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A Good Way To Pick a Fight by Charles L. Mee, Jr

Term Paper II

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HIST-1302

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The article *A Good Way to Pick a Fight* by Charles L. Mee, Jr. is about the grievances between the Allies after World War II that led to the beginning of the Cold War. Mee argues that the majority of the people in the world seek peace above all else and that the Cold War was the result of haughty politicians and diplomatic reasoning falling apart. The Cold War was a natural conclusion of the political conflicts of the first half of that century. As imperialism began to trend downwards, a power vacuum in governing was left to be fulfilled. Imperial dynasties such as the Czars and Kaisers were replaced by communism and fascism. Total monarchy in England was long a thing of the past with the King largely serving as a figurehead with little more power than a celebrity. American political machines saw their peak before the great depression and the favor system began to give way to party politics. The three main political schools of thought; being communism, fascism, and democratic systems of government, were naturally at odds with one another. Western Europe only tolerated the Bolshevik movement in Russia at best, notably with Winston Churchill and France seeking to crush it out of existence in the years immediately after World War I. Fascism at the state level was defeated in most places during World War II, save holdouts such as Francisco's Spain, which left the democratic west pitted against the communist east in this ideological struggle. This article shows how these opposing forces slipped into the perilous spiral known as the Cold War and how quickly the Allies went from working together to being mortal enemies.

Belligerence between the two sides did not begin with the end of World War II and the events of this article. British and French politicians sought to suppress the communist revolution in Russia from its onset, through both political and military means. On the other side, the Russians were not innocent of political intrigue prior to the Cold War. The Soviets established the Comintern to subvert democratically elected governments and incite revolution fully a decade before World War II even began. The postwar rift that began with the events in this

article has its foundation in the years prior to World War II. Upper class parliamentary men were scared of Communism spreading in the working class in Britain in the 1930's and inciting a revolution reminiscent of the one that destroyed Czarist Russia, which thus created and perpetuated the weak foreign policy of appeasement adopted by Chamberlain. At the point in time of this article, Churchill and Stalin had already long been political adversaries, working together only to defeat the greater evil in Europe to both of them; fascism. To suggest that the events that led to the birth of the Cold War were not calculated and fully intentional for both sides would be an error.

In this interwar period between World War II and the conglomeration of conflicts known as the Cold War, no single side holds all of the blame for the sequence of events that led to its escalation. Initially, the article states that the Americans antagonized the Russians by bluntly confronting their behavior in Poland, Britain antagonized Russia by leaving the remaining German air force and some of the army largely intact to serve as a possible buffer, and Russia antagonized the West by suppressing several democratic movements in Eastern European countries and fortifying their positions as buffers to the West. This was only the beginning. Mee argues that each of these alone would be enough to antagonize a fight between any one of the belligerent nations. The Allies met in 1944 and early 1945 after the European theatre of World War II ended for several conferences to discuss what their next step would be in restructuring Europe as the victors in this post war environment. Both sides seemed amicable at first and there was hope that the coordination that they previously experienced during the war would continue after. The process began by dividing up Eastern Europe in a way that suited the major powers at play, Russia, America, and Great Britain. The smaller powers had little say in the arrangements and the concept of "spheres of influence" began to emerge. Some of the smaller nations, such as Poland, sought to influence the conference's decision on how their homeland was treated after

the war but were met with scorn. Cordiality among the major powers first began to break down over the Polish problem. Russian diplomats wanted to establish a government friendly to the Soviet Union as they had done in several other Eastern European countries but the United States objected due to perceived violation of rights in other Soviet controlled states. It soon became apparent that no matter the agreement made, neither side would be comfortable with the other exerting their spheres of influence so close to their borders.

At the center of the issue of the spheres of influence stood Germany. After the War Germany was roughly divided in half by the Allies, with Berlin also being divided in half although it fell completely in Soviet territory. The way that the major powers went about dividing up Germany politically and economically between themselves ensured that there would be strife in the near future. The Americans and English sought to keep their side Germany weak enough to never again be capable of starting a war on the continent but strong enough to offer up a substantial buffer against the other side of the newly dubbed "Iron Curtain." Mee argues that as long as Germany was divided both sides would constantly be working against the other side within itself, thus pulling the major powers that represented each side into working against one another.

At the Potsdam conference in which the dividing up of Eastern Europe occurred, the full realization of what the atom bomb was capable of came to be known. The western powers sought to end the war with Japan before the Soviets were able to declare war on Japan and seize parts of East Asia for their own sphere of influence. Mee argues that the bomb was not needed militarily to make Japan surrender, but instead was used to make Stalin easier to deal with in Europe. It is at this point also that the phenomena known as McCarthyism began with the advancing political careers of those that spoke out against Russia and shunning of those that refused to speak aggressively of Russia. As a result the nuclear arms race began in earnest at this

conference, further multiplying the already tense relations between the former Allies and changing the world forever.



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