

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on November 13, 2023.

The Silver Thread

There is, perhaps, no single period in history about which so much has been written as the decades from World War I through WW II. The silver thread in that may be the exceptionally large number of published books about the period, but only if the books get read. For personal reasons, I have read, for a lifetime.

Mine are books about Nazi Germany and World War II and how it came to be that a supposedly civilized land came to see extermination of certain groups as desirable or just OK. How people who had, between two world wars, lived in democracy, and then followed a lunatic, to not just taunt the “others,” bad enough, but to slaughter them with machineguns, and starve them in cattle cars and pens, and gas them in chambers. How on earth did that happen in supposedly civilized Europe? And how also did vigilantes get away with hanging African-Americans in our country after Reconstruction? No difference there, nor for the Islamophobia after 9/11 and now.

I am born XXX. “Dirty XXX” is in childhood memories. How does a child understand that kind of epithet? I couldn’t. That is why from young adulthood until present time I have read and still am reading very serious books about WW II, the Holocaust, and fascism. Lots of them. Here first, in brief, are important ones I have mentioned before, and then the ones that I think that I have not mentioned before, or maybe only briefly referenced.

Volker Ullrich’s “Hitler,” V. 1 & 2; William Shirer’s “The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich”; Harrison E. Salisbury’s “The 900 Days”; A. Anatoli Kuznetsov’s “Babi Yar”; Albert Speer’s “Inside the Third Reich”; Anne Frank’s “The Diary of a Young Girl”; and Anthony Doerr’s “All the Light We Cannot See.”

1. Uris, Leon, “Exodus” (1958).
2. Larson, Erik, “In the Garden of Beasts” (2011).
3. Kertzer, David, “The Pope and Mussolini: The Secret History of Pius XI and the Rise of Fascism in Europe” (2014).
4. Brown, Brandon R., “Plank: Driven by Vision, Broken by War” (2015).
5. Snyder, Timothy, “Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning” (2015).
6. Vanagaite, Ruta & Zuroff, Efraim, “Our Peace: Discovering Lithuania’s Hidden Holocaust” (2016).
7. Albright, Madeleine, “Fascism: A Warning” (2018).
8. Stanley, Jason, “How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them” (2018).

Published in the Penn-Franklin News on November 13, 2023.

9. Hughes, Ian, "Disordered Minds: How Dangerous Personalities Are Destroying Democracy" (2018).

10. Donner, Rebecca, "All the Frequent Troubles of Our Days: The True Story of the American Woman at the Heart of the German Resistance to Hitler" (2021).

And there are more. It is a hard story to fathom, but that is why so many books and perspectives are needed.

Charles B. Greenberg,
Board Director, Murrysville Community Library Foundation