

The USA Chart in 2020

Part Two (of Four)

by Bill Herbst

Version 1.3 (posted on 25 September 2018)
© 2018 by the author, all rights reserved

[In Part One of this four-part commentary about America's chart in 2020, I listed the major transits for the year and discussed the importance of America's natal Pluto as it is activated in three new cycles during the early years of the 2020s. Now in Part Two, I'll focus on how 2020 might feel and unfold for the U.S., given that its Saturn-Pluto and Jupiter-Pluto cycles will start while Saturn is opposite the USA's natal Mercury.]

Let me open this commentary by clarifying an important point. The USA chart does *not* indicate that America is in decline as an empire, a country, or a culture. No chart for any individual or nation indicates that. Charts go merrily on forever, past the point where the entities they describe, whether personal or collective, are long dead and gone. Yes, astrology provides a cornucopia of information about the life of its subject, defining its nature and indicating the timing of predictable periods of challenge or relative flow through the interplay of natural cycles. But an astrological chart contains no information about the *condition* of its subject. That perspective must be gleaned from outside the chart. Once it is, astrology can illuminate and further flesh out our understanding, providing potentially valuable information about the meaning and form of changes occurring at any given time. But we have to provide the context.

America's Decline

One doesn't need to be an astrologer, however, to know that America is indeed in decline. The evidence is all around us, and we see it every day. I'll discuss some of that evidence in the next section of this commentary.

The paradox is that being in ascendancy is not always and invariably a good thing, and being in decline is not necessarily a bad thing. Youth and vitality are beautiful and exhilarating, but the young and strong are often neither smart nor wise. Old age brings disability and suffering, but with it may come maturity and wisdom, levels of understanding and acceptance that allow former excesses, misunderstandings, and personal failings to fall away. So it may be during America's decline. We might actually become better than we were during our adolescent potency. I know, it doesn't look like that right now, but some of the awful things happening in our country are a welling up of symptoms from

illnesses that have disturbed us for so long: including racism, greed, a penchant for violence, and the rejection of truth. All these are facets of Us versus Them — a rueful terror about the mistrusted and monstrous Other — and that deep programming within human nature may yet do us in. Or we might evolve beyond it. Odds of that are slim, of course, especially with human-created ecocide looming as a real threat to civilization's and our species' continued survival, but that ticking clock makes the effort to free ourselves from domination by our dark side all the more urgent. Those of us committed to that spiritual effort have to stand up for what we believe and fight for what we value — empathy, compassion, humility, and consciousness.

The Coming Cycles to America's Pluto

As a cycle between two moving bodies in civilizational astrology, Saturn-Pluto is 31-38 years long with 8-9 year quarters and has a definite connection to business, economics, and finance. The two worst economic and financial meltdowns of the past century — the first when the Great Depression reached its nadir in 1930-1932, and the second during the collapse of major investment banks in 2008 — both occurred during quarterly phase changes of the Saturn-Pluto cycle.

As a personalized cycle within a natal chart, the Saturn-Pluto cycle is a moving body (Saturn) in relation to a fixed point (Pluto). Like all personal Saturn cycles, it's 29 years long with 7-year quarters. America's Saturn-Pluto cycle is even more strongly connected to economics and finance than the civilizational version, because of the planets' positions in our national chart. Saturn is in the 10th house and rules the 2nd, while Pluto occupies the 2nd house. The 10th and 2nd are two of the four houses that pertain directly to business or money (the other two are the 6th and 8th).

So, this is another instance of a double-whammy. The mundane Saturn-Pluto cycle that applies to all of humanity begins in January 2020 (with an effective period using an orb of $\pm 10^\circ$ from December 2018 through January 2021). The personalized Saturn-Pluto transit in the USA chart is a three-pass transit over ten months, with its gestation and birth from February through December 2020. In addition, the Jupiter-Pluto cycle in the USA chart coincides this time, beginning simultaneously. Astrologically, that's very difficult to minimize or ignore.

Almost universally, pundits and politicians extol America's "economic recovery" and the strength of our economy. The stock market has gone up steadily over the past seven years to all-time highs, both productivity and growth are at near-record levels, and unemployment is very low.

In stark contrast, however, are other, less optimistic views of America's economic and financial condition. The stock market is disconnected from any real or intrinsic value, wages for workers are stagnant, and many people are

unemployed because they've stopped looking for jobs, have dropped out of the work force, and aren't even factored into in the unemployment statistics.

Wealth inequality is now extreme, worse than during the Gilded Age of Robber Barons in the 1880s and exceeded only by the pre-Great Depression bubble of the 1920s. The big winners of the "recovery" have been those who were already financially secure, topped by a now sizable and growing elite club of billionaires. More than half the population has been economically left behind, effectively abandoned. For the first time in American history, future generations are less likely to be as well-off as their parents. Buying a home — once the hallmark of equality and upward social mobility in middle-class America — is now beyond the reach of much of the population.

Careers have devolved into occupations, occupations into jobs, jobs into tasks, and tasks into low-wage "gig" auctions. What passes for employment for many Americans are such wonderful examples of "work" as being a Wal-Mart Associate or an Uber driver, neither of which provides a living wage. Costs of rent, medical treatment, and higher education have grown untenable for too many. While our military budget approaches a trillion dollars per year, 100 million regular Americans have no savings, no retirement or pension plans, and face the prospect of a future with government-imposed austerity with no social safety nets. If the Republicans have their way, Medicare/Medicaid and Social Security will soon be on the chopping block.

These are all examples of the negative expression of Pluto in the 2nd house: *"All for me and none for anyone else."* *"Money talks and bullshit walks."* *"I got mine, so screw you."*

Our collective agreement in America seems to be that everything should be run as a business designed to produce maximum profits in the shortest possible time. This applies to every arena of productive endeavor: manufacturing, construction, banking, insurance, education, medicine, media, defense. Our entire economy amounts to a kind of unspoken racketeering.

Meanwhile, America declines. Our infrastructure is crumbling, our electrical grid is old and frail, our educational system is failing, and our lead in technology is evaporating. For example, the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation (ITIF), a U.S. non-profit think tank, published a survey in 2009 ranking 40 developed nations for how much they had increased their innovation-based technological competitiveness through new public policies over the first decade of the 21st century. The U.S. came in dead last. In other words, we're resting on our laurels rather than moving ahead toward the future. China now builds the fastest supercomputers in the world, outstripping U.S. counterparts in quantity, speed, and power. China has also invested heavily in infrastructure, including building thousands of miles of new, high-speed (240 mph) rail lines throughout Eurasia. That gives the Chinese a critical advantage in public

transportation and fast, efficient shipping of goods, both within their country and internationally. The U.S. struggles to keep its bridges from collapsing.

President Trump's long held belief that America has been victimized by other countries in "bad deals" has resulted in nullification of international agreements, imposition of tariffs in trade wars, castigation of allies, and a general pullback from global cooperation. The "American Century" — where we helped rebuild a ravaged Europe and create a world order that has so far prevented another and presumably cataclysmic global war — is over. Despite our economic and military power, the U.S. finds itself increasingly isolated and alone.

The problem is not that America is full of scoundrels and thieves, nor that Americans are lazy. We are a country in which the vast majority of people are sincere, hard-working, and relatively unselfish. The problem is in the culture of institutions, which are increasingly self-serving.

Most elites in corporate business believe (with almost evangelical fervor) in the neoliberal "invisible hand of the market" as the sole determinant of the greater good. This allows them to pursue total self-interest (i.e., profits) in running their businesses without any inconvenient pangs of social conscience. It's not their fault if the world goes to hell. All costs that can be off-loaded onto the collective are OK, and corporate culture supports removal of every restraint to protect the public welfare, since regulations reduce profits. In other words, greed is good. This results in industries such as fracking, which are guaranteed to produce harmful collective results.

Not-for-profit social institutions, such as government and NGOs, are chartered to serve the public, and they start off doing so. With growth, success, and age, however, they become more concerned with their own survival. Feathering their nests overtakes public service. The highest echelons of politics are a prime example. Serving in Congress is now a gateway to personal wealth through the revolving door between elected office and lobbying.

None of this is new. What's different now is the degree to which this culture of sheer self-interest has taken hold in America. A little greed is human and acceptable. Overwhelming greed is not. Despite the propaganda theatre of public relations ("we care" — oh yeah?), Americans know that we're being taken for a ride and played for suckers. And we don't like it. Some of us don't like it because we're not included in the spoils. Many of us don't like it because it's just plain wrong, not just morally and ethically, but also practically. America can never even come close to living up to its ideals if such beliefs remain acceptable.

Among the American public, mistrust of government and business is now at an all-time high. When they can, millions of Americans seek refuge from the con game in their personal lives, through family and friends. While understandable as a response to loss of faith in society, that won't restore us collectively.

The very idea of dedicated public service has eroded precipitously. President John F. Kennedy's famous inaugural dictum — "*Ask **not** what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country*" — now seems quaint and anachronistic, the dusty relic of an earlier time of naïve idealism. This is, however, precisely what we need: a renewal of civic responsibility — local, state, national, and global. We need it from both the top down and the bottom up. Hoping for saviors in the form of charismatic leaders will not be enough, and might even lead us further down the road to perdition without an accompanying grass-roots revival of citizen activism and dedicated social participation to serve the greater good.

There are signs that such a change is already underway. First-time candidates for office in the 2018 midterm elections are at an all-time high, especially among women and minorities. It is, however, only a first step in what will have to be a growing and sustained movement throughout the coming decade.

The beginning of the Saturn-Pluto and Jupiter-Pluto cycles in 2020 — both for humanity as a whole and specifically for America through the personal transit cycles of the USA chart — kick off a new phase of our history and shine a light on economics and finance. Will we consider re-thinking our approach to these critical functions within human society, or will we disregard all the warnings, ignore what's coming, and steer the ship right over the falls?

These cycles will unfold through the 2020s and, in the case of Saturn-Pluto, all the way to mid-century. They are likely to be accompanied by increasing political and social turmoil throughout America and the world as external circumstances (such as disruptive climate change) put greater pressure on economic resources and fragile financial currencies.

We may find ourselves forced to change. Astrologically, 2020 represents the curtain rising on that drama.

End Part Two

[In Part Three of this quartet of commentaries, I'll discuss the meanings of the transiting Saturn and Pluto oppositions to the USA's natal Mercury in 2020.]