

THE IMAGE OF PROFESSIONAL ASTROLOGY: From Mid-Century to New Century
by John Marchesella

Who ever would have thought this diehard New York liberal would ever have a good thing to say about Nancy Reagan, much less a word of gratitude!

Her “out-ing” as an astrophile was a defining moment in the establishment of astrology as a serious profession. Even though, at that moment, she apologized for her actions and minimized her belief in astrology, and despite the naysayers who continued to debunk it (and still do), there was no hiding it: if the first lady uses astrology, it must have some validity!

That was the summer of 1988 and any astrologer worth their salt experienced at least a little boom in business, and that was nice. And some had an even bigger boom. More important, we were given a little more weight in the world. We were taken a little more seriously, maybe not as much by the press and the powers that be, but by the public, and that was a significant step in establishing the professionalism of astrology.

Students with good memories (or an ephemeris) will recall that was the time of the conjunction of Saturn and Uranus, the conjunction out of which, the current opposition is born. We might say the contemporary state of astrology is, in part, an outgrowth of that earlier time. So, thank you, Nancy.



Nancy Reagan

Coincidentally, that conjunction took place between the late degrees of Sagittarius and the initial degrees of Capricorn, of course, just where transiting Pluto is these days. This, too, has a resonance from the late 80's to our current times in astrology and, in fact, in all else in the world. So, you see, our economic crisis has roots as far back as that time, and we have Ronnie to thank for that, but that's a topic for another day.

Since the mid-century, the image of astrology took some interesting twists and turns. Actually, in the 1950's and early 60's, astrology was so low profile and lumped in with the rest of the occult that I'm not even sure it had an image! After all, remember the word, “occult,” means “out of the culture or center,” and aside from a few obscure astrology columns and even fewer full time professionals, such as Carroll Righter and Sydney Omarr, who were “astrologers to the stars,” not much existed on a vocational level.

On an avocational level, there might not have been a thriving interest by large numbers, but there was surely a devoted astrological community. Back then, one had to be devoted to erect charts by hand with logarithms! That community was populated with plenty of women as is the norm even today, but there were a surprising number of men, who, not surprisingly, played leadership roles; and some would say, these men were rather stuffy and conservative in nature. That's from hearsay, since I wasn't around to witness it. However, I'm sure behind their suits and ties, there was as much loony Uranus energy as there is today.

The eccentricities of Uranus took place, I hear, largely in the intellectual debate of astrological ideas and theories. Of course, to this day, a cardinal rule to be an astrologer is the ability to disagree with all other astrologers, but from what I've heard from eyewitnesses, the debates back then were much more spirited, shall we say, than they are today. The great intellects in the New York community of those days included men like Charles Emerson, Charles Jayne, Hans Niggeman, Edgar Wagner and Al H. Morrison, and believe it or not, there was a time when NCGR did not exist. In those days, the major game in town was the Astrologer's Guild.

Sadly, these great minds could not make a full-time living at the profession of astrology. Of course, we must make note the difference between the profession of astrology and the practice of astrology professionally. Serious-minded, indeed, and ethical and convicted and brilliant, but most astrologers back then held their day jobs and pursued astrology with vigor and passion. The names of our predecessors should be remembered and revered because they kept astrology alive for us to find it a little later, and they also serve as our link to a great tradition!

In the mid-60's, the counterculture happened. That was a Saturn-Uranus opposition of another kind, but just as we are seeing today, the opposition threw the world topsy-turvy. People needed meaning, purpose and peace, inner peace as well as peace in the world, and astrology helped them find it. The flower children, the search for transcendentalism, the influence of India on the West, brought astrology a little bit more into popular culture and added a more spiritual slant to the intellectual.

Part of the public got their astrological validation through the Beatles and other cultural leaders of the times, and some got it from pop-astrology columns. Although such columns started running as far back as the 20's in the day of Evangeline Adams, whose great contribution to astrology in the early part of the century must be noted, the astro-columns grew in popularity in the 60's and certain astrologers were even able to develop reputations, and therefore, more of a clientele, than their predecessors.

Then, in 1968, "Linda Goodman's Sun Signs" went straight to the New York Times Bestseller's List, the first time an astrology book made the grade, and astrology as a profession was one its way!

The public found out astrology could be purposeful in the "real" world, and not only give advice on relationships, but, "What's your sign?" became the fastest entree to a one-night stand. After all, the counterculture of the 60's became the sexual revolution of the 70's.

Around the same time, another revolution began: technology. In the astrological community, Neil Michelsen combined his computer skills with his interest in astrology and ACS was launched. We could get computerized charts in moments and his "American Ephemeris," which originally came only in decades, truly revolutionized how we work.



Linda Goodman

Then, in 1968, "Linda Goodman's Sun Signs" went straight to the New York Times Bestseller's List, the first time an astrology book made the grade, and astrology as a profession was one its way!

The public found out astrology could be purposeful in the "real" world, and not only give advice on relationships, but, "What's your sign?" became the fastest entree to a one-night stand. After all, the counterculture of the 60's became the sexual revolution of the 70's.

Around the same time, another revolution began: technology. In the astrological community, Neil Michelsen combined his computer skills with his interest in astrology and ACS was launched. We could get computerized charts in moments and his "American Ephemeris," which originally came only in decades, truly revolutionized how we work.

Public access cable television was part of the tech revolution too. It made astrology, well, more accessible. True, some people, such as Madame Rosa and her Dancing Tarot Cards and the like, just reinforced the public's silly image of us, but then professionals, like our own Faith

McInerney, presented astrology with intelligence, effectiveness and humor, and helped to expand the reputation of astrology.

The break-up of Ma Bell also helped the popularity of astrology in the technological revolution. A passing craze was dial-a-psychic and astrologers got in on the act with pay-by-the-minute readings. (Thank the gods, that's over!)

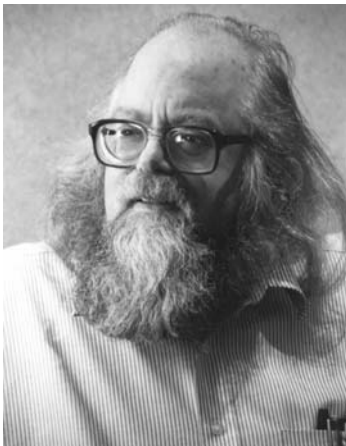
The number of believers grew, so the number of clients grew, and the number of students grew too. And a need for an astrological education organization was born. So, on March 6, 1971, seven men and women, some astrologers and some doctors (yes, doctors) with an interest in astrology (and the connection between medicine and astrology) started the National Council for Geocosmic Research. Our history is on the NCGR website, www.geocosmic.org, which I recommend for further details.

While the American Federation of Astrologers kept astrologers in contact with a wide net across the country since 1938, NCGR took a more grass roots approach to organizing local chapters. Our purpose was the spread of research and education of astrology.

As our membership increased and our education program developed, it became clear we were headed for certification, which was in its early stages in the late 70's when something happened.

Lenore Canter, one of New York's more popular astrologers and a president of NCGR-NY, was called as a witness in the high-profile divorce case of one of her clients. The opposing attorneys treated her in a derogatory and hostile way, and the judge was bewildered by the client's use of astrology in the first place. When he asked Lenore about her credentials as an astrologer, she was speechless, given there were no astrological credentials back then. So scandalous was this case that Lenore wound up on the front page of the New York Post!

She left that courtroom with every intention of making certification a reality, and like a fireball, she threw her Aries energy onto the certification committee....and shortly thereafter, NCGR Certification indeed was a reality.



Rob Hand



Stephen Arroyo



Liz Greene

Throughout the 70's still another revolution occurred. Astrology went psychological. The big three, as I think of them, Rob Hand, Stephen Arroyo, and Liz Greene published books that turned astrology in a new direction and raised Carl Jung from his grave. Interestingly, this Golden Age, if you will, was at its peak with the transiting square between Saturn and Uranus.

Another milestone in the professionalism of astrology was the formation of the Association of Astrological Networking, which went through a few incarnations in the early 80's. (See www.afan.org). The prime purpose of this excellent organization is to protect the legal rights of astrologers. It also has a vital program for media watch and it was the primal force behind the United Astrological Congress with NCGR and ISAR, the International Society for Astrological

Research. UAC, of course, is the crème de la crème of astrological conferences; it educates us, unites us, and inspires us!

Now, as Saturn and Uranus form the opposition in their cycle that began in the mid-80's with Nancy Reagan, or more important the astrologer, Joan Quigley, we are at another major turning point in astrology as a profession.

Due to new governmental regulations, NCGR has to restructure. In brief, some of our professional programs, such as certification, have to break off to become a new organization, NCGR-Professional Astrologers' Alliance (NCGR-PAA), and add more to our offerings, such as a mentorship program. Yes, astrologers and astrology organizations experience transits too!

Here is the Statement of Purpose from our website, www.astrologersalliance.org:

"The mission of the NCGR-Professional Astrologers' Alliance is to serve as a trade association to promote the common interests of astrologers and to improve the status of the profession of astrology primarily through the implementation of a certification program, the promotion of high ethical standards in the practice astrology, as well as any other matters relevant to the professional astrologer. These goals will be achieved through the following: 1). Standards for Ethical and Professional Practice, 2. Education, Training & Mentorship, 3). Advocacy, 4). Community Networking.

For further details, please visit our website, and expect an announcement from NCGR's National President, Madalyn Hillis-Dineen, in the near future. In order to ease the formation of PAA along side its sister organization, NCGR, some of us on the national and local boards are serving as board members for PAA. We look forward to offering you programs in professionalism and other benefits to promote your studies and your work as astrologers.

Those of us who have a profession of astrology, I'm sure, are very proud, but also very fortunate, and hopefully, grateful for that good fortune. However, whether we join this organization, or that; whether we work in this school of astrological thought, or that; whether we make a full time living at astrology, or just pursue it as a hobby; what is more important than a profession in astrology is that we practice astrology professionally, ethically. We are the representatives of astrology to the world now. We set the stage for future generations of astrology, and those generations will come!

John Marchesella may be reached at astrojohn@earthlink.net