

Appeasement – Peace or War?

NSWHTA Stage 6 History Teachers' Day

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Dr Michael Molkentin

Shellharbour Anglican College & University of New South Wales Canberra

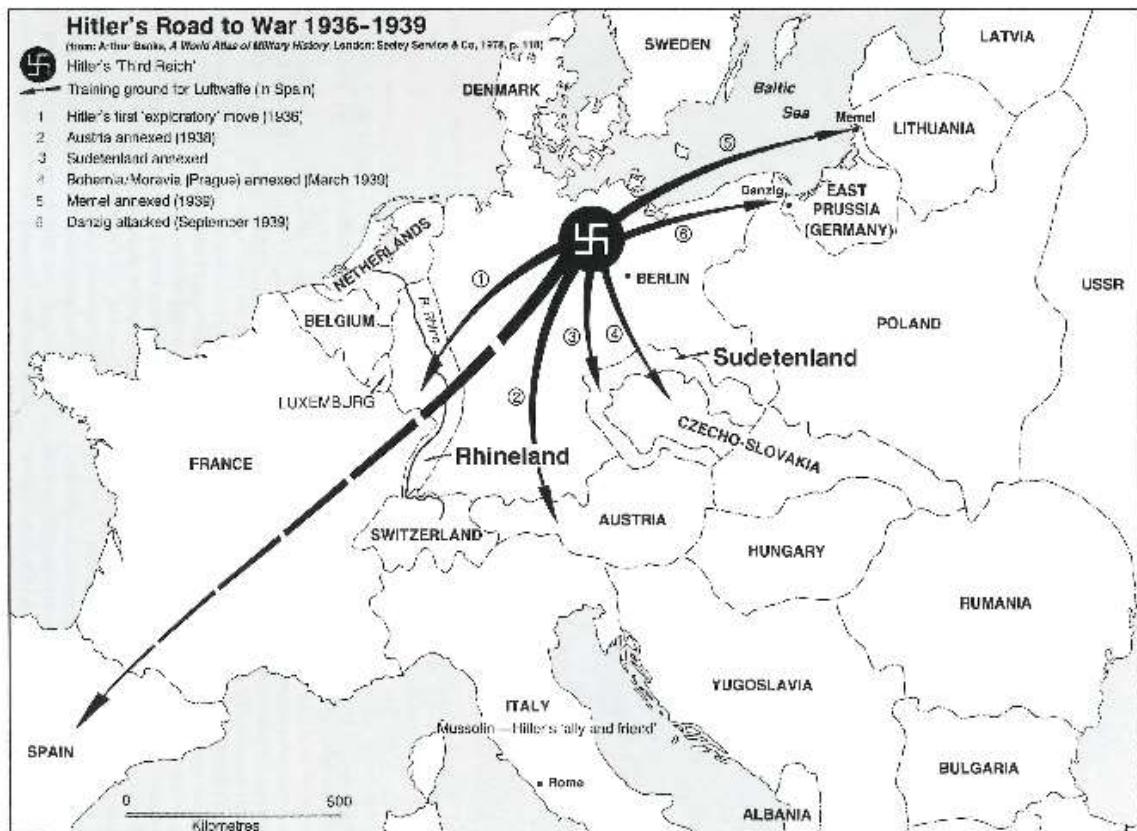
www.michaelmolkentin.com/resources

mmolkentin@shellharbourac.nsw.edu.au

The People, Events and Geography of Appeasement

Prime Minister	Foreign Secretary	Event
Ramsay MacDonald June 1929- June 1935	Marquess of Reading August-November 1931	<p>14 September 1930 The Nazis secure second largest vote in German elections</p> <p>18 September 1931 Japan invades Manchuria</p> <p>30 January 1933 Hitler is appointed Chancellor of Germany</p> <p>14 October 1933 Germany quits the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments and a week later leaves the League of Nations</p> <p>16 March 1935 Hitler publicly announces he intended to rearm Germany in contrivance of the Treaty of Versailles</p> <p>April 1935 Italy, Britain and France sign the Stresa Front to oppose the re-emergence of Germany</p>
Stanley Baldwin June 1935- May 1937	Sir Samuel Hoare June-December 1935	<p>June 1935 Britain and Germany sign the Anglo-German Naval Agreement</p> <p>3 October 1935 Italy invades Abyssinia</p> <p>7 March 1936 German troops re-occupy the demilitarised Rhineland region</p> <p>July 1936 German and Italian forces go to Spain to fight support the Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War against a left-wing Republican government.</p>
Neville Chamberlain May 1937- May 1940	The Viscount Halifax Feb. 1938- Dec. 1940	<p>12 March 1938 Germany annexes Austria ('the Anschluss')</p> <p>30 September 1938 The 'Munich Agreement' is signed by Germany, Italy, France and Britain, permitting Germany to annex the Sudeten region of Czechoslovakia</p> <p>15 March 1939 Germany occupies the remainder of Czechoslovakia</p> <p>31 March 1939 Britain and France guarantee that they will protect Poland's independence</p> <p>22 May 1939 Germany and Italy sign the Pact of Steel</p> <p>23 August 1939 Germany and the USSR sign a non-aggression pact</p> <p>1 September 1939 Germany invades Poland, starting the Second World War</p>

People	Events	Geography
Stanley Baldwin Edvard Benes Neville Chamberlain Winston Churchill Edouard Daladier Antony Eden The Viscount Halifax Adolph Hitler Benito Mussolini	Treaty of Versailles (1919) Locarno Agreement (1925) Hitler made Chancellor (1930) German rearment (1930s) Abyssinian Crisis (1935-36) Reoccupation of Rhine (1936) Spanish Civil War (1936-38) Anschluss (1938) Sudeten Crisis (1938) Nazi-Soviet Pact (1939) Invasion of Poland (1939)	A map of Nazi expansion in 1930s



Douglas Newton, *Germany 1918-1945: from days of hope to years of horror*, Addison Wesley Longman, 1990.

Suggested text-based overviews

- i. Thomas Cantwell's *Contested Spaces*
- ii. Richard Overy's *Origins of the Second World War*
- iii. Alan Monger's *Causes of the Second World War*
- iv. Frank McDonald's *Hitler, Chamberlain and Appeasement*

Overview of the debates

Area of debate from the syllabus	What it is about
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the origins of appeasement and relationship to earlier policies 	<p>This debate centres on the questions of when Britain and its allies adopted a policy of appeasement, who was responsible for it and why (for what reasons) they appeased Hitler. Traditionally, historians have seen appeasement as a product of Britain's weak leaders in the 1930s and an aberration of British foreign policy. More recent scholarship, however, explains appeasement by referring to the economic, military and political difficulties that Britain's leaders faced in the inter-war period and, in any case, note that appeasement had been a long standing feature of British foreign policy before the 1930s.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - British and French approaches to appeasement in the 1930s 	<p>When considering this debate students can compare how historians have explained the contribution that France and Britain made to the policy of appeasement respectively. French historians have often blamed the British for being too soft on Germany while, conversely, British historians have sometimes been quick to point out France's weakness between the wars and the way in which this constrained British action.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - international reactions to appeasement in the 1930s 	<p>Studies written in English have traditionally been Eurocentric in their analysis of appeasement: British, Germany, France and Italy have taken centre stage. In recent decades historians have taken a broader view of appeasement, considering it in a more global context and indicating the significance of the way in which other nations, especially the United States and the British Dominions reacted to appeasement.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - appeasement and the origins of the Second World War 	<p>Since the 1960s the causes of the Second World War have been a contentious issue among scholars. Up for debate is the relative significance of such factors as the Treaty of Versailles, the failure of the League of Nations, the Great Depression, Hitler's foreign policy goals and, of course, appeasement, in causing the war. Some see appeasement as a response to these other issues and not significant in itself of causing the war. Others perceive it as a principal cause of the war – one which, if replaced with a different approach, might have averted war altogether.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the extent of the successes and/or failures of appeasement. 	<p>A major concern in most commentary on appeasement is an evaluation of its results: was it a success in that it delayed war while Britain prepared to fight? Or was it a failed attempt at avoiding war altogether. And even within these two interpretations there is a diversity of views as to in what ways and to what extent it was a success or failure. At the heart of this debate lies a question about the goal of appeasement: was it to delay war or prevent it altogether?</p>

Literature Reviews

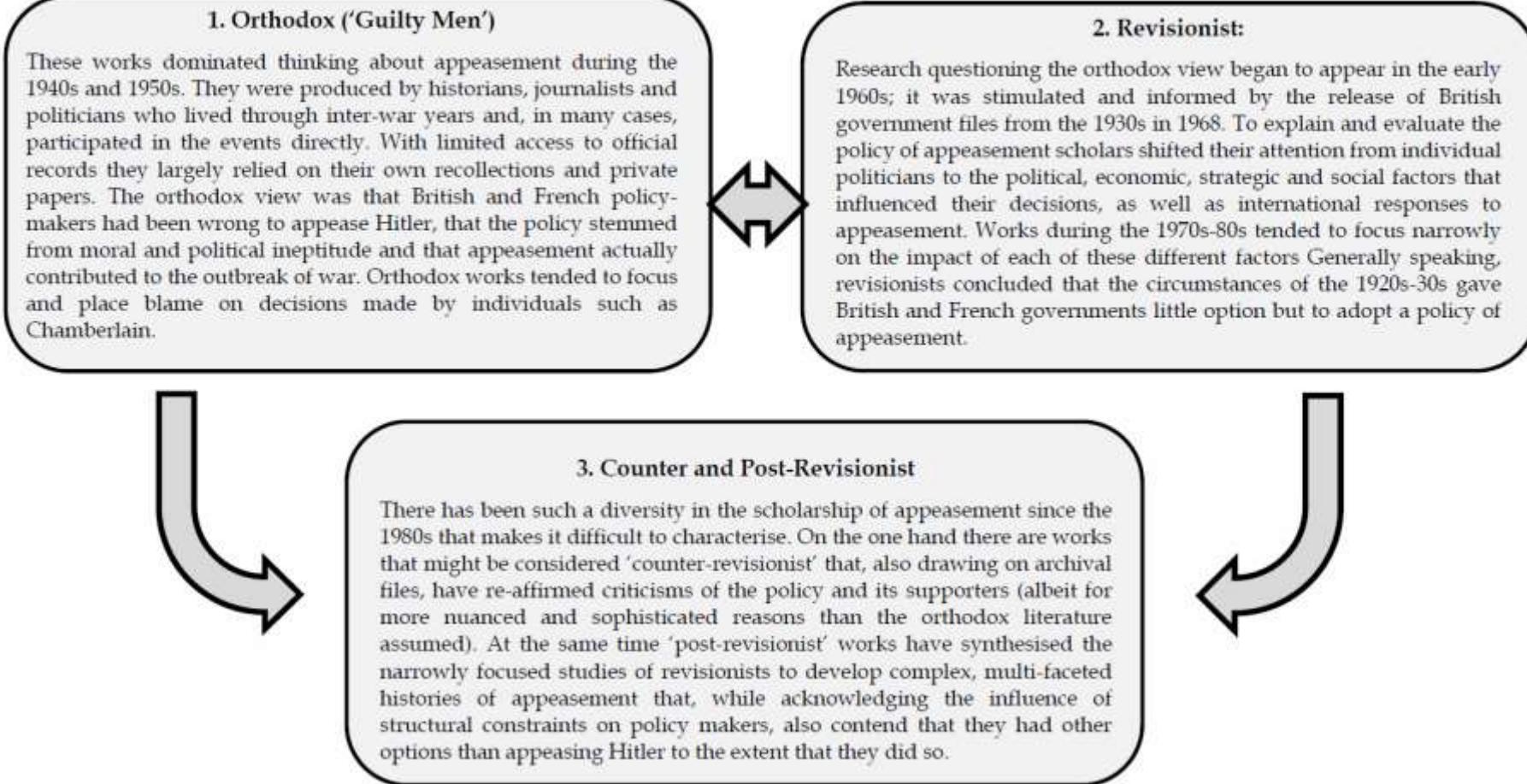
Sidney Aster, 'Appeasement: before and after revisionism', *Diplomacy and statecraft*, vol. 19, 2008, 443-480.

Andrew Boxer, 'French appeasement', *History today*, vol. 59, December 2007.

Patrick Finney, 'The romance of decline: the historiography of appeasement and British national identity', *Electronic journal of international history*, 2000.

Frank McDonough, 'The historical debate', in *Hitler, Chamberlain and appeasement*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, 77-85.

Diagram 4.1 Phases of appeasement historiography



1. The evidence

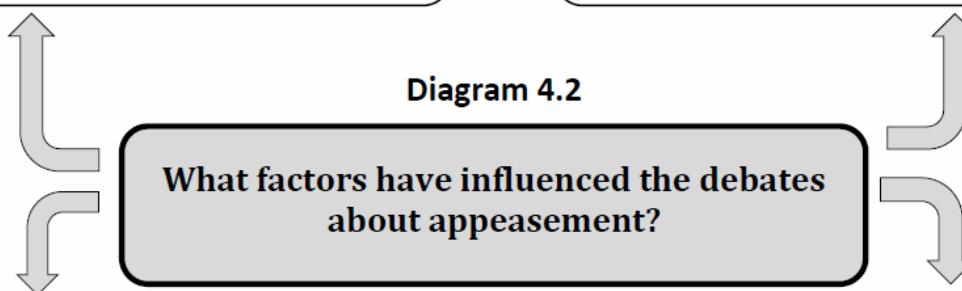
The evidence available to scholars of appeasement has grown over time. Milestones include the British parliament's *Public Records Act 1967* which changed the closure on government records from 50 to 30 years; the release of Neville Chamberlain's private papers in 1975 and the opening of British intelligence service files in 1997. The end of the Cold War also made archives in Eastern Europe and Russia available to western scholars.

2. The historians

The personalities and professional backgrounds of authors are indelibly stamped on the historiography of appeasement. Those who have been influential voices in the debates have included academic and popular historians, journalists, political scientists and politicians – all bring different methodologies and questions to the subject and all have written with contrasting purposes and for various audiences.

Diagram 4.2

What factors have influenced the debates about appeasement?



3. The social and political context

The social and political context in which appeasement studies have occurred has also influenced the way in which scholars have approached the topic. Contemporary events influence the questions asked and conclusions drawn about the 1930s. The disasters Britain faced in the early part of the Second World War, for example, encouraged a critical and emotive view of 'the appeasers'. The events of the Cold War had a more complex influence, encouraging some to cite appeasement as a 'lesson' against negotiating with aggressors while prompting others to see appeasement as a legitimate and indeed necessary policy for avoiding nuclear war.

Historian Patrick Finney also highlights the influence that changing ideas about British national identity have had on appeasement. Critics of the policy have tended to assume that British leaders *should* have confronted Hitler because they *could* have done so given Britain's dominant place in the world of the 1930s. Revisionists, working in the context of British decolonisation (1945-90s), came to realise that Britain was already in decline as a global power during the 1930s and, thus, had a limited capacity to alter the course of events in Europe.

Bibliographic details of the source (author, title, publisher, year)	
<p>Summary of the source's main points relating to one of the debates</p> <p>Summarise the main points of the author's thesis. Remember to identify how the author contributes to a specific debate in the Appeasement – Peace or War? case study.</p> <p>Note some illustrative quotations. Select pithy, telling quotes rather than long, discursive ones that will be difficult to remember in an examination.</p>	<p>Biographical details of the author</p> <p>Do some research to determine some details about the author's personal context: their professional qualifications, other work they have done, their political views and so on.</p> <p>Factors that shaped the author's perspective and interpretation</p> <p>What has influenced this author's approach to the topic of appeasement?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspects of their personal background and agenda (noted above) • Other works they might be writing in response to • Historiographical theories and trends • Contemporary events • The evidence they used (or did not use) • The purpose and readership for which they were writing
	<p>Critical evaluation of the source</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are this source's merits as a piece of historical interpretation? What valuable contributions does it make to your chosen area of debate? • What are this source's limitations? What are its weaknesses? • How does this source reflect or challenge historiographical approaches such as empiricism, modernism or post-modernism? • How does this source compliment or contest the views in your other chosen sources?

A suggested set of readings:

- Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, volume I, *The gathering storm*, Cassell, London 1948, Preface and Chapter 17; **and** David Reynolds, *In command of history: Churchill fighting and writing the Second World War*, Penguin, Camberwell, 2005, Chapter 7.
- A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Penguin, London, 1991 (first published 1961).
- Williamson Murray, 'Munich at Fifty', *Commentary*, 86, 1, July 1988, 25-30 and/or Williamson Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power 1938-39*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984.
- Norrin M. Ripsman and Jack S. Levy, 'Wishful thinking or buying time?: the logic of appeasement in the 1930s', *International security*, 33, 2 (Fall 2008), 148-181.
- Fredrik Logevall and Kenneth Osgood, 'The Ghost of Munich: America's Appeasement Complex', *World Affairs*, July-August 2010:
<http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/ghost-munich-americas-appeasement-complex>
- Anon, 'Barrack Obama's Munich', *New York Sun*, 9 August 2016:
<http://www.nysun.com/editorials/barack-obamas-munich/89681/>

Winston Churchill, <i>The Second World War: Volume I The Gathering Storm</i> , Cassell, London 1948.	
Debate 1: The origins of appeasement	Brief biography of the historian (note the context in which he worked)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Churchill attributes responsibility for the appeasement policy and Britain's unpreparedness for war to his Conservative predecessors, PM Stanley Baldwin (1935-37) and Chamberlain (37-40). He largely ignores the office of Labour PM Ramsay MacDonald (1929-35), though somewhat contradictorily he notes that it was in the 1931-35 period that 'the entire situation on the continent reversed' and that, once Germany commenced rearming without intervention from Britain a war became most likely. Criticism of Chamberlain: Churchill presents appeasement as Chamberlain's policy, and implies that it resulted from his personal (and even moral) failings and his failure to listen to the advice of his government. In his account of 'the Tragedy of Munich', Churchill presents Chamberlain as 'now in complete control of British foreign policy'. He claims 'The cabinet was deeply perturbed, but obeyed... one man, and one man only conducted our affairs'; Churchill, p. 268-69). In his history, Churchill emphasises his opposition to the policy of conciliating Hitler during the 1930s. Although the primary sources record that Churchill did criticise the foreign policy of his own party during this period – both in Parliament and in private – he was circumspect in his criticism before the Munich agreement. Reynolds demonstrates that Churchill realised he needed to be careful about criticising the government as he desperately wanted to be brought back into the government and given a ministry. Hence, his criticism of colleagues like Baldwin and Chamberlain, in 1948, were not as strident or public as they were before September 1938. As Reynolds puts it 'Under both Baldwin and Chamberlain the prophetic voice was muted, but in the memoirs it sounds out clear and strong. At times, book one of <i>The Gathering Storm</i> is almost history with the politics left out'. [Reynolds, p. 108] Focus on Germany: In evaluating British foreign policy Churchill considered it only narrowly, as pertaining to Nazi Germany. He largely ignores to wider world, especially events in the Far East, which, more recent research indicates, influenced British foreign policy in the 1930s. He likewise pays little attention to the Mediterranean (including Italian intentions) and devotes a passing mention to the Spanish Civil War. 	<p>Brief biography of the historian (note the context in which he worked)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political career began in 1905 as Under Secretary of State for the Colonies During WW1 served as First Lord of the Admiralty (head of the Royal Navy) and Minister of Munitions. During the 1920s he served in the Conservative government as Secretary of State for War and the Air (1919-21), Colonies (1921-22) and as Chancellor of the Exchequer (1924-29). Between 1929-35 Labour was in government and between 1935-39 he did not receive a ministry (though he retained his electorate)- 'wilderness years'. Succeeded British PM Neville Chamberlain in 1940 and led Britain until voted out in 1945. He succeeded to return to office in 1951-55.
	<p>Factors that shaped the historian's interpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Churchill saw his work 'not history' but 'a contribution to history which will be of service in the future'. He acknowledges the personal, subjective perspective of his work but also notes that his experience provides him with authority. [Churchill p. ix] David Reynolds claims that Churchill's philosophy of history was characterised by 'contingency not determination, individuals rather than impersonal forces , and the ostensible deference paid to the verdict of 'history' while seducing future historians'. [Reynolds, pp. 96-7]¹ Churchill was fond of hypotheticals (what historians now describe as 'counter-factuals') and employed them extensively as a rhetorical device. For Churchill History has a didactic purpose: he writes 'to enable a new generation to repair some of the errors of former years'. [p.] He perceived, in the Cold War context in which he wrote, a similar situation to that in the 1930s: 'no coherent or consistent policy, even in fundamental matters, among the good peoples, but deadly planning among the bad'. [Churchill in 1947 qtd in Reynolds, p. 93]. None of the 1930s PMs (MacDonald, Baldwin, Chamberlain) had published memoirs by 1948. Nor had any of the other major powers' wartime leaders. Churchill's version was uncontested by his peers in a similar format.

¹ David Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War*, Penguin, London 2005.

Debate 2: Appeasement and the origins of the Second World War

- Churchill was optimistic about Britain and France's opportunity to avoid war by confronting Hitler, even as late as Munich.
- He accepted as credible the testimony of Nazis at the post-war war crimes trials at Nuremberg, who claimed there was a groundswell of opposition to Hitler among Germany's generals, and foresaw a coup to overthrow him had his plans for Czechoslovakia been blocked by Britain and France at Munich. Despite finding no evidence to corroborate this in other archives, and the scepticism of his researchers, Churchill kept this idea in his book. It was important for his narrative and central motif of an 'unnecessary war', which could have been easily prevented. **Churchill presents Munich as a missed opportunity to avert war; instead it vindicated Hitler's position, intimidated internal resistance and made Hitler 'the undisputed master of Germany, and the path was clear for his great design'.**
- In a similar manner, Churchill is optimistic about the prospects that Soviet intervention might have averted war, had British and French leaders been more earnest in their attempts to draw the USSR into an anti-Hitler alliance. Reynolds points out how, in support of this counterfactual, Churchill selects facts that suit his case: comments by Soviet Foreign Minister Litvinov, for example, and 'Russian émigré gossip'. Though his researchers convinced him to tone the strength of this assertion down, given the flimsiness of this evidence, the idea that Britain and France could have averted war by engaging the USSR remains in his book. As Reynolds notes, 'This counterfactual is open to question in the light of what we know now: Hitler was determined to gobble up Poland, and after Munich he was sure British leaders – those 'worms' – would not resist him'. [Reynolds, p. 109]
- Churchill adopts a similar methodology when considering France's role in appeasement. His account gives the impression that France's reluctance to confront Hitler over the Rhineland, for example, was due to a lack of British support. That is, despite France's internal political, military and economic weaknesses, Britain's support might have 'tipped the balance' [Reynolds, p. 102]. Here, two characteristics of Churchill's history are evident: he simplifies complex issues (French domestic weaknesses) and takes an optimistic view of the influence Britain had over its continental neighbours.

- The culpable leaders in Churchill's narrative are Baldwin and Chamberlain- Churchill's conservative peers but also the two leaders who kept him out of office throughout the 1930s.
- Churchill had privileged access to sources created during his tenure as wartime prime minister: in fact, he was instrumental in having cabinet change the rules about using cabinet meeting records to write political memoir. He also took an enormous quantity of personal notes, memos, minutes and correspondence with him when he was voted out in July 1945.
- He secured one of the most lucrative publishing deals of all time for his history of WW2, including deals to publish it in book and serialised form all over the world. The total deal was worth \$2.2 million.

My critical evaluation of the historian's ideas and methodology

Churchill's status, the size of his publishing deal, his privileged access to cabinet papers, and the fact that he was alone among wartime leaders of pre-war British PMs to publish memoirs all contributed to *The Second World War* becoming highly influential and, indeed, even authoritative account of the war. Its influence was further enhanced by its resonance with earlier accounts of appeasement policy (notably Cato) and the Cold War context, in which people yearned to make sense of the Second World War.

Although Churchill claimed his work was not history, its narrative style, its political and strategic subject matter, and concern with causation make it function as history.

Churchill's access to papers, though privileged, restricted him to commentary on a narrow range of issues: largely British politics. He could say less about other countries, which weakened his analysis of the causes of the Second World War and led him to present an overly optimistic appraisal of Britain (and France's) potential for preventing the Second World War.

Churchill's employment of counter-factual scenarios makes for compelling reading but they are typically supported by a selective use of facts. This feature of Churchill's methodology considerably weakens his work as history.

The Second World War is shaped by Churchill's ambitions to get back into office. He is clearly presenting himself as a prescient and resolute leader who possessed the moral courage that some of his peers lacked. His account of the past is shaped to serve his present ambitions. It is also shaped by the Cold War context in which Churchill wrote it. For example, he emphasises the important role the USA might have played in restraining Hitler had Churchill been more earnest in engaging the Americans in bi-lateral agreements. This reflects the super-power status USA held in the late 1940s – not the isolationism the USA had demonstrated in the 1930s.

David Reynolds concludes that Churchill's first volume 'is weakened by too many counterfactuals, by fixation on German airpower, by Churchill's exaggeration of potential allies and by neglect of his political ambition. It is the book of a man excluded from a whole decade but for whom, in retrospect, that ostracism proved providential'. [Reynolds, p. 110]

A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Penguin, London, 1991 (first published 1961)

Debate 1: The extent of the successes and failures of appeasement	Brief biography of the historian (note the context in which he worked)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taylor is not critical of appeasement as a policy, per se. Indeed, he describes Munich as 'a triumph for British policy' in that British leaders achieved exactly what they had set out to achieve – the peaceful resolution of the Czech-Sudeten question. It was 'not a triumph for Hitler, however, who had started with no such clear intention'. It was also not the result of cynicism or self-interest but, rather, 'a triumph for all that was best and most enlightened in British life; a triumph for those who had preached equal justice between peoples; a triumph for those who had courageously denounced the harshness and short-sightedness of Versailles'. [235] • Where the British went wrong, claims Taylor, was that they did not maintain the policy of appeasement with consistency. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To answer his critics in the British parliament, who perceived the policy as weak and immoral, Chamberlain claimed that Britain was not ready to fight Germany and, hence, had no option. 'Chamberlain was caught by his own argument', observes Taylor; politically he had to push for re-armament to prepare for war with Germany while at the same time vouching for Hitler's good will and commitment to peace. 'In this way, Chamberlain did more than anyone else to destroy the case for his own policy'. With Britain re-arming Hitler came to distrust Chamberlain and saw appeasement not as a cooperative policy aimed at rectifying Germany's legitimate grievances but, rather, a capitulation in which Britain, from a position of weakness, had no option but to concede to Hitler's threats. This emboldened Hitler: he 'drew the lesson that threats were his most potent weapon'. [236] <p>The British guarantee to Poland in March 1939 (formalised as a military alliance in April) abruptly reversed the policy of appeasement with disasterous effects, argues Taylor. Hitler did not seek to invade Poland; rather to have an alliance and to revise the separation of Danzig by the Versailles Treaty. Reports in the British press of German preparations for an invasion of Poland, based on rumours, however, prompted the British to give an assurance to Poland. This bound Britain into going to war over the issue of Danzig and gave the Polish 'virtually... a veto on closer relations with Soviet Russia'. [263]</p>	<p>Factors that shaped the historian's interpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leftist views: Taylor was critical of conservative political views and attracted to subversive ideas. He was highly critical of governments and leaders that he deemed to have performed poorly. Taylor was particularly critical of elitist conservatives who he typically characterised as parochially minded. • Pacifist: Taylor sympathised with the policy of appeasement because he considered its goal of preserving peace a noble, morally virtuous one. He was anti-appeasement in the 1930s and, despite proclaiming to consider the records objectively, his interpretation as a scholar in the 1960s may reflect how he felt in the 1930s as a leftist activist. • Showman/ entertainer/ controversialist: Taylor sought attention through the popular media and used his history to engage audiences. He seems to have attracted controversy and enjoyed advancing unorthodox (and even anti-orthodox) interpretations to generate debate and controversy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sidney Aster argues that Taylor's <i>Origins</i> had such a significant impact and generated so much controversy not simply because of its complex arguments but because of 'the eminence of the author'.² • Taylor wrote in an engaging, flamboyant style; he had an engaging turn of phrase and enjoyed paradoxes. • Taylor wrote in 1961. He had access to published cabinet and other ministry records- these had been selected by the government for publication. They permitted Taylor to piece together a narrative of the decisions made but provided him little evidence of the thinking behind them, or of what leaders knew and thought as they made these decisions. As a result, while his narrative of <i>what</i> happened is based on a solid foundation of documentary evidence, his explanation of <i>why</i>

²² Sidney Aster 'Appeasement Before and After Revisionism', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 19, 3, 2008, 433-480.

<p>Debate 2: Appeasement and the origins of the Second World War</p> <p>Taylor portrays Hitler as an opportunist: he did not create instability in Europe, though he took advantage of it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> He emphasises the internal divisions of Czechoslovakia and seems to sympathise with the desire of Sudeten Germans to achieve union with the Reich following the <i>Anschluss</i> of the year before. 'Hitler did not create this movement... The crisis over Czechoslovakia was provided for Hitler. He merely took advantage of it'. [191] Taylor also challenges the orthodox view that Hitler was bent on starting a European war to achieve Nazi Germany's foreign policy aims. Rather, he argues, Hitler 'meant to succeed by intrigue and the threat of violence, not by violence itself'. [192] Regarding the Czech crisis, Taylor claims that Hitler lacked a clear plan: rather, he 'screwed up the tension' hoping that another nation would act first. [192] Benes did likewise, hoping to compel Britain and France to intervene on Czechoslovakia's behalf. 'Hitler and Benes both wished to increase the tension and to bring on a crisis' [194]. <p>Britain's role in the Czech crisis</p> <p>Taylor argues that Britain intervened in the Sudeten issue despite having no formal agreement with Czechoslovakia. It did so hoping to preserve peace in Europe and contain Hitler. 'In fact, the problem was insoluble in terms of compromise and every step in negotiations made that clear. By seeking to avert a crisis, the British brought it on. The Czechoslovak problem was not of British making; the Czech crisis of 1938 was.' [195]</p>	<p>(especially considering Hitler's motives) rests on fragmentary sources linked by speculation and imagination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patrick Finney links Taylor's interpretation in <i>Origins</i> to the Cold War context in which he wrote. Firstly, was his commitment to the idea of appeasement in a world in which nuclear war made the avoidance of armed conflict especially crucial. Secondly was his growing realisation, in the 1950s, that Britain was not the great imperial power it had once been. Indeed, it may not have been so in the 1930s, hence limiting the extent to which it might have been able to influence European affairs.³ <p>Critical evaluation of the historian's contribution to appeasement scholarship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taylor's interpretation of Hitler's motives is very significant. Any evaluation of appeasement as a policy hinges on Hitler's intentions. If he deliberately planned war (as the orthodox view argues) then appeasement to avoid conflict was folly. If, however, Hitler simply sought to revise Versailles and restore German national integrity – a reasonable policy goal contends Taylor – then appeasement was a prudent approach. The problem with this view, however, is that it ignores much of what we know about Hitler's foreign policy and the aggressive means by which he sought to achieve them. In <i>Mein Kampf</i> and documents such as the Hossbach memorandum Hitler demonstrates that his intentions went beyond simply revising Versailles and that he was prepared to fight a war with the nation of Western Europe to do so. Sidney Aster argues that Taylor's work 'seized the imaginations of historians' immediately before the British government reduced the closure on official records from 50 to 30 years (in May 1967). Hence, when the records became available, historians possessed an alternative view of appeasement policy and of the causes of World War II more generally to test with the archival record- something they did through an enormous amount of publications in the 1970s and 80s. Patrick Finney takes a similar line, arguing that, although Taylor's <i>Origins</i> cannot be characterised as revisionist, it 'comprehensively unsettled dominant ways of looking at the 1930s in order to open up spaces for new narratives, without itself offering a clearly-articulated re-interpretation'. [Finney, 4]
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³ Patrick Finney, 'The Romance of Decline: the Historiography of Appeasement and British National Identity', *Electronic Journal of International History*, 2000.

Williamson Murray, 'Munich at Fifty', *Commentary*, 86, 1, July 1988, 25-30.

<p>Debate 1: The extent of the success and/or failure of appeasement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'The results were catastrophic', claims Murray of appeasement policy at Munich in September 1938. • Significant here is Murray's vastly different view of Hitler (compared with A. J. P. Taylor), seeing him as wanting 'a limited war with Czechoslovakia' and uninterested in a settlement- appeasement was a policy, in other words, that could not have averted war. • Murray's central argument is that Munich in particular (and appeasement policy more generally) was a strategic disaster for Britain and, indeed, that at the time none of Britain's policymakers even seemed to have considered things from a strategic perspective. He notes the enormous military asset that Sudeten Czechoslovakia offered Hitler (especially the Skoda Works) and the economic benefits. Even if appeasement had been to delay rather than avoid war, Murray has found no evidence to suggest that anybody in the British government seriously considered the benefits that additional time (after September 1938) might give the German military forces to prepare for war. Ultimately, at Munich claims Murray, 'the British gave away nothing less than the strategic balance of Europe'. • In summarising Czechoslovakia's strategic value, Murray notes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Czech tanks equipped a third of the Panzer divisions, while four Waffen SS and four Wehrmacht divisions used Czech gear during the invasion of France in 1940 ◦ The Skoda Works would produce German military equipment up to 1945 ◦ The Germans traded Czech equipment for oil and other raw materials (which sustained the German economy to the conquest of Poland). ◦ More generally, Czech occupied the centre of Eastern Europe, a position from which Germany could dominate the region 'diplomatically, economically and strategically'. • Murray also underlines the failure of the appeasement approach by arguing that Britain would have been better to go to war in 1938 – when Germany's military forces, and especially its air force – were not prepared. • Following Munich, up to March 1939 the British Government did not – despite its rhetoric – increase armament in any meaningful way. 	<p>Brief biography of the historian (note the context in which he worked)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After graduating from Yale University with Honours in History he served in the US Air Force for five years, including tours to Vietnam. • PhD in military-diplomatic history from Yale • Based at Ohio State University since 1977 but his distinguished career has included temporary appointments at other universities and military academies. • He has published dozens of specialist academic books on military operations, strategies and diplomacy. • In 1984 Murray published <i>The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938-1939: The Path to Ruin</i>. He considered appeasement policy and sought to explain why European nations allowed Germany to gain a dominant strategic position in Europe. <p>Factors that shaped the historian's interpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Murray wrote in a context of revisionism, in which historians suggested that 'Munich was only a symptom of larger trends in the world, presaging the collapse of British and French empires...'. Even if this is the case, argues Murray, Britain and French can be criticised for their short-sightedness: winning a war and losing an empire would be far better than losing a war and being completely dismembered. • Murray approaches his subject from the perspective of strategic and diplomatic history; he is equipped to both analyse the diplomacy of appeasement and its strategic implications. • Use of operational records, in particular those in Germany. Murray's use of Luftwaffe records, for example, challenged the revisionist view that had Britain gone to war in 1938 it would have faced a devastating aerial attack. • Political context: Reagan Era (1980-88) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Massive increase in arms spending (\$1.6 trillion in five years) underlying Reagan's policy of confronting the Soviet Union more directly than his predecessors ◦ Significant US military interventions include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lebanon (1982-83) ▪ Invasion of Grenada (1983) ▪ Air strikes on Libya that were condemned by the UN (1986) ◦ 1988 election- great divergence in foreign policy and continued defence spending geared towards confronting USSR • Murray is motivated by what he perceives as 'a resurgence of the illusions of Munich' following the Vietnam war in the press and debates about foreign policy. He is disturbed by media commentary 'slanted toward the easy, soft assumptions of appeasement'. He clearly supports the Reagan administration's recent military interventions in Libya and Lebanon and the US's support for Israel against its Arab neighbours and the Palestinian movement. For Murray, the example of British appeasement in the 1930s justifies the use of military force in foreign conflicts if it is
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<p>Debate 2: The origins of appeasement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although the article focuses on Munich it conceives appeasement as a long-term policy. Murray, indeed, argues that Munich encapsulated 'the blighted fruit of a decade of appeasement and surrender'. Murray challenges A. J. P. Taylor's view that German foreign policy in the 1920s was justified by its harsh treatment in the Treaty of Versailles. '...the Germans got off lightly indeed in 1919', he argues. Germany convinced 'gullible' British and American leaders that they had been unfairly treated and embarked on a vigorous re-armament program in 1933 that the world's leaders did not attempt to check. Although Murray criticises Chamberlain for the policy, he notes the culpability of others in the British government too. He notes, for example, how the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, emphasised the moral importance (even at the expense of strategic and economic factors) of conciliating Germany. In fact, the only dissention Murray notes in Churchill – a point that David Reynolds has demonstrated is a myth, as Churchill remained quiet about the policy before Munich in the hopes of securing reappointment to Cabinet. He also, however, singles out Chamberlain for particular criticism, characterising him as a PM who wanted to simply appease Germany and 'get on with the serious business of social reform in the British Isles'. Murray notes that, despite worst-case scenarios by the chiefs of the armed services, Chamberlain actually reduced defence spending in 1937. In contrast to Churchill, he does not characterise Chamberlain as morally weak but, rather, as a politician predominantly concerned with domestic policy and unwisely faithful in Hitler's goodwill. 	<p>necessary in meeting the USA's 'larger responsibilities in the world'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Commentary</i> is a monthly magazine published by the American Jewish Committee. By the 1980s it had a reputation for taking a conservative political position on issues, especially those pertaining to the Arab-Israeli conflict (that is, it supported Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands and Israel's efforts to defend itself from its Arabic neighbours). Murray's critique of revisionist literature and, more broadly, of non-interventionism in contemporary conflicts, suits this magazine's political perspective: it justifies the use of military force, rather than appeasement, to maintain the state of Israel. <p>Critical Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Murray's contributes to the literature by considering appeasement from a strategic perspective, as opposed to the focus on other factors (leadership, morality, economics etc.) that other historians of the orthodox and revisionist schools used to evaluate the appeasement policy. In this respect he convincingly demonstrates that appeasement, and especially the Munich agreement, left Britain strategically weak while boosting Germany's military and economic strength in Eastern Europe. This is a significant challenge to Taylor's claim that appeasement was a 'triumph' for British policy. While agreeing with Churchill and the orthodox view, it does so with greater authority, based on archival research, including in Germany. Nonetheless, Murray is not a partial observer. His conservative political views on US foreign policy and, in particular Israel, is clear and is likely to have influenced his interpretation of Munich. For Murray, the failure British appeasement offers a justification of US intervention in Middle Eastern and South American conflicts, and its confrontation of the USSR with military force. Murray's <i>Munich at Fifty</i> is, therefore, an interesting example of how historians (and politicians) use what they consider the lessons of Munich to criticise or justify contemporary foreign policy. It is an example of how an understanding of the past can come to bear on how we perceive current events.
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Norin M. Ripsman and Jack S. Levy, 'Wishful Thinking or Buying Time: the Logic of Appeasement in the 1930s', *International Security*, 33, 2 (Fall 2008), 148-181.

<p>Debate 1: The Origins of Appeasement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ripsman and Levy challenge the orthodox view that appeasement policy was motivated by the British government's desire to avoid war at all costs, and its dangerously naive expectation that this might be possible. R&L contend that this was not the purpose of appeasement: British statesmen 'were driven by strategic balance of power calculations, not by wishful thinking about the ability to pacify Hitler'. In other words, they pursued appeasement to delay war ('buying time') until Britain was in a better strategic position to challenge Germany. They use a variety of cabinet and ministerial documents, and private papers, to demonstrate that British statesmen recognised German rearmament and expansionist goals from 1933 when Hitler first came to power. Most ministers predicted a war with Germany from an earlier date than the orthodoxy implies. British re-armament started in 1933 following the German withdrawal from the League. It was hindered by Britain's economic position, which, argue L&R, prompted British governments to appease Germany 'in an attempt to slow the pace of German challenges'. The Nazi Anschluss of Austria prompted the British to accelerate disarmament despite the fact that British ministers recognised the damage this would cause the British economy. Appeasement continued in 1938-39 with the purpose of slowing German expansion enough to allow the British to re-arm: 'British appeasement at Munich, then, was driven by a bleak assessment of relative power'. R&L acknowledge an ambivalence about the purpose of appeasement in Chamberlain's mind, as revealed in his letters to his sister. They indicate that he wanted to avoid a conflict with Germany altogether, if at all possible (though he was not optimistic about this); if not, then, to buy time to re-arm. 	<p>Brief biography of the historian (note the context in which he worked)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Norrin Ripsman is a professor in Political Science specialising in international relations and foreign policy. Jack Levy is a political scientist specialising in international relations and foreign policy. His publications have focused on war. <p>Factors that shaped the historian's interpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unlike most others who write about the inter-war policies of Britain and her allies, R&L are not historians – they are political scientists specialising in international relations. Whereas historians typically approach their subject to discern change and continuity, R&L are concerned with the mechanics of appeasement as a foreign policy device- how it works and what policymakers might use it to achieve. The history is secondary- it provides a real world example from which they can see how appeasement functions. R&L's analysis is framed by their particular definition of appeasement. They argue that most definitions of appeasement incorporate values (usually negative) – 'they prejudge the morality or effectiveness of appeasement'. R&L see appeasement as a distinct and credible strategic device and define it as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'a strategy of sustained, asymmetrical concessions in response to a threat, with the aim of avoiding war, at least in the short term'. Using historical examples they identify three purposes of appeasement strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To resolve grievances without fighting To diffuse secondary threats (ie to placate a minor adversary in order to focus on a larger one) To buy time in order to achieve a stronger strategic position before fighting R&L are careful to emphasise that their purpose is not to evaluate appeasement- that is, to determine if it was the right policy. Indeed, they acknowledge that British appeasement strategy was based on flawed intelligence and a mis-reading of Hitler's intentions.
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Debate 2: The Extent of the Success and/or Failures of Appeasement

- Although R&L explicitly indicate that *evaluation* of appeasement is not their purpose, their conclusions have some implications for this debate.
 - R&L link British re-armament to British awareness of German aggression and expectations of a war.
 - Delaying war until September 1939 allowed time for a significant boost to British arms. Between 1937-39 defence spending almost tripled as a total amount and doubled as a percentage of government spending. Rearmament gave the
 - Royal Navy a quantitative advantage over the German *Kriegsmarine*
 - British Army a higher level of mechanization than the German reserve army (the *landswehr*)
 - The British homeland coastal defences and radar networks
 - RAF new fighter aircraft such as the Hurricane and Spitfire
- R&L nonetheless concede that the Germans made better use of the time that appeasement ‘bought’. This does not, however, undermine appeasement as a ‘buying time’ measure – it instead points to problems with British intelligence and other areas of military policy that are outside the purview of R&L’s analysis.

Critical evaluation of the historian’s contribution to appeasement scholarship

- Though a recent contribution to the literature R&L maintain what Finney notes as a characteristic of revisionist scholarship – that is, an emphasis the structural factors that constrained British foreign policy in the 1930s and which might explain the motivation behind appeasement and perhaps even justify it.
- ‘Our analysis’, they claim, ‘builds on this newer scholarship by confirming these more pragmatic motivations and identifying more clearly the link between appeasement and rearmament’. Hence, R&L convincingly challenge a criticism made by Taylor that appeasement and rearmament were incongruent policies – that is, that they contradicted each other. R&L show how appeasement and rearmament were part of the same policy direction to delay war until Britain was equipped, militarily, to fight Germany.
- R&L make an important contribution by attempting to divorce appeasement strategy from its value-laden context and to analyse it from a pragmatic and strategic perspective. This allows them to consider the possibility that British ‘appeasers’ were not cowardly or naive- but rather, calculating and realistic.

Exam Advice

The challenge: Moving beyond describing the historians' contribution to the debates to analysing the historiographical issues that shaped and defined their work.

The Content	Historiographical issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do the historians say	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal context<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Politics◦ Position/training◦ Personality• Purpose• Evidence• Relationship to other works• Can historians discover a truth about this issue? Should they even try?

Some useful questions for class debate:

- To what extent do the historians agree? Where do they differ?
- How much has our understanding of appeasement changed over time?
 - Is there more of a consensus than there was in the 1950s?
 - Is our understanding more sophisticated now than it was then?
 - Are we getting closer to the truth of appeasement? Can we?
- Why do historians' accounts of appeasement differ?
- To what extent do representations of appeasement fit neatly into categories like 'orthodox', 'revisionist' and 'post-revisionist'?
- Patrick Finney argues that 'new evidence' (from the opening of archives etc) has had little impact on our understanding of appeasement. Rather, our understanding of Britain's declining role in world affairs has been the most influential factor. What do you think of this?
- What have been the most influential interpretations of appeasement?
- To what extent have professional, academic historians influenced the popular understanding of appeasement?