German people, against the Jews, for some time before; 'there was unrest amongst the masses'.

This seems reliable, as it is true that in 1934 the Nuremberg Laws made life for Jews very bad, for reasons such as propaganda and the anti-Semitic education. This meant that attacks on Jews were more common at this time, so not supporting Source C in saying that Kristallnacht was spontaneous. This now questions the reliability of source C. Source D was written by a German Jew, which naturally makes it more reliable, as this was probably a personal experience. Although it could have been true that although anti-Semitism was building up around this time, the attack may still have been organised by the Nazis'.

Source D makes Source C less reliable, as it contradicts it entirely. Whilst source C claims that 'the violence was carried out by SS men and Stormtroopers', source D clearly states that Kristallnacht could have been spontaneous as 'already for a few weeks there had been signs of unrest among the masses'. Although source D could have been entirely false as the Jew who wrote it would naturally have been afraid of the Nazis and could have changed the facts in order to stay safe. Source E is a note sent on 12

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November 1938, to the British Consul in Cologne, Germany. It was signed a 'Civil Servant.' In this source it completely supports source C in saying that 'most German people had nothing to do with these riots and burnings' of the Jewish shops.

It supports C further by saying that 'the police supplied men with axes, housebreaking tools and ladders', similar to where C says; 'they had been provided with hammers, axes and fire bombs'. These sources agree and so this makes the other information in source C more reliable. However, we don't know who wrote source E, as it was only signed 'a civil servant'. This definitely questions the reliability, as the writer could have been biased. But in theory a civil servant should be a supporter of the Nazis- so would have to send it anonymously as they would have been in a dilemma if a Nazi had found out what was in this letter, meaning it is reliable, as they would have no reason to lie about Kristallnacht.

Furthermore, the fact that it agrees so much with C increases its reliability. Source C is an account by David Buffman, the American Consul in Leipzig. Buffman was an American diplomat- his job was to be the eyes and ears of America in order to give America an impression of what was going on in Germany. Along with the fact that the account was written at the time- making it a primary source, this makes it a very reliable, as he would have no reason to lie because he was American and was therefore safe from the wrath of the Nazis' censorship. He recounts that the Nazi press described Kristallnacht as 'a spontaneous wave of anger', though contradicting this by saying; 'the local crowds were obviously horrified by the Nazis' acts', thus suggesting that it was not a spontaneous attack on the Jews.

Buffman describes to us what the Nazi press claims as the origin of the shattering of shop windows as ‘ a spontaneous wave of anger, as a result of the cowardly Jewish murder of Von Roth in Paris. ‘ Ernst von Roth was an official for the German Embassy in Paris and the Jewish man shot him dead on the basis of revenge for the mistreatment of his parents by the Nazis. Buffman goes on to say that the local people were ‘ obviously horrified by the Nazis’ acts’; he is obviously accusing the Nazis of committing vile acts of vandalism and murder, which he conveys by using the general public’s apparent views. Overall, Source E makes it more likely that the account given in source C is reliable, as they both agree that Kristallnacht was not a spontaneous, but a planned attack. But Source D disagrees with them both, suggesting that it could have been a spontaneous attack because of the build up of anti-Jewish feeling before Kristallnacht. This at first would seem to make source C less reliable, although the fact that source C and E agree so much perhaps indicates that source D is not reliable at all.

Source E states quite clearly that these acts of violence and house breaking were carried out by SS men who were supplied with the necessary equipment and local knowledge by the Police. So clearly the whole operation was planned and carried out by the State. This account is all the more believable, and therefore supportive of source C because it was written by a German civil servant – somebody who was involved and would have knowledge of such plans of the State.