

# Uranus-Pluto and the USA Chart

by Bill Herbst

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*#1 of 10 essays currently compiled in the USA Sibly Chart Series*

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## Preface

Before I began to devote myself in 2002 to the serious study of the astrology of collective humanity — for which I coined the term, *civilizational astrology* — my then just-more-than-half-century of life had already prepared me for the idea that the 2010s would be a momentous decade in human history. One doesn't need to study astrology to realize this; many diverse sources of direct experience and vicarious knowledge all point in that direction: peak oil, overpopulation, environmental degradation, political and financial corruption, institutional corporate distortion, agricultural exhaustion, medical vulnerabilities, etc.

I already had sufficient awareness about these and other looming social crises to see the years from 2012 on as a significant crossroads in human affairs. Add to this the more metaphysical indicators, such as the well-known ending of the Mayan Calendar, and the argument for the 2010s being a watershed decade is compelling.

Still, my mind harbored doubts. What if I was wrong? What if all of us who held concerns for humanity's future and foresaw an imminent collective crisis were just plain wrong, either incorrect about the extent to which the status quo might break down through overshoot and resource exhaustion or mistaken as to the timing of how fast or slow such an institutional disintegration might be paced?

This is where the study of civilizational astrology proved telling. The further I delved into the outer-planet cycle activations of the first two decades of the 21st century, the more convinced I became of the vision of the 2010s as a critical juncture in our social evolution. Analysis of the so-called Cardinal Cross (the 2008-2011 T-square configuration composed of Saturn, Uranus, and Pluto, which began late in mutable signs then moved over the zero points into cardinality, and which would be joined by Jupiter in 2010), and then the seven exact passes of the Uranus-Pluto first-quarter square to follow in 2012-2015 left little doubt that we were collectively entering that minefield.

Still, even after careful analysis of the symbolic implications of those major alignments, which included deeper study of the cultural history of the Uranus-Pluto cycle over the last 150 years, with particular attention paid to the social upheavals of the two previous activations of that cycle during the 1930s and 1960s, the seemingly overwhelming evidence remained on an uncertain footing.

Throughout history, accurately predicting the future has been a dicey proposal. Those who undertake that task often run smack into a vexing contradiction, namely, that the future has a way of defying all expectations, including even the most educated predictions.

One further astrological revelation, however, finally banished whatever shreds of doubt still remained for me. While I did not then (and do not now) claim to know for sure the exact nature or precise sequence of events that will propel the 2010s into the rarified club of super-critical decades, this one crucial piece of astrological information convinced me utterly that such events will indeed occur to foment the resulting period of crisis that will reflect the entire pantheon of Uranian-Plutonian responses: dramatic and sudden change; pockets of social chaos; global swaths of decay, destruction, and death; resource wars; movements of social disobedience; long-needed reforms in the institutions of commerce and finance due to economic collapse — in short, the onset of a brave new world composed of equal elements of the very best and worst in human nature, drawn from the practical wisdom of the past and the experimental solutions from a never-before-seen future.

The one piece of astrological information that proved so convincing was the Grand Cross that will be formed in 2014-2015 between Uranus and Pluto squared in the heavens and the natal Sun-Saturn square in any of the July 4, 1776 birthcharts for the USA. This is true no matter which of the various July 4th charts we wish to use — the classic Sibly chart or any others asserting different “birth” times for the country on that day. For this article, I will use the Sibly chart with its original, “uncorrected” birth time: July 4th, 1776, at 5:10 p.m. local time, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. *[Note: Some astrologers have published compelling arguments that the Sibly chart is misinformed and incorrect, but the fact remains that the original Sibly data produces a chart that corresponds exceedingly well to America’s national character and history, not to mention its central contradictions and paradoxes, which I will discuss shortly.]*

For this commentary, I will assume that readers are already familiar with at least some of my essays in The Uranus-Pluto Series and know something about the symbolic meanings of the Uranus-Pluto alignment of the 2010s. If you have not read any of those essays, please do. They contain in-depth analysis, historical precedents, and predictions about the events and developments that may correspond to the Uranus-Pluto alignment.

Before we get out on the dance floor of the commentary and begin to boogie, let me acknowledge that the awareness of this particular Grand Cross first came to me from Robert Gover — who is both an economic astrologer and my friend — through his book, **Time and Money**. The central thesis of that book is that Great Depressions occur in America every time two outer planets squared from Capricorn to Aries form a Grand Cross with the USA Sun and Saturn, which are squared from Cancer to Libra. I am indebted to Robert for the benefit of his exhaustive research on this subject.

## The USA Chart and the American Character

Many astrologers have provided eloquent interpretations of the salient symbolic indicators of the Sibly USA chart. Let me list some of those qualities briefly:

- *Cancer stellium (Sun-Mercury-Venus-Jupiter) spanning the 7th and 8th houses (depending on house system used).* At heart, Americans are family-oriented, deeply sentimental, and broadly emotional.
- *Mars in Gemini/7th square Neptune elevated in Virgo/9th.* On the one hand, Americans embody an exaggerated militarism, responding aggressively to every challenge from without. We are also mistrustful and even xenophobic toward anyone we see as foreign. On the other hand, Americans are very religious with mystical roots, although those are often tinged with superficiality or over-simplification. We believe in the miraculous, but often mistake illusion for magic.
- *Sagittarius rising with the ruling planet Jupiter conjunct Sun and Venus in Cancer/7th-8th.* Americans are spontaneous and sincere, a people of buoyant, almost irrepressible optimism. Collectively, we tend to believe that life will improve rather than degrade. We've been blessed to live on a continent containing a wealth of abundant national resources (Jupiter conjunct Venus). Less positively, we may succumb to arrogance (excessive belief in our own goodness) or the expectation of entitlement, as in our longstanding certainty about "American exceptionalism," which supposedly protects us from the fate of all past empires in history.
- *Aquarius Moon in the 3rd House.* Americans need to see themselves as rugged individualists and staunchly independent, even though other factors in the chart indicate strong group-dependence. This paradox shines through our ambivalence toward government, where we give up control on the one hand and expect government to take care of us, but still cry "Don't Tread on Me" on the other, and cling to the quaint notion of Americans as self-reliant.
- *Pluto in late Capricorn/2nd opposite Mercury in Cancer/8th.* In any natal chart, Pluto reveals the fault lines between the raw, unconscious power of compulsion versus self-aware choices. For Americans, that volcanic fault concerns money, land and natural resources, and possession/ownership/wealth in general. The institutional vehicle for our obsession with money is the corporation, which is forbidden by law to honor any other consideration than profits. That device is a bargain with the devil, however, for now corporations control nearly everything, with nary a whit of care about people, despite the endless propaganda of

public relations posturing. Pluto's passage through Capricorn (2008-2023) represents a watershed confrontation with our obsessions about wealth and money.

## The Sun-Saturn Square in the USA Chart

The Sun and Saturn are arguably the most important symbolic indicators in any natal chart. The Sun in astrology represents the gravitational center, the core, the source of both power and meaning within a given life. Saturn represents responsibility and physical limitations — experienced as fears of failure or denial, but also as deep ambition to overcome obstacles to achieve eventual fulfillment. The Sun reveals our life-purpose; Saturn shows the path of slow maturation over time. In America's birth-chart, these two critical symbols were located at right angles to each other, in mid-Cancer/8th house and mid-Libra/10th house respectively. That square is of particular importance in revealing central facets and paradoxes of the American character.

The Sun-Saturn square in the USA chart implies that, as a nation, America has at its core a fundamental dilemma: Are we a nation of social justice and equal opportunity for all, regardless of background or station in life, or are we instead a nation of untrammelled ambition to amass personal wealth through success in business, with accumulated wealth that will then be kept within our biological families to be handed down from one generation to the next?

In the first perspective, no one is above the law, and anyone can grow up to be President (meaning that one can rise or fall based solely on individual merit, rather than being aided or limited by the station in life occupied by one's father or family). In this view of social organization, governmental legislation and cultural morality would both support a level playing field of opportunity by limiting the power of the most fortunate and distributing some of that power more equitably throughout the population. This is exactly what happened in the 1930s New Deal and post-World War II policies that built a burgeoning middle class in America.

From the other perspective, every person is free to pursue the acquisition and accumulation of wealth, without any particular social responsibilities attached. Whether the wealth is acquired through personal diligence, hard work, and business success, or by inheritance through family makes no difference. Ownership of property by individuals is a sacred right, inviolable, protected by the constitution. In this view, concentrations of capital are what drives the economic engine of the society, and thus are considered necessary and correct. A person may feel motivated to return some of his wealth to society for the greater good, but that is his choice and should not be mandated by legal coercion.

Those who embrace the first perspective often feel that overwhelming disparity of wealth is an evil that harms society, while those who embrace the second

perspective may feel with similar passion that forced re-distribution of wealth is also an evil that harms society.

This contradiction lies at the very heart of the American consciousness. Are we all in this together? Or is it every man for himself? Do we have a duty to share what we have with others? Or should we be free to do whatever we want and choose with whom we will share whatever we have?

Even if the choice isn't black and white, the problem still remains: How do we allocate the gray shades of responsibility to others versus freedom to be ourselves? Where do we draw the lines, and how? This is only one of the dilemmas upon which the transit alignment of the coming Grand Cross transit will very soon shine its spotlight through disruption of whatever status quo agreements America has put in place concerning wealth, personal freedom, collective responsibility, and social justice, as well as how we configure our institutions and conduct our economy.

In a more general way, the disruption of America's natal Sun-Saturn square by Uranus and Pluto will remove all remaining illusions of security and safety. Life is never truly secure — anything can happen at any time to anyone. But human beings don't like that rather harsh fact. We're hard-wired to seek security more than unexpected and dramatic change, so we do everything we can to buffer the slings and arrows that life may throw at us.

Security and freedom are paradoxically connected. Each requires the other. Without at least some of one, the other cannot exist. The idea of freedom without any security is untenable, because security diminishes fear, and freedom cannot operate when fear is overwhelming. On the other hand, security is meaningless without freedom. Take away all freedom, and security becomes merely a prison.

Arguably, the Sun-Saturn square in the USA birthchart represents the very heart of the dilemma in which we Americans find ourselves. Are we really the light of mankind, the shining city on the hill, as we have so long declared? Or are we simply another in a seemingly endless series of blundering, violent empires that seek to dominate the rest of the world for their own ill-gotten gains but always suffer eventual downfall? How can we reconcile individual freedom with socially-engineered equality? Is America indeed a just and equitable society, or is she merely an elite club for wealthy white male landowners of European ancestry who engage in class warfare against every other segment of the American population? Is our country the paragon of virtue, generosity, and fair-dealing, or are we too often just a bunch of greedy, down-and-dirty, good-old-boy businessmen? Is America a level playing field, or is it a plutocracy marked by continuing racism with extreme economic and legal biases toward the ultra-rich, who now either own or control pretty much everything?

Apparently, the answer is "yes" to all of the contradictions listed above. At least this is so from my own perspective. Many people clearly feel different about

America. They would strongly assert that by affirming both sides of our nature I am being too harsh on our country, but I would suggest in reply that they have been hypnotized by the Great Mythic Propaganda Hologram that incessantly puts out its whitewashed jingoistic message (namely, that we are both The Good Guys and The Chosen People) through the mainstream media. In refining the power of mass media, most specifically television, America elevated the one-eyed monster to an art form that is brilliant in manipulating its own populace to consume certain beliefs as well as goods. America has not needed the brutal repression of totalitarian, fascist states, because it has television, which performs the same function covertly, without needing to resort to crude coercion and overt violence.

But wait, America is not a totalitarian culture, right? Isn't America a democracy, and a capitalist one at that? Well, not really. We never were a democracy, but instead were created as a representative republic. Over two centuries, that republic has moved very far from what our founding fathers envisioned. Unfortunately, those in elected office who supposedly represent our interests are no longer primarily beholden to their human constituents (even though they want us to believe that they are). No, especially in the federal government, our representatives are now inordinately influenced by financial interests with deep pockets that fund their election and re-election campaigns (i.e., big corporations and other wealthy lobbying groups). And, with the possible exception of small businesses, we no longer have anything that looks remotely like Adam Smith's Capitalism. What we have is managed social welfare for big corporations.

Sadly, America today is a plutocracy masquerading as a republic, where powerful interests with great concentrated wealth call the shots. In other words, government and big business are in bed together. The vast majority of elected and appointed office-holders in the federal government (which includes senators, representatives, judges, high officials in cabinet positions, and heads of departments) come into government from corporate board rooms, and go back to lofty positions in the private sector when they leave government. In other words, those who rule tend to come from an extremely rarified culture — like an elite club — and they share similar beliefs and attitudes. To suggest that the upper echelons of government embody a "group-think" mentality is a serious understatement. Whether by disposition, peer pressure, or business-as-usual gridlock, most are loyal servants of the Empire, rather than representatives of The People, and the great beehive of lower-level government workers follow their lead.

All three branches of government are effectively controlled by corporate big business, which writes the bills in Congress and then spends billions of dollars effectively lobbying for their passage into law. As far back in America as we care to go — all the way to our founding — the playing field has never been level. Wealthy property owners have always enjoyed an overwhelming bias in their favor, both legislatively and judicially. In America, money talks, which is to say, money is free speech, according to the Supreme Court. And neither you nor I have that kind of money. Only corporations have wealth in sufficient

concentration, and they use it without constraint to get what they want, which is more money through a larger share of the pie.

Throughout American history, the two mutually-exclusive approaches to society — equality/social justice versus freedom to pursue wealth — have been in conflict. They ebb and flow in terms of which view is embraced by the culture. Basically, however, while America's ideals have always included social conscience and equal justice under the law, the reality has been that we favor wealth and property ownership. The advances made in social justice and equitable distribution of wealth during the mid-20th century, from the 1930s through the 1960s, represented an aberration in American history. If you don't believe me, simply study Supreme Court decisions stretching back into the 19th century.

The problem is that many of us were born or grew up during that period of the mid-20th century, so we assume the America of that time to be consistent with our country's entire history. Wrong. Starting in the 1970s, America began to revert back to its elitist roots, where money and power set the agenda and make the policies. The increasing domination of mega-corporations over the past 40 years has resulted in the most extreme inequity of wealth ever in America's history — more than at our founding, more than in the Great Depression, and more even than in the Robber Baron epoch of the latter 19th century.

Social mobility in America — the percentage of individuals who elevate their social standing, which is one of the most telling indicators of social opportunity and an egalitarian culture — is now lower than ever before in America, and among the lowest among all developed nations. We have become economically stratified into the *Haves* and the *Have-Nots*. Even worse, the *Haves* are comprised these days by only a tiny percentage of Americans, about 5%, while more than half the population has now joined the *Have-Nots*. In between is a fast-shrinking middle class.

## What Could Have Happened Versus What is Likely to Happen

Please understand: I am not anti-American. I simply recognize both sides of our nature. For instance, I am pro-business, because commerce is the life-blood of communities. The exchange of goods and services in the marketplace, and the income-producing work generated by the marketplace, are the primary reasons that human beings congregate in towns and cities. We don't live in cities because we love being around our neighbors. No, we live in cities because doing so makes getting the products we need and want easier and more convenient, and because that's where the jobs and careers are.

I am, however, no lover of corporate hegemony. All social institutions, and especially corporations, start out with a mandate to serve the public. Over time, however, as they grow, age, and amass more concentrated wealth, they become self-serving. When institutions reach gargantuan scale — as they have now in America — their own survival becomes more important than whatever good they

contribute to the general welfare of the commons. "What's good for General Motors is good for the USA."

Many Americans resent the intrusion of government into their lives and pocketbooks (and not just Libertarians, Tea Partiers, and the right-wing Republican looney-tunes free-market ideologue politicians who have gerrymandered their way into Congress). They dislike legal but coercive rules and regulations that curtail their freedom to do whatever the hell they want. I sympathize to some extent. Left unfettered, however, mega-corporations will eventually own everything and crush our humanity. They will promote conformity over diversity, alienation over community, and their own profit-driven agendas rather than human agendas. This is inevitable.

One way to obstruct or at least delay that unhappy end is to limit the growth (and devolution) of corporations by governmental rules and regulations. This is the method we've attempted in America, but it has been undercut at every turn, by erosion from without (by lobbying to change the laws) and neutering from within (by lack of regulatory enforcement). Regulatory agencies are too often the equivalent of the foxes guarding the hen house. As a result, reform is now impossible. We are too far gone for reforms to reverse the trend, even if they could be put in place (which can't happen anyway, given gridlock).

At this point, the only viable solution is to let the game play out. The economics of the past two centuries, hinged on the lynchpin of perpetual growth (the fantasy of ever-increasing wealth) achieved through low-cost energy (fossil fuels) is rapidly approaching its end. In fact, the whole mantra of endless economic growth — embraced by every politician and business CEO — is hitting its limits. Push for more growth (as we invariably do), and the guaranteed outcome is collapse. That's the stark lesson of ecology: Ecosystems that lose their interdependent balance through the dramatic growth of one or more species inevitably suffer collapse as a sort of built-in system reset. That collapse is usually sudden and dramatic.

Guess which species in our ecosystem has grown too fast and too huge? It's us, of course — human beings — and our economic engines. Like every species from bacteria up to primates, we are genetically driven to reproduce, multiply, and prosper, and therein lie the seeds, if not of our outright extinction, at least of our comeuppance. Friends, there's something seriously out of whack about a world with only 3,200 tigers (down 95% since 1900), but seven billion humans (up 250% since 1900). I understand that Mother Nature does not mourn as species come and go, but human beings should. The survival of other species is a telling barometer about our own health and probable longevity.

The costs of oil, natural gas, or coal are measured economically in dollars per barrel/BTUs/tons, but those energy sources also incur costs not factored into spreadsheets in terms of environmental toxicity to extract, refine, and use. Those "invisible costs" are rising dramatically. But even if we ignore the environmental damage and think only in terms of market value, \$100/barrel oil all by itself will

be sufficient to kill the vaunted global economy, which is the nursery and playground of corporations. Predatory capitalism fails to see this (or perhaps sees it but doesn't care, since it believes in the myth that technology will allow us to continue as we have, without any serious reforms). As a result, mega-corporations look increasingly like dinosaurs headed for extinction through over-reach and lack of adaptability to changing economic and physical environments.

I don't relish the thought of economic collapse, since it may result in human suffering on a scale that is fearful to imagine. But I see no alternative. However painful our collective failure could be, breakdown and collapse contain the seeds of our rebirth. We will be forced to find a mixture of old and new ways of living that might---just might---reconstitute our humanity, and allow us to discover how to live more in harmony with each other and with the world of which we are a part. I don't know how good the odds are of our achieving any meaningful improvement in collective human nature, which remains in the mass stubbornly adolescent, but that challenge — to pick up the pieces and start over — is clearly the road that stretches out ahead of us for the foreseeable future, starting now.

## Enter the transiting Grand Cross

Every time a slow-moving outer planet moves through the middle of Aries at the same time that another slow-moving outer planet moves through the middle of Capricorn (specifically 13-14° of both signs), the birth-chart of America is dramatically affected by what is called a transiting Grand Cross. The two moving bodies form two points of a square box, with the other two points being the Sun and Saturn in the USA natal chart. Diagrammed on the circle of the zodiac, this alignment looks like a box with an "X" through the middle, composed of two axes at right angles to each other.

Of all the regularly recurring multi-planet astrological alignments — Grand Trines, T-Squares, Mini-Trines, Yods, etc. — the Grand Cross is the most powerful. Its potency derives from the mutual exclusivity of its two axes. If we take two strong magnets, their positive and negative poles are drawn to snap together. Try to force together the positive poles of both magnets, however, and they resist. A Grand Cross is rather like two magnets that have been forced together in that way. The energy of the magnetic fields wants to blow them apart.

Uranus is currently moving through Aries in the 4th House in the USA chart, fast approaching opposition to the USA Saturn in Libra/10th and square to the USA Sun in Cancer/8th. Meanwhile, Pluto is in Capricorn moving through the USA's 2nd house, approaching opposition to the USA Sun and square to the USA Saturn.

With Uranus moving into opposition with the USA natal Saturn, and Pluto moving into opposition with the USA natal Sun, and with both these axes aligned at right angles, something's got to give. The USA chart is 237 years old. It has been through many major multiple-planet transit alignments over those two-plus

centuries. But the USA chart has never been through any multi-planet transit configuration this precise, powerful, or disruptive.

Uranus opposes the USA natal Saturn every 84 years, so that's happened twice before in the country's history (in 1847-48 and 1930-31, with severe economic disruption occurring each time. By contrast, Pluto — the archetypal symbol for death-and-rebirth through eruptive convulsions — has *never* been opposite the USA natal Sun. This will be the first time that astrological event has occurred in American history. Not only is that transit unprecedented, but it's happening simultaneously with the Uranus opposition to the USA natal Saturn, and while Uranus and Pluto are square each other. Friends, that's off the scale. The argument can be made that this is most important crossroads ever faced by this nation, every bit as important as the Civil War or the Great Depression.

OK, so when does this tumultuous alignment happen in the USA chart?

## Technical Timing of the transiting Grand Cross

General timing of the transiting Grand Cross — during the mid-2010s — is fairly obvious. Precise timing of the alignment, however, is not as straightforward as it might seem.

The USA Sun and Saturn are not exactly 90° apart. They are 91 1/2° from each other — still a tight square, but not perfect. As a result, some variance will exist in the aligning of the two transiting outer planets to the two natal bodies. The dates I give will not attempt to reconcile the variation. Instead, I'll simply note when the first begins and the second ends, since they will overlap.

The other technical factor is which tropical zodiac to use: precessed or unprecessed? Because the earth's poles aren't perpendicular to its orbit around the sun (they're tilted by 23°), the equinox and solstice points move backwards (precess) very slowly relative to the background of apparently fixed stars. This is called the Precession of the Equinoxes and is where the Great Ages come from — the Age of Pisces, the Age of Aquarius, etc.

How much is the precession factor? Well, over about 26,000 years, the seasonal markers of the equinoxes and solstices will complete an entire circuit of the heavens. That's just shy of one minute or about 50 seconds of arc each year. This means that for a country such as America, which is now 237 years old, the tropical zodiac used to calculate its natal charts is 3° displaced in space from the tropical zodiac we use today. As a result, timing of the Grand Cross might be delayed by as much as two years. Whether or not that's true is a mathematical/philosophical problem I don't really want to take on here. I will simply use the natal and transit positions as they are given in the ephemeris.

## Practical Timing of the transiting Grand Cross

Below is the exact timing of the four separate transits that will be formed by Uranus and Pluto to the natal Sun and Saturn in the USA chart. These are all what are called three-pass transits. I will give only two dates, however — the beginning and the end dates of each transit's period:

Uranus square USA Sun: **17 Apr 2014 – 2 Feb 2015**

Uranus oppose USA Saturn: **15 May 2014 – 14 Mar 2015**

Pluto oppose USA Sun: **14 Mar 2014 – 1 Nov 2015**

Pluto square USA Saturn: **21 Feb 2014 – 24 Dec 2015**

So, the exact period of the Grand Cross alignment begins in mid-March 2014 and lasts for one year, until mid-March 2015.

The exact period is not necessarily the same as the *effective* period, however. An "allowable orb" increases the time-frame, extending it on either side, before the first exact date and after the last exact date. Transits in the personal charts of individuals are generally allowed a 1° orb. For mundane or civilizational charts, however, that orb is often extended to 3°, 5°, or even 10°.

If we use the 5° orbs often allowed for mundane or civilizational astrology, the boundaries move out considerably: from **January 2013 until April 2016**.

Which of these is correct? Reality will tell us the answer, but in the meantime I have some conjectures of my own.

All the uncertainties within the system of astrology — from which zodiac to use through the allowable orbs — make pinpointing precise dates for the Grand Cross very difficult. In addition, beyond the technical questions are the real-life issues. Events in the collective realm are almost never singular. Whether shocking or subtle, visible to the public or behind-the-scenes, the events themselves are often only triggers whose full repercussions take years to manifest in reality. My personal feeling is that much of the Plutonian "eruption" and Uranian "revolution" symbolized within the Grand Cross might take the form of smaller, less obvious breakdowns or collapses in the political and economic systems that form the power structure of America.

In other words, a delay factor exists in civilizational astrology between the actual transit alignment and the real-life manifestations in the collective, with even more delay for the full repercussions to unfold. What happens during the transit may not seem particularly dramatic at the time. Shocks may occur during the transit, but history suggests that these shocks are not likely to seem as profound at the time as they turn out to be later.

What is obvious, however, is that somewhere in the middle of this decade, America is likely to encounter developments that will eventually de-stabilize the status quo of business-as-usual, crack the foundations of the American Empire,

and lead us into the profound challenges and changes that lie ahead in the years and even decades yet to come. Exactly what these developments will be and precisely when they will occur are much less certain, however. We can be reasonably sure that economics and social institutions will be primary arenas for breakdown and/or collapse. Mother Nature may also play a role in one way or another.

The direction from which any significant disruptions occur is another question. If something noteworthy happens, will it be provoked from outside or will it emerge from within? The likelihood is that a cascade of widely divergent global events will coalesce to provide the critical mass shocks necessary to awaken us from our habitual comforts and conditioned acquiescence. Determining where the initial trigger originated may be far from obvious, and even when the source is clear, the full repercussions will not be. However unexpected in terms of their sudden appearance, these developments will not be without precedent or otherwise out of the blue. We have already been warned about them all, at length, by people who saw what might be coming from a long way off.

But — as is so often the case in human affairs — those with the power to set public policy are currently concerned more with maintaining the status quo at all costs than with heeding even the most cogent, practical warnings, much like in the fable of the Emperor's New Clothes. In fact, the powers-that-be have spent much of their time and effort over the past 30 years attempting to deride, decry, and deny all the warnings, no matter how obvious the truth of those concerns. As we know, America prefers comforting illusions over hard realities, and what has long passed for debate within the corridors of power are simply arguments between opposing fantasies.

America has always been a land of ideals and dreams, for better and for worse. In a real sense, this is the nation where dreams come to be fulfilled or to die.

Some fantasies can cross-fertilize with reality to actually improve it. Those ideals are worth keeping. Other fantasies are toxic and distort reality until it bites back hard, revealing our dreams to have been little more than foolish illusions that were cruelly poisonous to our well-being. How are we to tell the difference? Well, one way is to live long enough.

The 2010s is essentially the decade where reality bites back.

# America Divided: Part One

by Bill Herbst

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America is divided. That has always been true, since the founding of the nation. At times over the past two and a half centuries, the divide has been obscured, papered over for one reason or another by the pretense of unity. At other times, the great conflict that threatens to tear apart the nation has been painfully obvious, such as during the conflagration of the Civil War in the 1860s, and now again today, in the waning years of the second decade of the 21st century.

This conflict is not hidden. It exists in the open, in plain sight, and is contained in the closing phrase of the Pledge of Allegiance that so many of us memorized and recited in elementary school: "*...with liberty and justice for all.*" Liberty and justice may seem simple and direct as words, but in reality they turn out to be immensely complicated, paradoxical, and at odds with each other.

Astrology is particularly revealing and eloquent about how and why two such worthy ideals are so disturbingly tangled in the life of the nation and the character of its people.

Numerous birth charts for the founding of the American nation have been proposed and used by astrologers. At least ten different charts that I know of exist. Most of us use a date in early July 1776 — typically July 4th or July 2nd — based on historical research about the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Each of the July 4th charts is erected for a different time of day in Philadelphia. Other astrologers use the later ratification dates of the Articles of Confederation or the U.S. Constitution. All these possible birth charts for the nation have their champions and detractors within astrology. I have always used the Sibly chart for the USA — so named for British astrologer Ebenezer Sibly, who first published the chart based on his research. That chart is erected for July 4th, 1776, at 5:10 p.m. local mean time in Philadelphia, which is supposedly when the Declaration of Independence was finally agreed upon and signed.

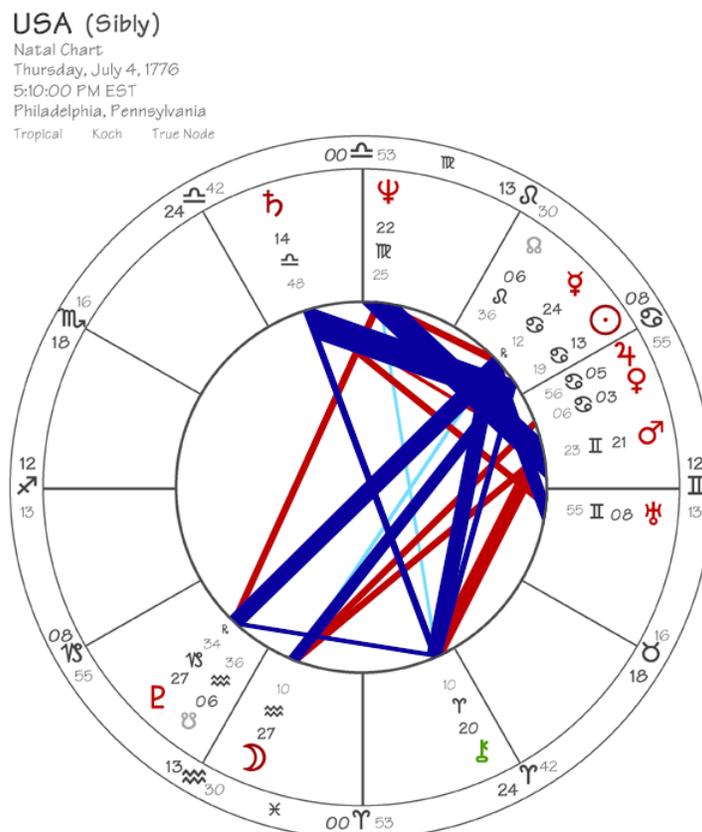
The Sibly data is the most common choice among astrologers for America's birth chart. It has been the subject of extraordinary scrutiny, passionately divided opinion, and even scholarly debates within astrology, and some astrologers insist that the time of day, or even the date itself, is incorrect. Despite that lack of universal agreement, the Sibly chart remains the most popular birth chart for America, and for good reason: It describes the character of our nation and people — with all the contradictions and paradoxes that make up that character — better than any other chart for America I've seen. That is just my opinion, of

course, but it is widely held. The Sibly chart is also generally reliable (and sometimes remarkably so) in accurately timing significant events in our nation's history.

To be fair, and in the spirit of full disclosure, I neither assert nor believe that the Sibly chart is "correct" and the other possible USA charts "wrong." All the various versions can be used sensitively to yield nuanced and illuminating interpretations. I use the Sibly simply because I personally find that chart most compelling. While I am probably less concerned with the timing of actual events than some of my astrological colleagues, I am deeply interested in what the Sibly chart implies about the American character, for both better and worse.

In the past, I've written at some length about the two dominant (and conflicting) memes in the Sibly chart for America. Both themes are based on the same confluence of critical factors in the chart, namely, the 10th-house Libran Saturn in tight square to the 8th-house Cancer Sun. Not every chart contains such a provocative and heavy combination, but many do, and all charts are subject to the natural hierarchy of importance among the symbols. The Sun and Saturn are two of the three most important bodies in astrology (the Moon is the other in the triad). When any combination of those symbols are powerfully connected, their significance is elevated even further. The Saturn-Sun square in the Sibly chart for the U.S. stands head and shoulders above every other set of factors in that chart for central importance.

Below is a graphic showing my rendering of the Sibly USA chart:



This chart for the USA contains numerous challenging planetary configurations, including the Pluto-Mercury opposition and Neptune-Mars square, each of which is worthy of detailed analysis and discussion. My focus here, however, and the subject of this commentary, is the single most important challenge in the chart, the square between Saturn and the Sun.

The Sun in Cancer/8th house implies an overriding concern for individual security and for the protection and well-being of one's personal family, either as biological blood relations or as a small group of chosen beloveds, since in Cancer those family bonds are included in one's personal identity as an extension of the self. At another level, however, and especially since this is the chart of a nation rather than an individual, the same configuration can indicate a heartfelt concern for the protection and well-being of the larger, more universal family of which we are all members. That might be the local community, the nation, or the entire "family of humankind." Beyond that, family might extend to the universal connection through empathy and compassion of all sentient beings on earth or throughout the cosmos. The expression of this drive in real life can vary dramatically, depending on how one's family is defined: as small and exclusive or large and inclusive.

On the other end of the square, Saturn in Libra/10th house has two fundamental but conflicting meanings. Interpreted through its 10th house placement, Saturn represents powerful, dogged ambition to succeed in the marketplace through business or executive leadership. Considered from its position in Libra, however, Saturn becomes the imperative of responsibility to treat everyone with respect and equality, and to enforce that challenge through social justice.

Considered in tandem, this pair of planetary symbols and their respective conditions contains the seeds of both great harmony and terrible struggle — with each other and within themselves. Astrologically, we are a nation where the Biblical question, "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" has profound relevance. The American answer to that question is definitely *yes*, but with crucial caveats. Who exactly is my brother? Or, stated another way, how far does my family extend? If the answer is that only certain individuals I love are my family, then life unfolds in one direction. If the answer is that family extends into the community and includes others in the collective, then life unfolds in a very different way.

When in harmony, these Sun and Saturn themes indicate, in one direction, the natural connection of business and commerce with the creation of wealth to nourish and protect the immediate family. In the other direction, they combine to produce an insistence on fairness and equality to take care of the larger family. Either direction can indicate inner wholeness, coherence, and integrity — taking care of one's own security while also being sensitive to the needs of others. When the themes are in conflict, however, serious trouble ensues.

On the one hand, we are a nation dedicated to the propositions of equality and social justice under the law. Everyone should be entitled to a fair shake, not just

the people we like. Favoritism must not override fairness. Given the often barbarous history of civilization, that is a profoundly revolutionary assumption, clearly Uranian in tone and stunningly idealistic, but the U.S. chart grounds the principles of equality and social justice in the common-sense practicality of Saturn. These are not just dreams or airy-fairy ideals; they are strict rules of conduct. Saturn's placement in Libra, the sign of its exaltation, elevates the normally dour planetary symbol to the apex of its noblest, most mature expression. The Golden Rule is invoked: "*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*"

America was intended to be a land where citizens would be able to feel safe in their homes, with legal protection against unlawful search and seizure, where everyone would get his or her day in court, and where justice would be blind to the privileges of wealth and position, so that each person would be treated with respect, regardless of race, religion, gender, or economic status. In reality, of course, we have fallen far short of this, enough so that one might wonder if equality under the law were ever truly our goal, or even a sincere intention. Nonetheless, that is one of the central symbolic ambitions indicated by the chart.

Slavery and servitude, as well as rule by the wealthy and powerful, are deeply embedded in humanity's past and present. To some extent, American history is an ongoing, often violent debate about whether or not equality is possible or even desirable. The Age of Reason in Europe (i.e., "The Enlightenment") challenged that existing order, and the so-called "Founding Fathers" of America were strongly influenced by the new and boldly radical philosophy. Even with their feet of clay — most of the founders were wealthy landowners, and many were slaveholders — the designers of America opted (dared?) to build a country around the legal structure of equality. That such a road is a difficult and long-term undertaking, with many failures and defeats along the path, is indicated by Saturn as its primary symbolic indicator in the chart. The climb up the mountain toward the summit of fully realized social justice is slow and arduous.

On the other hand, we are also a nation created to satisfy the fundamental human desire for unfettered freedom to pursue and amass wealth. That signature is all over the Sibly chart for the U.S. — in the Aquarian Moon, the Pluto opposition to Mercury on the 2nd/8th house axis, the Mars-Neptune square, and the 8th-house Venus-Jupiter conjunction — but one need look no further than the natal Sun in Cancer/8th house to find ample evidence.

When the European empires first began to explore and colonize the western hemisphere at the end of the 15th century, they did so in search of riches. Upon arrival in both continents that would later be named North and South America, they encountered large populations of indigenous native cultures. For the next 400 years, a genocide of tragic proportions occurred, along with the rising of a myth that emerged out of what became the United States of America.

America was the land of milk and honey, where the streets were paved with gold. And even though the quick and easy wealth of gold proved mostly false

(despite the various gold rush manias of the 19th century), the land itself was incredibly rich in abundant resources. The sheer amount of land available for ownership was seemingly unlimited, enough to allow nearly anyone to farm or run a business. That was the promise, anyway, again and again: Freedom and Wealth. People of every nationality who felt shut out or abused in their own countries flocked to America to escape their oppression. In so doing, they fervently hoped to gain a second chance at creating lives worth living in a place where the myth said they'd be able to fend for themselves and prosper for their families. The doorways to that goodness were business and the wealth it produces.

When any two symbols in astrology are strongly aspected together, their meanings interact in complex ways that result in a kind of hybrid archetype. In a conjunction, two symbols fuse into one. An opposition, with two points 180° apart, is similar, but with an alternating duality: each symbol stimulates the other into expression. A square, where two symbols are 90° of arc or one-quarter of the circle apart in perpendicularity, is different. The symbols are tied together, but "crossed." The operation of each symbol is at cross-purposes to the other.

In some ways, a square aspect between two symbols can be powerfully stimulating. When the symbols manage to operate together, they are immensely more potent. Usually this occurs by reinforcement of similar expression between the two symbols' respective conditions (sign and house associations). For instance, when the Sun's Cancer/8th house meaning is protection of the larger family (beyond just the personal of me and mine), that combines naturally with Saturn's Libra/10th house meaning of equality and social justice. In the other direction, the Sun's Cancer/8th house meaning of amassing wealth for oneself and one's personal family combines naturally with the Libra Saturn's 10-house meaning of the drive for success through business.

What we get in the first instance is a country and people devoted to inclusion and fairness for everyone, even to the point of attempting to reform human nature to achieve that end through institutions and the law of the land, and in spite of the fact that many people don't like the idea or want it. In the second instance, we get a juggernaut of powerful ambition through a strongly puritanical element of hard work combined with ownership and executive command, aimed at producing maximum freedom to pursue unlimited wealth (Neptune square Mars in support of Cancerian need-fulfillment) for oneself and one's personal beloveds.

These are two essential human motivations harnessed together: the drive for wealth, and also the need to nourish and protect one's family. That's what makes this expression of the square so powerful. Both linkages become immensely powerful memes in American life. And yet, each has downsides. The downside of social justice is that people do not like being forced to accept ideals or beliefs they may not hold, yet have to help pay for (*"No taxation without representation"*). The downside of business and wealth is that greed and

selfishness may overwhelm and undermine the greater good (*"I got mine, so screw you"*).

Is the story of the Saturn-Sun square in the Sibly USA chart really that simple and straightforward? No, of course not. There are twists and turns that are paradoxical and often brutally contradictory, which is where the commentary heads next.

**End Part One**

*[In Part Two of this commentary, I will discuss the inherent complexity of the square aspect and the further implications of America's competing and mutually-exclusive Sun-Saturn central themes, how that has played out in our history, and where we find ourselves now.]*

# America Divided: Part Two

by Bill Herbst

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*#3 of 10 essays currently compiled in the USA Sibly Chart Series*

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In *Part One* of this commentary, I discussed the two primary and conflicting themes of the Sibly chart for the USA, as indicated by the Sun-Saturn square that symbolizes the core of our national mandala — namely, equality and social justice versus individual freedom and unfettered pursuit of wealth. Now, in *Part Two*, I'll describe the complexity of that struggle in more precise astrological terms.

In astrology, any connection of two planetary symbols through a major aspect — the most important of which are conjunction (0° of arc), square (90° of arc), or opposition (180° of arc) — indicates that their interpretive meanings are mutually linked and will tend to function together. How their meanings will operate in harness, whether in cooperation or conflict, depends on many factors, one of which is the nature of the aspect itself.

Conjunctions, with two planetary symbols located together in the zodiac, fuse the separate implications of each symbol into a single, overall meaning. They operate in union, as one, whether harmoniously or disharmoniously. By contrast, when two symbols are located halfway around the zodiac from each other — across the chart — they are connected in opposition. Their meanings remain separate and individual, but they operate together through a kind of mutual harmonic resonance. When the meaning of one symbol manifests or is expressed in life, the meaning of the other, opposite symbol will also manifest, either immediately or shortly thereafter, whether or not that was intended. In other words, activate one planet of an opposition, and the other activates automatically.

Squares are different — more challenging, almost perversely so. Unlike conjunctions and oppositions, where two symbols naturally operate together, the two symbols in a square cannot cooperate, or, at the very least, encounter great difficulty in doing so. Allow me to explain why.

A square is an aspect of 90°, or division of the circle by four. The two symbols involved are at right angles, perpendicular to each other in the zodiac. They form a cross. To express its meaning, each axis of the cross naturally "travels" like an arrow, slicing through the air in whatever direction it points. Ah, but there's the rub: The "straight" path to expression for one symbol is "sideways" for the other. For the symbols, straight feels great, but sideways sucks. Put another way, their respective meanings are not easily expressed when they're pulled sideways. And

yet, they are tied together. Whichever symbol is expressed naturally (straight) drags along the other symbol in a way that is unnatural (sideways) and forbids or severely limits its natural expression. So, squares are mutually exclusive rather than inclusive. The two symbols cannot express together at the same time. Activate one, and the other is frustrated, denied, or shut down.

In a square, it's almost as if the two planetary symbols — which represent urges or motivations within the psyche — are locked in a struggle for dominance, a metaphorical fight to the death. It's as if they're trying to kill each other, almost like they were mortal enemies. Since these are archetypes rather than people, however, one symbol cannot destroy another. That may seem to occur temporarily, within a particular time-frame, but — eventually and inevitably — the vanquished symbol will regain strength, rise up, and do battle again. Typically, the last winner becomes the next loser, so we get an alternating rhythm — expression of only one symbol, then expression of only the other symbol. At least that's how it seems from the viewpoint of human beings who often like one of the two perspectives and fear the other. When their preferred side (the one they like) wins, they are triumphant; when the other side (the one they fear) wins, they are in despair. Given enough time, however, fortunes will reverse.

The upside of squares is that they correspond to a sharpened and intensified experience of the archetypes involved. At times, especially in a circumstantial crisis, squared planets may achieve a kind of temporary, forced cooperation that is stunningly powerful, even though it's usually raw and crude, rather than smooth and sophisticated. And, of course, the cooperation doesn't last long, since either or both motivations will be "bent out of shape."

The downside of squares is that they are often quite difficult for the person whose life the chart describes. Sometimes the individual may be frustrated by the conflicted nature of the square aspect involving two (or more) planetary symbols or angles (meridian and/or horizon, which are the two critical axes that correspond to the most individuated and custom-tailored experience of security and awareness in the chart), but more frequently frustration is based instead on the repercussions of the square in unsatisfying real-life results. It's a little like driving a car with faulty steering, acceleration, or brakes. Keeping the vehicle on the road is challenging, to say the least.

Typically, squares present us with an either/or choice — one planet's expression or the other's, but not both. Even when the square allows temporary cooperation, the results are usually more one-sided than truly cooperative across the spectrum of possible manifestations. So, in the Sibly chart for the USA, the Saturn-Sun square — symbolizing both the ideals of equality and social justice and the ambition to pursue wealth through commerce — tends at any given phase of history to favor one over the other. Whichever side wins the struggle often expresses itself in the extreme, while the side that is either diminished or shut out lies fallow, seemingly defeated. But the "winning" side usually overplays

its hand, which eventually exhausts its mandate and causes the social pendulum to swing back in the other direction.

Over the early decades of American history following establishment of the nation, equality and wealth both took a back seat to the more primal struggle for the young country's survival. By the 1820s, however, the conflict between social justice and individual freedom to pursue wealth had emerged and begun to take center-stage through the question of slavery, around which the agricultural economy of the South had been built. Initially, wealth won, but the outcome of the American Civil War swung the pendulum back toward equality and social justice, really for the first time ever. That shift didn't resolve the square, of course, since neither side can win in any ultimate sense, nor did it last.

By the late-19th century, Jim Crow laws had derailed the social justice movement, which headed off in different directions — banning child labor in factories, winning voter suffrage for women, and organizing labor unions to protect workers. All these reforms were won at great cost to the activists who supported them, and only after hard-bitten resistance from those who liked America the way it was, since the status quo insured their continuing power and wealth.

Racism and xenophobia continued to be America's "original sin," however, and would rise up again and again on the side of individual freedom to pursue wealth. This is an expression of the "limited family" side of the Sun-Saturn themes. If you are not like me, you're not part of my family, and I consider you not only an outsider, but a threat to my safety and security.

The Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917 during World War One scared the bejeezus out of every country in the west whose economy was based on capitalism (of which America was the standard-bearer). That began a century-long battle against communism, interrupted only by the necessity of a temporary alliance to defeat Nazi fascism in World War II. America puffed up her chest as the bastion of freedom and the savior of civilization.

Then, quietly during the 1950s and loudly during the turbulence of the 1960s, the Civil Rights movement made its biggest splash, culminating in landmark legislation intended to insure equality and social justice once and for all. But, as happened after the Civil War, that victory for one side proved to be short-lived.

Over the 50 years since then, individual freedom to pursue wealth has again risen up fiercely, and in a morphed form unlike anything America has seen since the Robber Baron era of the 1870s. The transformation of our economic base from manufacturing to FIRE (an acronym for Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate) has been accompanied by a financial sector mania where "anything goes and nothing matters." The concentration of massive but questionable wealth into the hands of those at the very top of the social/economic pyramid has resulted in income inequality that is both breathtaking in scope and tragic in implication.

While those of us born in mid-20th-century America may not have felt that equality and social justice had been perfectly realized (they weren't), millions of us grew up assuming that those ideals were a permanent and stable fixture of American culture, law, and government. A vibrant middle class, Social Security, and the illusion of safety left us thinking that equality and social justice were our birthright, and that we didn't need to embrace the headlong pursuit of wealth to gain a decent economic footing and live comfortable lives.

What some of us failed to factor in was that the Roaring Twenties, a decade where individual freedom to pursue wealth reached one of its historic peaks, had led to the Great Depression of the 1930s, which in turn resulted in FDR's New Deal. That changed the role of government in America, which had previously done little if anything to provide for the welfare of its citizens.

What many Americans assumed to be a steady evolution toward equality, social justice, and even economic security for all has been revealed as yet another temporary pendulum swing in American history, if not an outright aberration.

The political movements called populism and economic nationalism that arose in this decade to challenge the existing institutional order were predictable, given the Uranus-Pluto square that defines the 2010s. That they resulted in the election to the presidency of Donald Trump was surprising to some, but probably shouldn't have been, since mistrust in government and anger at the existing status quo have become noteworthy among a sizable percentage of the public. Timing aside, however, these developments reveal not only the deep divisions in the culture through the ongoing battle between conflicting ideals, but also the inherent contradictions and paradoxes that emerge from the corruption of such ideals.

The fundamental questions that concern Americans continue to be, as they have always been, about who we are as a nation and a people. No matter how complex, the issues tend to boil down to the definition and meaning of family (another word for which might be "tribe"). Who is "us," and who is "them"? What can we best do to support those we love and with whom we identify and empathize while protecting ourselves and our beloveds from others who don't care about us or may even seek to do us harm? Who is included and who is excluded? The answers to those questions depend on how the firm the boundaries of family are defined — literally, emotionally, and spiritually — and where those boundaries are placed.

# America's Pluto Return

by Bill Herbst

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*#4 of 10 essays currently compiled in the USA Sibly Chart Series*

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Jokes are the modern equivalent of parables. Below are two classic jokes. The first is an old Henny Youngman one-liner:

*Moving his arm up and down, a patient says, "Doc, it hurts when I do this." The doctor replies, "Then don't do that!"*

And another from Woody Allen:

*A man goes to a psychiatrist and says, "Doc, my brother's crazy, he thinks he's a chicken." The doctor says, "Why don't you turn him in?" The guy says, "We would. But we need the eggs."*

Rim shot.

Both of these jokes, as well as many others probably, describe (or at least reflect) the cockeyed collective situation in which we find ourselves these days.

Now, there's nothing new about civilization being nuts. Can we find any time in history where civilization wasn't insane? Temporary pockets of relative sanity might have existed in the past, but I don't know of any that would really pass muster. One of the questions associated with that search might be whether humanity is no more crazy than it ever was, or if we're getting crazier. My best guess would be that the craziness itself is fairly consistent, but the scale and repercussions of our collective insanity are considerably more serious at this point, in part because there are so many more of us than at any earlier time in history, and in part because the scale of human activity has grown so large that the consequences of our foolishness are profoundly amplified, to the point where our own continued survival is now in question, as well as the survival of a vast number of other life forms on this lovely garden planet.

As a species and a civilization, we seem unable to stop doing the things that are obviously harming us (and, even when the harm is less apparent, are setting up probable catastrophes not too far off). This is true even when we have abundant evidence of our need to stop certain activities and change the way we live. Also, all too often the presumed benefits of humanity's very questionable behaviors run counter to the most basic laws of reality, not to mention common sense.

I'm not suggesting that the benefits used to rationalize continuing our self-defeating activities are all fictional. Some are, some aren't. But most of the benefits are offered as justification not on the basis of their long-term wisdom, but rather because of their short-term efficacy — continuing to do the same crazy stuff we have been doing, and, in some cases, even increasing how much of it we do, serves only to prevent any uncomfortable shake-up in the status quo. [Think of the Keystone XL pipeline, for instance...] Heaven forbid that we should disrupt the way commerce operates. Apparently it's better that we drive headlong over the cliff than change course.

The word that has come into common usage over the past couple of decades to describe our predicament is *sustainability*. Some resources are, relatively speaking, infinite and can be renewed. Other resources are finite and will either run out or become so costly (or damaging) to use that we need to stop. While other values and variables also apply, one significant determination about which activities are OK and which are not is based on whether or not such activities can be sustained over time without causing harm to ourselves or the planet. For instance, renewable energy (solar, wind, etc.) is sustainable. Fossil fuel energy is not.

How we might create a world worth having includes a wide range of diverse subjects, of course, many of which are longstanding unsolved problems having to do with human nature. One subject that is a recurring and pressing topic is economics, and more specifically, the financial systems that underpin commerce. That's the only topic I want to focus on in this commentary (not that others are unimportant).

Here's the bad news in a nutshell: A financial meltdown of unprecedented proportions is coming in the years ahead in America (and the world), for which the great bulk of people, and particularly much of the American population, is unprepared or even unaware.

The neoliberal financialization of EVERYTHING that began in America during the 1980s has continued into this century. Apparently, the only value that matters in terms of economic policy is monetary profit, despite the fact that our money is more and more debased and disconnected from anything of real worth. The Masters of the Universe on Wall Street have come up with seemingly endless ways (one example of which is the financial instrument and investment product called "derivatives") to make more and larger profits for themselves. These schemes have nothing to do with actual productivity (i.e., real goods and services) and everything to do with making and hedging bets through investment. It's a little like the stock market, but way more complicated and bizarre, and the main players are those that possess the immense, concentrated wealth required to place bets.

Following the housing market crash in 2006, these draconian schemes for quick-and-easy financial gain through derivatives and other seriously questionable financial practices blew up in 2008 with the meltdown of big investment banks

that — like addicted gamblers in a casino — had made too many bad bets. Over the previous decades, Wall Street had gone crazy in its headlong pursuit of ever larger profits, and the whole house of cards collapsed, almost overnight.

At that point, we had a chance to correct our course. We could have (and should have) let those big banks fail and go belly up. That would have been a painful, but healthy corrective. Instead, the central banks interceded to pump in billions of fake dollars into the system (through the debt creation of quantitative easing), and thus resuscitate most of the failing firms. The Federal Reserve has continued that policy ever since, and, granted a new lease on life, the revived banks on Wall Street have not merely resumed their former nefarious activities, but have amplified and accelerated them. The result is a stock market that's risen steadily in a complete disconnect from what is still a troubled economy, with the upshot that we're now living through the Mother of All Financial Bubbles.

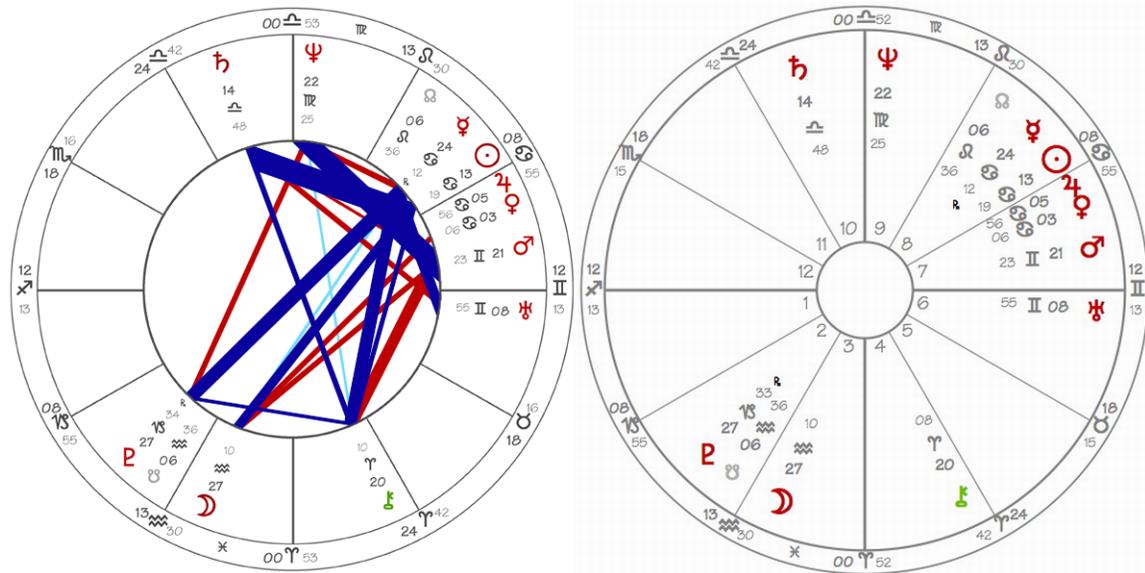
Although the economic high priests of the neoliberal religion (better known by its critics as "predatory capitalism") don't frequently discuss them, bubbles — with their inevitable, alternating booms and busts — are an essential facet of the dominant landscape in economics these days. Bubbles are asset classes whose value is artificially-inflated. The most famous example from history was the Dutch Tulip Mania that occurred in the 17th century. More recently, both the housing and stock markets have repeatedly gone through such cycles. What happens is a kind of ponzi scheme — the bubble grows into a frenzied boom, and then suddenly busts when the inflated value collapses seemingly overnight. Investors who bought in during the peak of the mania are ruined, but savvy firms rush in after the collapse to buy up the assets at bargain-basement, fire-sale prices. After the financial bloodbath and subsequent looting, the cycle starts all over again, like shampoo: *rinse and repeat*. Author Naomi Klein calls this phenomenon "Shock Doctrine," essentially the creation of catastrophe for profit.

The American economy, and, in many ways, the global economy as well, is now approaching extreme bubble status. Although the powers-that-be have done a truly amazing job of keeping the financial game going for almost a decade now, it's uncertain how much longer they can continue their prestidigitation sleight-of-hand. A relatively minor black swan event in any of numerous arenas — political, environmental, social, or economic — could turn out to be the pin that pops the economic bubble, kills the boom, and sets off the chain reaction that results in a major financial collapse. That might still be years away, or it could happen tomorrow.

Astrologically, the most serious economic/financial time frame for this country is from 2021-2023, when the USA's natal chart goes through its Pluto return. This means that Pluto will have made one complete circuit around the heavens since the founding of the nation in 1776 and will return to its natal position. That's a fairly rare event, because Pluto takes about 250 years to go around the Sun once. The wars and political upheavals of the past two centuries have re-drawn the map of the world so completely that most nations are relatively young. Oddly enough, America is now one of the older countries in the world. Now we are fast

approaching our first Pluto return, and that's a potentially watershed event in astrological symbolism.

Below are two graphics of the most commonly-used natal chart for the USA (called the "Sibly" chart, so named for the English astrologer who first published it). The chart on the left is my custom-tailored version that shows me what I want to see at a glance. The one on the right is a more traditional graphic representation. Both charts are exactly the same, however, erected for July 4th, 1776, at 5:10 p.m. local mean time in Philadelphia, using the Tropical Zodiac, Koch houses, and the True Node:



In an earlier draft of this Commentary, I wrote three pages about Pluto's symbolism in the USA natal chart, but all that ended up on the cutting room floor. Rather than offering an astrology lesson, I'd prefer to just cut right to the chase: Pluto explains a great deal about America's balls-to-the-wall pursuit of wealth and power, and a Day of Reckoning is coming (that could be more serious any of our earlier setbacks).

America is now roughly analogous to Pompeii and Herculaneum before the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D. Our volcano is not a physical mountain, however, but a financial and economic system that is largely divorced from reality and is building toward an eruption (or, more accurately, an implosion). The Pluto transits squaring the USA Midheaven and opposing our natal Venus in 2008-2009 represented the opening salvos in this drama — the initial burps that indicated serious pressures building inside the metaphorical magma dome. The Pluto return from 2021-2023 may very possibly correspond to the main event.

What makes this alignment (the USA Pluto return) so vexing for astrologers to accurately interpret is the uncertainty factor of watershed outer-planet configurations. Sometimes a particular symbolic event from the outer reaches of the solar system — most especially Pluto — corresponds to massively important changes in real life. Other times, such alignments come and go with little or no

apparent impact at all. That's part of why the outer planets are considered symbolic wild-cards — like jokers in the deck. We simply cannot predict with certainty how significant a particular configuration may be.

Most astrologers I've read tend to regard the upcoming Pluto return in the USA chart as an important crossroads that is likely to correspond to major events in American economics/finance (Pluto in the 2nd house) and government (Pluto in Capricorn). I tend to concur, but we'll have to wait to see what really happens during the early years of the 2020s.

My concern about our economic and financial future is not based primarily on astrology. I've been concerned for a long time for a gaggle of other reasons, most of which are from what might be called "real life." Astrology simply supports my perceptions from these more pragmatic realms. Everything I know, however, points in the same general direction: We're in trouble, and we don't seem to have the collective will to effectively head off disasters that are of our own making.

This is not to suggest that no one is doing good work or making sincere efforts in finance or economics. Millions of people around the world — perhaps hundreds of millions — are working diligently to restore sanity to the ways we do business and use money. It's just that the overall culture of global economics and finance (and most especially in America) is skating on dangerously thin ice. Not only has modern civilization lost its connection to nature, our institutions and policies are disconnected from reality as well.

I don't pretend to know what any particular individual might or should do to prepare for the nasty eventuality of an economic meltdown or financial collapse. Hell, I don't know what I'll do, other than living as simply and frugally as I can and working to deepen my emotional connections with the people I love.

My response to most everything these days is to refrain as much as possible from making life worse. More love and compassion, less violence and suffering. That alone is challenging enough.

# The USA Chart in 2018-2019

## *Part One*

by Bill Herbst

*Version 1.4 (posted on 4 September 2018)*  
*#5 of 10 essays currently compiled in the USA Sibly Chart Series*  
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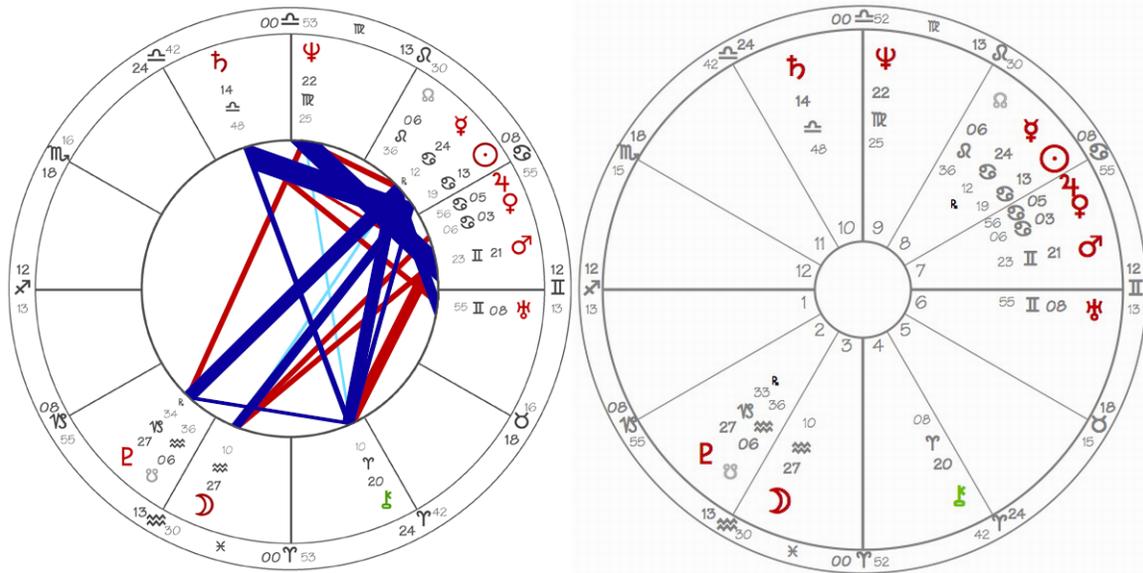
As we near the end of the tumultuous decade of the 2010s and approach the many challenges that will no doubt arise in the 2020s, what can astrology tell us about where America is now in 2018 and where it's headed in 2019? This week's commentary, the first of two parts, is my attempt to address that question through reference to the major cycle activations (called transits) in America's natal chart during 2018-2019.

This two-part commentary will be the fifth (and sixth) essays I've written over the past six years about the chart of the USA — one in 2013, three in 2017, and now two more in 2018. I've compiled the previous four commentaries into a single PDF file on the Essays Archive page of my web site. After I post Part Two of the current pair next week, I'll add both to the file. Here's a link to read or download the compilation file:

<http://www.billherbst.com/USA%20Sibly%20Chart%20Series.pdf>

In the first essay of the compilation file, the natal interpretation of the square from the Sun in Cancer/8th house to Saturn in Libra/10th house in the USA chart is particularly relevant to this current pair of commentaries. The two critical cycle activations in the USA chart during 2019 are transiting Saturn's opposition to the USA natal Sun and waxing square to the USA natal Saturn. Understanding the implications of those two simultaneous transits necessarily refers back to the fundamental meanings of their relationship in the natal chart. Readers — especially those who weren't following my commentaries back in 2013 — are strongly encouraged to download and read that material.

On the next page are two representations of what's called the USA Sibly chart, erected for July 4th, 1776, at 5:10 p.m. local mean time in Philadelphia, using the Tropical Zodiac, Koch houses, and the True Node. The graphic on the left is my custom-tailored version of the chart that shows me what I want to see at a glance. The graphic on the right is a more standard astrological presentation. Both charts are exactly the same, however:



## 2018 USA Sibly Major Active Cycles (Transits)

- ♃△☉△♁♀ ..... *Jupiter trine USA Sun and Mercury*
- ♄♁♀♃ π♁ ..... *Saturn oppose USA Venus and Jupiter; inconjunct USA Uranus*
- ♁\*♁☐☐♁♁ ..... *Uranus sextile USA Moon; square USA Pluto; inconjunct USA Midheaven*
- ♆△☉ π ♃ ..... *Neptune trine USA Sun; inconjunct USA Saturn*
- ♁☐♁ π σ ..... *Pluto square USA Chiron; inconjunct USA Mars*

Astrologically, 2018 is definitely the less important year within the two-year span of this commentary pair. It is also the least significant of all the years in America's chart from 2013-2023. Essentially, 2018 represents a kind of bridge or breather between the previous five years (2013-2017) — which were akin to the formation of a magma dome from pressures deep within the volcano — and the next five (2019-2023) — during which the volcano begins to smoke and belch lava as pressures approach eruption. That's not to suggest that 2018 is necessarily insignificant in reality, just that it's not particularly potent in astrological terms. The Jupiter and Neptune transits imply a period of buoyancy and expansion, but the Saturn transits indicate widespread unhappiness, dissatisfaction, and lack of opportunity. These contradictory elements in America's chart for 2018 don't cancel out. They coexist in a kind of intertwined dance of good news and bad news, whether as events of relevance to the nation or as indications of the overall psychological tenor of the American public in the cultural zeitgeist.

Some astrologers would emphasize the waning trine of transiting Neptune to the USA's natal Sun, and (to a lesser extent), the waxing inconjunct of transiting Neptune to the USA's natal Saturn, but I regard both of those transits as relatively minor. They blend into the background rather than stand out. Taken together (since the two transits are simultaneous), they imply a period of almost two years — from spring 2017 through the end of 2018 — where fact, fiction,

opinion, and belief blend seamlessly and cook down into smooth pudding. That could reflect well-formed perspectives or simply confirmation bias. Either way, Americans will tend this year to stick with what they already feel. Events and new information are not likely to alter many individual stances, and few minds will be changed. The years ahead will probably alter that as we are forced to reconsider what we assumed was true. Astrologically, though, 2018 isn't a year for rethinking.

Although some enthusiasm is indicated in the transits, excitement is generally at low ebb. As a collective, Americans are currently hunkered down into their respective tribal camps, waiting for something dramatic to happen. With the sole exception of the Uranus square to the USA's natal Pluto, nothing active in the USA Sibly chart for this year implies that sort of critical mass. Even the Uranus transit is insufficiently provocative by itself to upset the applecart. About all we can expect from the Uranus transit to Pluto is what we've already seen thus far in 2018: sporadic, sudden downturns in the financial markets in response to dicey news, from which the markets recover quickly.

Instead, 2018 is a pause — perhaps a pregnant pause, but a pause nonetheless — a year of gradual recovery where our psychic batteries are slowly recharging. Much of what's happening that might be important is occurring beneath the surface, out of sight and away from the video crawls of breaking news alerts, despite the daily melodramas of conflicting narratives continually vying for the attention of the national nervous system from every form of media. From the overall perspective of transits to the USA Sibly chart in 2018, most especially Neptune trine the USA Sun and inconjunct the USA Saturn, most of that is probably more superficial than substantial. This year is a temporary lull within a larger storm.

Overall, the 2018 transits seem to me to indicate that the national and state midterm elections in November are likely to draw a large turnout of voters, but with only moderate chances of surprises in the outcome. Will the much-anticipated "blue wave" of the voter pendulum swing back? I don't know. Maybe, maybe not.

I would assert that everything I know about the astrology of these times, whether from the USA chart specifically or the more universal transits currently active in civilizational astrology, strongly suggests that candidates for office would be well advised to *not* move toward or run from the center. That strategy, long employed by the Democrats but less by the Republicans, seems to me doomed to failure at this point. The "center" is empty. Appeals to the centrist "middle" will probably be met with indifference by the voters. America is in the throes of extreme partisanship. In politics, passion rules, mostly in the form of sustained anger. Whether candidates for office wave a red or blue flag, chances of winning are better if the color is bold. Pastels or purples are losers.

# 2019 USA Sibly Major Active Cycles (Transits)

♃♂♂♂♂..... *Jupiter oppose USA Mars; square USA Neptune*  
♄♂♂♂♂♂♂♂♂..... *Saturn oppose USA Sun; square Saturn & Chiron; inconjunct Mars*  
♅♂♂..... *Uranus sextile USA Venus*  
♇♂♂♂♂♂♂♂♂..... *Pluto square USA Chiron; inconjunct USA Mars; trine USA Neptune*

Compared to 2018's transits, 2019 is entirely different. Where 2018 is astrologically a year of watchful waiting and lack of tangibility, 2019 is like a massive block of granite that sits in the middle of the road and blocks our way ahead. At least as indicated by the astrology of major transits in the USA chart, 2019 is a much more important year.

Politically, if the Democrats regain the majority in the House, that will chasten President Trump and set us on a road toward more serious consequences. If the Republicans retain their hold over both legislative chambers (House and Senate), that will embolden Trump and set us on a much different but equally serious path. Either way, we will crash into a solid wall of resistance.

Socially/culturally, 2019 brings the "Us/Them" polarity to a head in America. If it seemed that our division into angry tribalism had gotten about as bad as it could get, 2019 may show us the full repercussions of extreme polarization. Is civil war around the corner? I don't know, but astrology strongly suggests that any sort of national unity or public consensus will be unlikely in 2019-2021.

Economically, 2019 will almost certainly bring further challenges in national finances and monetary systems. Business and money are at the heart of the USA Sibly chart as central themes (8th house Sun, with Saturn in the 10th house ruling the 2nd), and 2019's major transits are powerfully connected to both arenas in difficult ways. Am I predicting another financial collapse as in 2008? I'm not willing to go that far, but I am concerned. Many astrologers believe that America's Pluto return in 2021-2023 (exact in 2022) is a prime indicator of economic/financial meltdown. I would be hard-pressed to disagree. Our financial systems seem to me much more fragile than we are told.

All this is strongly indicated for 2019 by the overall pattern of conflicted transits, but in particular by two simultaneous Saturn transits that dominate America's astrological landscape — one to the USA natal Sun and the other to our natal Saturn. These are both very serious transits. By "serious," I don't mean "headline news spectacular event" serious, but rather "deep in the gut" serious. Americans will be forced to examine who we've been, who we are, and who we will become. That process will occur with or without any provocative events to stimulate it. Major events may happen, of course, but I expect that their impact will be grinding over time rather than suddenly sensational.

To discuss 2019 in more depth, I need to write first about the Saturn-Sun cycle, which I've addressed partially in other, earlier commentaries. So, to paraphrase Shakespeare, "*Once again, dear friends, into the breach...*"

The Saturn-Sun cycle is (in my opinion) the most important cycle in personal astrology. Many other cycles in individualized astrology are important, but the Saturn-Sun cycle easily takes the blue ribbon for what and how much it reveals about the central themes of our lives. The cycle represents a 29-year period in four seven-year quarters during which an individual (or, in this case, a nation) sets a course that will determine the fundamental meaning and overall purpose of its life throughout the cycle. Whatever happens (by choice or fate) at the beginning of the cycle will tend to remain of major importance throughout the entire three decades. This is so whether or not we realize it at the time (we may or may not), and also whether or not the events seem important at the beginning. Changes will occur along the way, of course, but the central tone will continue to resonate, necessitating further actions as circumstances unfold over time.

If we plant an acorn, we cannot be certain that the seed will produce a stout and strong tree. The sapling or young tree could wither and die along the way for any of a thousand reasons, or it might flourish and mature into full flower and magnificent tree-ness. But what we can know for sure, right from the start, is that planting an acorn will result in an oak tree — not a pine, not a birch, not a fir. The same is true of the beginning of the Saturn-Sun cycle (and indeed, of all astrological cycle beginnings). We can't be sure of the eventual outcome, but we can know the essential nature and quality of what's growing.

The Saturn-Sun cycle addresses a fundamental issue: what can we create and do that will provide us with a meaningful life. Not necessarily a happy or easy life, but a life that has meaning. To determine our path, we bring together our core vitality and connection back to Cosmic Central (the Sun) with the custom-tailored challenges we face and obstacles we must overcome inside ourselves and in the outer world (Saturn). This "seed germination" of setting out on a path starts when Saturn in the heavens passes over the zodiacal position occupied by the Sun at our birth. That's the beginning of the Saturn-Sun cycle. As a convenient shorthand, I call it the Life Purpose cycle, since it involves a major investment of time, energy, activity, and — crucially — patience to produce a meaningful and fulfilling life-experience.

The Saturn-Sun cycle doesn't start at birth. It kicks in at some point between birth and age 29 (the chart tells us when), and then repeats every 29 years thereafter. In a full human life, we will get at least two complete Saturn-Sun cycles, and perhaps even three. No one gets four. Think of the cycle as a garden with four seven-year seasons: spring planting, summer tending, autumn harvest, and winter lying fallow. If we live long enough, we'll get two or three chances throughout our lives to see if we can grow a beautiful garden.

For a nation, more Saturn-Sun cycles are possible. America is reaching the halfway point in its eighth Saturn-Sun cycle of purpose and meaning, the first of which began in 1798. Each cycle represents another variation on a basic theme, revealed by the Sun and Saturn in the birth chart.

The actual transits of quarterly phase changes in Saturn cycles, usually about ten months long, are a time of forced stoppage in our life-journeys. Everything slows to a standstill in preparation for a 90° shift in direction. At the halfway point, as the Full Phase gets underway, the shift is away from forward development and toward realization of what was built. It's a little like building one's own house. At some point, the house under construction must cease being a project. We have to move into the house and live in it as our home.

In 2019, America's chart reaches that halfway point in our current Saturn-Sun cycle of central purpose and meaning as Saturn, now moving through Capricorn, arrives at the degree exactly opposite the USA's natal Sun in Cancer. That midpoint in the cycle implies the necessary transition from summer tending of the growing crops to the autumn harvest. The period of the transit itself announces that it's time to change direction. Over the following seven years, we reap whatever was sown, whether the fruits of the crop we grew are bountiful or sparse.

This doesn't mean that we have no choice about how to make the shift and what to do over the coming years. Choices are important, and our collective decisions matter. It does imply, however, that we have to work within the context and structure that now exists. This isn't starting over from scratch. Instead, it's about understanding the full implications of what we created (whether we did so consciously or unconsciously, with wisdom or foolishness, and for better or worse), then finding the best ways to put to good use whatever we created.

End Part One

*[In Part Two of this pair of commentaries, I'll discuss the history of America's Saturn-Sun cycles over the past century. Then I'll return to the year ahead in 2019 and write about some of the probable meanings for Saturn's opposition to the USA's natal Sun and their implications for America's necessary adjustments coming in the 2020s.]*

# The USA Chart in 2018-2019

## *Part Two*

by Bill Herbst

*Version 1.1 (posted on 11 September 2018)*  
*#6 of 10 essays currently compiled in the USA Sibly Chart Series*  
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*[In Part One of this pair of commentaries, I wrote about the major transits to the USA Sibly chart in 2018 and 2019. Now in Part Two, I'll discuss the history of America's Saturn-Sun cycles over the past century. Then I'll return to 2019 and write about some probable meanings for this year's Saturn opposition to the Sun.]*

For more than a century, America's Saturn-Sun cycles have been shaped by three fundamental questions about our sense of national Life-Purpose: *How wealthy can we become? How powerful do we want to be? And how shall we use our great wealth and power, both at home (to enhance American life, liberty, and our pursuit of happiness) and throughout the world?*

Let's take a trip down history lane and examine the Saturn-Sun cycles in America's chart over the past century.

### **1916-1944: The Rocky Road to Wealth and Influence**

In 1916, Saturn conjoined the Sun in the USA Sibly chart. That was the middle year of World War One, when America had geared up economically to supply the Allies and was preparing to enter the war. We had already made the decision to become a global empire, but that period astrologically marked the beginning of our status as an industrial giant and supreme economic force in the world. America became the bastion of both capitalism and freedom, as well as the breadbasket of the world. For the next decade and a half, we flexed our industrial muscles and economic might. America grew rich (or rather, some Americans did), but our infatuation with wealth backfired at the end of the 1920s.

Saturn's opposition to the USA natal Sun in 1930 ushered in the devastating results of over exuberance about the unfettered pursuit of money through capitalism's boom-and-bust market cycles. Our economy collapsed into the Great Depression, which brought America to its knees and held the nation in its grip for the next decade.

## 1945-1973: Economic Juggernaut and Cold War Superpower

In 1945, at the next Saturn-Sun conjunction, President Franklin Roosevelt died in office, America dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, World War Two ended, and the Cold War began. At that point, America reigned as the world's greatest imperial superpower. Throughout the first half of that new Saturn-Sun cycle of central purpose and core meaning, the Cold War became our preeminent obsession. We shifted very quickly from defeating Nazism to defeating Communism. An almost hysterical anti-communist frenzy arose in 1950s America, during which the military-industrial complex and the Deep State dug in and took root, along with the nuclear arms race.

In 1960, as Saturn opposed the USA Sun, we moved into the harvest phase, reaping what we had sown. John F. Kennedy was elected President, and the Cold War with the Soviet Union reached full crisis in the botched Bay of Pigs invasion and subsequent Cuban missile crisis. Those dodged bullets would be followed by Vietnam and the turbulence of the 1960s.

America's Saturn-Sun cycle, which is always about wealth, power, and security ran headlong into the global Uranus-Pluto cycle, which was about revolution, equality, and social justice — all of which are supposedly ideals that America espouses, but which tend to run counter to wealth and power. Much of the waning half of that cycle of purpose and meaning was spent with America in conflict with itself. Lyndon Johnson's presidency was torn apart trying to accomplish the social reforms of the Great Society (Uranus-Pluto) while simultaneously fighting the Vietnam War (Saturn-Sun).

A relevant aside is that some people suggest that had President Kennedy not been assassinated, the tragedy of Vietnam wouldn't have occurred. They hold that JFK's intention was to gradually defuse the Cold War and reverse the nuclear arms build-up, and that blame for Vietnam should be laid squarely upon President Johnson. I find that explanation far too simple. Kennedy, as a creature of his times, was a committed Cold Warrior, as were most of Kennedy advisors, the so-called "best and brightest." Astrologically, the 1960s were the full phase of that Saturn-Sun cycle in America, implying that at the level of government, the decade was the result of the previous 15 years of Cold War confrontation. It was not a time of spring planting, but of autumn harvest.

The radical developments of that decade, including the peace movement, were essentially out of synch with the full phase of America's Saturn-Sun cycle. Instead, they were tuned to the birth of a new Uranus-Pluto cycle in civilizational astrology that applied to humanity as a whole and brought a tidal wave of revolution that challenged authority and tradition. What I'm implying here is that, during the 1960s, those of us who were turned on by the rebellion of the counter-culture were essentially breaking with America, which, following two World Wars and a Great Depression, had happily returned to conservatism. What felt empty and hollow to us felt secure, safe, and reassuring to the majority of Americans.

Kennedy assassination conspiracy advocates often assert that the President was taken out by the Deep State to prevent any movement toward rapprochement with the Soviet Union. I don't know that this is literally the case, but, considered astrologically, I have to grudgingly admit that such a theory makes a certain sense, whether factual or mythic. The military-industrial complex was part of the crop we sowed in the Saturn-Sun cycle that began in 1945. By the 1960s, it had grown robust and huge, and America reaped the inevitable results of what it had sown, in consequences that were both impressive and terrible. Some Americans were horrified by the extent of our powerful economic militarism. Most Americans were proud of it. Most Americans still are.

## 1974-2002: American Exceptionalism and History's End

In 1974, at the culmination of the Watergate cover-up, Saturn once again conjoined the USA Sun, starting yet another 29-year Saturn-Sun cycle of purpose and meaning. During the transit, President Richard Nixon resigned, insuring that the age-old struggle between corruption and justice would be a significant part of the cycle for decades to come. Shortly after, the Vietnam War finally ended, closing out a tragic period in the Cold War against communism.

Cracks had begun to appear in the American Dream. Americans were exhausted and increasingly disillusioned, and a malaise took hold. Ronald Reagan rode to the rescue, however, and turned the new cycle into a celebration of unrestrained capitalism and the unapologetic quest for material gain.

American Exceptionalism also became part of the central theme of that Saturn-Sun cycle. Our belief in our own innate goodness was seemingly restored, along with conspicuous consumption and "traditional" American values. A fundamentalist Christian revival garnered millions of followers. The pursuit of wealth and infinite abundance returned (with a vengeance). Former hippies and radicals became stock brokers, and it was once again "Morning in America." Or so we told ourselves.

At the halfway point of the cycle in 1989, as Saturn again opposed the USA Sun, the Berlin Wall came down, followed in short order by the collapse of the Soviet Union, and America emerged victorious from the Cold War. Capitalism had won, although Wall Street's euphoria was already tarnished by the ongoing Savings and Loan scandal. Greed was now considered a good thing, and the headlong pursuit of wealth was extolled, despite a disturbing economic inequality that was clearly on the rise. The coastal and urban 'haves' began to separate from the flyover and rural 'have nots.'

We had already exported much of our manufacturing base to the cheap labor factories of the Third World and shifted away from industry to the FIRE economy (**F**inance, **I**nsurance, and **R**eal **E**state). The hard-won 20th-century gains for workers by the labor movement were steadily dismantled, aided by Republican propaganda. The "wisdom of the market" became a neoliberal religion. Big Business and Wall Street created financial schemes that made them seem like

wizards and believe that they were indeed the Masters of the Universe. Humility gave way to hubris as the end of history was announced. America was now the world's sole superpower.

But our wild celebration proved slightly premature. The dark shadow of corruption kept dogging America's heels. Wages stagnated despite increased worker productivity. Then, in the final years of the cycle, with Pluto smack on the Ascendant of the USA Sibly chart, 9/11 shattered our illusions of omnipotence and safety. That was a foreshadowing of things to come.

## 2003-2032: Overreach and Imperial Decline

America's current Saturn-Sun cycle began in 2003. By far, the single most important event of that year was the American military invasion of Iraq and the subsequent overthrow of Saddam Hussein's Iraqi regime. What began as a stunning military victory quickly went sour, however, devolving within a year into a terrible quagmire out of which sectarian violence emerged in an insurgency that grew to monstrous proportions. Of the many ham-fisted misadventures of the American empire over more than a century, the invasion of Iraq was arguably the most egregious blunder of all, a tragic mistake of immense proportions for America, for Iraq and the Middle East, and perhaps even for the world.

That series of events set a tone for the entire purpose-and-meaning cycle to come (2003-2032) in America's chart. Our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have continued since then without resolution, and with no end currently in sight.

Other major developments that proved momentous also began during the initial "seeding" phase of this current Saturn-Sun cycle. The frenzied real estate housing mortgage bubble was one, whose bursting in 2006 led directly to the financial meltdown of huge investment banks in 2008, followed by a massive bailout to keep the game going. The subsequent economic "recovery" enriched those in the top 10%, but the biggest winners were the billionaire class. The losers were most Americans on the bottom half of the wealth ladder.

In addition, the dramatic rise of the Internet, the smart phone revolution, and the birth of social media arose like mushrooms, seemingly overnight. The technology revolution has so completely altered the economic and cultural landscape of America and the world that day-to-day, ordinary life now is shockingly different from what it was a mere two decades ago. The ways we lived even 40 or 50 years ago now seem like ancient history, and the early 20th century might as well be the Stone Age. Meanwhile, our every mouse click and swipe are tracked and logged. Algorithms determine what we see. Brave New World is here, and the future is hurtling toward us faster than anyone can process. The pace of change is downright dizzying.

I cannot repeat often enough that the full phase of the Saturn-Sun cycle represents reaping what was sown. For better or worse, for good or ill, we are

confronted by the results of our own actions. Whether we were wise or foolish, conscious or unconscious in what we built, now we get the results. The challenge is not to start anything from scratch, but to expand our understanding and perspective about possible new uses for what we created and brought into manifestation. In both real and metaphorical ways, first we build, then we share. If what we build is positive, the sharing can be joyous. If what we build is troubled, sharing is a way of salvaging our work and redeeming our sense of purpose and meaning.

To make the shift successfully from the 15 years of building during the waxing half of the cycle into the 15 years of sharing during the waning half requires a social adjustment. It requires realizations about consequences, as well as the willingness to include others.

For America as a nation, those realizations will demand increased awareness that we must cooperate with the rest of the world rather than dominate it. We'll be notified one way or another that acting unilaterally, as a law unto ourselves, doing whatever we choose, has not served us well in the past and will not serve us at all any longer. This will take much more than a single year and may be accompanied by unpleasant or even terrible shocks to awaken us to the realization of our common humanity in all its diversity.

If we get the message, we can make adjustments — political, diplomatic, economic, cultural, and even military — toward greater cooperation and better understanding. If we ignore the message, we'll suffer the repercussions during the 2020s by finding ourselves isolated and shunned by the world.

I hope we get the message.

# The USA Chart in 2020

## *Part One (of Four)*

by Bill Herbst

*Version 1.2 (posted on 18 September 2018)*  
*#7 of 10 essays currently compiled in the USA Sibly Chart Series*  
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### 2020 USA Sibly Major Active Cycles (Transits)

♃♁☉□♄	.....	<i>Jupiter oppose USA Sun; square USA Saturn (Jan-Feb)</i>
♃△♁♁♁	.....	<i>Jupiter trine USA Neptune, oppose Mercury (Feb-Nov)</i>
♃♁♁	.....	<i>Jupiter conjunct USA Pluto; trine Midheaven (Apr-Dec)</i>
♃△♁	.....	<i>Jupiter conjunct USA Pluto; trine Midheaven (Dec)</i>
♄△♁♁	.....	<i>Saturn trine USA Neptune; trine Midheaven (all year)</i>
♄♁♁♁	.....	<i>Saturn oppose USA Mercury; conjunct Pluto (all year)</i>
♅♁♁	.....	<i>Uranus sextile USA Venus (all year)</i>
♁□♁	.....	<i>Neptune square USA Mars (May-2021, not yet partile in 2020)</i>
♁△♁♁♁	.....	<i>Pluto trine USA Neptune; oppose USA Mercury (all year)</i>

Of the 14 transits listed for the USA chart in 2020, four stand out: Jupiter opposite the USA's Sun, Jupiter conjunct the USA's Pluto, Saturn opposite the USA's Mercury, and Saturn conjunct the USA's Pluto.

The year begins with a burst of national optimism as Jupiter opposes the USA's Sun. That's a single-pass transit, however, which has a very brief effective period — a mere two months at the outside. The rest of the year is more challenging and amounts to a power struggle that will intensify over 2020 and through the three years that follow.

### Background

As we leave the 2010s and move into the next decade of the 2020s, two different but interconnected levels are relevant in assessing astrologically the probable tone and possible meanings of that transition for America — as a nation, as a society, as a people, and as a powerful agent in world affairs.

The first factor is the ever-changing panorama of the ten outer-planet cycles that comprise what I call "civilizational astrology." These paired cycles apply to humanity as a whole — all of us — and indicate the particular symbolic qualities that are foremost in the archetype field during any particular time period. I use the phrase *archetype field* to describe the poetic "water around the fish" — the invisible ether that undergirds collective events, perceptions, thoughts, and

feelings. Other phrases also describe this ether: collective unconscious, zeitgeist, background radiation, whatever. I like *archetype field*.

2020 is an unusual and significant year in civilizational astrology, because three of its ten dyadic cycles are starting over. Three outer planets — Jupiter, Saturn, and Pluto, will be moving through Capricorn. That means that three cycles will begin anew: the 13-14 year Jupiter-Pluto cycle, the 20-year Jupiter-Saturn cycle, and the 31-38 year Saturn-Pluto cycle.

The Saturn-Pluto cycle begins in January 2020, the Jupiter-Pluto cycle follows with an eight-month gestation and birth from April through November 2020, and then the Jupiter-Saturn cycle kicks off in December 2020. The fact that they all begin within a one-year time span implies that developments and events in civilization during 2020 will be harbingers of things to come, revealing symbolic portents that will resonate for decades ahead.

All three cycles begin within an 8° arc of the zodiac from 23° Capricorn to 1° Aquarius. That implies that their correspondences will be focused on humanity's political, social, and economic structures (as opposed to other important human experiences, such as family, marriage, or education). From the perspective of astrology, we are entering a period where governments around the world will struggle to maintain their authority and will likely attempt to do so by any means possible, including authoritarian force. Revolts, rebellions, and coups seem to me inevitable, and no nation will be totally exempt from those possibilities.

The general meanings of these cycles go beyond a particular nation or individual to encompass all of humanity, but astrology allows us to see how their symbolism might be expressed for any individual or group. We do this by analyzing the personal transits that occur in each chart.

## Pluto in the USA Sibly Chart

In the birth chart I use for America, called the USA Sibly chart, the most important planetary symbol that will be activated soon by this trio of moving outer planets is Pluto.

As a symbol in astrology, Pluto tends to operate as a power source from deep within the unconscious that often bypasses conscious sentience completely. Thus, it functions as a motivation that is often deeply obsessive and compulsive. We may not realize how much our orientations and actions are being shaped by Plutonian urges that are deep but invisible to us until they burst into full view, almost like a volcanic eruption. Pluto makes us powerful, but it also may destroy us.

Pluto is not the most important astrological factor in the USA chart. Those distinctions go to two squares — from the Sun to Saturn and Mars to Neptune — which imply a national character that is tough and aggressive, and pragmatic yet

idealistic. Pluto, however, is the subterranean wild-card in the American archetype, both a great resource and a serious liability.

Located in late Capricorn in the USA chart, occupying the 2nd house while ruling the 12th, Pluto indicates the drive for self-worth (2nd house). Psychologically or spiritually, that means proving the value of the self by doing sustained good work. Pragmatically, it means amassing wealth. Good work is America's great resource, but the pursuit of wealth through money is our most striking liability.

From the end of our Civil War in the 19th century through the end of World War II in the 20th century, America became an industrial giant, a commercial empire, and a global power. Fueled by bountiful natural resources, a fortunate position (protected by two oceans), a genius for invention, an outsized appetite for big projects, and a willingness to work hard (aided by an influx of immigrant labor), America not only prospered, but became the envy of the world. This was the Plutonian drive in its most grounded dimension.

After the mid-20th century, however, America turned. From our position of dominance as an economic and military world superpower, the elites decided to outsource much of our heavy industry and manufacturing to countries around the world where labor was cheaper. We also chose to shift our compulsive pursuit of wealth from making tangible goods to financial services. We were rich, so we decided to use our amassed wealth to make money, relying on the global economy to provide products and components. We assembled goods rather than building them from scratch. Our obsession with money became all-consuming. This is the shadow aspect of Pluto's drive for self-worth.

Three of the five moving outer planets are about to start new cycles to America's natal Pluto. Jupiter, Saturn, and Pluto are all moving through Capricorn, and each will pass over the position of Pluto in America's chart. Two of these cycles begin in 2020 — Jupiter-Pluto and Saturn-Pluto. The third and most important, called the Pluto Return, meaning the beginning of a new Pluto-Pluto cycle, doesn't occur until 2021-2023 (with the exact start in 2022).

The Pluto Return is an extremely rare event. Since Pluto takes almost 250 years to complete one orbit around the Sun, no individual human being lives long enough to experience a Pluto Return. Not even close. Nations can, but few do. While many cultures have ancient roots, most have not had consistent governments. In terms of "sovereign states," America is now one of the oldest nations on earth, having existed since 1776 with a single continuous system of government. By contrast, a country such as Iran is far older than the USA as a culture, but much younger as a nation. In 1953, Iran's then-new secular democracy, formed after World War Two during the early phases of the Cold War and led by Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, was overthrown and the Shah reinstated (in a coup engineered by John Foster Dulles and carried out by the CIA). That regime lasted only 26 years before the Islamic Revolution led by the Muslim cleric Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah's monarchy in 1979 and replaced it Iran's current theocratic government.

So, America's Pluto Return is a singular event of potentially profound astrological importance — not only for the USA, but for the world as well, since we are such a powerful force in global affairs. Astrologers, especially here in America, have been awaiting this rare Pluto Return with a combination of great anticipation and somber concern, even dread. Since that event is still 3-4 years away, however, I won't go into the possible meanings in this commentary.

In June, I wrote and posted a commentary about the coming Saturn-Pluto cycle in mundane or civilizational astrology, which happens to nearly coincide this time with the Saturn-Pluto cycle in the USA chart. They are different — one applies for all humanity, the other specifically for the USA — but their coincidence in 2020 is meaningful. For readers who missed that or want to go back and re-read what I wrote then, here's a link to that commentary:

<http://www.billherbst.com/Comm99.pdf>

End Part One

*[In Part Two of this quartet of commentaries, I'll focus on America's decline and the three transit cycles to the USA's natal Pluto in 2020-2023 that have so many astrologers concerned about our financial and economic future.]*

# The USA Chart in 2020

## *Part Two (of Four)*

by Bill Herbst

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

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

### America's Decline

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

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

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

## The Coming Cycles to America's Pluto

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

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

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

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

In stark contrast, however, are other, less optimistic views of America's economic and financial condition. The stock market is disconnected from any real or intrinsic value, wages for workers are stagnant, and many people are unemployed because they've stopped looking for jobs, have dropped out of the work force, and aren't even factored into the unemployment statistics.

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

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

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

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

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

President Trump's long held belief that America has been victimized by other countries in "bad deals" has resulted in nullification of international agreements,

imposition of tariffs in trade wars, castigation of allies, and a general pullback from global cooperation. The “American Century” — where we helped rebuild a ravaged Europe and create a world order that has so far prevented another and presumably cataclysmic global war — is over. Despite our economic and military power, the U.S. finds itself increasingly isolated and alone.

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

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

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

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

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

The very idea of dedicated public service has eroded precipitously. President John F. Kennedy’s famous inaugural dictum — “Ask **not** what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country” — now seems quaint and anachronistic, the dusty relic of an earlier time of naïve idealism. This is, however, precisely what we need: a renewal of civic responsibility — local, state, national, and global. We need it from both the top down and the bottom up.

Hoping for saviors in the form of charismatic leaders will not be enough, and might even lead us further down the road to perdition without an accompanying grass-roots revival of citizen activism and dedicated social participation to serve the greater good.

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

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

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

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

End Part Two

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

# The USA Chart in 2020

## *Part Three (of Four)*

by Bill Herbst

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*[In Part Two of this four-part commentary about the USA chart in 2020, I discussed America's decline and the Saturn-Pluto and Jupiter-Pluto cycles that begin in the first year of the new decade. Now, in Part Three, I'll focus on the most important of the transits to the USA chart in 2020 — the simultaneous Saturn and Pluto oppositions to the USA's natal Mercury.]*

### More Major Transits

Following transiting Saturn's opposition to the Sun in the USA chart during 2019, which I wrote about in my commentary of two weeks ago, both Saturn and Pluto then oppose the USA's natal Mercury throughout 2020. As important as 2019 is astrologically, the first year of the next decade becomes even more critical.

Transits to Mercury in any natal chart imply periods of mental deliberation and decision. That is stretched to the very limit with simultaneous oppositions to America's natal Mercury from both Saturn and Pluto, which elevate those deliberations and decisions to a level of profound seriousness and great difficulty.

The Saturn opposition to Mercury represents the culmination (halfway point) of the current Saturn-Mercury cycle in the USA chart that began in 2004-2005. The cycle is about practical plans of the nation and the decisions that implement them. We will come face-to-face with the inevitable consequences of policies and actions that America undertook over the past 15 years. In addition, questions about leadership and authority (Saturn in the 10th house) come to a head.

The Pluto opposition to Mercury is also a culmination, but within a much longer cycle that dates back to its beginning over the years 1932-1936 during the depths of the Great Depression. That period was the prelude to World War II, the onset of FDR's New Deal (designed to save capitalism from its own worst excesses), and the bottom from which America rebounded over the next decade to emerge as an economic juggernaut and eventual global superpower. Because of Pluto's extremely elliptical orbit, the halfway point in America's current Pluto-Mercury cycle will have been reached in less than 90 years. (The waning half of the cycle will take another 160 years before the cycle starts over in 2178-2180.)

# The Mystery of Pluto

Pluto presents astrologers with a conundrum. Despite its demotion by astronomers to the reduced status of a minor planet, Pluto remains a potent symbol within astrology. All the various historical correspondences that accompany Pluto's discovery lobby for its great importance as a symbol of profound power in civilization through all implications of such power, for good and for ill. The 20th century was arguably the epoch of Pluto. The idea of realms of primal power within human and earthly existence that are invisible to us but exert tremendous influence is Plutonian. Historical correspondences include Freud's positing of the Unconscious in psychology and the parallel development of advertising and marketing as effective manipulators of people's desires and beliefs, the discoveries in science of the subatomic realm of quantum mechanics, the splitting of the atom and resulting benefits and terrors of nuclear energy, the shift in warfare during the 20th century to total war, where civilians are no longer exempt from harm — all these are considered Plutonian within astrology.

The most frequently used metaphor for Pluto's meaning and operation is that of a volcano. Seams or fissures within the earth's crust connect the molten core of our planet to its surface through volcanoes. Pressure builds, and volcanic eruptions are the eventual result. But volcanoes can remain apparently dormant for centuries. The science of volcanism is only beginning to understand why some volcanoes erupt while others don't, and when such eruptions will occur is still mysterious. Sometimes lava flows are moderate, as with Kilauea in Hawaii. These are called "effusive eruptions." Other times, violent eruptions are spectacular, as with Vesuvius in 79 A.D., Mount Tambora in 1815, and Krakatoa in 1883. The eruption of Mount St. Helens in 1980 was a mere burp compared to those much larger blow-outs.

Pluto's astrological meaning is often stated as "endings and beginnings," or "death and rebirth," or "transformation to an enlarged perspective." When fully expressed, Plutonian symbolism is both destructive and creative. Whatever existed before is swept away in a massive purging, clearing the ground for new growth. The problem for astrologers in interpreting transits to or from Pluto within a particular chart is that we don't know whether the correspondences in real life will be tangible or intangible, obvious or subtle. Undergoing a spiritual transformation of consciousness may share symbolic meanings with losing everything in an unavoidable disaster, but they sure as hell don't feel the same to the ego.

Sometimes we see the "expected" correspondences — provocative external changes produced by the release of massive and irresistible power that purges the old and makes way for the new. But sometimes what happens is not so obvious. When transiting Pluto conjoined the Sun in America's chart during the mid-1920s, the financial changes astrologers studying that chart would expect were not accompanied by destruction or disaster. But the "irrational exuberance" of financial speculation during the 1920s led directly to the Crash of 1929 and the subsequent Great Depression of the 1930s. Astrologically, the 1920s were the set up to the 1930s.

Similarly, when Pluto opposed the USA natal Sun in 2014-2015, nothing obvious happened in the financial sector. No crash, no new catastrophe. Instead, that two-year period accelerated the economic "recovery" from the financial meltdown of 2008 through low interest rates and massive increases of the money supply (quantitative easing by the Federal Reserve, essentially a bail-out for the big investment banks). Little was done, however, to reform the financial policies that had led to the 2008 unraveling. Is it possible that the same dynamic of extreme financial speculation followed by collapse that occurred in the 1920s-1930s might happen again in the 2010s-2020s? Supposedly, safeguards were implemented to prevent any such recurrence, but those regulatory precautions have been steadily dismantled over the past decades.

## Pluto Opposite Mercury in the USA Chart

Mercury's general meaning in the charts of nations centers around education, communications, and transportation. How does the nation approach decision-making? What do people tend to think about most? Mercury in Cancer in the USA chart (along with Sun, Venus, and Jupiter) implies that America isn't strongly inclined toward rationality, but rather to the more emotional values of need-fulfillment and security. Also, America has been and thus far remains a culture dedicated to personal rather than mass transportation. The entire structure of our society has been built around the automobile. Trains are mostly relegated to shipping freight rather than moving people.

Added to these qualities is Mercury's placement in America's natal 8th house opposed to Pluto in the 2nd. The issue of value becomes paramount — *How much is America worth? And how do we use our value?* This means our system of finances and allocation of money. The interpretation of that natal opposition between Mercury and Pluto implies that America spends much of its thinking time focused on money and wealth, and that this drive will be primal, potent, at least partially unconscious, and quite possibly obsessive.

Mercury is always close to the Sun in astrological charts, never more than 28° away. In the USA chart, Mercury is 11° behind the Sun. So, any transit to the USA Sun is always followed by the same transit to the USA Mercury. Pluto conjoined the USA Sun in the mid-1920s, then opposed the USA Mercury in the early-1930s. Pluto opposed the USA Sun in 2014-2015, and opposes the USA Mercury in 2020.

Since Mercury is opposite Pluto natally, the major alignments of transiting Pluto to the USA's Mercury will be more powerful than if the two planets were unaspected in the birth chart. The worst depths of the Great Depression coincided with Pluto's conjunction to the USA's natal Mercury. In 1980-1982, Pluto made its waxing square to the USA Mercury. Those years began the Reagan revolution, where neoliberal "supply-side, trickle-down" economics reaffirmed unfettered capitalism and the headlong pursuit of wealth. In both the

1920s and 1980s-1990s, the short-term results were stunning as financial booms. But both led inevitably to busts.

Is America headed to yet another financial disaster? Will the economy be taken down by a monetary implosion? I don't know, but the astrology of the USA chart provides no reassurance to the contrary.

With transiting Saturn and Pluto simultaneously opposed to the USA's natal Mercury in 2020, followed by America's Pluto Return in 2021-2023, the astrological implications are daunting, to say the least. We are coming to yet another major crossroads.

Although a financial and/or economic crisis is astrologically the most likely trigger for this watershed national crossroads, the USA chart reveals at least one other possible cause that might emerge to provoke significant changes in American leadership, social structure, and decision-making.

End Part Three

*[In Part Four, the final commentary of this quartet, I'll discuss the social changes already underway in America concerning gender relations through the #Me Too and #Time's Up movements, and the potential implications in the USA chart for what might develop.]*

# The USA Chart in 2020

## *Part Four (of Four)*

by Bill Herbst

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*[In Part Three of this four-part commentary about the USA chart in 2020, posted two weeks ago, I discussed the Saturn and Pluto opposition to the USA's natal Mercury. Now, in Part Four's final installment, I'll focus on a very different possible meaning for Pluto in the USA chart that could turn out to be a significant movement as the new decade opens.]*

### Pluto Redux

The primary interpretation for Pluto in the USA Sibly chart, positioned late in the sign Cancer, occupying the 2nd house and ruling the 12th, opposite Mercury, concerns the powerful but deeply unconscious drive to amass material riches through work, business, and economics— personal wealth , family wealth , and national wealth. To suggest that America is and has always been obsessed with money is an understatement. The shift toward America's becoming a global empire that began late in the 19th century and coincided with the closing of continental expansion and the end of the Western frontier was motivated by economics. At that time in our history, America produced more food and goods than it could consume, and empire seemed to many the natural answer, through the opening of foreign markets.

Over the next century, America's transformation into a global superpower was always driven by our own economic interests. Foreign policy increasingly became an arm of capitalism, especially in the ideological conflict with Soviet Communism starting as early as the Russian Revolution in 1917, but ramping up to fever pitch as the Cold War immediately followed defeat of Germany and Japan in World War II.

Throughout the 20th century — correctly dubbed “the American Century” — the U.S. enjoyed the ethos of being a “can do” nation and people. No industrial project was too big for us, no invention beyond our creative means. Underplayed as a crucial contributor to our economic success was the fact that it was fueled by the influx of immigrants willing to work hard for low wages, in return for a better future for their children. The titans of industry who owned most of the companies and became unimaginably wealthy sometimes started out as immigrants, but eventually solidified their social position among the ruling elites of white Northern European stock. All this is reflected in the USA chart, with Pluto as a significant factor.

## Another Interpretation for Pluto in the USA Chart

There is, however, another interpretation for Pluto's meaning in the chart. It doesn't leap out at first glance, and some astrologers might consider it a stretch, but I'll make a case for it in this commentary. It doesn't invalidate or supersede the more obvious monetary and economic interpretation of Pluto about which many astrologers have written (including me, most recently in the three previous parts of this quartet of commentaries about America in 2020 and the opening text above. Instead, it augments the basic interpretation and casts it in a new light.

The USA Sibly chart has a particular emphasis on sex. That emphasis isn't straightforward — it's definitely twisty, potentially confused, and historically difficult. The USA chart indicates that America is both culturally conservative and politically radical (Cancer Sun and Aquarius Moon). The nation tries to square the circle between hard-core traditionalism and forward-thinking progressivism, often with great inner conflict.

In the astrological houses, which specify different arenas of life-experience, four sexual areas exist. These are the houses termed "Succeedent" and concerned with judgment or evaluation of experience. Succeedent houses are the 2nd, 5th, 8th, and 11th. Each of the four is associated with numerous meanings, and included among them is a particular expression of sexual orientation, experience, and meaning.

The **2nd house** connects to sex as pure, self-absorbed sensuality. No "relatedness" exists here — it is metaphorically similar to the newborn infant suckling at the mother's breast. This is the primal satisfaction of warmth, milk, and love, driven by vital, biological imperatives. The 2nd house in any chart reveals the natural orientation toward fundamental sensuality — sex as personal pleasure for the self.

The **5th house** is the area of creative performance through intentional persona. Here is the actor onstage and the audience, with the actor doing everything possible to please the audience, but remaining the center of attention. In different terms, the 5th house is other-directed but still personal. The 5th is the area of the role of "the good lover" — pleasing a partner through one's own creative display of prowess. The payoff is the beloved's happiness and subsequent gratefulness. The risk is being judged by the beloved as inadequate.

The **8th house** is the arena of union, of two separate individuals merging into oneness. This is tantric sexuality, the great mystery of sexual energy as a means to transform the self. In physical terms, it is the orgasm — the temporary loss of ego control and ordinary personal consciousness during the momentary surge of kundalini. The French phrase, "*le petite mort*" (the mini-death) refers to the surrender of the small self as consciousness cascades into transcendent, if temporary, merging with another.

**11th house** sexuality is the area of social mores, the attitudes and orientations toward sex that are held by one's society or culture. This is the intellectual dimension of sexuality. For some people, sex is proscribed by the beliefs or norms of their social groups. Others may be inclined to break the rules and move sex into previously forbidden realms. The 11th house reveals this in charts.

## Pluto in the 2nd House

In the USA Sibly chart, Pluto is in the 2nd house. This fuses the frequently unconscious drive for power of Pluto with the self-centered sensuality of the 2nd house. The linkage of Pluto with the 2nd house is not inherently negative — the intensity and passion of Pluto can be beautiful and profound, and powerful sensuality can be deeply pleasurable for both lover and beloved. The problem arises when that drive takes the form of domination through sex. In that case, no relationship exists, no negotiations conducted, and no agreements forged. The object of one's desire and pleasure is seduced if possible or overwhelmed if necessary, then consumed.

Over the past 50 years, we have learned a great deal about sexual assault. The statistics about sexual abuse in America and around the world reveal how common such violations are. Anyone can be the target of sexual abuse, but women and children are far more likely to suffer.

Throughout much of the 200,000 year history of the human species, gender equality was not an issue. We lived in small groups, based on kinship, as hunter/gatherer/foragers. Groups were as likely to be matriarchal as patriarchal in social structure. Women and men worked together.

While humans have always been contentious, conflict between such groups was limited. With the onset of civilization 11,000 years ago, that changed. Domestication of animals for labor, the beginnings of agriculture, possession of land, and ownership of resources all fostered competition for wealth acquisition, which promoted the assertiveness of masculinity. Men took power in civilization, gradually cementing their dominance, and women found themselves in the back seat. Humanity has struggled with gender problems ever since.

Feminist social movements arose in the 19th and 20th centuries to restore women's dignity and respect, and to allow full participation in society. Despite ebb and flow, these often radical movements have achieved significant gains — women's suffrage in the right to vote, the right to own property, and even acceptance of their presence in the workplace and the military. America and most of the world remain stubbornly patriarchal, however, and women still have a long way to go in reclaiming their power.

The recent rise of the #MeToo and #Time'sUp movements mark a major step forward in this struggle. The prevalence (and de facto acceptance) of sexual abuse has remained a dirty secret until now, kept under wraps by a combination

of factors, from the existing male-dominant power structures in society to women's very realistic fears that they will be dismissed and not believed if they come forward to bear witness. Justice in the sexual arena has been slow to evolve.

In addition, any social movement that arises quickly and powerfully after a long and seemingly invisible gestation tends to inadvertently provoke serious backlash in opposition, no matter how justified its goals. Once released, long-repressed passions galvanize supporters as a flood of emotion is released, but those same passions also stiffen resistance among disbelievers. Reason and a sense of proportion are not typically characteristic of these early periods of social revolution, whether for or against.

Some people continue to believe that gender inequality is a peripheral sideshow, essentially just another facet of identity politics based on presumed grievance. I disagree. I think such people are missing the Big Picture. In a world facing extraordinary and urgent crises — among them, catastrophic climate change that threatens not just human beings but all life on earth; huge and increasing disparities of wealth and privilege; economic systems based on infinite growth, unregulated extraction, and pure self-interest; the emptiness of consumerism; rampant militarism; and the continuing threat of nuclear war — we are not likely to come up with solutions to protect humanity and preserve civilization without a major rebalancing of masculine and feminine archetypes. This is not really about women versus men. It's about the masculine and feminine inside each of us.

By itself, the #MeToo revolution won't save us. Here in the early days of its arising, the movement has not yet found its sea legs. Just outing certain male predators for public shaming and punishment will not be enough. Nor will just electing more women to political office be sufficient to save us, either. Both of these changes, however, are necessary steps in the right direction.

In America, white men have been dominant and in power since the beginning of the nation. Sadly, they've made a mess of things, and nothing indicates the likelihood of their changing for the better. Since Donald Trump took office as President in 2017, backed by Republican majorities in both chambers of Congress, we've witnessed shocking displays of raw political power. None were more obvious than the recent confirmation of Judge Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court.

Trump himself — a self-admitted sexual predator, who cannot utter three sentences without lying, labels anyone who disagrees with him as "evil," projects all his own sins onto others, and has hoodwinked the most gullible 30% of the American public by stoking their worst instincts of racism, hatred, and division — has both captured and emboldened the Republicans. Winning at any cost is all that matters to them. The misogyny of so many of these old white GOP gargoyles, such as Mitch McConnell and John Kelly, would be appalling were it not so utterly predictable.

Who can challenge the scourge of Trump and the Republicans? Not the current Democratic Party, which has lost its way and survives only by losing. In our political duopoly, Democrats tend to be Republican Lite, beholden to corporations and the wealthy and supporting endless wars and increasing militarism.

For all the hope invested in the young, those under 30 are the least likely to vote. I hope that will change in the 2020s, but it hasn't changed yet.

No, the only force I know of that can rid us of Trump and the Republicans are women. Women who vote, and women who run for office. Those in command will not relinquish their power. Women must take it.

## Plutonian Power

In the early years of the coming decade, America's chart indicates that we are coming to a major Plutonian watershed, a time of dramatic transformation that may be more than any of us are prepared for. This includes the social, political, economic, and financial realms.

In 2020, both Jupiter and Saturn conjoin the USA's natal Pluto. Then in 2021-2023, the USA chart goes through its Pluto return. Coming as they do on the heels of the Uranus-Pluto square that began its destabilizing symbolism in 2007 and is now approaching its end, these three new Plutonian cycles imply that Something Big is already underway, although we cannot yet know exactly what will manifest or how. One need not be an astrologer to see these dynamics operating in America. The volcanic rumblings are plain to see for anyone who cares to look.

End Part Four

*[This concludes my four-part commentary on America's chart in 2020. At some point, I'll address more completely the USA chart in 2021-2023 (In December, 2017, I wrote an early commentary about America's Pluto Return). Right now, however, 2021 is still more than two years away, so I may wait until the new decade arrives and we know more about the real circumstances that will shape the new decade.]*