



In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s

Professor Michael S. Sherry

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Examining how war has defined modern America, this text argues that America's intense preoccupation with war emerged on the eve of World War II, marking a turning point as important as the Revolution, the end of the frontier, and other watersheds in American history. In the 60 years since the war, says Sherry, militarization has reshaped every facet of American life: its politics, economics, culture, social relations and place in the world. According to Sherry, America's militarization began partly in response to threatening forces and changes abroad, but its internal sources and consequences in the long run proved more telling. War - as threat, necessity, or model of unified action - persistently justified the state's growing size, power and activism. But as national government waged "war on poverty", "war on AIDS" and "war on drugs", it fostered expectations of "victory" that it could not fulfill, aggravating the very distrust of federal authority that leaders sought to overcome and encouraging Americans to conceive of war as something they waged against each other rather than against enemies abroad. The paradigm of war thereby corroded Americans' faith in national government and embittered their conflicts over class, race, gender, religion, and the nation's very meaning. Sherry concludes by speculating on the possibility of ending America's long attachment to war.

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