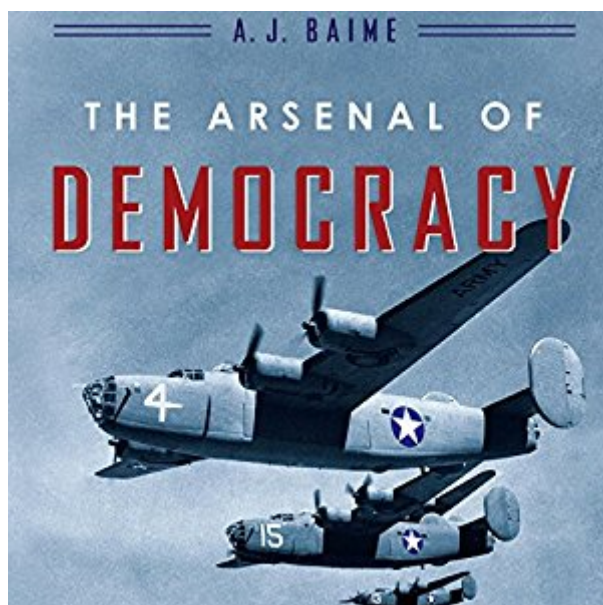


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The Arsenal Of Democracy: FDR, Detroit, And An Epic Quest To Arm An America At War



Synopsis

A New York Times best seller. A dramatic, intimate narrative of how Ford Motor Company went from making automobiles to producing the airplanes that would mean the difference between winning and losing World War II. In 1941, as Hitler's threat loomed ever larger, President Roosevelt realized he needed weaponry to fight the Nazis - most important, airplanes - and he needed them fast. So he turned to Detroit and the auto industry for help. The Arsenal of Democracy tells the incredible story of how Detroit answered the call, centering on Henry Ford and his tortured son Edsel, who, when asked if they could deliver 50,000 airplanes, made an outrageous claim: Ford Motor Company would erect a plant that could yield a "bomber an hour". Critics scoffed: Ford didn't make planes; they made simple, affordable cars. But bucking his father's resistance, Edsel charged ahead. Ford would apply assembly-line production to the American military's largest, fastest, most destructive bomber; they would build a plant vast in size and ambition on a plot of farmland and call it Willow Run; they would bring in tens of thousands of workers from across the country, transforming Detroit, almost overnight, from Motor City to the "great arsenal of democracy." And eventually they would help the Allies win the war. Drawing on exhaustive research from the Ford Archives, the National Archives, and the FDR Library, A. J. Baime has crafted an enthralling, character-driven narrative of American innovation that has never been fully told, leaving readers with a vivid new portrait of America - and Detroit - during the war.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A.J. Baime's *Arsenal of Democracy* is so well written that it's tough to put down. It's a five-star read from the first page to the last. It's a deep dive into the Fords and Detroit. Several books have drawn attention to this recent time in America. The story of FDR's 'Arsenal of Democracy' is right-fairly called the greatest human project in history. The story of the mobilization of the American industrial base from depression to victory in WW2 in 42 months is utterly fascinating. Baime plunges the reader's mind into the pressures of the production schedule versus war casualties. He drives the reader to an anxiety ... an empathy with the participants in the massive story. Nearly half of Baime's story is set in the dismal industrial decline in the years before Pearl Harbor. Setting the stage in this way amplifies the magnitude of the industrialization effort as the Great Depression is dragging into its 10th year. US industry is worn out and Baime lets the reader feel it. The gov't is out of tricks. Big corp executives are an alienated lot. The citizens are in rags (that would be my parents). National morale is so low that one wonders that it might be generally imagined that the American Dream was an empty hope. America is inward looking and withdrawn from the world since WW1. A pacifist majority dreamed they were protected and insulated by two oceans from the epic battle between good and evil raging 'over there'. Absolutely unprepared, the US is pulled into an unwanted war. Baime succeeds in pulling the reader into the maelstrom. He writes the reader into the frenetic War Dept issuing orders to the factories, and through the unrelenting performance pressures that just as surely killed factory exec's as keenly as the bullet.

• The Arsenal of Democracy • by A.J. Baime (July 2014). I have read hundreds of books related to World War II, and I initially thought that this book would be a rather boring look at production data regarding various WWII aircraft. I could not have been more wrong. This is the first WWII book that I have read regarding how the Ford Motor Co. -- primarily at the instigation of Edsel Ford -- started from scratch in building warplanes to support Pres. FDR's desire of supplying warplanes to the British and Russians. This is the first time that I have read anything about how Henry Ford was so opposed to the 'socialist' policies of FDR, that Henry actively strove to curtail -- if not outright end -- his company's efforts in supplying warplanes to the British. Besides Henry's almost fanatical opposition to anything FDR was advocating, Henry was a pacifist who thought that his company's production of warplanes would assist FDR in guiding the U.S. into war in support of Britain. Henry apparently had a sincere loathing of war, and its destructive consumption of soldiers and civilians -- so much so that Henry became an active pacifist in opposing America's slip-sliding into war in support of England. Unlike Henry, his son Edsel was all aboard in supporting FDR's plans in aiding the UK. Having not been familiar with this topic before, I found this book to

be very informative with its revelations about how harsh the split was between Henry and Edsel, as to how the Ford Motor Co. might enter the production of warplanes. The company had never before manufactured airplanes.

THE ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY By A. B. Baimel have read and reviewed here for VINE and many other places innumerable books on WW II, and many about FDR. This book ranks among the finest of all those I have read and/or written about in this genre. The book reads like both a novel and a screenplay of semi-fictional war history, but it is not, and in fact, there is not a thread of fiction within the text, and in the words of the author, "not a word of it is made up." In the words of Charles Emil Sorensen (Cast Iron Charlie) (7 September 1881 - 11 August 1968) who was a Danish-American principal of the Ford Motor Company during its first four decades and a witness to much of this story. His words: "rivals the weirdest of fiction and the wildest imaginings of the comic books." The story begins with the struggles of Henry Ford in his attempts to create the Model T ford automobile and follows his progress to success and then catches fire in 1941 as Hitler was creating Hell in Europe, and Japan was terrorizing vast spans of two oceans. Ford was an FDR hater and an Isolationist and thus highly opposed WW II. He also had factories in Europe including Germany, making cars and trucks before and into WW II. However, FDR was seeking to do the impossible, with his brainstorm of having automakers create assembly lines of warplanes. FDR's prophetic view of the upcoming war saw fighter and bombers to be the keys to victory. He eventually approached all of the automakers and others to take on the task of outdoing the vaunted Nazi war materials machine.

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