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[A President Betrayed by Bureaucrats: Scott Atlas's Masterpiece on the Covid Disaster \(/archives/featured-articles/2021/november/30/a-president-betrayed-by-bureaucrats-scott-atlas-s-masterpiece-on-the-covid-disaster/\)](/archives/featured-articles/2021/november/30/a-president-betrayed-by-bureaucrats-scott-atlas-s-masterpiece-on-the-covid-disaster/)

written by [jeffrey a. tucker \(/archives/featured-articles/?author=jeffrey+a.+tucker\)](/archives/featured-articles/?author=jeffrey+a.+tucker)

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I'm a voracious reader of Covid books but nothing could have prepared me for Scott Atlas's [A Plague Upon Our House \(https://www.amazon.com/Plague-Upon-Our-House-Destroying/dp/163758220X\)](https://www.amazon.com/Plague-Upon-Our-House-Destroying/dp/163758220X), a full and mind-blowing account of the famed scientist's personal experience with the Covid era and a luridly detailed account of his time at the White House. The book is hot fire, from page one to the last, and will permanently affect your view of not only this pandemic and the policy response but also the workings of public health in general.

Atlas's book has exposed a scandal for the ages. It is enormously valuable because it fully blows up what seems to be an emerging fake story involving a supposedly Covid-denying president who did nothing vs. heroic scientists in the White House who urged compulsory mitigating measures consistent with prevailing scientific opinion. Not one word of that is true. Atlas's book, I hope, makes it impossible to tell such tall tales without embarrassment.

Anyone who tells you this fictional story (including [Deborah Birx \(https://brownstone.org/articles/dr-deborah-birxs-failed-attempt-to-flip-the-script/\)](https://brownstone.org/articles/dr-deborah-birxs-failed-attempt-to-flip-the-script/)) deserves to have this highly credible treatise tossed in his direction. The book is about the war between real science (and genuine public health), with Atlas as the voice for reason both before and during his time in the White House, vs. the enactment of brutal policies that never stood any chance of controlling the virus while causing tremendous damage to the people, to human liberty, to children in particular, but also to billions of people around the world.

For the reader, the author is our proxy, a reasonable and blunt man trapped in a world of lies, duplicity, backstabbing, opportunism, and fake science. He did his best but could not prevail against a powerful machine that cares nothing for facts, much less outcomes.

If you have heretofore believed that science drives pandemic public policy, this book will shock you. Atlas's recounting of the unbearably poor thinking on the part of government-based "infectious disease experts" will make your jaw drop (thinking, for example, of Birx's off-the-cuff theorizing about the relationship between masking and controlling case spreads).

Throughout the book, Atlas points to the enormous cost of the machinery of lockdowns, the preferred method of Anthony Fauci and Deborah Birx: missed cancer screenings, missed surgeries,

nearly two years of educational losses, bankrupted small business, depression and drug overdoses, overall citizen demoralization, violations of religious freedom, all while public health massively neglected the actual at-risk population in long-term care facilities. Essentially, they were willing to dismantle everything we called civilization in the name of bludgeoning one pathogen without regard to the consequences.

The fake science of population-wide “models” drove policy instead of following the known information about risk profiles. “The one unusual feature of this virus was the fact that children had an extraordinarily low risk,” writes Atlas. “Yet this positive and reassuring news was never emphasized. Instead, with total disregard of the evidence of selective risk consistent with other respiratory viruses, public health officials recommended draconian isolation of everyone.”

“Restrictions on liberty were also destructive by inflaming class distinctions with their differential impact,” he writes, “exposing essential workers, sacrificing low-income families and kids, destroying single-parent homes, and eviscerating small businesses, while at the same time large companies were bailed out, elites worked from home with barely an interruption, and the ultra-rich got richer, leveraging their bully pulpit to demonize and cancel those who challenged their preferred policy options.”

In the midst of continued chaos, in August 2020, Atlas was called by Trump to help, not as a political appointee, not as a PR man for Trump, not as a DC fixer but as the only person who in nearly a year of unfolding catastrophe had a health-policy focus. He made it clear from the outset that he would only say what he believed to be true; Trump agreed that this was precisely what he wanted and needed. Trump got an earful and gradually came around to a more rational view than that which caused him to wreck the American economy and society with his own hands and against his own instincts.

In Task Force meetings, Atlas was the only person who showed up with studies and on-the-ground information as opposed to mere charts of infections easily downloadable from popular websites. “A bigger surprise was that Fauci did not present scientific research on the pandemic to the group that I witnessed. Likewise, I never heard him speak about his own critical analysis of any published research studies. This was stunning to me. Aside from intermittent status updates about clinical trial enrollments, Fauci served the Task Force by offering an occasional comment or update on vaccine trial participant totals, mostly when the VP would turn to him and ask.”

When Atlas spoke up, it was almost always to contradict Fauci/Birx but he received no backing during meetings, only to have many people in attendance later congratulate him for speaking out. Still, he did, by virtue of private meetings, have a convert in Trump himself, but by then it was too late: not even Trump could prevail against the wicked machine he had permissioned into operation.

It’s a Mr. Smith Goes to Washington story but applied to matters of public health. From the outset of this disease panic, policy came to be dictated by two government bureaucrats (Fauci and Birx) who, for some reason, were confident in their control over media, bureaucracies, and White House messaging, despite every attempt by the president, Atlas, and a few others to get them to pay attention to the actual science about which Fauci/Birx knew and care little.

When Atlas would raise doubts about Birx, Jared Kushner would repeatedly assure him that “she is 100% MAGA.” Yet we know for certain that this is not true. We know from [a different book \(https://www.amazon.com/Nightmare-Scenario-Administrations-Response-Pandemic/dp/006306605X\)](https://www.amazon.com/Nightmare-Scenario-Administrations-Response-Pandemic/dp/006306605X) on the subject that she only took the position with the anticipation that Trump would lose the presidency in the November election. That’s hardly a surprise; it’s the bias expected from a career bureaucrat working for a deep-state institution.

Fortunately, we now have this book to set the record straight. It gives every reader an inside look at the workings of a system that wrecked our lives. If the book finally declines to offer an explanation for the hell that was visited upon us – every day we still ask the question why? – it does provide an accounting of the who, when, where, and what. Tragically, too many scientists, media figures, and intellectuals in general went along. Atlas’s account shows exactly what they signed up to defend, and it’s not pretty.

The cliché that kept coming to mind as I read is “breath of fresh air.” That metaphor describes the book perfectly: blessed relief from relentless propaganda. Imagine yourself trapped in an elevator with stultifying air in a building that is on fire and the smoke gradually seeps in from above. Someone is in there with you and he keeps assuring you that everything is fine, when it is obviously not.

That’s a pretty good description of how I felt from March 12, 2020 and onward. That was the day that President Trump spoke to the nation and announced that there would be no more travel from Europe. The tone in his voice was spooky. It was obvious that more was coming. He had clearly fallen sway to extremely bad advice, perhaps he was willing to push lockdowns as a plan to deal with a respiratory virus that was already widespread in the US from perhaps 5 to 6 months earlier.

It was the day that the darkness descended. A day later (March 13), the HHS distributed its lockdown plans for the nation. That weekend, Trump met for many hours with Anthony Fauci, Deborah Birx, son-in-law Jared Kushner, and only a few others. He came around to the idea of shutting down the American economy for two weeks. He presided over the [calamitous March 16, 2020, press conference \(https://brownstone.org/articles/donald-trumps-march-16-2020-press-conference-that-kicked-off-this-catastrophe-transcribed/\)](https://brownstone.org/articles/donald-trumps-march-16-2020-press-conference-that-kicked-off-this-catastrophe-transcribed/), at which Trump promised to beat the virus through general lockdowns.

Of course he had no power to do that directly but he could urge it to happen, all under the completely delusional promise that doing so would solve the virus problem. Two weeks later, the same gang persuaded him to extend the lockdowns.

Trump went along with the advice because it was the only advice he was fed at the time. They made it appear that the only choice that Trump had – if he wanted to beat the virus – was to wage war on his own policies that were pushing for a stronger, healthier economy. After surviving two impeachment attempts, and beating back years of hate from a nearly united media afflicted by severe derangement syndrome, Trump was finally hornswoggled.

Atlas writes: “On this highly important criterion of presidential management—taking responsibility to fully take charge of policy coming from the White House—I believe the president made a massive error in judgment. Against his own gut feeling, he delegated authority to medical bureaucrats, and then he failed to correct that mistake.”

The truly tragic fact that both Republicans and Democrats do not want spoken about is that this whole calamity is that did indeed begin with Trump’s decision. On this point, Atlas writes:

Yes, the president initially had gone along with the lockdowns proposed by Fauci and Birx, the ‘fifteen days to slow the spread,’ even though he had serious misgivings. But I still believe the reason that he kept repeating his one question—‘Do you agree with the initial shutdown?’—whenever he asked questions about the pandemic was precisely because he still had misgivings about it.

Large parts of the narrative are devoted to explaining precisely how and to what extent Trump had been betrayed. “They had convinced him to do exactly the opposite of what he would naturally do in any other circumstance,” Atlas writes, that is

...to disregard his own common sense and allow grossly incorrect policy advice to prevail.... This president, widely known for his signature “You’re fired!” declaration, was misled by his closest political intimates. All for fear of what was inevitable anyway—skewering from an already hostile media. And on top of that tragic misjudgment, the election was lost anyway. So much for political strategists.

There are so many valuable parts to the story that I cannot possibly recount them all. The language is brilliant, e.g. he calls the media “the most despicable group of unprincipled liars one could ever imagine.” He proves that assertion in page after page of shocking lies and distortions, mostly driven by political goals.

I was particularly struck by his chapter on testing, mainly because that whole racket mystified me throughout. From the outset, the CDC bungled the testing part of the pandemic story, attempting to keep the tests and process centralized in DC at the very time when the entire nation was in panic. Once that was finally fixed, months too late, mass and indiscriminate PCR testing became the desiderata of success within the White House. The problem was not just with the testing method:

Fragments of dead virus hang around and can generate a positive test for many weeks or months, even though one is not generally contagious after two weeks. Moreover, PCR is extremely sensitive. It detects minute quantities of virus that do not transmit infection.... Even the New York Times wrote in August that 90 percent or more of positive PCR tests falsely implied that someone was contagious. Sadly, during my entire time at the White House, this crucial fact would never even be addressed by anyone other than me at the Task Force meetings, let alone because for any public recommendation, even after I distributed data proving this critical point.

The other problem is the wide assumption that more testing (however inaccurate) of whomever, whenever was always better. This model of maximizing tests seemed like a leftover from the HIV/AIDS crisis in which tracing was mostly useless in practice but at least made some sense in theory. For a widespread and mostly wild respiratory disease transmitted the way a cold virus is transmitted, this method was hopeless from the beginning. It became nothing but make work for tracing bureaucrats and testing enterprises that in the end only provided a fake metric of “success” that served to spread public panic.

Early on, Fauci had clearly said that there was no reason to get tested if you had no symptoms. Later, that common-sense outlook was thrown out the window and replaced with an agenda to test

as many people as possible regardless of risk and regardless of symptoms. The resulting data enabled Fauci/Birx to keep everyone in a constant state of alarm. More test positivity to them implied only one thing: more lockdowns. Businesses needed to close harder, we all needed to mask harder, schools needed to stay closed longer, and travel needed to be ever more restricted. That assumption became so entrenched that not even the president's own wishes (which had changed from Spring to Summer) made any difference.

Atlas's first job, then, was to challenge this whole indiscriminate testing agenda. To his mind, testing needed to be about more than accumulating endless amounts of data, much of it without meaning; instead, testing should be directed toward a public-health goal. The people who needed tests were the vulnerable populations, particularly those in nursing homes, with the goal of saving lives among those who were actually threatened with severe outcomes. This push to test, contact trace, and quarantine anyone and everyone regardless of known risk was a huge distraction, and also caused huge disruption in schooling and enterprise.

To fix it meant changing the CDC guidelines. Atlas's story of attempting to do that is eye-opening. He wrestled with every manner of bureaucrat and managed to get new guidelines written, only to find that they had been mysteriously reverted to the old guidelines one week later. He caught the "error" and insisted that his version prevail. Once they were issued by the CDC, the national press was all over it, with the story that the White House was pressuring the scientists at the CDC in terrible ways. After a week-long media storm, the guidelines changed yet again. All of Atlas's work was made null.

Talk about discouraging! It was also Atlas's first full experience in dealing with deep-state machinations. It was this way throughout the lockdown period, a machinery in place to implement, encourage, and enforce endless restrictions but no one person in particular was there to take responsibility for the policies or the outcomes, even as the ostensible head of state (Trump) was on record both publicly and privately opposing the policies that no one could seem to stop.

As an example of this, Atlas tells the story of bringing some massively important scientists to the White House to speak with Trump: Martin Kulldorff, Jay Bhattacharya, Joseph Ladapo, and Cody Meissner. People around the president thought the idea was great. But somehow the meeting kept being delayed. Again and again. When it finally went ahead, the schedulers only allowed for 5 minutes. But once they met with Trump himself, the president had other ideas and prolonged the meeting for an hour and a half, asking the scientists all kinds of questions about viruses, policy, the initial lockdowns, the risks to individuals, and so on.

The president was so impressed with their views and knowledge – what a dramatic change that must have been for him – that he invited filming to be done plus pictures to be taken. He wanted to make it a big public splash. It never happened. Literally. White House press somehow got the message that this meeting never happened. The first anyone will have known about it other than White House employees is from Atlas's book.

Two months later, Atlas was instrumental in bringing in not only two of those scientists but also the famed Sunetra Gupta of Oxford. They met with the HHS secretary but this meeting too was buried in the press. No dissent was allowed. The bureaucrats were in charge, regardless of the wishes of

the president.

Another case in point was during Trump's own bout with Covid in early October. Atlas was nearly sure that he would be fine but he was forbidden from talking to the press. The entire White House communications office was frozen for four days, with no one speaking to the press. This was against Trump's own wishes. This left the media to speculate that he was on his deathbed, so when he came back to the White House and announced that Covid is not to be feared, it was a shock to the nation. From my own point of view, this was truly Trump's finest moment. To learn of the internal machinations happening behind the scenes is pretty shocking.

I can't possibly cover the wealth of material in this book, and I expect this brief review to be one of several that I write. I do have a few disagreements. First, I think the author is too uncritical toward Operation Warp Speed and doesn't really address how the vaccines were wildly oversold, to say nothing of growing concerns about safety, which were not addressed in the trials. Second, he seems to approve of Trump's March 12th travel restrictions, which struck me as brutal and pointless, and the real beginning of the unfolding disaster. Third, Atlas inadvertently seems to perpetuate the distortion that Trump recommended ingesting bleach during a press conference. I know that this was all over the papers. But I've read the transcript of that press conference several times and find nothing like this (<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-briefing-31/>). Trump actually makes clear that he was speaking about cleaning surfaces. This might be yet another case of outright media lies.

All that aside, this book reveals everything about the insanity of 2020 and 2021, years in which good sense, good science, historical precedent, human rights, and concerns for human liberty were all thrown into the trash, not just in the US but all over the world.

Atlas summarizes the big picture:

...in considering all the surprising events that unfolded in this past year, two in particular stand out. I have been shocked at the enormous power of government officials to unilaterally decree a sudden and severe shutdown of society—to simply close businesses and schools by edict, restrict personal movements, mandate behavior, regulate interactions with our family members, and eliminate our most basic freedoms, without any defined end and with little accountability.

Atlas is correct that "the management of this pandemic has left a stain on many of America's once noble institutions, including our elite universities, research institutes and journals, and public health agencies. Earning it back will not be easy."

Internationally, we have Sweden as an example of a country that (mostly) kept its sanity. Domestically, we have South Dakota as an example of a place that stayed open, preserving freedom throughout. And thanks in large part to Atlas's behind-the-scenes work, we have the example of Florida, whose governor did care about the actual science and ended up preserving freedom in the state even as the elderly population there experienced the greatest possible protection from the virus.

We all owe Atlas an enormous debt of gratitude, for it was he who persuaded the Florida governor to choose the path of focussed protection as advocated by the Great Barrington Declaration, which

Atlas cites as the “single document that will go down as one of the most important publications in the pandemic, as it lent undeniable credibility to focused protection and provided courage to thousands of additional medical scientists and public health leaders to come forward.”

Atlas experienced the slings, arrows, and worse. The media and the bureaucrats tried to shut him up, shut him down, and body bag him professionally and personally. Cancelled, meaning removed from the roster of functional, dignified human beings. Even colleagues at Stanford University joined in the lynch mob, much to their disgrace. And yet this book is that of a man who has prevailed against them.

In that sense, this book is easily the most crucial first-person account we have so far. It is gripping, revealing, devastating for the lockdowners and their vaccine-mandating successors, and a true classic that will stand the test of time. It's simply not possible to write the history of this disaster without a close examination of this erudite first-hand account.

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