

SOURCE TRAIL

From “Noble Lies” to the Diary

Tracing every claim in the July 2021 Slate essay by Kerrington Powell and Vinay Prasad back to a primary document — and then forward to the July 2026 Senate hearing on Anthony Fauci’s diary. Compiled August 3, 2026.

DOCUMENTED

CONTESTED READING

UNVERIFIED

THE ORIGINAL ESSAY

“Covid-19: The Untold Toll of Noble Lies”

Slate · July 28, 2021 · Kerrington Powell & Vinay Prasad

The argument was not that Fauci committed crimes. It was that officials sometimes shaped what they said in order to produce a behavior rather than to report what they knew, and that the cost would be paid in public trust. The authors close with a question rather than an accusation:

Do we want public health officials to report facts and uncertainties transparently? Or do we want them to shape information to influence the public to take specific actions?

Worth knowing: co-author Vinay Prasad went on to direct the FDA’s Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research — the division regulating vaccines — from 2025 until his departure in April 2026.

[Slate — the original essay](#)

[STAT — Prasad departing CBER \(March 2026\)](#)

CLAIM 1 · MASKS

DOCUMENTED

The private email and the public interview

February 5 – March 8, 2020

Released under the Freedom of Information Act in June 2021, Fauci's email to former HHS Secretary Sylvia Burwell:

Masks are really for infected people to prevent them from spreading infection to people who are not infected rather than protecting uninfected people from acquiring infection. ... The typical mask you buy in the drug store is not really effective in keeping out virus, which is small enough to pass through material.

One month later, on 60 Minutes:

There's no reason to be walking around with a mask. ... It could lead to a shortage of masks for the people who really need it.

CDC recommended cloth masks for the general public on April 3, 2020. Fauci later said he had been protecting the supply for health workers.

The honest counterweight: PolitiFact rated the bare "Fauci lied about masks" claim *False*, noting the February email predates the pandemic declaration and that evidence on asymptomatic transmission genuinely changed in that window. Both can be true — the essay's point was that the public was never told which factor was driving the advice.

[CBS News / 60 Minutes — original segment, March 8, 2020](#)

[PolitiFact — the email in full context](#)

[FactCheck.org — on the out-of-context video](#)

CLAIM 2 · HERD IMMUNITY

DOCUMENTED

"I can nudge this up a bit"

New York Times · December 24, 2020 · Donald G. McNeil Jr.

This is the strongest item in the essay because it is Fauci describing his own method, in his own words, to a reporter:

When polls said only about half of all Americans would take a vaccine, I was saying herd immunity would take 70 to 75 percent. ... Then, when newer surveys said 60 percent or more would take it, I thought, "I can nudge this up a bit," so I went to 80, 85.

The number moved with public opinion polling, not only with new immunological data. McNeil reported it plainly; Fauci has never disputed the quote.

[Axios — summary with the full quote](#)

[Donald McNeil Jr. — his own later account](#)

CLAIM 3 · SIX FEET

DOCUMENTED

"Sort of just appeared"

Closed-door testimony January 2024 · Report December 2, 2024

Not in the 2021 essay, but the clearest later vindication of its thesis. Asked under oath about the origin of the six-foot distancing rule, Fauci said it "sort of just appeared." The House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic's 500-plus page final report concluded the guidance was *"arbitrary and not based on science"* and that officials *"flip-flopped on the efficacy of masks without providing Americans scientific data."*

This was a Republican-led committee, and the report's origins findings are contested — but the six-foot finding rests on Fauci's own sworn answer.

[House Oversight — full final report \(PDF\)](#)

[House Oversight — release with key findings](#)

THE 2026 DIARY

DOCUMENTED

What the pages say

Released by Sen. Rand Paul · July 25–28, 2026 · 1,141 pages, Dec 2019 – Dec 2022

January 26, 2020: the Wuhan market “was not the source, it was the amplifier,” and “somewhere the virus jumped from animals to humans.”

February 1, 2020 — the conference call that preceded the “Proximal Origin” paper:

There was not total agreement. ... The rest felt that deliberate insertion was possible.

Per NPR’s reading of the entry, only 2 of 12 participants backed natural origin at that meeting. Later entries have Fauci “almost certain that the virus evolved naturally from a species jump” while keeping “an open mind about the possibility of a lab leak.”

March 2020: entries describe Mayor de Blasio and Gov. Newsom closing schools and restaurants “based on what I was saying publicly” — which sits awkwardly beside his 2022 statement that he had “nothing to do” with school closures.

[NPR — what the diary notes say](#)

[CBS News — diary release coverage](#)

[Forbes — entry-by-entry rundown](#)

[Sen. Paul’s “Reading Room” — the primary document](#)

UNVERIFIED

Where the diary came from

Provenance not established

Paul’s office has not said how it obtained the journal, and CBS reported it did not respond to questions about it. RFK Jr. has claimed he handed the files over; that claim is uncorroborated. The document was posted, pulled Monday evening, and reposted Tuesday with redactions. No subpoena, court order, or NIH production has been documented as the source, and the pages’ authenticity has not been independently confirmed.

This does not mean the entries are fake. It means anyone sharing them should say plainly that the chain of custody is unknown.

Factually — verified vs. unverified on provenance

DOCUMENTED

The hearing

Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs · July 29, 2026

Fauci invoked the Fifth Amendment more than 50 times, telling the committee: “under the advice of my attorneys, I will invoke my right under the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution to refrain from answering your questions,” and adding that it “pains me to do so because of the respect I have for the legislative branch.” He accused Paul of an “unhinged obsession with calling for my prosecution.” Paul ejected Fauci’s attorney, David Schertler, from the room. A contempt vote was scheduled for the following week.

Fauci received a preemptive federal pardon from President Biden in January 2025. It does not cover state charges or perjury arising from new testimony — the stated basis for the Fifth Amendment invocation.

[HSGAC — official hearing page](#)

[NPR — hearing coverage](#)

[Axios — the biggest clashes](#)

[NBC News — Fauci calls Paul “unhinged”](#)

WHAT DOESN'T HOLD UP

CONTESTED READING

Four hearing claims that fail on checking

Fact-check by Dr. Céline Gounder

“Fauci edited the Proximal Origin paper.” Overstated. He received the accepted manuscript and replied, “Thanks for your note. Nice job on the paper.” Lead author

Kristian Andersen testified the only suggested edit came from Jeremy Farrar, changing one word from “unlikely” to “improbable.”

“Fauci told Collins to delete an email about origins.” The deletion request is real but misframed — it concerned criticism of WHO officials, not scientific discussion of origins.

“80,000 animals at the market tested negative.” The 80,000 figure is nationwide livestock surveillance. At the market itself, 457 specimens from 18 species were sampled — after live mammals had been removed on January 1, 2020.

“Precedent settles that a pardoned witness can’t take the Fifth.” Overstated; later rulings complicate *Brown v. Walker*, and in the Lois Lerner case DOJ declined prosecution.

[Céline Gounder — hearing fact-check](#)

[Kristian Andersen — written testimony \(PDF\)](#)

CONTESTED READING

Uncertainty is not deception

Virologist Felicia Goodrum and biosecurity researcher Gigi Gronvall both note that the February 1 call happened before meaningful data existed, and that scientists entertaining a lab origin in week one and abandoning it as genomic evidence arrived is ordinary method, not a cover-up. Goodrum points out that genetic evidence maps the earliest known cases to the market rather than the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

The counter-argument, from the House Select Subcommittee and from the essay’s own logic: the problem is not that officials were uncertain — it is that the uncertainty was never shared with the public while it was live.

[House Select Subcommittee — Proximal Origin memo \(PDF\)](#)

[The Intercept — unredacted NIH emails](#)

[U.S. Right to Know — Proximal Origin visual timeline](#)

The through-line. Nothing released so far proves a conspiracy. The diary mostly shows a man who was uncertain in January and less uncertain by March, which is what science

looks like from the inside.

But millions are reading it as a confession — and that reading was earned. The mask email, the polling-adjusted herd immunity number, and the six-foot rule that “sort of just appeared” taught a large part of the country that the podium says less than it knows.

That is the real cost of a noble lie. Not the lie itself. The next hundred true things nobody believes.

Compiled August 3, 2026. Every factual claim above links to a primary document or to the reporting that first published it. Where sources conflict, both are shown. Dates and quotes verified against the original documents where publicly accessible.