

# The U.S. Pluto Return:

## A Preliminary Assessment - 2019 – 2024

By Ray Grasse



Over the last few years, the U.S. has been experiencing its very first “Pluto return”—a celestial event involving that distant planet’s return to where it resided at the time of this nation’s birth in 1776. (And yes, I still choose to call Pluto a planet, despite naysayers to the contrary!) While the full impact of this transit is by no means over, I feel we’ve experienced just enough of it so far to make at least a cursory assessment of its influence on American culture, while allowing for the fact there is undoubtedly much more to come.

This piece is a follow-up to an article I wrote for the Mountain Astrologer magazine in 2019, in which I projected ahead to this period, titled [“Turning Point: The United States Pluto Return.” \(#1\)](#) My forecasts in that piece were based on three things in particular: drawing on historical examples of Pluto returns in earlier nations like Rome and England; potential clues in

the half-return of Pluto in the U.S. horoscope during the 1930s; and last but not least, speculation based purely on archetypal logic. Some of the predictions I made proved to be quite accurate, others involved trends I overlooked entirely. (I encourage readers to go back and review what I said in that piece about those historical precedents, since those are important to consider but too lengthy to reprise in detail here).

## A Technical Note on Timing

Before diving into this further, I need point out there are actually *two different* frameworks for determining the exact timing of the Pluto return, based on an obscure astronomical distinction known as “precession-corrected” versus “non-precession-corrected.” Explaining the astronomical rationale for that is beyond the scope of this article—you can find YouTube videos or articles explaining these nuances, if you’re interested—but suffice it to say that by *non-precession-corrected* terms, the U.S. Pluto return triggered for the first time on **February 22nd of 2022, then again on July 1st and Dec. 28th of that year**; while according to *precession-corrected* terms, the Pluto return technically became exact for the first time **two years later on July 16th, 2024, and will soon be followed by another exact trigger on Dec. 30 th**. For reasons both empirical and symbolic, I’ve come to believe *both* frameworks are valid (for much the same reason that I pay attention to both natal and progressed positions of planets in the horoscope—something most of my fellow astrologers will understand). As I think you’ll discover in the following pages, some of the events we’ll be looking at here fall closer to the 2022 time-frame, while others coincide more closely to the 2024 period. However, I recommend not becoming too bogged down in exact dates or debates over which of these two is more influential or even valid. That’s because the orb of influence for a multi-century cycle like this one is so broad that it’s safe to say the impact of the U.S. Pluto return likely extends for a number of years in either direction. For that reason, the question of exact dates becomes something of a wash at some point. That said, let’s run through some of the developments from the last few years which stand out for me as most closely bound up with this epic cycle.

# Civil Unrest

In my earlier 2019 piece, based partly on what I learned from studying the Pluto returns of nations like England and Rome, I suggested we could expect to see “a growing mood of social unrest in the country, possibly bordering on a civil war-type atmosphere... there’s little question there could be strong—and potentially violent—emotions bubbling up to the surface these next few years.” After all, Pluto has much in common with Mars, so it wasn’t much of a stretch to think this could become a turbulent time, one that awakened intense passions and even anger amongst the populace. But what could possibly trigger such an extreme level of anger and unrest, I asked? I listed the following potential causes:

“In addition to hot-button issues like abortion, immigration, political corruption, and income inequality, it’s likely that *whoever* wins the next presidential election [in 2020] will elicit a firestorm of reaction on the opposite side of the political divide. If Trump wins, that would trigger much frustration and anger among his detractors, while his loss certainly would not be taken well by his supporters either, to put it mildly.”

Well, we all know now what happened after Trump lost that election, when thousands of his supporters attempted to overthrow the U.S. government, to prevent the peaceful transition of power. It was a shocking development, and eventually led to ten televised congressional hearings in 2022 by the newly formed United States House Select Committee on the January 6th Attack. Overseen by both Democratic and Republican lawmakers, and closely coinciding with the country’s Pluto return that year, it involved sworn testimony by an array of witnesses to the events of that day about the subversive behavior of certain elected officials, and resulted in the publication of a damning report on Dec. 19th of 2022 which referred Donald Trump to the Department of Justice for various crimes. Coming on the heels of the double impeachments of President Trump in 2019 and 2021, it certainly made for a turbulent time in the country—a turbulence that’s been churning up forcefully again during the present 2024 presidential election season.

But the other potential triggers I mentioned in that piece played a big role, too—such as immigration. This took various forms, including ongoing crises at the border, southern governors shipping busloads of immigrants to Democratic cities and states up north, as well as inflammatory remarks made during the 2024 presidential campaign about Haitian immigrants supposedly eating cats and dogs in Springfield, Ohio.

Another hot-button issue was, of course, the abortion debate. When I wrote my 2019 article, I felt this would continue being a bone of contention, but I didn’t honestly believe there was any real chance of *Roe vs. Wade* being overturned. It had been such a “third rail” issue that I felt even the Right-leaning Supreme Court justices would be dissuaded from touching it. To my surprise, they not only touched it but toppled it over completely, on June 24, 2022, right in the thick of the Pluto return. Needless to say, that decision sent shock waves throughout the country and drove a wedge into those already existing fault lines between opposing political and religious factions, making it a decisive issue in the 2024 election season.

Another major source of unrest in the country throughout this period was, of course, racism. This, too, has assumed different forms in recent years, ranging from “tiki torch” marches by white nationalists in Virginia to an upsurge in hate crimes generally. (#2) But it became a particular flashpoint in the wake of George Floyd’s murder by a Minneapolis policeman in 2020. Though the Black Lives Matter movement actually began a decade earlier, following the death of young Trayvon Martin in Florida, it was now catapulted into a worldwide movement and ignited marches and around the U.S. We’ll come back to this question of racism when we consider the “shadow” aspect of Pluto’s influence on the national psyche later in this article.

## The Great Dying

One development that none of us seemed to really expect from the Pluto return was the heavy hand of the grim reaper. That shouldn’t have surprised us, really, considering the close association of Pluto with death. While a surprising number of U.S. citizens seem to have largely forgotten it now, the years from 2020 to 2023 saw over a million civilian deaths in the U.S. resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. That is a staggering statistic. To put things into perspective, more men and women died from Covid-19 than all the fatalities America suffered in two World Wars, Vietnam, and the Korean War *combined*. Or, as some expressed it, the number of deaths during that period was equivalent to a 9/11 attack every day for roughly a year.

It's true that there were several other countries with higher per capita death rates from Covid-19, but the death rate in the U.S. far exceeded that of any other wealthy or "peer" country. (#3) By comparison, while the pandemic killed around a million people in the United States, 800,000 died in Russia, 690,000 in Brazil, and 530,000 in India. Obviously, the pandemic itself can't be attributed to the U.S. Pluto return alone, since the contagion affected the entire planet. My personal sense is that the worldwide contagion stemmed primarily from the Pluto-Saturn conjunction of 2020, which affected the entire world, but that the U.S. Pluto return piggy-backed *on top of that*, thereby taking an already serious issue and amplifying it even further for American citizens. (#4).



Image by [Yoav Aziz](#) on [Unsplash](#)

## Corruption, Scandals, and Falls from Grace

In my 2019 article I addressed the possibility that the U.S. Pluto return could well usher in a period when we might see "explosive scandals or falls from grace." I said that not just because of the sometimes salacious and scurrilous nature of Pluto, or the fact this planet tends to expose previously hidden secrets, but because this return was happening specifically in Capricorn—the sign of prominent individuals, authorities, politicians, and business leaders. I wrote:

"Previously hidden corruption, including sex crimes or possibly even treasonous activities, will be exposed to the light of day. Will that extend to the very highest political office of the land—i.e., the President? Impossible to know for sure, but it will undoubtedly be a challenging time for *whoever* is occupying the Oval Office at the time, whether they be Republican or Democrat."

There have always been scandals of one sort or another throughout American history, of course, but there does seem to have been a serious uptick in that regard in recent years. One of the most lurid of those centered around the Jeffrey Epstein scandal, which involved young women being sexually exploited at his private island by various politicians, celebrities, business leaders, even English royals. Truth is, we still haven't learned the full extent of that scandal—and probably never will. Though the scandal began erupting as early as 2005, it truly exploded onto the scene in 2019 with Epstein's arrest on July 6th, followed by his not-at-all suspicious "suicide" in a jail cell on Aug. 10th of that year.

But there were many other prominent figures involved in headline-grabbing scandals besides those, including mega-film producer Harvey Weinstein (arrested May 25th, 2018, found guilty of three of seven charges on Dec. 20th, 2022 – within just days of an exact Pluto return trigger date); actor and comedian Bill Cosby (sentenced to from three to ten in state prison on September 25th, 2018, conviction overturned on June 30th, 2021); rap mogul P. Diddy (arrested September of 2024, currently pending further trials and possible sentencing); and New York mayor Eric Adams (indicted on September 26, 2024, also pending further trials and possible sentencing).

But by far the most high-profile scandal of them all involved no less than the former president himself – Donald J. Trump. On top of the unprecedented double impeachment dramas of 2020 and 2021, and having been accused of sexual assault by numerous women over the course of several decades, on May 9th of 2023 a civil jury found Trump liable for sexually abusing columnist E. Jean Carroll, awarding her a \$5 million judgment. Then, on May 29th, 2024, just six weeks before the first exact precession-corrected Pluto return of that year, Donald Trump became the first former American president to be convicted of felony crimes. A New York jury found him guilty in a scheme to illegally influence the 2016 election by means of hush money payments to porn actress Stormy Daniels, who claimed the two of them had sex. You can't make this stuff up.

Previous presidents had of course experienced setbacks, sex scandals (think Bill Clinton), tragedies or even assassinations, but sitting in that New York courtroom like a chastened schoolchild was certainly a "fall from grace" quite unlike that experienced by any other U.S. president in recent times.



# The Economy

In my 2019 article, I wrote that “one effect of the Pluto return for America will almost certainly be economic.” This wasn’t just because the half-return of America’s Pluto in the 1930s was accompanied by the Great Depression, as well as FDR’s restructuring of the U.S. economy with his “New Deal” programs that decade but the fact that earlier examples of Pluto returns in nations like England likewise accompanied periods of financial restructuring or collapse-and-renewal. (#5)

So what happened this time?

Here as well, many Americans strangely seem to forget just how difficult things really became. There was a massive downturn in the U.S. economy during the years adjacent to the Pluto return, largely as a result of the Covid-19 epidemic, and which heavily impacted many sectors of the economy. Besides air travel, social services, and the automotive industry, restaurants around the country were closing. People were rushing to their stores to hoard toilet paper, the streets in my own city looked completely abandoned at one point, and citizens everywhere were wearing masks to guard against the pandemic. A good time was decidedly *not* had by all.

All of this had a dire impact on the U.S. economy. March 2020 in particular saw one of the most dramatic stock market crashes in history. In barely four days of trading, the Dow Jones Industrial Average plunged 6,400 points, an equivalent of roughly 26%. Total non-farm employment fell by 1.4 million jobs in March of 2020 with a staggering 20.5 million jobs lost in April, creating a 22 million jobs deficit since the start of the recession, largely erasing gains from the previous decade of job growth. From 2020 to 2023, the cumulative net economic output of the United States amounted to about [\\$103 trillion, whereas without the pandemic, the total GDP over those four years was projected to have hit \\$117 trillion—nearly 14% higher in inflation-adjusted 2020 dollars.](#) (#6)

Yet in true Plutonian “death/rebirth” fashion, the economy has rebounded to a surprising degree. As one article put it, an extremely slow recovery could have followed, “and based upon the trajectories of other recent economic recoveries, that was the most likely outcome. However, targeted fiscal supports, including an [expanded social safety net](#) as well as a historic federal vaccination program and rollout, helped ensure that didn’t occur. Instead, the COVID-19 recession was the [shortest recession](#) on record: It lasted two months, and the economic recovery that followed was faster and more equitable than other recent recessions.” (#7)

## Environmental Issues

Partly because of what happened during the half-return of Pluto in the 1930s when America experienced its devastating Dust Bowl crisis, but also because Pluto is the planet most associated with toxins and pollutants, I speculated that we might well see serious environmental challenges in the U.S. during this planet’s full return in the early 2020s. In recent years, there has indeed been an upsurge of concerns about the growing threat of tornadoes, pollutants, flooding, topsoil erosion, and climate change generally. On that last front, the effects of increased heat and dryness led to unprecedented forest fires that have devastated vast regions in such areas as Texas (2024), Maui (2023), Paradise, California (2018), and Dixie, California (2021). As of this writing, hurricanes have also caused historic devastation not just in Florida but much further north in states like North Carolina and Tennessee.

When it comes to toxins and pollutants, two developments in particular stand out. One of those was the Keystone Pipeline oil spill on December 7, 2022—the same month as the third exact Pluto return that year. That’s when a leak in the Keystone Pipeline released 14,000 barrels of oil into a creek in Washington County, Kansas, making it the largest leak in the United States since the 2013 North Dakota pipeline spill. Two months later, on February 3, 2023, a freight train carrying hazardous materials derailed in [East Palestine, Ohio](#); several railcars burned for more than two days, and emergency crews also conducted [controlled burns](#) of several railcars, which released [hydrogen chloride](#) and [phosgene](#) into the air. Residents within a 1-mile radius were evacuated, and long-term effects on the health of those residents is still undetermined.

As serious as developments like these are, it raises the question whether they’re really any more destructive than what has been taking place in other countries around the world during this same period. Well, maybe, maybe not. Which is why, dramatic as they’ve been, I’m hesitant to place them towards the very top of my list of developments related *specifically* to the U.S. Pluto return. But it’s also good to

remember that the effects of the Pluto return are by no means over, so it remains to be seen what long-term effects these events may yet hold for us, not to mention what other environmental developments could still unfold in the months and years ahead.

## The Threat of Autocracy

In my 2019 piece about the Pluto return, I speculated about the growing threat of autocracy in America. “It’s no secret Pluto can behave quite dictatorially at times,” I wrote, “and we’ve already started seeing signs of that not only in Donald Trump’s unabashedly forceful style but in the rise of various far-Right neo-fascist elements throughout the country.” Here as well, I pointed to possible parallels with the half-return of Pluto in the 1930s:

“Though now largely forgotten, America in the 1930s saw the rise of various pro-fascist groups around the country including the Silver Shirts, Black Legion, Khaki Shirts and Fascist League movements. While for the most part this trend remained outside the mainstream, it received support from no less prominent figures than Ezra Pound and Charles Lindbergh. And in 1934, the U.S. came perhaps the closest it’s ever come to a true fascist *coup d’état*, when democracy was nearly subverted by a cabal of wealthy individuals and businessmen but prevented by Major General Smedley Butler.”

I then took it one step further:

“...with Pluto now coming up to its first full return, does this mean that an elected candidate—Trump or otherwise—will try to exert even greater control over our country’s government? *A related possibility could be that Trump loses the election but simply refuses to abdicate the Oval Office, thus creating a constitutional crisis.*” (Emphasis added.)

Since 2019, we’ve not only witnessed an attempted coup on the U.S. government by supporters of Donald Trump, but the growing influence of pro-fascist groups in a way that’s eerily reminiscent of what happened in America during the 1930s. (#8) The Heritage Foundation-proposed document “Project 2025,” crafted largely by former associates of Trump and pitched as a legislative wish-list for his possible new administration, is essentially a blueprint for American rule-by-dictatorship. Trump himself even spoke in late 2023 about becoming a dictator “on day one” of his hoped-for re-election. Shockingly, a subsequent poll showed that a large percentage of his supporters were entirely comfortable with that possibility. (#9)



Rally Poster of a German-American Bund Rally at Madison Square Garden on February 20, 1939, Public domain, via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

## A Country at War—Both Within and Without

As I pointed out in my earlier article, one of the distinguishing characteristics of Pluto returns in earlier countries like Rome and England was an upsurge of military skirmishes or wars near or beyond their borders. During its last Pluto return, for instance, England was embroiled in a number of military conflicts in various parts of the world, including the American colonies. Because of precedents like that, I speculated that “it’s possible America could likewise find itself embroiled in one or more conflicts, too, whether that involve Iran, Korea, Venezuela, or another country.”

As of this writing, the U.S. hasn’t engaged in major wars with any of those three nations—although the assassination of Iran’s Qassem Soleimani by Donald Trump in January of 2020 nearly brought us to the brink of one; and in light of Israel’s current conflicts in the Middle East, it’s hardly inconceivable that the

U.S. could find itself in a major stand-off with Iran. But as it's turned out, the country that looks to pose the greatest threat to America is one I didn't even include in that short list, but should have—namely, Russia.

First, consider how the very first Pluto return took place on February 22nd, 2022—and literally within 24 hours, Russia began its extended invasion of Ukraine. (#10) True, we didn't (and still don't) have any boots on the ground there, officially, and the conflict took place far away from U.S. shores; yet the fact is, we found ourselves closely entangled with that conflict due to our military support of Ukraine. Because of that, the conflict actually put America on a cold war footing with the Russian bear for the first time in decades. The sense of potential danger during that opening phase was such that I remember stocking up on food those first few weeks because of threats from Russian officials about the potential for all-out war, coupled with veiled threats directed at our electrical grid. It remains to be seen what the outcome of that situation will be—or for that matter, with the situation around Israel's ongoing conflicts with its neighbors, since either of these could wind up drawing us into their fold.

But here is another angle to hold in mind. Unlike the more “in your face” quality of Mars-style aggression, Pluto tends to be far more covert and underhanded in its methods, with its dangers often sneaking in through the proverbial back door. In that spirit, I think we need to look at the effects of America's Pluto return that have already surfaced through acts of election interference by our foreign adversaries, along with incidents of sabotage and cyber-terrorism, as opposed to conventional battlefield conflicts.

Indeed, over the last few years the U.S. has been subject to a series of damaging cyber-attacks from foreign interests, who have burrowed like digital termites into America's corporate and governmental infrastructures. One of the most serious of those incursions was the “SolarWinds” attack of 2020. Over a period of nine months, a Russian group known as APT29, or Cozy Bear, breached about 100 companies and about a dozen government agencies. Those companies included Microsoft, Intel and Cisco, and the list of federal agencies violated included the Treasury, Justice and Energy departments, and the Pentagon. If that wasn't bad enough, the hackers also found their way, rather embarrassingly, into the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, or CISA, the office at the Department of Homeland Security – whose job it is to protect federal computer networks from cyberattacks. (#11) (*You had just one job...*)

But the other side of Pluto's “covert” workings is the potential threat posed by the *enemy within*, that is, by treasonous sabotage from America's own citizens. As I said in my earlier piece, that could even extend to its very highest public figure: the president. During his administration, there had been many suspicions raised about Trump's obsequious behavior towards Vladimir Putin, but the concerns extended well beyond those public displays.

As one glaring example, Trump asked the Office of the Director of National Intelligence to provide him with a list of all its employees—including all of our “spies.” Months after Trump left office, the New York Times ran a story, “Captured, Killed or Compromised: C.I.A. Admits to Losing Dozens of Informants,” describing how a shocking number of CIA informants in other countries had been captured, arrested or killed. (#12) Developments like these naturally raise the troubling question: *Did Donald Trump sell out our country?* For that matter, what about the ten million dollars Trump received from Egypt shortly before his 2016 election and any possible *quid pro quo* there? Or Trump's campaign manager, Paul Manafort, colluding with Russia to interfere with the 2016 election (for which he was convicted but ultimately pardoned by Trump)? Or when Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner received over a billion dollars from Saudi Arabia shortly after Trump left the White House, raising concerns whether that came in exchange for favors the White House did for the Saudis (such as turning a blind eye to their murder of Washington Post journalist, Jamal Khashoggi)? I could go on. Until further evidence comes in, though, I'll have to leave it for readers to make up their own minds.

From a symbolic standpoint, bear in mind that Pluto relates closely to issues of *theft*, so apart from matters of espionage, cyber-terrorism, and even treason, it's worth pointing out just how powerfully that theme has driven stateside politics since 2020. On the one hand, we had the rising chorus of “*Stop the Steal!*” chants by supporters of Donald Trump after his loss in the 2020 election, while from the other side of the aisle Democrats have raised growing concerns about the theft or suppression of votes by Republicans in states like Georgia, Florida and Wisconsin. Whichever side of the political aisle you're on, it all smells of Pluto! (#13)



# Facing Our Country's "Shadow" Energies, and the Rise of the Repressed

As I hinted at earlier, Pluto deals to large extent with buried emotions and memories which, like the planet itself, lie hidden far from obvious view. That includes what psychologist Carl Jung commonly referred to as "shadow" issues. As a result, whenever Pluto acts up in a horoscope, unresolved feelings that are buried deep can start bubbling up to the surface, inviting a reassessment of past mistakes, injustices, or wounds from times past.

So what Plutonian "darkness" from America's own past is coming to the surface during this period?

Not unlike what happened in England during the early 1800s under the influence of its third Pluto return, one of its most obvious expressions for America has been having to come face-to-face with the legacy of slavery, and its related issues of bigotry, racism, and discrimination. Among the many examples of this has been a re-examination of the so-called "Tulsa Massacre" of 1921, which first came to many Americans' attention via the 2019 HBO film production of Alan Moore's graphic novel *Watchmen*. That was followed two years later by numerous media discussions about the massacre on that event's centenary. (Coincidentally, just as I was wrapping up work on the present article, a friend sent me a news item dated Oct. 1, 2024 saying that the U.S. Justice Department was launching a review of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre—a 103 years after the fact!) (#14)

Also, the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis policeman on May 25th of 2020 led to nationwide protests and several riots, and in turn, turbo-charged the Black Lives Matter movement. Things became so anxious at one point during that period that the businesses in my own neighborhood hired carpenters to come in and board up their front windows for fear of violence from street marchers. (The marchers materialized, but the violence didn't, fortunately.) One might argue, as I did in my earlier article, that we can even glimpse the first inklings of the U.S. Pluto return all the way back to when Pluto first moved into Capricorn in 2008, when our first black president, Barack Obama, was elected. In its own way, that singular event foreshadowed both the perils and potentials that would erupt more explosively in later years under the exact Pluto return.

As those familiar with my previous books and articles know, I believe cinema can offer important clues into the prevailing zeitgeist, and in that vein it's worth noting the emergence of the "black superhero" theme that exploded onto movie screens during this Pluto return. In particular, the 2018 American film production of *Black Panther* featured a largely black cast and focused on themes of liberation, black empowerment, and cultural oppression; it became the highest-grossing (solo) superhero film, and ninth highest-grossing film of all time. Its 2022 sequel, *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, continued an exploration of similar themes, and earned nearly a billion dollars at the box office worldwide. Both films were widely regarded as stepping stones in the emergence of black voices in popular culture.

But as I said in my earlier piece, the role of the Pluto return in this cultural shift hasn't solely been about America's black population; it's also played host to the rising up of its marginalized and repressed peoples generally. That includes our society's uneasy relationship with Muslims, Hispanics, Asian Americans, Latinos, the LGBTQ community, and of course, our Native American population.

On that last front, we've seen a growing reassessment in recent years of this country's treatment of—and crimes against—our Native American population. November, 2022 witnessed the much-publicized return of artifacts and personal items stolen from the Wounded Knee massacre site by soldiers and officers in 1890, back to their rightful place amongst the Lakota peoples. With a timing nothing short of uncanny, those items were laid on the mass grave of the massacre on Dec. 29th, 2022—just one day short of Pluto's final (non-precession-corrected) return that year. I interpreted that as a small but powerful sign of the times, a welcome step in the larger Plutonian healing that's been long overdue in those quarters. (#15)

In terms of popular media, 2023 saw the release of Martin Scorsese's critically-acclaimed film *Killers of the Flower Moon*, and was based on tragic events that took place in Oklahoma, involving murders of members of the Osage Nation by white outsiders. The Native American presence became much more prominent on TV as well, which included the series "Reservation Dogs," which ran from 2021 to 2023 and centered around the daily lives of indigenous teenagers in Oklahoma. It was the first American

series to feature all Native writers and directors, and received widespread critical acclaim, including two Peabody Awards, and nominations for one Golden Globe, five Primetime Emmy Awards, and nine Critic's Choice Television Awards.

The Plutonian “rise of the repressed” has also brought us the growing ascent of women—especially minority women—into greater positions of political power and influence, both in D.C. and elsewhere. Among those, note how just *three days after* the first Pluto return in late February of 2022, President Biden nominated Ketanji Brown Jackson to become the first black female Supreme Court Justice in American history. Things do seem to be changing, in other words, albeit at a glacial pace.

Then of course there is Kamala Harris—who we will turn our attention to next.

## Passing the Torch: The Biden/Harris Hand-Off

Finally, I want to call attention to a curious set of events that took place in the summer of 2024, which I believe offer some further clues into the archetypal shifts we're exploring here.

On July 21st of 2024, Joseph Biden announced his decision to withdraw from his campaign for re-election to the presidency—which automatically left his vice-president, Kamala Harris, as the default Democratic candidate. It was a political earthquake quite unlike any other in recent American times, and I found the timing of it astrologically intriguing. Why?

*Because it took place the same week as the first (precession-corrected) U.S. Pluto of 2024, on July 16th.*

What's so significant about that? First, consider how with any planetary return, whether that be in the life of an individual or a nation, we generally see a symbolic closing off of one life-chapter and the opening up of a new one. That's true even for our ordinary birthdays, when the Sun returns to where it was when we were born. Planetary returns are transitional symbols in that regard—and that's certainly what took place for the U.S. when Biden turned the page by passing the political torch to his second-in-command. (The fact that Biden is himself a Pluto-ruled Scorpio only added to the Plutonian symbolism of that transition.)

As befits the nature of Pluto, there was an unmistakable “death/rebirth” quality surrounding Biden's announcement, with many in the Democratic camp feeling a profound sense of sadness over Biden's withdrawal from the race, amplified by the withering criticism he fielded leading up to that point—which was followed almost immediately by a mood of near-euphoria amongst many in that camp as they watched Kamala Harris step up to the plate. Not unlike its corresponding sign Scorpio, Pluto is symbolically associated with a phoenix-style “death/rebirth” dynamic, which is exactly how many in the Democratic and progressive camps felt in the wake of that development.

Taking this one step further, I think we can draw further clues about this hand-off from the central figures themselves. On the one hand, there's Biden—an older white male who's been in politics for decades and generally viewed as a member of the “old guard” in D.C. politics. While he turned out to be far more progressive in his policies than anyone expected, his image has still been a very Capricornian one, not only because of his longstanding D.C. background but his comparatively advanced age.

Then, on the other hand, we have Kamala Harris, who represents a tectonic shift in not just one but *three distinctly different* respects: she's female, she's from a younger generation, and she's interracial (her father being from Jamaica and her mother from India). For that reason, it seems clear that she embodies a broader shift in the country towards a more inclusive, multi-racial and multi-cultural identity. In one sense, it symbolized a fundamental transformation in the Plutonian/Capricornian power structure of the country. To be clear, I don't say this as an endorsement of Harris or of the Democratic party itself, since there's no way to know this early how well she would govern as commander-in-chief, should she be elected. But competent or not, elected or otherwise, there's no question she represents a sea-change in the country in just the ways I've mentioned.

(It's also worth mentioning that *just three days before* that exact Pluto return—and eight days before the Biden/Harris hand-off—ex-president Donald Trump was nearly assassinated during a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania. On the one hand, that certainly reflects the more violent side of Pluto's energies erupting into view, but there's a subtler possibility to consider. In light of Trump's frankly racist and misogynistic tendencies, the fact this happened just *before* the Biden/Harris hand-off may well be



underscoring the significance of that transition from the older order to the newer one. Trump definitely falls into that older camp; yet the fact he survived relatively unscathed may also be saying we're still a long way away from being rid of those regressive tendencies, and will likely be contending with them for quite some time to come.)

## Conclusion

So what are we to make of all this?

It goes without saying that no planetary cycle is all good or all bad, since each and every one is inevitably a mixture of both. That's especially true in the case of a planet like Pluto, which embodies such dramatic extremes in its essential nature.

On the one hand, Pluto is justifiably associated with such factors as anger, vindictiveness, covert scheming, power-tripping, sexual obsession, unhealed wounds, and of course, death. Not surprisingly, we've seen all of those themes prominently surface in the U.S. news. From a certain perspective, what's been happening in America these last few years could be seen as a massive Plutonian power struggle, on both the political and religious fronts, as competing forces vie for control of the nation's future, resources, or even identity. At the moment that's especially visible in the mounting turmoil over the 2024 election and how that will ultimately resolve. (And as for election interference from our foreign adversaries, by the way, it's tempting to ponder whether there may even be a bit of "national karma" coming back to haunt the U.S. under this Pluto return, considering all the times we've interfered in the elections of *other* countries, including Bolivia, Brazil, Greece, Chile, Italy, El Salvador, Albania, Iran, and even Canada, among others! 16)

But then there are Pluto's more constructive and transformative potentials, which allow us to see these struggles in a much broader context. Nations, like individuals, have their own virtues and vices, and when Pluto comes onto the scene it can enflame those more toxic and regressive elements in a way that draws them to the surface similar to what happens in a human body during a healing crisis. Viewed in that light, it may be that the upheavals we've been seeing in America are part of a broader detoxification process, a national death/rebirth dynamic that hints at something new in the American character struggling to be born. Once that process completes, a more purified and evolved identity can ideally emerge out of the ashes into a new and regenerated order.

Like I say, *ideally*. Because, as I've said, that renewal process *can't* complete until those more regressive and toxic aspects are first acknowledged, similar to how an addict can't truly begin to heal until they've first recognized they have a problem; indeed, they may even have to hit rock bottom first. I pointed out in my earlier essay how the second Pluto return of England in the 1550s saw the inauguration of the slave trade during the reign of Elizabeth I—clearly a dark and tragic chapter in that nation's past. It was then during England's *next* Pluto return in the early 1800s that it began facing up to the horrors of that trade and set about abolishing it once and for all. Both of those episodes were distinctly "Plutonian," but in very different ways, with the former illustrating that planet's more controlling and cruel nature, the latter revealing Pluto's more redemptive and cathartic possibilities. The key here is, England couldn't become free from that bloody institution until enough of its citizens had first faced up to its moral implications.

I feel that much that same double-edged dynamic is at work in the U.S. these days. The Pluto return is facing our nation with some of its most regressive traits, along with a review-view mirror look back at its historical transgressions. I make no bones about the fact I regard many of the darker qualities I've been describing as having their central mouthpiece in Donald Trump, who is arguably the living personification of America's Pluto return. To both myself and many others, he embodies all the traits of the classic "ugly American"—arrogance, bullying, racism, self-interest, greed, and so on. For those of us alive right now, he essentially *is* America's "shadow." If so, then what is the lesson here? In a sense, you could say he's the universe's way of forcing us to confront those traits in ourselves that we've long been in denial about but which have long been an integral part of the American character, at least in its more negative aspects.

But new possibilities are open up to us now as a result—presuming we can step up to the plate. As happened with England, it requires that America face up to (and learn from) those shortcomings, both past and present, and not simply deny them altogether, such as through banning books, silencing teachers, or media misinformation. I also feel any national renewal requires learning how to fight fire with

fire—that is, employing that same Plutonian passion and intensity to combat this planet’s coarser expressions in the culture. How? Think grassroots activism, legislative reforms, and a general raising of consciousness via teaching and media outreach, for starters.

In the Spring of 2021, an interesting juxtaposition of events caught my attention that may well be hinting at some of these possibilities. On April 20th, the very same day policeman Derek Chauvin was convicted for the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, archaeologists announced that they had discovered the family home of pioneering black activist Harriet Tubman (1822 – 1913).

Think about that.

To my mind, there was something weirdly synchronistic in the way those two developments converged, with this famous black abolitionist re-surfacing into public awareness the very same day a prominent white supremacist was held accountable for a notorious act of deadly racism. It suggested to me a possible balancing of the scales might be taking place in our country. I’d like to believe so, anyway.

As I write this in late October of 2024, we have yet to see the results of both the presidential election and the final pass of Pluto’s return in late December of this year. One doesn’t have to be a Nostradamus to predict there could be turbulent times right ahead of us, especially in the aftermath of election night with accusations of Plutonian “*theft!*” that will surely be bandied about in the weeks and months to follow—no matter *who* wins. (Journalist Greg Palast has even suggested, employing an intriguing bit of Constitutional logic, that MAGA militants are likely gearing up to riot during the second week of December, as a way to help insure the election of their preferred candidate.<sup>17</sup>)

There are even some who wonder whether the “American experiment” might actually be coming to an end under this Pluto return, similar to what happened with the fall of the Roman Empire in the years following that nation’s second Pluto return. While that’s not impossible, it’s by no means inevitable. After all, Rome survived its first Pluto return, while England has survived fully three of them. Rather, this Pluto return may simply indicate a dramatic restructuring of the body politic, or even, as hinted at above, a “death/rebirth” dynamic heralding a new cultural identity struggling to be born.

It certainly will be interesting to see where America takes things from here, not only because of the Pluto return but due to the fact we’re on the brink of yet another revolutionary cycle—namely, America’s next *Uranus* return. While that isn’t technically exact until 2027 (and by precession-corrected standards, 2028), it will have an orb of influence several years on either side. But that’s another astro-story for another day!

To paraphrase Bette Davis’s famed line in the film *All About Eve*, “Fasten your seat belts, it’s going to be a bumpy ride.”