

The Times That Try Men’s Souls: The Biden Presidency, 2021-2025

By Matthew Carnicelli, Human Potential Left

“THESE are the times that try men’s souls.” — American Crisis, 1776

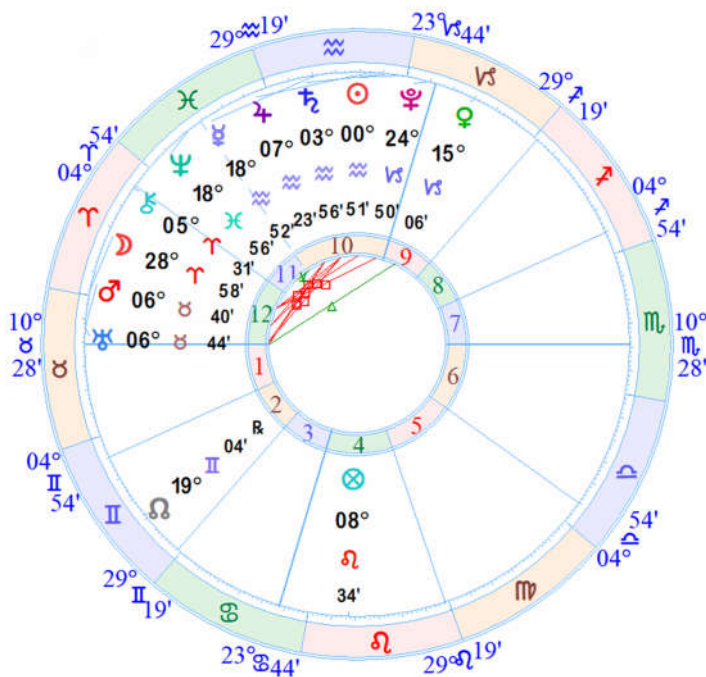
With these words 245 years ago, Thomas Paine, the revolutionary-era patriot, and Deist, eloquently set the tone for the long, bitter struggle that was then underway, and would only fully conclude seven years later with The Treaty of Paris. On January 20, 2021, ‘we the people’ will have again become engaged in yet another long, bitter struggle for the survival of our democratic republic – a struggle that we must not lose but can only truly win through forging a second American revolution in consciousness.

Introduction

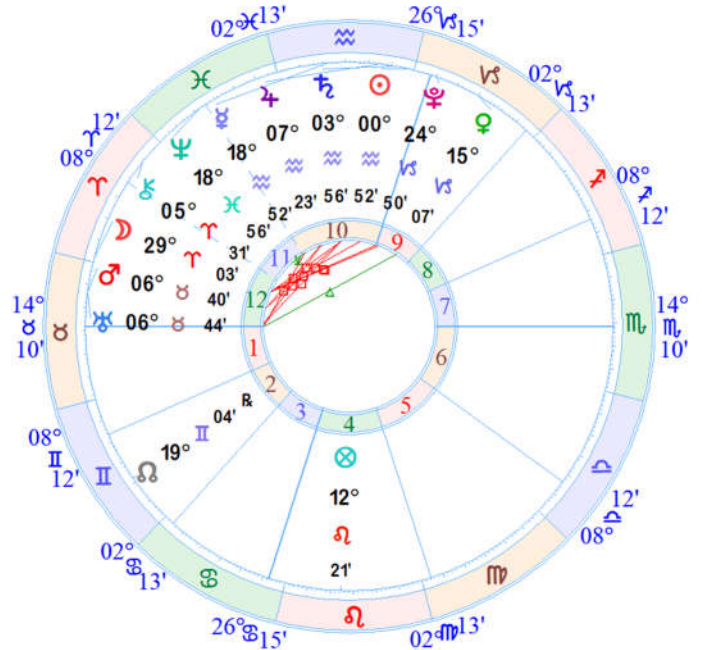
American presidents in the modern era take the Oath of Office on the 20th day of January, at or around noon. It is the considered opinion of this mundane astrologer that a chart set for the moment this Oath becomes operative ⁽¹⁾ roughly describes both the overall tenor of the incoming administration and the nature of the challenges and opportunities that it will be asked to confront or embrace. To ‘roughly describe’ a moment is to imply that seeds of the future have been planted but that the ultimate flowering of that moment is at least partially dependent, if not predominantly dependent, on the consciousness and moral courage of **all** who participate in that unfolding. In a democratic republic like the United States, this **all** must be thought to include the people of that country.

A chart set for either noon (the moment when Biden officially took office) or 11:49, the moment when he completed the Oath of Office, on January 20, 2021 strongly suggests that a continuation of the intense national strife that was first described in Barack Obama’s second inaugural moment and then magnified in the extraordinarily corrupt, chaotic, and disturbing presidency of Donald J. Trump, will surely continue into the Biden presidency and likely be with us through at

Biden completes Oath – 1/20/21, 11:49:26 am



Biden’s term officially begins – 1/20/21, 12:00 pm



(1) Biden took the Oath at 11:49:26 on January 20, 2021; however, President Trump’s term in office could not end until 11:59:59 on that same day. Legal scholars insist that a President’s term cannot begin until the previous President’s term has ended. Consequently, only time will tell whether an 11:49am or noon chart better fits the trajectory of this presidency.

least the early 2030s. In my opinion, over these next twelve years, Americans will be hard-pressed to demonstrate whatever wisdom we have individually and collectively earned in consciousness.

The inaugural chart that Joseph Biden and Kamala Harris will take power under is dominated by a complicated cluster of planetary actors. Most prominent among them is a conjunction of Sun and Pluto. Both sit in the 10th house of the chart, with Pluto itself conjunct the MC, in the 11:49 am chart (with Pluto in the 9th, but still conjunct the MC in the noon chart). Both Sun and Pluto are also in a square with the inaugural Moon while more widely conjunct Saturn and Jupiter. Jupiter and Saturn themselves are tightly square a nearly exact Mars-Uranus conjunction. Let me attempt to unpack all this for the non-technical reader, who may be unfamiliar with the jargon.

Normally, in interpreting any chart, an astrologer would start by focusing on one, two, or three isolated planetary configurations. This is appropriate in most instances since the planetary action in the typical chart tends to be distributed in discrete strands. In this inaugural moment, however, a large number of planetary actors are clustered together and must be thought of as likely to operate as if materially entangled with each other. The entanglement expressed in this moment can be profitably thought of as a mirror of a confused, deeply-troubled American psyche.

The Sun in this chart, as has been true in every inaugural moment since Congress moved the Presidential installation from March 4th to January 20th, is situated at 0 degrees Aquarius, roughly conjunct the Midheaven. I argue that this change, which became operative with the 1937 inauguration (and FDR's 2nd term as President), was symbolic of a shift in our ongoing, ever-evolving American narrative. And make no mistake: the historical narrative of the United States is continually evolving, as new perspectives are introduced and previously undervalued or largely ignored Americans' contributions to our national story are brought to light and become more perfectly integrated into the telling of the tale.

This Aquarius Sun has powerful company in 2021, inasmuch as it sits precisely on the degree of the newly-formed Jupiter-Saturn conjunction of 2020, the first conjunction of these two planets in 20 years and the first in a series of consecutive conjunctions in air signs over the next 140 years. All but one of the previous Jupiter-Saturn conjunctions over the last 240 years occurred in earth signs (Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn), or signs that emphasized a more tangible, possession-oriented, ownership-focused, materialistic perspective. The sole exception during this period was the conjunction in Libra, in 1981, which coincided with the era in which personal computers took over offices and found their way into every home, and during which the Internet first exhibited its prodigious ability to impact our lives. This was also the period of the mid-to-late 1990s tech bubble, a bubble that would implode with the onset of the next Jupiter-Saturn conjunction in Taurus in late 2000—the last of the earth conjunctions in any of our lifetimes. This 'air mutation' or extended series of upcoming Jupiter-Saturn conjunctions in air signs (Gemini, Libra, Aquarius) over the next century-and-a-half promises to elevate the importance of 'information' to unprecedented levels, and as well as promote new forms of communication and virtual organization. For instance, one fascinating Theory of Everything (or TOE) currently being actively explored in university physics departments, as an explanation for the more puzzling aspects of quantum theory, postulates that our existence is actually not physical but instead digital – and that what we experience as reality is merely a simulation in which we are all collectively participating.

As referenced earlier, this Sun is also simultaneously conjunct Pluto in Capricorn, with Pluto exactly conjunct the MC of the chart – and not just any Pluto in Capricorn, but a Pluto about to make its return to the exact place where it was positioned in any July 1st to July 4th, 1776 United States chart. I will expand on this at great length shortly.

Finally, this same Sun is tightly square the Moon of the chart, in Aries, a square albeit across air signs, but nonetheless suggestive of intense conflict during this four year period, with the Moon itself additionally involved with both Pluto and in an out-of-sign conjunction with a nearly exact conjoining of Mars-Uranus on the Ascendant.

A return to the beginning – an extended aside

The United States first came into existence with Pluto transiting the tenth segment of the ecliptic, the segment that astrologers call Capricorn. While some astronomers have attempted to downgrade Pluto to the status of a dwarf planet, this experienced mundane astrologer finds no basis for making any distinction between Pluto any other heavenly body in astrological analysis. My long-term historical studies emphatically confirm that Pluto's passage through the twelve phases of its 248-year cycle correlates with truly epochal changes in the collective zeitgeist (or spirit of the times).

Furthermore, these same astronomers have also attempted to float a theory that a thirteenth zodiacal segment exists, the constellation of Ophiuchus. This supposition might make sense if the tropical zodiac (the zodiac that the vast majority of western astrologers use) had anything to do with actual constellations, several of which have widths inconsistent with any symmetrical dissection of the heavens. However, the fact is that since the third century ACE, the moment when ancient astrologers first recognized the phenomenon called 'precession of the equinoxes', western practitioners have been using a completely different coordinate system, a system based on an equal twelvefold dissection of the ecliptic (or apparent path of the Sun). While retaining the names of the original twelve star clusters, these tropical segments today retain little spatial connection with the star clusters bearing the original names. Hence, a tropical Ophiuchus does not exist since there cannot be a thirteenth segment within a twelve segment dissection!

The United States will technically experience its Pluto return between 2022 and 2024, as part of this four-year cycle. However, given the deeply problematic placement of Pluto in any July 1st-4th 1776 chart for the US (the dates when members of the Second Continental Congress commenced their final debate on independence, then voted to move forward as a separate nation, and finally, ratified the language of the Declaration of Independence), a placement in tight opposition to retrograde natal Mercury at 24 Cancer, in this astrologer's opinion, this return should be properly thought of as having already begun with its retrograde transiting station on April 25, 2020. To better illuminate the potential impact of this return, and the importance of this proposed timing, I need only point out that the deadly police confrontations with Breonna Taylor and George Floyd took place on March 13th and May 25 of this same year, roughly bracketing this April 25th date, and that these incidents have served as trigger points for the release of at least 248 years of repressed, toxic emotions around race and its relationship to national identity.

Why should race and national identity still be such contested issues for Americans in the year 2021 – and how precisely do these issues relate to the US Pluto return?

As a nation with four planets in Cancer in any July 2nd through 4th US Chart, the zodiacal archetype intimately associated with the delicate web of relationships that constitute the ideal of family, contention over the issue of who does or doesn't get to be an equal member of our national family has long been America's Achilles' heel. Even though virtually all of the ancestors of the current population of the United States came from somewhere else, their descendants have often sought to limit the circle of trust to those groups that came earlier rather than later. Over time, however, even previously ostracized or outcast groups have become accepted – especially once they and their children became fully assimilated - at least if they were white.

The dynamic around race is more complicated. At a moment in our civilization when young Whites gravitate to hip hop music and culture as readily as Blacks, intermarriage between the races is at its height, and America has already elected its first Black President, a man whose popularity continues to skyrocket (along with that of his deeply accomplished and justly esteemed spouse) in retirement, it stands to reason that racial division should be a distant object in Americans' rearview mirror. That it is not is in this astrologer's opinion largely an artifact of one political party's deliberate messaging strategy – namely, the Southern Strategy.

The Southern Strategy in brief

When first initiated, the Southern Strategy was focused exclusively on leveraging certain White Americans', primarily southern, sense of racial animus in order to get them to vote for the Republican Party.

As Kevin Phillips, the Republican political operative who helped popularize this approach, explained to the New York Times in 1970:

From now on, the Republicans are never going to get more than 10 to 20 percent of the Negro vote and they don't need any more than that... but Republicans would be shortsighted if they weakened enforcement of the Voting Rights Act. The more Negroes who register as Democrats in the South, the sooner the Negrophobe whites will quit the Democrats and become Republicans. That's where the votes are. Without that prodding from the blacks, the whites will backslide into their old comfortable arrangement with the local Democrats.

The original Southern Strategy sought to weaponize Civil Rights Era social programs that were specifically intended to reverse the impact of systemic racism, like Affirmative Action, as well as undermine support for the Johnson

Administration's 'Great Society' expansion of the welfare state. For instance, Ronald Reagan, in his 1976 and 1980 Presidential campaigns, made extensive use of rhetoric that sought to portray the typical African American woman receiving public assistance as a 'welfare queen'. Reagan's portrayal was deliberately misleading – based on the example of a single Black woman in Chicago, Linda Taylor, rather than representative of the vast majority of women receiving public assistance.

Reagan would double-down on his Southern Strategy rhetoric in 1980 by launching his general election campaign in the town of Philadelphia, Mississippi, a town known for little else of note but it having been the place where three brave civil rights workers, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner had been stopped and brutally murdered by white supremacists. Reagan literally used this occasion in 1980 to emphasize his support for the Confederate battle cry of 'states' rights'. This can only have been a deliberate attempt to further mobilize this messaging strategy.

The GOP would soon further expand this strategy to include appeals to Christian evangelicals and fundamentalists, asserting that their religious liberty was somehow in jeopardy from encroaching secularists and adherents to non-Judeo-Christian traditions expecting equal treatment under the First Amendment – that is, a freedom of and from religion. Over time, and to the steady drumbeat of hard right conservative political messaging, via print, talk radio, Fox News, and eventually the Internet, Twitter, and Facebook, White racial grievance and White evangelicalism became fused into the red team in American politics.

At the same time that this profoundly toxic and character-devolving messaging campaign was being undertaken, Republicans were transforming their party from one that emphasized hard-headed fiscal responsibility to one that instead embraced the new gospel of supply-side – of low taxes and magical thinking - the gospel that George H. W. Bush would aptly label early on as 'voodoo economics'. While many in the former Party of Lincoln were not personally racist, as voodoo economics failed to either lift all boats equally or even come close to paying for itself, the GOP opted to leverage the strategy of racial and religious division all the more – since it had little else that was working, especially in the aftermath of the disastrous Iraq War and election of America's first Black president.

Furthermore, as the trend towards globalization increased, via bipartisan efforts to open up China and undermine state-sponsored communism, the manufacturing jobs of many Americans began heading to the PRC and other lower-wage nations. This led to a significant worsening in the economic plight of both White and non-White working and middle-class Americans – to the deindustrialization of America, and a heightened sense of economic desperation and despair. Rather than confront the dynamics driving this trend towards deindustrialization, a paucity of reinvestment in America and its working class, which would surely require enhanced revenues via an increase in taxation – an approach that the Democratic Party supports but the very thing that the oligarchs who fund the conservative think tanks, like the Heritage Foundation, Cato Institute, or American Enterprise Institute, would not stand for – the GOP left their political heavy lifting to the propaganda wing of the movement, a wing that they would soon discover they had little-to-no control over. As former George W. Bush speechwriter David Frum would sagely observe about Fox News, in the aftermath of Barack Obama's landslide win in 2008, "Republicans originally thought that Fox worked for us and now we're discovering we work for Fox."

When modestly reform-minded GOP leaders, like the then Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, sought to push back at some of the rhetorical excesses that were becoming standard fare on conservative talk radio, television, and Internet sites, they were quickly brought to heel by Rush Limbaugh and other hard-right conservative media figures. The for-profit propaganda wing of the GOP, led by Fox, Limbaugh, Glenn Beck, Michael Savage, Ann Coulter, Alex Jones, and Breitbart would come to assert a near-complete control of the messaging efforts of the conservative movement, for good or for ill – and with it, for the ongoing intellectual and spiritual devolution of the conservative base. And these media organizations and figures would be asked to pay no price regardless of how scandalous and patently false their assertions might prove. This culture of for-profit media libertinism was key to the rise of as utterly disreputable a political figure as Donald Trump – as well as the spread of the endemic yet absurdly far-fetched QAnon conspiracy theories.

The Paranoid Style in American Politics

"American politics has often been an arena for angry minds. In recent years we have seen angry minds at work mainly among extreme right-wingers, who have now demonstrated in the Goldwater movement how much political leverage can be got out of the animosities and passions of a small minority. But behind this I believe there is a style of mind that is far from new and that is not necessarily right-wing. I call it the paranoid style simply because no other word adequately evokes the sense of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy that I have in mind."

In 1964, when the eminent American historian Richard Hofstadter began his famous essay with these words, he surely did not know that the final vote for American independence, and ratification of the language of the Declaration of Independence, had taken place at moments when a retrograde Mercury was opposed in the heavens by a body that would not be discovered by astronomers for roughly 150 years, namely Pluto, a combination that 20th-century astrologers would come to associate with a strong tendency for promoting either healthily skeptical or deeply paranoid modes of thinking. Hofstadter may have known no astrology – but had intuitively come to understand the dynamics of the US Mercury-Pluto opposition:

Slightly later in the essay, Hofstadter, explains:

"The paranoid spokesman sees the fate of conspiracy in apocalyptic terms—he traffics in the birth and death of whole worlds, whole political orders, whole systems of human values. He is always manning the barricades of civilization. He constantly lives at a turning point. Like religious millennialists he expresses the anxiety of those who are living through the last days and he is sometimes disposed to set a date for the apocalypse."

"The enemy is clearly delineated: he is a perfect model of malice, a kind of amoral superman—sinister, ubiquitous, powerful, cruel, sensual, luxury-loving. Unlike the rest of us, the enemy is not caught in the toils of the vast mechanism of history, himself a victim of his past, his desires, his limitations. He wills, indeed he manufactures, the mechanism of history, or tries to deflect the normal course of history in an evil way. He makes crises, starts runs on banks, causes depressions, manufactures disasters, and then enjoys and profits from the misery he has produced. The paranoid's interpretation of history is distinctly personal: decisive events are not taken as part of the stream of history, but as the consequences of someone's will. Very often the enemy is held to possess some especially effective source of power: he controls the press; he has unlimited funds; he has a new secret for influencing the mind (brainwashing); he has a special technique for seduction (the Catholic confessional)."

<https://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/the-paranoid-style-in-american-politics/>

I urge every concerned American to read in full Hofstadter's classic essay and come to grips with its message at this truly perilous moment in our national story.

It is no accident that a group as wrong-headed and utterly deluded as Q'Anon emerged in American politics as Pluto neared its cyclical return opposite the US Mercury, or that our aging Constitution enabled the election of a pathological liar, grifter, and purveyor of witless, mind-numbing conspiracy theories. This Pluto return is exposing the single most problematic component of our archetypal national mindset as well as the frighteningly low default level of consciousness of many ordinary Americans – a level of consciousness that is meaningfully progressed or retarded through exposure to the media that one consumes and perhaps even the conception of God that one embraces.

Our inaugural moment in depth

As stated earlier, the Sun in our 2021 inaugural moment is positioned at 0 Aquarius, 51 minutes, to be precise. This places it in a relatively tight square with the Moon at 29 Aries. A square is an aspect suggesting a challenge or conflict of some sort. A square between Sun and Moon suggests a battle between proverbial head and heart, between archetypal male and female principles. This single configuration in an inaugural moment would suggest a four year period during which an unmistakable tension is likely to pervade our national life and political dialogue.

Although dynamically coupled to the Sun in this chart, I need to note that the Moon is technically considered void-of-course. A void-of-course Moon is considered present when the next aspect the Moon will make will only occur after it moves into the following zodiacal sign. The Moon has been void-of-course in nine previous inaugurals - or eight, if you take the position that Barack Obama did not successfully complete the Oath of Office in 2009 at noon on January 20 (he was literally asked to redo it with John Roberts the next day), and it was only with that second ceremony that he truly

assumed the burden of office. No one at the time expressed any doubt whether Obama was or wasn't President – but he and Roberts nonetheless did opt to repeat the ceremony.

In four of these either eight or nine void-of-course Moon inaugurations, a President either did not complete his term or became incapacitated during it (1917, Wilson's second term; 1945, FDR's fourth term; 1961, JFK's only term; 1973, Nixon's second term). This is a fairly high percentage, albeit based on a small sample size. In yet another, a President was impeached (1997, Clinton's second term) – but was never seriously in danger of being removed from office. In the instance of 1845, James Polk made it known beforehand that he had no intention of even serving more than one term.

The Sun is conjunct Saturn in Aquarius, a phase that describes a roughly two-and-one-half year period in human affairs, a segment which is part of a larger twenty nine-year cycle of growth and maturity. Aquarius emphasizes the role of the individual within the group, the collective dimension of human experience, so to speak – and the fact that this Sun is both conjunct the recent Jupiter-Saturn conjunction of December 2020, and is situated on the exact degree that this new cycle commenced, strongly suggests that this presidency will have much to do with amplifying the new spirit of this larger cycle. While Aquarius is thought to be a more 'progressive' energy, it is important to note that many conservatives have had an Aquarius Sun – most notably, Ronald Reagan, Dick Cheney, Jeb Bush, Paul Ryan, Jim Jordan, Dan Quayle, Sarah Palin, Glenn Beck, etc. Hence, an Aquarius Sun is less an indicator of political affiliation and more a style of expressing one's essence in the world.

Aquarius is a fixed air sign – and this fixity can produce individuals who feel as if they are in full possession of all the facts of any situation, and thus have little doubt as to how something should be implemented. This assumption can sometimes, in practice, be either partially incorrect (they may have some of the facts but not necessarily all of them and for all time) or lead to emotionally insensitive attempts to impose a new hegemony on others not quite ready for the Aquarian's brave new world. That cautionary aside expressed, my decided bias is that this Sun-Saturn-Jupiter conjunction, especially as expressed by the incoming Biden-Harris administration, is likely to be strongly 'progressive'.

The tightest single planetary configuration in this inaugural chart is that between Saturn and Neptune. The Saturn-Neptune cycle is a 36-year sequence that describes the inescapable tension within human societies between impulses towards selfishness and altruism, libertarianism and collectivism, and idealism and corrupted tradition. Charles Harvey, a great British astrologer of the mid-late 20th century, described Saturn-Neptune as The Cycle of Utopian Socialism.

This planetary combination was strongly influencing our archetypal landscape during the 2015-16 presidential primaries and throughout much of the 2016 general election campaign. In this astrologer's opinion, these two planets' typically volatile mix helped fuel the furious populism of both the Trump and Sanders campaigns, a populism ultimately born out of the unwillingness of the previously triumphalist neoliberal establishment to acknowledge the failure of the globalist-friendly economic status quo to equally lift all boats. Donald Trump ran in this election on the issue of bringing back jobs to America and disrupting this globalist status quo, as did Bernie Sanders, but not Hillary Clinton, at least not in convincing enough fashion. It didn't help that when Hillary expressed her opposition to the newly completed Trans-Pacific Partnership (or TPP) at the 2016 Democratic Convention, a treaty in which corporate interests had been given a direct seat at the table during the negotiations, but not American organized labor (except through President Obama's hand-selected trade representative, a former Investment Banker), her long-time friend and colleague Terry McAuliffe was quick to stomp all over her messaging by attempting to assure investors that Hillary was actually for it!

The operative aspect in 2015-16 was the 3rd quarter square; the presenting aspect in this 2021 chart is the waning semi-square (or final dynamic aspect between these two planets before their next conjunction, coming in 2026-27, on what astrologers describe as the world axis, at 0-1 Aries). In my considered opinion, this next conjunction, occurring on the world axis, is likely to be a very big deal – and is likely to describe a significant shift in our human assumptions about the proper relationship between capitalism and socialism. How significant?

The original Bolshevik Revolution in Russia emerged within weeks of the initial conjunction of Saturn and Neptune of August 1917. The most recent Saturn-Neptune cycle commenced in 1989 – with the final conjunction of these two heavenly bodies coinciding precisely with the date that the Berlin Wall came tumbling down. State-dominated authoritarian communism had been weighed in the balance by human beings and found wanting. Francis Fukuyama, an American political scientist, opined at the time that we had reached what he described as 'the end of history'. But does

history ever truly end? Authoritarian socialism had surely failed. But might there still be a place for a more voluntary, nationalist approach – like those embodied in the universal health care systems that had sprung up since the Second World War in Western Europe, Britain, Australia, Japan, and Canada, systems that are funded by taxes levied by democratically-elected legislators? Centralized, minutely-planned economies had failed, but might there still be a place for governments seeking to provide a robust safety net that would ‘catch’ workers once the creative destruction of the capitalist system cast them down into what could seem to many, especially in the deindustrialized heartlands of Europe and America, as a trash heap?

To bolster this argument I need to document that the combination of Saturn-Neptune has typically been an important marker of significant progressions in this nation’s spiritual development. For instance, in late July-August 1862, as transiting Saturn approached its conjunction with any July 1-4 natal US chart Neptune, Abraham Lincoln first presented his Cabinet with a plan to begin the emancipation of the slaves of the Confederacy once Union forces had taken control of a place – with the official Emancipation Proclamation becoming operative on January 1, 1863, under a reasonably close opposition, or half-cycle, of Saturn and Neptune in the heavens. So yes, the Saturn-Neptune cycle in American history has much to do with a now 150+ old year project of instilling the notion of authentic spiritual and material equality among Americans – regardless of how uncomfortable some insecure, emotionally-stunted whites might be with that objective.

The Social Security system itself is an expression of the ideals of Saturn-Neptune made manifest in the modern world - the bill authorizing the creation of the system was passed in the Senate on June 8th, 1935, within a few days of a station of transiting Saturn square Neptune in the heavens – as is Medicare, which was signed into law on July 30, 1965, within 1 day of transiting Neptune having stationed within a 1 degree of transiting Saturn. Hence, key elements of the Saturn-Neptune ethos appear completely consistent with what most 21st-century human beings deem defensible forms of political organization, including citizens of the United States and those of Western Europe, Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, and other democracies.

Let me here emphasize that the Saturn-Neptune ‘social democratic’ approach is not one that is imposed by violent revolution, or decreed from above, but instead voluntarily embraced from below, an expression of a people who consciously and rationally acknowledge the ties that bind, and willingly choose to invest in the future of each other – recognizing that to do so can only make their nation greater.

The Moon in this chart is in Aries. While astrological symbolism must always be thought of as inherently multidimensional, and capable of a wide range of expressions in any chart (especially an inaugural chart), in this specific instance it feels reasonable to describe this Moon, domiciled in the 12th house of the chart, and widely conjunct a Mars-Uranus conjunction in Taurus, as potentially reflecting the opponents of the incoming Administration and expressing a decided bias towards economic and social libertarianism, property rights, and a more traditional, conservative religious orientation. Why? Aries, the first phase in the twelvefold progression of styles that constitutes the tropical zodiac, is customarily thought of as being pioneering – and pioneers generally are most comfortable leading or doing things on their own, in their own way (and hence apt to be congenitally hostile to collectivists – unless they are leading the collective). They are more apt to attempt to hack a path through a wetlands area than wait for a committee to conduct an ecological survey that eventually permits them to do so, but only after careful review and consideration of the impact on the whole, including that part of the whole not yet born but who will ultimately inherit this nation and planet from all of us currently living.

It is equally fascinating and terrifying to note that this Mars-Uranus conjunction in the 12th house is roughly conjunct the Ascendant (especially in the 11:48 am chart, less so in the noon chart) in a Gauquelin zone, thus intensifying its power, and square the Jupiter of this moment, and that these three bodies square / oppose President Biden’s natal Pluto. This suggests that any effort Biden makes to ‘transform’ America into a 21st-century social democracy will be fiercely, actively opposed by defenders of a status quo that is anything but their economic friend. The combination of Mars-Uranus square Jupiter suggests an ardent desire for freedom (sometimes at the expense of social order), a tendency towards rebelliousness, and a strong potential for violent impulses and reprisals. The degree of this Jupiter is the same as the Sun degree of the most recent addition to the United States Supreme Court, Amy Coney Barrett. This suggests to me the strong possibility that Ms. Coney Barrett and her Court will have quite a bit to say on how events

progress over the next four years – and that with the addition of this new Justice, the conservatives on the Court will not even need the cooperation of the more cautious and politically sensitive (if equally conservative) Chief Justice to reverse settled precedent (like, for instance, the precedent protecting women’s reproductive rights or what remains of the Affordable Care Act).

The historical precedents available for study for this and upcoming 2025 Pluto-Sun alignments on the Midheaven in inaugural moments are Thomas Jefferson’s second term and James Madison’s first. The former saw Jefferson seek to avoid involvement in the Napoleonic Wars via the imposition of an embargo on American commerce. This embargo proved both ineffective at altering either British or French attitudes towards the neutrality of American shipping and deeply unpopular since it dramatically depressed exports. This term also saw Jefferson prosecute Aaron Burr, his previous Vice President, on charges of treason. In explaining his actions to the Marquis de Lafayette, Jefferson would write that the alleged incident involving Burr:

“has been one of the most flagitious of which history will ever furnish an example. he meant to separate the Western states from us, to add Mexico to them, place himself at their head, establish what he would deem an energetic government, & thus provide an example & an instrument for the subversion of our freedom. ... there is not a man in the US. who doubts his guilt”

The accusations against Burr appear suitably ‘Plutonian’ – but he was ultimately acquitted in a trial that John Marshall, the Chief Justice of the United States, would preside over. Were Jefferson’s suspicions of Burr’s intentions legitimate or the byproduct of a paranoid moment in American history? Historians and novelists have debated this question ever since.

US-British maritime conflict only accelerated in James Madison’s first term, as English attempts to stop American shipping and impress former British subjects serving on US ships increased. His Majesty’s Government had yet to acknowledge a subject’s absolute right to voluntarily renounce their citizenship (and thus be free to become a citizen of another nation). These accelerating tensions ultimately led to an American declaration of War in 1812 – a war that the Brits would, fortunately, treat as a sideshow to their primary battle with Napoleon, and which would continue into Madison’s second term. The conflict would result in the burning of Washington, DC in 1814.

A square of inaugural Pluto to the Ascendant / Descendant axis of the inaugural moment was present in the contested presidency of John Quincy Adams. In the election of 1824, Andrew Jackson won a plurality of the popular vote but failed to generate sufficient support in the Electoral College to become President. The election was thus thrown to the House of Representatives where supporters of Quincy Adams and Henry Clay came together to deliver the presidency to the former, with the latter becoming Secretary of State. This outcome was deemed by the more numerous Jackson supporters as a corrupt bargain – even though such an agreement between two candidates would have been fully constitutional. Jackson remained extremely popular during the next four years, and Adams was routed in his bid for reelection in 1828.

The most recent example that we have of Pluto conjunct an angle in an inaugural moment comes from 1937 – with Pluto conjunct the IC (or bottommost angle of the chart). This was the four year period in which FDR attempted his Supreme Court-packing effort, but without adequately consulting with either his Democratic majority or properly preparing the American people for the effort. Roosevelt lost his battle to pack the Court – but with his next electoral victory in the 1938 mid-terms, the Court began to adopt a less hostile attitude towards FDR’s recovery efforts.

Not only is this Moon square the Sun, but it is also square inaugural Pluto (since the Sun and Pluto, as previously explained, are themselves conjoined across signs). **Moon-Pluto hard aspects in an inaugural moment suggest a four year period in which the people of the United States are subjected to an emotionally grueling experience. It suggests a term in which sudden loss and collective grieving is likely. The most recent Presidential terms in which relatively tight Moon-Pluto hard aspects were present were 1941, 1965, and 2001.**

The 1941 inaugural moment is, of course, memorably associated with the shocking Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and America’s sudden entry into a total war scenario, the Second World War. In 1965-1968, America became much more heavily involved in the Vietnam conflict, with this involvement generating a powerful counter-reaction from young people within the nation. This was also a presidential term in which both advances were made in race relations, via the

passage of the historic 1965 Civil Rights Act, but also grievous losses experienced – through riots in America’s cities and the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. The 2001 inaugural moment will forever be associated with the shocking terrorist attack on 9/11 and George W. Bush’s subsequent, deeply problematic decision to invade Iraq, a nation that bore no responsibility whatsoever in the attack. As with the conflict in Vietnam, Bush’s decision to invade Iraq would provoke a furious counter-reaction within the nation.

Mercury is situated in Aquarius in our inaugural moment, in the 10th house, but devoid of ‘major aspects’ to the other players in the drama — although in both a semi-sextile with Neptune (the second tightest aspect in the entire chart) and quintile the Moon in Aries. This suggests a noisy four year period in which popular talk of Constitutional reforms will resound. Most of these proposed ideas will prove, at least over the short term, politically unrealistic given the sheer size of our current national divide, and the requirement that two-thirds of the states ratify any change. This Moon’s positioning conjunct the Equatorial Ascendant, in the 12th house, also amplifies the notion of a period of great public feeling and expression – much likely of a religious nature, given the public grieving that is inevitable once our current Coronavirus crisis can be resolved, and it is safe again to publicly memorialize our dead.

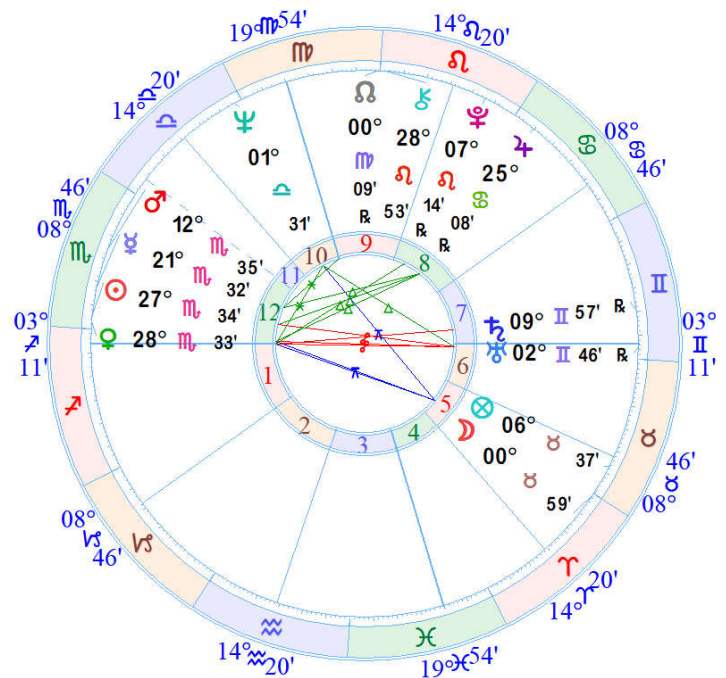
The placement of Venus in Capricorn, tightly trine the Ascendant of the noon inaugural moment (but less so in the 11:49 chart), suggests that a healing of the economic damage caused by the pandemic, the pandemic that arrived in the year of the Saturn-Pluto conjunction, will be a concern of many Americans during these four years.

From the perspective of AstroCartography (an approach to chart analysis that allows the astrologer to view how the angles of any chart shift as its subject moves across the globe), the angular Mars-Uranus configuration of this earlier 11:49 inaugural moment runs slightly to the west of North Korea, directly through Shanghai, the Taiwan Strait, and the east coast of China. However, Jupiter is itself conjunct the IC for Beijing – which suggests significant sabre rattling but also the possibility of a rapprochement, at least with China – especially with Joe Biden’s natal relocated Jupiter-descendant line running roughly through the same area. Inaugural Mercury-IC also runs through North Korea, suggesting a continuation of talks begun under the previous administration.

Joe Biden brings a Scorpio stellium in the 12th house to the American presidency, as well as roughly 45 years of experience in and around the Federal government. In that specific sense, he is as different from his predecessor in the White House as can be – and can truly be said to “know where the bodies are buried”. Biden’s chart features a tight Sun-Venus alignment which combines to form a larger Sun-Venus-Mercury conjunction. This conjunction enjoys a relatively close trine to natal Jupiter at 25 Cancer, roughly the degree of the IC of this 2021 inaugural moment. Biden’s chart also features a Mars in Scorpio.

A Scorpio stellium in the 12th house would suggest a person of deep feeling and intensity, with a keen interest in accumulating power, and who is most comfortable operating behind the scenes, in the shadows, with little need to be the center of attention. It further suggests a card player who is impossible to read at the table. IMHO, Biden’s strategic instincts have not always been perfect. For instance, he supported the Iraq invasion of 2003, buying into the faulty intelligence consensus of the previous decade, which postulated that Saddam Hussein both had WMDs available to him and that his removal could be effected without completely destabilizing the region. To reiterate, that was the foreign policy and intelligence community consensus of the previous decade, as articulated by both Democrats and Republicans. So in that sense, Biden was not an outlier but squarely representative of a consensus that happened to be off the mark.

Joseph Biden – November 20, 1942, 8:30 am, Scranton PA,



A Scorpio stellium in the 12th house would also suggest a person of authentic religious instincts. For instance, Biden is well known to never leave the house without a set of rosary beads in his pocket. Jimmy Carter is another example of a President with 12th house Sun, and a person for whom religious principles are something that one quietly seeks to embody rather than use as a club to pummel and shame your opponents or portray one's self as holier than thou.

Perhaps the most striking yet discordant component of Biden's chart is his Saturn-Uranus conjunction on the descendant, a configuration that perhaps best describes the emotionally wrenching, "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" that he has had to withstand throughout his life – including the death of his first wife and child in a car accident, and later the premature death of his son Beau. Uranus, in particular, on the descendant suggests a life where sudden, uncomfortable interruptions are likely to be endemic. It also suggests a person who, once he or she has psychologically been able to incorporate these discordant elements into the psyche, becomes capable of consistently surprising us all. This Saturn-Uranus on the descendant further mirrors an aspect in the 2021 inaugural moment – a square that will form in the sky in February of 2021.

To offer a bit context for this aspect, the most recent conjunction of this Saturn-Uranus cycle formed in 1988, at about the time when the cracks in the Iron Curtain were first beginning to become evident. The first quarter square formed in May 2000, at the top of the Tech Bubble. Barack Obama was elected as President on November 4, 2008, on the day of the first of five hits of the Saturn-Uranus opposition of 2008-09, at a point when financial markets were falling as if they would never again go up. As I wrote in a 2009 essay, *America at a Crossroads*

"This opposition suggests a changing of the guard, a palatable, visceral tension between the need for fundamental change and an understandable fear of losing what one had, and had become comfortable with."

Obama was born with an exact Saturn-Uranus quincunx, within 4 minutes of orb. Due to the presence of that planetary combination, he was cosmically attuned to inherit that moment, that tension between the need to bravely harmonize the old and the new, even if, with the quincunx aspect, he surely did not know going in how he was going to do it.

Similarly, although the aspect is less precise, it strikes me that Biden was born to inherit this type of moment in American history, with all its likely upsetting twists and turns. For instance, he was, of course, elected Vice President under the same Saturn-Uranus opposition that brought Obama to power; that Saturn-Uranus opposition closely conjoined the angles of Biden's chart that describe his career and home, within 1 degree of orb.

To conclude this brief introduction to the President-elect's chart, Biden has Sagittarius rising in both Scranton, PA, where he was born, and Washington, DC – a lens on the world that suggests an ability to frame every challenge as if there is a lesson that can be learned and a brighter future that could be achieved. His Moon at 0 Taurus 59 suggests a mensch, a man of the people, who is as comfortable talking to the conductor on the Amtrak trains that he would take every day to and from Washington, all so that he could make dinner every night for his children back in Delaware, as he was talking to a Head of State. The recent Jupiter-Saturn conjunction of 2020 squared his Moon – guaranteeing his strong emotional and personal involvement in the unfolding of this new twenty-year cycle.

Biden assumes the presidency with transiting Neptune roughly conjunct the IC of his chart. Neptune across the IC would be a challenge for most of us. It suggests a tendency to see everything through rose-colored glasses. It further suggests a tendency to put your trust in people that do not deserve it. With that 12th house stellium, however, and natal Neptune sextile his natal Ascendant from birth, perhaps Biden can withstand this transit better than others – and might even be capable, in a best-case scenario, of calling on an intuition that transcends mere logic. However, my greatest fear for Biden is that under this typically problematic transit, his 'faith' in the good intentions of his foes, namely Senate Republicans, will prove misguided, if not his undoing.

Salting the American ground

Despite being fairly and predictably defeated, Donald Trump has made a point of salting the earth that the Biden-Harris Administration must attempt to build on over the next four years. His loathsome encouragement of low-information, emotionally-stunted, white supremacist groups and treasonous effort to preserve his tacky brand by casting completely unfounded aspersions on the legitimacy of the 2020 elections, not to mention outlast the Statute of Limitations on

financial crimes he likely committed in New York State before becoming President, will surely have dire ramifications for the United States over the next decade.

To anyone collectively-deranged enough to lend even an iota of credibility to Trump's utterly bogus assertion of election fraud, at least on the Biden campaign's behalf, let me brutally assert the facts.

Donald Trump was the first President in the polling era to never once over four years enjoy an approval rating of 50% or higher in a major national poll. According to the final *Fox News* poll before the election, a poll known to be sympathetic to conservative candidates, Donald Trump trailed Joe Biden in the national polling by around 8%. He today trails Joe Biden in the national popular vote by 4.4% or a little more than 7 million votes. Donald Trump lost states like Maine by the same margin that a GOP Senatorial incumbent handily defeated her Democratic challenger – suggesting if anything, that independent and even Republican voters in swing states hedged their bets by voting for Joe Biden at the top of the ticket and Republicans down-ticket. That's how strongly even sane, sagacious Republicans and Independents wanted this catastrophe of a President gone. Nero is reported to have fiddled while Rome burned — and Trump played golf when not pathetically sulking over his loss and spreading despicable lies, as record numbers of Americans perished from Coronavirus in the darkest days of late 2020. And yet this child-man, this congenital narcissist, this incurious, emotionally and intellectually stunted individual thought it appropriate to cast aspersions on the legitimacy of our cherished electoral processes. And worse yet, just like every other fascist leader in western history, including that house painter from Austria, he found knaves willing and eager to do his dirty work. Here's looking at you, Rudy Giuliani.

If there was any systemic cheating whatsoever in this election, it involved attempts at deliberate voter suppression by the Republican Party – a party whose political operatives readily acknowledge that when every American votes, its chances for victory materially decrease.

I don't want everybody to vote. Elections are not won by a majority of the people. They never have been from the beginning of our country and they are not now.

Paul Weyrich, Co-Founder of the Heritage Foundation and ALEC (the American Legislative Exchange Council)

I humbly submit that in a 21st-century democratic republic, voter suppression is cheating. If you agree, then I suggest that we repeat this loud and often – for we are taught that the truth will set us free.

Fearful symmetries

My primary expectation for this next four year period is one of extraordinary political, and potentially military, confrontation and upheaval. Given everything we have all seen and heard over the last four years, including the shocking assault by unhinged Trump supporters on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, an assault incited by the outgoing President's campaign against the legitimacy of the electoral process, coupled to this confused, deeply entangled incoming planetary mosaic, I wish that I had something more Pollyannaish or uplifting to offer – but I can think of nothing.

The placement of Pluto in Capricorn tightly conjunct the Midheaven of this chart, in a reasonably tight out-of-sign conjunction with the Sun – the first of two consecutive US presidential inaugurations with Sun conjunct Pluto on the MC – suggests to this astrologer, first and foremost, the possibility and need for changes in our understanding of the American presidency, the American Constitution, and America's role in the world. According to my historical studies, Pluto in Capricorn has everything to do with the deconstruction of unhealthy hegemonic forces – like the British Empire that the Founding Fathers broke away from 245 years ago this year, setting in motion, recent revisionist history aside, a brilliant revolution in human consciousness and political structures. Might America itself over the last quarter-millennium have become an unhealthy hegemonic force requiring cosmic deconstruction? I'd like to think not – but it's sometimes difficult to see how our nation will be able to heal the extraordinary gulf that our current politics describe, especially in the wake of the Trump presidency, a presidency based on tweets and lies so numerous that if printed on paper and laid flat on the ground, edge to edge, they would likely stretch from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific. Yet it must be admitted that were this nation to come apart at the seams over the next decade, this downsizing would prove an extremely potent form of cosmic deconstruction. **Do we wish to be cosmically deconstructed, with our collective**

madness serving as the instrument? IMHO, that is perhaps the primary choice ‘we the people’ of the United States face over the next decade.

The positioning of Mars in this chart, conjunct Uranus on the Ascendant, in what astrologers describe as a Gauquelin zone, is extremely worrisome. To begin with, as referenced earlier in this essay, when applying the lens of AstroCartoGraphy, this Mars-Uranus conjunction becomes angular, on the Descendant, slightly west of North Korea and through the east coast of China, directly through Shanghai and the Taiwan Strait (especially in the 11:49 moment, less so in the noon moment). While I fully expect the Biden Administration to attempt to mend fences within the NATO alliance, and with our Pacific allies, and to not engage in military adventures, this placement strongly indicates that relations with North Korea and China will continue to be both challenging and unpredictable.

Having enjoyed an intimate relationship with Donald Trump, it is probable that Kim Jong-Un, in particular, will attempt to command a similar degree of attention from the Biden Administration. If Kim doesn’t receive that attention, might he devise scenarios in which the President might feel as if he has no choice but to engage? So long as Kim controls an imposing arsenal of conventional weapons pointed directly at Seoul, South Korea, and has the ability to deliver a nuclear warhead against at least regional targets allied with the US (Japan and perhaps even Australia), there is surely no military solution to safeguarding America’s allies in the region – thus making some kind of diplomatic effort paramount. But no such effort is possible without the active cooperation of China.

As regards China, any sign of American military preoccupation with the home front, as would be natural were a separatist movement to emerge here in America, would likely provide the PRC with an excellent opportunity to militarily have its way with Taiwan. Chinese leaders might even point to any American effort to restrain a breakaway movement at home as a sign of our hypocrisy in attempting to prevent it from forcibly reuniting with that island democracy.

With regard to the home front, the simple fact that Mars-Uranus is conjunct the Ascendant for Washington leads me expect a four year period in which Oklahoma City type bombings, and other forms of soul-quaking domestic terrorism, are possible. We saw one such effort on January 6th – and with this aspect coupled to inaugural Moon square inaugural Pluto, I feel it only prudent to warn that that incident may prove a mere harbinger of what is to come.

Given this same positioning of these planets in this chart, in hard aspect to Joe Biden’s natal Pluto, I seriously worry that the United States Secret Service is likely to have their hands full attempting to keep him and his family safe (especially given the void-of-course Moon square Pluto in this inaugural moment). And this goes double for Vice President Harris, the first Black woman to hold the office, and her family.

With regard to the economy, particularly given the Mars-Saturn square in this chart, an aspect that is typically associated with blockages and frustrations, while the stock market has continued to soar to new heights throughout this last year of pain, loss, death, and isolated grieving, bolstered by dreams of a FED forever accommodating its insular needs, the real American economy has suffered mightily – with American cities likely to experience major hardship and financial crisis for years beyond the day that every American is finally vaccinated. In light of the symbolism embedded in this inaugural moment, coupled with the arrival of the Saturn-Uranus square of 2021, the likely financial impact of serious domestic terrorism, and my analysis of the inaugural moment for the next Mayor of New York (a bellwether indicator for the economic health of US cities in general), I would not be at all surprised if America settles into a deep, prolonged recession once the full extent of the pandemic’s toll on American cities is known. As an aside, I must note that the Trump stock market bubble was fueled by \$1 trillion in deficit spending per year, at least up until the pandemic hit – and this at a time of peace, low interest rates, and full employment. With the FED interest rate already at .25%, I fail to see what arrows the FED has left in its quiver should the need arise. If only this country could travel back in time twenty years, to the moment when Bill Clinton exited the White House, with the nation running an actual budget surplus – before all the voodoo economic tax cuts, financial deregulation, and wars launched on our national credit card, brought us to this awful place. We could surely use those squandered financial assets now, in this moment of utterly unforeseen, God-given crisis.

Given the prominence of the Moon in this chart, in a house associated with either religion or perhaps the feeling of being trapped by religion, the issue of women’s reproductive rights, and abortion, in particular, could be hotly contested during this four year period. And make no mistake, the moment that *Roe v. Wade* is no longer the law of the land is that

moment that abortion will become a fiercely-debated issue in every state in this Union, with the rhetoric summoned to defend both the pro-choice and pro-life positions becoming ever more incendiary – and potentially deadly (especially with Moon square Pluto in this inaugural moment) – and the relationships between the states that choose to outlaw abortion or protect it becoming ever more tenuous.

As I have repeatedly warned in previous essays, were Roe to be repealed, our states and Union would almost assuredly find itself further immersed in needless conflict and controversy, with solidly blue states likely subject to acts of domestic terrorism, especially given both this volatile inaugural moment and the deeply problematic assertion of conservative religious figures that their church and religious traditions can adequately grasp the will of the creator of a universe comprised of literally hundreds of billions of galaxies, within which each galaxy is contained hundreds of billions of solar systems, and thus likely hundreds of billions of experiments in consciousness, and all based on their interpretation of ancient scriptures that modern scholars routinely demonstrate are riddled with inconsistencies, if not purely the stuff of legend. And this violence would be occurring at a moment when our poor planet is already reeling from the catastrophic impact of climate change, a malady primarily caused by the all-too-large ecological footprint of advanced industrial citizens (like those in the United States). Hence, I would plead with Justice Coney Barrett and her fellow conservatives to view the issue of women's reproductive rights within a context far broader than their more conservative legal and ecclesiastical inclinations might otherwise recommend. IMHO, to know only one spiritual tradition is to become a prisoner of that tradition; however, to know and experience many traditions, and to view one's experience of those traditions from a critical-thinking, 21st-century perspective, a perspective informed by a respect for an honest, humble science, is to be positioned to more authentically understand the mind of Nature's God.

Given the orgy of unjustified, self-serving pardons that Trump has issued on his way out of the White House, I certainly expect an attempt by Congress to narrow the President's powers in this area – although it may require Pluto's ingress into Aquarius in 2024 for sufficient momentum to build for this kind of change. The United States Constitution was originally framed with Pluto in Aquarius – and hence I would expect the necessary, thorough revision of the document to wait until sometime during this 2024-2043 period.

Now that Democrats have won the two Georgia Senate seats, and have at least gained control of the right to place bills on the Senate floor, we can at least expect that Joe Biden's legislative agenda will be debated (if not given a final vote) – the thing that IMHO every President deserves, and that every Senator should have the right to do. How 'we the people' ceded complete control of the legislative agenda to the Senate majority leader is a mystery – and one that our leaders need to solve. James Madison, in *The Federalist Papers*, does not even envision the formation of political parties. What would he think of a scenario where a majority leader prevents his caucus from voting for legislation that at least some within that caucus would otherwise gladly support, if not for the unhealthy controlling influence of the majority leader?

So long as the profoundly anti-democratic procedural filibuster continues to exist, final votes on legislation can still be blocked by a controlling minority (except in a limited number of areas, and then only when using a byzantine reconciliation process) – as it was in 2009-10 when Republicans utterly abused this rule in their attempt to sabotage the Obama presidency. The votes reportedly do not exist within the incoming Democratic caucus to remove it. IMHO, if the best interests of American democracy are to be considered, it would be eliminated, with the talking filibuster perhaps retained if Senate traditionalists so wish. The talking filibuster at least has the potential to focus an entire nation on a relevant issue – and both extracts a heavy physical price on the participants (thus making it less likely to be casually used) and an equally heavy political price if the cause is not deemed worthy by the American electorate. This much is certain: going forward, a minority cannot be given the ability to sabotage a presidency the way Jim DeMint and Mitch McConnell attempted to sabotage the Obama presidency. America would be a far more functional 21st-century democracy if mere majorities were required to pass, and then later repeal if necessary, legislation.

A similar dynamic can exist in the House of Representatives when Republicans control it. This dynamic bears the name of a convicted child molester (read it and weep, Q'Anon adherents), The Hastert Rule (after Denny Hastert, former a Speaker of the House and convicted sex offender) limits the consideration of legislation to only items that a majority of the majority supports. Where in the Constitution does it say that a majority of the majority must support legislation before it receives a vote? Does not this profoundly unnatural rule, a rule that I submit is as unnatural as Hastert's sexual proclivities, lead precisely to the deep sense of endemic frustration that too many Americans (and Congresspersons)

have come to feel about the functioning of our government? Of course, it does. I strongly submit that these attempts at exercising an unhealthy control over the legislative process are areas in which America's Pluto return demands we dramatically upgrade our default mode of functioning.

A personal reflection on our presenting American crisis

The emerging American crisis that I first began to warn of in my 2010 essay, "Size Matters – Understanding the Size-Related Dynamics of Our Emerging American Crisis", and then sought to further expound on in "Take Care of this House" (2012), "Of the People. For the People, By the People" (2013) and finally in "The War Within" (2016) is now upon us. This crisis will almost assuredly persist beyond the end of this Presidential term – and likely extend into the 2030s

Gary Lortenzen, a Northwest-based mundane astrologer and researcher, brought to the attention of a Facebook group that I participate in a truly chilling insight – that two previous instances of transiting Pluto forming a 'hard' aspect (conjunction, opposition, or square) to the US Nodal axis have coincided with total war scenarios. The first instance, in 1861, involved transiting Pluto, then in Taurus, forming a square to the US natal North Node in Leo; this instance was also accompanied by our first-ever national Uranus return (or return of Uranus to the degree of the zodiac it was situated on the day that the US came into existence, a period of roughly 84 years). The second instance was in 1941, and involved the conjunction of a stationary transiting Pluto in Leo with the US North Node; this conjunction roughly coincided (within 1 degree of orb) with the attack on Pearl Harbor. More optimistically, the most recent return of this configuration, the square of Pluto in Scorpio to the node of 1985-87, saw America not drawn into a total war scenario but instead enter into what would prove productive, transformative negotiations with a new leader of an old enemy, Mikhail Gorbachev, and the beginning of the end of the Cold War. Of course, the associated inaugural moment of 1985 featured Jupiter conjunct the Moon on the MC – a signature of national exhilaration and triumph, if there ever was one.

The next major aspect in this transiting Pluto-US nodes cycle, the opposition, will form in 2027-28, during the same period when Uranus will be making its next scheduled planetary return. The inaugural chart of 2025 reflects this potentially challenging development – with Mars tightly conjunct the IC of the chart and Sun conjunct Pluto on the MC, semi-square Venus conjunct Saturn. The symbolism here strongly hints at impulses towards separation and loss. This suggests a four year period in which the inner impulse toward violent separation will be at its height. For those readers desperate for a thread of hope amidst this gathering darkness, I note that Jupiter is also involved in this moment, in a nearly exact sesqui-quadrate (or 135-degree aspect) with the midheaven.

But these aspects are all in the distance. Over the next few years it will be America's Pluto return, and opposition to our national natal Mercury, that must command our undivided collective attention, at least if we wish to survive as a single nation (much less Make America Great Again).

IMHO, the United States' 'Pluto return' demands nothing less from 'we the people' than an exponential collective upgrade in our mental and emotional functioning, at least if we hope to preserve our once noble Union. It demands that we rip the pretty colored doilies from the light bulbs that we have used to prettify racist, know-nothing attitudes, which have only served to retard the intellectual and spiritual development of every American. It further demands that we commit to a cross-cultural, 21st century Enlightenment ethos of lifelong learning, personal development, painstaking emotional and spiritual honesty, and rededication to the proposition that all men and women are equal before the law.

In practical terms, it demands that we lessen our addiction to mindless reality television, fantasy violence, conspiracy theories, and intentionally inflammatory media, and instead subscribe to more dispassionate, enlightening fare, like **The Great Courses Plus**, **Coursera**, **Masterclass**, **The PBS Newshour**, etc. Through extended exposure to this kind of fact-based content, every person in America not saddled with a serious cognitive impairment can meaningfully upgrade their intellectual functioning, and by extension the functioning of our once-great but now reeling democratic republic, regardless of whether they even graduated from high school or college. They can accomplish this while they commute to and from work, during their leisure hours, at any hour of the day or night. If the truth is told, the Framers of the Constitution never intended to extend the franchise as widely as we have. It thus behooves us as Americans to rise to meet the challenge of self-rule, by striving, as best as each of us is able, to become the intellectual equals of our founding elite. This upgrade process necessarily begins within and can spontaneously, over time, spread to others. Thus, every step along the path to authentic personal enlightenment that we take for ourselves, we take for others – by

exploding any notion of personal limitation that they may be holding on to. So long as a person still breathes, they can grow – in knowledge, wisdom, and their capacity to positively impact the whole.

Ours is a nation that encompasses many different defensible theological and ethical traditions. Some see this diversity as a liability and feel threatened by it. I see this diversity as a strength – so long as all sides are open to learning from each other, and altering their stances once the light from above reveals the next stretch in the path up the mountaintop of human and cosmic truth. Be that light “the bright sunshine of the mind” that John Locke wrote of, the light provided by a humble, empirically-grounded science that is not seeking to arrogantly impose itself in realms where it has little expertise (as in attempts by adherents to ‘scientism’ to convert Americans with DNA far more sensitive to spiritual and devotional strivings to atheism), or the light emanating from a patient, painstaking application of the mind-expanding technologies that underpin most of the world’s great spiritual traditions, matters little in the cosmic scheme of things.

In my humble opinion, America was once, long ago, truly ‘exceptional’, if also imperfect. And make no mistake: both can and have been simultaneously true in human history. Yes, smug presentism aside, a people can indeed be exceptional in some sense for their moment while also sharing too many of the prejudices of their barbarous era. We are all products of our collective eras – and participate in barbarous behavior that our posterity will surely shudder at. Few, if any of us, are exempt from this tendency - regardless of race, color, sexuality, gender orientation, or preferred ethical creed. Yes, our ancestors were imperfect – some deeply imperfect. But as we forgive them, **while simultaneously correcting for their errors**, we create the psychic space within which our posterity can forgive us – for instance, for doing little-to-nothing to arrest climate change and the desecration of the natural world while we had the chance.

Our presenting crisis today is centered on the reality that far too many Americans are collectively devolving to the point where some of the most witless, mind-numbing, loathsome lies imaginable have been allowed to take hold in this country; and these lies threaten to unleash an explosion capable of imploding our once mighty Union from within. And so long as this ongoing devolution is allowed to continue, things can only go from bad to worse.

At the root of this perilous devolution into ‘collective insanity’ is a for-profit media that has run amok – a media that routinely elevates worship of the almighty dollar over the pursuit of authentic human wisdom and collective cultural and spiritual evolution. Fox News, one of the worst offenders in this regard, defends the daily calumnies of a Tucker Carlson in legal proceedings as the shtick of an ‘entertainer’. Similarly, InfoWars’s Alex Jones defends his lunatic, destabilizing antics in divorce proceedings as the act of an ‘entertainer’. The host of that low-brow reality TV series, ‘The Apprentice’, knew damn well early on that Barack Obama had been born in America, and thus had every legal right to serve as President, but nonetheless insisted on spreading his poison for as long as this tawdry form of distraction and demonization served to bolster his tacky brand.

That said, it wasn’t Rupert Murdoch who opined that a completely undisciplined, barely literate, career grifter and business failure like Donald Trump “may not be good for America, but it’s damn good for CBS”. And it wasn’t Breitbart’s Steve Bannon who decreed that when this viewer changed station between innings of Yankees games in 2015, to hear what MSNBC’s Chris Matthews had to say about the events of the day, he was instead subjected to a live feed of yet another Trump rally.

Thus, at the heart of our collective crisis at present resides an unfortunate tendency to equate a libertine style of capitalism, a rapacious, utterly amoral style of capitalism that is increasingly allied with a feel-good but intellectually-challenged forms of evangelical and new age religion, with virtuous behavior – rather than see it as the profound perversion that Adam Smith would surely see it as. And lest we forget, the year 1776, the year when transiting Pluto last approached the 28th degree of tropical Capricorn, the degree upon which rests the United States’ Pluto, three seminal documents were published: Smith’s ‘The Wealth of Nations’, Edward Gibbons first volume in his epic study, ‘The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire’, and Thomas Jefferson’s ‘Declaration of Independence’.

Adam Smith was a moral philosopher and leading figure in the Scottish Enlightenment. IMHO, Smith would not only be appalled by the crony capitalism of our time – a style of capitalism that socializes corporate losses while demonizing individuals who experience authentic economic hardship due to no moral fault of their own, including accidents of birth - but he would also surely be appalled by a politics that rewards every form of deception and dishonesty in pursuit of the almighty dollar.

I've written a lot about the Saturn-Neptune cycle in this and my previous inaugural essay, 'The War Within'. The Saturn-Neptune cycle that commenced in 1847-48 not only witnessed the publication of Karl Marx's 'Communist Manifesto' and outbreak of the ill-fated 'Springtime of the Peoples', but also, at the full moon phase of its 36-year cycle, in 1861-63, gave birth to the impulse that made tensions over America's 'peculiar institution', slavery, no longer tolerable (and simultaneously, half a world away, impelled a Czar's liberation of Russia's serfs).

The seed idea embedded within this cycle is one that is also embedded within the core mythology of the United States, using different words than Marx or the revolutionaries of 1848 would have used. In fact, this seed is literally embedded in any July 1-July 4 US chart, by way of a precise, 16th harmonic (or 22 ½ degree) aspect. **This aspect is literally the closest dynamic aspect, bar none, in any July 4th, 1776 US chart.** This seed would give birth to a phrase that would be forever immortalized in the Preamble to our 1787 Constitution, a phrase that remains justly famous, and still capable of inspiring noble hearts, even to our day:

"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union..."

Saturn in Libra semi-octile (or 22 ½ degrees) Neptune in Virgo equals a perpetual quest for that 'more perfect Union' that more perfect nation-state. This seed requires that every generation of Americans take up their burden and make the effort to 'progress' — to insure that this nation always goes forward, never rests on its laurels, and never goes back. It further demands that we recognize that America is very much a work in progress — and always has been.

I am not a socialist — although if you read my essays, you might come away with the erroneous impression that I am one. I have sound reasons for resisting the siren's song of utopian socialism. I share them here in closing in the hope that they will resonate with others.

First and foremost, while I passionately argue for the ideal of a 21st century social democracy, I hold no illusions that utopian societies are even possible at humanity's underwhelming present state of evolution. Social scientists tell us that most human behaviors can be described by a 'bell curve' — a graph in which the vast majority of traits are broadly dispersed towards the middle of the distribution, with much smaller segments on either extreme. My definite sense is that, with regard to altruism, for every Jesus or Gandhi, there are probably many more Donald Trumps. When human beings spiritually evolve to the level where altruism becomes the rule in human affairs and not the exception, then utopian societies will fall like an apple from the tree. But until that day, which I suspect is a long, long way off, likely many centuries (assuming that our species even manages to survive that long), we had best attempt to mold our political systems around humankind as it authentically is — imperfect, chronically under-informed, predominantly self-interested, but capable of being awakened by exposure to education, both technical and spiritual, formal and informal, and under the best of circumstances, open to arguments around what Alexis de Tocqueville, the author of 'Democracy in America', called "self-interest well understood". I'd still like to believe that a society with a majority of human beings committed to the ideal of "self-interest well understood", to a nation in which self-interested participants nonetheless view each other as at least distant relations, with meaningfully intertwined economic, social, and ecological destinies, remains possible. For without such a commitment going forward, I sincerely doubt that this now faltering American experiment can survive. Of this much I am certain: Trumpism represents the surest path to spiritual and national oblivion.

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Chart wheels produced in Cosmic Patterns Kepler 8.

For more on the cosmic weather impelling our times, see:

The War Within (2017) — <http://hpleft.com/011417.pdf>

Of the People, for the People, by the People (2013) — <http://hpleft.com/010513.pdf>

Take Care of This House (2012) — <http://hpleft.com/010412.pdf>

Size Matters: Understanding the Size-Related Dynamics of Our Emerging American Crisis (2010) — <http://hpleft.com/040810.html>

America at a Crossroads (2009) — <http://hpleft.com/090809.html>

Storm Clouds at High Noon (2001) - - <http://hpleft.com/highnoon.html>

About Matthew Carnicelli

Matthew Carnicelli is a mundane astrologer, contemporary Deist, and spiritually-oriented political activist. He is a regular contributor to the Comment section of *Washington Post* and in 2015 was featured in a story highlighting *The New York Times'* most influential reader contributors. He currently lives and works in New York City.

When not digging ever deeper into the cycles of history and foundations of comparative religion, he continues his research for his first two books, ***What God Tells Me: The Confession of a 21st Century American Deist*** and ***The Spiritual Template of America: A Self Help Book for Our National Life.***