

# Uranus-Pluto: Still Potent

by Bill Herbst

*Version 1.2 (posted on 26 June 2018)  
© 2018 by the author, all rights reserved*

I wasn't sure I'd get a chance to write another commentary about Uranus-Pluto, but here we are again. Even though less than two years remain of the 14-year effective period of the Uranus-Pluto alignment (2007-2020), we are seeing the fullest expression of the transit's symbolism. The current battle for America's soul and whatever remains of democracy in this country, provoked by the crisis over immigration across our southern borders from Central American families fleeing drug-cartel-inspired gang violence in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, is the most stunning example yet of Uranus-Pluto in action. Everything that's happened in America since 2007 — economic inequality, identity politics, culture wars, foreign military entanglements, widespread public mistrust of institutions and government, the uprising of ethno-nationalist populism, and our division into tribal factions — has led us to this current crossroads.

The crisis is not really about the refugees from Central America who seek asylum. While their plight is tragic, they are merely pawns in this conflict. Well, not quite pawns perhaps. Once again, it's the children who matter. Just as the young students at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School added a new and powerful element to the debate about gun control, so the children — some of whom are almost babies — of these desperate refugees are the reason that Something Big is happening now.

Impoverished (and thus illegal) migrants, most especially those from Central America, have had a hard time in America for decades. Whether they make it into our country to eke out subsistence as undocumented laborers or are nabbed by immigration authorities, their struggles haven't made a dent in most Americans' hearts, because adults (or even adolescents) are easily discounted and demonized. Tared with nasty epithets by racist xenophobes (such as Donald J. Trump), characterized as "criminals, drug dealers, and rapists," they are unworthy of consideration in the eyes of many frightened, angry Americans, and considered less than human, basically beneath contempt. The suffering of the young, however, is not so easily dismissed. The audio and video of little children who are terrified at the loss of their parents are the reason this crisis is happening. Even so, it's still not really about them.

No, this crisis is about Americans — who we are, what we stand for, and the kind of government we will allow. It's about the difference between America as an

Empire of fearful, reactionary, profit-based totalitarian cruelty and America as a beacon of hope for a world in danger of coming apart at the seams.

That question won't be resolved anytime soon, no matter how events play out over the coming months, but the staggering crisis concerning immigration that has recently exploded (after simmering for decades) is nonetheless an important moment in the ongoing struggle to somehow turn around the downward slide of a country that was founded on ideals of freedom, equality, and human rights.

The poem, "*The New Colossus*," written by Emily Lazarus in 1883, was inscribed in 1903 on a bronze plaque inside the State of Liberty's pedestal base and remains there to this day. The first stanza is not well known, but the bulk of the second stanza, essentially Lady Liberty's creed, is justifiably famous:

***"Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me.  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"***

Those sentiments are enshrined in American ideals of the open-door melting pot, but they have never been true in policy. Since the mid-19th century, immigration has been selectively restricted in America (largely on the basis of race) in both federal and state laws. As just one example among many, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 limited Chinese immigration to counter the so-called "Yellow Peril."

America may be a nation of immigrants, but Americans have been (and remain today) seriously divided in our attitudes toward immigration. The intensity of the conflict has waxed and waned over time, but it's always been present and unresolved. In periods of prosperity for Americans, where cynicism, hypocrisy, or complacency are widespread, the conflict tends to recede into the background. In times of passionate discontent or fear, however, the intensity ramps up and the conflict moves closer to center stage.

The current crisis is not about resolving the immigration question. Precious few people in America advocate completely open borders and unlimited immigration, despite the lofty sentiments of the Lady Liberty poem. In fact, the urgent dilemma we're witnessing is less about immigration *per se* than it is about the worsening global refugee crisis. The version we're experiencing emerged due to an increase of people fleeing from gang and drug cartel violence in Central America who seek a safe haven through asylum. Technically, the crisis is about refugees who are undocumented and attempting to enter the U.S. illegally, but even that is uncertain, since some evidence exists that what's happening includes some refugees who present themselves to authorities as required at legitimate points of entry.

No, this crisis is about how America treats the families and children of non-citizens. What precipitated the emergency wasn't merely Trump's "zero tolerance" policy, but rather the revelations through media coverage of refugee families being broken up and incarcerated by immigration authorities along our southern border. The audio and video of children who have been separated from their refugee parents, with great uncertainty about reunion with their families, are variations on the "little girl trapped in the well" stories that historically tugged at America's heartstrings. We're suckers for sentimentality.

The present situation is intensified because it's something other than an act of God or capricious fate. Under the direction of the Trump administration, the American government appears to be engaging in outright cruelty, perhaps deliberately. This isn't a story of unfortunate suffering. We are causing the suffering. And when that suffering is happening to families and children in ways we can hardly avoid seeing, the reactions are dramatic.

Cruelty is not rare; it occurs every single day in civilization, perpetrated by humans on other humans. In modern civilization, this is often done by governments through institutional cruelty, which is coldly impersonal. Mostly, however, the public doesn't know about it, because the government tries to keep it secret. An intentional cloak of invisibility hides it from us — out of sight, out of mind. I daresay that, if the media hadn't presented audio and video evidence of freaked-out children incarcerated in facilities set up as impromptu internment camps that are effectively jails, the current crisis wouldn't have arisen.

The American public is almost evenly divided about this problem. In polling conducted last week, almost half the respondents felt that punishment is warranted for illegal immigrants — including refugees seeking asylum — as a measure of toughness. That's the Trumpian stance. Slightly more than half, however, voted for kindness rather than punishment and are disturbed by what's happening. The majority of Americans don't want to think of our country and ourselves as coldly cruel. We like to believe that our government is fair and just, and that we are kind-hearted. The sight of children in detention, forcibly separated from their parents, challenges those assumptions.

This past week's Time magazine cover, with its photoshopped image of a little refugee girl crying while President Trump looms over her, sparked a political kerfuffle about journalistic "integrity" and fact-checking. The video of that little girl crying while her mother was patted down by a U.S. immigration officer went viral, so Time used the image. Accusations immediately arose from the right that the child was never separated from her mother, who had already been deported in 2013 for attempting to enter the country illegally. And so the political battle to win the hearts and minds of Americans continues by any and all means — facts, half-truths, fictions, lies, whatever. It's damned near impossible to tell them apart anymore. The ends justify the means for both pro-Trump and anti-Trump forces in the war to determine who will wield power in America.

Do I have a dog in this fight? Sort of, but I'm not sure where "my side" is. Yes, I loathe Trump and all he stands for, but — as I've written often — I don't feel that getting rid of Trump will magically solve our problems. Although I don't like it, I understand the all-too-human tendency toward aggrieved scapegoating, anger at elites, and rejection of government that undergird the populist-nationalist-nativist political movements that have arisen with such fury in America and Europe, but I don't trust those crusades as far as I can throw them. The hardcore supporters from Trump's base who show up at his rallies frankly scare the hell out of me in much the same way that, had I been Chinese, I would have been terrified by the Red Guard purges that ravaged China's society during the Cultural Revolution there during the 1960s. Zealots of all stripes frighten me.

I don't have a personal stance on immigration. My parents were garden-variety, middle-class American bigots. They weren't KKK members or extremists, but both my mother and father believed that blacks were inferior to whites (lazy, shiftless, and less intelligent), and Jews were equally suspect in ways that were never clear to me. I've always been aware that I have prejudiced family imprints lurking inside me, although I try not to let that influence my attitudes and actions.

My concerns are for compassion rather than cruelty, and care rather than harm. Those are guiding principles for me, but these days especially, they no longer translate easily into obvious political or even social allegiances.

I certainly believe that Trump doesn't give a damn about human rights or humanitarian treatment of refugees. He cares only about the optics of his Reality-TV presidency. During the campaign, Trump promised that he (and only he) could stop illegal immigration, and he's making good on that promise to his base. The Executive Order Trump signed last week (after denying that he could), supposedly to stop the separation of refugee parents and their children, actually takes the zero tolerance policy even further. The Order mandates that families will now be held together in detention (i.e., jail), but crossing the border "illegally" has been changed from a civil to a criminal offense. This means that as soon as criminal charges are filed against detainee refugee parents, their children will still be forcibly taken from them.

Now Trump wants to immediately deport all illegal immigrants with no due process at all. None. Nada. Zip. No surprise there. I suppose someone will make the case that, in a weird sort of way, bypassing entirely the legal justice system might be less inhumane than criminal arrest, incarceration, trial, and eventual deportation anyway, although arguably that amounts to sending refugees straight back to the hell from which they sought deliverance. The only silver lining here is that the courts will throw out that plan as unconstitutional in about two seconds.

Will the 2,000 children already separated from parents be reunited with their families any time soon? Various government officials give different answers, but no response seems dependable or trustworthy. Immigrant groups and social justice associations are already filing lawsuits (which has been occurring since Trump took office across the entire spectrum of his attempts to dismantle the federal government). Since the Republicans in Congress won't stand up to Trump, the courts are the last bastions against descent into chaos.

I am reminded once again, as I am so often in these disturbing times, of the famous quote from lawyer Joseph N. Welch spoken to Senator Joe McCarthy in June, 1954, during the Army-McCarthy hearings — a scathing question about McCarthy's total lack of conscience that precipitated his downfall from power into disgrace:

***"Until this moment, Senator, I think I never really gauged your cruelty or your recklessness... You have done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir? At long last, have you left no sense of decency?"***

In astrological terms, this current upwelling of pathos and outrage is yet another Uranian shock, one more chance to rouse Americans from our hypnotic slumber. I doubt that it will do much to reduce the pandemic of primal rage that plagues us — rage that lashes out at any presumed scapegoat — but it might have at least some effect (although how much is unknown) on the large percentage of Americans who are not hell-bent on destruction. The question posed throughout the 2010s by the Uranus-Pluto symbolism is whether an awakening is possible. Are we fated to continue sinking into mindless, heartless consumerism as captives to predatory capitalism's sole value — pursuit of material wealth, where money is all that matters and screw everyone else — or might we have even a snowball's chance in hell of waking up and remembering our humanity?

I don't know the answer to that question, at least not one that is particularly optimistic, but here we are again, at yet another crossroads. I hope that more Americans will choose the better angels of our nature.