

*astrological-cultural-spiritual-political
views & commentary...*

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THE HERBST NEWSLETTER



Thoughts, dates, & reminders about our lives as members of the craziest species on this lovely planet. Like a message in a bottle washing up on the sandy shores of consciousness...

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Dear friends,

This is the second installment of the Uranus-Pluto series, exploring the history of revolutionary changes that occurred in America during the 1960s and their re-emergence in 2008-2015.

—Bill Herbst

URANUS-PLUTO #2: THE 1960s

To comprehend the critical importance of the 1960s to our shared future and the sweeping changes so soon to come, we need to understand not only what that decade meant in the symbolism of astrological cycles, but also through the historical precedents that led up to that turbulent period.

In 1900, America was the Promised Land. The waves of immigration to these shores at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries were unprecedented. Whether well-off or downtrodden, people around the globe looked to America as the Land of Opportunity, where two precious dreams might be realized: Liberty and Wealth. Both dreams revolved around freedom—freedom from oppression, on the one hand, including religious tyranny and social inequity, and, on the other hand, freedom from want through the ability to earn, if not outright riches, at least sufficient income to support a modest standard of living.

These were, of course, mythic ideals. Their impact was always greater as propaganda than in reality. In fact, liberty and wealth were reserved for certain Americans above others. Privilege mattered, and the playing field was never level. That is the paradox of America: what is promised is usually quite loftier than what is delivered. Our ideals challenge base human nature; too often, human nature wins.

The endless struggle between the controlling power of capital and populist movements for social justice tipped in the 1930s during the Great Depression. So many millions of Americans suffered during that economic disaster that social unrest exploded (again) in labor strikes and farm disputes. The New Deal was the emergency reform compromise, a mixed bag of successes and failures that nonetheless fostered the notion that America was a country that cared about the welfare of its citizens.

The 1940s brought the Second World War, which cemented the unity of Americans as never before. At this pinnacle of American solidarity, however, as the citizenry rallied 'round the flag, inequality persisted. War profits soared for corporations while worker's wages were frozen or cut. As a result, 14,000 labor strikes occurred during the war, involving nearly seven million American workers. Even patriotism had its limits.

In a very real sense, World War II was a clash of titans, a contest between empires. That global conflict was less about ideologies (i.e., democracy versus fascism) than about markets, resources, and economic dominance. By the end of the war, Germany and Japan were decimated, England exhausted, and France marginalized. Through unimaginable sacrifice (30 million dead), the Soviet Union survived, but America was the big winner. We emerged nearly unscathed as a global economic powerhouse. And we began to reshape the world to our liking.

America did not demilitarize after the war. Instead, Truman ramped up military-industrial output to protect and further our global empire, using the "threat" of communism and the Cold War in justification. So, 1950s America came to represent the most fundamental paradoxes: peace and war, wealth and poverty, freedom and repression.

Never before had any country in history experienced such material bounty. The National Highway System spawned the development of suburbia. The G.I. Bill gave millions of Americans a leg up toward education, home ownership, and the good life, while Social Security sheltered the elderly.

The production boom of World War II, which pulled America out the Depression, also spawned the rise of huge corporations. By the mid 1950s, out of some 200,000 total corporations in the country, a mere 200 giant corporations controlled 60% of our manufacturing wealth. An aggressive foreign policy combining economic and military power feathered those nests. Of the \$50 billion we "gave" to other countries in foreign aid over that decade, 90% was for military development (which we offered in part to secure bases around the world), and all our aid came with strings attached insuring control of foreign markets by American business. We effectively ran the world and enjoyed the fruits.

But peace and prosperity at home were shadowed by a climate of subtle but deep-seated paranoia. Anti-communist hysteria peaked in the 1950s with McCarthyism and the blacklists. Public fears of nuclear annihilation included "Duck and Cover" drills in schools. These twin anxieties, along with the rise of consumer culture, the psychology of marketing, and the image-based power of television, changed the American landscape. The "can do" unity of the 1940s was supplanted by a more sinister conformity in the 1950s. Hidden beneath the orderly surface of American life, dissent and discord continued to simmer, bubbling away on the collective back burner. Inequities of wealth distorted the American Dream. The bottom 20% of American families lived in poverty, earning only 5% of the total income, while the top 20% raked in nearly half. Racism against blacks and other minorities remained unresolved nearly a century after the abolition of slavery. The bulk of white Americans, however, contented themselves with the belief that we were always the "good guys," generous to a fault, and dedicated to both freedom and equality. This was surely the American century, and we were the chosen people. That was the consensus, anyway, and the elites in power were happy to promote that attitude among the populace.

Out of conformity and shared belief, the 1960s entered quietly but optimistically. A stolid, older Dwight Eisenhower surrendered the presidency to the young and glamorous John Kennedy, warning us as he left of the dangers of the military-industrial complex. America was too entranced by Camelot to notice, however. Our increasing militarism and the rise of megacorporations did not distract most Americans from their personal ambitions for new homes and second cars. MAD Magazine's satirical gap-toothed icon, Alfred E. Neuman, epitomized the limited awareness of the American public in the sardonic phrase, "What, Me Worry?" Our complacent unconsciousness would soon be rocked, however, by multiple rebellions from within.

Writing intelligently about the 1960s is a challenge, especially so because so much of what happened in that decade has become iconic and cliched. This was true even during the 1960s, as mass media (itself a hallmark of those times) jumped on every new and surprising development, presenting these to the public in visual and verbal translations that were invariably watered-down and ersatz. Viewed through the

distorted lenses of middlebrow conformity, many of the truly extraordinary people and events of the 1960s were painted as mere oddities or, more often, as worthy only of mockery and disdain.

Consciousness is a delicate matter. In any era, some people are hip to the cutting edges of cultural and spiritual evolution, while most are not. A great divide always exists between the center and the ends of the bell curve. Human beings are mammals—herd instinct animals—and most cluster toward that safe center. To awaken from the comforts of conformity and gain perspective and new awareness, one must give up acceptance by others and move outward toward the fringes of the curve, four or five standard deviations out.

Usually this “leaving the herd”—whether intentional, inadvertent, or compulsive—means risking social ostracism and mainstream ridicule. To be “different” in America during the first half of the 20th century implied instant marginalization, if not tarring and feathering and being ridden out of town on a rail. Suffragettes at the turn of the century were scorned as “unfeminine.” Labor organizers in the early decades were beaten or murdered. Blacks were lynched. Pacifists and conscientious objectors were jailed in America during both World Wars. The Beats of the 1950s, including writers and poets such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, were subjects of jeering caricature in sarcastic images of smoke-filled coffeehouses, black turtlenecks, goatees, and French berets.

What made the 1960s unique in the evolution of American (and world) culture was that the “fringe consciousness” that emerged through radical social movements demanding justice and dignity did not remain on the edge of the bell curve, but rather bled inward toward the center, challenging the status quo and gaining converts along the way. The result was dramatic confrontation on many levels, surrounding numerous issues unfamiliar to a largely unconscious public. The “Establishment” (a term first coined in the '60s, meaning the traditional power elites and institutions of government, business, and society) was bombarded by these new perspectives and had to counter them in some fashion.

The center tends to repeat what it knows—innovation is not a characteristic of the herd—so most challenging ideas come from the fringe. These challenges may emerge through revolts, rebellions, or simply independent movements, but they all threaten the stability and control of the center. The center then has four options: to ignore, resist, co-opt, or respond. The first three choices are predictable and sequential: First *ignore* and hope the disruption passes. If not, *resist* through derision by labeling the disruption as radical and dangerous. If that fails, try *co-opting* by absorbing the disruption and diluting its meaning, thus rendering it harmless.

The fourth choice, however, is the most interesting: to *respond* by fomenting a counter-revolution that comes from the center and works outward to undercut or overwhelm the rebellion from the fringe. This is the inevitable karma of revolutions. If initially successful, they provoke counter-revolutions. The ways that karma took shape in the wake of the 1960s are plainly seen in the astrology of the period.

Astrologically, the social explosions that rocked the 1960s corresponded to (and were predicted by) a configuration of three planets—Saturn, Uranus, and Pluto—which occurred in two signs—Virgo and Pisces.

Between April 1st, 1965, and June 30th, 1966, Uranus conjoined Pluto in the middle of the sign Virgo. Simultaneously, Saturn was opposite both bodies from the middle of Pisces. This configuration between three slow-moving outer planets carries such great significance in astrology that we can extend that time period of its impact by about three years on either side. For purposes of historical convenience, I date the effective time frame from the Cuban missile crisis in October, 1962, to the Apollo 11 lunar landing and Woodstock, which occurred respectively in July and August, 1969.

Pluto represents collective power (in its most raw state, available for good or evil) and the total transformations of death and rebirth (or endings and beginnings). Saturn is the symbol for traditional authority, business, the status quo, boundaries and resistance to change, and the bottom-line pragmatism of harsh necessities in real life. Uranus is the wild-card in this three-planet configuration, indicating revolution, shock, and sudden, unexpected change as the new crashes into the old.

Saturn forms significant aspects to both Uranus and Pluto about every eight years, so its recurring connections to those planets are not especially a big deal in the larger scheme of things. What happened in 1965-66, however, was rare, special, and immensely powerful.

Uranus and Pluto came together, implying that new and radical ideas fused suddenly with the raw power of the collective unconscious. Because Saturn—representing the Establishment—was precisely opposite, the new confronted the old in a polarity that illuminated formerly hidden areas of the past. The rebellions were aimed directly at the powers that be. Grassroots movements (Virgo) rose up to challenge faith (Pisces) in authority and control. Seemingly all at once, conformity and passive acceptance were challenged from every direction. Unable to resist this onslaught, Saturn tried desperately to ignore, then resist, then co-opt these shocking new realities into older and “safe” forms. Finally, Saturn had to respond with counter-revolutions of its own. A life-and-death struggle had begun for control of mass consciousness.

The litany of developments that galvanized our awareness in the '60s is long: the Civil Rights movement, Feminism and Equal Rights for Women, Native American resistance, Prison rebellion and reform, Farm Workers' protests, Ecology and Environmentalism, the revolt against the Vietnam War, Alternative Lifestyles, and, of course, Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'n Roll. Punctuating these were the tragic shocks that occurred along the way: the assassinations of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King; 55,000 American soldiers killed in Vietnam (along with 3,000,000 Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian dead).

I feel no need to discuss any of those in detail, because they are all well-known. Instead, I'll focus on three specific movements that occurred farther off the radar of news headlines. I choose these three because they illustrate the contradictions of peaceful movements—less revolts than pleas for sanity—that were undercut by simultaneous counter-revolutions.

1. Food, Diet, and Agriculture

The 1960s saw the beginnings in America of an organized organic farming movement through farmer's markets and local food co-ops that provided an alternative to industrial agri-business. The use of toxic chemical fertilizers to squeeze extra productivity from farmland had reached epic proportions by the 1960s. Factory farming was exhausting the fertility of our topsoil. Organic farming utilized sustainable methods of living in harmony with nature to preserve the integrity of the land and the purity of locally-based foods.

Though that movement gained a permanent foothold, it was rapidly overwhelmed by giant corporations such as Archer Daniels Midland, Cargill, General Foods, MacDonald's, etc. Their counter-revolution pushed in exactly the opposite direction, toward monoculture rather than agricultural diversity; toward fast, fake food that was processed, adulterated, and packaged; and toward the creation of a marketplace based on trucking that food hundreds or thousands of miles to huge warehouse grocery stores.

Four decades later, the result is that the American diet, once solid and nutritious, is now among the worst on the planet.

2. Wellness and Healthcare

Another 1960s movement occurred in natural medicine and alternative healthcare. Though undeniably useful for crisis intervention, allopathic western medicine was based on a mechanistic view of the body, treatment of symptoms rather than underlying causes, and reliance on pharmaceutical drugs. So, holistic medicine was reborn in reaction. The counter-revolution from the institutions of western medicine involved decrying and denouncing holistic methods as bogus and unscientific, refusing to consider alternative approaches or work with practitioners, and moving aggressively toward high-tech medicine and pharmaceutical domination.

Four decades later, the result is an American health care system in utter crisis, beset by inefficiency and corruption, astronomically rising costs, and near chaos. American medicine was once the envy of the world. Now, adequate care is affordable only for the wealthy and privileged. 40 million Americans have no health insurance and face bankruptcy should illness overtake them. Corporate-driven “health delivery” is a shambles. The counter-revolution won, but has failed spectacularly.

3. Spirituality

Consumer culture appeals to the hunter-gatherer instinct in human genetics. By the 1960s, Americans were awash in stuff to buy. Homes, cars, appliances, furnishings—we wanted to own it all. Advertising fueled the lust for products while distracting us from the ever-increasing alienation of American life, with its burgeoning suburbs, decaying cities, and crowded highways. We had become materially rich but communally and spiritually impoverished. This provoked among some Americans, especially the young, a search for spiritual meaning far from the traditions of church-based Christianity. That movement, which involved diverse spiritual sources and sometimes arcane metaphysics, challenged the validity of organized religion.

Two things occurred, however, to undercut the movement. One was the co-opting of authentic spiritual yearnings into a marketing industry. “New Age” spirituality proved a vulnerable target for the voracious maw of consumer culture and devolved into a commodity to be packaged, sold, and delivered. Like so much else in America, the sacred is sacrificed on the altar of mammon.

The other unexpected development was the astonishing rise of fundamentalist Christianity in America. While not unprecedented—fundamentalism has ebbed and flowed throughout America’s history—this resurgence was a major counter-revolution, and a well-organized one. While New Age Spirituality was populist and diverse, fundamentalist Christianity was institutional and corporate. Like the conservative, right-wing think tanks that are its ally, fundamentalist religion is now a major force in American culture and politics.

In the 1960s, the eruption of challenges to social conformity, systematic oppression, and the established order rippled across the American landscape like shock waves from an earthquake. These crackling lightning bolts ripped holes in the cultural fabric, but the fundamental structures of power and authority remained intact. A backlash of counter-revolutions followed, some from deep and invisible bunkers, reinforcing the old control with a vengeance. Over the decades that followed, the best, most humane elements that emerged in the '60s were subsequently buried under an avalanche of reactionary ideology. Looking at America today, I would say that the counter-revolutionaries have obviously won, but their victories may be illusory and short-lived.

The seemingly defeated progressive movements that sought to awaken America toward broader humanity are not dead. They have simply gone underground, lying fallow, waiting for the right circumstances to burst forth again. Those political, economic, and social circumstances will reach critical mass as Pluto enters Capricorn and is then squared by Uranus in Aries. What transpires in America during that time from 2008-2015 will expose our short-sightedness and complacency, ripping away the calculated lies and masks of deception that are sad hallmarks of contemporary American culture.

The existing order is currently squandering its legitimacy, perverting its authority, exhausting its resources, and generally self-destructing before our eyes. When revolution returns, this time in more mature form, the impact will be very different from the 1960s. What was seen then as radical challenges to stability will manifest instead as necessary responses to chaos. They will be called forth by the urgent need to address profound crises in collective consciousness.

This is not to suggest that conflict or suffering can be avoided in what will be nothing less than a struggle for our souls. That has been true throughout history and will continue. The future of humanity is still very much in doubt. One thing is certain, however: For those of us who came of age or were born during the turbulent awakenings of the 1960s and strove to honor the best of those ideals through all the darkness that followed—our time will finally have arrived.

But more about that in future newsletters.

