

Uranus-Pluto and the Sports Revolution

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Who could have imagined that, out of all the different types of social institutions in our culture, one of the most provocative, lightning-rod shocks of the Uranus-Pluto decade would come from the realm of professional team sports?

For those who don't follow the news, the last week in April---arguably the fulcrum month of this entire Uranus-Pluto decade---an unexpected explosion of cultural change erupted to engulf the National Basketball Association (NBA), America's professional basketball league. Professional sports have long been among the most conservative bastions of institutional society in our country and around the world. Every so often, however, sports turns away from its legacy as "safe entertainment" and becomes momentarily a heated battleground of social revolution.

Besides such reactionary stances as endless patriotic flag-waving and uncritical praise of the military, all professional sports leagues---baseball, football, basketball, etc.---have a long history of almost feudal organization. Ultra-rich fatcats use their extreme wealth to purchase professional sports franchises, which they then run like lords from the middle ages who operated feudal fiefdoms, complete with indentured serfs. Until the 1960s, when baseball player Curt Flood challenged in the courts the "reserve clause" of contracts that prohibited players from becoming free agents, franchises effectively owned the players on their teams, who, despite their athletic prowess, were essentially slaves to the owners' puppeteering.

After the Supreme Court overturned that captivity to allow free agency, the flood gates (no double-entendre intended) gradually opened to the nearly unimaginable salaries---tens of millions of dollars per year---paid today to the superstar players of professional sports. Even with that sharing of the institutional wealth, owners of professional sports franchises continue to rake in incredible, astonishing profits. Professional sports team franchises are now worth literally billions of dollars, and the owners collectively exert almost god-like control (with certain legal caveats) as they frolic in this playground of the wealthiest members of our society, not only over their employees, but often over

the cities in which their franchises operate. Ownership of a major sports franchise represents the final pinnacle of success for a select group of capitalists and entrepreneurs who made their fortunes in business. With a few notable exceptions, ownership of major sports team franchises is an elite club of stinking rich white guys living out adolescent fantasies by proxy.

Baseball enjoys the most honored lineage among professional team sports. For almost a century, baseball was America's Game, with Major League baseball riding the crest of that wave. Our iconic heroes were often baseball players: Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Stan Musial, Sandy Koufax, Hank Aaron, Willie Mays. Though baseball has now lost its crown, it remains the most beloved of professional sports in America, and the one with the longest traditions.

Football is the upstart 800 lb. gorilla---a violent, primal struggle for physical domination that has reflected and mirrored America's emergence as a super-power empire. Comedian George Carlin's famous routine contrasting baseball to football is a classic indictment of football's war-like nature and essential brutality. And yet, football has emerged as the modern equivalent of the ancient Roman Circus, with huge, muscular gladiators seeking to beat each other's brains out. The NFL amplifies and exaggerates many of the arguably wrong-headed directions America has taken over the past 50 years. Only NASCAR (now the most popular spectator sport in America) is a more egregious example of high-tech tomfoolery.

Basketball is the third in the Holy Trinity of professional team sports in America. If we ignore organized team sports such as soccer and hockey---neither of which America has embraced with anything even vaguely resembling mass enthusiasm--the NBA has historically been the weak sister of the Big Three.

The achilles' heel of all these mega-profitable sports institutions is (fanfare please) RACISM, specifically the brand of racism directed by white America against African-Americans. Xenophobia in general---and anti-black racism in particular---are America's tragic Original Sin, one that continues to haunt us, undercut our ideals, and wreak havoc on our culture more than two centuries after our founding. [Note: I would add gender inequality toward women as an equally dreadful illness, but treating women badly is a world-wide phenomenon, whereas anti-black racism is a deadly strain that infects the very heart of America.]

We may have ended chattel slavery during the Civil War, but 150 years later America has still failed to find any viable solution to the scourge of personal racism, nor to the institutional racism that is deeply embedded in our society.

Enter Donald Sterling to shake up the status quo.

Donald Sterling is an 81-year-old rich white guy who made his billion-dollar fortune owning rental apartments in Los Angeles (he has been called a "slum landlord" by at least one journalist) with a lifelong track record of bald-faced racism against African-Americans. He is also the longstanding owner of the Los Angeles Clippers basketball franchise of the NBA. Sterling has a white wife and a black girlfriend, which almost qualifies him as a cotton plantation slave owner from the antebellum south. Sterling may regard blacks as inferior, but he loves him some brown sugar.

Last week, two brief recordings surfaced (leaked by his black girlfriend) of parts of conversations between Sterling and the girlfriend, wherein Sterling assertively voiced---once again, for the umpteenth time---his true feelings about blacks, unvarnished and without a shred of public relations spin. If you're hip to the news, you've probably heard these racist snippets. I need not reiterate them here.

The recordings hit the internet, went viral, and within two days had provoked a crisis in the NBA. An outcry went up throughout sports-loving America, calling for Sterling's head. Adam Silver, the NBA's new Commissioner, has banned Sterling from all NBA activities for life, fined him \$2.5 million, and promised to use his authority with the other NBA owners to force Sterling to sell the franchise.

Wow. Talk about a shocking development that came out of the blue. This is the Civil Rights Act of 2014. It may not cure what ails us, but it does send an extraordinary message about the urgent necessity of social change in our attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and cultural memes.

OK, so how is all this symbolically reflected in the Uranus-Pluto alignment of the 2010s?

Some of the ways are obvious. First of all, these events signal a shocking and unexpected (Uranus) challenge (first-quarter square) to the institutional status quo (Pluto in Capricorn). Second, the scandal emerged because of the actions of single individual (Uranus in Aries) who didn't seem to care that his beliefs ran counter to the prevailing social winds.

In more subtle ways, however, this week's developments reveal the complexity of Uranus and Pluto's symbolic interactions. The simplistic (and incorrect) manner of understanding the Uranus in Aries square Pluto in Capricorn transit is to assume that Pluto in Capricorn is the "bad guy" of the pair, with Uranus as the heroic individual courageously challenging draconian, inhumane institutions. Ah, but think again. What we have here is a reactionary individual making a mockery

of the egalitarian ideals of the culture whose actions aroused the fury of a powerful institution.

Essentially, Donald Sterling is an insensitive, octogenarian jerk---in astrological terms, a willfully eccentric Uranian social misfit---who failed to comport himself with even a modicum of self-preservation by not applying the artifice of public relations. Does anyone think that Sterling's crude racism was unknown, or that his recent remarks were merely a one-time gaffe? No, Sterling's lifelong racism is well known among NBA owners, who have never before so much as mentioned it, much less censured Sterling for the expression of his beliefs.

The reasons that Sterling's head went on the chopping block this week, as opposed to any of his previous transgressions, are quite revealing. While what he said in the conversations was certainly inflammatory---that he didn't want his girlfriend hanging out with other black people, that he didn't want her to bring black people to Clippers' games, and that Sterling regarded himself as having "paid for" his players' homes and cars (implying that he owned those black players rather than their having earned their incomes by their own efforts---that doesn't really account for why now rather than earlier.

What happened was the internet. The recordings were posted online and went viral. The internet itself is a particularly apt symbol for Uranus---technological developments---and Pluto---massive collective power. What got the NBA owners' attention was not Sterling's comments in and of themselves, but rather the extraordinary public outrage that was provoked by dissemination of the statements. This mass outrage went beyond NBA fans and the sports world in general, all the way to the larger body politic. In other words, Sterling's oafish statements may have been better suited to the 18th century than the 21st, but the key factor was headlines not just on ESPN, but on CNN as well. President Obama even weighed in on the unacceptability of the comments.

So, what we have is an elite group of wealthy oligarchs in the club of sports franchise ownership (a Pluto in Capricorn expression if ever there were one) who are using their power to provoke a dramatic change in cultural attitudes of right and wrong (Uranus), but doing so not out of any revolutionary sentiment, but instead, to cover their own asses and protect the survival of their elite club. The owners (through NBA Commissioner Silver) didn't lower the boom on Sterling because they wanted to, but rather because they had to. Reality forced them to do so, leaving them no other viable options. And that is the central hallmark of Uranian-Plutonian change: the revolutionary upheavals necessary to allow continued social survival.

So, one of the great ah-ha realizations of the Uranus-Pluto alignment (and all astrological symbols in general---planets, signs, aspects, etc.) is that the symbols

aren't assigned fixed moral roles. Each symbol can be positive or negative in expression. On a given day, Uranus is the good guy and Pluto the villain. On the next day, Uranus may be the villain and Pluto the hero. That shape-shifting duality is often overlooked by astrologers who mistakenly believe that some symbols are "good," while others are "bad." Nothing could be further from the truth.

Ordinarily, sports are entrenched mainstays of the status quo. Every so often, however, in infrequent but significant moments, something happens in sports that pushes forward the quest for justice and social equality, especially in regard to racism directed toward African-Americans: Jesse Owens' victories at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Branch Rickey's breaking the color barrier by bringing Jackie Robinson to the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, Muhammad Ali's refusal to be drafted during the Vietnam War in 1967, Tommie Smith's and John Carlos' upraised fist black power protest on the victory stand at the Mexico City Olympics in 1968. And now we have an ironic twist---a new and unwitting anti-hero: Donald Sterling.

In an unrelated but complementary development, I've watched with interest over the past year or two as a juggernaut began to grow in the sport of organized football. Traumatic brain injury---long ignored by the institution of football, which traditionally revels in its thinly-veiled violence---has emerged as a growing concern in the sport, not only at the professional level of the NFL, but in the college, high school, and youth football programs as well.

Individuals whose bodies and brains have been permanently damaged by playing football are coming out of the woodwork, first as a trickle, but more recently as a flood of revelations. Public reaction to these personal tragedies has been steadily gaining traction. The upshot is that powers-that-be who make the rules in football are sufficiently alarmed that they are scrambling to put in reforms.

In the long run, this is the death knell of football as we have historically known it. Remove the violence from football, and what is left? If the gladiators don't maim or kill each other to win, what's the point? I don't know, but it sure ain't Dick Butkus.

These Uranus-Pluto radical upheavals in organized sports are but a tiny sliver of the larger scope of profound and necessary changes whose time has come that will effectively reshape civilization in the years ahead.

Welcome to Brave New World.