

The Plutonian Meltdown of the United States, 2000-2023

Part One (of Three) *The USA's Plutonian 21st Century*

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Among the reasons people turn to astrology is the hope of better understanding why stuff happens in the world. "Stuff" here can mean anything and everything, but especially the extremes of dreams coming true and catastrophes that occur. This is to say, people are fascinated by the fact that life contains both fantastic gain and horrific loss, not only for individuals, but also for organizations (companies, institutions, restaurants, sports teams, etc.), cities (Pompeii, Paris, Moscow, New York City, etc.), whole cultures (the Incas, the Aztecs, the Jews, the Mongols, etc.), and entire countries (Greece, Rome, England, China, etc.).

In particular, I'm interested in the astrology of what's happened to America over the first quarter of this current 21st century, specifically as it astrologically pertains to the planet Pluto in its symbolic manifestations.

As many Americans know, in 2006, an organization of astronomers — the International Astronomical Union (IAU) — voted to demote Pluto from its former standing as a major planet in the solar system to diminished status as a minor or "dwarf" planet. This was done for numerous reasons, chief among them being Pluto's small size and failure to clear its neighboring region of other bodies. The demotion was approved, but not without considerable controversy within the scientific community.

Astrologers, however, ignored that judgment and the reduction in Pluto's status. In our symbolic system, which has its roots in antiquity and is fundamentally different than and separate from the modern science of Physical Cosmology, Pluto remains among the most powerful symbols to which we pay attention and refer. There is nothing "dwarf" about Pluto with regard to its powerful symbolism.

In terms of modern astrological symbolism, Pluto is the planet that indicates endings and new beginnings, destruction and creation, death and rebirth. It corresponds to the onset of the Atomic Age through the Manhattan Project's development of the first nuclear weapons. From astrology's perspective on modern psychology, Pluto is an indicator of primal, raw power from beyond

(beneath) the ego and conscious will that emerges from the unconscious similarly to magma from a volcano. It may flow out like a stream or river, or it can erupt violently, but whatever it touches will be profoundly affected and probably fundamentally changed.

As the furthest planet from the Sun, Pluto represents the interface between our local celestial neighborhood (the solar system) and the larger world beyond (the Milky Way galaxy). It also has a very elliptical orbit around the Sun that is oriented toward the center of our galaxy. This makes it less like a regular member of the solar system — a standard planet — and more like an emissary from the galaxy. Symbolically, this is a bridge where the impact and agency of the greater collective unconscious connects with and flows into the more limited personal unconscious.

Plutonian power itself is amoral, but the intense potency can supercharge both morality and immoral endeavors, depending on the agent it's coming through and the purposes for which it is used. So, it can be "good" (meaning beneficial) or "bad" (meaning harmful). Medical surgery is Plutonian, but so is military bombing. So, context matters.

Of the major planetary symbols in astrology, Pluto is the newest. Its existence was first posited by mathematicians in 1905, then confirmed by telescopic observation in 1930. It quickly became the major astrological symbol of the 20th century, informing both the astonishing human advances in industry and technology, as well as the worst cruelty imaginable through war and violent hatred.

In the 21st century, however, that balance has tilted further toward the dark side. As an astrologer, I look to Pluto to better understand what has happened both to us and within us.

Consider the transits of Pluto. By this, I mean the relationship of Pluto to the other planetary symbols in any birth chart, which then are seen as cycles that activate periodically, most notably at the four quarters of the cycle — 0° (conjunction), 90° (first-quarter square), 180° (opposition), and 240° (last-quarter square). Activations occur at numerous other angles, but they are less important in symbolic weight and literal impact in the life.

For my purposes here, I'm using only the ten major planetary bodies, plus the horizontal and vertical axes. No asteroids, comets, or other more recently discovered minor bodies. Please understand that many astrologers, especially younger ones, use those other bodies as part of their work to reveal meaning. I'm not dissing them; I'm sort of like an old country doctor who works with what he learned and knows.

Anyway, each planet has a cycle with Pluto that incorporates four transits — Pluto-Sun, Pluto-Moon, Pluto-Mercury, all the way to Pluto-Pluto. When we add Pluto relative to the two major axes (horizon and meridian), that means 12 cycles with 48 separate transits in all that occur every 244 years. Each transit

has an effective period of about two years, but that depends on the astrologer doing the calculations. We determine the symbolic and practical meanings of each transit based on the particular chart we're using.

To study the Pluto transits for America, I use what's called the USA-Sibly birth chart for America, erected for July 4th, 1776, at 5:10 p.m. local time in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. While there are other possible birth charts for our country, this one is most popular and commonly used by astrologers. It correlates very well with significant events and longer phases in American history.

Pluto transits correspond to periods of intense expression and transformation of the natal planets they pair with. Something happens during the transit in the life of the native — in this case a nation rather than a person — that changes the way the natal symbol had been manifesting. Old ways cease. New ways begin. Forms morph. Values shift. Sometimes the overall change is beneficial for the native; other times it may be harmful. My assumption as an astrologer is that we can't know which until after the Pluto transit is over and the new expression normalizes.

Among the features that set Pluto apart from other planets is the extreme eccentricity of its orbit around the Sun. Most of the planets have orbits that are nearly circular. Not Pluto. Its orbit is elliptical. In terms of astrology, this means the Pluto's passage through the ecliptic (the earth's orbit around the Sun, otherwise called the Zodiac) is not regular. Pluto appears to speed up and slow down. For instance, Pluto takes 25 years to move through the sign Pisces and 30 years to move through Gemini, while taking a mere 12 years to move through Libra and Scorpio each.

This means that people born during Pluto's fastest motion will, on average, experience almost three times as many Pluto transits over their lifetimes as did their grandparents and great grandparents, since those people from the 19th and 20th centuries were born while Pluto appeared to move at its slowest. With regard to the U.S.A chart, we are experiencing dramatically more Pluto transits over the past three decades than America did during earlier periods in our nation's history.

For instance, over the initial two centuries after America became a nation, from 1776 to 1976, the U.S. chart went through 33 major Pluto transits. That's an average of one Pluto transit every six years.

By contrast, in the relatively few years of the 21st century, from 2000 through 2023, the U.S chart experienced 10 major Pluto transits, an average of one Pluto transit roughly every two years. This is a very big deal astrologically. It's a lot of immensely powerful transformative energy streaming out of our collective unconscious like a fire hose in a very short time — endings and beginnings, death and rebirth, out with the old and in with the new, and damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead.

The reason for so much Plutonian activity in so short a time in the USA chart is two-fold. One reason is what I just discussed — Pluto's elliptical orbit that causes slow and fast motion through the zodiac. The other reason is the USA chart itself, which is skewed and uneven in its distribution of major symbolic elements. More than two-thirds of all possible Pluto cycles in the chart — 10 of 12 — activating by major transit in only 23 years is downright ridiculous, and way too much for any society to handle. What's implied is profound, dramatic change accelerated to breakneck pace. But that's what happened in America during the 21st century.

Think back. Can you even remember what daily life felt like before the Internet? Before smart phones? Before social media? Before Amazon delivered everything? If you're old enough you may remember what life was like in America during earlier decades, but the 20th century is fading rapidly even for those of us who lived through much of it. And many younger Americans born in the 21st century have no clue what life was like in 1980, much less 100 or 200 years ago. The bulk of what our youngest generations understand about the past in America is likely to have come from movies and TV shows, which are, as should be obvious, not the most reliable or accurate way to learn history.

My thesis in this commentary is that America has changed fundamentally in the short span of the 21st century — and mostly not in a good way. We are no longer the same country nor the same people who formed, fleshed out, and built America over her initial 200 years. That earlier nation has vanished down the memory hole or been relegated to the dustbin of history. Our past is now forgotten, done in by "progress" and excessive wealth, a victim of its own success. In its place is a country that has lost the thread of its early idealism for social betterment and replaced that with the celebration and rewarding of personal greed for crude and superficial wealth, and pursuit of celebrity for its own sake. Our integrity has been largely replaced by corruption, and our seriousness with silliness. Sometimes these changes were unintentional, but other times deliberate, almost wanton. For instance, we now have a President who thinks of governing as a reality TV show.

I don't mean to suggest that what's happened is black and white or absolute. No, greed and corruption have always been with us. They are part of the pantheon of psychological traits contained within human nature and were obviously present when America was younger. Similarly, idealism and integrity are still alive among us. What's changed are the relative proportions of each pair within the citizenry. During the 18th and 19th centuries, America's population embodied a great deal of idealism and integrity, along with some greed and corruption. Now, however, we are a nation and a people characterized by a great deal of greed and corruption, with only some idealism and integrity — not nearly enough to guide us safely into a very uncertain future.

America was always impressed by willful ego power and the drive to succeed. But we also honored milder, more spiritually mature virtues, such as humility, selfless devotion, and compassionate kindness. We still pretend to honor such traits, but we actively reward ego domination, selfishness, and even cruelty.

What we have now in America is far too much wealth concentrated into far too few hands, and it's ruining us.

This is not to say that earlier Americans were purer people than current modern Americans. No, all humans suffer damage from life's slings and arrows, thorns and rocks, and all the saints have feet of clay. But, despite considerable delusion and painful hypocrisy, America nonetheless began as a noble experiment to see if society and government could harmonize to make life better for most of us. Through the earlier millennia of human civilization, working for the greater good had not been much in evidence, so the American experiment that emerged out of the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason was noteworthy. Sadly, most of that idealism and intention to pull together for the common good is gone now. We are no longer the "shining city on the hill." Oh, we still claim to be, but that's mostly posturing, public relations, and propaganda.

— End Part One

In Part Two of this Commentary, I'll go through the first four of the seven two-year periods in the 21st century that were defined by either one or two of the ten major Pluto transits in the USA chart. I'll note significant events and developments in America that transpired during each of the periods, and discuss at least briefly how each contributed to the changes that are hollowing out the American psyche.