

The Journey to Renewed Strength¹

By Larry Kleinman²

Think of this essay as a check in with the *Tomorrows* Desk.

A year from now, mass vaccinations will have put the pandemic largely behind us. As physical distancing ends, a flood of gatherings—personal, organizational, occupational—will simultaneously unleash intense joy and pent up sadness.

Two years from now, progressive forces will be preparing to move major legislative initiatives after mid-term elections handed (or solidified) Democratic control of the Senate and increased the House majority. Our two-year campaign of sustained praise and appreciation for the Biden/Harris Administration’s bold executive actions will have helped energize the voter turnout to win key races.

As set out below, the journey to these and other milestones can be visualized in **four phases** demarcated by Presidential Inauguration (January 20th), Coronavirus vaccination (by mid-summer 2021), the winter holidays culminating that intense period of in-person re-engagement (through early 2022), and adaptation to evolved norms (throughout 2022).

First, though, a return to today.

The mass media has unanimously declared Joe Biden President-Elect. The White House’s current occupant is holding out and agitating for some other result.

Through our masks, we’ve breathed a restrained sigh of relief because a decisive majority of voting citizens—by 5.6 million and counting—acted to end Trump’s presidency on January 20th. Our exhale feels tentative, though, and we’re right to keep our guard up. Trump hasn’t conceded. The pandemic’s “third wave” gains momentum. The hobbled economy stalls and putters. Black lives may be ended by police murder and extreme negligence. And armed insurrectionists “stand by” for signals from the vigilante-in-chief.

We correctly see the Trump Administration’s end as a prerequisite to progress—maybe even survival. We also rightly anticipate that Trump and Trumpism will threaten and undermine well into the future and will likely contend again for presidential power.

¹ This essay is posted in the Larry Kleinman’s Writing page of www.pcun.org. Appreciation to Leslie Frane, Kim Fellner, David Kimball and Nancy Ramírez Arriaga for edits and suggestions.

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How do we imagine rallying ourselves to press forward as we struggle to hold our own? As described in this narrative, a critical initial step is to visualize what may lay ahead. *By doing so, we can more adeptly re-direct our energy and prepare ourselves mentally and emotionally—in short, **pre-activate our resilience**.*

This visualization is centered in the pandemic's path, based on the assumption that it deeply impacts the economy, social fabric, and politics. And today, the world is probably only halfway along that path.

Phase 1: Hang on and prepare to move ahead (now through January 20th)

For many millions of us, Trump's final days in office feel like an ever-present prospect of walking across burning coals. On any given day, little of lasting consequence may happen. But we begin each day prepared for anything. At least this Phase has a hard stop date: Trump's last day in office on January 20th.

We should expect that Trump will never concede the election; he needs to press his unflagging narrative of grievance and conflict. His baseless lawsuits, though, will crumble as states certify election results. Republican-controlled legislatures in swing states will ignore Trump allies' calls to appoint rival slates of Electoral College electors. Biden and Harris will receive 306 electoral votes on December 14th, the identical number that Trump declared a "landslide" for him in 2016.

To preserve his political brand, base and fundraising juggernaut, Trump will feel compelled to exit fighting. He will embody the resistance to "illegitimate rule" with him, *alone*, as the agent of restoration. No one should be surprised if he seeks the presidency in 2024.³ He might even file his candidacy on January 21st, four years to the day after he had filed for re-election in 2017.

Given four years of damage and wreckage, much of what he'll have added in the final eleven weeks of his term may seem incidental. A substantial number of his final actions will have a short shelf life. The Biden Administration will remove his political appointees and reverse or cancel last-minute (and many other) executive orders.

Our attention and response—such as is feasible—should focus on Trump's actions that cause irreversible harm. Among others, these include:

- destruction of evidence, hopefully undercut by alert and patriotic civil servants;
- pardons of family, cronies and even himself;
- ICE arrests and deportations of immigrants in sanctuary, prompting host churches to increase vigilance and ready rapid community response;
- guaranteed-payment contracts (e.g., to continue building the wall);

³ A tacit admission of 2020 defeat, since Trump would only be eligible to run in 2024 if he was *not* re-elected.

- corruption/manipulation of Census data, such as exclusion of undocumented immigrants, a controversy already headed to the Supreme Court;
- transfers of political appointees into civil service positions.

Meanwhile, the 2020 Election season goes into overtime through year end as Senate control is decided on January 5th by simultaneous run-off contests for Georgia's two U.S. Senate seats. An impressive united front—co-led by BIPOC organizations—that won Georgia for Biden will swell with thousands of volunteers and tens of millions of dollars. If they can lift Rev. Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff to victory, our prospects improve dramatically for moving progressive change legislatively in 2021 and 2022.

Phase 2: Reduce pain, deliver relief, “lash-back” (January 21st to summer 2021)

During its first days in office, the Biden Administration will act to pause almost all deportations, end non-health related travel bans, and take a wide array of other executive actions on pandemic response, climate change, racial justice, government ethics, and the economy. Biden and Harris will have played key behind the scenes roles in negotiating the next legislative package of economic relief, which will likely extend unemployment benefits, provide other payments, funding to states/cities, and much more.

We can renew our communities, our organizations, and our morale by “delivering relief.”⁴ We faced this challenge/opportunity after passage of the CARES Act last spring. An early 2021 relief bill will probably not occasion as much confusion as CARES but ever-present misinformation will create critical needs we can meet: *outreach, support and advocacy that help put relief in people's hands*. Relief we help to deliver builds our movement.

Executive action reinstating DACA and re-authorizing Temporary Protected Status (TPS) will prompt *hundreds of thousands of immigrants to seek/renew legal status*, especially young immigrants who “aged-in” to DACA eligibility since September 2017 but were unable to apply because Trump had canceled it. Even with a Republican-controlled Senate, the Farm Workforce Modernization Act, which passed the House last December on a 260-165 vote (including 34 Republicans motivated by broad agribusiness support), could win quick enactment, *opening a path to permanent legal status for up to two million agricultural workers*. The immigrants' rights and farmworker movements will, once again, build grassroots power by organizing application legal assistance programs. That's more relief we help to deliver.

The Covid-19 toll will continue to mount and, along with it, the aggregate tangible and intangible weight of loss and trauma. That weight will strain the logistics, politics and equities of Coronavirus vaccinations dissemination. Here again, we can add major value

⁴ I articulated this strategy last April in *Building Power on the Path to Post-Pandemic Recovery and Beyond*, posted at Larry Kleinman's Writings at www.pcun.org.

via trustworthy information and advocacy for prioritizing essential workers and *for resourcing vaccine availability in historically under-served communities.*

All the while, Trump will likely feed his attention addiction and his coffers by barnstorming—physically and virtually—against all things Biden/Harris. He will have launched his own media platform (the only kind of venture he can make profitable) and continue to command the loyalty of tens of millions. This will hold captive—or simply continue to *be*—the Republican Party and spawn all manner of backlash.

In 2021 and beyond, our strategies for change must include assertive and omnipresent *lash-back*, tactics that counter attacks on progress and on those leading it. Otherwise, Trump’s endless war will slow or halt our forward movement. *Our movements must widely and consistently broadcast our support for Biden Administration relief and repair measures in order to enlist affected communities and allies in their defense.* This will require some hard decisions and delicate balancing as we will also have to pressure the Administration to do more and to hold firm.

During this period, we will face questions about Trump Era accountability and about exacting consequences for the many crimes and transgressions of Trump and his Administration. We cannot afford either inaction or quagmire. A strategy for this dilemma may lie in pressing for appointing special counsel to investigate corruption even as individual authorities may pursue discreet instances of illegal conduct. We could seek creation of a “truth commission” to gather the testimonies and facts on abuses of power and human rights violations. Re-asserting the centrality of facts seems essential to sustaining our individual and collective sanity.

Though we will feel purposeful and draw energy from genuine progress on relief and repair during this phase, the fog, fatigue and compression of the pandemic will remain dominant in our daily realities. We do well to prepare to *support organizations who will face transitions as leaders feel the need to step back or shift into government service.*

Phase 3: Emerge from bunker reality and mentality (mid-2021 to early 2022)

We should assume that mass vaccination campaigns will have reached most people in the U.S. no earlier than next summer.

Then—and only then—will the in-person dimensions of life begin to fully re-emerge. A flood of engagement will quickly overwhelm us.

We’ll experience a tangle of joy and sadness generated by *countless memorials, weddings, organizational gatherings and other postponed events.* We’ll keenly feel the loss of missed gatherings that can’t or won’t be held. We’ll feel exhilarated by the return of galas and conference but overtaxed by their sheer number as tens of thousands of organizations simultaneously re-boot.

The release of pent-up trauma will occasion P-PTSD—*Post-Pandemic Traumatic Stress Disorder*—a new form of a familiar syndrome.

This phase will reach a crescendo from Thanksgiving through New Year's, a season more bittersweet than most of us have ever experienced. Our renewed strength will lie in the power of connection and our new appreciation for its fragility.

Also during the period, we will see new openings for reforming institutional practices such as incarceration and detention. In response to the pandemic, government authorities will have dramatically reduced the number of people deprived of their liberty. This, plus the shift in consciousness catalyzed by the Black Lives Matter movement, may create unique and favorable conditions for lasting change.

Phase 4: Reset to “new normal” (the rest of 2022)

The 2021 year-end holiday season will set in motion a broader re-shaping of in-person business, organizational, political, and personal interaction.

Throughout 2022, we'll individually and collectively make countless adjustments to the way we conduct our affairs. While many of us will need or want a period of recovery from *Zombie-itis*, we can imagine even now that virtual meetings will have become a part of life as permanent and commonplace as cell phones and social media.

Our response to the pandemic will have shifted our defaults. An array of pre-pandemic type all-day meetings will remain in the virtual, for-shortened form that had become routine. We'll be choosier about business and organizational travel. The in-person gatherings we resume will more likely include a resilience element--not just the pre-pandemic “taking care of business” affect. Organizations will try out and settle into new work rhythms. The appetite for re-acquaintance will take several years to satiate.

Electoral organizing and voter engagement will revive canvassing but complemented by relational organizing (through personal networks) and the many virtual avenues that figured so centrally in 2020. The clashing claims to country—whose America is governed and governing—will continue to roil politics. Trump's agitation will dominate Republican primaries, possibly nominating extremists. We will help rally, grow and energize the coalition that elected Biden/Harris. High profile races for U.S. Senate control will renew focus on Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and North Carolina where Democrats will contest open seats now held by Republicans. Re-districting will re-shape dozens of contests in the House of Representatives, another expression of “new normal.”

Two years from now, we will yet draw strength from the spirit of resistance that has sustained us through the Trump Era and from the solidarity and persistence that carried us through the pandemic. Our souls will be tempered but our capacity for appreciation and gratitude—even for everyday pleasures—will have deepened. *Así Se Puede!*