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A Tale of Two COVID Regimes: Transatlantic Travel Under Trump & Biden

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Upon my return to the United States from Europe, I was reminded of Ronald Reagan’s insight that, “The trouble with our liberal friends is not that they’re ignorant. It’s just that they know so much that isn’t so.”

Every liberal critic ‘knows’ President Donald Trump was too lax and too late in his response to the [COVID-19](#) pandemic. They know the [Trump administration](#) made-up its anti-COVID campaign as it went along, including its response to international travel during the pandemic.

Every critic also ‘knows’ that, in striking contrast, the Biden administration meticulously follows the science. It uses joined-up thinking to plug all of the public health holes it inherited from its hapless predecessor. Everyone knows

that, to-date President Joe Biden's War on COVID has been decisive, universal, and airtight in its application.

But every liberal critic is wrong—at least when it comes to Americans returning home via domestic airports. My own transatlantic travel this past year was an experience completely at odds with the public narrative about Trump's sloppy and Biden's rigorous anti-COVID regimes.

On March 11, 2020, I flew out of Washington's Dulles Airport on the evening that Trump banned incoming European flights. My return British Airways flight on March 16 was the last flight to depart London before the guillotine fell on U.S.-bound flights.

Dulles was one of a dozen airports sanctioned by the Trump administration to process, screen, and test international passengers. While on board the Dulles flight, every passenger completed a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) COVID health questionnaire that you carried with you after disembarking the aircraft. Once U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) finished with you, a CBP officer sent you back to a cordoned-off area designated for a lengthy nurse-conducted health assessment.

If you failed the assessment in any way, based upon a temperature check, COVID test, visual assessment, and your answers to the health questionnaire, you were escorted out of the area and transported immediately to one of six quarantine facilities around the country.

If you passed the nurses' assessment, you were sent home conditional upon entering into "supervised self-quarantine" for the next 14 days. Those of us released into self-quarantine were given pamphlets and other documentation educating us about COVID-19 and advising us of our responsibilities throughout our forthcoming self-isolation period.

For example, for the next two weeks we had to keep a self-quarantine log, i.e., record our temperature twice a day and note any developing COVID symptoms detailed on the CDC checklist. During those 14 days, I was contacted multiple times by the CDC to make sure I was in good health and obeying the self-quarantine rules.

Fast forward to Aug. 24, 2020, when I once more flew on British Airways into Dulles from London's Heathrow Airport after spending a week across continental Europe. Both the pre- and post-landing COVID procedures were comparable to those I experienced five months earlier.

The only change this time was the extensive health screening took place immediately upon disembarkation and prior to passing through CBP. As in March, I passed the health screening, but was still required to self-quarantine for 14 days. Subsequently, I was contacted regularly by the CDC inquiring about my health status.

On Jan. 12, 2021, Trump's CDC [announced](#) that, effective Jan. 26, 2021, official government policy is that all passengers arriving by air into the United States be prevented from entry unless they have been tested for COVID-19 no more than three days before their flight departs, and they present their negative pre-departure COVID-19 test result (NAAT or antigen) to the airline before boarding.

The CDC also recommended that these passengers take another COVID-19 test three to five days after their arrival in the United States and self-quarantine at home for seven days after travel. Even if you don't get tested, the CDC said it's safest to stay home and self-quarantine for 10 days after travel. Also, the CDC said to avoid being around people who are at increased risk for severe illness for 14 days, whether you get tested or not.

When I checked-in for my recent United Airlines flight from Heathrow to Newark International Airport, a United customer service representative asked for my

COVID-19 test result. I took out my phone, opened the UK National Health Service's COVID-19 app, and showed her the image that simply stated, "Your test result is negative."

It was my test result, but it could have been anyone's test result displayed on anyone's phone. The image I showed her didn't identify me as the test subject or provide any other details about the results or the nature of the test, itself.

I also wasn't asked which type of test I had taken, as certain types are unacceptable for entry to the United States. Approval to travel includes requiring the passenger to produce the detailed lab results of their test, copies of which I carried with me. But I wasn't asked for them. And, I wasn't asked to produce, verify, or validate the airline health questionnaire I'd earlier completed online.

She's only the airline rep, after all; she's not the last line of defense against undocumented (in a COVID sense) entrants to the country. But she is.

United's customer service lady in London was both the very first and the very last person to ask me to produce any documentation at all regarding the state of my health or my COVID-19 test result prior to departure, or my travel or accommodation plans upon arrival in America.

During the flight, the cabin crew told us that, upon arrival in Newark, we'd have to produce our COVID-19 test paperwork. We didn't.

New Jersey now has the highest rate of coronavirus infection in the United States. The UK variant of the virus, which is especially infectious, is at least partially responsible for the surge in coronavirus cases across the Garden State.

Hence, the cabin crew informed us that New Jersey recently introduced a mandatory 14-day quarantine for international and out-of-state visitors, and that we should be prepared to be processed accordingly. We weren't.

No mention was made of the new state regulation by any member of the airline ground crew or any CBP official. Nor did any signage inform us of this rather important development.

No nursing staff or public health officials were present upon disembarkation from our London flight. There were no independent health assessments made, no documents verified or collected. No one inspected my NHS test result. We weren't questioned about our health or our ongoing domestic plans or arrangements.

There was no CDC or public health literature available either to counsel and advise arriving passengers on COVID-19 issues, nor was there any documentation stipulating how we should conduct ourselves while we self-quarantined at our destination. No self-quarantine logs to complete or temperatures to record. We weren't informed by anyone in an official capacity that the CDC even recommends self-quarantine, let alone the attendant details.

The arrival process at Newark was eerily anachronistic. It was a "back to the future" experience whereby everything occurred just as it did in pre-pandemic times. When it comes to air travel in the Biden era, it seems the "new normal" is simply the old normal dressed up with an ill-fitting mask.

The lone message from Biden's CDC was a text following my flight's arrival in Newark, which simply asked, "Recently travelled internationally?" It then 'helpfully' advised, "Watch your health for 14 days." There's been no further communication from the CDC.

At the nation's most vulnerable travel hubs, the Biden administration has taken its eye off the coronavirus ball. Given that Biden's CBP doesn't test illegal immigrants for COVID-19 before welcoming them across our southern border, it's an unsurprising outcome. It's an incredibly dangerous one, too.

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