

Post mortems are not what they seem

When it comes to learning the lessons of life, it's always best not to wait until we're dead to start.

With that in mind, we've now said our final goodbyes to one of the most challenging years we've experienced in many years, and most of us are more than happy to inter it with those that live in infamy. Unlike our reasoning machines, many of which depend on engineered algorithms and AI software, we humans have an advantage. We can take the long look back to do some serious analysis on what we did right or wrong in previous years. This contrasts starkly with our machine *cousins* which rely on a programmer's decisions as to how much historical data should comprise their memory banks.

Unfortunately, many of us don't take that long journey backward because we feel it will be too painful to voluntarily relive uncomfortable experiences and because we believe that new situations will be based on a new set of conditions (and that trying to apply lessons learned from even one year ago will be a waste of our time). That, my friends is a flawed and terribly short-sighted argument and presupposes that like our machines we needn't be bothered with too much historical context so as to avoid repeating our mistakes and formulate future plans.

Americans have a relatively short history and even shorter attention spans. We also suffer from a bad case of *history-aversion*. Current generations have been taught to live in the 'now' with one eye on the future and have little regard for what happened before they were born. While there are institutions like think tanks that do their best to draw historical parallels, they are outdone by our media that does its level best to make sure our focus is squarely fixed on the present by portraying each problem as if just appeared out of nowhere. Granted, there are exceptions and those few outlets that try to be objective and flag similar historical comparisons deserve credit for reining in our concentration, but they are in the minority.

There are two best times for conducting post mortems. The first and most obvious one is shortly after the victim (or as in this case, a year) has passed. The second is after the immediate tissue decay has progressed sufficiently so that the benefit of fresh eyes, hindsight (and possibly new forensic technology) can be applied to arrive at a more thorough and honest conclusion. That said, last year was a repeat of the English Queen Elizabeth's *annus horribilus* in 1992 ("1992 is not a year on which I shall look back with undiluted pleasure. In the words of one of my more sympathetic correspondents, it has turned out to be an *annus horribilis*.").

An example of two such mortems is the immediate casual conjunction and connection presented immediately after the January 6th 'insurrection' on the Capitol Building by hundreds of out-of-control protesters to President Donald Trump and 'White supremacy' groups. Relying on its bias and few if any actual facts, the media pronounced the President 'guilty' of incitement to riot and then handed the ball off to the Congress for sentencing which it did at a rushed and unfair impeachment trial - one post mortem down, one to go. The Congress was not satisfied with impeaching the President twice in his four years in office. On May 14th, Resolution HR 3233 set up the "National Commission to Investigate the January 6 Attack on the United States Capitol Complex" (aka. the January 6th Commission).

Unfortunately, THIS post mortem is not interested in investigating the actual cause of the 'mass trespass'; it is only interested in finding as many Republicans or Republican supporters as possible and nailing their carcasses to the wall of history AND to stop Donald Trump from running for a second term as President in 2024. If all post mortems were conducted like this, we would never know the actual *reasons* for any action or whether a crime has even been committed. Like the Democrats, we would only be conducting them for the purpose of punishing anyone we disagreed with.

While each year of life presents challenges and sometimes seemingly insurmountable problems and a few 'Sophie's choices' along the way, 2021 was one of unusual transparency. Americans were able to clearly see the actual consequences of their votes in 2020 play out before their very eyes. They saw 'amateur hour' at the White House, vicious demands for political payback by Congress, abusive government overreach and bumbling on the Coronavirus crisis, a dereliction of duty on our southern border, a blatant disregard for citizens' individual liberties like free speech, freedom of movement and assembly and an assault on and insult to Americans' right to know the truth from their government.

Though the cards may be stacked against us in getting an honest assessment of the year that passed, one thing is for certain. The repeated blows inflicted on American freedom, decency and respect left an indelible mark on the body of our country, one that cannot be ignored when any serious post mortem is finally done.

Stephan Helgesen is a retired career U.S. diplomat who lived and worked in 30 countries for 25 years during the Reagan, G.H.W. Bush, Clinton, and G.W. Bush Administrations. He is the author of twelve books, six of which are on American politics and has written over 1,200 articles on politics, economics and social trends. He operates a political news story aggregator website, www.projectpushback.com. He can be reached at: stephan@stephanhelgesen.com