



On Tyranny

Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century

Timothy Snyder · 2017

WHAT IT'S ABOUT

Timothy Snyder is a Yale historian who studies Europe in the twentieth century. In this short book he looks at how democracies there gave way to fascism and communism, and turns those histories into twenty lessons for ordinary citizens.

The lessons are brief, a few pages each. A few of them: *Do not obey in advance. Defend institutions. Believe in truth.* You can read one on a lunch break and still have something to talk about.

WHY WE PICKED IT

It is short, practical, and focused on what everyday people do, not just what leaders do. A good place to start a conversation about democracy without needing a textbook.

QUESTIONS FOR THE TABLE

- 01 Snyder's first lesson is "Do not obey in advance." What does going along before you're asked look like at work, at school, or online?
- 02 "Defend institutions." Which local institutions (libraries, courts, newspapers, school boards) do you count on without thinking about it?
- 03 Pick one lesson you could act on this month. What would it actually look like?

CONNECT IT TO RIGHT NOW

In February 2026, the federal Office of Personnel Management finalized a rule creating Schedule Policy/Career, which removes some civil service protections from career employees in policy roles. Supporters say it makes government more accountable. Critics say it makes it easier to fire people for political reasons.

Snyder says to "remember professional ethics" and "defend institutions." How should we balance accountability with independence for the people who run government?

All 124 seats in the South Carolina House are on the ballot on November 3. State Senate seats are next up in 2028.

Snyder argues democracy depends on ordinary people paying attention. What would it take for more people to follow a state House race as closely as a presidential one?