

America's Pluto Return

Part Two: Dynamics

by Bill Herbst

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I'll open by reposting a brief, edited passage from the end my January 4th, 2021, commentary, **Returns in Astrology**:

America (meaning the United States) has its roots back in the European discovery and colonization of the New World (1492), but the specific entity of the United States formally began in the late-18th century. The signing in Philadelphia on July 4th, 1776, of the Declaration of Independence from England is the date of choice for most astrologers. Charts for other dates are used also — for the Articles of Confederation or the ratification of the Constitution — but, by and large, most astrologers use some version of the July 4th, 1776, chart.

Most nations currently existing are much younger than America. The chaos of the 20th century's two World Wars changed the geopolitical map dramatically. We may think of America as a relatively young or psychologically immature culture. I certainly do. From the astrological perspective of national birth-charts, however, we are an old country — so old that we're coming up on our Pluto Return. Let's see, 1776 plus 245 years (an average Pluto cycle through the zodiac) equals... Why, that's 2021! And that's exactly what the ephemeris tells us.

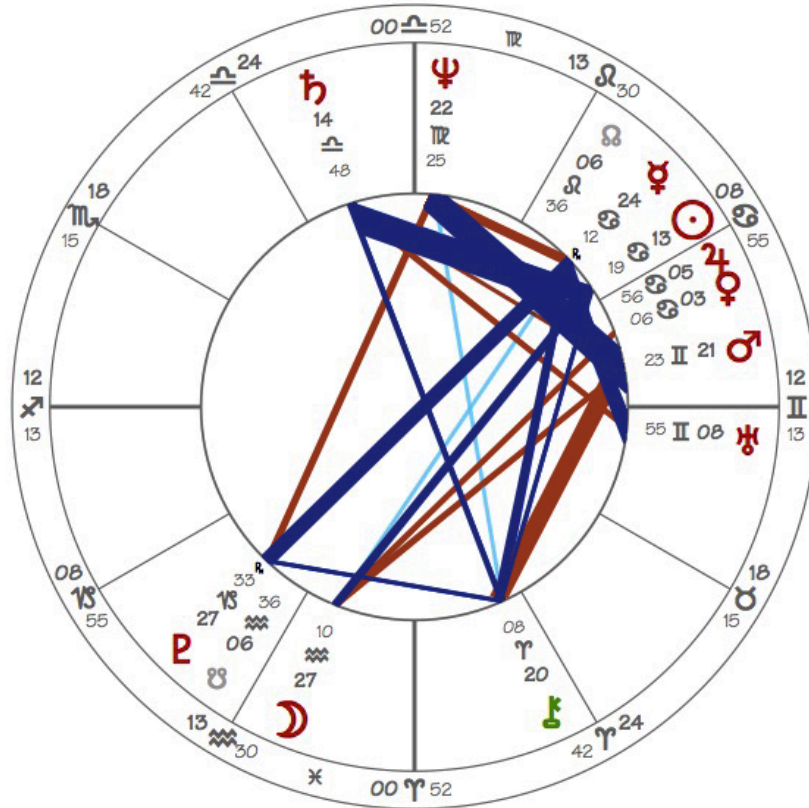
The difference between the various July 4th, 1776, charts is in the exact time of day used to erect the chart. The overall planetary patterns (planets in signs and interplanetary aspects) of all the July 4th charts are effectively identical, but the house associations — occupied and ruled houses — are different. Since houses in astrology are dependent not only on the date (day/month/year) and place, but predominantly the time of day used, different "birth" times yield very different interpretations, often provocatively so. Within any 24-hour day, meaning changes dramatically from hour to hour. Even at the same moment, charts drawn for different places around the world are radically different in interpretation. Date, time, and place all matter in assessing a chart's meaning.

The July 4th version I like best and use most often is called the Sibly USA chart, named for Ebenezer Sibly, the English astrologer who published it in 1787, and erected for 5:10 p.m. in Philadelphia. That time has been seriously contested among astrologers, but I'm less interested in the historical scholarship than I am in the practical relevance of the chart as a mirror of what I understand to be the American character and its correspondence to significant events in our nation's history. So, to make a long story short, that's the chart I'm using for this series.

On the next page is a graphic of the Sibly USA chart in the way I prepare all charts for my own use:

USA (Sibly)

Natal Chart
 Thursday, July 4, 1776
 5:10:00 PM EST
 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
 Tropical Koch True Node



Below is a list of the planetary sign and house associations I use for this chart. My house assignments differ from many other astrologers in that I regard house cusps as the strongest point of the house, not the beginning boundary. For me, where one house ends in the zodiac and the next begins is fluid, not fixed.

Planet	Sign	Occupied House	Ruled House(s)
Sun	Cancer	8th	9th
Moon	Aquarius	3rd	8th
Mercury	Cancer	8th	7th
Venus	Cancer	8th	6th, 10th, 11th
Mars	Gemini	7th	4th, 5th
Jupiter	Cancer	8th	1st
Saturn	Libra	10th	2nd
Uranus	Gemini	7th	3rd
Neptune	Virgo	9th	3rd
Pluto	Capricorn	2nd	12th

This series is not, however, about an overall natal interpretation of the USA chart. I've done that elsewhere. Here, I feel no need to further discuss the basic planet-sign-house alignments, nor the Cancer stellium, Sagittarius Ascendant, Sun-Saturn and Mars-Neptune squares, nor any of the many other interpretive factors that reveal the content of the American character. Although I will draw on that base of astrological insights, I want to focus this series of commentaries as much as possible on Pluto alone, and on its imminent Return in the USA chart.

So, what does Pluto in the Sibly USA chart tell us about this country and its people? Basically, it says that America and Americans are compulsively driven by "self-worth" (2nd house). That means the effort of earning or extracting "personal value." Psychologically, this translates to feeling good about ourselves. Materially, it means amassing personal or family wealth through ownership, property, and possessions. Given Pluto's extremism, that often corresponds to not allowing anyone or anything to stand in the way of feathering one's own nest. The Plutonian tendency is to see others either as obstacles or resources.

Curiously, Pluto often represents a "blind spot" in the psyche. Americans may not be aware of how compulsive we are about amassing wealth and power, nor about using others. Other countries and cultures see that plainly and judge it either positively (as in the immigrant's wish to come to America for a better life) or negatively (as in countries and cultures that resent our messing with them), but we ourselves tend to be unconscious about how driven we are toward wealth, power, and dominance.

The fly in the ointment here — besides the shadow side of Pluto itself — is Pluto's rulership of the 12th house in the USA chart. Occupying the 2nd and ruling the 12th indicates both selfishness and selflessness, a quite paradoxical combination. It also implies that the unconscious drive to acquire personal wealth in any way and regardless of the cost to others could be our undoing.

That undoing — in whatever ways the ending takes shape — is the looming portent of the Pluto Return that's already underway and will be symbolically (and quite probably pragmatically) critical to life in America over the coming years. From an astrological perspective, America and Americans are fast approaching a great reckoning with our entire history of obsession with personal wealth, as well as our tendency to use others — including other Americans — for our own gain.

With Pluto in Capricorn, government and business are the primary arenas of raw power. The whole complex structure of our political and economic systems are where the Pluto Return takes aim. Who wields power and who doesn't? Who gets rich and who doesn't? Who benefits and who suffers or is shut out? While America calls itself a democracy, we have become a plutocracy (both overtly and covertly). Lincoln's famous phrase, "*of the people, by the people, and for the people*" has become "*of the rich, by the rich, and for the rich.*" Our society denies this, of course, but it has become screamingly obvious.

The earthquakes and volcanic eruptions (speaking metaphorically, but who knows?) of America's Pluto Return will, to one degree or another, destroy that. The rumblings are already underway. A restart is coming, and it's likely to be deeper and more vast than we currently foresee. Some manifestations may be inspiring, but other expressions could be tragic. Whether democracy can survive the culminating meltdown of the plutocracy is as yet unknown. How it all will play out is impossible to predict, but we can already see some of the forms.

[In Part Three of this series, I'll discuss the timing of America's Pluto Return.]