

Book review: Three perspectives on the COVID response

written by Dr. Ronald Hoffman | December 18, 2021



This month, I'm poring over three books with the common theme that we've seriously missed the boat on handling the pandemic. Each author offers a distinct perspective on what went wrong. Here's a brief rundown on each:

The Real Anthony Fauci by Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. A scion of the Kennedy family, Kennedy has been pilloried as an inveterate anti-vaxxer, and one of the top disseminators of COVID "misinformation". Yet I was impressed by the depth of research, backed up by extensive references, that he's brought to bear in this comprehensive book.

The rhetoric is a little overheated, but he brings a useful critical perspective on how the pandemic has been mismanaged and manipulated. As of December 5, *The Real Anthony Fauci* was listed as number three on Amazon's bestseller list. At the very least, that's an indication of widespread discontent with the mainstream narrative about COVID.

Kennedy goes further than other critics of the way we've handled COVID; it's not just that we've made mistakes in the fog of war; rather, his theme is that there's been a concerted effort to suppress inexpensive, plausible treatments to advance the interests of BigPharma in cahoots with the government health establishment, which Fauci leads. Bill Gates is said to be implicated, too, because his enormous wealth manipulates researchers and politicians to support his narrative and favor his projects. And, Kennedy points out, there are big financial incentives to prioritize novel drugs and vaccines over remedies like hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin. He does a pretty good job of resurrecting the bona fides of these now-shunned therapies.

Kennedy quotes one of his many physician sources as saying: *"The sacred doctor-patient relationship needs to be wrenched away from Anthony Fauci and the government/medical/pharmaceutical industrial complex. Doctors need to return to their oaths. Patients need to demand from medicine their right to be treated. This year has revealed the countless flaws of a medical system*

that has lost its direction and soul."

I'm not sure that I'm all-in on RFK Jr.'s assertion that Fauci and Gates are in it for the money. I think it's more about power and legacy—after all, the ancient pharaohs, sensing their mortality, erected immense pyramids to commemorate their reigns. Vanquishing COVID—albeit via a misguided approach—is their final act. But Mother Nature has a way of punishing *hubris*.

On the other hand, I agree with RFK Jr.'s critique that the pandemic has exposed fundamental flaws in our approach to disease eradication; it's profit-driven, enamored of advanced, uncertain technologies, and overlooks natural interventions that can strengthen the terrain which makes us vulnerable to pathogens.

RFK Jr. complains: *"I was struck, during COVID-19's early months, that America's Doctor [Fauci], apparently preoccupied with his single vaccine solution, did little in the way of telling Americans how to bolster their immune response. He never took time during his daily White House briefings from March to May 2020 to instruct Americans to avoid tobacco (smoking and e-cigarettes/vaping double death rates from COVID); to get plenty of sunlight and to maintain adequate vitamin D levels (Nearly 60 percent of patients with COVID-19 were vitamin D deficient upon hospitalization, with men in the advanced stages of COVID-19 pneumonia showing the greatest deficit); or to diet, exercise, and lose weight (78 percent of Americans hospitalized for COVID-19 were overweight or obese). Quite the contrary, Dr. Fauci's lockdowns caused Americans to gain an average of two pounds per month and to reduce their daily steps by 27 percent. He didn't recommend avoiding sugar and soft drinks, processed foods, and chemical residues, all of which amplify inflammation, compromise immune response, and disrupt the gut biome which governs immune competency."*

There are a lot of claims in the Kennedy book that critics will label as unsubstantiated "conspiracy theories". But, to date, I haven't seen a detailed, credible rebuttal of his assertions, other than the usual name-calling, ad hominem attacks, and efforts to cancel him on social media.

A Plague Upon Our House: My Fight at the Trump White House to Stop COVID from Destroying America by Dr. Scott Atlas. Taking a slightly different tack, Dr. Atlas enumerates the missteps that led to draconian lockdowns and suppression of selective protective measures, with a narrow obsession on vaccines for all. He writes:

"The United States is on the precipice of losing its cherished freedoms, with censorship and cancellation of all those who bring views forward that differ from the 'accepted mainstream.' It is not clear if our democracy, with its defining freedoms, will fully recover, even after we survive the pandemic itself. But it is clear that people must step up—meaning speak up, as we are allowed, as we are expected to do in free societies—or it has no chance."

Atlas' central contention is that politicians surrendered to alarmist public health bureaucrats, who, relying on faulty models, treated COVID like the Zombie Apocalypse, instead of adopting a balanced approach to keep society

functioning while protecting the vulnerable.

Then the pandemic became politicized, and the measured responses advocated by Dr. Atlas and others succumbed to critics' hysteria over the Trump administration's seeming inaction. Politicians and the press piled on, stoking fear. The economic devastation that followed, he claims, and the unintended consequences to our health from delayed diagnosis and treatment, lack of exercise, school closings, and surging rates of depression, far outweigh the toll of COVID itself.

He reveals some inside-baseball about his tenure as advisor to the White House. President Trump, Atlas discloses, was conflicted about acceding to the mask and lockdown mandates advocated by the Task Force headed by Dr. Fauci and Dr. Birx, but relented as the pandemic spread. Trump brought Atlas in to offer a counterweight to champions of the extreme measures then going into effect. Atlas writes:

"In enacting lockdowns without evaluating the secondary health effects of those harsh policies, the fundamental principles of public health were violated. They failed to consider the total health impact of the policies and the pandemic; they also failed to protect those most vulnerable to those harms—children, the poor, and the elderly. That inappropriate commandeering of policy by a narrow focus on stopping the spread of the infection and nothing else is the main reason so many people died during this pandemic, why so many families were destroyed, and why so many disastrous public health consequences will be endured by young and old for decades."

Atlas claims that he was thwarted at every turn by Dr. Fauci, Dr. Birx, and Dr. Robert Redfield, who, he says, *"unlike doctors that I had worked with, none showed familiarity with clinical medicine"* and advanced *"strikingly unsound conclusions [over which they] virtually always agreed, literally never challenging each other."* An outsider to the world of politics, Atlas never envisioned the extent to which his involvement with the Trump administration would subject him to vilification. He did not survive regime change when the Biden presidency began—and the Fauciites prevailed.

Pandemia by Alex Berenson: Berenson's contention is that Americans have worked themselves into a frenzy over COVID, abetted by overzealous public health officials, sensationalistic journalists, opportunistic politicians, and pharmaceutical industry profiteers. He coined the meme "Virus gonna virus", and maintains that misguided efforts to contain it will only delay herd immunity, and distract us from better therapeutics, which offer the most plausible exit scenario for the pandemic.

Despite being a lay journalist, he was ahead of the curve in predicting the waning efficacy of the vaccines. Like the other authors reviewed here, he's been reviled and canceled, but the current trajectory of the pandemic is vindicating his controversial views. Countries and states with less severe lockdowns and reduced vaccine compliance aren't faring particularly worse—and they're better off economically—and it turns out it's not a "pandemic of the unvaccinated" after all.

Berenson offers a readable, mostly fair and balanced chronicle of the pandemic, and its many missteps. Despite the fact that he's become a darling of conservative media, he doesn't pull his punches about the Trump administration's early miscalculations. This sums up his perspective:

"I had always been an outside reporter, naturally contrarian and cynical. I was comfortable poking through databases and papers and reaching my own conclusions. And I started to wonder: Did shutting the economy really make sense? What would happen to people forced to stay in tiny apartments as the weather warmed up? Everything I had read suggested that kids weren't at huge risk, so why were we in such a rush to close schools? My skepticism ramped up day by day."