

America's Mars

Part One: The Mars-Neptune Problem

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Astrologers — probably not all, but most — tend to regard countries and nations as somewhat akin to individual humans. Ancient astrology apparently focused entirely on rulers — kings and such. Modern astrology has changed that focus to individual humans. Each of us has a natal or birth chart, erected for the moment and place of our first breath, our initial entry into autonomous life in the outer world. In much the same way, astrologers look to seminal events in the history of nations that represents their “birth.”

Birth is obvious with human beings (at least so far...). Not so with nations, however. For instance, when was England born? With the signing of the Magna Carta? Maybe. But maybe not. And when did England morph into Great Britain? Are those two different countries? No, the natal charts of nations is a subject open to heated debate. Sometimes, as in the case of the 15 new republics that came into being as nations following the fall and dissolution of the Soviet Union in December, 1991, the official birth moments can be surmised by the date, time, and place of the signing or ratification of certain legal or political documents, such as constitutions. That's generally the case with America.

Astrologers have created numerous different birth charts for America based on various events over many of the new country's early years — such as the signing of the Articles of Confederation in 1777, the ratification of the U.S. constitution in 1788, or, most commonly, the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th, 1776. Even that seminal event, however, is open to much disagreement and debate.

The so-called Sibly chart for the U.S., erected for July 4th, 1776, at 5:10 p.m. local time in Philadelphia, was the first astrology chart published for the new country by the English occultist and astrologer, Ebenezer Sibly. His birth chart for America appeared in a London newspaper in 1787. That chart has been debated ever since, mainly because of carefully-researched and well-founded disagreements about his choice of the 5:10 p.m. time. And birth time matters. Change the time even a little — like, say, an hour — and the core meaning revealed by the chart can change dramatically. So, getting the time right is a big deal. But despite all the disagreements and arguing among astrologers, the original Sibly chart remains the most popular birth chart for the U.S. among a

majority of astrologers, including me. The Sibly chart has proven its value over time, accurately describing the American temperament and corresponding frequently to important events in American history, sometimes uncannily so.

Thus, despite a significant number of reasonable caveats and disclaimers, that's the chart I've always used in my astrological writing about America. And so it will be here.

Squares in astrology are 90° aspects that tie together two symbols in perpendicularity. While they must combine, the merging isn't smooth or cooperative. Instead, each symbol tries to dominate and shut out the other. That cannot happen for long before a flip occurs, causing a see-saw effect, a careening from one emphasis to the other. The result is that their impact on each other appears to be amplified.

In the U.S. Sibly chart (and all the other July 4th, 1776 charts as well, regardless of the "birth" time used), two interplanetary aspect squares dominate the symbolic signature of the entire chart: One is the Sun in Cancer/8th house squared to Saturn in Libra/10th. This square is tight, with a 1.5° orb, which implies greater potency. The configuration highlights the connections and contradictions between business and family, and between impersonal and personal relatedness. While it emphasizes social fairness and a level playing field (Saturn in Libra/10th), such qualities are in conflict with the core belief that family always comes first, especially where money is concerned (Sun in Cancer/8th).

The Sun-Saturn square is a very conservative and protective alignment that resists the more revolutionary need for change indicated by America's Aquarian Moon. Basically, that conflict implies a permanent rift in the American psyche between a reactionary clinging to the past and a progressive push into the future.

The other major square is between Mars in Gemini/7th house and Neptune in Virgo/9th. As with the Sun/Saturn, the Mars/Neptune square is very tight, with a 1° orb, implying tremendous potency in experience. As planetary symbols, Mars and Neptune are not natural allies. They're not remotely sympathetic. Mars is focused, kinetic, and very physical, with a linear trajectory (like an arrow, a bullet, or a missile). By contrast, Neptune is unfocused in a universality that goes far beyond the physical.

As a trans-Saturnian symbol, Neptune symbolizes the experience of altered states that are distinctly unlike "ordinary" consciousness. These states include both the sacred and the profane — sacred in the yearning for reunion with the infinite by returning to undifferentiated oneness, and profane in that Neptunian fantasies idealize whatever is beyond normality, no matter how perverse. The question with Neptune is whether our experience is real or merely illusory. In its

most ethereal form, Neptune confers empathy so deep that universal compassion may be achieved. In more practical dimensions, humans characterized by Neptunian impulses have a difficult time dealing with the hard harshness of “real life,” preferring to escape into dreams that can run the gamut from artistic inspiration and creativity all the way to terminal drug addiction.

Neptune’s action is to expand wildly, often to the point of exaggeration, while removing natural or social constraints. Mars action is to heat up whatever it touches into urgent action with a laser-like focus. When forced to manifest in the physical (which Mars pushes for), Neptune becomes phantasmagorical — larger than life, but not necessarily authentic. By contrast, when Mars is forced into transcendence and universality (which Neptune brings), it loses effectiveness and tends to wreak havoc and destruction indiscriminately.

With Mars, Neptune’s effect is to amplify the Martian impulse beyond realism and into the archetypal realm of dreams and fantasies, as well as making aggression “sacred.” The reverse — Mars’ effect on Neptune — is to weaponize religion and spirituality. This implies that the entire group of Mars’ symbolic, psychological, and practical meanings are permanently altered in the American psyche and nation: masculinity, desires (sexual and otherwise), aggression, competitive urge, will to win, action undertaken urgently, are all emphasized in highly exaggerated ways.

The position of the Mars-Neptune square in the west of the U.S. Sibly chart — in the 7th and 9th houses — implies that relatedness to others is critical in the way passion is felt and expressed. When juxtaposed with the Sun-Saturn square, assertive action is no longer used nearly so much in pursuit of natural desires, but instead defensively, to neutralize perceived threats from others to our security and safety. In the chart of a nation, that includes threats from other nations and also from internal enemies.

The American response to perceived threats is paradoxical. The Sun-Saturn square is cautious and relies on diplomacy as long as possible, while the Mars-Neptune square prefers to shoot first and ask questions later. Both strategies have their champions and critics.

American fantasies are irrevocably connected to Mars. Consider Americans’ love of firearms and the importance of guns in American history. The First Industrial Revolution of the late-18th to mid-19th centuries was kick-started by many nearly simultaneous developments — the steam engine, the cotton gin, the sewing machine, and various other mechanical devices that freed humans from the prior burdens of manual labor — but central to that revolution was a very particular American invention, namely, the mass production of firearms (rifles and pistols). Before Samuel Colt and others, guns were made by artisan machinists — one gun at a time. Parts from one firearm wouldn’t work in another. And, as a product of hand-crafting, guns were very expensive.

America changed all that. Mass production of firearms made them much cheaper and easier to maintain.

More than any other country, America has designed, produced, and marketed the most deadly weapons ever known to humanity, including the atomic bomb. Since then, we have literally armed the entire modern world. In the first half of our history, America employed our exaggerated aggression to conquer the western continent. In the second half, we turned our attention outward, beyond our own borders. Using our skill at industry, America became a global empire. As the only major nation unscathed by the devastation of World War Two, we used our expanded military (Mars-Neptune) to create and maintain a world order that served our business interests and wealth (Sun-Saturn).

While arguably a force for stability, the eventual price we paid for world domination was very steep, with a devastating cost to the American psyche. We became the dragon eating its own tail. Over the past 75 years, unsuccessful wars (Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan) have cost the U.S. many trillions of dollars. The outsourcing of manufacturing implemented by American elites in the last third of the 20th century eviscerated the working class. Addiction and suicide followed in epidemic proportions. One tragic result was an entire generation of young men who were lost and stranded, with starkly reduced positive outlets for their masculinity.

The recent phenomenon of “incels” is tied directly to negative expression of America’s Mars-Neptune symbolism. This is an online subculture that grew out of gaming — young men defining themselves as “involuntary celibates” who desire romantic partnerships but cannot find any. That movement quickly devolved into hateful misogyny, blaming and denigrating girls and women, and glorifying masculine supremacy.

While a source of vitality and strength early on in our history, masculine dominance eventually became a serious social problem for which we have found no effective solutions. Gun violence in America is far greater than that of any other nation. Over just the past 30 years, mass public shootings have become routine. School shootings in particular are more than commonplace — with hundreds every year — and disturbed young men are invariably the perpetrators.

So, the negative expressions of Mars square Neptune are all too obvious. What, then, might the positive expression of Mars square Neptune be??? Well, those could include transcending anger and developing compassion, using one’s vital energies selflessly to inspire and/or heal, and the general redirection of ego drives and desires toward more profound spiritual dimensions.

I have no doubt that there are millions of Americans who express the Mars-Neptune archetype with soul and grace. In my view, however, that’s not reflected much within the overall American zeitgeist these days. The algorithms

of social media are designed to respond to the negative rather than the positive. Anger, hatred, and outrage produce more revenues for the owners of social media platforms. In the corporate America of late-stage capitalism, public well-being is mostly lip-service and cynical public relations rather than actual business practices.

And now we have a federal government that isn't content to wage war beyond our borders, nor just to deport illegal immigrants. The current administration intends to bring the violence home by using the military against our own citizens. And to all those who believed that *"it couldn't happen here, not in America..."*, we can now say, *"Wanna bet?"*

I wish I had some workable solutions for all this madness, but I don't. Perhaps humanity will weather these outrageous and cruel storms, but I doubt that it will turn around soon. I'd love to be wrong about that, however.

The second installment of this two-part commentary is an analysis of the incidence of major outer-planet transits to the U.S. Mars in the many wars that America has fought over its 250 years.