

Reasons for Optimism, Reasons for Pessimism

by Bill Herbst

*Version 1.4 (posted on 7 April 2020)
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Reasons for optimism:

- Every pandemic in recorded history has ended. They start, they grow, they rage, then eventually they fade out and end. This one probably will, too. And that will happen no matter what we do or don't do.
- A certain percentage of human beings are moderately sane, capable, and willing or able to rise to the occasion during a crisis. Not a majority, perhaps, but at least a plurality. This percentage is probably similar in the general population and the ruling elites. Enough of those people probably exist for us to collectively overcome the fecklessness, bat-shit crazy beliefs, and stunning stupidity of the damned fools.
- There are fewer Republicans than Democrats in this country. Thank God. Yes, the Republicans are better at winning elections, but they're terrible at governing. I mean, Republicans don't believe in government to begin with, so their devout intention once elected is to destroy it. Not that the Democrats are any great prize...
- Greed and selfishness don't look so rosy during a pandemic. Though not impossible to mask, their cruelty and disdain are more difficult to hide.
- The pandemic will, to some extent, melt away the veneer of lies and other bullshit put out constantly by the damned fools, including those who would keep us hypnotized. At least for awhile.
- Collectivist cultures (such as South Korea) do better at combating a pandemic than Individualistic cultures (such as Italy and America). Even Individualistic societies, however, undergo at least some course correction during a prolonged crisis as they painfully discover that their vaunted, sacred individuality is a recipe for death and disaster. Replace "individuality" with "freedom," and the same applies. Cultures that value obedience over personal freedom fare better in a crisis. Those qualities aren't either/or absolutes, of course, but rather about proportion and balance. No culture leans more strongly toward individual freedom than America, however, so we do better in good times and worse in bad ones. Can Americans pull together when necessary? Many of us can,

thankfully. That some of us can't or won't doesn't cancel out the goodness of the many.

- Astrologically, America leans toward optimism. Various dates and times have been suggested by astrologers for America's birth, spurring exhaustive research and lively debate. Of all the numerous natal charts that are used for the USA, far and away the most popular among astrologers is called the Sibly chart — named for 18th-century English physician and astrologer Ebenezer Sibly, who asserted that the Declaration of Independence was formally signed on July 4th, 1776, at 5:10 p.m. local time in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. A decade later, in 1787, Sibly published the chart he erected for that date and time. That became the first ever birth chart for the United States of America. It remains to this day the most popular astrological chart for the U.S.

Despite considerable contention about the time of day the Declaration was signed, I prefer that chart myself, since I feel that of all the many charts proposed the Sibly USA chart best describes the American character and culture, as well as having a pretty darned good track record of accurate correspondences with major events in American history. For instance, both the botched 2000 Presidential election and 9/11 happened during Pluto's once-every-250-year passage across the chart's Ascendant, with 9/11 occurring less than one month after Pluto's final exact pass. That's about as dead-on accurate as it gets in astrology.

Here's the optimism part: The Sibly chart for the USA is Sagittarius Rising.

For those among my readers who are novices about astrology, the "Ascendant" sign is the section of the ecliptic (i.e., the zodiac of twelve signs) that was rising over the eastern horizon at the moment of birth, as viewed from that location. In terms of beginner's textbook-style natal astrology, the Ascending or Rising Sign is important in the assessment of character, second only to the position of the Sun.

The Ascendant (eastern horizon) is the point in a natal chart that symbolically indicates natural, spontaneous self-expression outward into the environment. The Sun (by sign, houses, and planetary aspects) reveals our inner orientation, the way we organize and interpret reality from within, as well as how we create meaning and coherence in our lives, while the Ascendant shows who we are visibly in attitude and behavior as we interact with the outer world. Think of the Ascendant as how others see us, rather like a lens through which the vital energy of our inner selves (Sun) is focused and expressed.

Sagittarius Rising implies that Americans are optimistic by nature — despite whatever tragedies we suffer or create. Given Jupiter and Venus conjoined, America's psychological buoyancy often expands to the point of cockeyed optimism. It makes us feel good about ourselves.

As a country, the Sibly chart suggests that no “reasons” for optimism are required. Seeing the glass as half full rather than half empty is embedded into our national character. At the level of basic textbook natal interpretation, the Sibly USA chart reveals that our national optimism is linked to bountiful natural resources, business acumen, and substantial material wealth (compared to many other nations and cultures).

Reasons for pessimism:

- We’re fucked. We’ve always been fucked, we’re still fucked, and the bill for how fucked we are is coming due.
- All the USA charts erected for July 4th, 1776, have Pluto (which was then undiscovered) in the 28th degree of Capricorn. That means that America is soon coming up on its Pluto Return. The Sibly USA chart — my favorite — places Pluto in the chart’s 2nd House, which implies that we are and have always been obsessed with “self worth” — ownership, money, and material wealth. Pluto’s rulership of the 12th house in the Sibly chart reveals additionally that our headlong, no-holds-barred pursuit of wealth is an unconscious fantasy, a collective dream, and that it’s all too easy for us to lose our way by mistaking illusion for reality where wealth is concerned. Well, duh. Anyone with half a brain can see that plainly in American culture.

The fact that Pluto, having made one complete trip around the zodiac (ecliptic) since America was founded, is about to return to its natal position in the U.S. chart is a Very Big Deal in astrology. Most nations in the world today aren’t 244 years old. Their cultures may be, but their forms of government aren’t. For instance, China is ancient, but the People’s Republic of China is a mere 70 years old, because it was formally established in 1949. So, the USA’s having been around for a quarter millennium with a single, consistent Constitution is rare to begin with.

The exact alignment of America’s Pluto Return occurs from January 2022 through October 2023, but we can add at least two years on either side, with 2020-2021 as the onset phase and 2024-2025 as the denouement. Some astrologers would expand the effective period by another three to four years on either side, which takes us back to the 2016 Presidential election as the first pre-shock and extends through most of the second half of the 2020s as the playing out of all the ramifications.

The symbolic weight of this rare and potent symbolic event is magnified by a Jupiter-Saturn conjunction that occurs every 20 years, this time in the first degree of Aquarius, less than four degrees away from Pluto’s natal position. The Jupiter-Saturn alignment, marking the beginning of their 20-year cycle that describes global social and economic conditions, is gestating now and reaches its birth at the end of 2020. That suggests that the next two decades of humanity’s social and economic evolution will be different from the first two decades, which were different from the last two decades of the 20th century.

All of that together — the USA's Pluto Return aligned with a new Jupiter-Saturn global cycle — implies that America is about to go through a restart caused by what might be described poetically as a volcanic eruption of events we didn't adequately foresee or plan for, the power of which will be beyond our control (like an earthquake or tsunami).

Our fantasy-based economy, our looney-tunes financial system, our outmoded and often corrupt social institutions, and perhaps even our government itself could fail — either partially or totally, subtly or spectacularly.

Astrologically, the specific events that will unfold and the amount of suffering that results are unpredictable. But not all facets of this turmoil are unpredictable. We hear the President and his henchmen saying that they are not responsible, that "*no one could have predicted the pandemic.*" (Same damned lying excuse as Bush used after 9/11.) Balderdash. Utter BS. Nothing more than lies to cover their guilty asses.

Medical experts have been screaming for years about how unprepared we were for the inevitable eventuality of a serious pandemic. But what did Trump do? He ignored the warnings as he gleefully gutted all the agencies and institutions that figure out ways to keep us safe, including preparedness for a pandemic. Oh no, in Trump-Republican world we couldn't afford such wasteful efforts — they might reduce profits for corporations (i.e., the richest 10%) and would lead to bigger government. Funny, though, how the size of government always increases under Republican administrations, along with the burgeoning national debt. But then, Republicans are the best (worst) liars on the planet, although Democrats aren't too far behind. But I digress...

Pluto's symbolism implies that this is a death-and-rebirth experience, with death being a certainty and later rebirth a possibility. What dies? Our unconscious compulsivity around ownership, money, and material wealth. We've been greedy and have abused our power without realizing it (or caring), and the Pluto Return suggests that much of what we have may be taken away as power wells up and boomerangs against us. As I stated last week, this is not astrologically defined as moral retribution or punishment from an angry God, but rather an inevitable and necessary rebalancing after a long period of our ignoring reality.

What are the chances that we will collectively wise up and resurrect ourselves, our country, and our culture more sanely? I don't know. Right now, though, we're a helluva long way from any rebirth, and destruction is the order of the day. The wrecking ball has arrived. Perhaps we will indeed rise from the ashes. In the meantime, I hope the suffering is not too severe.