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In 2020 Hindsight

A 3 Standard Deviation Year

December 21, 2020

I have been searching to make sense of 2020. I acknowledge difficulties including suffering and heartache will be true trademarks of 2020. Hindsight led me to search history, statistics and philosophy to make my own sense of it all. As a result, I have concluded the 2020 events have happened before to humankind, only faster and concurrent this time.

Ancient Hebrew Scriptures tell us that there is nothing new under the sun. Could this to be true?

To me, 2020 was what statisticians should call a *3 standard deviation* event. From a statistical perspective, the below events of 2020 may seem rare, but not new. *3 standard deviation* events rarely happen, but they are within statistical probability.

The 1880s writer, Mark Twain knew this as well when he said, "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes." Please tell me if this does not rhyme:

Approximate Time Period	Years Ago	Historical Event	2020	Category
1918-1919	100	Spanish Flu	Covid 19	Health Care
1947-1952	70	Fed. Res. Neg. Real Interest Rates	0% Interest Rates	Gov't Monetary Policy
1965-1970	50	Civil Rights Movement	Social Unrest	Social Movements
2000-2001	20	Market Bubble/Recession	Market up/Recession	Economics
2000	20	"Hanging Chads"	Contested Pres. Election	Presidential Elections
2008-2009	10	"Great Recession"	Covid Recession	Economic/Business Cycle
1623	400	Saturn/Jupiter	Saturn/Jupiter	Astronomy

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Have we not been here before? Not you or me, necessarily, but humankind. Moreover, not so long ago. So, what is different? Why are we so unsettled by 2 or 3 *standard deviation* events? Maybe it is because we have had at least 7 of these events almost concurrent, in one year!

What is new is that everything seems to happen faster. We are living in and unsettled by the digital age; which has brought us speed, complexity and connectedness. We have lost margin; the time between events we desperately need to process what just happened. So how do we process and put in context when faced with speedy algorithms of social media, feeding us data and opinion 24/7 so fast?

We slow down. There is help. From the beginning, artists, playwrights, poets, theologians, philosophers have helped us to slow down. They help us find our compass, point to our own north star and maybe we will even find time to enjoy the celestial dance of Saturn drawing nearer to Jupiter.

Here are some practical guidelines that can help us slow down and plan for the future:


1. Set your sights on the future. *Where am I in 5 – 10 years? What am I doing, for instance, at 10 AM on Dec 29th 2025, 2030? Who is with me?*
2. Identify one or two things that you can do today that will point you in that direction.
3. Find an accountability partner to take this journey with you, because more 3 *standard deviation* events may await.

Reflecting on 2020, I realize that by slowing down, I am more peaceful than when I live it in real time. There is nothing like hindsight. We can see the above table differently. Maybe it is fitting to end with Jupiter and Saturn. To me, there is irony that the visual convergence of Jupiter and Saturn creates one bright beacon in the southwest sky at dusk on December 21, 2020- Winter Solstice. Perhaps this can signify a new start. Like others before us, there is a journey still ahead for you and me. We will find our own stars and be comforted that others have gone before us.

Smile, a new year is coming! After we tell our 2020 stories and throw them into the fire, we can leave the worst in us behind. If you did not think 2020 would ever end, *this Ground Hog Day will*. (Thank you, Bill Murray.)

We can find 2020's "silver linings" and choose to carry ourselves forward into this new 2021 with purpose, intentionality and fresh resolve.

Respectfully submitted and always willing to be wrong,



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