New Perspectives on Kristallnacht

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CHAPTER 5

A Scream, Then Silence. Kristallnacht and the American Journalists in Nazi Germany: The “Night of Broken Glass” as an Unwanted Transnational Media Event

by Norman Domeier

If things had gone according to the intent of the propaganda in the “Third Reich,” the November Pogrom of 1938—the “Night of Broken Glass”—would not have been a full-scale media event. The decision-makers among the Nazi leaders—Hitler and Goebbels—did want the excesses of violence, as they occurred, and perhaps even in a more radical form. The world public, they initially believed, might accept crimes against a defenceless minority, perhaps even condone it, as was the case with many coups of Nazi policy since 1933. In the German press that had been forced into line, the National Socialist regime could reframe and minimise the events of the pogrom from November 7–14, 1938.

The international press, however, especially the American press, which had a strong presence in Berlin, would not be controlled, as this article will show. Quite the contrary: the events in question were reported quickly and truthfully to the United States (and thus to a global audience), and criticised in a manner devastating for the prestige of Hitler’s Germany, which had reached its zenith with the Munich Agreement. Even National Socialist sympathisers in the foreign press, such as George Ward Price, turned away from the regime.1
The enormous loss of prestige and social capital, in Bourdieu’s sense, was caused not necessarily because the foreign journalists were offended by the persecution of the Jews—the beginning of what we call the “Holocaust” today.² No, most of the foreign sympathisers of the regime now realised, that they would soon have to choose sides in a coming European war.³ Hitler’s government left no doubt in two respects: a war was looming, and it would bring with it the destruction of the European Jews. In Hitler’s infamous speech on January 30, 1939, he declared a nexus of the dynamic of war and genocide. This became gruesome reality until the last days of National Socialist rule in spring 1945. This speech by Hitler was the mental conclusion, derived from Nazi ideology, of the November Pogrom of 1938, and the start of the phase of European global expansion and genocide.⁴

Looking at secondary literature on the persecution of Jews in the Third Reich, which also takes news coverage into account, the November Pogrom of 1938 is remarkably underexposed. Hence, this chapter is an attempt to reconstruct the coverage of the pogrom by the leading American foreign correspondents. Hitherto, scholars emphasized that American journalism provided highly selective, ideologically biased, partially anti-Semitic and, in general, inaccurate articles on the persecution of Jews in Hitler’s Germany, both by the standards of the time and of today.⁵

This perspective is closely connected with a key problem in the history of media and journalism regarding the Holocaust: the striking silence in the American press on the murder of the European Jews. Especially after America entered the war in December 1941, there could have been numerous occasions for large-scale coverage on front pages, even for press campaigns against the murder of the Jews. But until the liberation of the first concentration camps by Allied troops, there were only scattered references to massacres and pogroms somewhere in the East. “Buried,” as Laurel Leff fittingly put it, in the daily mass of newspaper information, also-ran features on the last pages of the quality papers.⁶ This phase of silence also included a lack of images. During 1942 until 1944, not one picture in the Allied mass media is known that depicted the Holocaust.

By contrast, the “Night of Broken Glass,” from November 9–10, 1938, was an event reported in great detail in the international media. The focus is on four American journalists, who held long-term accreditations in Nazi Germany, and who each received Pulitzer Prizes between 1934 and 1940 for their reports from the “Third Reich”: Otto Tolischus and Frederick Birchall from the New York Times, their direct competitor Ralph Barnes from the New
York Herald Tribune, and one of the most well-known and influential foreign correspondents in Germany, Louis P. Lochner, Chief Correspondent of the New York news agency Associated Press (AP). As the largest news agency in the world, AP supplied hundreds of newspapers in the United States and worldwide with their reports.

QUICK AND DETAILED PRESS COVERAGE AFTER THE ASSASSINATION IN PARIS

Here and there, windows were smashed, synagogues had caught fire or went up in flames some other way. The reports should [not] be made up too big, no headlines on the front page. For now, no pictures. No collective reports from the whole Reich, but it may be reported that similar actions were conducted throughout the country. No individual case studies. Local events can be reported in detail. All of this only on the second or third page. If comments are considered necessary, they must be short and say, for instance, that the understandable outrage of the population found its expression in this spontaneous answer to the murder of the attaché.\(^7\)

This press directive from the Ministry of Propaganda reflects how the Nazi regime wanted to see “Crystal Night” portrayed in the media, in other words, which “truth” it intended to impose on the people under its rule. The German press, which was no longer edited by journalists, but by “editors” (Schriftleiter) and thus by National Socialist functionaries, was forced to execute.\(^8\) Deviations, mistakes and editorial errors, especially in regional papers, were punished, sometimes with draconic measures. The system of press directives had already been in place for several years, and worked to perfection by 1938.\(^9\)

The problem was the foreign correspondents in Berlin, most notably those from the United States and Great Britain, who were not only major powers in military, but also in media terms. American foreign correspondents generally had something close to an allergic reaction when they had the feeling they were being duped by an official National Socialist interpretation of events. By 1938, they hardly had anything in common anymore with their German “colleagues.” Speed and exclusiveness of the news item counted: the “scoop” was the fuel for the American journalists. Already on the 8th of November, one day after the assassination of the German diplomat Ernst vom Rath in
Paris, the American public knew everything about the events. Vom Rath was still alive when, on November 8, the news agency United Press (UP) reported from Berlin that leading National Socialists declared: “The Jewish Question will now find its own solution.” And the American press was everywhere, not only in Berlin. Its resources were considerable, with unrestricted mobility in the German Reich, but also in Europe. Every means of transport was used, including the expensive and exclusive airplane routes of the time, in order to beat the competition. The major competitor of UP, Associated Press (AP), had their own journalists at the celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of the attempted Putsch in Munich, on the evening of November 9, 1938. Hitler’s commemorative speech was recorded and analysed minutely. The American newspapers that had subscribed to AP reported on November 9, that the “Führer” had attacked the Jews in general, and blamed them for the catastrophe after the First World War. The first indications of anti-Semitic action were mentioned in the AP report, such as the Berlin Head of Police Count Helldorf having all Jews disarmed, and attacks on the synagogues of Kassel and Dessau.

Two correspondents based in Berlin, and competing directly for readers in New York, Otto Tolischus (New York Times) and Ralph Barnes (New York Herald Tribune), were also admirably well-informed. Already on November 8, Tolischus pointed out to his readers the plans of revenge of a regime, which interpreted the deed of seventeen-year-old Herschel Grynszpan as a “new plot of the Jewish world conspiracy against National Socialist Germany.” Tolischus indicated that the entire commercial activity of the Jews in Germany would probably be brought to an end.

But the scoop of having reported about the “Night of Broken Glass” before anyone else goes to Frederick Birchall, Tolischus’ boss in the office of the New York Times in Berlin. “The correspondent going off late watch in the New York Times bureau in Berlin,” Birchall writes of himself in his memoirs, “saw some sort of racket in progress in the Leipzigerstrasse at three o’clock in the morning of Thursday, November 10, 1938. After a quick look, he hurried to a telephone and called a colleague out of bed. Between them they told a sensational story in the same morning’s paper in New York. It was the story of Berlin’s Anti-Semitic terror.” Already in 1934, Birchall had won the Pulitzer Prize in “Correspondence” for his reports on the National Socialist “revolution” of 1933. In his articles after 1933, Birchall concentrated on the persecution of political enemies and disliked minorities such as the Jews. As the press critic George Seldes granted in 1937: “None but Nazis have found fault with a single word or line in the Birchall dispatches.”
The report of Ralph Barnes, printed on November 10th in the New York Herald Tribune, illustrates how chaotic things were in the Berlin offices of the American press from November 9–10, 1938. This included a wireless report from UP, which was probably added in New York, to support the second heading: “Police-Controlled Reign of Terror Is Planned.” It also mentioned the fact that “half a million Jews in Germany lived through a night of a police-controlled regime of ruthless persecution.” The report was compiled hastily, with two levels of narrative time, but it was nonetheless accurate and, above all, it arrived fast. The German public, on the other hand, was informed of vom Rath’s state of health, but could read nothing about the excesses of violence against the Jews directed from above.

What was not known at the time was the individual behaviour of many American foreign correspondents, who offered shelter to persecuted Jews. Years later, in 1943, AP Chief Correspondent Louis Lochner wrote in his book, What About Germany?, that for him, Crystal Night is always connected with a sense of pride of being American: “During that hideous night, when no Jew dared remain in his home for fear he might be tortured or murdered, there was not an American house in Berlin which did not offer shelter to some Jewish fugitive from Nazi terror.” His opposite number at UP, Frederick C. Oechsner and his wife, also took in Jews too frightened to return home. “A later check-up revealed,” Lochner wrote, “that Americans generally regarded it as their self-evident duty to shield the Jews.”

THE CRUSHING CRITICISM IN THE AMERICAN PRESS AND THE PROPAGANDA STRATEGY OF THE NAZI LEADERSHIP

The American correspondents enjoyed reporting openly, which had continued to be a thorn in the side of the Nazi Leadership since 1933. But now the pipe burst. Otto Tolischus’ article in the New York Times, dated November 10, 1938, may be considered one of the most depressing descriptions of the “Night of Broken Glass,” and one of the most severe journalistic reckonings with the “Third Reich.” The headline, “Reich Swept by Anti-Jew Terrorism,” left no doubt as to what Tolischus thought of the German authorities. In a wide historical arc, he termed the excesses of the last few hours a “wave of destruction, looting and incendiarism, unparalleled in Germany since the Thirty Years’ War and in Europe generally since the bolshevist revolution.” Tolischus
also included moving episodes in his account of the larger events: “Foreign embassies in Berlin and consulates throughout the country were besieged by frantic telephone calls and by persons, particularly weeping women and children, begging help that could not be given them.”

Ralph Barnes, Tolischus’ competitor on the New York media market, kept this pace in his articles for the *New York Herald Tribune*. “An Anti-Semitic terror, unprecedented in civilized countries since the Middle Ages, was sweeping the Greater Reich today as Nazi authorities, ably supported by mobs, dealt blow upon blow against the panic-stricken 500,000 persons who now compose German Jewry.” And on the next day, November 12: “Hence the terror may be said to have passed from its gangster orgy-stage, marked by man hunts, pillage and destruction of Jewish property—including the burning, bombing and defiling of synagogues—to what might be termed a ‘legal stage.’”

Also on the side of the National Socialist propaganda apparatus, this was an exceptional situation. No foreign correspondent was threatened with serious consequences for newspaper articles, which in more peaceful times had led to immediate expulsion from the Reich. But this concern remained. “There are rumors of impending expulsions of American correspondents,” noted Wallace Deuel on November 22, 1938. The regime was still “much annoyed with the reporting of the ‘action of punishment and education.’”

In light of the “rampage” in the foreign newspapers, as Goebbels called the international press war on the November Pogrom, small measures such as individual expulsion would hardly have any effect. Instead, Goebbels, as the head of the Reich propaganda ministry, spoke himself before foreign correspondents on November 11, 1938, where he did not apologise, but went over to the offensive. One of the crucial and most intelligent arguments of National Socialist propaganda in a crisis was to place the excesses in a global context, and thus relativize them. Many foreign correspondents drew historic comparisons, and complementary to this, the German press ran week-long stories on the British Empire in Palestine. The aim of putting the crimes committed in Germany into perspective succeeded to a certain extent. “Is it humane to fight Arab nationalism with wholesale executions and the dynamiting of entire blocks of houses in the name of British civilisation?” This was an argument given from the National Socialist propaganda authorities, which even the *Manchester Guardian*, critical of colonialism, was receptive to. Since this argument was reproduced almost identically by the entire German press, however, many foreign correspondents in Berlin criticised the evident “orchestration” of German newspapers by a “higher source,” which meant, of course, Goebbels.
course of November 11, Goebbels prepared an article justifying the events for the next day’s edition of the Völkischer Beobachter, which was also circulated among the foreign correspondents. The author did not intend to calm the outrage in newspapers abroad, but provoked even further by outright blackmail, stating that the Jews in the United States should better keep quiet, if they did not want to cause harm to their co-religionists in Germany. Ralph Barnes filled the title page of the New York Herald Tribune on November 12, 1938 with the inflammatory words of the German Minister of Propaganda.

The British press also seized on Goebbels’ open threat, that the Jewish Question would now be solved systematically. “The hatred in the foreign press does not worry us. Germany is safe, and no one will be permitted to protest if we fight these troublesome parasites.” In Goebbels’ diary, he reflected on the situation: “My appeal worked wonders. The Jews can even be grateful to me. The foreign press is very negative. Especially in the US. I receive the Berlin foreign correspondents and explain the whole question to them. That impresses them. Then, I dictate a spirited essay for the German press. Here, the problem is described and explained for our own public.”

The German press tried to hush the pogrom up, and only to provide the barest information necessary. German newspapers were banned, “until further notice,” from publishing photographs of the events. But the Berlin
AP office would not be intimidated. AP was able to use its technologically advanced radio-photo-system, and send its own pictures, which had been transported by airplane from Berlin to Copenhagen, from there via London and New York with their transmitters to its subscribers all over the world. In a 1983 interview with photo historians, the head of the photography section of AP Germany in the 1930’s, Günter Beukert, remembered that AP had its four best photographers out in the streets of Berlin to document the riots.

The (attempted) photo ban on behalf of the National Socialists was discussed in *Life* on November 26, 1938. The journal was proud to be able to show the few photos, which had made it out of the Reich, including one of the New Jewish Synagogue in the Prinzregentenstraße in flames. Smugly, the magazine contrasted the images of destruction and suffering with pictures of the baptism of Göring’s daughter Edda, which showed “Germany’s two head men,” Hitler and Göring, playing with the child.

AP Chief Correspondent Louis Lochner commented on the “liberal” position of the National Socialist propaganda system towards foreign press

![Life magazine, November 26, 1938. Left: the New Jewish Synagogue in the Prinzregentenstraße in flames; right: German citizens outside a Jewish-owned shop.](image-url)
reporting on Jewish topics. “So blind were the Nazis in their hatred of the Jew that they had less objection to truthful reporting on anti-Semitic measures and action than on almost any other manifestation of Nazi-regimented German life.” Perhaps this explains why there were no post-factum sanctions against the precipitate photo-sending by AP, or why no American or British foreign correspondent faced consequences for their coverage of the November Pogrom. Lochner reported regularly about the persecution of Jews in Germany, just like the entire American press corps in Berlin. “American correspondents in Germany were unceasing in their vigilance concerning new manifestations of anti-Semitism.”

By contrast, in the auto-suggestive style typical for his diaries, Joseph Goebbels drew an interim balance on November 13, 1938: “My explanations to the foreign press are published as big news in the whole world. They bring all of our arguments together. We are in the offensive again. The chief correspondent of Reuter flies to Berlin especially for an interview. I enlighten him without reserve and complain about the position of the British press, listing a vast number of examples. He is disconcerted. I believe he will write something accordingly. Makes a good impression.”

In fact, the criticism of the pogrom in the foreign press was so devastating, that the National Socialist regime instigated one of their most extreme measures in dealing with the non-German press: it ordered the Gestapo to confiscate the London Times and most other foreign newspapers when they were delivered to Berlin, on November 11 and 12, 1938 (Friday and Saturday). As had become customary in recent years, no reason for this was given. The Times explained, however, that the cause was openly critical journalism and numerous negative letters to the editor. In this case, it was especially dangerous for the regime if sceptical German citizens read foreign newspapers, which were still available in Germany, and noticed the striking discrepancy to the domestic news coverage.

UNANIMOUS PRESS VERDICT WITHOUT POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

The opinions voiced in the American press were catastrophic for the “Third Reich.” In various press reviews quality newspapers cited each other and backed each other up with regard to content. The main argument ran thus:
it was a breach with civilisation, and an act of barbarism to blame an entire segment of the population for the deed of one man.\textsuperscript{36} The British press was also unanimously damning, including the \textit{Times}, which distanced itself now from supporting the Appeasement policy of Chamberlain’s government, and even Lord Beaverbrook’s \textit{Daily Express}, which, for years, had reported with sympathy for National Socialism.\textsuperscript{37} “No foreign propagandist, bent upon blackening Germany before the world, could outdo the tale of burnings and beatings, of black-guardly assaults upon defenseless innocent people which disgraced that country,” ran the verdict in the \textit{Times}. The \textit{Daily Express} called upon its readers, that “at such a moment as this we in Britain have got to reiterate the virtue of tolerance and must dedicate ourselves anew to worship at that shrine.”\textsuperscript{38}

Five days after Kristallnacht, President Roosevelt instituted an unusual sanction against Nazi Germany. He recalled Ambassador Hugh Robert Wilson from Berlin, and this post remained vacant until the entry of the United States into the Second World War in December 1941. Roosevelt gave a press conference, at which he proclaimed it repulsive, “that such things could occur in a twentieth-century civilization.” After the first indignation had died down, however, the main part of the American press still opposed “European entanglements” and giving up neutrality. Perhaps not the majority of foreign correspondents, but the majority of American journalists back home, who set the tone of the commentary, stood firm against all initiatives to let more refugees into the country, or to change immigration laws. Gallup surveys revealed similar tendencies in the general population. Even after the pogrom, most Americans did not want to open the gates to more refugees.\textsuperscript{39}

Public opinion and the political reactions in the United States were taken seriously by the National Socialist leadership and influenced the policy of the regime. This underlines the political causalities, which a media event can unleash: the political event “Crystal Night” impinged upon international coverage, particularly in the American and British press. This coverage, in a performative circle, affected the political actions of the Nazi regime in turn, and so, again, the (media) event “Crystal Night.” No source reveals this more convincingly than the entries Goebbels made in his diary. On November 10, 1938: “All morning long a hail of new reports. The Führer and I think about appropriate measures. Allow them to carry on with the violence or call it off? That is the question.”\textsuperscript{40} One day later, he writes: “His (Hitler’s) ideas are very radical and aggressive. ( . . ) We are waiting now for reactions from abroad. At the moment, just silence. But the thunder will come.”\textsuperscript{41}
The early and staunchly critical reporting in the American press probably contributed to the end of violence, proclaimed officially by Goebbels in the afternoon on November 10, 1938. The news was passed on immediately to North America, citing Goebbels order: “The justified and understandable anger of the German people over the cowardly Jewish murder of a German diplomat in Paris found extensive expression during last night. In numerous cities and towns of the Reich, retaliatory action has been undertaken against Jewish buildings and businesses. Now, a strict request is issued to the entire population to cease immediately all further demonstrations and actions against Jewry, no matter of what kind. The final answer to the Jewish assassination in Paris will be given Jewry by way of legislation and ordinance.”

By “letting the anger of the people loose,” Goebbels had gone too far, also for rivals such as Göring and Himmler. They were afraid the events would develop their own dynamic, which would move beyond the unconditional control from above that many leading National Socialists considered imperative. Aside from this, Goebbels was reproached for besmirching the German name abroad. Himmler’s SS saw its plans disturbed to arrange for the emigration of the German Jews to other nations in the world.

By announcing the persecution and deprivation of rights of the Jews on a gigantic, but “legal” scale, Goebbels managed to end the friction within the National Socialist leadership. Once more, Goebbels was satisfied with himself: “The press and public opinion are entirely preoccupied with the latest laws on the Jews. The German people are fully in agreement. The other countries only take provisional notice. Fuming commentaries will probably follow. The German press offers invaluable help. Our journalists know what is at stake.”

In the global public, the National Socialist regime could not redeem itself. Even his exclusive Reuters interview did not do Goebbels any good, as he had to concede—which rarely happened—the limits of his propaganda capacities: “Reuter is presenting my interview on a big scale. The whole English press is publishing it. I release it to the German press, as well. The foreign newspapers continue to foam at the mouth. But we cannot do anything about that now. I let the German papers beat this down.”

Goebbels meant not only the disastrous articles and reports, but also the extremely negative comments in the American press, which almost never came from foreign correspondents accredited in Germany. The correspondents concentrated on news which would not offer the regime an excuse for restrictions and extraditions. The real arguments against the “Third Reich,” and subsequent discussions, were carried out in the commentary, which included strong
judgments from which the foreign correspondents could distance themselves out of self-preservation. They had to do this in order to keep their daily work in Nazi Germany running, by referring to the necessary journalistic division of labour. Under the heading “Great Germany,” the New York Times commented on November 11: “Thus does a great Government take revenge for the act of a maddened boy, a Government which exercises supreme and unquestioned power over 80,000,000 people, boasts of the order it maintains and aspires to spread this order over all of Central Europe. Recently, this Government has extended its domain with the consent of the Western Powers who acquiesced in its bloodless victories as the prelude to European appeasement. Instead they were the prelude to the scenes witnessed yesterday, scenes which no man can look upon without shame for the degradation of his species.”

Many correspondents and commentators stressed the religious element. In a similar vein, apart from the articles on the pogrom, on November 13, 1938 the American and British press reported about smashed windows in the palace of the Munich cardinal Faulhaber. This took place after Gauleiter Adolf Wagner had ranted against Catholics as allies of the Jews two days earlier. Ralph Barnes stressed the anti-Jewish, anti-Christian ideology of Hitler’s regime in general. “It is interesting to note that Chancellor Adolf Hitler’s organ, the Voelkischer Beobachter, published an editorial commenting on today’s decrees under the sacrilegious heading: ‘Jehova’s Bankruptcy.’” Already before the November Pogrom, the National Socialist regime had prepared anti-Jewish measures, as Sonia Tomara emphasised in the New York Herald Tribune under the heading “Jews Knew the Nazis Awaited ‘Incident’ to Loose New Terror.” The Jews she had spoken to on her recent trip through Germany all, without exception, expected the establishment of ghettos and “special concentration camps for Jews.” The assassination of vom Rath by Grynszpan provided the government with a welcome excuse to intensify the persecution.

THE “NIGHT OF BROKEN GLASS” AND THE AMERICAN PRESS ON THE HOLOCAUST 1942–44

Even at the high point of the British policy of Appeasement, it is not clear why there were no serious consequences on an international level for Hitler’s Germany after the November Pogrom and the following disenfranchisement of the German Jews. The anti-Jewish decrees by Hermann Göring as
commissioner of the four-year plan had been cited by the American press word for word on November 13.

The Austrian journalist in exile, Anton Kuh, offered one of the best explanations in the magazine of exile, Aufbau. For Kuh, it was clear that “the demolished memory is one of the principle columns of support for Nazi rule.” For without remembering and memory, Kuh argues, there is no justice. He states that most remarkable in the relationship between the “Third Reich” and a world audience is the enormous pace: “The ruling principle is: increasing speed. The new rulers hope that the memory of the other countries will not be able to keep up with the increased pace of their lies and misdeeds.”

Some American foreign correspondents were aware of the correlation between the pace of Nazi misdeeds and the lack of public memory. In a title story in the New York Times on November 23, 1938, Otto Tolischus warned the Americans not to forget what had just occurred in Germany. He cites the SS journal Das schwarze Korps (also to pre-empt any allegations of “atrocity propaganda”), which demanded that all Jews should leave Greater Germany as soon as possible, otherwise they would be “exterminated with ‘fire and sword.’”

It was for such explicitly anti-National Socialist articles that Tolischus received the Pulitzer Prize for “Correspondence” one year after Lochnner, in 1940. After this, the German Foreign Ministry let his visa expire. Even though he had fallen into disgrace, and his days in Berlin were numbered, Tolischus still had the courage to accompany the Wehrmacht troops marching into Denmark and Norway. From Oslo, he sent a confidential memorandum to the editors of the New York Times in April 1940, specifying what he knew about the persecution of the Jews: “The Poles, like the Jews, are marked for extermination—physical extermination for the Jews and for those Poles who cannot reconcile themselves to German rule...” Arthur Hays Sulzberger, owner of the New York Times, considered Tolischus’ note so timely, that he sent it to Henry Morgenthau, who passed it on to President Roosevelt. But still a year and a half had to pass before the United States entered the Second World War in December 1941.

What Barnet Nover had already predicted on November 15, 1938 came to pass late, but not too late: “In the long run, their savagery is certain to prove a boomerang. The fact that they have so repeatedly flouted world opinion and suffered no penalties does not mean that they can continue to do so indefinitely. No nation can put itself outside the pale of decent opinion as Nazi Germany has done without courting ultimate retribution. No nation ever benefits by failing to exhibit that ‘decent respect for the opinions of mankind’ displayed by the founding fathers of our nation.”
There is nothing to criticise in the American press coverage of the November Pogrom of 1938 with respect to journalistic standards, neither of the period nor today. Quite the contrary, articles, reports (usually sent directly from Berlin) and comments (written mostly by the editors in the United States) were exemplary concerning speed, correctness and apt interpretation. This is also true for the further reporting until December 1941—as long as American foreign correspondents were present in Berlin.

Thanks to the daily “checks and balances” among the foreign correspondents in Berlin, and among the newspapers and magazines in the United States, journalistic reporting was far superior to that in the diplomatic sector. There, governments were sometimes offered quite bizarre interpretations of the November Pogrom, such as by the British Consul General, Robert Smallbones, with his theory of a specifically German brand of homosexuality. Although Smallbones behaved without reproach in political practice, helping thousands of Jews to emigrate to Great Britain after the pogrom, and thus forming an exception amongst the high-ranking diplomats of the period, he felt the need to explain the riots in terms of sexual pathology: “The explanation of this outbreak of sadistic cruelty may be that sexual perversion, and in particular homo-sexuality, are very prevalent in Germany. It seems to me that mass sexual perversity may offer an explanation for this otherwise inexplicable outbreak.”

On behalf of American diplomacy, no real help was offered during the pogrom, even if many American correspondents used their quasi-diplomatic status to hide Jews. Also after the pogrom, the United States refused to accept more refugees from territories controlled by Nazi Germany than their quotas allowed. For Germany, this quota was not even fulfilled, so restrictive was the American visa policy. One of the favourite arguments of Hitler and Goebbels, that the Western democracies should follow up their philo-Semitic proclama-
tions with words and take in Jewish émigrés, foisted on the sad reality of the international rejection of refugees. At most, as in Great Britain, there were neocolonial pseudo-debates on potential, remote safe havens in the British Empire.

Provided they read the papers regularly, until December 1941, Americans could learn much of what went on in Nazi Germany, decidedly more than the German public, which after 1938 only had the one-line National Socialist press to refer to. Indeed, the American public consisted of the best-informed readers in the world, thanks to the global network of their foreign correspondents and the strong competition among these journalists, among different media and media companies for scoops. Then as today, readers may have rejected articles as “fake news” (the Allied propaganda lies of the First World War had a
horrible impact). Or decided to accept them as true but without relevance for their everyday lives.

In his notorious speech of January 30, 1939, Hitler announced the elimination of the European Jews, should it come to another world war. This message, crucial to us looking back today, was indeed registered by the foreign press. But other aspects of this several-hour harangue overlaid the announcement of genocide, and were considered more significant at the time. Some journals understood Hitler’s speech, once more, as the expression of his will for peace, if only justified German demands, such as the return of its former colonies, were fulfilled. For British weeklies, which had an influence on the foreign policy of the British Empire, “Crystal Night” and the heightened persecution of the Jews were regarded as irrelevant for the Western democracies, who had to look on while their “last bastions” on the European continent fell away, as described by the senior foreign correspondent in Vienna and Prague, George Gedye. On November 16, 1941, only weeks before the American entry into the war, Joseph Goebbels presented in an article in “Das Reich” under the title “The Jews are to blame!” “ten points” against the Jews. The article made public and legitimized that the Nazi regime was in the process of murdering the Jews of Europe: “We are experiencing the fulfilment of this prophecy [in Hitler’s speech from January 30, 1939] and Jewry is meeting a destiny which is harsh, but more than deserved. Sympathy or compassion is entirely inappropriate. World Jewry completely misjudged the forces at its disposal in the war it unleashed, and is now suffering the gradual process of annihilation, which it had intended for us, and would see through without a doubt, if it possessed the power to do so. It is now being destroyed by its own law: ‘An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth!’” Even in this legitimation of genocide, Goebbels did not forget to point out the power of the American and British press: “It is characteristic that every measure we take against the Jews is printed in the English and United States papers the next day. So still today, the Jews have secret connections to enemy powers, and use these not only to their own ends, but in all matters important to the war effort of the Reich. The enemy is therefore in our midst. [. . .] The Jews are to blame for the war. The way we treat them is no injustice. They have more than deserved it. To finish up with them once and for all is the business of the government.” The American press reported this from Berlin already on November 14, 1941, two days before the original Goebbels article appeared in “Das Reich.”

The American press could not report on the murder of European Jews in the field, however, for with the declaration of war in December 1941, all
American foreign correspondents were interned and exchanged, in spring 1942, against German diplomats and journalists in Lisbon. But AP stayed on, as I recently discovered. Well camouflaged, the largest news agency in the world was embedded into the structures of the “Third Reich” and embarked on a daily photographic exchange with the National Socialist regime, through the neutral capitals Lisbon and Stockholm, until April 1945. This secret deal, sanctioned by the White House, may serve to explain the “phase of silence” of the American press, or at least AP, on the Holocaust between 1942 and 1944. For if one invests enormous resources into keeping contact with an enemy power, one is certainly quite satisfied with the exclusive material one receives in the trade-off. Even the harshest reporting in the American press on the National Socialist persecution of the Jews had no political consequences—this was the lesson learnt from Kristallnacht by the American media. Why should one have risked a perfectly working secret arrangement during the Second World War, which yielded countless spectacular events worth reporting in articles and—exclusive—photos, to probe such an inconceivable phenomenon as the disappearance of the European Jews?
Notes


9. On the system of press instructions for the nazified German press see Jürgen Hagemann, Die Presselenkung im Dritten Reich (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1970).


33. Lochner, What About Germany? 238.
34. Joseph Goebbels, diary entry, November 13, 1938, vol. 6, 185–86.
39. Lipstadt, Beyond Belief, 104–09.
40. Joseph Goebbels, diary entry from November 10, 1938, vol. 6, 179–81. On the chains of command of the Nazi elite assembled, for the most part, in Munich, and the sequence of events after the death of vom Rath, see Kreutzmüller, Ausverkauf, 167–74.
42. “Reich Swept by Anti-Jew Terrorism,” 1.
48. Ibid.
52. New York Times, November 23, 1938, 1, 8. The article by Tolischus was also published in the Houston Post on November 23, 1938 with the heading “Nazi Germany Threatens to Exterminate the Jews.”
53. The memorandum is just marked with “Berlin correspondent.” According to Laurel Leff (Buried by the Times, 75–76), only Tolischus was in Oslo at that time. Henry Morgenthau to Franklin D. Roosevelt, April 20, 1940, Morgenthau Correspondence, Box 277, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum.


57. Ibid.


63. “Goebbels Spurs Abuse for Jews,” New York Times, November 14, 1938, 11. The Times (London) reproduced a part of Goebbels’ article from Das Reich with his ten points against the Jews on November 17, 1941 on page 3 with the heading “Jews Are to Blame. Goebbels Venom in Das Reich. Ten Articles of Hate.” Delivered from the “German Frontier” “From Our Special Correspondent.” See also Leff, Buried by the Times, 75–76.

64. A number of experienced American journalists left Nazi Germany already before December 1941, or were extradited like Otto Tolischus. In the Berlin office of the New York Times, only the pro-German senior correspondent Guido Enderis stayed on, supported by two young assistants (Leff, Buried by the Times, 62). On the internment in Bad Nauheim only a small study exists: Charles B. Burdick, An American Island in Hitler’s Reich: The Bad Nauheim Internment (Menlo Park: Markgraf Publications Group, 1987).

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