



Beating Plowshares into Swords: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1606-1865

Paul A. C. Koistinen

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Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say I am strong.—Joel 3:10

Beating Plowshares into Swords inaugurates an extraordinarily ambitious effort by Paul Koistinen to compose a comprehensive and wide-ranging study on the economics of American warfare from the colonial period to the present. When completed, this multi-volume project will stand as the definitive work on a complex subject that until now has been superficially treated or completely ignored.

Koistinen focuses not upon battlefields and battles but upon the means used to make and sustain the armies and navies that have fought in such horrific arenas. Drawing upon a vast array of sources in a number of diverse fields, he analyzes how America has mobilized itself for the conduct of war. He argues that to fully understand that process we must closely examine the complex interrelations among economic, political, and military institutions within the context of relentless modernization and technological innovation.

In this first volume, Koistinen describes how an undeveloped "preindustrial" economy forced Americans to fight defensive wars of attrition like the Revolution and the War of 1812. By the time of the Mexican War, however, a gradually maturing economy allowed the U.S. to use a much more offensive-minded strategy to achieve its goals. The book concludes with an exhaustive examination of the Civil War, a conflict that both anticipated and differed from the total wars of the industrialized era. Koistinen demonstrates that the North relied upon its enormous economic might to overwhelm the Confederacy through a strategy of annihilation, while the South bungled its own strategy of attrition by failing to mobilize effectively a much less-developed economy.

With this and subsequent volumes, Koistinen's sweeping synthesis provides a panoramic view that enlarges and in significant ways alters our vision of the turbulent relationship between war and society in America.

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