

Looking Back and Looking Ahead

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I have very few memories from the earliest days of my life, between infancy and early childhood. Specifically, only three vignettes are embedded in my memory. They are just brief scenes of about five seconds each in duration and might as well be still photographs from a picture album. I accept that memory is often untrustworthy for human beings, that fiction and reality tend to blend together in what we remember, but these very few longstanding memories of mine are so vivid and clear that I'm fairly confident that they really happened.

One memory in particular is relevant to this commentary. My father and I are walking outdoors down a street in the new housing development where our home-to-be is being built. My father is holding my hand, with my arm upraised. There's a car parked ahead of us. (Subsequent research I did into the history of this memory revealed that car to be a 1951 Ford.) In my memory, our new house is an unfinished shell located out of view, off the right side of what I see. That's it. Five seconds worth.

In real life, my family left the rental apartment in St. Louis proper and moved to a second-tier suburb in St. Louis County when I was two years old, in 1951. So, my memory is from some months earlier than that. Our new low-slung California ranch-style space-age house was nearly identical in design to every other of the 300-or-so single family homes in that suburban housing development. These were modest houses, selling for \$14,000 each. Each house had a quarter-acre yard.

This took place a mere four years after the hastily built, mass-produced houses of Levittown in New York kicked off the post-World War II demographic exodus from the cities to the suburbs, which accompanied the rise of the new so-called Middle Class. By that time, newly-built housing developments were springing up like mushrooms in the second-tier suburbs of every major American city. The one my family lived in was like thousands of other similar suburbs all across America.

What followed over the next ten years was the fleshing out of the commercial infrastructure that accompanied these new suburbs. Shops, stores, and retail businesses popped up like hotcakes along the connecting highways and main thoroughfares giving the suburbs automobile access to their major cities. By

1960, this had culminated in the next development wave of shopping centers. Initially, shopping centers were like long chains of outdoor retail stores, often with larger grocery or department stores at either end, surrounded by massive parking lots for cars. Later, in the 1970s and 1980s, those outdoor shopping centers morphed into gargantuan indoor malls and then big box retailers.

Along with the suburbs came new schools mandated by rapidly growing population within a burgeoning tax base. In my almost completely white suburban school district, they couldn't build new schools fast enough. Over the 13 years of my young life from kindergarten through high school, I inaugurated eight brand-new schools. During that time my family did relocate once, but we moved less than two miles away, from one housing development to another in the same school district.

My entire generation of Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, grew up during this historically unprecedented development of American suburbia. That was the era when the Middle Class was created. Not all Boomers were born into the Middle Class — even during the heyday of the demographic, America still had sizable percentages of both rich and poor. Still, tens of millions of Boomers grew up in the suburbs as part of the Middle Class. And a critical point in this is that those of us in that category, namely young suburbanites, assumed that the Middle Class was the natural order of society. We thought it was *normal*. But in fact we were oh, so wrong.

Everyone who grew up in America during the mid-20th century was part of an extraordinary bubble sometimes called The American Century. This bubble emerged because of an unusual and quite rare set of coalescing circumstances that combined to produce it. The Middle Class was a hallmark of both The American Century and the American Empire, and its rise and fall over our lifetimes is a symptom of the rise and fall of that Empire.

The 19th century — a turbulent hundred years that witnessed the Industrial Revolution and major political upheavals — had closed on a note of widespread optimism and hopefulness. Surely, it was thought, the 20th century could and would turn out to be a glorious time of civilization's maturing and providing stellar improvements toward overall human happiness and well-being.

Well, those hopes were not borne out. Three terrible events erupted during the first half of the 20th century and engulfed much of human civilization — two world wars and a global great depression sandwiched between them.

First, a Saturn-Pluto cycle in Cancer began in 1914, just as the great European powers fumbled their way into starting the cataclysm of World War I. I've written numerous essays about the Saturn-Pluto cycle, which is the harshest and most repressive of the ten long-term cycles in mundane or civilizational astrology. And the one that started in 1914 was really bad, signifying as it did the military

destruction through reactionary nationalism of nearly all the existing colonial empires that had defined the structure of civilization for centuries.

Following the madness and horror of World War One, some people thought the sun would shine again, and it seemingly did for awhile during the Roaring Twenties, but a Last-Quarter phase shift in the Uranus-Pluto cycle at the beginning of the 1930s corresponded to the onset of financial collapse and the worst years of the Great Depression. That tragedy provoked German rejection of the bitter armistice of World War One and led directly to World War Two, which turned out to be even more deadly than the first.

Yes, industrial progress continued throughout the first half of the 20th century in sometimes amazing developments — telephones, automobiles, electricity, radio, air travel, and much more — but overall, the good didn't outweigh or cancel out the terrible. Humans caused the violent or early deaths of more than 100 million other humans through wars, pogroms, famine, and pestilence. Although the butcher's bill then slowed, the gruesome toll continued throughout much of the rest of the century through global unrest in politics and government.

World War Two ended with the birth of the atomic age. Among the many new developments that emerged during the postwar period, two were especially noteworthy for my subject in this commentary. One was the beginnings of the Cold War, with its fanatical nuclear arms race (MAD — mutual assured destruction). That brought the development of a permanent National Security State in America through the CIA and soon other, less visible, government agencies. Eisenhower warned us about this to no avail in his last speech before leaving the Presidency in 1961. The contrasting development was the creation of a large Middle Class in America. A booming industrial economy, along with progressive legislation such as the G.I. Bill and increased taxation of corporations and the wealthy helped to foster a vibrant and flourishing Middle Class. Of these two parallel developments, the National Security State would prove to be permanent. The Middle Class wouldn't.

The 1960s brought a new Uranus-Pluto cycle that included a renewed spirit of rebellion and revolution to our resolve to create a better society for Americans and even a better environment for all living entities. But this was by no means welcomed universally or by everyone. Many people felt that the 1960s were a chaotic aberration, and they longed for a return to "stability." I put stability in quotes because almost nothing in the 20th century had been stable, so people's wish to go back to something less turbulent was primarily a fantasy.

Meanwhile, the Technology Revolution — another correspondence to the new Uranus-Pluto cycle of radical change — was cooking up a storm. In 1958 (when microchips were invented), and even in the 1980s (with the onset of personal computers into the consumer marketplace through Macs and PCs), few of us foresaw the dramatic effects of the internet that began in the 1990s and blossomed in the 2000s, followed in the 2010s by smart phones and social media

platforms. Now Artificial Intelligence looms directly ahead, and the fervent embrace of AI by business already threatens to engulf us before we understand its full ramifications.

The last three paragraphs are meant to imply that our commitment to techno-progress is headlong, pedal-to-the-metal, rather than measured or reasonable. Hell, it's not safe at all. We've thrown caution to the winds and become foolhardy in the risks we take (as all empires do when, inevitably, they decline). If we manage somehow not to destroy ourselves with nuclear war or make the planet uninhabitable through human-caused climate change, we still have to deal with the ever-increasing scourge of wealth inequality that led to the plutocracy we have now, and which threatens to return civilization to feudalism. Adding to our woes is the general insanity of a social climate that encourages endless lies and propaganda. We can't agree on the most basic facts about what's real and what's not, so even beginning a thoughtful conversation about what we might do together to save ourselves is difficult, if not impossible.

My point in writing all this is to suggest that, considered from within my discipline of astrology, the various major cycles that reveal the characteristic tonalities permeating the zeitgeist, the ether, the collective unconscious (or whatever other term we want to use to describe the invisible influences that shape the beliefs and attitudes of collective humanity) over the past 100 years haven't worked out very well for our species.

I don't blame "the heavens" for this, however. Though homo sapiens has been around for quite awhile, we are still a species suffering through a disturbed adolescence. Our collective cleverness far exceeds our collective wisdom.

Over the two plus decades of the 21st century, we've already had some major astrological chances to mature and move ahead. The 13-year activation from 2007 to 2020 of the shift in the Uranus-Pluto cycle from its spring phase to its summer manifestations (by building upon its beginnings in the 1960s) brought us to a long crossroads that set a tone for what was to emerge next. I wrote more than 100 commentaries about that event during its active period.

From where I sit, at every turn in that extraordinary 13-year transit, we made the wrong choice. Again, and again, and again, we chose the road to perdition rather than salvation. In America, that usually meant choosing money over every other consideration. The housing bubble of the first decade was all about quick profits, as were the derivatives marketed by the big Wall Street banks to provide them with immensely profitable but unwise investment strategies. Landmark decisions by an increasingly right-wing U.S. Supreme Court, such as Citizens United, opened the door to the further corruption of our politics via big money. The Tea Party flourished while Occupy Wall Street expired with hardly a whimper. All of that and much more was not predestined in terms of astrology. We could have gone another way. But we didn't.

By the time that long Uranus-Pluto transit ended and the cycle faded back into the woodwork (not to return with another chance until the mid-2040s), the die was cast. We were already set up to kick off the 2020s on a very shaky footing.

Enter the next Saturn-Pluto cycle in 2020, the same cycle that started World War One in 1914. This time, though, that harshest, most cruel and restrictive of all ten long-term cycles in mundane or civilizational astrology did not begin in the sign Cancer, implying an implosion of colonial empires through perverse nationalism, but in the opposite sign — Capricorn — implying that government and the core institutions of society would disintegrate and be rejected.

The obvious and precise correspondence with the onset of this new Saturn-Pluto cycle was the COVID-19 pandemic. Faith in government as a trustworthy, authoritative source had already eroded throughout the Uranus-Pluto period (2007-2020), but the fiasco with COVID-19 left us in divided camps of belief that were unreasonable, dogmatic, and unyielding. Vicious name-calling and outright hatred ensued, which is a hallmark of Saturn-Pluto.

In World War One, British propaganda came up with the story that German soldiers were bayoneting Belgian babies. That was untrue, but it helped instill hatred of “the evil Hun” within the British public. During COVID, the propaganda was that those Americans who mistrusted the mRNA vaccines and refused to take the jabs were threatening the lives of everyone else. Thus, so the propaganda went, they deserved to die from the virus. Wow. Talk about hatred. That really does resonate to Nazi “untermensch” attitudes about Slavic and Jewish people.

What I’m attempting to get at with this commentary is that, especially in America, but elsewhere as well, where we are collectively is not random, and also not short-lived. The terrors we face are not a temporary aberration. They’re a long-term problem, and one that we brought on ourselves. The predicament in which we find our nation and even our species didn’t mysteriously come out of nowhere, as there is ample historical and astrological evidence to indicate a marked tendency toward harshness and cruelty among humans over the past century.

Also, our current struggles are linked symbolically to astrological cycles that are still relatively new and will take decades more to unfold, so expecting any sort of quick turn-around in the near future is almost certainly a fool’s errand. We are embroiled in a long, hard fight, and there’s no telling whether the angels or devils of our nature will emerge victorious. In terms of “sides,” “teams,” or “tribes,” I don’t much trust any of them.

Having studied and practiced astrology for the past 50 years, I’m in a position of at least some authority in suggesting that the astrological system itself is not evenly divided between passion and indifference, easy and difficult, soft and hard. Overall, more within astrology leans toward difficult and hard than toward

easy and soft. Could I be wrong about that? Sure. But looking at life itself without any reference to astrology yields for me a similar conclusion: More in life is difficult than is easy, and more is hard rather than soft.

Folks, it appears to me that we're headed into a particularly nasty phase within the Death Throes of the American Empire and a specific form of insane patriarchy tied loosely to the Strong Man theory of social organization. Both of these have been immensely powerful for quite awhile through these early millennia of civilization. Admittedly, the patriarchy is way, way older than the American Empire, but each has been weakened gradually through our sustained efforts to uplift ourselves into a somewhat more adult maturity that is not based so exclusively on the tyranny of the ego.

Now these forces of wounded individual selfhood are making a desperate, defensive stand, pulling out all the stops to reestablish dominion over society. The cruelties that come with this are perversely attractive to many Americans who feel humiliated and seek revenge. Others, especially some of those who are conspicuously wealthy, simply believe in Social Darwinism — the law of the jungle, dog eat dog, and the strongest win.

The coming years and probably decades are likely to be difficult, and perhaps even terrible — nasty, brutish, stupid, and harmful to many of us — but we can't avoid going through this time of suffering. To get to rebirth, we have to go through collapse. Well, this is what collapse looks like, and it's as necessary as it is ugly.

Will this reign of terror be permanent? Will it destroy us? Maybe, but I'd like to think that we might persevere even through this dreadful, self-inflicted wound, this suicidal backlash, this insult to the human heart and spirit.

The bottom line in all this is that I regard love, empathy, compassion, kindness, and generosity not as qualities we are given as gifts nor endowed with innately by God or Nature, but instead as the extraordinarily valuable products of long discipline — works in progress, traits to be earned and achieved. The real evidence of our progress as a species is neither industrial nor technological. It's not about increasing our power. It is spiritual in the most common sense manner imaginable — the ability to see oneself in others.

Hate and indifference are what happens when we don't do the hard work on ourselves to become authentically loving. In my view, that's what it means to be a truly mature and self-actualized human being — the willingness and ability to choose Love, in spite of everything.