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## **Books in a Time of Ukraine**

The news is filled with horrid and bloody stories of Russia's aggression against Ukraine based on smoldering territorial claims and imagined or real threats from NATO. The so-called claims and threats arise, at least in recent history, out of the aftermath of World War II and disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. It is a very complex story, best told in well informed and resourced books, but not easily in newspapers or magazines or the evening's TV news.

We live in an age of voluminous and outstanding scholarship about these not so distant events. That is what makes studying them in depth so easy, even for novice historians like me. Not all periods of history are that easily accessible. I have suggested some important books to you before about World War II and its aftermath. I will do so again and expand. I should say, too, that I have read some of these books purposefully, beginning in my 20s, because part of my heritage, my lost World War II period heritage actually, is Ukrainian, of Kiev specifically.

For how the Nazi's sought to build "lebensraum" and empire based on their own brand of nationalism and racism, to take Soviet bloc lands for their own in particular, two sources stand out: (1) Shirer, William L., "The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich" (1960); and (2) Ullrich, Volker, "Hitler: Ascent 1889-1939," Vol. 1 (2016), and "Hitler: Downfall 1939-1945," Vol. 2 (2020). Ullrich's books are translated from the German. All three books are tomes, but do not be deterred!

And if you want to read about a siege of an important and symbolic major city of an earlier day, then: Salisbury, Harrison E., "The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad" (1969).

Timothy Snyder is Richard C. Levin Professor of History at Yale University. His perspective is as both historian and interpreter of history, both evident by a sampling of titles of his works, which include: (1) "The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America" (2018); (2) "On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century" (2017); (3) "Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning" (2015); and (4) "The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999" (2003). Professor Snyder is a prolific author, with books written even in Ukrainian, Russian, and Czech languages.

And, if your appetite for authoritarian figures of only the recent past is merely whetted, then try also: (1) Toland, John, "Adolf Hitler" (1976); and (2) Payne, Robert, "Mao Tse-Tung: Ruler of Red China" (1950). There is no shortage of actual authoritarian figures about whom utterly thorough and comprehensive biographies and histories have been written, just as there is no dearth of wannabes in present time.

In a constitutional democracy, it is the responsibility that we all have as citizens to know authoritarians for their documented horrors, but also to recognize them early by their aspirations come anew. That is one reason, of many, that public libraries matter: as

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access points for these books. Public libraries are vital to the preservation of democracy; they are, first but not only, the keepers of the written word, the record.

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” – Santayana, George, “The Life of Reason” (1905).

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