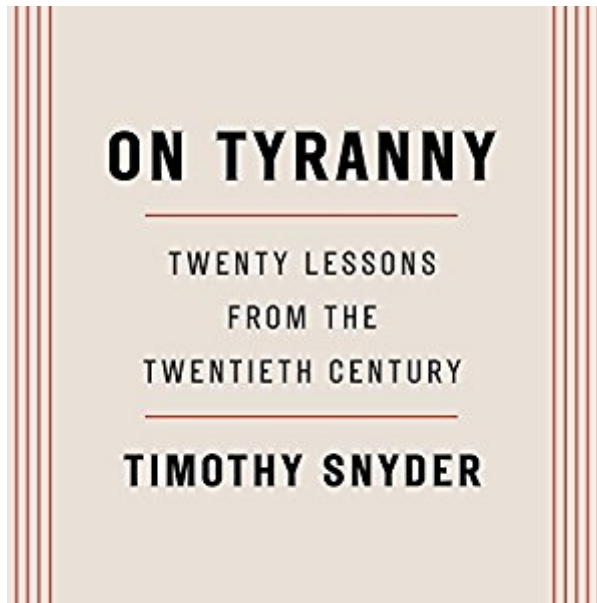




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# On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons From The Twentieth Century



## Synopsis

The Founding Fathers tried to protect us from the threat they knew, the tyranny that overcame ancient democracy. Today, our political order faces new threats, not unlike the totalitarianism of the 20th century. We are no wiser than the Europeans who saw democracy yield to fascism, Nazism, or communism. Our one advantage is that we might learn from their experience.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a short, quick book to read, perhaps 30-45 minutes of your time. And at only \$2.99 (on Kindle) you can't afford not to buy it. For those who found his list of 20 points elsewhere on the web for free, don't let that suffice. The book adds commentary to his list, and it's worth the small cost. For those of you not acquainted with Snyder, he's a historian of Eastern Europe and has written extensively on the turmoil--the killing fields--of Eastern Europe in the 20th century. He knows whereof he speaks. I will offer you a couple of his thoughts from his concluding remarks. In addressing what he terms "the politics of inevitability," he notes "Until recently, we Americans had convinced ourselves that there was nothing in the future but more of the same. The seemingly distant traumas of fascism, Nazism, and communism seemed to be receding into irrelevance. We allowed ourselves to accept the politics of inevitability, the sense that history could move in only one direction: toward liberal democracy. After communism in eastern Europe came to an end in 1989-1991, we imbibed the myth of an 'end of

history. In doing so, we lowered our defenses, constrained our imagination, and opened the way for precisely the kinds of regimes we told ourselves could never return. Snyder, Timothy. *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (Kindle Locations 765-769). Crown/Archetype. Kindle Edition. But he then addresses the converse attitude, what he calls "the politics of eternity." About this attitude, he states: In the politics of eternity, the seduction by a mythicized past prevents us from thinking about possible futures. The habit of dwelling on victimhood dulls the impulse of self-correction. Since the nation is defined by its inherent virtue rather than by its future potential, politics becomes a discussion of good and evil rather than a discussion of possible solutions to real problems. Since the crisis is permanent, the sense of emergency is always present; planning for the future seems impossible or even disloyal. How can we even think of reform when the enemy is always at the gate? Id. at 810-815 In contrast to both of these attitudes, he places history (an encomium with which I could not agree more): Both of these positions, inevitability and eternity, are antihistorical. The only thing that stands between them is history itself. History allows us to see patterns and make judgments. It sketches for us the structures within which we can seek freedom. It reveals moments, each one of them different, none entirely unique. To understand one moment is to see the possibility of being the cocreator of another. History permits us to be responsible: not for everything, but for something. The Polish poet Czesław Miłosz thought that such a notion of responsibility worked against loneliness and indifference. History gives us the company of those who have done and suffered more than we have. Id. at 822-827 In his peroration, he exhorts young people especially (although it applies to all of us) One thing is certain: If young people do not begin to make history, politicians of eternity and inevitability will destroy it. And to make history, young Americans will have to know some. This is not the end, but a beginning. "The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right!" Thus Hamlet. Yet he concludes: "Nay, come, let's go together." Id. at 830-834 Buy this book and read it!

Shatters any illusion that democracy is a given in the US or in any country. One detail I keep thinking about: Snyder's argument that the evisceration of privacy and the humiliation of the individual is a very old fascist technique. Consider that when you think about the email breaches of the last election, or why doxing is a weapon of choice among the cyber brown shirts. Another: the long and terrible legacy of dismantling the rule and protections of law as "exceptions" -- which quickly become permanent -- due to safety "emergencies." Americans may be tested on that sooner

than later. Democracy has and can become totalitarianism in but a few months. The time to stand up for institutions, fair voting, and (this is surprisingly crucial) the ethics of your profession is NOW -- not after it's too late.

I have no doubt *On Tyranny* is a book Tim Snyder wished he didn't have to write, in the same way, as he reminds us, that Hamlet was fated to "set things right". No one knows the history of 20th century Germany, eastern Europe, and Russia better than prof. Snyder. He has accomplished immense scholarship in those countries and shared some of it in *Bloodlands*, *Black Earth*, scholarly papers and commentaries over the years. In measured prose, he imbues his history with the existential anguish of its victims and imparts the cold-blooded nature of the perpetrators. He quietly relates how individuals and societies have weaseled out of bearing responsibility. Personal, familial, and cultural tragedies seep into his writing and it has brought me to tears many times. Prof. Snyder knows a lot more about how tyranny takes hold and uses chance opportunity to impose itself than he can tell in a thousand or ten thousand pages. Reading his work, you can tell that the years of close reading have affected his core. Furthermore, he is very active in the contemporary eastern European culture, where recent years have not been kind to Liberal Democracy. Now, suddenly, authoritarian intolerance and anti-democratic forces are openly and aggressively imposing themselves here in the US. Clearly, he is compelled to share cautionary lessons for Enlightenment-loving, Constitution-embracing, and liberal democratic citizens of his own country and that would be us. We, who are so unprepared to face our threat, who are traumatized and ill-equipped to recognize and react to repression have ask ourselves: "what is to be done, how can we endure this, maintain our self-respect, and resist?" In *On Tyranny*, prof. Snyder has distilled the life lessons of those countless courageous people who faced tyranny and he implies how countless more have shriveled and looked away from the horror they felt coming. This book will aide you to surf your fear and panic well enough to dispassionately lay out how authoritarian politics can modify your behavior and how to be mindful in resisting these changes. Lesson number 1 is about how a person caves into tyranny: individuals think ahead what a more repressive government will want, and then offer themselves without being asked. A citizen who adapts in this way is teaching power what it can do. Fortunately, the other 19 lessons truly instruct and remind the reader about options to resist letting tyranny dominate your life.

I will leave those lessons for you when you read the book. Prof. Snyder's epilogue offers brilliant insight into the fallacies that predominate in our contemporary culture that brought us to this crisis. This is a very serious book and needs to be read a few times and shared with as many people as you can reach. It's an inexpensive book and I recommend buying several copies and handing them out to people who need to read it. It's a small investment for your survival as a member of a civilized and compassionate society.

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