

Interpretations of Appeasement

Word	Definition
Appeasement	British policy which gave in to the dictators, allowing them to have what they wanted in the hope that they would stop.
interpretation	A view of history
orthodox	An accepted view
revisionist	Historians who change/modify the orthodox view
Counter revisionist	Historians who change/modify the revisionist view
Cabinet	The top advisers and ministers who help the prime minister.
telegram	A written message sent along a wire
Munich	Reference to the Munich Conference 1938 when Hitler was allowed to take the Sudetenland.
Grand Alliance	A union of the most important countries. Stalin wanted to create a Grand Alliance against Hitler but Chamberlain refused.

This information was in KO 1 but the bulk of the work for this will be in LC2

Interpretation 1

Popular majority view

'Well done Chamberlain!' (1937 – 1938)

The interpretation is that: Chamberlain stopped war. He kept the peace.

Features of this interpretation:

- In 1938 Chamberlain came back from Munich as a hero.
- The Munich Agreements had stopped war breaking out.
- 40,000 telegrams were sent to Chamberlain congratulating him.
- The king and queen celebrated Chamberlain on the Buckingham Palace balcony.

Reasons why this interpretation came out at this time (1937-1938)

- The British people still had memories of WW1; they did not want another war so supported Appeasement.
- The British people feared modern warfare. They had seen how deadly German bombing raids had been in the recent Spanish Civil War.
- Most British people had not heard of the Sudetenland so they would not support going to war to defend it.

Interpretation 2

Popular and political view

'The Guilty Men' (1939 – 1948)

The interpretation is that: Appeasement was foolish, cowardly, and immoral. It made Hitler stronger and Britain weaker.

Features of this interpretation:

- The dictators had been appeased which made them stronger.
- Japan had got away with Manchuria; Italy got away with Abyssinia and Hitler had been allowed the Sudetenland. This made Britain look weak.
- Britain was left unprepared for war.

Reasons why this interpretation came out at this time (1939-1948)

- Many people felt ashamed about Munich. Chamberlain had betrayed Czechoslovakia by letting Hitler have the Sudetenland.
- The war was going badly. France and Norway had been taken over by Nazi Germany. Chamberlain was blamed for this.
- Lord Beaverbrook paid for 'Guilty Men' to be published. He wanted his friend Winston Churchill to replace Chamberlain as prime minister.

Interpretation 3

The Orthodox view

(1948 – 1960s)

The interpretation is that: Appeasement was a misjudgement and miscalculation even though Chamberlain thought he was doing the right thing.

Features of this interpretation:

- Churchill wrote his interpretation as a book called 'The Gathering Storm'.
- Churchill argued that Appeasement was wrong and had encouraged Hitler rather than stopping him.
- Churchill argued that Chamberlain was morally right to try to stop war but misjudged Hitler.
- Churchill argued that Chamberlain should have put together a 'Grand Alliance' of Britain, France, the USA and the USSR against Hitler.

Reasons why this interpretation came out at this time (1948-1960s)

- Churchill wrote 'The Gathering Storm' to make himself remembered as the only politician who kept criticising Appeasement in the 1930s.
- Churchill was trying to warn the world that if you ignore dictators then disaster will follow. At the time Churchill was writing, Stalin was taking over Eastern Europe so Churchill compared Stalin to Hitler.

Interpretation 4

The Revisionist view

(1960s – 1990s)

The interpretation is that: Chamberlain was in an impossible position. He did the best he could have in the circumstances; he bought Britain time to re-arm.

Features of this interpretation:

- AJP Taylor was the first revisionist. He praised and criticised Chamberlain saying that no one could have predicted Hitler's actions. Taylor did not see Appeasement as something positive.
- Historians like Donald Cameron Watt argued that there was nothing else Chamberlain could have done. He had other problems like the British Empire, money and the military.
- Appeasement bought time to re-arm. Britain had time to build up its air defences and the RAF.
- Britain was not ready to fight in 1938; it was in 1939 and the people were more supportive of going to war over Poland than the Sudetenland.

Reasons why this interpretation came out at this time (1960s-1990s)

- The 1960s was a time when historians thought about history in different ways.
- War was seen as wrong by many. In America, their war in Vietnam was going very badly. The Americans had rejected peace. So, historians writing in the 1960s were affected by the peaceful attitudes of the time, so Chamberlain was seen as a hero again.
- The 1958 Records Act was passed in Britain which meant that historians could see documents from the 1930s which had been secret. They saw that Chamberlain had many other problems to deal with – Hitler was just one of many.

Interpretation 5

The Counter Revisionist view

(1990s onwards)

The interpretation is that: Chamberlain was part of the problem. He was vain and made the mistake of believing he could trust what Hitler told him.

Features of this interpretation:

- RAC Parker was the first counter revisionist. He argued that Chamberlain overrated his abilities and made the mistake of trusting Hitler.
- Chamberlain refused to listen to the advice of those closest to him.
- Chamberlain ignore the USSR (Stalin's) attempts to make an alliance with Britain and France against Hitler. Consequently, this made Stalin make the Nazi-Soviet Pact with Hitler.
- Chamberlain betrayed Czechoslovakia at Munich.

Reasons why this interpretation came out at this time (1990 onwards)

- Many historians like RAC Parker could not agree with the Revisionist view that Chamberlain had no other options. It is the job of professional historians to disagree with earlier views and attempt to make them better.
- When the Soviet Archives were opened, historians discovered documents which revealed that Stalin had tried several times to try to form an alliance with Britain against Hitler but Chamberlain had not responded.

Interpretations of the origins of the Cold War

Word	Definition
Cold War	A war of words, threats and propaganda between the USA and the USSR 1945-1990.
interpretation	A view of history
orthodox	An accepted view
revisionist	Historians who change/modify the orthodox view
Post revisionist	Historians who change/modify the revisionist view
Containment	US policy of stopping Communism spreading
Communism	A political/economic idea based on everyone being equal.
Capitalism	A political/economic idea based on individuals making money.
Eastern Europe	Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, East Germany
economic	things to do with money

Date	Event
1945	WW2 ended when USA dropped two atomic bombs. Meetings at Yalta and Potsdam show that the relationship between the USA and the USSR was breaking down. Stalin continued taking over the countries of Eastern Europe
1946	George Kennan's Long Telegram published. Winston Churchill's Iron Curtain Speech Red Scare in the USA
1947	Truman Doctrine – President Truman promises to help any country trying to stop the spread of Communism Marshall Plan - \$17 billion given to Europe to stop Communism.
1948	Berlin Blockade and Airlift
1959	William Appleman Williams published his book 'The Tragedy of American Diplomacy'
1972	President Nixon visited China and the USSA. Cold War was thawing.
1983	John Lewis Gaddis produced his post revisionist view of the origins of the Cold War. President Reagan described the USSR as an 'evil empire'.
1999	John Lewis Gaddis returned to the orthodox view in his new book 'We Now Know.'

Interpretation 1

The US Orthodox view

(1940s – 1960s)

The interpretation is that: The USSR was to blame for the Cold War.

Features of this interpretation:

- The USSR under Stalin was aggressively spreading Communism.
- The USSR caused the Cold War by taking over Eastern Europe.
- The USA had no choice but to introduce the Marshall Plan to save Europe from Communism.

Reasons why this interpretation came out at this time (1940s – 1960s)

- The Americans were obsessed with stopping Communism. They were afraid that Soviet spies were working within the USA. This was called the Red Scare.
- Some of the historians who produced this interpretation were involved in the events and clearly hated Communism. For example, George Kennan.
- US historians were unlikely to explain the causes of the Cold War without putting all the blame on the USA.

Interpretation 2

The US Revisionist view

(1960s – 1970s)

The interpretation is that: The USA were to blame for the Cold War.

Features of this interpretation:

- The USA wanted to build an economic empire in Europe. This was the 'open door' policy.
- The Marshall Plan was set up to protect US trade with Europe – to stop the USA losing money.
- President Truman's attitude to Stalin was too aggressive so it is no surprise that he became defensive.

Reasons why this interpretation came out at this time (1960s-1970s)

- Historians like William Appleman Williams was critical of America's actions in other parts of the world like Cuba and Vietnam.
- Appleman Williams said that it was wrong to criticise the Soviets spreading communism in places like Cuba when the USA was spreading capitalism in Europe through the Marshall Plan.
- The Vietnam War made the US public question everything their government told them.

Interpretation 3

The Post-Revisionist view

(1970s – 1989)

The interpretation is that: Both the USSR and the USA were to blame.

Features of this interpretation:

- Both sides misunderstood each other.
- The USA overreacted to the actions of the USSR which then caused the USSR to overreact.
- It was fear, confusion and misunderstanding on both sides.

Reasons why this interpretation came out at this time (1970s-1989)

- Historian John Lewis Gaddis said that the orthodox and revisionist views were too simplistic.
- The 1970s was a time when President Nixon (USA) was following a policy of détente. This helped 'thaw' the Cold War. It was backed up with the SALT agreements.

Interpretation 4

The New Cold War historians

(1989 onwards)

The interpretation is that: it still isn't clear which side caused the Cold War although many historians like Gaddis returned to the orthodox view.

Features of this interpretation:

- New sources confirmed what people already thought.
- John Lewis Gaddis decided that Stalin was mostly to blame.
- Only a small number of historians still agree with the revisionist view. E.g., Caroline Kennedy Pipe.

Reasons why this interpretation came out at this time (post 1989)

- The Cold War ended. The USSR collapsed. This meant that all the USSR's secret documents were available to historians like Gaddis.
- President Reagan had been US president in the 1980s. He had convinced many people that the USSR was an 'evil empire' and that communism was an 'evil system'. This convinced many that the USSR caused the Cold War.