British Appeasement 1936-1939: The Debate between Parliament and the Public

Kylie Johnson

My paper will explore the debate over appeasement in Great Britain from 1936-1939 as this period shows the most evidence of the debates between the public and parliament on the issue of appeasement. The research process brought me through a period of “source overload” where I had too many resources to know where to begin. My research brought me from a broad topic of “World War II” to “Britain and World War II,” “British Appeasement and World War II,” “British Appeasement 1936-1939,” and finally “British Appeasement 1936-1939: The Debate between Parliament and the Public.” Using a collection of secondary sources from traditionalist, “old revisionist,” revisionist, and “new revisionist” historians of appeasement from the book stacks in Lied Library and the JSTOR database, I was able to narrow down my research to my investigation of the debate between the British Parliament and Public. These resources not only helped me develop my thesis, but also helped me identify my “place” in the scholarship on appeasement prior to World War II.

One article in particular from the JSTOR database provided my research with the most direction, “Wishful Thinking or Buying Time? The Logic of British Appeasement in the 1930s” by Norrin M. Ripsman and Jack S. Levy. These historians provided me with a base definition of appeasement that I was able to develop and expand on throughout my research. This source also guided my research by allowing me to narrow down my “source overload” to those sources and resources that best suited my direction and purpose. Once I had developed a rough thesis, I was able to begin looking into primary sources that dealt with the British policy of appeasement.

The primary sources that I analyzed for my research include articles from the *London Times,* the Chamberlain and Churchill papers, the HANSARD database of United Kingdom Parliamentary documents, and the UK Parliamentary papers. The *London Times* articles and sources best represent the voice of the public, as these articles best represent the wide and changing opinions of the average British person in this time period. Understanding the viewpoints of the public is crucial to my analysis of the British policy of appeasement and how/why it changed throughout the years 1936-1939. The HANSARD documents, as well as speeches and articles made and printed by members of Parliament and Prime Ministers Churchill and Chamberlain, best represent the voice of Parliament in my research. The HANSARD database was perhaps the most important resource for my research as it provided the “real life” opinions of the members of Parliament beyond the official documents. These sources illustrate the changes in Parliamentary opinion on an individual basis, showing the diversity within Parliament between its members on top of the differences between Parliament and the Public.

The *London Times* and HANSARDdatabases allowed me to form two interesting graphs to analyze the appearance of key terms in British documents during this period. My keyword searches in both databases included: “Appeasement and War and Germany,” “Appeasement and War and Germany and Rearmament,” “Appeasement,” and “Rearmament.” Tracking the usage of these terms from 1936-1939 provided an interesting dimension to my research that helped zero in the debate between Parliament (HANSARD) and the Public (*London Times*)over the policy of appeasement.

After completing this research and providing new information into the scholarship on appeasement, I began applying my work in other cases. I used this research for a paper in my History of World War II in Europe and North Africa, and applied to present at the Western Regional Honors Conference (WRHC) for 2017. The theme for the conference this year is leadership and the research I am continuing to develop aids in the understanding of the relationship between government and the public.