

## How the COVID-19 Censors Killed the Truth

Estimates are all over the place, but it's now beyond dispute that Soviet policies in the 1930s led to the deaths of somewhere between 7 and 12 million Ukrainians (about the equivalent to killing every person in Michigan today). It's one of the greatest horrors in world history. The world knew little about the Ukrainian famine at the time. When independent journalists tried to get news out about the atrocity, they were accused of promoting conspiracy theories. Sound familiar? The New York Times, whose Moscow bureau led efforts to protect the Soviet Union and crush dissenting viewpoints, has since apologized for its role in suppressing news about the famine. Based on the media's handling of COVID-19 reporting today, however, it's clear we have forgotten any lessons once learned about the dangers of suppressing ideas and dissent on unproven matters the way the Times did to such tragic effect all those decades ago.

The oddest part about the effort to stifle debate over COVID-19's origin is even the experts agree we still don't know the answer. There is a prevailing theory, but nobody knows precisely where COVID-19 originated. The disease has killed nearly 2.5 million people around the world and almost 500,000 in the U.S. alone. It's in everybody's interest to understand exactly where it came from and how it started, but efforts at investigation have been stymied from the start. Among those eager to suppress dissent on this topic are: the Chinese government, U.S. media outlets, the Big Tech platforms and scientists with a financial or reputational stake in the outcome of any investigation.

The best analysis to date on COVID-19 origins came from Nicholson Baker in New York Magazine. Baker did such a solid job that The Washington Post and others finally began to take a second look. Baker chronicles the history and intense debate within the scientific community over laboratory coronavirus testing. In essence, scientists have been creating dangerous coronaviruses in labs for many years. Their goal was to help us predict and protect against viruses that we could encounter in the real world. Opposing scientists have argued for many years that this research was of little benefit and was way too dangerous. They said, in clear terms, that the research itself could lead to a pandemic. There are millions of dollars on the line, and millions of lives could be affected. As Baker chronicled, the scientific battles over the creation of these increasingly dangerous viruses in laboratories have been intense. In 2014, under the Obama administration, U.S. funding was paused due to the potential dangers. Funding was then restarted in 2017 under the Trump administration. Some of the funding from the U.S. government went to the Wuhan Institute of Virology, located at the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak.

The majority of scientists seem to believe that the virus started naturally, transferring from bats, through another animal, to humans in Wuhan, China. However, this is not a proven fact; it's the predominant theory with some big holes left to fill, including that the bats in question live 900 miles to the south of Wuhan.

The problem is that those most central to investigating the origins of COVID-19 are: 1. China; 2. the World Health Organization, which is deferential to China; and 3. the scientists involved in the debate over the dangerous laboratory coronavirus experimentation over the past couple of decades. The virus started in China, so we can't investigate without their help, but China has withheld key information and has silenced Chinese scientists who were speaking out. The WHO

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has not been helpful either. As for the scientists, it's impossible to investigate without them, but their conflicts of interest have already been playing out.

By Neil Patel

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Dr. Peter Daszak, the sole U.S. citizen on the WHO investigative team, is a close associate of China's premier bat-based coronavirus researcher and was a key figure in directing American taxpayer funds to the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Daszak even organized a public relations campaign in early 2020 to paint the lab leak hypothesis as a "conspiracy" before any thorough investigation had been conducted. His spokesperson later said the goal was to protect the lab's scientists, but ultimately the beneficiary was Beijing and its preferred narrative.

The point is not to prove that Daszak is a bad guy or that the virus leaked from lab experiments. The point is that we don't know. If you look at the details of all the investigations to date, they reach the same conclusion: We don't know yet. What's more, efforts to suppress the lab leak theory are unconvincing on their face. The fact is that SARS escaped from a Beijing lab twice in 2004. The virus that causes COVID-19 is SARS-CoV-2. If SARS 1.0 leaked from a Chinese lab twice, why is it a conspiracy theory to question whether SARS 2.0 could have also escaped from a Chinese lab? Nobody has answered this persuasively.

As the founder of Check Your Fact, one of the best fact-checking operations in America, I am well aware of the massive amount of completely made-up misinformation on the internet. When it comes to health issues such as the coronavirus, misinformation can be dangerous. However, it's also dangerous to allow interested parties or countries with something to hide to use claims of misinformation or conspiracy to suppress legitimate debate or oversight.

Throughout history, numerous initial expert conclusions about major matters have been proven wrong over time: Y2K, Titanic can't sink, smoking is good for you. The list goes on. The media is supposed to be skeptical. It is supposed to be on the lookout for conflicts and bias, yet almost nobody in America understands this simple narrative because the media has chosen to ignore it. We are a long way from 1930, but it sure seems like nothing has changed.

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Neil Patel co-founded The Daily Caller, one of America's fastest-growing online news outlets, which regularly breaks news and distributes it to over 15 million monthly readers. Patel also co-founded The Daily Caller News Foundation, a nonprofit news company that trains journalists, produces fact-checks and conducts longer-term investigative reporting. The Daily Caller News Foundation licenses its content free of charge to over 300 news outlets, reaching potentially hundreds of millions of people per month. To find out more about Neil Patel and read features by other Creators writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators website at [www.creators.com](http://www.creators.com)

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