

It has been difficult to write an essay this week—evident in how late in the week it is appearing—because of the distress that has come into our lives. First, we lost Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the Supreme Court Justice whose dedication to the law and whose expertise in constitutional matters has no equal. Her brilliance was only exceeded by her humanity. She cannot be replaced by anyone near her high standards. And, instead, a choice of Trump will be rammed through as quickly as possible to increase his chance of retaining power any way he can. The rest of our unease and dismay this week has come through the words of Donald Trump. He has, after weeks of hinting at this, come right out in the open and admitted that he will contest the legitimacy of the election on November third if he does not win. People of conscience in this country, regardless of their political beliefs, must not support this. This will mean the end of our democracy as we know it. Trump would not state that he would transfer power peacefully if he were defeated.

These words and all of the increasingly inflammatory rhetoric of Donald Trump make Timothy Snyder's last four lessons from his 2017 book, *On Tyranny*, important for us to learn and to follow.

Lesson #17: Listen for Dangerous Words. Well, we have heard them time and again, with the danger of their taking control of our lives more and more possible. So, we see masks in the minority in our area. Scoffers who have listened to Trump criticize those of us who are following this mask mandate to protect our own health and that of others. We hear racist remarks on a daily basis on the national stage, we hear members of Congress who are immigrants or children of immigrants denigrated and told to "go back to their countries," we see a government in chaos, a Senate that has lost even the appearance of independence. And this is all reinforced day after day, week after week, month after month, by Trump, McConnell, and their followers, people who have neither integrity nor the ability to see the wreck that this country is becoming.

Lesson #18: Be calm when the unthinkable arrives. Snyder writes: "Modern tyranny is terror management. When the terrorist attack comes, remember that authoritarians exploit such events to consolidate power." In our case today, our real concern should be the global Covid 19 pandemic. But, Trump has used it to try to gain power, especially through taking away the legitimacy and the independence of the national health agencies. Statements like he's made regarding his disapproval of too much testing—"if you test, you get more cases"—should have long ago made it clear to the American people that this man does not deserve another four years in the White House. As with his denying that a fair election can take place, and as with his lies to the American people—much of it on tape, he wants to keep the American people terrorized—afraid of immigrants, afraid of protests, afraid of "them," whoever "they" are. In Trump's case, he has minimized the real danger of coronavirus and instead, has stoked Americans' fears of each other.

Snyder goes on: "The sudden disaster that requires the end of checks and balances, the dissolution of opposition parties, the suspension of freedom of expression, the right to a fair trial, and so on, is the oldest trick in the

Hitlerian book. *Do not fall for it.*”

Lesson #19: Be a patriot. Snyder says it best—“Set a good example of what America means for the generations to come. They will need it.”

That example tells us to beware of tweets, treat others with respect—including on social media where people are likely to be less careful with their vitriol than in person. Snyder gives some good examples of what is NOT patriotic behavior: “It is not patriotic to admire foreign dictators. It is not patriotic to cite Russian propaganda at rallies.” He gives several more examples, but the message is—patriotism is serving your own country.

But, patriotism is not nationalism. A nationalist, wrote George Orwell, author of the eerily prescient mid-twentieth century novel *1984*, tends to be “uninterested in what happens in the real world.” A nationalist encourages the worst in us, while a patriot wants us to be the best we can. So, Trump the Nationalist says that climate change does not exist, that allies are not important, that health care is not for all of us, that masks are foolish (except for the people standing close to him who have also been tested for Covid 19.)

The last lesson in *On Tyranny* gives us is: “Be as courageous as you can.” We must all interpret that statement in light of our own abilities and our own convictions. For me, living here in an isolated rural area, the best I can do is to express my views to anyone who reads these weekly essays. If I am in a place or a situation where it is possible, I will speak out in person. And I hope you and I and all of us who want the best for our country and its people will do the same.