

This Day in History... March 11, 1941

Roosevelt Signs Lend-Lease Act

On March 11, 1941, Franklin Roosevelt signed the Lend-Lease Act to provide aid to Allied forces in World War II.

At the end of 1940, Nazi Germany was marching through Europe. The British and the Commonwealth were boldly fighting alone against the powerful enemy, but their military supplies were running low. They had been paying for their supplies in gold as required by the US Neutrality Acts of the 1930s, but soon ran low on funds.

While the US was resolved to remain neutral, the government also began preparing for war, instituting the first peacetime draft and increasing the defense budget to \$10 billion. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill began pressing President Franklin D. Roosevelt for help.



"We cannot, and we will not, tell them that they must surrender, merely because of present inability to pay for the weapons which we know they must have."

that President Roosevelt had introduced a few months before into action. The agreement allowed America to loan our Allies supplies until they were either no longer needed or destroyed. The US loaned tanks, trains, planes, and trucks to our allies: the Soviet Union, China, France, and the United Kingdom.

The "Liberty Ships" that carried cargo across the sea were produced for Britain before the US entered the war. They were mass-produced in factories, and many women worked on assembly lines for the first time. The US also supplied much-needed rations and clothing to the soldiers in Europe.



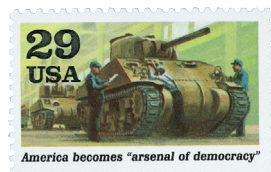
The first Liberty ship was delivered December 30.



Stamp picturing a jeep being delivered under the Lend-Lease Act.

Roosevelt knew America could help, but was hindered by the Neutrality Acts. He also had to get American citizens to support such a plan. On December 29, he gave a radio broadcast in which he referred to the United States as "the great arsenal of democracy," because he knew the automobile factories could be converted to produce the supplies that Britain needed. The US was not willing to go to war in Europe at that time, but through the president's urging, would help its allies defeat the enemy. As one of Roosevelt's biographers put it, "Britain and the Commonwealth were carrying the battle for all civilization, and the overwhelming majority of Americans, led in the late election by their President, wished to help them."

The Lend-Lease Act – also known as "An Act to Promote the Defense of the United States" – was signed into law on March 11, 1941. It put the "arsenal of democracy"



Stamp illustrating the "arsenal of democracy" from Roosevelt's fireside chat.

The act wasn't without its critics. Senator Robert Taft, for instance, claimed that the bill would "give the president power to carry on a kind of undeclared war all over the world, in which America would do everything except actually put soldiers in the front-line trenches where the fighting is."

As stipulated in the act, once the US officially joined the war, it received leases to use Army and Navy bases in Allied territory. Over the course of the war, the US provided \$50.1 billion worth of supplies. This totaled about 17 percent of the nation's total war expenditures. After the war, supplies that hadn't been destroyed were either returned to the US or purchased by the borrowing nation at a deep discount.

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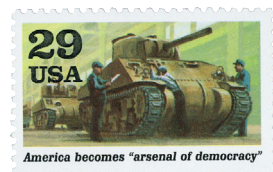
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