



Fauci, Emails, and Some Alleged Science

 Phillip W. Magness (<https://www.aier.org/staffs/phillip-w-magness/>) - December 19, 2021

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Reading Time: 5 minutes



From October 2-4, 2020, the American Institute for Economic Research hosted a small conference for scientists to discuss the Covid-19 lockdowns. Just four days later, Dr. Francis Collins, the retiring Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), would call the three of the scientists in attendance “fringe epidemiologists,” in a directive he sent to Anthony Fauci and other senior staff of his agency. They were “fringe epidemiologists” because they had the temerity to ask whether the lockdowns of 2020 were effective. Those three, Martin Kulldorff of Harvard, Sunetra Gupta of Oxford, and Jay Bhattacharya of Stanford were simply doing what any good scientist would do: They were following the evidence.

They wrote the Great Barrington Declaration [GBD] as they parted company at AIER, [posting it \(https://gbdeclaration.org/\)](https://gbdeclaration.org/) for all to see.

So why was Dr. Collins so intent on impugning these three scientists? It’s hard to know exactly, mostly because any scientist worth his salt should have been happy to see further research being done. That is, after all, how ignorance is replaced by knowledge. But Collins was clearly in no mood to replace his own possible ignorance with any kind of knowledge. He was pretty sure he knew all he had to know; and this is one of the most dangerous positions a scientist can take.

In an email obtained by AIER through a Freedom of Information Act request, [Collins told Anthony Fauci \(https://www.aier.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FirstCollinsEmail.pdf\)](https://www.aier.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FirstCollinsEmail.pdf), CCing Lawrence Tabak, Deputy Ethics Counselor at NIH, that he wanted “a quick and devastating published take down (sic)” of the Great Barrington Declaration’s premises.

One wonders why he would CC the Deputy Ethics Counselor on this, given the trouble these people seem to have with ethics, but here they were in October of 2020. Fauci wrote that same night to let Collins know that there was already a devastating take down of the Great Barrington Declaration...in that august scientific publication *Wired*.

"Francis," Fauci wrote, "I am pasting in below a piece from *Wired* that debunks [the GBD] (<https://www.aier.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FauciWiredArticle.pdf>)." There, science reporter Matt Reynolds told us there was no "scientific divide" (<https://www.wired.co.uk/article/great-barrington-declaration-herd-immunity-scientific-divide>) over herd immunity, but that's not the funny part. The funny part came when Reynolds declared quite confidently that we no longer had anything to worry about, as lockdowns were – as of October 2020 – a thing of the past.

"The problem [with the GBD] is that we aren't in lockdown," Reynolds explained. "[I]t's hard to find people who are advocating for a return to the lockdown we saw in March. When the Great Barrington Declaration authors declare their opposition to lockdowns, they are quite literally arguing with the past."

This Fauci-endorsed passage may be one of the worst takes of the entire pandemic. Less than a month later, lockdowns came roaring back with a vengeance.

Fauci wrote to Collins (<https://www.aier.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FauciGonsalvesArticle.pdf>) again the next day, this time referencing a [breathless op-ed](https://www.thenation.com/article/society/covid-jacobin-herd-immunity/) (<https://www.thenation.com/article/society/covid-jacobin-herd-immunity/>) by Gregg Gonsalves, a public health professor at Yale, in *The Nation*. And here we arrive at yet another funny part. Gonsalves' article was not exactly a critique of the Great Barrington Declaration. Instead, Gonsalves went after Martin Kulldorff, who in [an interview](https://jacobinmag.com/2020/09/covid-19-pandemic-economy-us-response-inequality) (<https://jacobinmag.com/2020/09/covid-19-pandemic-economy-us-response-inequality>) with the leftist magazine *Jacobin* quite reasonably pointed out that the lockdowns hurt the poor more than most talking heads were willing to admit. Gonsalves's grievance was that by interviewing Kulldorff, *Jacobin* had broken the lockdown "solidarity" of other far-left websites including *the Nation* and the *Boston Review*.

By October 10, the lines were well drawn, and Fauci thrust himself into the middle of the media hootenanny that was clearly emerging. Collins [emailed](https://www.aier.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/collinswhitehouse.pdf) again (<https://www.aier.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/collinswhitehouse.pdf>) to boast about calling the three scientists "fringe" in the *Washington Post* (https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/covid-herd-immunity/2020/10/10/3910251c-0a60-11eb-859b-f9c27abe638d_story.html), although he told Fauci that their ongoing campaign to take down the GBD "will not be appreciated in the W[hite] H[ouse]." The White House, Fauci retorted, was "too busy with other things to worry about" the GBD. There was an election to deal with, after all.

As the bedfellows became more strange, Gregg Gonsalves [wrote directly](https://www.aier.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/gonsalvescollins.pdf) to Collins (<https://www.aier.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/gonsalvescollins.pdf>), thanking him for his undiplomatic approach. For his part, Gonsalves became ever more hostile and profane, in his remarks on the GBD. "This f****g Great Barrington Declaration is like a bad rash that won't go away," Gonsalves [tweeted](https://twitter.com/gregggonsalves/status/1315767761398890496) (<https://twitter.com/gregggonsalves/status/1315767761398890496>), shortly before reaching out to Collins. A day earlier, the Yale professor also began promoting [unhinged conspiracy theories](https://twitter.com/gregggonsalves/status/1314867770530594816) (<https://twitter.com/gregggonsalves/status/1314867770530594816>) about the

GBD and AIER that traced to the [blog of a former 9/11 Truther movement activist \(https://www.aier.org/article/quacks-in-the-ivory-tower-how-conspiracy-theorizing-took-over-lockdown-science/\)](https://www.aier.org/article/quacks-in-the-ivory-tower-how-conspiracy-theorizing-took-over-lockdown-science/).

Some of the emails between Collins and Fauci sent in response to AIER's FOIA request have been [redacted \(https://www.aier.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Redacted.pdf\)](https://www.aier.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Redacted.pdf), but surrounding context makes it pretty clear that they were looking for a way to impugn the GBD further if it came up at the White House Covid Task Force meeting on October 16. That morning, Fauci emailed Deborah Birx (<https://www.aier.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FauciBirx.pdf>), the White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator. He pressed the need for her to oppose the GBD, and set the stage for an attack on Scott Atlas, who was the most friendly champion of the GBD on the Task Force.

Fauci, it turns out, had to miss the October 16 task force meeting, though he likely breathed a sigh of relief when [Collins emailed him \(https://www.aier.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FauciBirx.pdf\)](https://www.aier.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FauciBirx.pdf) two days later. "Atlas did not take part in the [task force] meeting on Friday," Collins wrote, "and the Great Barrington Declaration did not come up." Another partially-redacted email hints that Fauci celebrated this outcome. Atlas's opposition to the lockdown faction on the task force "is driving Deb [Birx] crazy," he continued.

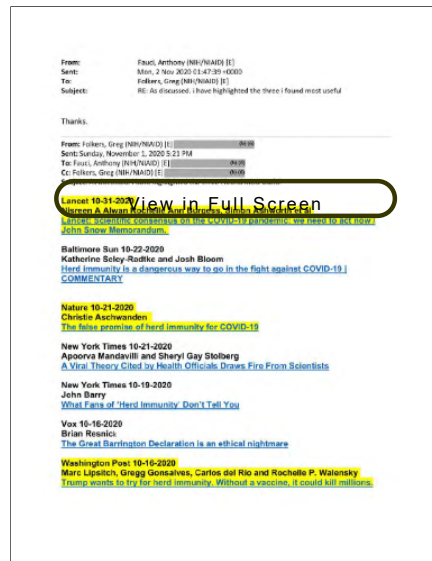
Fauci and Collins were not done, though, in their campaign to "take down" the GBD scientists.

Our story picks up again in earnest on November 2, when Fauci's chief of staff [Greg Folkers replied to an email \(https://www.aier.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FauciFolkers.pdf\)](https://www.aier.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FauciFolkers.pdf) that was not made public in pursuance to AIER's FOIA request. It seems pretty clear, though, that Fauci asked Folkers for a list of sources that would allow him to argue effectively against the GBD. The email's subject line references a previous correspondence from Fauci "as discussed," noting that Folkers had "highlighted the three i found most useful" (sic).

Multiple sources, and particularly [Scott Atlas's recently-published account \(https://www.amazon.com/Plague-Upon-Our-House-Destroying/dp/163758220X\)](https://www.amazon.com/Plague-Upon-Our-House-Destroying/dp/163758220X) of his time on the task force, have noted that Fauci often relies on aides to curate lists of sources in advance of his many media appearances. He seldom reads the scientific literature on Covid-19 himself, and instead arrives at meetings with staff-prepared talking points. It appears that Folkers' email was an answer to one such request for talking points to attack the GBD scientists.

Note that Fauci [frequently portrays himself \(https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/15/covid-fauci-decries-threats-based-on-coronavirus-guidance.html\)](https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/15/covid-fauci-decries-threats-based-on-coronavirus-guidance.html) as a staunch defender of science who stays above the political divide and remains outside of partisan debates. In light of that, you might expect that Folkers' response to Fauci's request would yield a small sample of scientific analysis on the logic behind lockdowns, even if only in a format bullet pointed by his staff. But you'd be wrong. Folkers sent Fauci a [list of seven political op-eds \(https://www.aier.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FauciFolkers.pdf\)](https://www.aier.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FauciFolkers.pdf) and articles opposing the GBD from popular media outlets.

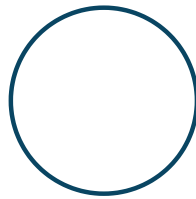
So yeah. Science.



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Prior to joining AIER, Dr. Magness spent over a decade teaching public policy, economics, and international trade at institutions including American University, George Mason University, and Berry College.

Magness's work encompasses the economic history of the United States and Atlantic world, with specializations in the economic dimensions of slavery and racial discrimination, the history of taxation, and measurements of economic inequality over time. He also maintains active research interest in higher education policy and the history of economic thought. In addition to his scholarship, Magness's popular writings have appeared in numerous venues including the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, Newsweek, Politico, Reason, National Review, and the Chronicle of Higher Education.

Selected Publications

"How pronounced is the U-curve? Revisiting income inequality in the United States, 1917-1960 (<https://academic.oup.com/ej/advance-article-abstract/doi/10.1093/ej/ueac020/6544663?redirectedFrom=fulltext>)" Co-authored with Vincent Geloso, Philip Schlosser, and John Moore. *The Economic Journal* (March 2022)

"The Great Overestimation: Tax Data and Inequality Measurements in the United States, 1913-1943 (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/ecin.12865>)" Co-authored with Vincent Geloso. *Economic Inquiry* (April 2020).

"The anti-discriminatory tradition in Virginia school public choice theory (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11127-020-00794-6>)" *Public Choice*. James M. Buchanan Centennial Issue. (March 2020).

"John Maynard Keynes, H.G. Wells, and a Problematic Utopia

(https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3418380). Co-authored with James Harrigan. *History of Political Economy* (Spring 2020)

"Detecting Historical Inequality Patterns: A Replication of Thomas Piketty's Wealth Concentration Estimates for the United Kingdom
(https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3272391)." *Social Science Quarterly* (Summer 2019)

"James M. Buchanan and the Political Economy of Desegregation
(https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3071403)," Co-authored with Art Carden and Vincent Geloso. *Southern Economic Journal* (January 2019)

"Lincoln's Swing State Strategy: Tariff Surrogates and the Pennsylvania Election of 1860
(<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5215/pennmaghistbio.143.1.0005>)" *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, (January 2019)

"Are Adjuncts Exploited?: Some Grounds for Skepticism."
(<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10551-016-3322-4>) Co-authored with Jason Brennan. *Journal of Business Ethics*. (Spring 2017).

"Estimating the Cost of Adjunct Justice: A Case Study in University Business Ethics." (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10551-016-3013-1>) Co-authored with Jason Brennan. *Journal of Business Ethics*. (January, 2016)

"The American System and the Political Economy of Black Colonization
(<https://philmagness.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/AmericanSystem-Colonization-JHET2015.pdf>)." *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, (June 2015).

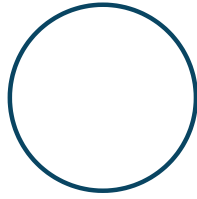
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"Morrill and the Missing Industries: Strategic Lobbying Behavior and the Tariff of 1861.
(<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/jer/summary/v029/29.2.magness.html>)" *Journal of the Early Republic*, 29 (Summer 2009).

Books by Phillip W. Magness

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Dr. Harrigan was previously Dean of the American University of Iraq-Sulaimani, and later served as Director of Academic Programs at the Institute for Humane Studies and Strata, where he was also a Senior Research Fellow.

He has written extensively for the popular press, with articles appearing in the Wall Street Journal, USA Today, U.S. News and World Report, and a host of other outlets. He is also co-author of Cooperation & Coercion. His current work focuses on the intersections between political economy, public policy, and political philosophy.

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