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MODERN AMERICAN DRAMA PLAYWRITING 2000-2009

Voices, Documents, New Interpretations

Julia Listengarten and Cindy Rosenthal

B L O O M S B U R Y

Modern
American Drama:
Playwriting
2000–2009

DECADES OF MODERN AMERICAN DRAMA:
PLAYWRITING FROM THE 1930s TO 2009

Modern American Drama: Playwriting in the 1930s

by Anne Fletcher

Modern American Drama: Playwriting in the 1940s

by Felicia Hardison Londré

Modern American Drama: Playwriting in the 1950s

by Susan C. W. Abbotson

Modern American Drama: Playwriting in the 1960s

by Mike Sell

Modern American Drama: Playwriting in the 1970s

by Mike Vanden Heuvel

Modern American Drama: Playwriting in the 1980s

by Sandra G. Shannon

Modern American Drama: Playwriting in the 1990s

by Cheryl Black and Sharon Friedman

Modern American Drama: Playwriting 2000–2009

by Julia Listengarten and Cindy Rosenthal

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New Interpretations

*Julia Listengarten and
Cindy Rosenthal*

Series Editors: Brenda Murphy and
Julia Listengarten

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE AND NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Julia Listengarten is Professor of Theatre and Artistic Director at the University of Central Florida, USA. She has worked professionally as a director and dramaturg and her translation of *Christmas at the Ivanovs*’ premiered Off-Broadway at Classic Stage Company (1997) and was included in *Theater of the Avant-Garde, 1890–1950* (2001). Her research interests include modern and contemporary American theatre, avant-garde theory and performance, Russian theatre, translation theory, and nationalism in theatre. She is the author of *Russian Tragicfarce: Its Cultural and Political Roots* (2000) and co-editor of *Theater of the Avant-Garde: 1950–2000* (2011) and *Playing with Theory in Theatre Practice* (2012). She has also contributed to many academic journals and edited collections including *Women, Collective Creation, and Devised Performance* (2016), *National Theatres in a Changing Europe* (2008) and *A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (2004).

Cindy Rosenthal is Professor of Drama and Dance at Hofstra University, USA. She is a scholar, theatre director, dramaturg and performer. She has directed Off-Off-Broadway (Cynthia Sophia’s *Everyone Has Tears*, TBG Theatre, NYC, 2012) and has performed professionally Off-Broadway and in regional theatre. She is a founding member of the Equity ensemble at the Bread Loaf Theatre, Vermont. Rosenthal has written on political theatre, on the avant-garde and on women playwrights and directors in the *New York Times*, *Women and Performance*, *Theatre Survey* and *TDR*. She is co-editor with James Harding of *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theatres and Their Legacies* (2006) and *The Rise of Performance Studies: Rethinking Richard Schechner’s Broad Spectrum* (2011). With Hanon Reznikov, she co-edited *Living on the Street: Plays of the Living Theatre from 1989–92* (2008). Current work includes *Ellen Stewart Presents: Fifty Years of La Mama Experimental Theatre* (forthcoming 2017).

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Dorothy Chansky is Associate Professor and Director of the Humanities Center at Texas Tech University, USA. She writes about American theatre, audiences and feminist theatre, and, most recently, about translation. Her most recent book is *Kitchen Sink Realisms: Domestic Labor, Dining, and Drama in American Theatre* (University of Iowa Press, 2015). She co-edited *Food and Theatre on the World Stage* (Routledge, 2015) with Ann Folino White. Her book *Composing Ourselves: The Little Theatre Movement and the American Audience* won a President's Book Award at Texas Tech in 2006. Her work has appeared in *Theatre Journal*, *TDR*, *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *Women and Performance*, the *Journal of American Drama and Theatre*, *Theatre History Studies* and the *Journal of Adaptation in Performance and Film*.

Scott T. Cummings is Professor of Playwriting and Dramatic Literature in the Theatre Department of Boston College, USA, where he served as Chair from 2010 to 2014. His directing work for Boston College includes four different programmes of fully produced one-acts by BC student playwrights, an original devised work called *Ashley's Purpose*, and plays by Shakespeare, Marivaux, Beckett, Fornes and Mee. He is the author of *Charles Mee*, *Anne Bogart and the SITI Company* (Cambridge University Press, 2006) and *Maria Irene Fornes* (Routledge, 2013) and the co-editor (with Erica Stevens Abbitt) of *The Theatre of Naomi Wallace: Embodied Dialogues* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

GENERAL PREFACE

Decades of Modern American Drama: Playwriting from the 1930s to 2009 is a series of eight volumes about American theatre and drama, each focusing on a particular decade during the period between 1930 and 2010. It begins with the 1930s, the decade when Eugene O'Neill was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature and American theatre came of age. This is followed by the decade of the country's most acclaimed theatre, when O'Neill, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller were writing their most distinguished work, and a theatrical idiom known as 'the American style' was seen in theatres throughout the world. Its place in the world repertoire established, American playwriting has taken many turns since 1950.

The aim of this series is to focus attention on individual playwrights or collaborative teams who together reflect the variety and range of American drama during the eighty-year period it covers. In each volume, contributing experts offer detailed critical essays on four playwrights or collaborators and the significant work they produced during the decade. The essays on playwrights are presented in a rich interpretive context, which provides a contemporary perspective on both the theatre and American life and culture during the decade. The careers of the playwrights before and after the decade are summarized as well, and a section of documents, including interviews, manuscripts, reviews, brief essays and other items, sheds further light on the playwrights and their plays.

The process of choosing such a limited number of playwrights to represent the American theatre of this period has been a difficult but revealing one. In selecting them, the series editors and volume authors have been guided by several principles: highlighting the most significant playwrights, in terms both historical and aesthetic, who contributed at least two interesting and important plays during

the decade; providing a wide-ranging view of the decade's theatre, including both Broadway and alternative venues; examining many historical trends in playwriting and theatrical production during the decade; and reflecting the theatre's diversity in gender and ethnicity, both across the decade and across the period as a whole. In some decades, the choices are obvious. It is hard to argue with O'Neill, Williams, Miller and Wilder in the 1940s. Other decades required a good deal of thought and discussion. Readers will inevitably regret that favourite playwrights are left out. We can only respond that we regret it too, but we believe that the playwrights who are included reflect a representative sample of the best and most interesting American playwriting during the period.

While each of the books has the same fundamental elements – an overview of life and culture during the decade, an overview of the decade's theatre and drama, the four essays on the playwrights, a section of documents, an Afterword bringing the playwrights' careers up to date, and a Bibliography of works both on the individual playwrights and on the decade in general – there are differences among the books depending on each individual volume author's decisions about how to represent and treat the decade. The various formats chosen by the volume authors for the overview essays, the wide variety of playwrights, from the canonical to the contemporary avant-garde, and the varied perspectives of the contributors' essays make for very different individual volumes. Each of the volumes stands on its own as a history of theatre in the decade and a critical study of the four individual playwrights or collaborative teams included. Taken together, however, the eight volumes offer a broadly representative critical and historical treatment of 80 years of American theatre and drama that is both accessible to a student first encountering the subject and informative and provocative for a seasoned expert.

Brenda Murphy (Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor
Emeritus, University of Connecticut, USA)

Julia Listengarten (Professor of Theatre at the University of
Central Florida, USA)
Series Editors

1

Introduction: Living in the 2000s

Julia Listengarten

Background

What else could possibly have gone wrong in the first years of the twenty-first century? The country lived through the devastating terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001; major corporate bankruptcies; the collapse of the car industry; the deep economic recession; mass shootings; political and sex scandals. The unemployment rate rose above 10 per cent for the first time since 1983. Surveillance culture grew and intelligence gathering proliferated. Climate change led to environmental catastrophes, such as Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. While the fear of a massive Y2K computer meltdown did not materialize on midnight of 1 January 2000, other fears soon entered the lives of many Americans: the fear of snipers near Washington, DC, and anthrax attacks, the fear of global terrorism, the fear of losing one's home, the fear of losing a job, the fear of losing a loved one to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

'The noughties', as the British sometimes refer to the decade, was a period of great calamities and inventions. Indeed, this decade of major economic and political upheavals also featured many

groundbreaking technological discoveries, including the explosion of Internet-based culture. It was also a decade of great paradoxes: the period of conservative politics in the country coincided with a number of progressive changes toward social equality; globalism and the growth in social networking produced a sense of isolation – both national and personal – and anxiety over the loss of identity and originality. Was it ‘the lost decade’ of massive political and environmental disasters? The ‘digital decade’ of Facebook, Twitter and video games? The decade of the ‘look-at-me generation’, of reality TV and celebrity culture? This chapter explores the decade from these various perspectives and discusses key events and developments in the 2000s which include

- War on a global scale
- The Great Recession
- Changing perspectives on gender and sexual identity
- Racial politics and religious intolerance
- Environmental concerns
- The rise of neoconservatism and the Tea Party
- Evolving definitions of ‘family’
- The emergence of digital and social media

Society

War on Terror

It was, we were soon told, ‘the day that changed everything’, the 21st century’s defining moment, the watershed by which we would forever divide world history: before, and after, 9/11.

Jon Henley, *Guardian*, 9 September 2011

On 11 September 2001, nineteen Islamic fundamentalists hijacked four US airliners. Two planes were crashed into the World Trade Center in New York City, collapsing the Twin Towers; one was crashed into the Pentagon, seriously damaging the building; and one that was targeted at the White House or the US Capitol instead crashed in a cornfield in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, after passengers

tried to stop the hijackers. The al-Qaeda organization, led by Osama bin Laden, was responsible.

Nearly 3,000 people perished as a result of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The long-term effects included significant physical and mental health issues. In June 2007, New York City commissioned the World Trade Center Medical Group to analyse the short-term health effects of 9/11 and project the long-term care needs of people exposed at ground zero. The report, issued in 2009, found that 15,688 people that year received publicly funded treatment for World Trade Center-related health conditions. Furthermore, over 40,000 first responders and workers were screened or monitored for disease.

In response to the 9/11 attacks, the US launched wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, respectively, with the support of an international coalition. These would become the longest military conflicts in US history. In Iraq, US military fatalities exceeded 4,300 up to 2009. In Afghanistan, US combat deaths numbered 946 up to 2009.

The immediate and long-lasting effects of the wars on the US military personnel deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq included post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), major limb amputations and self-inflicted wounds. In 2003, there were 977 cases of the PTSD diagnosis reported among the deployed personnel; by 2009, the number rose to 13,863. TBI cases reached 28,877 by 2009.¹

As the country engaged in the War on Terror, various national security policies emerged, authorizing domestic surveillance as well as detention and interrogation programmes. The establishment of the Department of Homeland Security aimed to unify national security efforts. The National Security Agency (NSA) implemented the Terrorist Surveillance Program (TSP) to intercept al-Qaeda communications, although the programme was later implicated in engaging in widespread domestic surveillance. Blackwater Security Consulting, a private security company, was contracted by the Federal government to conduct risky and at times controversial military operations in the wake of 9/11. During the 16 September 2007 Blackwater operation in Iraq, seventeen Iraqis were killed and twenty-four wounded when Blackwater operators opened fire in a traffic circle in central Baghdad.

BOX 1.1: WAR ON TERROR

The War on Terror, a phrase first used by President Bush on 20 September 2001, is an ideological concept that emerged after the 11 September attacks to fight terrorism. It also refers to the series of international military and diplomatic campaigns aimed at putting an end to international terrorism, largely associated with radical Islamist groups such as al-Qaeda, Hezbollah and Hamas. The War on Terror campaigns were launched by the US, with support from NATO and other allies, in the aftermath of the 11 September terrorist attacks.

In addition to the Bush administration-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the War on Terror also involved covert military operations and new security legislation, as well as efforts to block the financing of terrorist organizations. There was widespread criticism of ‘War on Terror’ as an approach to combating global terrorism and strengthening national security. Critics argued that, instead, this concept promoted an ideology of fear and mistrust, both domestically and internationally.

Economy

The decade’s economy in the US was plagued by a series of crises leading to a major economic decline, also referred to as the Great Recession. The decade began with the dot-com bubble bursting and ended with the meltdown of the financial system caused by the crisis in subprime mortgages.

The development of the global economy prompted the outsourcing of US service and technology, which precipitated what Thomas Friedman called the ‘flattening’ of the world.² The rise of China and India as world financial powers presented a challenge to the US economy, as the global balance of power began to shift toward the East.

Dot-com bubble burst

The period of the dot-com bubble (also referred to as the Internet bubble or information technology bubble), which began roughly in 1997, achieved its climax on 10 March 2000, when the NASDAQ stock exchange soared to over 5,100.00 in intraday trading. The bubble was created by a combination of rising stock prices, market confidence in future profitability of dot-com companies and easily obtainable venture capital. In April 2000, inflation reports triggered the collapse of the bubble. As a result, a large number of information technology companies ran out of capital and filed for bankruptcy. Many companies were subsequently liquidated or acquired. In March 2000, the market value of NASDAQ companies peaked at \$6.7 trillion; in October 2002, it reached its bottom at \$1.6 trillion.³

Corporate and investment frauds

The decade was marked by a significant rise in fraud involving major corporate organizations and accounting firms. These scandals stemmed from improper accounting practices: inflated revenues, overstated sales, understated earnings, misused or misdirected funds.

2001: Enron, a top energy company, and Arthur Andersen, one of the top five public accounting firms, were involved in corporate fraud that resulted in the bankruptcy of Enron and dissolution of Arthur Andersen. Shareholders lost more than \$60 billion.

2002: WorldCom, a major telecommunications company, was caught in fraudulent accounting operations to maintain the price of its stock. As a result, the company filed for bankruptcy. According to investigators, the company's total assets had been inflated by about \$11 billion.

2002: Tyco, a manufacturer of electronic components and health care and safety equipment, also became engulfed in an accounting scandal when its CEO, Dennis Kozlowski, along with several other top executives, was exposed for selling shares of unauthorized stock for \$450 million and smuggling these funds out of the country disguised as executives' bonuses and benefits.

2008: Bernard Madoff, owner of an investment advisory firm and former chairman of NASDAQ, admitted to running a huge Ponzi scheme, as a result of which his investors had been defrauded of \$18 billion. Madoff's Ponzi scheme was one of the largest investment frauds in Wall Street history.

Subprime housing collapse and financial crisis

In the first half of the decade, the housing market was thriving, housing values kept inflating and the phenomenon known as subprime lending began to emerge. Subprime and alternative mortgages with very low or no down payments and very low initial rates became available for people without steady jobs or with tainted credit histories who would not have qualified for regular mortgages in the past. These mortgages were then packaged into mortgage-backed securities and sold to investors. As the interest rates rose, the mortgage payments became increasingly higher, and the inflated housing prices went down. These people were unable to make their mortgage payments and were eventually crushed by debt. As a result, home foreclosures rose and the value of the mortgage-backed securities fell. As of September 2008, 25 million subprime and other mortgages were outstanding, with an unpaid principal of over \$4.5 trillion. This led to the collapse of major investment banks, whose portfolios of loans were worth nothing. Some of these institutions had also been involved in fraudulent accounting practices such as deceitful transactions (in the case of Lehman Brothers). In late 2008, the Bush administration stepped in to mitigate the financial crisis by creating the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP) to bail out failing financial institutions.

Economic downfall of 2008

As banks had no lending ability because of their loss of assets, consumers and businesses could no longer borrow money, which affected their spending and productivity growth. New houses did not sell. The amount of foreclosures became unprecedented. Unemployment rose and consumer spending went down.

By the time the Obama administration reached the White House in January of 2009, the economy was in a deep recession. The US

national debt more than doubled (from \$5,674,178,209,886.86 in 2000 to \$11,909,829,003,511.75 in 2009) due in part to governmental efforts to mitigate the financial crisis. At the end of 2009, the US economy began to show some signs of recovery. A Pew Charitable Trusts report provides some relevant detail.⁴

BOX 1.2: PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS REPORT

Income: US households lost on average \$5,800 in income from September 2008 through to 2009.

Government spending: Federal spending, due to government interventions to alleviate the financial crisis (Troubled Assets Relief Program), amounted to \$2,050 for each household.

Home values: The US lost \$3.4 trillion in real estate wealth between July 2008 and March 2009, according to the Federal Reserve – \$30,300 per household. The subprime mortgage crisis resulted in 500,000 more foreclosures than had been expected.

Stock values: The US lost \$7.4 trillion in stock wealth from July 2008 to March 2009, according to the Federal Reserve – roughly \$66,200 per household.

Jobs: 5.5 million more American jobs were lost during the financial crisis because of slower economic growth than had been predicted.

The economic crisis had major global repercussions. The US economy experienced significant decline in the growth of both exports and imports, which led to slowing production and employment cuts in the rest of the world.

BOX 1.3: DEMOGRAPHICS

In December 2009, the US population was 308.2 million. Non-Hispanic whites made up about two-thirds of the population.

Education

The unsatisfactory quality of American elementary and secondary education continued to be a hot topic in political debates. To effect major changes in public education, President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act into law in 2002. This reform focused on four principles: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and teaching methods that had been proven to work.

In an effort to improve elementary and secondary education, the Common Core State Standard Initiative was announced on 1 June 2009 to provide consistent and clear expectations of what students must learn.

Secondary education graduation rates increased. In 2009–10, 3,128,022 public school students nationwide received a high school diploma; this resulted in an Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate of 78.2 per cent.⁵ In post-secondary education, between 2000 and 2008 the proportion of adults aged twenty-four and older with a bachelor's degree or higher increased from 24 per cent to 28 per cent. The proportion of adults with an associate degree rose from 6 per cent to 8 per cent, while the number of adults completing college education without receiving a degree remained 21 per cent.

Although educational achievement continued to increase among all racial and ethnic groups, there were still considerable gaps. In 2008, 31 per cent of non-Hispanic whites and 50 per cent of Asian-Americans had completed college or graduate education, compared to only 13 per cent of Hispanics and 18 per cent of blacks.⁶

Between 1999 and 2009, published tuition for four-year colleges increased by 39.8 per cent from the previous year; for two-year colleges, tuition increased by 3.1 per cent.

Crime

In 2002, the US incarceration rate reached the highest level in the world. The total number of prisoners continued to increase, from 6,437,400 in 2000 to 7,225,800 in 2009. While rates of violent crime declined (the homicide rate declined by nearly half, from 9.3 homicides per 100,000 residents in 1992 to 4.7 in 2011), crime involving federal offences and firearms slightly increased. In 2009, the number of people arrested on suspicion of federal offences reached 183,000, a significant rise from 140,000 in 2005. Firearm violence increased from 7.3 per cent of all violence in 2000 to 7.4 per cent in 2009; firearm homicides also increased from 1.7 per cent in 2000 to 2.7 per cent in 2009.⁷

Drug cases remained the most prevalent in terms of adjudication and sentencing. In 2009, five judicial districts along the US–Mexico border had more than 56 per cent of all federal arrests.

BOX 1.4: TYPES OF CRIME

New types of crime involved cybercrime and online bullying. Examples of cybercrime included hacking, theft of information in electronic form, email bombing, virus/worm attacks and Trojan attacks. The decade also experienced an increase in corporate fraud and a spike in mass shootings. The deadliest mass shooting occurred in April 2007, when a student at Virginia Tech killed thirty-two people and wounded fifteen others before shooting himself.

Identity politics

While the gender inequality gap continued to decrease, issues such as lower wages for women, a small percentage of women in leadership positions and a declining number of women in the labour force persisted. In 2010, women in the US on average received 81 per cent of the salary of their male counterparts, compared to about 62 per cent in 1979. In 2009, only 24 per cent of chief executive officers (CEOs) in the US were women, and their

salaries were 74.5 per cent of what male CEOs earned.⁸ While women's participation in US labour during the previous decades had increased, between 2000 and 2010 it dropped from 60 per cent of representation to 46.7 per cent.⁹

LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) rights evolved in varying degrees by state. Starting in 2000, some states began to recognize civil unions between same-sex couples. In 2004, Massachusetts became the first state to issue marriage licences to same-sex couples. By 2009, five states had passed same-sex marriage legislation.

Many states outlawed discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Hate crimes also became punishable by federal law under the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009.

BOX 1.5: PROPOSITION 8

Proposition 8, or Prop 8, was a California ballot proposition and a state constitutional amendment that defined marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman. Created by opponents of same-sex marriage, it was passed in 2008 during state elections, overturning previous legalization of same-sex marriages by the state. A federal court then ruled Proposition 8 unconstitutional in 2010.

The decade experienced remarkable achievements in race relations ranging from culture to politics. Colin Powell became the first African-American to serve as Secretary of State (2001); Halle Berry and Denzel Washington won the Academy Awards for Best Actress and Best Actor in the same year (2002); Condoleezza Rice became the first African-American woman to serve as Secretary of State (2005); Barack Obama became the first African-American to win the presidency (2008); Sonia Sotomayor became the first Hispanic Supreme Court Justice (2009). Despite these significant strides, racial and ethnic inequalities remained obdurate, especially in employment and income distribution, criminalization and immigration policies, and life expectancy.

Table 1.1 Unemployment rates by race/ethnicity in 2009

Asian-Americans	Whites	Hispanics	Blacks
7.5%	8.7%	12.4%	15.3%

The recession of 2008 hit African-American and Latina/o communities particularly hard. The 4-percentage-point gap between unemployment rates for whites and blacks in 2000 grew to nearly 7 percentage points by 2009. The unemployment gap between whites and Latina/os increased significantly as well.¹⁰

In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, racial profiling and religious intolerance surged. A *New York Times* article reported in 2006 that ‘in the aftermath of Sept. 11, Arab Americans [had] a greater fear of racial profiling and immigration enforcement than of falling victim to hate crimes’.¹¹

Environment

The alarming environmental changes raised concerns about the world’s irresponsible consumption of natural resources, prompting research groups, business corporations and politicians to think of new ways to make our planet a greener, cleaner and ecologically safer place. The topic of climate change and its negative effects received much attention both domestically and globally, especially after the melting of the Antarctic ice sheet and the recession of Arctic glaciers that occurred significantly faster than experts had predicted. Melting ice, drought, early springs and disappearing polar bears, among other species, were some of the disconcerting effects of the decade’s climate change. Climate change was also linked to devastating natural disasters such as the Southeast Asian tsunami in 2004 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Developing renewable energy sources and clean energy technologies became one of the principal goals of major environmental research and investment programmes. According to a 2009 United Nations Environment Program report, in 2008, \$155 billion was invested globally in renewable energy, including hydropower and biofuels, a fourfold increase since 2004. While the US continued to lag in its effort to embrace green initiatives, politicians and

businesses paid more attention to environmental protection. During all three presidential elections in the period, environmental concerns became a significant element in presidential debates. To protect the country's key natural resources, the Obama administration launched America's Great Outdoors Initiative in 2010.

Other global environmental concerns included overpopulation, the water crisis, oil and coal ash spills, nuclear waste disposal, endangered species, pandemics and superbugs, all rooted in environmental causes.

Politics

A Republican held the White House for most of the decade. George W. Bush became the 43rd US president after the Supreme Court ruling in his 2000 election dispute with Democrat Al Gore and won re-election in 2004. Barack Obama, a Democratic senator from Illinois, won the 2008 election and became the first African-American president in US history.

National security drove domestic and foreign policies after the 9/11 attacks. As a result of the Homeland Security Act in 2002, the Bush administration formed the US Department of Homeland Security as 'a concerted national effort to prevent terrorist attacks within the United States, reduce America's vulnerability to terrorism, and minimize the damage and recover from attacks that do occur'.¹² The US foreign policy after the 9/11 attacks that relied on a strategy of 'preemptive strikes' to protect the security of the country is often referred to as 'the Bush Doctrine'.¹³

BOX 1.6: NEOCONSERVATISM

Neoconservatives (at times referred to as neocons) rose to prominence during the Bush presidency and played a crucial role in promoting and planning the invasion of Iraq. Prominent neoconservatives in the administration included Vice President Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle and Paul Bremer. Neoconservatism advocates promotion of American interests in international affairs and adopts strategies such as the use of military force.

The 2001 invasion of Afghanistan was followed by the 2003 Operation Iraqi Freedom. Its main mission, according to Bush, was 'to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, to end Saddam Hussein's support for terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people'.¹⁴

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq became increasingly unpopular, especially after the dissemination of official findings that Iraq had no chemical or biological weapons of mass destruction before the invasion. The public discontent with the wars also stemmed from the spikes in violence in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the rising numbers of US military casualties. In the meantime, the US grappled with the challenges of globalization, such as terrorism, growing environmental concerns and financial and economic crises.

During the Bush administration, economic policies included the tax cuts of 2001 and 2003, the Economic Stimulus Act of 2008 to boost the economy and prevent the recession, and the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008, commonly referred to as a bailout of the US financial system.¹⁵ In 2009, President Obama formed the Presidential Task Force on the Auto Industry to manage the financial bailout of car manufacturers Chrysler and General Motors. Following task force recommendations, which included fuel-efficient cars, the US government loaned \$25 billion to the companies.

BOX 1.7: THE TEA PARTY

The Tea Party, which emerged as a grassroots political movement, consists of libertarian, populist and conservative activists. It sprang up in full force in early 2009 with multiple protests, including one at the US Capitol and National Mall, demanding reduction of government spending and taxes. (The Tea Party has also been called an 'AstroTurf' movement – a fake grassroots movement that actually was started and financed by elite groups.)

Timeline of major political events¹⁶

2000

George W. Bush won the US presidency after the Supreme Court ruling despite winning fewer popular votes than Al Gore.

Hillary Rodham Clinton won a United States Senate seat from New York, becoming the first First Lady to win public office.

2001

11 September: The terror attacks on the US orchestrated by Islamic fundamentalists caused nearly 3,000 deaths.

18 September: The first anthrax attacks by mail against targets among journalists and government officials were reported.

7 October: In response to the 11 September attacks, the US military, and its United Kingdom ally, began the first phase in the War on Terror by launching an offensive against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. This war became the longest military conflict in US history.

26 October: Bush signed into law the USA PATRIOT Act. Its title stands for ‘Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism’.

2002

21 May: The State Department declared that seven nations sponsored terrorism: Iran, Iraq, Cuba, Libya, North Korea, Sudan and Syria.

2003

March: The US invaded Iraq, coordinating military operations with British, Australian, Polish and Danish ground troops.

April: The US-led coalition seized control of Baghdad, driving Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from power. He was later arrested and executed on 30 December 2006.

June to November: Amnesty International and the Associated Press reported that the US military and the CIA abused detainees at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. In 2004, the American Civil Liberties Union released documents obtained under the Freedom of Information

Act that indicated that the US government authorized the use of torture ('enhanced interrogation techniques') against prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and in Afghanistan and Iraq.

2004

January: The CIA's top weapons adviser in Iraq, David Kay, admitted that the country possessed no active weapons of mass destruction or related production facilities before the war – refuting the US justification of the invasion. In September, Kay's successor as the CIA's chief weapons inspector, Charles Duelfer, testified before Congress that Hussein had no chemical or biological weapons and no capacity to make nuclear weapons.

2 November: Bush won re-election over Democratic Senator John Kerry from Massachusetts.

2005

29 August: Hurricane Katrina's storm surge overwhelmed levees in greater New Orleans, flooding 80 per cent of the city: the confirmed death toll was 1,836 and the total damage was estimated at \$108 billion. Katrina, arguably the greatest natural disaster in US history, prompted heated public debates about the local, state and federal governments' lack of preparation and mismanagement of relief efforts.

2006

In the mid-term elections, the Democratic Party won control of both the US House of Representatives and the Senate. This overwhelming victory was attributed to growing public discontent over the Bush administration's Iraq policy.

2007

January: California Representative Nancy Pelosi became the first woman Speaker of the US House of Representatives.

January: Bush announced a 'surge' of additional troops into Iraq to stop attacks against coalition forces and civilians.

June: A terror plot to blow up jet fuel supply tanks and pipelines at JFK International Airport in New York was foiled.

2008

October: Bush signed into law the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act – a bailout of the US financial system. The \$700 billion Troubled Assets Relief Program to purchase failing bank assets was the government's response to the subprime mortgage crisis.

November: Barack Obama overwhelmingly won the presidential election over John McCain. Obama became the 44th US president in January 2009.

2009

February: Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, an economic stimulus package.

April: Some 750 Tea Party protests emerged across the nation in response to government spending, such as the bailout of the banking and car industries that had begun during the Bush administration and expanded under Obama.

October: Joblessness climbed above 10 per cent, signalling that the recession had deepened.

December: Obama announced a 'surge' of 30,000 additional troops in Afghanistan to curb increased Taliban attacks.

Terrorist attacks around the world

2001, 11 September: 9/11 terrorist attacks, US (2,996 killed)

2002, October: Bali bombings, Indonesia (202 killed)

2002, October: Moscow theatre hostage crisis, Russia (130 killed)

2003, November: Istanbul bombings, Turkey (57 killed)

2004, March: Madrid train bombings, Spain (191 killed)

2004, September: Beslan school hostage crisis, Russia (334 killed)

2005, July: London bombings, UK (56 killed)

2007, August: Yazidi communities bombings, Iraq (796 killed)

2008, November: Mumbai attacks, India (164 killed)

Everyday life

Family life

The definition of family continued to expand, especially with the legalization of civil unions and same-sex marriages. Despite legal hurdles concerning adoption for same-sex partners, the percentage of gays and lesbians with adopted children increased. While only about 8 per cent of same-sex couples had an adopted child in 2000, this number rose to about 19 per cent in 2009.

Both marriage and divorce rates continued to decline. Whereas in 2000, the marriage rate was 8.2 per 1,000 individuals, in 2009 it dropped to 6.8. In 2000, the divorce rate was 4 per 1,000 people; in 2009 it decreased to 3.5.¹⁷

Pregnancy rates declined, reaching their lowest level in twelve years in 2009: 102.1 per 1,000 women aged fifteen to forty-four. Pregnancy rates for women younger than age thirty dropped; rates for women thirty and older increased. Rates for teenage pregnancy dropped, reaching a historically low level in 2009. Also, the abortion rate in 2009 was at its lowest level since 1976. Birth rates slightly rose in the middle of the decade but dropped again by 2009: from 2008 to 2009, the number of births declined by 3 per cent.¹⁸

Life expectancy continued to increase gradually. In 2009, life expectancy was 80.9 years for white women, 77.6 years for black women, 76.4 years for white men and 71.1 years for black men.¹⁹

What things cost

From 2000 to 2009, the Consumer Price Index (the government's inflation measure) as a whole rose by 24.5 per cent.