

President Donald Trump?

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Over my lifetime, my personal attitude toward national politics in America has evolved (or rather, devolved) from strong idealism when I was a child to cautious optimism as an adolescent to deep pessimism as an adult to my current outlook as a senior of complete cynicism that borders on despair. Oh, I see and appreciate many wonderful, inspiring efforts occurring in America, with more to come I'm sure, but none of these are in the arena of traditional national politics. How much of the arc of my eroding trust and lost faith in politics is attributable to objective changes in American society over the past half century versus my own particular and cumulative life-experience as an individual? 50/50? 60/40? 20/80? I don't know, but I'm sure that both elements have played a significant role in my changing outlook.

Not only do I profoundly mistrust the political process for a host of different reasons, but I'm extremely dubious about our historical assumption that the choice of President matters as much as popular belief holds. While I wouldn't suggest that the occupant of the Oval Office is irrelevant to the decisions and policies that chart our collective course as a country, I've become disenchanted because of the unavoidable truth that whoever is elected President will be a dutiful servant of the Empire. The fact that America became an Empire over the past century was probably unavoidable, given human nature and the course of world history, but I'm not a fan of the Empire and won't willingly support it.

Politicians, like snake-oil salesman, are brilliant at making statements (and often outright promises) that appeal to the wishes of their potential supporters, but once in office they are constrained by the extreme complexity of the system. The President in particular is likely to be chewed up and spit out by pressures that are equivalent to

being drawn and quartered. Anything the President does will be criticized and excoriated by large numbers of people. The job itself has become virtually impossible for any human being.

How we collectively use our national power and distribute our society's wealth is primarily a function of our institutional culture. That should be OK, since institutions correctly provide the skeletal structure of any large, advanced nation. By and large, however, institutions in America are now corrupt and untrustworthy. Whether political, commercial, or social, too many of our institutions no longer serve the public honorably. Instead, they have devolved into racketeering to maintain the status quo, their own survival, and, most importantly, the iron grip of the ruling elites that run and benefit from them. Reform of that situation seems to me no longer possible through political idealism (i.e., party platforms or campaign promises by any particular candidate for office), but only through the painful necessities that will inevitably follow institutional overreach, breakdown, and failure. I'm saddened to write this, but I believe it to be correct.

Yes, I understand very well that all the major institutional contributors to the propaganda hologram that constitutes the mainstream media are busy reassuring us that "all is well" in America, that we are still the world's premier superpower on every meaningful level, which to them basically means economic wealth and military dominance. That is, of course, their job — to lie to us, in part by cooking the books, and in part by carefully not mentioning all the many signs that our ship is taking on water at an alarming rate that increases with each passing year.

But wait, isn't America a country "*of the people, by the people, and for the people?*" And isn't politics the means through which we exercise our collective will, as well as the natural and correct way to produce reforms to right our ship and stay on course? Well, uh, no, not anymore, especially not on the national macro-level.

Despite the continuing presence in our population of a significant percentage of Americans who are sincere, well-meaning, hard-working, and at least reasonably honest, our country — and the institutional cultures that should support it — has gone too far down

various roads from which there is now no return. Corruption and utter disregard for the truth have become accepted norms. The ubiquitous drumbeat of advertising tells us that all we need to have a wonderful life in America is the latest smart phone, a 4K flat-screen TV, a new car, and prescriptions for miracle pharmaceuticals. This is only the most obvious commercial meme that attests to our delusion and eventual downfall. *"Ask your doctor if Viagra is right for you..."*

Despite my personal disdain, however, presidential campaigns and elections remain a central drama in American culture, most especially in the media — both mainstream and alternative. Even astrologers — who are about as far from mainstream as it gets — are expected to weigh in with their opinions about the major candidates and the outcome of the election.

I want to state right up front that I will make no prediction regarding who will win the November election. We're living through a decade of shocks, surprises, and unpredictability. I don't pretend to know the outcome, and placing a bet would be not merely tantamount to gambling, but more akin to attempting to pin a tail on the donkey while blindfolded and after having been spun around three times. The very idea of predicting the election winner makes me dizzy.

I will, however, write astrological commentaries about at least three of the candidates, the first being Donald Trump. Why? Because both his candidacy itself and his current front-running status among the gaggle of Republican wanna-be-Presidents is in some ways so improbable, yet also perfectly suited to the extraordinary tenor of our times, which numerous pundits in America have characterized as "anything goes, but nothing matters." That's tongue-in-cheek, of course, but it may not be too far from the truth.

In future commentaries, I intend to focus on the charts of Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders. Depending on how events unfold, I may add other candidates.

Hillary Clinton, whose most recent job was as Secretary of State, before that U.S. Senator from New York, and before that First Lady during husband Bill's two terms as President, is the perennial Democratic candidate with a lifetime of political experience (and the

scars to prove it, including a recurring historical theme where her integrity has been questioned and is frequently under fire). Hillary sits atop a strongly funded and well-oiled campaign organization to support her longstanding hope/belief that "it's my turn" in 2016.

The other leading Democrat in the race, Bernie Sanders, the junior U.S. Senator from Vermont, previously an independent but now a Democrat, started out as the proverbial symbolic candidate whose chances of winning were considered slim-to-none (in large part because he identified himself as a "socialist," which, given the historical meme in America of "better-dead-than-Red", is still a dicey label for any political resumé). His candidacy was expected to exert at best some leverage to force Hillary a little to the left, presumably to correct and redefine a "center" that has been dragged very far to the right and hasn't reflected the true middle of the bell curve among Americans for some decades. Sanders' early campaign has been so successful, however, that his position in the race is no longer merely symbolic; currently he's challenging Clinton for the lead among Dems.

Curiously, current polls suggest that Trump would stand a better chance of winning against Clinton than Sanders. Go figure. That said, however, the November election is still a long way off, and nothing is yet cast in stone. The arduous process of weeding out the also-rans will begin soon with primaries in Iowa and New Hampshire.

In a crowded Republican field dominated by hard-core right-wingers, Donald Trump started out as the joker in the Republican deck, but recent polls have elevated his current stature to the King of Clubs. Trump has never held any significant elected public office, and his experience in the actual machinery of American politics is limited. His party affiliations have changed over the years from Democrat to Republican to alternative third party and back to Republican again. This is not to suggest that Trump has no political savvy or connections, but merely to establish that his history is not in the arena of what was once called "public service."

Trump's long business career has been quite diverse, with fingers in many different pies, but his main image in the public mind is as a mover and shaker in the wild west world of Big-Money real estate

Character

Donald Trump's natal chart is anchored by an elevated Sun-Uranus conjunction in Gemini. Like all emphatic Uranians, the very core of his personality represents a challenge to traditional wisdom and the status quo. Trump gives no particular respect to typical authority. This doesn't mean that he is ignorant of the existing power structures, just that he doesn't genuflect to them. In fact, he sees himself as a rebel.

He loves power, of course — Trump's long career in the seven-league boots world of financial speculation attests to that. In addition, he has no aversion to notoriety, as shown by his eager pursuit of fame through television, playing himself. Trump does respect the traditional institutions of culture, if not the more tender mercies of polite public comportment, but his candidacy represents something of a crusade for radical change, for which he sees himself as the ideal leader.

How does this differ from the gaggle of Tea Party, knee-jerk right-wing candidates, most of whom also engage in relentless provocation? The difference is that Trump sees himself as an outsider with no group allegiances. Though obviously a Republican and a dyed-in-the-wool committed capitalist, his actions as President wouldn't fall neatly into the playbook of any single political camp. Trump loves nothing better than to see himself as absolutely unique and original.

I wouldn't call Trump fearless (mostly because I don't know the astrological signature for fearlessness), but I think it's safe to say that he isn't afraid to piss off people, in part because---unlike someone like Bill Clinton---he doesn't shy away from giving offense. Trump counts more on a talent for boldness and persuasion than on personal charisma. Leo Rising implies that he can be gracious and friendly in interpersonal socializing, especially one-to-one, but in his public performances, shock effect "trumps" charm, as befits his Sun-Uranus conjunction. He seems to relish his own outrageousness, and that persona hasn't softened with advancing age, remaining his characteristic approach to the public arena.

Trump was born with his Gemini Sun in very close opposition to the Moon in Sagittarius (he was born on the day of that month's full moon, two hours before the exact opposition). The Gemini-Sagittarius axis in charts indicates interest in everything, inherent optimism, quicksilver spontaneity, and quick mental facility.

That axis in Trump's chart is near the 5th/11th house cusp, implying that he is — by temperament — an enthusiastic gambler. He likes taking risks by betting on himself. As stated above, the addition of Uranus to the Sun-Moon opposition adds an element of intentional provocation to his public performances (where, with Leo Rising, he displays an affinity for the limelight; he likes being center-stage as the star). Trump enjoys shocking people, courts controversy, and doesn't shrink from personal eccentricity. He epitomizes the quote attributed to various well-known Americans including P.T. Barnum, Mae West, Will Rogers, and W.C. Fields, among others: *"I don't care what the newspapers say about me as long as they spell my name right."* Aggressive self-promotion has always been part of Trump's stock-in-trade, and his love of media attention is obvious and well-documented. None of that is surprising, given the factors in his chart noted above.

He has a Saturn-Venus conjunction in Cancer at the end of the 11th, beginning of the 12th house, implying that his friends and lovers tend to be "fantasy archetypes" selected with a certain cold calculation. Other associations of that pairing imply that personal friendships are a significant factor in his social stature, and that he cultivates these relationships to enhance his public image. Trump can be sincerely heartfelt with his friends, but this doesn't neutralize the strategic sense of feathering his own nest. While the Sagittarius full Moon indicates a spontaneous and friendly attitude of *"Hail, fellow, well met,"* where even strangers can become instant friends, Trump has another, quite different side. Mars just above the Leo Ascendant, combined with the Venus-Saturn and Sun-Uranus, imply that he often behaves as a take-no-prisoners warrior with a marked streak of cruelty. That may seem paradoxical, but in astrology contradictions don't cancel out — they co-exist within the personality. Which facet of self comes to the front for expression in a given moment depends on many variables, among them context and situation. Trump is nothing if not unpredictable.

With Neptune in the 2nd house square to his Cancer Mercury, Trump's intellect is strongly influenced by emotion and intuition, which is sometimes very acute. He is likely to play fast and loose with the facts to support an argument. Very quick on his feet mentally, Trump has an uncanny sense for what his audience wants to hear.

The 2nd-house Neptune also implies that Trump's self-judgment is based on an idealized image of his self-worth. Combined with Leo Rising, his self-esteem is very high. He has little reserve in assessing his own value, often overstating it with exaggeration. However, Trump believes that to be an accurate evaluation, since he relies so heavily on a self-created image. This is an advantage when it becomes necessary to re-invent himself after failure, which he has done often in his life. Failure causes him to change strategy and/or tactics as quickly as possible to recover, but otherwise leaves very little impression on his psyche, since confidence and bravado are essential traits of his self-expression.

I think it safe to say that humility is not Trump's strong suit, although there's no telling what he might feel in his most private or vulnerable moments.

The "truth" does not dwell for Trump in factual reality. Instead, he puts his faith in what I could call "creative possibilities." He does have a strong and savvy feeling for the bell curve of opinions held by any particular audience for whom he is performing and seeking to win over, however, and his ability to read people's beliefs is potent.

In general, Trump feels that he is the author of his own destiny, and while he considers the opinions of others, he doesn't really care what they think. That may not always be true behind closed doors or in serious deliberations, but it's always the case in his public persona.

From October 2015 through March 2016, Trump's chart is riding a wave of opportunity. Those who loudly proclaimed his candidacy to be a joke are sorely mistaken. Given the early disdain in the media regarding Trump's candidacy, the surprise is that he might be able to win the candidacy of the Republican party. His chances of winning the election are a different matter, of course. Trump is the darling of

a particularly disaffected and angry segment of the voting public that spans the right side of the political bell curve. These are mainly Republicans, but the demographics are dispersed over a wide range of political leanings. The lack of a coherent ideology in his campaign doesn't endear Trump to the far right wing, however, nor to the Republican establishment. Trump's supporters are aggressively activist and very likely to vote, and they are making their presence felt in no uncertain terms, but the question remains whether their numbers will prove sufficient to carry Trump all the way to the nomination and then into the White House.

Trump's current pattern of long-term, outer-planet transits in the mid-2010s confirms the opportunistic timing of his candidacy without providing certainty about its ultimate success. In fairness, no transit ever indicates that a positive outcome is assured. Astrology, like life, sells no insurance. Four planetary symbols comprise the primary archetypes that are dominant in Trump's chart during the campaign: Uranus, Pluto, Chiron, and Jupiter. By contrast, cycles activated by Saturn and Neptune are relatively minor in 2016, remaining quietly in the background.

Uranus

In this period, Trump's chart contains two successive back-to-back Uranus transits: first, an opposition to his natal Jupiter from April 2015 through March 2016, followed by a last-quarter square to his natal Saturn from May 2016 through April 2017. Jupiter and Saturn are the symbolic pair most associated with participation in the social realm, so both transits indicate the likelihood of major (if temporary) changes in Trump's social stature.

The first transit — Uranus oppose Jupiter (which is in Libra near the cusp of Trump's 3rd house, ruling his 5th house — implies dramatic and sudden shifts in risk-taking inspired by willful optimism. Trump has long coveted becoming President; he gave it a go briefly Party in the 2000 campaign as a candidate for the Reform Party, where he won primaries in Michigan and California before bowing out. 2016 feels very different in America, however, and this Uranus transit implies that Trump believes that his time has now come. It also indicates strong feelings of privilege, confidence, and the increased

possibility that his message will find a receptive audience. At the very least, whatever Trump talks about in the campaign is likely to be a lightning rod for public discourse.

The Uranus square to Saturn is a very different animal, but with similar impacts. Normally, Trump's social success is limited in the collective realm. He may have many friends in high places and be admired by some people, but the public as a whole has tended to regard him as a curiosity and something of a loose cannon. The Uranus-Saturn transit implies that his public popularity could increase significantly, since he's expressing the frustrations of a fair number of Americans. Current polls confirm that new approval.

At their best, Uranus transits — which occur at roughly 20-year intervals in any particular Uranus cycle — are like free "sneak previews" of results in life that we want but previously couldn't achieve. The effects are sudden and sporadic, and they tend to stop happening when the transit ends. The "gift" of the transit is that now we know how certain experiences actually feel, which can act as inner motivation to later build that goodness into our lives by diligent efforts and sustained work.

At their worst, Uranus transits are marked by a number of sudden and unpleasant shocks over the duration of the transit, rather like being stuck repeatedly with a 400-volt cattle prod. We are taken completely by surprise, jolted seemingly out of the blue by nasty developments we didn't expect and for which we weren't prepared.

Over a one- to two-year period, any given Uranus transit will contain elements from both sides of that duality. All the "spikes" will be relatively sudden, unpredictable, and probably brief, whether as tasty carrots in front of our donkey, or as unexpected, disagreeable shocks to our expectations. The point to all of these manifestations is disruption of our habitual rhythms of unconsciousness. To whatever extent we're living on auto-pilot, Uranus shocks us awake. With transits in the Uranus-Saturn cycle, these short lightning bolts — whether in the form of gifts or curses — are particularly powerful in their impact on us. We aren't likely to sleepwalk through them.

Pluto

Then, from early 2016 through the end of 2017, Pluto moves into first-quarter square to Trump's natal Jupiter. This transit indicates that Trump is moving into a new and expanded experience of opportunity for greater social impact. More than any of his other transits, this one lends considerable symbolic support to his chances of a successful candidacy. His campaign has rapidly gained traction after an initial period of media disdain, and his popularity among voting Republicans has soared, according to the polls. The Pluto-Jupiter transit indicates that Trump is in the right place at the right time. For better or worse, he is now a political force to be dealt with by friend or foe.

Interestingly, the Pluto-Jupiter transit indicates a strong possibility that certain of Trump's long-held philosophies will change over the course of the campaign and beyond. However didactic and fixed his pronouncements may sound, Trump could find himself shedding old beliefs and espousing new ones. He wants to change the world, but the world may change him.

Chiron

Chiron is a minor planet, sometimes considered a comet, associated in astrology with our unconscious beliefs and assumptions, especially those that are in conflict with reality and tend to undercut our intentions, decisions, and behaviors without our realizing that our own self-programming is leading to outcomes that backfire on us.

Chiron transits act to bring to the surface these unconscious and illusory assumptions, giving us the chance to change our own beliefs and attitudes to bring them into harmony with reality. We may or may not "realize" the fantasy-basis of our beliefs during Chiron transits to natal positions (and transits of other planets to our natal Chirons), but we have the opportunity through events that bring our unconscious assumptions into bold relief, giving us the chance to make the "ah-ha!" linkages.

In 2015-16, Chiron moves through a perpendicular relationship to the axis of Trump's natal Uranus-Sun/Moon opposition. He's likely to get ample opportunity to see the repercussions of too much careless

spontaneity in “shooting from the hip” by saying whatever he’s thinking without any social filtering. Whether Trump will “get it” or not remains to be seen, since his identity is deeply invested into the notion that blunt generalizations are somehow more “truthful” than careful or thoughtful diplomacy. After all, Trump is seeking the Presidency, not pontificating in some neighborhood bar.

Jupiter

Finally, Trump’s chart contains major Jupiter activity from November 2015 through early August 2016, with significant transits to his natal Sun and Moon. These indicate that Trump feels a strong sense of inner permission and supreme confidence to expand his influence into new social realms, and also that external circumstances will tend to cooperate with these intentions.

These Jupiter transits to his natal Sun and Moon will end more than two months before the election, however, so whether or not his luck will hold until November is uncertain. Two other brief Jupiter transits occur in October (conjuncting Trump’s natal Neptune and first-quarter square his natal Mercury), but his ongoing Uranus-Saturn transit is an unpredictable wild-card that can cut both ways, to his advantage or disadvantage. Overall, the pattern in Trump’s chart around the time of the election is buoyant but also prone to sudden and unexpected reversals.

Of course, this is moot if Trump doesn’t become the Republican nominee. Having the lead right now in January is no guarantee of success in November, since the primary season will soon start to pare down the field.

Beyond the Campaign

If Trump wins the election, what does his chart indicate about his life during the years of his term, 2017-2020? Immediately following the election, in December, prior to the inauguration, the chart moves from a phase of low Saturn impact (only two relatively minor Saturn transits in 2016) to an entire year of dramatic Saturn influence (six Saturn transits, two of which are as major as they come).

Contrary to certain simplistic and incorrect popular beliefs about astrology, Saturn is not a “negative” symbol, and Saturn transits aren’t “bad.” Astrology has no negative symbols. Every symbol is dualistic, with expressions that our egos like, and expressions that our egos hate. In the case of Saturn, that means long-term ambitions and the gumption to fulfill them, but also obstacles, delays, and failures along the way.

In fairness, major Saturn transits are typically difficult in actual experience. We feel stressed and “heavy,” with an increased tone of seriousness under increased burdens of responsibility that may push us to our limits. Saturn transits are usually characterized by obstacles and frustrations that must be carefully managed by pacing ourselves. Saturn teaches us about delayed gratification as an important facet of maturity.

From January through October of 2017, Saturn conjoins Trump’s natal Sagittarian Moon and opposes his natal Gemini Sun. These transits are critical, representing respectively the beginning of a 29-year cycle of finding ways to satisfy our own or others’ needs and the halfway point of a 29-year cycle of developing and expressing the central purpose and core meaning of our lives. These are extraordinarily significant events, and potentially quite positive in their long-term implications. The actual periods of each transit at the quarters of most Saturn transits are trying, however, as transitions from one approach to life to another that requires very different strategies and tactics.

The Saturn-Moon transit is a conjunction, meaning that it’s the beginning of a cycle, symbolically representing the birth of something new. Every woman knows that birth is hard — the new baby is pushed out from the warm comforts of the womb into the harsher realities of a cold world. The beginning of every Saturn cycle involves going back to square one and starting over. No one likes that.

In the Saturn-Moon cycle, this means that habits and routines we’ve developed over the previous three decades to help us feel comfortable and satisfied on a day-to-day basis are suddenly stopped, no longer ineffective, or made irrelevant. Imagine that you always loved peanut butter sandwiches, but one day your PB-and-J

sandwich either didn't taste good or didn't satisfy you. So you ate another one the next day, but the result was the same. Eventually, you'd stop eating peanut butter sandwiches and looking for some other food to give you the comfort you wanted.

So, in the 10-month period of the Saturn-Moon conjunction, when needs go unmet and comfort is nowhere to be found, we resolve to set out on the long path to find new and more effective ways to take care of our needs. The point here is that what satisfies us in one phase of our lives may not provide the same satisfaction decades later. We have to update the ways we fulfill our own needs and respond to the needs of others (Moon) by finding new activities, behaviors, and approaches to fulfillment. This is both natural and inevitable. What makes us feel happy and content at age 10 will not be identical to what we need at age 40, or at age 70.

Trump's other major Saturn activation in the Saturn-Sun cycle is not a conjunction, but an opposition, meaning the halfway point in a cycle. At the middle of every cycle, we move from the summer season of tending to the autumn season of harvest. If you've ever built a house, you know that it starts out as a vision (initially a dream, but then a plan), moves into manifestation by acquiring the site and digging out then pouring the foundation, becomes exciting as the framing crew puts up the shell, then settles into a long period of finishing work, which seems to last forever. Very few newly-built houses are actually finished when we move in, but that often becomes necessary, whether or not we feel that the house is "ready."

Moving in represents a huge symbolic change, from "building a house" as a project separate from our regular lives to "living in the house we built" as the fulfillment of our original intention. And so it is with the Saturn-Sun cycle. Whatever we've been working to develop as central themes in our lives over the previous 14 years to provide a continuing source of coherence and meaning changes after the halfway point from a project to the primary vehicle for our self-expression. That's wonderful, actually, especially if we've built a good house within our means that suits our purposes. But, as everyone knows, moving is hell. "Moving" is metaphorically the ten months of the actual transit, when Saturn jockeys back and forth opposite our

natal Suns. And that's what Trump goes through in 2017, a transition that's positive in meaning, but no fun at all to go through.

It's safe to say that, if he becomes President, Trump will immediately run into unforeseen responsibilities that are likely to feel overwhelming. However well-prepared he believes himself to be from a long-term perspective, settling into the saddle of the Oval Office and actually being President will push him to his limits (and sometimes past those limits) and feel immensely difficult.

[Note: These transits will occur in Trump's life in 2017 whether or not he is President, of course. Charts don't change because of circumstances, but the correspondences of what happens and how we feel are always tied to the conditions of our lives at the time. As President, Trump would probably experience the Saturn transits as serious challenges to his new status. If he isn't elected, then he might experience the transit as disappointments and frustrations about the failed run for office and regrets about what might have been. Either way, the transits indicate significant shifts in his life-journey that will require substantial re-calibration.]

Later, Trump's chart moves into a long and powerful outer-planet transit as Pluto arrives at the first-quarter square to his natal Saturn for two years, from March 2019 to January 2021. If elected, that would mean almost the entire the second half of his term. This is *exactly* the same transit that President Franklin Roosevelt's chart was undergoing when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entered World War II.

As an astrological symbol, Pluto is the ultimate wild-card. Sometimes it is quiet, coming and going in our charts seemingly without so much as a whisper. Other times, Pluto transits are apocalyptic, like a violent volcanic eruption that wipes out everything in the landscape. Both of these expressions fit Pluto's symbolic meaning of "death and rebirth," a purging that clears out the old to make way for the new. The difference is that sometimes the transformation occurs invisibly, beneath our awareness, completely contained within the unconscious, while other times the obliteration that opens up possibilities for new growth occurs right at the surface, at the visible, tangible level of our real lives.

The experience of an eruptive Pluto transit in an individual life is a confrontation with immensely powerful forces beyond our control that we can neither defeat nor resist. These forces may come from inside ourselves as disruptions within our unconscious programming, or they may beset us from outside through challenging circumstances caused by literal events. Sometimes both occur simultaneously.

The transits of the Pluto-Saturn cycle, which occur these days usually twice over a full lifetime, offer the possibility of removing the shadow fears of failure from our psyches by confronting us with situations where we cannot possibly be "responsible" or "successful." All we can do is surrender. Later, after coming out the other side of what can be a terribly dark tunnel, we may discover that capitulation has brought a newfound sense of humility to simply do the best we can and not expect ourselves to be superhuman. So, paradoxically, we rid ourselves of the neurosis of failure by actually failing.

The old saying that "what doesn't kill me makes me stronger" is often not true, in part because "strength" is not the sole measure of recovery. Enhanced flexibility and greater understanding can also be positive outcomes after loss or travail. And I'm not suggesting that any renewal is *guaranteed* after a meltdown. Not everyone recovers. Many factors affect individual renewal, and they go far beyond mere circumstance.

But Pluto is not merely one side of an equation. It isn't *only* destruction. Yes, major Pluto transits often correspond to an ending through the death of something in our lives, but they also carry the seed-potential for renewal. That's the way life works on this planet. Without volcanic eruptions, we wouldn't even be here, since the land we walk on is created from magma. Everything is food for something else. Endings and new beginnings. Goodbyes and hellos.

How this Pluto-Saturn transit might hit Trump if he were President we can only speculate and hope that it wouldn't manifest as something disastrous for the country. At this point, however, future disasters may be inevitable, regardless of who occupies The White House. I would like to believe otherwise, but the signs aren't encouraging. American Exceptionalism, long a bulwark of our national

mythology, is an assumption that may finally be proven false in the decades ahead. All empires imagine themselves immortal even during the decline of their powers, but they all crumble. Ironically — depending on future events and how they unfold, of course — the end of our run as an Empire might turn out to be a surprisingly positive outcome for America.

Update, 3 March 2016:

In this commentary on Donald Trump, and my two other recent essays on presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders as well, I have attempted so far to keep my own political beliefs and opinions out of the writing, in order to prevent the essays from becoming polemics. My intention was not to convince anyone of the correctness of my personal beliefs about society and politics, but instead to reveal the roots of the candidates' personalities as illuminated by astrology through their natal charts and major transits now and in the years ahead. Recent events in the campaign, however, mainly on the Republican side of the race, have made all but impossible any continuing efforts to stay on the neutral side of the line. From this point on, my opinions about the candidates will necessarily take their place alongside whatever further astrological insights I can offer.

Trump has tapped into the powerful sentiment among Republican voters who are not merely disaffected, but downright apoplectic about government. Obviously, progressives, liberals, and even centrist Democrats are the primary focus of their ire, but their dissatisfaction extends across the political spectrum to include even mainstream and conservative Republican office-holders and party insiders. Basically, these voters see all government and everyone associated with it as the enemy. Venting this barely suppressed rage is more important to them than policies or programs, and Trump is the perfect iconoclastic demagogue for that release of steam.

Trump has spent much of the campaign up until now trashing his Republican opponents with crude insults and character assassination. Meanwhile, his various confident promises about what he will achieve as President — bring China to heel with trade sanctions, build a wall

to keep out illegal immigrants from Mexico, get tough on terrorism, rebuild the military, reform healthcare, etc. — have absolutely zero chance of coming to pass. Apparently Trump assumes that immediately upon his election, he will be crowned King or Dictator. He seems to have no understanding of the built-in divisions of power in American government that intentionally limit the power of the President. Either he's flat-out lying to get votes or he believes himself to have magical powers. That's no problem for his supporters, however. They love Trump's over-inflated self-esteem and constant pose as a "winner." The Pied Piper nature of his candidacy doesn't concern his supporters in the least.

But then, nothing is out-of-bounds in politics. Impugning a candidate's motives, character, lineage, or sexual morality through insults based on innuendo or outright fiction are commonplace in American elections. I suppose I could give us credit for stopping short of murder, but even that is uncertain. Throughout American history, numerous candidates for elective office have died unexpectedly or tragically during campaigns, which always provokes immediate suspicion of conspiracy.

Political campaigns marked by civility between the candidates in their public pronouncements are the exception rather than the norm. And this year's presidential election circus is proving true to form. If the election comes down to Trump versus Clinton, increased insults and innuendoes are virtually guaranteed.

The dirty politics of schoolyard bullying has a longstanding if less-than-illustrious history in American political life. If we think that the circus of this year's presidential campaign is somehow unusual, we need only turn to history to refute that. Lest we forget, it was a brief 16 years ago that a presidential election in the U.S. was contested after some rather obvious corruption and the winner decided (or rather, anointed) by a Supreme Court whose votes were cast according to party loyalties.

A little farther back in time, during the Democrats' 1968 nominating convention, party bigwigs blocked the anti-Vietnam war candidate Eugene McCarthy, who had won clear voter approval in six state primaries, and — in what is politely called a "brokered convention,"

but actually means back-room skullduggery and manipulation of rules — gave the nomination instead to standing Vice-President Hubert Humphrey. Heaven forbid that anyone who opposed that illegal, immoral, and idiotic war should have been allowed even possible access to the White House. Well, the Democrats paid for their eleventh-hour shenanigans by losing the subsequent election, which gave us Richard Nixon as President, and in turn led to the Watergate scandal, followed by the first-ever resignation in disgrace of a sitting President. Remember all that? It may seem like ancient history, but it was less than half a century ago.

The Republican establishment and donor class are currently engaged in similarly desperate scheming in the aftermath of the Super Tuesday primaries to come up with a way to deny Donald Trump their party's nomination. Will we see another "brokered convention?" I doubt it, since Trump's lead in the delegate count may soon be insurmountable, but I can't entirely dismiss the possibility of a conspiratorial derailment of Trump's triumphant march to the nomination. Lord knows, stranger things have happened. This is, after all, another Uranus-Pluto period in our history — as were the late 1960s — so unexpected twists and turns are not only possible, but probable. Odds are, however, that Trump will become the Republican nominee.

If that comes to pass, it will quite probably insure the formal disintegration of the Republican Party, an event that in hindsight appears more and more to have been inevitable. For the past 40 years, Republicans have given up, step by step, any idea of "governing," and adopted instead the sole and sorry strategy of obstructionism. If they couldn't have things their own way, then the Republicans settled for making it impossible for the supposedly evil Democrats to have theirs.

That nihilistic and primarily sour grapes effort to block legislation has been at least partially responsible for provoking the current voter rebellion, since Americans of all political stripes expect, at the very least, that government will actively look out for their interests through policies with which they may not always agree, but hope will be effective nonetheless. The Republican playbook of blocking the Democrats at every turn by the refusal of their majorities in Congress

to compromise has not reduced the size of government (presumably a Republican goal), but has instead resulted in our suffering through a federal government hamstrung by gridlock, which satisfies no one.

Observe for example the current threat by the Republican-controlled Senate to block, by tactics of refusal and delay, *anyone* President Obama nominates for the Supreme Court seat vacated by Justice Scalia's recent death. No surprise there. The Constitution clearly mandates that a vacancy on the Supreme Court shall be filled by the President's appointment of a new Justice, but with the "advice and consent" of the Senate. Oh well, screw the Constitution. Winning is all that matters to these Republicans, and if they can't win, they'll make damn sure that no one else wins.

While "all or nothing" may reflect a certain passionate ferocity of devotion to principle, in the real world of necessary political compromise, it's a recipe for failure in the short term and extinction in the long term. Like the Whigs of the mid-19th century, the Republican Party may soon find itself so splintered that it cannot survive intact and will end up consigned to the scrap heap of history.

Conservative principles and beliefs won't vanish, of course, since they are undeniably embedded in the crazy quilt programming of human nature, but they may need new institutional forms and structures in American culture and politics if they are to find renewed and meaningful expression.

Update, 11 March 2016:

Trump's brash performance style in the campaign has resulted in increasing polarization. While his choice of an Us-Them strategy has worked to solidify support among his core followers, Trump has alienated various minorities: blacks, Latinos, Muslims, and — although they could hardly be called a minority — women.

The upshot is that his campaign rallies have become arenas of tense conflict. His supporters at these events are increasingly interspersed with larger numbers of protestors, most often minorities, who attempt to disrupt the proceedings. Trump has chosen the dubious

tactic of verbally taunting the protestors from the podium and inciting both law enforcement and his supporters to expel the protestors with rough treatment. The result has been a sudden explosion of violence at rallies in St. Louis and Chicago.

Apart from what this implies about the deep anger and rage that is once again coming to a head in America, as happened during previous Uranus-Pluto transits, including the 1930s labor conflicts and 1960s race riots, it is a very dangerous development for Trump's candidacy.

So far, reaction in the media to this outburst of violence between Trump's supporters and anti-Trump protestors is divided along predictable political lines. Fox News puts the blame squarely on the protestors, while MSNBC indicts Trump himself, because of his crude and repeated comments during the disruptions. For some of the Trump faithful, the trip from suppressed rage to active violence is a very short trip, indeed, and Trump seems to be intentionally inflaming their passions.

Similar incidents occurred at Trump rallies throughout the earlier primary season, but they were sporadic and limited. Critical mass has obviously been reached, however, and no one can predict where this will lead over the coming weeks. So far, Trump accepts no responsibility and plays down his role in the escalation.

If the violence continues past the Florida and Ohio primaries (which are critical to the hopes of Cruz, Rubio, and Kasich, as well as the movement among the establishment Republican leadership to stop Trump from gaining enough delegates to insure his nomination), all sorts of unpredictable consequences might ensue. Not the least of these would probably fall at the feet of Trump himself.

As dramatic expression of the Uranus-Pluto symbolism of this decade, events in this election are heating up in ways that are both ugly and fascinating. Honestly, I don't have a clue where they will lead.