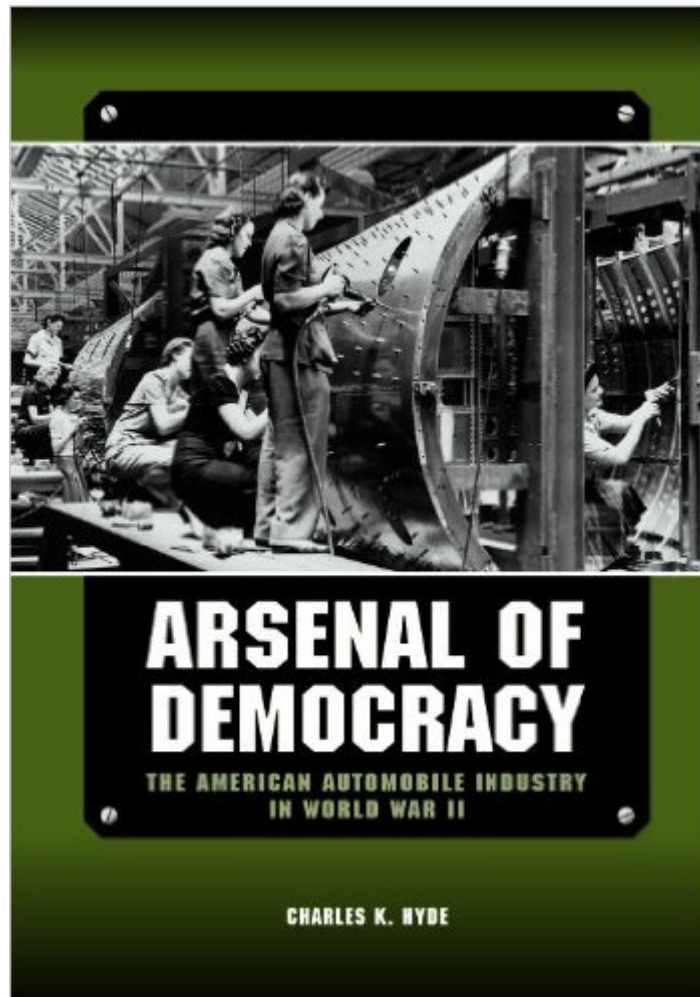


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Arsenal Of Democracy: The American Automobile Industry In World War II (Great Lakes Books Series)



Synopsis

Throughout World War II, Detroit's automobile manufacturers accounted for one-fifth of the dollar value of the nation's total war production, and this amazing output from "the arsenal of democracy" directly contributed to the allied victory. In fact, automobile makers achieved such production miracles that many of their methods were adopted by other defense industries, particularly the aircraft industry. In *Arsenal of Democracy: The American Automobile Industry in World War II*, award-winning historian Charles K. Hyde details the industry's transition to a wartime production powerhouse and some of its notable achievements along the way. Hyde examines several innovative cooperative relationships that developed between the executive branch of the federal government, U.S. military services, automobile industry leaders, auto industry suppliers, and the United Automobile Workers (UAW) union, which set up the industry to achieve production miracles. He goes on to examine the struggles and achievements of individual automakers during the war years in producing items like aircraft engines, aircraft components, and complete aircraft; tanks and other armored vehicles; jeeps, trucks, and amphibians; guns, shells, and bullets of all types; and a wide range of other weapons and war goods ranging from search lights to submarine nets and gyroscopes. Hyde also considers the important role played by previously underused workers—namely African Americans and women—in the war effort and their experiences on the line. *Arsenal of Democracy* includes an analysis of wartime production nationally, on the automotive industry level, by individual automakers, and at the single plant level. For this thorough history, Hyde has consulted previously overlooked records collected by the Automobile Manufacturers Association that are now housed in the National Automotive History Collection of the Detroit Public Library. Automotive historians, World War II scholars, and American history buffs will welcome the compelling look at wartime industry in *Arsenal of Democracy*.

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Customer Reviews

This is first-rate history. Indeed, this is now the standard history of the automobile industry and its contributions to the Arsenal of Democracy. The volume is a carefully and thoroughly researched study of a subject that many people recognize -- that American industrial prowess fueled the allies victory in World War II -- but few know much about the details of the Arsenal and the role of the automobile manufacturers in Detroit, the state of Michigan and around the nation. Hyde tells in detail the massive job of conversion; that is, converting industry from the production domestic products to the machines, airplanes, tanks, artillery, machine guns, ammunition, trucks that won the war, to name just a meager few of the many products produced in American automobile factories. There is one main theme throughout, supported by ample documentation and statistics -- the automobile industry in the United States was the premier manufacturing system in the world, and as airplanes, engines, tanks and other war goods were needed, it was the American car makers that led the way. There is one other important aspect to Professor Hyde's work. Along the way, as he researched and writes about the arsenal, Hyde adds a tremendous amount of information about women -- black and white -- entering the factories in huge numbers, and the service they performed as inspectors, Rosie the Riveters, and every job that previously had been reserved for men. This is a fine book and a contribution to our understanding of America in World War II.

Very insightful book, enjoyed reading from cover to cover. The build up of weapons for the Allies in WWII is astounding. How much and how fast this country was able to build up arms when we had been in a terrible depression with little arsenal to begin with is one of the greatest achievements by this country in our history. Many companies that never before produced anything for the military were very quickly converted to building aircraft, tanks, weapons, having to overcome many major obstacles but persevering nevertheless. If you feel it may be too detailed well isn't that what real history is about, I don't agree with another reviewer that it is too laborious. However there are plenty of real lessons in here for example the racial prejudice against black people where whites would stage strikes. Happened many times at many defense plants and were supported by the unions.

Even in the face of the Axis powers their hatred against blacks overrode their patriotism. There were many people at the time who wanted non-intervention many were prejudice against Jews such as Henry Ford. He refused at first to convert his assembly plants to the war effects as most all major manufacturing companies did. I found one lesson after another here and feeling very proud of all we overcame in order to preserve our freedom. This book should be required reading in school, enjoy.

Arsenal of Democracy is a wonderful book that shows the amazing capability of American industry in the greatest crisis of the twentieth century. Charles Hyde explains how automobile manufacturers and parts suppliers, in Detroit and many other places, worked closely with government officials and the military in the years just before and during World War II. The rapid transition from civilian to military production was simply astounding. After overcoming serious obstacles and expanding its workforce to unprecedented levels, the automobile industry provided an almost limitless supply of weapons, ammunition, planes, vehicles, and other critical equipment for the war effort. No other country approached the incredible level of military production in the United States. Historians are only now beginning to realize how important this industrial strength and logistic wizardry was in achieving victory on the battlefield. Hyde gives ample credit to workers as well as managers and points out that women and African Americans, most of whom were entering the automobile industry for the first time, played a crucial role in this triumph of mass production. Hyde's well-written and nicely-illustrated book will appeal to anyone interested in military, industrial, or business history.

The subject material of the book is actually quite interesting. For example that the automobile industry got to be quite good in making aircraft, and more particularly aircraft engines. On the other hand, the automobile industry did not have as big or decisive a role in making tanks or armored vehicles. Vignettes about some of the folks in the industry (Ford) were also kind of interesting. The downside is that the prose in the book is kind of wooden, and numbers come and go, sometimes repeated, often with little context. It is hard to keep one's attention.

With *Arsenal of Democracy*, Charles Hyde has produced a valuable and detailed history of the contributions of the American auto industry to the Allied victory over the Axis powers during the Second World War. The book is written in a clear and direct manner that makes it accessible to scholars and non-scholars alike. It is also meticulously researched and supported by a wealth of statistical information about the industry's wartime manufacturing output. The opening chapter examines the period before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the respective roles played by

federal government, military, and auto industry leaders in preparing the industry's transformation into the centerpiece of the US war economy. The second chapter carries this same analysis to the war period itself. In the heart of the book the author explores a wide range of military products made by automobile companies during the war. Most of the attention (in chapters 3-5) is devoted to aircraft and tanks. Hyde shows the rude awakening experienced by those who naively believed that the mass production methods of making automobiles could easily be transferred to making aircraft and tanks. Nevertheless, with aid of engineers and draftsmen (who, in my view, are the true, yet unrecognized, heroes of this story) and billions of dollars from the government the industry ramped up production and generated a torrent of war materials. The book concludes with an interesting discussion the auto industry's wartime labor that turned the wheels of production. The emphasis here is on three groups of "new workers": white southern migrants (the most forgotten of the workers), African Americans (particularly African American women, who experienced the most blatant forms of discrimination by management and fellow workers alike), and white women. Arsenal of Democracy should be read by anybody who has an interest in the history of the American auto industry or the history of the economic-side of Second World War.

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