Debating the Causes of World War II?

WHY IS THIS DEBATE IMPORTANT?

The Second World War claimed the lives of approximately 50 million people. Historians, politicians, decision-makers and others have decided that it is important to look into its causes, at least to avoid such a conflict ever occurring again.

THE LONG HISTORICAL DEBATE

You will discover the further that you study this topic that historians continue to argue over what were the real causes of World War II. After World War II it was convenient for Britain, France, the USA and the USSR to blame the evil demagogue Hitler for scheming the expansion of Germany and hence the war.

In 1961 the Historian AJP Taylor came up with different reasons which removed some of the blame from Hitler and cast some of that on the Allies failure to intervene at an earlier stage; he also argues that Hitler didn’t have a master plan, but that Hitler took advantage of opportunities provided by his opponents. Some Historians, such as PMH Bell, argue differently; that World War II was a continuation of World War I (the Thirty Years War: 1914-45) and was made inevitable mostly by the failure of the Treaty of Versailles settlement – ie it provided Germany with the cause to expand eastwards, only guided by Hitler.

Some influential people, such as Churchill, argued that German expansion could have been stopped when they had started to re-arm. There are those who blame the USA for not providing support to the League of Nations and for later remaining isolationist. Some put the emphasis on the Great Depression for paving the way for Hitler to come to power and for the need for Japanese expansion.

There has been an argument that Germany’s rearmament created a need for raw materials which they could only acquire by conquering new territory, thus they needed to rearm further to do this (an endless cycle).

Recently, with new information being released from the former Soviet Union, there is an argument that the Nazi-Soviet Pact was designed by Stalin to open up the way for him to later invade Germany, and that Hitler beat him to it on 22nd June 1941; so can Stalin be blamed for opening the way to Germany’s invasion of Poland and thus for the war?

DEBATE FOCUS QUESTIONS

In the next class lesson there will be a Discussion/Debate over the causes of World War II. As you prepare for this Debate by going through TASKS ONE, TWO & THREE below, try to keep in mind these Focus Questions:

1. What were the various causes of World War II?
2. What were the Long Term and Short Term causes of the War?
3. Who/what was MOST to blame for the War?
4. How could the war have been avoided?

TASK ONE

Listen to the Sound file called “Who was to blame”. At the same time read through the transcript of the sound file called “Who was to blame – transcript”.

As you do try to identify who each of the Four People blame for causing the Second World War? The Four people are:

John
Andrea
Peter
Paula
TASK TWO

Read through the document called “Causes – Davies” and answer the questions 1-5 at the end of the document.

TASK THREE

Open the document called “Causes – Fuller” and read through Page 1 (Pages 2-3 are extra optional information). This document focuses on long and short term causes of the War.

Congratulations!! You should now be ready to contribute intelligently to the coming lesson.

EXTRA OPTIONAL READINGS

The following are extra readings which have been enclosed in the webpage resource called “Optional Extra Readings”. They all bring up extra or different aspects to the debate. It would be worth quickly scanning through some of them:

1. Causes – Pearce
2. Causes – Taylor
3. Long Term Causes – History Learning Site
4. Causes – Angelfire
5. Causes – BBC

EXTRA QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Here are some extra questions that you might like to think about:

1. How were the effects of World War I related to the causes of World War II?
2. How did the great depression contribute to the coming of World War II?
3. How did fascism contribute to the coming of World War II?
4. What were the roles of England, France and the Soviet Union in contributing to the coming of World War II?
5. What was the role of the United States in contributing to the coming of World War II?