

America Divided: Part Two

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In *Part One* of this commentary, I discussed the two primary and conflicting themes of the Sibly chart for the USA, as indicated by the Sun-Saturn square that symbolizes the core of our national mandala — namely, equality and social justice versus individual freedom and unfettered pursuit of wealth. Now, in *Part Two*, I'll describe the complexity of that struggle in more precise astrological terms.

In astrology, any connection of two planetary symbols through a major aspect — the most important of which are conjunction (0° of arc), square (90° of arc), or opposition (180° of arc) — indicates that their interpretive meanings are mutually linked and will tend to function together. How their meanings will operate in harness, whether in cooperation or conflict, depends on many factors, one of which is the nature of the aspect itself.

Conjunctions, with two planetary symbols located together in the zodiac, fuse the separate implications of each symbol into a single, overall meaning. They operate in union, as one, whether harmoniously or disharmoniously. By contrast, when two symbols are located halfway around the zodiac from each other — across the chart — they are connected in opposition. Their meanings remain separate and individual, but they operate together through a kind of mutual harmonic resonance. When the meaning of one symbol manifests or is expressed in life, the meaning of the other, opposite symbol will also manifest, either immediately or shortly thereafter, whether or not that was intended. In other words, activate one planet of an opposition, and the other activates automatically.

Squares are different — more challenging, almost perversely so. Unlike conjunctions and oppositions, where two symbols naturally operate together, the two symbols in a square cannot cooperate, or, at the very least, encounter great difficulty in doing so. Allow me to explain why.

A square is an aspect of 90°, or division of the circle by four. The two symbols involved are at right angles, perpendicular to each other in the zodiac. They form a cross. To express its meaning, each axis of the cross naturally “travels” like an arrow, slicing through the air in whatever direction it points. Ah, but there’s the rub: The “straight” path to expression for one symbol is “sideways” for the other.

For the symbols, straight feels great, but sideways sucks. Put another way, their respective meanings are not easily expressed when they're pulled sideways. And yet, they are tied together. Whichever symbol is expressed naturally (straight) drags along the other symbol in a way that is unnatural (sideways) and forbids or severely limits its natural expression. So, squares are mutually exclusive rather than inclusive. The two symbols cannot express together at the same time. Activate one, and the other is frustrated, denied, or shut down.

In a square, it's almost as if the two planetary symbols — which represent urges or motivations within the psyche — are locked in a struggle for dominance, a metaphorical fight to the death. It's as if they're trying to kill each other, almost like they were mortal enemies. Since these are archetypes rather than people, however, one symbol cannot destroy another. That may seem to occur temporarily, within a particular time-frame, but — eventually and inevitably — the vanquished symbol will regain strength, rise up, and do battle again. Typically, the last winner becomes the next loser, so we get an alternating rhythm — expression of only one symbol, then expression of only the other symbol. At least that's how it seems from the viewpoint of human beings who often like one of the two perspectives and fear the other. When their preferred side (the one they like) wins, they are triumphant; when the other side (the one they fear) wins, they are in despair. Given enough time, however, fortunes will reverse.

The upside of squares is that they correspond to a sharpened and intensified experience of the archetypes involved. At times, especially in a circumstantial crisis, squared planets may achieve a kind of temporary, forced cooperation that is stunningly powerful, even though it's usually raw and crude, rather than smooth and sophisticated. And, of course, the cooperation doesn't last long, since either or both motivations will be "bent out of shape."

The downside of squares is that they are often quite difficult for the person whose life the chart describes. Sometimes the individual may be frustrated by the conflicted nature of the square aspect involving two (or more) planetary symbols or angles (meridian and/or horizon, which are the two critical axes that correspond to the most individuated and custom-tailored experience of security and awareness in the chart), but more frequently frustration is based instead on the repercussions of the square in unsatisfying real-life results. It's a little like driving a car with faulty steering, acceleration, or brakes. Keeping the vehicle on the road is challenging, to say the least.

Typically, squares present us with an either/or choice — one planet's expression or the other's, but not both. Even when the square allows temporary cooperation, the results are usually more one-sided than truly cooperative across the spectrum of possible manifestations. So, in the Sibly chart for the USA, the Saturn-Sun square — symbolizing both the ideals of equality and social justice and the ambition to pursue wealth through commerce — tends at any given

phase of history to favor one over the other. Whichever side wins the struggle often expresses itself in the extreme, while the side that is either diminished or shut out lies fallow, seemingly defeated. But the “winning” side usually overplays its hand, which eventually exhausts its mandate and causes the social pendulum to swing back in the other direction.

Over the early decades of American history following establishment of the nation, equality and wealth both took a back seat to the more primal struggle for the young country’s survival. By the 1820s, however, the conflict between social justice and individual freedom to pursue wealth had emerged and begun to take center-stage through the question of slavery, around which the agricultural economy of the South had been built. Initially, wealth won, but the outcome of the American Civil War swung the pendulum back toward equality and social justice, really for the first time ever. That shift didn’t resolve the square, of course, since neither side can win in any ultimate sense, nor did it last.

By the late-19th century, Jim Crow laws had derailed the social justice movement, which headed off in different directions — banning child labor in factories, winning voter suffrage for women, and organizing labor unions to protect workers. All these reforms were won at great cost to the activists who supported them, and only after hard-bitten resistance from those who liked America the way it was, since the status quo insured their continuing power and wealth.

Racism and xenophobia continued to be America’s “original sin,” however, and would rise up again and again on the side of individual freedom to pursue wealth. This is an expression of the “limited family” side of the Sun-Saturn themes. If you are not like me, you’re not part of my family, and I consider you not only an outsider, but a threat to my safety and security.

The Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917 during World War One scared the bejeezus out of every country in the west whose economy was based on capitalism (of which America was the standard-bearer). That began a century-long battle against communism, interrupted only by the necessity of a temporary alliance to defeat Nazi fascism in World War II. America puffed up her chest as the bastion of freedom and the savior of civilization.

Then, quietly during the 1950s and loudly during the turbulence of the 1960s, the Civil Rights movement made its biggest splash, culminating in landmark legislation intended to insure equality and social justice once and for all. But, as happened after the Civil War, that victory for one side proved to be short-lived.

Over the 50 years since then, individual freedom to pursue wealth has again risen up fiercely, and in a morphed form unlike anything America has seen since the Robber Baron era of the 1870s. The transformation of our economic base from manufacturing to FIRE (an acronym for Finance, Insurance, and Real

Estate) has been accompanied by a financial sector mania where “anything goes and nothing matters.” The concentration of massive but questionable wealth into the hands of those at the very top of the social/economic pyramid has resulted in income inequality that is both breathtaking in scope and tragic in implication.

While those of us born in mid-20th-century America may not have felt that equality and social justice had been perfectly realized (they weren't), millions of us grew up assuming that those ideals were a permanent and stable fixture of American culture, law, and government. A vibrant middle class, Social Security, and the illusion of safety left us thinking that equality and social justice were our birthright, and that we didn't need to embrace the headlong pursuit of wealth to gain a decent economic footing and live comfortable lives.

What some of us failed to factor in was that the Roaring Twenties, a decade where individual freedom to pursue wealth reached one of its historic peaks, had led to the Great Depression of the 1930s, which in turn resulted in FDR's New Deal. That changed the role of government in America, which had previously done little if anything to provide for the welfare of its citizens.

What many Americans assumed to be a steady evolution toward equality, social justice, and even economic security for all has been revealed as yet another temporary pendulum swing in American history, if not an outright aberration.

The political movements called populism and economic nationalism that arose in this decade to challenge the existing institutional order were predictable, given the Uranus-Pluto square that defines the 2010s. That they resulted in the election to the presidency of Donald Trump was surprising to some, but probably shouldn't have been, since mistrust in government and anger at the existing status quo have become noteworthy among a sizable percentage of the public. Timing aside, however, these developments reveal not only the deep divisions in the culture through the ongoing battle between conflicting ideals, but also the inherent contradictions and paradoxes that emerge from the corruption of such ideals.

The fundamental questions that concern Americans continue to be, as they have always been, about who we are as a nation and a people. No matter how complex, the issues tend to boil down to the definition and meaning of family (another word for which might be “tribe”). Who is “us,” and who is “them”? What can we best do to support those we love and with whom we identify and empathize while protecting ourselves and our beloveds from others who don't care about us or may even seek to do us harm? Who is included and who is excluded? The answers to those questions depend on how the firm the boundaries of family are defined — literally, emotionally, and spiritually — and where those boundaries are placed.