

Uranus-Pluto and the USA Chart

by Bill Herbst

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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.

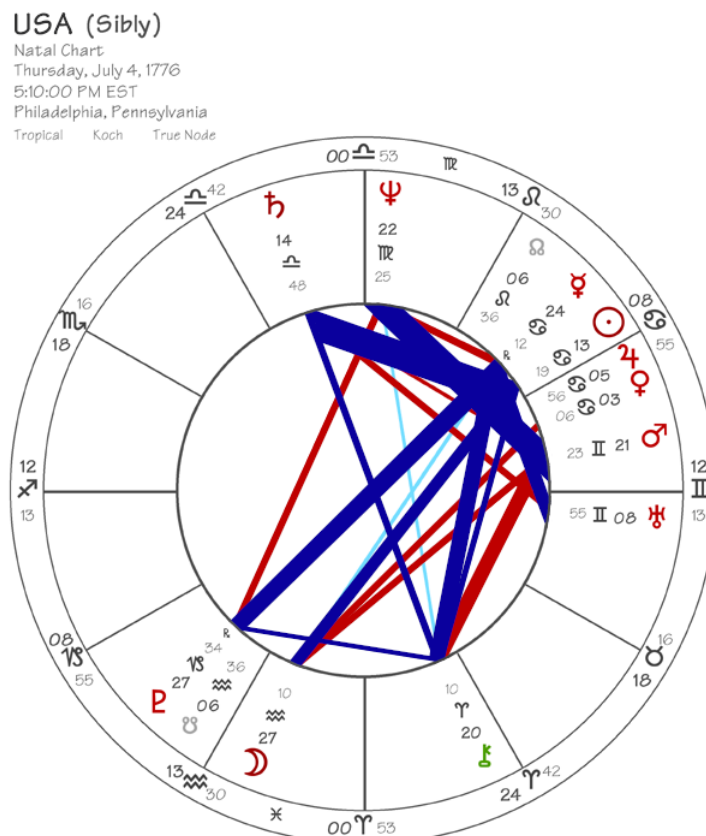
The Sibly data is the most common choice among astrologers for America's birth chart. It has been the subject of extraordinary scrutiny, passionately divided opinion, and even scholarly debates within astrology, and some astrologers insist that the time of day, or even the date itself, is incorrect. 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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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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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.

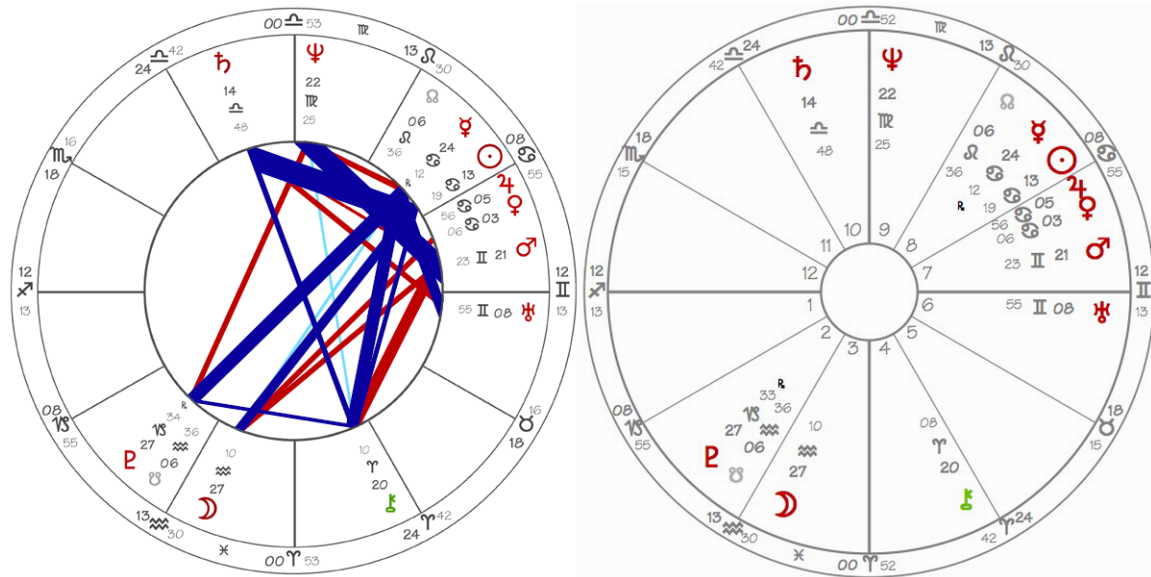
Although the economic high priests of the neoliberal religion (better known by its critics as "predatory capitalism") don't frequently discuss them, bubbles — with their inevitable, alternating booms and busts — are an essential facet of the dominant landscape in economics these days. Bubbles are asset 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.