AM: Bob Woodward was one half of the team that broke the Watergate story which brought down President Nixon. Along with Carl Bernstein it’s a partnership as famous in political journalism as Simon and Garfunkel were in pop music. In recent years he’s been producing a series of political books of which the latest, ‘Rage’ tells the inside story of the Trump administration, not least through a series of interviews with the President himself. Among the revelations not least was that President Trump deliberated downplayed the danger from Covid-19 which has so far killed more than 200,000 Americans. Here is a recording of the President explaining to Bob why.

Trump: ‘Well I think, Bob, really to be honest with you –
W: Sure, I want you to be.
Trump: I wanted to - I wanted to always play it down. I still like playing it down -
W: Yes, sir.
Trump: because I don’t want to create a panic.”

Woodward: January 28th in the Oval Office, a top secret briefing, his National Security advisers told him what was coming. They had contacts in China. The President asked questions and then he failed to tell the truth to the public. A shocking tragedy for this country.

AM: Now you say that President Trump should have told the truth. But you yourself also knew the truth. Should you not have revealed these conversations many months ago and thereby perhaps saved many American lives?
W: I see this is – this is false. When he told me on February 7th the virus is as I say was not on anyone’s mind. I misunderstood, I thought oh he’s talking about China ’cause President Trump told me the night before he’d been talking to Chinese President Xi. I did not learn about the key January 8th meeting until May and then the virus was on fire. What would I say? Oh, it’s airborne. Oh, people who don’t have symptoms can transmit it? That was already known.

AM: Well let’s turn to some of the other extraordinary revelations on this book. You say that some of the people closest to President Trump genuinely feared a full on nuclear war with North Korea.

W: Well, the President told me that we came much closer to war with North Korea than anyone knows. The President says North Korean Leader, Kim Jong-un told him that. I report that Secretary of State, Pompeo, who’s as close to Trump as anyone who’s the number one senior Cabinet Officer, I didn’t know whether it was real or was a bluff. But Mattis as the Secretary of Defense said, one responsibility and that is to protect the country and President Trump confirmed to me he authorised Secretary of Defense Mattis to shoot down a missile from North Korea if it was coming to the United States. At that moment because North Korea had a couple of dozen nuclear weapons well concealed, Mattis’ worry, which is one anyone would have in that position that if he shot down a North Korean missile the North Korean Leader, Kim Jong-un will say well, now I’ve got to use all the weapons I have and we would have had a nuclear war.

AM: Now you’ve come to know the President pretty well, Bob, over the last few years. If in November he loses and Joe Biden wins do you think he will accept the result?

W: Who knows? I asked him about this and he said it’s one of the things he said I’m not going to comment on that now. Publicly he’s made it clear he has no confidence in the procedures of counting and making decisions on this. Put on your seatbelt
because we’re going to go through multiple hurricanes, electoral hurricanes and hail storms and you know, what comes of this, I think now it’s his responsibility to come forward with the other party, with the Democrats and come up for some procedures and say, let’s have a level playing field and let’s make sure this is fair. But Trump is not doing that and he has sown discord and distrust in the system across the board.

AM: Bob Woodward, seat belt on, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

Ends