

Debunking 5 popular (and false) notions about the 1918 Spanish Flu



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New York City. Nov. 11, 1918. Victory day. During a global pandemic hundreds of thousands jam city streets to celebrate, not wearing masks, and still there was no resurgence of the influenza virus.

Did the Spanish Flu really kill 50 to 100 million people? Did the pandemic last 2 years? Was the influenza virus really the killer? Did government censorship prevent the public from hearing about a deadly disease spreading in 1918? Did everyone wear masks and were they effective? Was Philadelphia's Liberty Loans Parade a 'super-spreader' event?

Due to modern media disinformation and propaganda, most people today would answer ‘Yes’ to these questions. But a closer look at the facts and scientific data show the true reality. My historical research debunks many common assumptions about the Spanish Flu that are dishonestly used to justify today’s draconian and illegal public ‘health’ measures.

The article below is an updated version of the one I published in summer 2020. Since then, I’ve gathered more facts and scientific data that lead me to conclude that the accepted narrative of the Spanish Flu is incorrect and false.

Fake news is one of the great scourges of our era, and most of it emanates from the press offices of major corporations and government agencies. However, academia has also joined their ranks, since the livelihood of historians often depends on grants from those very same corporations and state agencies. How is it possible that leading historians were unable to find what I have found? The information is easily available, and the data does not lie.

For the record: I have not received any funding for this article; I am entirely self-supporting and independent. I do not have any affiliation with any corporation, government or university. I do not own shares in any pharmaceutical or medical corporation.

By John Varoli

Introduction

Even though we live in the Information Age, ironically we also live in a new Dark Age. Our era is marred by a War on Science, a War on Logic, a War on Facts. Today, the ‘Narrative’ is king, promoted in the mass media by corporations and governments, and blindly reprinted by docile and obedient ‘journalists’.

Freedom of thought, research and debate are rare; and academic integrity and courage even more difficult to find. Those who speak against the “Narrative” are burned at the proverbial stake by the Neo-Inquisition, their reputations attacked and destroyed. The ‘Narrative’ has triumphed over the public’s collective thought and mind.

Since March 2020, myths about the Spanish Flu have been used to justify today’s brutal Covid-19 restrictions. For example, how long do you think the Spanish Flu lasted? I bet you’ll say “two years”, which is what today’s corporate media have been telling the public. Well, any claim that the Spanish Flu lasted “two years” is a lie.

The historical archives are very clear — U.S. and European governments were able to bring the Spanish Flu, which primarily hit in autumn 1918, under control after several months. Today's diabolical Covid cultists have weaponized a fake narrative about the 1918 Spanish Flu to provide a fake historical justification for their evil agenda.

Also, let's remember that the Spanish Flu hit at the end of World War 1, after four years of the worst horrors ever seen. As all available resources poured into the war effort, citizens on both sides were left malnourished, exploited, exhausted, exposed to very cold winters in poorly heated homes, and facing extreme stress; all of which left their immune systems debilitated. Had there been no world war, there would have been no pandemic in 1918.

The arrival of a seasonal flu was merely the last straw, the spark that ignited the proverbial haystack. Scientists today admit that the influenza in itself was not deadly, and most Flu victims in fact died from common respiratory infection such as pneumonia that was due to the poverty, pollution and overall squalor that many Americans and Europeans had been living in.

This article is an effort to set the record straight about the 1918 Spanish Flu. By doing that, my goal is to debunk and undermine the foundations of the false Covid-19 narrative that North American and European governments and Big Pharma have been promoting in order to generate tens of billions of dollars in profits and establish totalitarian regimes in the previous western democracies.

Embrace your inner virus: your life depends on it

Bacteria are the most prevalent living organisms, found everywhere in staggering numbers. Viruses, however, are merely strands of genetic code (DNA or RNA) and aren't alive; they far outnumber bacteria in the air, water, soil, and in all creatures.

About 40 trillion bacteria live inside each of us; and for viruses, that figure is a mind-blowing 400 trillion. These microorganisms need us to flourish. Bacteria and viruses aren't killing machines; they're not something to fear. They're the fundamental building blocks of life. In fact, life on Earth would be impossible without them.

What we think of as 'infection' is to a large degree part of the symbiotic relationship between humans and microorganisms. The idea that we can hide from and sanitize ourselves free from viruses and bacteria is pure nonsense.

Viruses bring much benefit, especially in terms of gene transfer and evolution. **Viral genes account for about 30% to 40% of the human genome. We are in large part the product of viruses that infected our ancestors thousands of years ago.** Also, many viruses attack and destroy bacteria, keeping their numbers in check. To quote from *The New Yorker*: “The battle between viruses and bacteria is brutal: scientists estimate that [viral] phages cause a trillion trillion infections per second, destroying half the world’s bacteria every 48 hours.” (*An artist’s rendering of viruses attacking a bacterium*).



Science is very clear — when viruses mutate they become less deadly. **If viruses and bacteria were truly as deadly as many people mistakenly believe, then humans would have been wiped out eons ago.** We live in a symbiotic relationship with bacteria and viruses; we need each other to survive.

Of all the approximate 30 million viral species on Earth only about a few dozen cause illness; and chances are you'll never meet any of them in your life, with the exception of influenza. Your personal lifestyle, especially eating habits, as well as the chemicals in your environment, are far greater threats to your health.

The 1918 Spanish Flu

One of the two worst pandemics in history is the 1918 Pandemic, mistakenly known as the 'Spanish Flu'; (the other is the Bubonic Plague in the mid 1300s). Before March 2020, the

Spanish Flu was mostly of interest to a small circle of historians and health officials. With the appearance of COVID-19, however, the Spanish Flu suddenly found itself in the limelight, an integral part of a false Covid narrative.

Today's draconian lockdowns and unprecedented violations of civil liberties are based on a flawed computer model made in March 2020 by the Imperial College predicting deaths totaling tens of millions. To bolster such claims, these scientists, as well as journalists hungry for sensation, asserted that "50 to 100 million" had died in the 1918 Spanish Flu, which supposedly lasted for two years.

As someone who many years ago studied the Spanish Flu at Cornell University during the course of my research on President Wilson's foreign policy, I quickly realized that the "50 to 100 million dead" was false; and so, I was curious from where it came.

Starting in spring 2020, I went back and reviewed the historical material — old newspapers, private letters, scholarly articles and monographs, as well as online archives. (A huge body of material is online at the *Influenza Encyclopedia*, assembled by the University of Michigan's Center for the History of Medicine.)

Many claims about the Spanish Flu are made without hard facts. Wild speculation and rashly-drawn conclusions are the norm, as authors compete with each other to claim that the pandemic was (falsely) worse than it really was.

Most scholars fail to draw the obvious connection between World War I and the 1918 pandemic. **We must be very clear — if there had been no world war, then there'd be no Spanish Flu.**

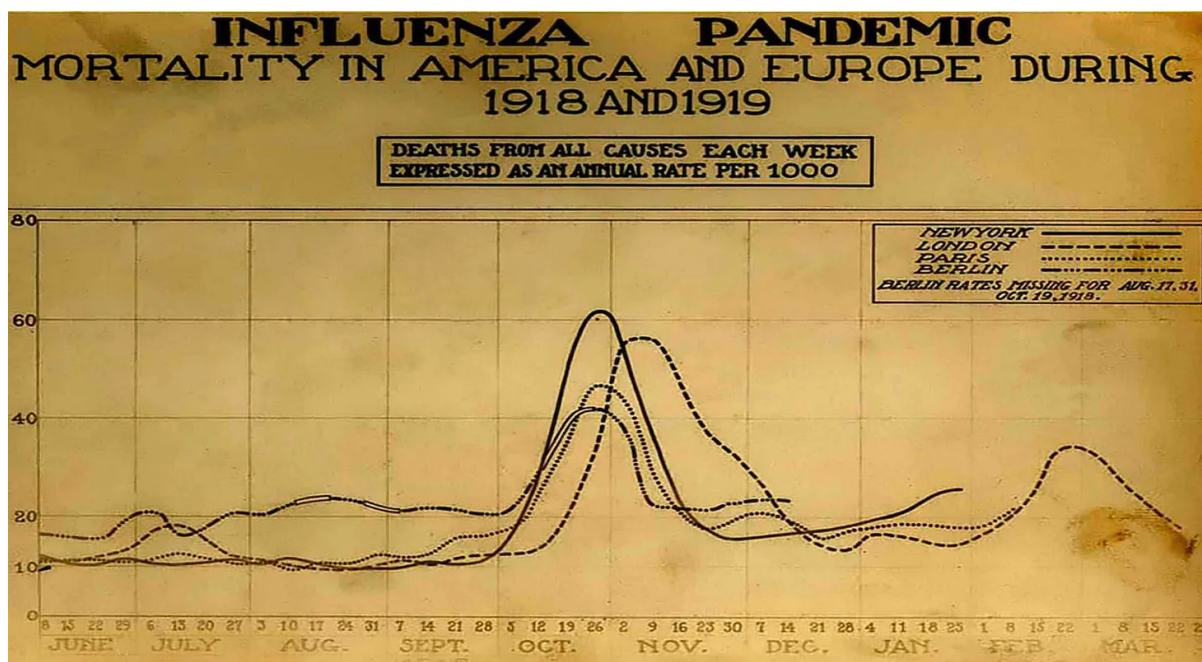
Unfortunately, our understanding of the 1918 Spanish Flu has been confused by media myths that are weaponized for a 21st century agenda. I hope this article will provide a better understanding of those tragic events a century ago.

1. How long did the pandemic last?

The historical record is clear — **If you were alive in 1918, the pandemic lasted about two months.** One only needs to look at the frequency of newspaper articles in the U.S. media about the Spanish Flu to be convinced of this. Almost all are published from mid September to mid November 1918. Only in some cities does media attention on the Spanish Flu run into December, but mostly to say it was ending.

In terms of restrictive social measures, the 1918 pandemic lasted as little as one month in New York City, and under two months in cities such as Philadelphia and Washington D.C. In Boston, restrictive measures were in force from Sept. 25 to Oct. 21. In Pittsburgh, the hardest hit American city in terms of deaths per capita, the restrictions lasted six weeks, from Oct. 4 to mid November.

Nowhere in the U.S. were restrictive measures in place for more than two months; and certainly not for 12 to 18 months, or even two years. Also, the record is clear — as soon as those short-term restrictive measures were removed the pandemic didn't return to American cities.



So, where did claims of such a two-year pandemic originate? It's based on the notion of flu 'waves' first promulgated in 1921 by Dr Warren T. Vaughn, and then adopted by modern-day scholars eager to find a pattern in the Flu's development.

This notion of 'waves' is in itself highly suspect and deserves a closer look. Disease was circulating on Europe's wartime front in 1916–1918 : typhus, scarlet fever, pneumonia, cholera, and etc. What exactly afflicted people is hard to say because symptoms can be similar and modern medicine was in its infancy. Many ailments were lumped into the "influenza" category, without rigorous medical scrutiny.

The 'wave' narrative was neatly crafted and goes like this: While the Spanish Flu had been circulating on the front in Europe, in spring 1918 a flu also appeared at a U.S. army base in Kansas and it then spread to other army bases. This so-called 'first wave' was mild, very few died, and no one gave it much thought.

Next, American soldiers took this 'Kansas flu' to France, where it allegedly bonded with the Spanish Flu on the front, becoming more virulent and then returning to the U.S.; and so began the dreaded 'second wave'.

This mutated Spanish Flu spread across the globe via Allied shipping in late summer, constituting the deadly 'second wave'. Indeed, in October and November 1918, over half a million Americans rapidly perished; and globally, maybe 15 million died.

Inflammation produced fluids that overwhelmed the lungs, and the bodies of healthy young people reacted so strongly that their immune systems literally killed them. This hardly fits the description of a flu. (The nature of this disease will be examined below.)

Each American state, and even city, had the authority to decide measures to combat the disease. For example, New York City had mild restrictions that lasted one month, and the city "...[acted] to quickly identify and isolate those who fell ill". But few shops closed, and children continued to go to school.

After just one month those measures were lifted. But by then, nearly 20,000 New Yorkers had died, which is 450 per 100,000. While awfully tragic, this death toll is much less than Washington and Philadelphia, both of which had a total lockdown.

By early November, the pandemic was over in New York City. People weren't paralyzed by irrational fear and germophobia. Life quickly returned to normal. In fact, on Nov. 11, New Yorkers and all Americans poured into the streets to celebrate victory against Germany. **Even though hundreds of thousands of people flooded the streets, not wearing masks, there was no resurgence of the influenza.** (See photo)

When one reads letters and newspapers from autumn 1918, one is struck by the absence of panic and fear. Perhaps this owes to Americans' stoic character. They were well-bred and less irrational than today, and demanded their cities to reopen.

And a strange thing happened — once a city ended restrictions, the virus subsided. Nevertheless, some historians today still speak of a ‘third wave’ in February and March 1919. But that was a seasonal flu; and there’s little scientific evidence to connect that to what happened in autumn 1918. In fact, in 1919, average U.S. life expectancy increased rapidly, reaching an all-time record high of 57.4 years!



Armistice Day celebrations on Nov. 11, 1918, worried public health experts as people crowded together in cities across the U.S. Credit: AP Photo

2. How many people died?

The Spanish Flu total death toll is controversial and nearly impossible to determine. Records weren’t well kept during the war and it was difficult to say which diseases were killing people. In addition, hunger was widespread during World War I.

“In 1918, death certificate recording and epidemiology was in its infancy,” said Amesh Adalja, senior scholar at Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, (*NPR*, April 2020).

When talking about 1918 death totals, Alex Navarro, assistant director of the Center for the History of Medicine at the University of Michigan, cautions, “It’s really just a guess”, (*USA Today*, April 2020).

India, which ranked N°1 for Spanish Flu deaths, is what we need to closely examine. Also, let’s look at other highly populated countries, namely Imperial China and Russia.

In the 1920s, American bacteriologist Edwin Oakes Jordan calculated global Spanish Flu deaths at 21 million. That figure remained the standard until the 1990s when revisionist historians, eager to make a name for themselves, used dubious calculations to mysteriously reach a death toll of 25 to 40 million.

Then, in 2002, Johnson and Mueller, took this ‘numbers game’ even further and came up with 50–100 million dead, purporting to draw upon ‘peer reviewed’ sources. The abstract of their article says:

“Further research has seen the consistent upward revision of the estimated global mortality of the pandemic, which a 1920s calculation put in the vicinity of 21.5 million. A 1991 paper revised the mortality as being in the range 24.7–39.3 million. This paper suggests that it was of the order of 50 million. However, it must be acknowledged that even this vast figure may be substantially lower than the real toll, perhaps as much as 100 percent understated.”

Eager for sensationalist details to impress their readers, journalists in spring 2020 seized upon the 50 to 100 million figure, and ran with it. Mind you, global population in 1918 was 1.8 billion; and 100 million would have been about 5.5% of the total.

If we look at the data and historical context, then there’s good reason to doubt even the 20 million Spanish Flu death total. About 75% of total global deaths, or 15 million, supposedly occurred in British-ruled India; but there’s no conclusive evidence for that. In fact, U.S. newspapers in spring 1919 were claiming that 5 to 6 million had died in India from the Flu. Surely, 6 million is a horrifying figure, but it’s not 15 million.

As the two most populous places in the world, India and China are the keys to tallying the global death toll. In his article “The Spanish Influenza in China, 1918–1920”, author Wataru Iijima (Cape Town, Sept. 1998) says China was **not** impacted much by the Spanish Flu.

Indeed, **no evidence exists** to prove widespread influenza deaths in China, as the *New York Times* reported in late 1918. Some scholars cite China’s traditional medicine, as well as the fact that the Chinese have better immunity to respiratory disease as to why China escaped unscathed.

Western revisionists, such as Johnson and Mueller, disagree and claim between 4 million and 9.5 million died in China. But this is guesswork; reliable evidence is absent. Yet,

Johnson and Mueller are adamant, and bizarrely claim “the absence of evidence is no evidence for the absence of illness [in China]”.

As far as India, in April 1919, the British government released a report stating that about 6 million had died in India from the Spanish Flu at the end of 1918. But let’s look at the context. All throughout the war and especially in 1918, the British had been diverting resources to the European front. Famine was rife in India.

We surmise with much certainty that what better way to cover up imperial ineptness — blame the many deaths on a raging mysterious disease! While we might never know the full truth, there is much evidence indicating that’s what precisely happened.

“The role of malnutrition, in relation to the existence of famine in the north, west and centre of India may also help explain not only the geographical distribution of mortality within India, but also India’s position as the country with the highest recorded mortality during the pandemic.” (Mills)



Also, mortality rates were high in India’s interior, while coastal areas were less hard-hit. This is very odd. The Spanish Flu had supposedly arrived by ship; if that was true, then certainly the coastal areas would have been hit harder than the interior.

Now, data for India states that excess deaths from fevers and respiratory diseases, in June 1918 to May 1919, totaled 7.46 million in regions that were home to 75% of India's total population. Even if we accept that all those deaths were due to the influenza virus, which is highly unlikely, then India's Spanish Flu death toll is in the range of 10 million at the most; and certainly not 15 million. That's a big difference.

Yet, many researchers further speculate and bizarrely reach a national influenza mortality number in India of 17 to 18 million, about 6% of the population. Once again, this is intellectual dishonesty and not based in fact.

Unfortunately, inflating death totals is common in historical research. The reason why is obvious — determining a new and even greater death total for a tragedy gives one a certain sense of academic 'accomplishment'.

It's also worth mentioning the work of historian David Hardiman. He believes that the 18 million died in India, but concludes that many factors were in the fore: "[Indians] poverty, poor sanitation, diet and water supply, and the chronic malaria that sapped their energy and undermined their immune system, along with—at that time—an undiagnosed sickle-cell anaemia, all made them particularly susceptible when influenza swept their villages in 1918."

Lastly, let's briefly look at attempts to reclassify the millions who died in the Russian Civil War as 'Spanish Flu deaths'. Again, evidence is lacking for this claim. Many diseases, especially cholera and typhoid, were common in Russia in 1918–1921. Many also died in the military conflict, as well as from political repression and hunger. There's no evidence Spanish Flu was a major killer during the Russian Civil War.

In conclusion, **any claim of 50 to 100 million global Spanish Flu deaths should be discarded entirely. The evidence indicates that the death toll doesn't surpass 15 million.** Even the 20 million figure is unlikely because it's derived from the mistaken notion that 15 million people died in India alone, which most likely isn't the case.

3. The myth of Spanish Flu censorship and the effectiveness of masks

There's a widespread myth common in our media today that the U.S. Government censored mention of the Spanish Flu in order not to demoralize the war effort. And therefore, this is the reason why Americans today had never heard of the Spanish Flu until it came to

national attention in March 2020 at the start of the Covid outbreak. However, again this is a total falsehood. While going through the archives, primarily newspapers from many cities across the country, I literally found hundreds and hundreds of articles in the American press about the Spanish Flu. There was no censorship of this topic. None whatsoever.

As far as masks, very few people wore them despite some government propaganda to get people to mask up. Sure, there were staged propaganda photos (see below) and these we often see today reprinted in our media. But the vast majority of Americans in 1918 never wore masks. This was evident to me while reading hundreds of newspapers in cities from across the USA in autumn 1918 and early winter 1919. Published photos of that period, even at the peak of the Spanish Flu, almost always show people going about their lives, without wearing any type of gauze mask.

A few cities tried to enforce mask mandates, such as San Francisco, but the people pushed back and succeeded in getting the mask mandates repealed after several weeks.

Nevertheless, American media today spread disinformation that everyone was masked in 1918. But archival material makes it very clear — that people back then knew that masks didn't work. In fact, in 1919, American medical authorities ruled on the matter — that masks are useless outside of the sterile hospital environment — and thus, never again did Americans wear medical masks in public. Not until spring 2020. (*Staged mask propaganda photo, 1918; what photographer would possibly be sitting at the batter's feet?*)



A baseball player wearing a mask in 1918. Photo: George Rinhart/Corbis via Getty Images

4. Did the influenza virus really kill?

This question is the least controversial. Most experts today are unanimous that the Spanish Flu was characterized by medium virulence, and it wasn't potent enough to kill on its own. So, what was the killer?

Based on the observations of medical personnel, in autumn 1918 many people died quickly from a respiratory disease that exhibited unusual and excruciating symptoms. Most died within 6–12 days of showing symptoms, which is unprecedented for any flu.

The virus induced aberrant immune responses, leading to excessive inflammation. But that wasn't all. In the U.S., a large percentage of the victims were healthy military age men. Indeed, American troops were hit very hard, and this disease accounted for half of American military deaths in World War I.

Today we know that the real culprit was secondary infection — bacterial pneumonia. In the words of Anthony Fauci: “The weight of evidence ... of the 1918 influenza pandemic favors a scenario in which viral damage followed by bacterial pneumonia led to the vast majority of deaths. In essence, the virus landed the first blow while bacteria delivered the knockout punch.”

In 2010, the CDC said: “Contemporaneous reports suggest that the pathophysiologic effects of the virus, in and of themselves, did not directly cause most (or even many) of the deaths during the pandemic.” Nevertheless, this is rarely reported in today's media, which still names the influenza virus as the sole culprit.

This begs another question — why was bacterial pneumonia prevalent in so many people in 1918? Let's discuss the context. First, up until the mid 20th century respiratory disease was the top killer in cities, which were highly polluted to levels that we can't imagine. The amount of industrial and household toxic air was staggering. Pittsburgh, for example, was the most polluted city in the U.S., and not surprisingly, it had the highest per capita death toll during the Spanish Flu.

Second, war always brings much stress and deprivation. Stress is a leading factor in disease. Microbes are ubiquitous and live in 'harmony' with us until a point when our bodies are weakened, our immune system compromised. This made World War I a perfect breeding

ground for all sorts of disease. **Again, if there had been no war, there'd be no pandemic.** It's that simple.

Third, the previous winter, (1917/18), was one of the coldest on record; so cold that hundreds froze to death in American cities since railways shut down and couldn't deliver coal to urban areas. That severe cold winter further crippled city residents and therefore, we can guess that many became 'walking pneumonia colonies' ripe for the next autumn when the cold returned.

In conclusion, the influenza virus wasn't the killer in autumn 1918. Along with the stress and deprivation of war, the Spanish Flu merely weakened bodies, allowing more deadly opportunistic pneumonia bacteria in the lungs to thrive and to kill.

5. The myth of Philadelphia's Liberty Loans 'super-spreader' event

Lastly, let's look at one more event that holds a prominent place in urban legend today — the alleged 'super-spreader' event in Philadelphia on Sept. 28, 1918; known as the Liberty Loans Parade.

In March 2020, when COVID began its fury, journalists pontificated about this previously obscure 1918 Philadelphia parade, lecturing the public as if it had been a major event in U.S. history. Their version goes like this — the Spanish Flu was first detected in Philadelphia on Sept. 19, but inept and reckless city authorities went ahead with the Liberty Loans Parade on Sept. 28. The virus then spread wildly among the estimated crowd of 200,000, killing many.

In spring 2020, the following sentence was widely published in U.S. media and then reposted on social media: "Within 72 hours of the parade, every bed in Philadelphia's 31 hospitals was filled. In the week ending Oct. 5, (1918), some 2,600 people in Philadelphia had died from the flu or its complications."

That appears to be a convincing narrative, but once again, there's no evidence. In 2009, a study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, casted doubt on the notion that the 1918 parade in Philadelphia was a 'super-spreader' event.

“If we’ve accurately estimated the timing of the decline in infectivity ratios, then the parade was probably **not** a major venue for transmission,” say the authors, arguing that the virus was circulating in the city before the parade. They also point out that **the parade was outdoors**; another reason to question its role in spreading disease.

Finally, the strongest evidence to doubt the alleged deadly role played by the Liberty Loans Parade is the fact that just six weeks later, on Nov. 11, Philadelphia and all other American cities held massive victory day parades, but yet there was no Flu resurgence. (Photo of the parade).



Conclusion

Understanding the complexities of the Spanish Flu is difficult. On one hand, there’s an enormous body of information to go through, but at the same time hard scientific evidence is often lacking because medical research was in its infancy in 1918. In addition, researchers often have a politicized agenda for the modern world.

Still, the data is clear and not subject to further discussion. **Nearly all Spanish Flu deaths occurred within a two month period in autumn 1918. Social restrictions were in place**

only for those two months. And as soon as Americans forced politicians to reopen their cities, the Spanish Flu never made a resurgence. The historical record left by newspapers and personal letters is clear about this.

The Spanish Flu appeared suddenly across the globe in autumn 1918 and hit very hard, taking the lives of millions, but then it quickly and mysteriously subsided. If we wish to honor the memory of those who died a sudden and agonizing death, then we should strive to have an accurate account of what truly happened, and not weaponize their deaths in order to further a political and social agenda in our modern era.

***About the author:** John Varoli is a graduate of Cornell University (New York State) and began his professional career in communications for S.W.I.F.T. in Belgium. He left that position to found and direct an NGO helping homeless people in Moscow and St. Petersburg in the early 1990s. That work lasted four years, putting him on the ‘front lines’ of two of the world’s most deadly epidemics: antibiotic-resistant Tuberculosis, and HIV-AIDS. During that time, Mr Varoli worked closely with leading Russian and international infectious disease experts, including groups such as the International Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders. Starting in 1997, Mr Varoli began a 15-year career as a foreign correspondent in Russia, working first for the New York Times and then with Bloomberg News, as well as with Reuters TV in Moscow. During those years, he also worked as a freelance media consultant for UNICEF.*

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25 Comments



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Todd Rubinstein Jan 22 ❤️ Liked by John Varoli

Outstanding article. Thanks a million for spending the time to research these very important topics. I was born with an anti-hysteria and anti-panic meter. Knew within a week of mid March 2020 that this whole thing was designed to take down Trump and to finally get the