

# America Divided: Part One

by Bill Herbst

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America is divided. That has always been true, since the founding of the nation. At times over the past two and a half centuries, the divide has been obscured, papered over for one reason or another by the pretense of unity. At other times, the great conflict that threatens to tear apart the nation has been painfully obvious, such as during the conflagration of the Civil War in the 1860s, and now again today, in the waning years of the second decade of the 21st century.

This conflict is not hidden. It exists in the open, in plain sight, and is contained in the closing phrase of the Pledge of Allegiance that so many of us memorized and recited in elementary school: "*...with liberty and justice for all.*" Liberty and justice may seem simple and direct as words, but in reality they turn out to be immensely complicated, paradoxical, and at odds with each other.

Astrology is particularly revealing and eloquent about how and why two such worthy ideals are so disturbingly tangled in the life of the nation and the character of its people.

Numerous birth charts for the founding of the American nation have been proposed and used by astrologers. At least ten different charts that I know of exist. Most of us use a date in early July 1776 — typically July 4th or July 2nd — based on historical research about the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Each of the July 4th charts is erected for a different time of day in Philadelphia. Other astrologers use the later ratification dates of the Articles of Confederation or the U.S. Constitution. All these possible birth charts for the nation have their champions and detractors within astrology. I have always used the Sibly chart for the USA — so named for British astrologer Ebenezer Sibly, who first published the chart based on his research. That chart is erected for July 4th, 1776, at 5:10 p.m. local mean time in Philadelphia, which is supposedly when the Declaration of Independence was finally agreed upon and signed.

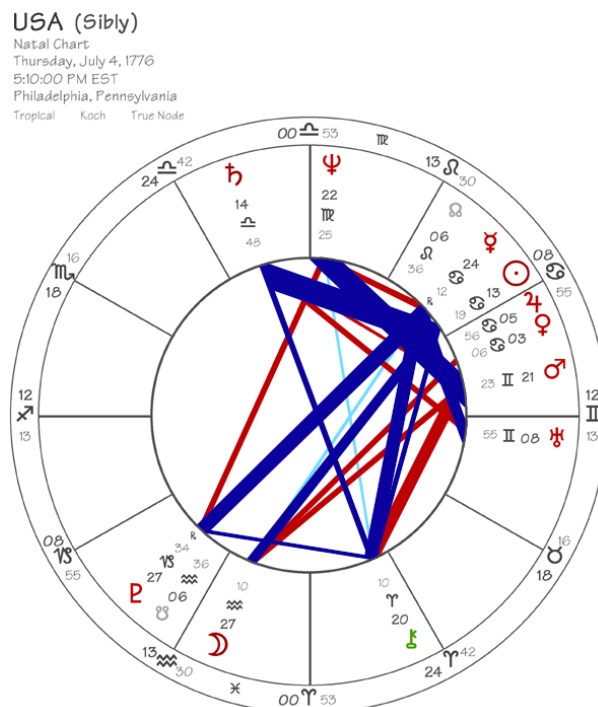
The Sibly data is the most common choice among astrologers for America's birth chart. It has been the subject of extraordinary scrutiny, passionately divided opinion, and even scholarly debates within astrology, and some astrologers insist that the time of day, or even the date itself, is incorrect. Despite that lack of universal agreement, the Sibly chart remains the most popular birth chart for America, and for good reason: It describes the character of our nation and

people — with all the contradictions and paradoxes that make up that character — better than any other chart for America I've seen. That is just my opinion, of course, but it is widely held. The Sibly chart is also generally reliable (and sometimes remarkably so) in accurately timing significant events in our nation's history.

To be fair, and in the spirit of full disclosure, I neither assert nor believe that the Sibly chart is "correct" and the other possible USA charts "wrong." All the various versions can be used sensitively to yield nuanced and illuminating interpretations. I use the Sibly simply because I personally find that chart most compelling. While I am probably less concerned with the timing of actual events than some of my astrological colleagues, I am deeply interested in what the Sibly chart implies about the American character, for both better and worse.

In the past, I've written at some length about the two dominant (and conflicting) memes in the Sibly chart for America. Both themes are based on the same confluence of critical factors in the chart, namely, the 10th-house Libran Saturn in tight square to the 8th-house Cancer Sun. Not every chart contains such a provocative and heavy combination, but many do, and all charts are subject to the natural hierarchy of importance among the symbols. The Sun and Saturn are two of the three most important bodies in astrology (the Moon is the other in the triad). When any combination of those symbols are powerfully connected, their significance is elevated even further. The Saturn-Sun square in the Sibly chart for the U.S. stands head and shoulders above every other set of factors in that chart for central importance.

Below is a graphic showing my rendering of the Sibly USA chart:



This chart for the USA contains numerous challenging planetary configurations, including the Pluto-Mercury opposition and Neptune-Mars square, each of which is worthy of detailed analysis and discussion. My focus here, however, and the subject of this commentary, is the single most important challenge in the chart, the square between Saturn and the Sun.

The Sun in Cancer/8th house implies an overriding concern for individual security and for the protection and well-being of one's personal family, either as biological blood relations or as a small group of chosen beloveds, since in Cancer those family bonds are included in one's personal identity as an extension of the self. At another level, however, and especially since this is the chart of a nation rather than an individual, the same configuration can indicate a heartfelt concern for the protection and well-being of the larger, more universal family of which we are all members. That might be the local community, the nation, or the entire "family of humankind." Beyond that, family might extend to the universal connection through empathy and compassion of all sentient beings on earth or throughout the cosmos. The expression of this drive in real life can vary dramatically, depending on how one's family is defined: as small and exclusive or large and inclusive.

On the other end of the square, Saturn in Libra/10th house has two fundamental but conflicting meanings. Interpreted through its 10th house placement, Saturn represents powerful, dogged ambition to succeed in the marketplace through business or executive leadership. Considered from its position in Libra, however, Saturn becomes the imperative of responsibility to treat everyone with respect and equality, and to enforce that challenge through social justice.

Considered in tandem, this pair of planetary symbols and their respective conditions contains the seeds of both great harmony and terrible struggle — with each other and within themselves. Astrologically, we are a nation where the Biblical question, "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" has profound relevance. The American answer to that question is definitely *yes*, but with crucial caveats. Who exactly is my brother? Or, stated another way, how far does my family extend? If the answer is that only certain individuals I love are my family, then life unfolds in one direction. If the answer is that family extends into the community and includes others in the collective, then life unfolds in a very different way.

When in harmony, these Sun and Saturn themes indicate, in one direction, the natural connection of business and commerce with the creation of wealth to nourish and protect the immediate family. In the other direction, they combine to produce an insistence on fairness and equality to take care of the larger family. Either direction can indicate inner wholeness, coherence, and integrity — taking care of one's own security while also being sensitive to the needs of others. When the themes are in conflict, however, serious trouble ensues.

On the one hand, we are a nation dedicated to the propositions of equality and social justice under the law. Everyone should be entitled to a fair shake, not just the people we like. Favoritism must not override fairness. Given the often barbarous history of civilization, that is a profoundly revolutionary assumption, clearly Uranian in tone and stunningly idealistic, but the U.S. chart grounds the principles of equality and social justice in the common-sense practicality of Saturn. These are not just dreams or airy-fairy ideals; they are strict rules of conduct. Saturn's placement in Libra, the sign of its exaltation, elevates the normally dour planetary symbol to the apex of its noblest, most mature expression. The Golden Rule is invoked: "*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*"

America was intended to be a land where citizens would be able to feel safe in their homes, with legal protection against unlawful search and seizure, where everyone would get his or her day in court, and where justice would be blind to the privileges of wealth and position, so that each person would be treated with respect, regardless of race, religion, gender, or economic status. In reality, of course, we have fallen far short of this, enough so that one might wonder if equality under the law were ever truly our goal, or even a sincere intention. Nonetheless, that is one of the central symbolic ambitions indicated by the chart.

Slavery and servitude, as well as rule by the wealthy and powerful, are deeply embedded in humanity's past and present. To some extent, American history is an ongoing, often violent debate about whether or not equality is possible or even desirable. The Age of Reason in Europe (i.e., "The Enlightenment") challenged that existing order, and the so-called "Founding Fathers" of America were strongly influenced by the new and boldly radical philosophy. Even with their feet of clay — most of the founders were wealthy landowners, and many were slaveholders — the designers of America opted (dared?) to build a country around the legal structure of equality. That such a road is a difficult and long-term undertaking, with many failures and defeats along the path, is indicated by Saturn as its primary symbolic indicator in the chart. The climb up the mountain toward the summit of fully realized social justice is slow and arduous.

On the other hand, we are also a nation created to satisfy the fundamental human desire for unfettered freedom to pursue and amass wealth. That signature is all over the Sibly chart for the U.S. — in the Aquarian Moon, the Pluto opposition to Mercury on the 2nd/8th house axis, the Mars-Neptune square, and the 8th-house Venus-Jupiter conjunction — but one need look no further than the natal Sun in Cancer/8th house to find ample evidence.

When the European empires first began to explore and colonize the western hemisphere at the end of the 15th century, they did so in search of riches. Upon arrival in both continents that would later be named North and South America, they encountered large populations of indigenous native cultures. For the next

400 years, a genocide of tragic proportions occurred, along with the rising of a myth that emerged out of what became the United States of America.

America was the land of milk and honey, where the streets were paved with gold. And even though the quick and easy wealth of gold proved mostly false (despite the various gold rush manias of the 19th century), the land itself was incredibly rich in abundant resources. The sheer amount of land available for ownership was seemingly unlimited, enough to allow nearly anyone to farm or run a business. That was the promise, anyway, again and again: Freedom and Wealth. People of every nationality who felt shut out or abused in their own countries flocked to America to escape their oppression. In so doing, they fervently hoped to gain a second chance at creating lives worth living in a place where the myth said they'd be able to fend for themselves and prosper for their families. The doorways to that goodness were business and the wealth it produces.

When any two symbols in astrology are strongly aspected together, their meanings interact in complex ways that result in a kind of hybrid archetype. In a conjunction, two symbols fuse into one. An opposition, with two points 180° apart, is similar, but with an alternating duality: each symbol stimulates the other into expression. A square, where two symbols are 90° of arc or one-quarter of the circle apart in perpendicularity, is different. The symbols are tied together, but "crossed." The operation of each symbol is at cross-purposes to the other.

In some ways, a square aspect between two symbols can be powerfully stimulating. When the symbols manage to operate together, they are immensely more potent. Usually this occurs by reinforcement of similar expression between the two symbols' respective conditions (sign and house associations). For instance, when the Sun's Cancer/8th house meaning is protection of the larger family (beyond just the personal of me and mine), that combines naturally with Saturn's Libra/10th house meaning of equality and social justice. In the other direction, the Sun's Cancer/8th house meaning of amassing wealth for oneself and one's personal family combines naturally with the Libra Saturn's 10-house meaning of the drive for success through business.

What we get in the first instance is a country and people devoted to inclusion and fairness for everyone, even to the point of attempting to reform human nature to achieve that end through institutions and the law of the land, and in spite of the fact that many people don't like the idea or want it. In the second instance, we get a juggernaut of powerful ambition through a strongly puritanical element of hard work combined with ownership and executive command, aimed at producing maximum freedom to pursue unlimited wealth (Neptune square Mars in support of Cancerian need-fulfillment) for oneself and one's personal beloveds.

These are two essential human motivations harnessed together: the drive for wealth, and also the need to nourish and protect one's family. That's what makes this expression of the square so powerful. Both linkages become immensely powerful memes in American life. And yet, each has downsides. The downside of social justice is that people do not like being forced to accept ideals or beliefs they may not hold, yet have to help pay for (*"No taxation without representation"*). The downside of business and wealth is that greed and selfishness may overwhelm and undermine the greater good (*"I got mine, so screw you"*).

Is the story of the Saturn-Sun square in the Sibly USA chart really that simple and straightforward? No, of course not. There are twists and turns that are paradoxical and often brutally contradictory, which is where the commentary heads next.

**End Part One**

*[In Part Two of this commentary, I will discuss the inherent complexity of the square aspect and the further implications of America's competing and mutually-exclusive Sun-Saturn central themes, how that has played out in our history, and where we find ourselves now.]*