

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

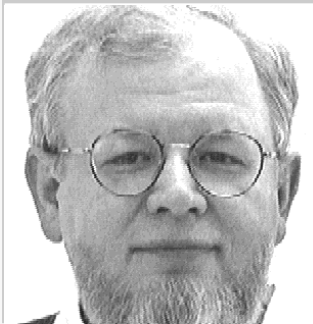
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THE HERBST NEWSLETTER



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,

Numerous readers of my ongoing commentaries in this now substantial and slightly obsessive series about Uranus-Pluto have emailed to ask me if I feel any optimism about what's coming. This newsletter is my response.

—Bill Herbst

THE 2010s: REASONS FOR OPTIMISM

Some of us—I daresay many of us—spent our childhoods feeling alienated and alone in the world. This has been true of every post-World War II generation in America, although each has its own characteristic tone of estrangement: Boomers grew up in Ozzie-and-Harriet or Leave-It-to-Beaver conformity. Gen-Xers had Brady-Bunch divorces and blended families, followed by two-working-parent latch-key kids. Millennials grew up in Day Care and moved into techno-consumerism. Even the aging G.I. Civic Generation now leaving the stage—which reveled in togetherness through the Great Depression and the World War that followed—is now alienated, with its octogenarian members wondering what happened to the America they so loved and believed in.

Whatever our generational cohort, our worlds have been by turns amazing and terrible. We did not make those worlds, of course; like everyone, we were born into them as strangers. Television and mass culture made the divide greater for us than for earlier generations. The lessons taught by our elders and teachers about fitting in were sometimes sincere, but just as frequently those lessons were pro forma indoctrination toward obedience. How many parents counseled their children to question authority? To challenge religion? To think for themselves? Some, no doubt, but probably not a significant percentage.

Abundance was the blessing and alienation the curse for many of us born in America after World War II. The tender (and not-so-tender) mercies of family did little for some of us to assuage this gnawing feeling

of non-belonging and invisible isolation. If life was so good—as we were told over and over—then why did we feel so bad?

Were we stuck in the wrong world altogether? Had the cosmic bus taken a left rather than right turn at Alpha Centauri and dumped us out on some strange planet where we were never meant to be? From our youthful vantage point in the quiet angst of suburbia, many of us wanted to write “Return to Sender” on our foreheads and go back home, wherever that was. For God’s sake, beam me up, Scotty! E.T. phone home. Get me out of here and back to the starship. This was hidden for a long time in our childhoods and adolescences, buried under the facades of “normal” American life.

For my generation, or at least a part of it, the 1960s provided an unexpected and inviting escape hatch. The countercultural, political, and spiritual movements of that decade cut through our solitary confinement like a hot knife through butter and showed us that we were in the right world after all, even if it wasn’t yet the “right” world in the way humans were creating it. We discovered that we *were* home on this planet, that nature really *was* our mother, and that our having been seemingly orphaned was not finally true. It was civilization that was alienating and deadening, conforming and repressing, hateful and violent. To be sure, we too contained inside our psyches all those and other faults of humanity and civilization, but we desperately longed for something better.

There were moments in that halcyon decade of the ’60s—different moments for different individuals, based on age, location, and circumstance—where you could recognize your brothers and sisters instantly. The minute you saw certain people, you knew that they understood and were with you in the awakening, the shucking of conformity and false allegiance, the rebellion against tacit obedience. For many of us, music provided those moments: when Dylan went electric, when the Beatles made Sergeant Pepper, when The Doors sang “The End,” or when Jefferson Airplane said “Feed your head.” For others, it was protests for civil rights or shared opposition to the Vietnam war. For an even larger number, the critical moment of realization was the Democratic convention in 1968. For me, there were many such moments along the way, but my culmination occurred in 1969, for all of about ten minutes somewhere between Woodstock and the Moon Landing.

Those extraordinary moments that starkly redefined who was “us” and who was “them” came and went in a flash, in large part because what revealed our bond was superficial, based mostly on appearance and a certain in-your-face attitude that was open and loving, yet simultaneously angry and defiant. Long hair, patched jeans, a faded G.I. combat jacket bought at a surplus store, whatever. Someone handing you a joint at a concert. Walking by a person in a park who was reading *The Bhagavad Gita* or *Silent Spring*. Returning to your dorm to find your roommate meditating, or making love, or tripping. All those were neon signs flashing: Something’s Happening.

Most of that, however, especially the clothes and drugs, were quickly co-opted into mainstream culture, so that by the mid-1970s, the emblems of counterculture had been rendered meaningless, reduced to mere fashion statements. Appliance salesman at Sears sported sideburns and polyester bellbottoms. Insurance adjusters smoked marijuana. Everyone wore faded denim jeans.

More importantly, the moment itself had passed, as the decade-long awakening went underground and the counterrevolutions took hold—Ford pardoned Nixon, the 700 Club appeared on television, globalization began as corporations flexed their financial muscles and sent gaggles of high-paid lawyers to Washington to lobby (and take over) the lawmaking in Congress. The malling of America already begun in the early 1960s expanded hundredfold. The giants of agribusiness turned about 80% of the world’s fertile farmland into monoculture, and they began their long war to control the world’s seed banks. Rivers were dammed and oceans plundered. Well-funded right-wing think tanks sprouted up like poisonous mushrooms. Universities that had been the sites of war protests settled into quiet pursuit of lucrative Pentagon grants. Vietnam ended with a whimper, replaced by a host of smaller military adventures and paramilitary black ops launched from the dark heart of the CIA—in Peru, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Panama, Grenada, Lebanon, East Timor, and eventually Iraq (twice, no less). The full litany of our messing with other countries is as long as one’s arm, with a permanent American military presence in 173 nations.

But I digress. All those depredations were, in a sense, banal and predictable, given the extraordinary backlash the 1960s provoked among the powers-that-be. The '60s did not derail the American Empire; they inadvertently accelerated it.

What amazes me, however, is the consistency of character between then and now. My generation of Baby Boomers who were at the forefront of the '60s awakening have caught a lot of flak for being pampered (definitely) narcissistic (true) and for selling out (less true, I believe). If I think back to everyone I knew in the various interconnected countercultures of that era—from hippies and hitchhikers to politicians and young radicals to social activists starting food co-ops and community radio stations to drug crazies and dope dealers to potters and weavers to organic farmers and back-to-the-land folks—if I think about all of us, it was clear even then who was serious and who was not, who was committed and who was just a hanger-on.

Take drugs, for instance. A hallmark of the 1960s was “experimentation” with psychoactive drugs. By the late '60s, those drugs—marijuana, hashish, LSD, peyote buttons and mescaline, psilocybin mushrooms—were easily available throughout the hip subculture, from college campuses, through big cities, to small rural towns. Millions of us took those drugs. Some of us sold them as growers or distributors.

A friend of mine who was a wholesale marijuana grower from his farm in rural Missouri had spent 10 years doing Mendelian seed crossbreeding of various strains of marijuana toward just the right kind of high—a perfect balance of body rush and mind expansion. In 1982, my friend told me that he knew the good-vibe days had ended when prospective buyers began showing up on his farm armed with Uzis and AK-47s. That was it, my friend said. He quit growing marijuana and walked away. He gave the profits from his last growing season to ten poor Mexican families with whom he spent winters, allowing them to purchase a thousand-year-lease from the Mexican government for a small but gorgeous tropical island just off the Caribbean coast. Helping 100 people secure a home in paradise was, in my friend's words, good karma.

If we had known in 1969 what was coming and you had asked me then which of the hundreds, perhaps thousands of people I knew who took drugs would be going on to uppers and downers and cocaine and heroin, I could have told you. *Exactly*. Distinguishing between those who used or sold drugs as part of an amazing social experiment of consciousness awakening and those who were in it only for the high or the money was easy and obvious. You could tell the good-vibe folks from the hardcore businessmen. You could see at a glance who was likely to become a casualty and should never have taken drugs in the first place versus those who would not only survive, but benefit profoundly from their drug experiences. Same with spirituality. Same with politics.

In fact, it was the same with all levels of the subculture. You could tell which people were waking up in authentic ways and becoming committed to social change versus others who were just partying with the herd. It didn't matter much what people said or how they acted, you could see through that into their character and anticipate their future paths. You knew pretty much who would run for minor office eventually and become a city councilman, who would go corporate and become a stock broker or lawyer, or who would settle into a marriage and family and return to the fold of typical American life. You knew also who was likely to run with the awakening for decades to follow, never giving up, never selling out.

Sure, there were exceptions. The arc of some lives take surprising turns, for better or for worse. But it's never been all that hard to separate the real human beings from the pod people. In an interview, the screenwriter of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* said that the 1956 sci-fi movie did not allude to the McCarthy-era political witchhunts, as some critics and moviegoers believed, but instead was a cautionary parable about the soul-deadening effects of American consumerism. Just as in that movie, it's easy to tell the genuine humans from the empty-suit robots.

That's what was so incredible about the 1960s. Feelings of vitality and sheer aliveness released us from our cages. As if anything were possible. When I think back to my personal experience in the '60s, not so much day-to-day but over the whole period, that's what I remember. The palpable experience of being alive, and of receiving some intangible but potent permission to come alive more fully. The many individuals I met along the way who were real human beings (not pod people) reinforced that feeling, con-

firmed it, and made me even more alive by their presence. Without them, and without the recognition that we were awakening together, I doubt that the decade would matter much to me.

Could I be wrong about this? Of course I could. Human beings are notoriously deluded about themselves and their worlds, and I am not immune from those flaws. I was 19 years old in 1969, for heaven's sake, so *of course* I was vital. My natal chart was powerfully activated by the Saturn-Uranus-Pluto opposition that defined the 1960s, so perhaps I'm wrongly generalizing my own subjective experience. Maybe I'm just sentimentalizing the past, exaggerating the meaning of a time that allowed my first and most joyous burst of personal freedom.

But I think not. However much those factors might belie or at least temper my exuberance, they cannot invalidate it. Over the past decades, I've talked to literally thousands of people who lived through that time as I did, and whose experience resonates with mine. They confirm for me that I didn't just imagine the feeling of the electric charge of the 1960s. Something big happened, and a lot of us felt it and lived it together, even if we didn't know each other at the time.

In contrast are other people I've met whose lives in the '60s were utterly normal, as if no awakening at all happened to them—no radical involvements, no breakthroughs, no revelatory Ah-Ha's. In fairness, most are significantly older than my Boomer peers, members of the G.I. or Silent generations, with some very deep conservative roots. But many within my own generation were not truly part of the awakening (both Bill Clinton and George W. Bush qualify as Boomers who missed the boat). All those and many others who believe the standard elementary-school myths of American exceptionalism and moral superiority tend to see the '60s as an aberration, an explosion of shameful civil disobedience and immaturity. Well, they're certainly right in part: The '60s *were* immature. The Uranus-Pluto conjunction kicked off a brand new cycle, so of course it was passionate, experimental, and somewhat infantile.

But here's the point: In the decades since the 1960s lapsed into history, I haven't felt anything like that period in the collective ether. The air was different then. You could breathe in the vitality, like a tonic. By contrast, the last five years of the 1970s were disappointing, the 1980s were depressing, and the 1990s were delusional. Now we've suffered through six years of the initial decade of the 21st century, which have been both deadening and downright deadly.

One reason I'm looking forward to the 2010s (which really means 2008 and beyond) is that I'm tired of living in times that are so stultifying. Yes, I'm a narcissistic Boomer, and I want something amazing to happen during my lifetime. Once is not enough, especially when we didn't really change anything. I'm sick to death of suffering through a 30-year run of unbelievable collective stupidity, pettiness, lies, greed, immorality, and just plain damned foolishness. Things have gone from bad to worse in this country, and I'm fed up with it.

All that is about to change, however.

2007 is the pivotal year for another major awakening from the programmed sleep of unconsciousness and passive obedience. Though we will continue to slog through the confusion of Saturn opposite Neptune throughout 2007, the archetypes of radical change will finally begin to make their presence felt. This year we move into the beginnings of the Uranus-Pluto shocks and revolutions of the 2010s. As Uranus reaches its first 10° orb within square to Pluto in May, 2007, and as Saturn reaches that same 10° orb in opposition to Uranus in October, 2007, we will start to stir from our collective slumber.

Even now, one can see and feel the shift in public awareness. The illusions that overtook so many Americans through right-wing propaganda, corporate takeover, religious fundamentalism, and red-blue culture wars will start to fade after Pluto leaves Sagittarius and enters Capricorn in 2008. As the aptly-named Cardinal Climax kicks off this revolutionary decade with a Saturn-Uranus-Pluto T-square from 2009-2011, we will be forced to deal with harsher problems, especially those of plutocratic government and unsustainable global economics. Though we cannot yet predict which triggers might provoke it, the 2010s could bring a worldwide depression.

What's the good news in that? Well, economic collapse will be accompanied by the first real possibilities for regaining our collective sanity and rebuilding civilization. Because the imperial mystique has so completely infected our culture, we can't do much to change it. Our political, commercial, and social institutions are much too interwoven by big money to allow reform. Empires collapse not from resistance, however, but by overreach, internal corruption, and decay. America is just about at that point now. So while painful and chaotic, the coming breakdowns will create conditions where renewal is at last possible. Throughout America, people *will* stand up, not merely to protest, but to address crises and co-create solutions.

The very air we breathe will once again acquire the electric charge of Uranus-Pluto. Some of us will welcome this archetypal shift in the psychic atmosphere with sighs of relief. Others will be shocked awake in spite of themselves. Individual and collective reactions will be all over the map, of course, but the unifying feature provoked by whatever crises emerge will be the palpable sensation that *anything is possible*—evolution, revolution, transformation. Death *and* rebirth.

Power will erupt from the very ground under our feet, and those who harness that power peacefully, guided by love, will find their hearts open and full, their minds awake and alert, and their hands set to work toward rebuilding a better world. The wellsprings of common humanity will once again open as we reconnect with each other in unprecedented ways.

And *that* is ample reason for optimism.



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