

# America's Pluto Return

## Part Three: Timing

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*Version 1.3 (posted on 30 March 2021)*  
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The question of timing in astrology is a big deal. If we're looking to find meaningful correspondences between "real life" — which is to say, events and experiences common to humans — and astronomical alignments in the heavens, then we need a way to predict with relative precision when things will happen or would at the very least be most likely to happen.

"Natal" astrology, based on birth charts, is typically used to investigate and define the "character" of the native, as well as the many possible or probable experiences that individual will undergo over his or her life. The same applies to the birth chart of a country. All charts are a snapshot of a certain moment in time and space and remain fixed as an indelible imprint revealing overall purpose and meaning. But life isn't the same at the age of 10 as it is at 30 or 50 or 80. We're on a journey with experiences that change over time, even as they may refer back to a fundamental inward pattern.

To investigate this journey and reveal its ever-shifting chapters and phases, astrology uses moving cycles. While we may (and do) compare natal charts to other charts, the most common way to reveal these changes is through the personal cycles of transits or symbolic progressions. I don't want to get lost in the woods here and detour into a discussion of all that, though. I'll assume that the reader knows enough about astrology to understand what I'm referring to.

I'm a transits guy and don't use symbolic progressions. Other astrologers do. That's fine. Whatever floats your boat. The discussion that follows is relevant to either technique.

Once we have some understanding of the meaning of a Pluto Return, the two questions that inevitably come up about America's imminent Pluto Return are: 1. "*What's going to happen?*" and 2. "*When will it happen?*" The answers to the first question are found both within and also beyond the chart. Charts give possibilities (many of them), but circumstances matter as well. In terms of *what* will happen, astrology is useful but not definitive. The system works better looking backward than forward.

By contrast, the answer to the second question — *when* something will happen — is contained wholly within the astrological system itself. The public expects astrology to nail that down precisely, and many astrologers yearn to do so, but

our ability to accurately time the occurrence of events and experiences is limited. The best we can do is to define a range of time within which a particular event might occur. That range varies widely based on the specific cycle or cycles we're considering, and the primary factor we invoke to make this assessment is called the "orb of influence," typically spoken of as an "allowable orb."

OK. What's that? Well, let's look at America's Pluto Return, since that's the topic at hand. In the USA Sibly chart, Pluto is located at 27° 33' of the sign Capricorn. Mathematically (or, more properly, geometrically) the Return occurs when Pluto again arrives at this exact point in the zodiac. That will happen three times, all in 2022: on February 20th, July 11th, and December 28th.

These are called "partile passes." The first and third (February and December) happen while Pluto is moving forward through the zodiac in direct motion; the second or middle pass (July) occurs while Pluto is apparently moving backwards in retrograde motion. Together, the three dates comprise what is called a "three-pass transit," which is common for the slower-moving outer planets.

Does that mean that we should anticipate some major traumatic event in America happening on any or all of those dates? *No*. Then does it mean that something really big might happen in 2022? *Maybe*. The problem here is that the "influence" of the Return begins *before* the first exact pass and continues *after* the third and final pass. Thus, the big question is: *How far in time before and after?* That's where allowable orbs come in.

If, as astrologers, we say that the allowable orb is  $\pm 1^\circ$  (used for most shorter duration transits by many astrologers, including me), then the entire period of influence starts when Pluto arrives at 26 Cap 33 and doesn't end until it finally gets past 28 Cap 33. This is a very tight orb and gives us an effective period for the Pluto Return from March 2021 through January 2023 — almost two years. By the "effective period" of the transit, what I'm referring to is the range of time where something that happens in real life could be attributed reasonably to correspondence with the symbolic implications of the transit as defined by the natal chart and the particular cycle.

I think that most astrologers would agree that 2022 represents the heart of the American Pluto Return. That's when all three exact passes happen. Does this mean that all or most of the Really Big Stuff (i.e., the shit hitting the fan in this country) is likely to occur during that year alone? Nope. The allowable orb for a Pluto Return must be factored in, and the orb should definitely be more than zero and probably larger than  $\pm 1^\circ$ . The nagging question for astrologers is: *How much larger?*

On the following page is a list with a range of allowable orbs — from  $\pm 1^\circ$  to  $\pm 15^\circ$  — their beginning and end dates, and the effective periods:

Orb	Effective date range	Duration
$\pm 1^\circ$	March 2021 – January 2023	2 years
$\pm 2^\circ$	February 2021 – January 2024	3 years
$\pm 3^\circ$	March 2020 – December 2024	5 years
$\pm 5^\circ$	March 2019 – December 2025	7 years
$\pm 10^\circ$	January 2017 – December 2028	11 years
$\pm 15^\circ$	February 2014 – January 2032	20 years

I assure you, there are skilled astrologers who regard a  $\pm 15^\circ$  orb as both reasonable and relevant for a Pluto Return. My opinion is not that they're necessarily wrong — in fact, I think they may be right. My problem with a 20-year effective period is that it muddies the waters for the kind of writing I do. Attributing the correspondence of any major event to multiple transit cycles is easy enough to do in an astrologer's mind, but it complicates a written narrative, testing both the writer's skill and the reader's attention span. I'm not writing for a technical journal or a professional symposium. I'm writing for a thoughtful public that's interested in adding astrological insights to their already-broad knowledge. That's my audience of choice. Maintaining thematic clarity is challenging enough without the inevitable dilution of too many other factors.

While I used  $\pm 10^\circ$  orb and a 13-year effective period in my many essays about the Uranus-Pluto square (2007 through 2020), which served me well in the writing, I don't love the idea of so much overlap between the Uranus-Pluto square and the Pluto Return. I prefer to regard them as sequential, one following the other. So, I wouldn't go beyond  $\pm 10^\circ$  orb at the outside for the Return, and my inclination is to use a much tighter orb than that.

Another disturbing factor is that orbs are probably not as straightforward or simple as I'm making them seem here. For instance, the allowed orb that happens before the transit is initially exact (i.e., before the first partile pass) is called an "applying" orb, while the orb that follows the final pass is called "separating." It's possible that those orbs shouldn't be equal. In all likelihood, the applying orb should be larger than the separating orb, but not always.

All of these technical considerations become wearisome after awhile, even though astrologers have to deal with them. So, for purposes of this series of commentaries, let me simplify and cut to the chase. My take on the timing of America's Pluto Return is to use an orb of  $\pm 3^\circ$ , resulting in an effective period of five years, from 2020 through 2024. In truth, the period may extend beyond that range, but those five years are what I'll focus on in my current writing.

This means that I consider the COVID-19 Pandemic to be part of America's Pluto Return. Think of the Pandemic as the opening act. (I'll have more to say about that next week.) It also means that I do not regard Donald Trump's Presidency as part of the Return. From my perspective, Trump's rise to political power was tied very firmly to the Uranus-Pluto square.

Does this mean that Trump's "day in the sun" is over? Yes, as far as I'm concerned. It faded out in 2020 as the effective period of the Uranus-Pluto square wound down and ended. The repercussions of Trump's influence will live on, of course. Trump made it acceptable for Americans to overtly express their racism and xenophobia, as well as their crudeness, cruelty, and hatred. Those qualities have been an undeniable part of America's psychic shadow. Donald Trump simply brought them out of hiding. In addition, Trump ripped off the masks of certain shopworn presumptions in American life — faith in institutions, trust in authority, belief in science and the essential goodness of the whole American system. He revealed by personal example the ugly truth that American business is too often selfish, unethical, and even criminal.

All that will live on and contribute to the toxic stew that might just boil over during the Pluto Return. But Trump himself is finished. He will spend the rest of his sorry-ass life on the run, essentially as a fugitive trying to escape justice (or vengeance, whichever you prefer...). Not that he will ever admit that.

But I digress. Getting back the question of allowable orbs and effective periods, I regard America's Pluto Return as encompassing five years — basically the first half of this current decade, from 2020 through 2024, although repercussions could continue into the second half of the decade. Within that five-year period, I don't pretend to know and won't predict any sequence of events that will align with the Plutonian work of transformation through destruction.

Unlike some astrologers, I'm not particularly interested in precisely timing major events in the collective. Yes, I'm aware of the many technical factors astrologers use to refine predictions, such as eclipses and trigger points. And I'm not subtly implying that astrologers are wrong to use these more sophisticated techniques in making their bold projections. I just don't care about exact dates in the future when something might happen. Personally, what I find more compelling is the underlying substance and meaning of what's happening and might come to pass in the world. If timing and precise predictions with exact dates are important to you, then by all means look to other astrologers for that. What you'll get from me is The Big Picture.

Also, I've come to feel strongly that the incrementalism of gradual reform so beloved among centrists and moderates simply will not work. It might have, if America had started that effort 40 years ago. But we didn't. In fact, we went in the opposite direction, toward flagrant corruption of cherished American ideals. We have made a mockery of both freedom and equality. The system cannot be "reformed." We can't go back to "normal." Instead, we've left it to the Lord of Hades (Pluto) to destroy the existing structure, paving the way for a rebirth. I worry about the possible suffering involved, but I don't see any way around that.

*[in Part Four of this series, I'll discuss some of the more potent events that correspond to America's Pluto Return — some of which have already happened, some that are currently ongoing, and others that are cooking under the surface and may transpire over the next three years as our Pluto Return fully unfolds.]*