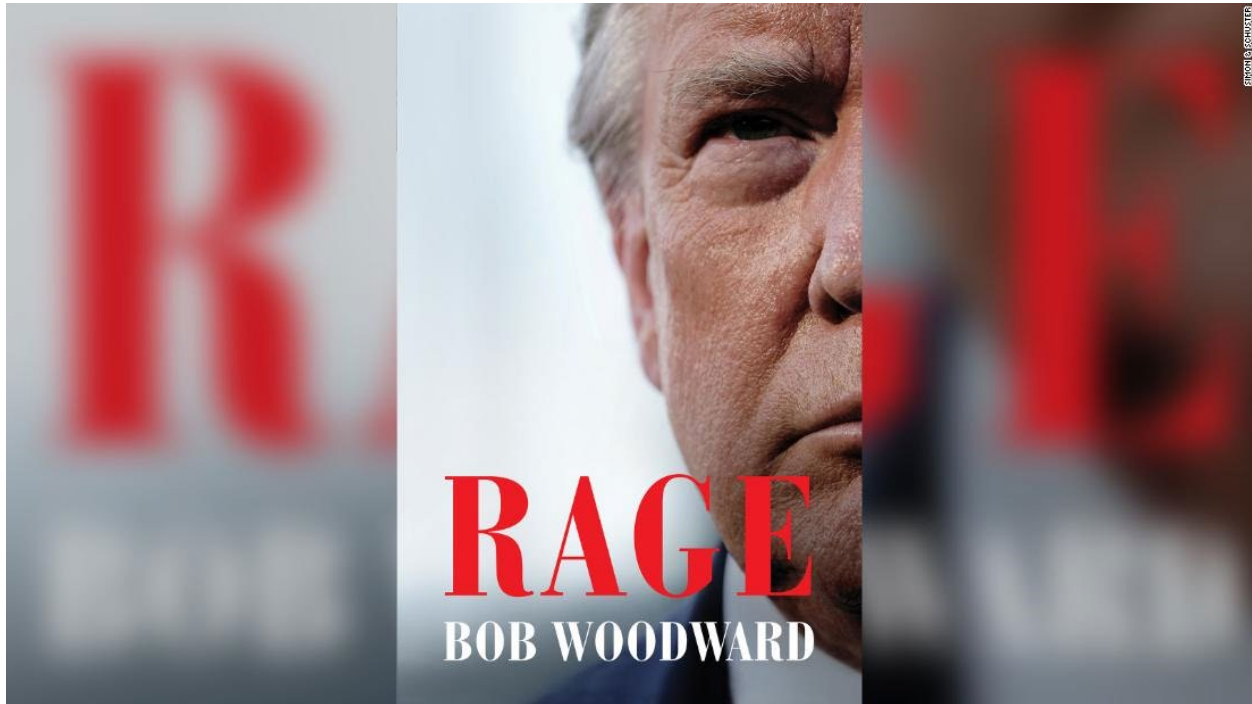


The Facts in Woodward's *Rage* Contradict His Claims



by John D. O'Connor

Bob Woodward's book, *Rage*, has been promoted by the famed reporter and his media acolytes with a single claim: that President Trump withheld information from the public that the Coronavirus was "deadly," causing the loss of thousands of lives. However, facts offered throughout this prosaic work belie this central thesis.

Never well written or lucidly analyzed, offerings of the fabled journalist are inevitably rescued by juicy, dueling insider accounts designed to enhance the reputation of each declarant.

In *Rage*, however, the only "insider" insights about the virus are some fragmentary chest-puffs from NSA Robert O'Brien (he presciently told Trump on January 29 that the Coronavirus could be Trump's greatest national security threat) and his deputy, [Matt Pottinger](#) (son of Woodward's buddy, [J. Stanley Pottinger](#)) who boasted in hindsight of his early suspicion that the virus could spell real trouble.

The reporter hastens to add that he himself was "complacent," and warned no one, in spite of Trump's admission on February 7 that the virus was "deadly." Why not? Because, according to Woodward, he did not know of O'Brien's January 29 warning until May. Huh? Is Woodward really telling us that,

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notwithstanding long, strong and continual repetition of forewarning by public health officials (including Trump) that [this O'Brien comment](#) would have been decisive in counseling an earlier shutdown? Or is the better view that Woodward said nothing because there had been more than enough public forewarning of deadliness, but insufficient information on rate of spread?

China was withholding information on the rates of transmission, but based upon limited knowledge, Trump formed a Coronavirus task force on January 29, 2020, followed by a [China travel shutdown on January 31](#), siding with public health officials against political appointees. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex M. Azar, with only six United States cases reported, declared that same day [a public health emergency](#).

Woodward cites a *Washington Post* headline of February 1, 2020 which screamed, “Administration Elevates Response to Coronavirus, Restricts Travel From China”, the article suggesting that Trump was being excessively sensational. On February 4 in his State of the Union address, President Trump pledged to keep the public safe from this emerging virus. From the outset, Trump attempted unsuccessfully to reach Chinese Premier Xi Jinping to allow American scientists into Wuhan. The public was getting the picture both that the virus was deadly, and that China was withholding information.

On February 9, at a meeting of over twenty-five state Governors, CDC’s Robert Redfield told them that the outbreak was going to get much, much worse before it got better. “I think we scared the shit out of them,” Dr. Anthony Fauci said that day.

On February 11, in response to a concerned reporter’s worried question, Fauci, while noting that with only 13 cases, all travel related, America needn’t be frightened. But, Fauci added, “is there a risk that this is going to turn into a global pandemic? Absolutely, yes.” By February 18, the public had begun buying masks into scarcity, against the advice of public health officials.

On February 25, Dr. Nancy Messonnier of CDC issued its stark talk of public warning that schools might have to close, conferences curtailed and employees working from home. The question, she said, was not if, but when and how many would become seriously ill. The headlines immediately amplified her warning. “[Viral Crisis in U.S. Deemed Likely](#),” declared the *New York Times*. “[Spread to Americans Deemed Inevitable](#),” the *Washington Post* headline stated.

According to a study by Stanford School of Medicine, Public Health Section, beginning February 23, the American public overestimated the lethality (5%) of the virus and showed awareness of the facts – airborne, saliva-based transmission, with need to stay away from the infected and not touch the eyes, nose or mouth. At drugstores and grocery stores, sanitizers, wipes and toilet paper had become largely sold out by February 28, a day before the first death in the United States.

At the end of February, the stock market slid seven days in a row, reflecting widespread panic over the virus.

On the *Today* on February 29, NBC’s Peter Alexander reflected the public’s fear, asking Dr. Fauci, “People are waking up with real concerns about this ... Should we be changing our habits, and how?” Both Fauci and Redfield felt the risk was still too low to alter normal lives.

However, by March 2, Fauci said the situation was “evolving” with “likely pandemic proportions.”

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On March 11 (37 deaths in), Trump issued a European travel restriction and gave an Oval Office address. While the risk was “very, very low” for the vast majority of Americans, Trump strongly advised the washing of hands, cleaning surfaces, covering one’s face and mouth when coughing and staying home if not feeling well. Peggy Noonan wrote that Trump’s address “while aimed at quelling fears, it was generally labeled unsettling.” WHO officials declared Covid-19 a “pandemic” that day. On the morning of March 12, many government offices and businesses went to remote work. Trump may have been “downplaying” panic, but not protective information.

Woodward, rather than praising Trump for not being overly optimistic, criticized him as not being “as spontaneous” as he was at campaign rallies!. Trump declared a national emergency on March 13 and advised a lock-down on March 15.

What were the Democrats doing during this timeframe? Woodward, again, dishonestly, omits Joe Biden’s critical tweet immediately after Trump’s China travel ban alluding to it’s [being “xenophobic”](#); Biden’s massive rally on March 9, with abundant hugging and crowding; Nancy Pelosi’s exhortation to a frightened public to [visit San Francisco’s Chinatown on February 24](#); Governor Andrew Cuomo’s requirement that nursing homes admit Covid patients; and the March 15 exhortation of New York City mayor Bill de Blasio urging New Yorkers [to patronize bars](#).

Even in a partial “shutdown” ordered the evening of March 16, Cuomo and de Blasio allowed bars to serve take-out drinks, causing [massive street parties](#). There was no New York “stay at home” order until March 22. California delayed in heeding Trump, ordering its shutdown on March 19.

So, the Trump Administration was more transparent than China; more restrictive than Europe, greatly responsible for the U.S. spread; and far more cautious than Democratic governmental officials. Of course, after the lockdown, these same Democrats became power-obsessed Coronafascists, swinging too far in the other economy-destroying direction.

So is Woodward’s thesis even close to correct? No. By writing a fallacious book, both for profit and political effect, he is thereby harming public health by sowing distrust in public health messaging.

“You’re probably going to screw me,” Trump told Woodward. “And in the end you’ll probably write a lousy book.”

The astute reader should agree that the President has been proven correct on both of these predictions.

John D. O’Connor is a former federal prosecutor and the San Francisco attorney who represented W. Mark Felt during his revelation as Deep Throat in 2005. O’Connor is the author of the book, [Postgate: How the Washington Post Betrayed Deep Throat, Covered Up Watergate, and Began Today’s Partisan Advocacy Journalism](#).