



MODERN AMERICAN DRAMA PLAYWRITING IN THE 1990s

Voices, Documents, New Interpretations

Cheryl Black and Sharon Friedman

B L O O M S B U R Y

Modern
American Drama:
Playwriting in
the 1990s

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

Modern American Drama: Playwriting in the 1990s

Voices, Documents,
New Interpretations

*Cheryl Black and
Sharon Friedman*

Series Editors: Brenda Murphy and
Julia Listengarten

Bloomsbury Methuen Drama
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
B L O O M S B U R Y
LONDON • OXFORD • NEW YORK • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Methuen Drama

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Imprint previously known as Methuen Drama

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

**BLOOMSBURY, METHUEN DRAMA and the Diana logo are trademarks of
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc**

First published 2018

© Cheryl Black, Sharon Friedman and contributors, 2018

Cheryl Black and Sharon Friedman have asserted their right under the Copyright,
Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Authors of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted
in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying,
recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior
permission in writing from the publishers.

No responsibility for loss caused to any individual or organization acting on
or refraining from action as a result of the material in this publication can be
accepted by Bloomsbury or the authors.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-472-57247-9

Pack: 978-1-4725-7264-6

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Series: Decades of Modern American Drama: Playwriting from the 1930s to 2009

Cover design by Louise Dugdale

Cover image: Rally to Save the National Endowment of the Arts in Union Square
Park, New York City (1990). Photo © Images Press/Getty Images

Typeset by Fakenham Prepress Solutions, Fakenham, Norfolk NR21 8NN

To find out more about our authors and books visit www.bloomsbury.com. Here
you will find extracts, author interviews, details of forthcoming events and the
option to sign up for our newsletters.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements x

Biographical Note and Notes on Contributors xi

General Preface Julia Listengarten and Brenda Murphy xiii

1 Introduction to the 1990s *Cheryl Black* 1

Politics 2

 The Clinton presidency 2

 International relations 4

Society 5

 Terror on the home front 5

 AIDS 6

 Identity politics 7

Science and technology 13

 Silicon Valley 13

 Genetics 14

 Space 15

Everyday life 15

 Population and demographics 15

 Religion 15

 Domestic economy 16

 Fads 16

 Education 17

 Media 18

Culture 18

 Music 18

 Film 21

	Television	23
	Sport	25
	Literature	26
	Art	28
	Fashion	29
	Food	29
	The millennium approaches	30
2	American Theatre in the 1990s	<i>Sharon Friedman</i> 33
	The economic climate and funding sources in the 1990s	38
	Censorship and the National Endowment for the Humanities:	
	The 'NEA Four'	41
	New business models for the theatre	43
	The 'Broadway' theatre in the 1990s	44
	Musical theatre	48
	The megamusical: British and French imports and the	
	Americanization of the genre	50
	Disney on Broadway	53
	Lower-budget musical productions in the non-profit	
	theatre	54
	Images of the nation in musical theatre	55
	Drama and dramatists Off-, Off-Off-Broadway and	
	beyond	60
	Canonical playwrights	61
	Themes of white male heteronormativity in the theatre of	
	the 1990s	64
	African-American, ethnic and feminist theatrical visions as	
	genres and cultural practice	68
	African-American theatre	69
	Asian-American theatre	75
	Latina/o theatre	78
	Feminist theatre and the under-representation of women	
	playwrights	81
	Lesbian/gay/queer theatre	87

- Performance art 89
- Conclusion: A theatre of diversity in form and intention 93
- 3 Terrence McNally *John M. Clum* 97
- Introduction 97
- Lips Together, Teeth Apart* (1991) 101
- A Perfect Ganesha* (1993) 105
- Love! Valour! Compassion!* (1994–5) 108
- Master Class* (1995) 112
- Corpus Christi* (1998) 114
- Conclusion 118
- 4 Paula Vogel *Joanna Mansbridge* 121
- Introduction 121
- The Baltimore Waltz* (1992) 124
- Hot 'n' Throbbing* (1995) 128
- The Mineola Twins* (1997) 134
- How I Learned to Drive* (1997) 139
- Conclusion 147
- 5 Tony Kushner *James Fisher* 149
- Introduction 149
- Angels in America* (1991–2) 154
- Codas to *Angels: Slavs!* (1994) and *G. David Schine in Hell* (1996) 162
- Adaptations: *The Good Person of Setzuan* (1994) 163
- Adaptations: *A Dybbuk; or, Between Two Worlds* (1997) 165
- Homebody/Kabul* (1999–2001) 168
- Conclusion 172
- 6 Suzan-Lori Parks *Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr* 175
- Introduction 175
- Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom* (1989) 184

The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World
(1989–92) 186

The America Play (1993) 188

Venus (1996) 191

In the Blood (1999) 193

Conclusion 196

Afterword *Cheryl Black and Sharon Friedman* 199

Introduction 199

Terrence McNally 205

Paula Vogel 208

Tony Kushner 211

Suzan-Lori Parks 213

Documents 217

Terrence McNally 217

Nathan Lane, *Playbill*, 2015 217

Interview by Mervyn Rothstein 218

Interview by Charlie Rose 219

Opera and Maria Callas 220

On the evolution of *Master Class* 221

Zoe Caldwell on McNally 221

In protest against *Corpus Christi* 223

McNally on *Corpus Christi* 223

Paula Vogel 224

Interview with Arthur Holmberg on *How I Learned to Drive* 224

Miriam Chirico on *A Civil War Christmas* 228

On teaching 229

On collaboration 230

Tony Kushner 231

Interview with Zeljko Djukic by Cheryl Black regarding
the Serbian premiere of *Homebody/Kabul* 231

Suzan-Lori Parks 239

Liz Diamond 239

Richard Foreman 241

‘An Equation for Black People Onstage’ 241

Interview with Han Ong 242

Commencement Address at Mount Holyoke 243

Notes 245

Bibliography 277

Index 285

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank series editors Julia Listengarten and Brenda Murphy, and commissioning editor Mark Dudgeon from Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, for their knowledgeable, thoughtful and meticulous guidance throughout this process. We are deeply grateful to authors John M. Clum, Joanna Mansbridge, James Fisher and Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr. for their authoritative and insightful contributions. We would like to thank Syma Mohammed, LR Hults, Zeljko Djukic, Natasha Djukic, Kim Storry, Ronnie Hanna, Ian Buck and the staff at Bloomsbury Methuen Drama for their invaluable assistance. Special thanks to the University of Missouri Research Council for granting Cheryl Black a research leave to work on this project and to Dean Susanne Wofford and the faculty at the Gallatin School of New York University for granting Sharon Friedman a Faculty Research Fellowship.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE AND NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Cheryl Black is Professor of Theatre and Catherine Paine Middlebush Chair in Fine and Performing Arts at the University of Missouri, President of the American Theatre and Drama Society and a Fellow in the College of Fellows of the American Theatre. She is the author of *The Women of Provincetown, 1915–1922*, co-editor of *Experiments in Democracy: Interracial and Cross-cultural Exchange in American Theatre and Drama, 1912–1945* and the author of numerous essays in edited collections and scholarly journals. She is also an actress, director and dramaturg.

Sharon Friedman is Associate Professor of Modern Literature and Drama in the Gallatin School of New York University. She is the editor of *Feminist Theatrical Revisions of Classic Works* and has authored numerous essays in publications such as *Theatre Journal*, *American Studies*, *New Theatre Quarterly*, *Women and Performance*, *New England Theatre Journal*, *Text and Presentation*, *Codifying the National Self: Spectators, Actors and the American Text* and *Intertextuality in American Drama*. She is currently working on a book project titled *The Gendered Terrain in the Theatre of War*.

John M. Clum is Professor Emeritus of Theater Studies and English at Duke University. His books include *Still Acting Gay: Male Homosexuality in Modern Drama*, *Something for the Boys: Musical Theatre and Gay Culture*, *He's All Man: Learning Masculinity, Homosexuality and Love from American Movies*, *The Drama of Marriage: Gay Playwrights/Straight Unions from Oscar Wilde to*

the Present and, most recently, *Terrence McNally and Fifty Years of American Gay Drama, 1965–2015*. He is also a playwright, director and opera librettist. His theatre blog can be found at <http://clumtheater.blogspot.com>.

James Fisher is Professor of Theatre at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and the 2007 recipient of the Betty Jean Jones Award for Excellence in the Teaching of American Theatre from the American Theatre and Drama Society. He has directed and/or acted in over 150 theatre productions and his publications include the two-volume *The Historical Dictionary of Contemporary American Theater, 1930–2010*, four books in the ‘Playwrights in an Hour’ series, three bio-bibliographies, *The Historical Dictionary of American Theater: Modernism*, *The Historical Dictionary of American Theater: Beginnings*, *Understanding Tony Kushner* and *The Theater of Tony Kushner: Living Past Hope*.

Joanna Mansbridge is an Assistant Professor of American Culture and Literature at Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey. Her book *Paula Vogel* is the first book-length study of the playwright. Her essays appear in *Modern Drama*, *Comparative Drama*, the *Methuen Guide to Contemporary American Playwrights*, *Canadian Theatre Review* and the *Journal of Popular Culture*. She is currently working on two projects: a study of four key works of contemporary American drama and a comparative genealogy of feminist popular theatre and political activism. She also serves on the advisory board for the performance studies journal *Performance Matters*.

Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr is Professor and Chair of Theatre Arts at Loyola Marymount University. He is the author of eight books, including *Athenian Sun in an African Sky: Modern African Adaptation of Classical Greek Tragedy*, *Black Dionysus: Greek Tragedy and African American Theatre* and *Modern Asian Theatre and Performance 1900–2000* (with Siyuan Liu and Erin B. Mee). He is also the editor or co-editor of 11 books, including *Suzan-Lori Parks: A Casebook*, *Portrayals of Americans on the World Stage*, *Black Medea* and the *Methuen Drama Anthology of Modern Asian Plays* (with Siyuan Liu).

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 of volumes is to focus attention on individual playwrights or collaborative teams who together reflect the variety and range of American drama during the 80-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 eighty 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 to the 1990s

Cheryl Black

The last decade of the twentieth century is framed by two world-changing events: the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, heralding the end of the Cold War between America (Western democracy) and the Soviet Union (Eastern European communism), and the destruction of the World Trade Center Towers by the militant organization al-Qaeda on 11 September 2001, an event that triggered America's 'war on terrorism' now entering its fifteenth year.¹

From the vantage point of the second decade of the twenty-first century, the 1990s, before 9/11 and before the fiscal debacle of 2007–8, was an era of relative peace and prosperity, dominated (for most of the decade) by a charismatic and moderately liberal president whose approval rating peaked at 73 per cent during his final year in office despite a steady stream of sexual and other scandals that led to his impeachment for perjury and obstruction of justice. It is a decade that has recently evoked a wave of nostalgia. In 2015, *New York Times* writer Kurt Anderson proclaimed the 1990s the 'best decade ever', citing economic prosperity; dramatic reductions in violent crime and in deaths from HIV/AIDS; an international 'tide of progress' marked by the fall of the Soviet Union, the end of South African apartheid and the normalizing of relations with China; vibrant cultural expression in music, literature and film; and '*just the right amount* of technology'.²

Like Clinton's presidency, however, the decade was marked by profound contradictions and has also been characterized as a 'best of times, worst of times' historical moment,³ when the scientific and technological advances that created dot.com billionaires, cloned mammals and genetically modified crops inspired awe and anxiety in roughly equal proportions. It was a decade when the increased visibility and audibility of cultural minorities cracked the surface of mainstream complacency, revealing troubling undercurrents of sexism, racism and homophobia. It was a decade when the term 'media frenzy' entered the lexicon to describe the excessive zeal on the part of the media to satisfy public obsession with the decade's sensationally (in)famous events that rocked the nation, harbingers of even worse disasters (natural, political, military and economic) to come.

Politics

The Clinton presidency

The media feeding frenzy found much to relish during the presidential election of 1992. The Republicans had held the White House for twelve years, and the Republican candidate, incumbent President George H. W. Bush, who had also served for eight years as vice president during the administration of his party's revered Ronald Reagan, must have thought a second term would be a slam dunk. Bush was also a decorated veteran of the Second World War and had waged his own military 'operation' in Iraq in 1991, after which his approval rating rocketed to 90 per cent. His Democratic challenger was the largely unknown Arkansas governor Bill Clinton, whose campaign was plagued by accusations of draft-dodging and sexual indiscretions. Clinton was also the first presidential candidate to admit to having experimented with smoking pot, although he notably denied inhaling. In April 1992, *New York Times* reporter Wick Allison proclaimed that Clinton did not have a prayer and urged Democrats to snag the third party candidate, eccentric Texas billionaire Ross Perot, as their nominee.⁴

The tide began to turn, however, as the economic recession (begun in summer 1990) worsened and unemployment continued to rise.

In August 1992, the nation was devastated by the most destructive hurricane in US history, Hurricane Andrew, which caused sixty-five deaths and over \$65 billion in damage.⁵ Bush's approval dropped to 30 per cent. Meanwhile his running mate, incumbent Vice President Dan Quayle, was widely ridiculed for his inability to spell 'potato' on national TV. Although Clinton was criticized for choosing Tennessee senator Al Gore (a fellow Southerner) as his running mate, the 'Baby Boomer' ticket (at ages forty-five and forty-four, respectively, the youngest White House team in history) appealed to MTV's 'Rock the Vote' generation,⁶ and Clinton's saxophone solo on the *Arsenio Hall* show in June 1992 sealed the deal. Clinton's crackerjack campaign team focused on the recession, and 'it's the economy stupid' became the iconic slogan of his winning campaign. In November 1992, Clinton won a decisive election, garnering 370 electoral votes (to Bush's 168) and 43 per cent of the popular vote (to Bush's 37.5 per cent and Perot's 18.9 per cent).⁷ In true 1990s paradoxical fashion, Clinton's lead strategist James Carville and Republican campaign director Mary Matalin, who had alluded to Clinton in a 1992 *New York Times* article as a 'philandering, pot-smoking draft dodger',⁸ were married in 1993.

As soon as Clinton took office, a fierce counter-attack was launched by conservative Republicans, spearheaded by Congressman Newt Gingrich. Gingrich and Congressman Richard Armey authored a 'Contract With America' that promised smaller government, lower taxes and other conservative reforms. As a result, the Republicans swept the 1994 elections, winning majorities in both houses of Congress for the first time in forty years, and Gingrich became Speaker of the House in 1995. Despite this setback, and an increasingly polarized political climate, Clinton, for the most part, fulfilled his campaign promises to generate economic growth, expand world trade, tackle crime and drug use, cut taxes on the middle class and move people from welfare to work.⁹ Economic prosperity was his greatest achievement. Inheriting a budget deficit of 3.8 per cent, he left office with a budget surplus of 2.3 per cent.¹⁰ The unemployment rate dropped from 7.5 per cent in 1992 to 4 per cent in 2000.¹¹ According to historian Mark White, Clinton can claim to have been 'the most successful economic president' of all time in terms of performance on these issues.¹² Along with Clinton, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan was lauded as author of the economic boom. The 'boom', however, did not

significantly reverse income inequality. By the end of the decade, Greenspan admitted that 'the gains have not been as widely spread across households as I would like'.¹³ Writing in the early twenty-first century, historians compared the economic boom of Clinton's administration to other, unstable 'boom' and 'bust' eras, labelling the 1990s 'the roaring nineties', 'the new Gilded Age' and 'the greediest decade in history'.¹⁴

International relations

In 1992, Francis Fukuyama's bestselling *The End of History and the Last Man* posited Western liberal democracy as the last and best form of human government.¹⁵ Colin Harrison has argued, however, that Fukuyama revealed a 'hubristic' complacency following the collapse of apartheid and communism that may have encouraged America's subsequent 'regime-change' interventions.¹⁶ Although America avoided prolonged military engagement during the 1990s, several interventions that hovered somewhere between peace-keeping and nation-building laid the foundation for increasingly tense international relations. In 1991, President George H. W. Bush authorized 'Operation Desert Storm', which, in ten days, effected the liberation of Kuwait from invading Iraqi forces and elicited an agreement from Iraq to end support of international terrorism. During Clinton's administration, 'Operation Restore Hope', an effort to intervene in Somalia's Civil War, led to a disastrous attempted raid in Mogadishu in October 1993. Somali militia shot down two US Blackhawk helicopters, and the subsequent attempt to rescue the helicopter crews resulted in the deaths of twelve US soldiers and seventy-eight injured. After the battle, the bodies of two American soldiers were dragged through the streets.¹⁷ Stung by the Somali debacle, the US largely ignored the genocidal wars that raged in Rwanda (1990–4) and the military and ethnic conflicts following the dissolution of Yugoslavia that spanned the decade (1991–2001).¹⁸

At about the same time the Berlin Wall came tumbling down, two militant extremist organizations were formed, Hezbollah al-Hejaz and al-Qaeda, determined to end Western (especially American) influence in the Middle East. In 1992, al-Qaeda operatives bombed two hotels in Yemen where US troops were lodged

en route to Somalia. No US personnel were harmed, but two tourists were killed.¹⁹ In 1993, bombs exploded in the World Trade Center parking lot, killing six people and injuring a thousand. Six conspirators associated with al-Qaeda were captured, convicted and imprisoned. In 1996, Hezbollah operatives bombed the Kobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, which housed foreign military personnel. Nineteen USAF servicemen were killed and nearly 500 persons from various nations were injured.²⁰ In August 1998, al-Qaeda bombed US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, killing more than 200 people and injuring more than 5,000 others.²¹

Society

Terror on the home front

As chilling as international acts of terror seem from a post-9/11 perspective, during the 1990s, terror on the home front garnered even more attention. Domestic terrorism included the 1996 bombing of the summer Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia, resulting in one death and over a hundred injuries. In 1997, two subsequent bombings in the Atlanta area (of an abortion clinic and a lesbian nightclub) led to the arrest and conviction of Eric Robert Rudolph for all three bombings. In 1995, the 'Unabomber', Theodore Kaczynski, was convicted and sentenced to eight life sentences; his mail bombs, delivered between 1978 and 1995, had killed three and injured eleven. In 1992, a stand-off between federal agents and anti-government separatist Randy Weaver (wanted on a weapons charge) in Ruby Ridge, Idaho, resulted in the deaths of Weaver's wife and son and a deputy US marshal. In 1993, a bloodier encounter between federal agents and an anti-government religious group called Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas, resulted in the loss of nearly ninety lives. Heated debate surrounded these tragic events; some blamed the Davidians as a 'doomsday cult' bent on self-destruction; others considered Waco and Ruby Ridge unwarranted abuses of federal power.

Among the tragic consequences of these events was the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma

City, masterminded by Gulf War veteran Timothy McVeigh in retaliation for what he perceived as federal abuse of power. The blast killed 168 people, including nineteen children, and injured nearly 700 others. The destruction also included more than \$600 million in damage. McVeigh was convicted of murder and conspiracy in 1997 and executed in 2001. His partner Terry Nichols was sentenced to life imprisonment without parole.²²

The decade of shocking acts of domestic terror was brought to a heartbreaking conclusion with the deadliest high school shooting in US history.²³ In April 1999, two teenage boys, seniors at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, shot and killed twelve students and a teacher, injured twenty-one others and then committed suicide. Documents left by the shooters indicate their wish to emulate the Oklahoma City bombing. The ‘massacre’ sparked heated debate throughout the nation regarding gun control, mental health, high school culture, Goth subculture, popular music, and violence in movies and video games. Rocker Marilyn Manson was particularly targeted as a harmful influence, a charge he rebutted in an interview with *Rolling Stone*.²⁴

AIDS

The AIDS epidemic, which had erupted during the 1980s, continued to ravage the nation. The decade’s casualties (over 300,000) included artist Keith Haring, dancer Rudolf Nureyev, designer Halston, actor Anthony Perkins, Queen’s lead singer Freddie Mercury, tennis star Arthur Ashe, model Tina Chow, activist Elizabeth Glaser and eighteen-year-old Ryan White, who had been expelled from middle school when diagnosed at the age of twelve. In 1991, the Center for Disease Control reported that one million Americans were HIV-positive; by 1995, AIDS had become the leading cause of death among all Americans aged twenty-five to forty-four.²⁵ Awareness and activism, however, increased throughout the decade. In 1990, Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act, which protected individuals, including people with HIV/AIDS, from discrimination. In 1991, HIV-positive basketball legend Earvin ‘Magic’ Johnson became an advocate for HIV/AIDS research. In 1992, HIV-positive tennis star Arthur Ashe founded the Arthur Ashe Foundation for the Defeat

of AIDS, and President Clinton established a new White House Office of National AIDS Policy.²⁶ In 1993, Tom Hanks won an Oscar for his role as a gay man with AIDS in the film *Philadelphia*. In 1995, Clinton formed the President's Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS. Beginning in 1996, new combination therapies led to a dramatic decline in AIDS-related deaths, which continued to drop throughout the remainder of the decade.²⁷

Identity politics

'Identity politics' (an awareness of differential treatment within a society based on identity categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.) had a major impact on American society in the 1990s. The renewed fervour with which the politics of identity dominated public discourse was partially attributable to shifting demographics.²⁸ A wave of immigration from Mexico significantly expanded the Hispanic population; by the end of the decade, three states had majority 'minority' populations, and one out of four Americans was of a race other than white.²⁹ Meanwhile, globalism challenged prevailing perceptions about national identity, and gender and sexual identities became similarly destabilized. All categories of identity were increasingly called into question, a condition that many found liberating and many found alarming. Race and racial conflicts dominated headlines for much of the decade, conflicts frequently complicated by gender, class and religious identities.

The case of Rodney King

In March 1991, George Holiday looked out of the balcony of his Los Angeles apartment and saw four white police officers brutally beating a black man. It was not, as history suggests, an unusual event, but most likely no one would ever have heard about it if Holiday had not just purchased a Sony Camcorder (introduced to consumers in the 1980s). His videotaping of the beating of Rodney King 'went viral', sparking public outrage around the globe. Within a week, the LA district attorney dropped all charges against King (who suffered nine skull fractures, a crushed eye socket, a broken leg and nerve damage in the attack) and the LA County Grand

Jury charged the four officers with felony assault. When a mostly white jury in East Ventura County acquitted all four officers of the charges in April 1992, LA exploded. Six days of rioting, looting, arson and violence devastated the city and shook the nation. Fifty-five people were killed, 2,000 injured and property damage was estimated at over a billion dollars. These acts of violence reflected and brought into the public consciousness decades of disenfranchisement, poverty, oppression and racial conflict.

Crown Heights

Just a few months after the Rodney King incident, in the Crown Heights neighbourhood of Brooklyn, New York, a seven-year-old Guyanese American child named Gavin Cato was struck and killed by a station wagon bearing Lubavicher Grand Rebbe Menachem Schneerson, a Jewish spiritual leader in the community. The incident inflamed already-smouldering racial tensions; black residents rioted, and a group of young black men attacked and killed a Hasidic student from Melbourne, Australia, Yankel Rosenbaum. After three days of rioting, resulting in nearly 200 injuries, New York police finally restored order. Before he died, Rosenbaum was able to identify one of his assailants, who was tried and acquitted in 1992, but eventually served a ten-year sentence for violating Rosenbaum's civil rights.³⁰

Anita Hill vs Clarence Thomas

In 1991, President George H. W. Bush nominated African-American federal circuit judge Clarence Thomas to replace retiring Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. The nomination was somewhat controversial, as Thomas was known to hold conservative views on affirmative action and abortion rights, but his confirmation seemed assured until a young law professor named Anita Hill (also African-American) accused Thomas of sexual harassment that occurred years earlier when she worked for him at the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission. Hill's televised testimony of Thomas's lewd conversation and conduct, and Thomas's dismissal of the hearings as a 'high-tech lynching', fed the media frenzy and threw the current state of racial and gender relations into sharp relief.

Thomas was eventually confirmed by a narrow margin. Feminists rallied in support of Hill, however; six Democratic congresswomen marched on the Senate to urge greater consideration of Anita Hill's charges, scrutinized by a Judiciary Committee composed entirely of men. The case brought increased attention to workplace sexual harassment, and the number of claims of sexual harassment filed with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission more than doubled between 1991 and 1998.³¹

Susan Smith: Sex, lies, race and infanticide

In October 1994, a tearful, 23-year-old Susan Smith, from Union, South Carolina, claimed that her car, with her two small children inside, had been carjacked by a black man. Days later, Smith admitted that she had deliberately drowned her children, strapping them into her car and then pushing it into a lake. Her apparent motive was her involvement with a man who did not want children. During her sensational trial, it was revealed that she had been sexually abused in her teens by her stepfather and had attempted suicide twice. The case attracted worldwide attention, and her false accusation exacerbated racial tensions in America. In 1995, Smith was sentenced to life imprisonment. By the end of the decade, two correctional officers had been convicted of having sex with her while in prison.³²

O. J. Simpson's 'Trial of the Century'

Race, gender and technology converged in the highly publicized, televised trial of former professional football star O. J. Simpson for the murder of his ex-wife Nicole Simpson and her friend Ron Goldman in 1994. Both Nicole and Ron Goldman were white. For eight months, America obsessively tuned in to this real-life drama, beginning with the televised car chase in which Simpson, driving a white Ford Bronco, evaded LA police, with 95 million viewers watching. All the major players, including the judge, detectives, attorneys and witnesses, became overnight celebrities. The public fixation continued unabated for the duration of the trial, during which Simpson's history of physical abuse of Nicole was revealed, and *Time* magazine incurred public outrage by digitally darkening

a cover photo of Simpson. Public opinion regarding Simpson's guilt was sharply divided along racial lines, and as the jury (composed of ten women and two men, with a racial/ethnic make-up of nine black, two white and one Latino) deliberated, the nation braced itself for riots. On 3 October 1995, 100 million people stopped what they were doing to hear the verdict announcement. Cameras across the nation recorded the racial and gendered responses to the 'not guilty' verdict, as black supporters cheered and white doubters shook their heads in shocked disbelief. According to a CBS poll, 78 per cent of black Americans thought O. J. was innocent, and 75 per cent of white Americans thought he was guilty.³³ In 1997 the families of Ron Goldman and Nicole Simpson won a wrongful death lawsuit against Simpson. Like the Rodney King case, this trial exposed racial conflicts and racism within the US justice system, but Simpson's trial also brought increased attention to domestic abuse in America.

The status of women

Women in the 1990s were still feeling the effects of the conservative backlash of the 1980s, documented by journalist Susan Faludi's bestselling *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, published in 1991. The decade saw the popularization of the term 'postfeminism', coined to suggest a 'third wave' in feminist activism, more inclusive than the 1970s 'second wave' of feminist activism, which third wave feminists critiqued as too focused on white, middle-class women and issues. More commonly, however, the prefix 'post' was used to dismiss any form of feminist activism as irrelevant and passé.

Yet women made substantial advances during the decade. Cultural icons of powerful womanhood included First Lady Hillary Clinton, media impresario Oprah Winfrey and domestic mogul Martha Stewart. Indeed, 1992 was dubbed 'the year of the woman' following the election of a record number of female senators. Clinton's administration saw the first 'Take Our Daughters to Work Day' in 1993 and the passage, in 1994, of the Violence Against Women Act. Hillary Clinton redefined the image of the 'First Lady', acting as a powerful political partner throughout her husband's presidency. On the other side of the political spectrum, in 1992 televangelist Pat Robertson demonized feminism as a

'socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism, and become lesbians'.³⁴

It is indicative of America's conflicted views of women and feminism that the era's most notable male figure, Bill Clinton, is equally remembered for sexual harassment and for record appointments of female cabinet members. Clinton appointed America's first female Attorney General (Janet Reno), first female Secretary of State (Madeleine Albright) and added a second female Supreme Court justice (Ruth Bader Ginsberg). Clinton's record as an advocate for women, however, was forever marred by recurring accusations of sexual harassment, beginning with allegations of a past affair between Clinton and Gennifer Flowers that surfaced during the 1992 election campaign. Clinton vehemently denied the affair at the time but later admitted to a sexual 'encounter' with Flowers. In 1994, Paula Jones, a former Arkansas state employee, sued the President for sexual harassment, eventually receiving an out-of-court settlement of \$850,000. During the Jones hearing, former White House volunteer Kathleen Willey accused Clinton of sexually assaulting her in 1993. Foremost among Clinton's sexual scandals, however, was 'Monicagate', the gradual revelation of a sexual relationship with 22-year-old White House intern Monica Lewinsky, which spanned 1995–7 and eventually led to Clinton's impeachment for perjury and obstruction of justice. Special prosecutor Kenneth Starr's zealous pursuit of Clinton made him a controversial figure, and Clinton's infamous televised statement (later recanted), 'I did not have sexual relations with that woman', remains a YouTube favourite.³⁵

Women struck back against sexual abuse with a vengeance in the 1990s. In 1991, eighty women who worked for the US Navy alleged sexual assault by nearly 100 men attending the Tailhook convention at the Las Vegas Hilton. Several women sued the Tailhook Association, a fraternal organization founded to support sea-based aviation, and the Hilton; defendant Navy Lieutenant Paula Coughlin settled with the Tailhook Association and won over \$5 million in her suit against the Las Vegas Hilton.³⁶ In June 1993, a young woman named Lorena Bobbitt took drastic measures to end domestic abuse, cutting off her husband's penis with a knife while he slept (the penis was later surgically reattached). At the trial, Mrs Bobbitt claimed that her husband had repeatedly raped and abused

her, and after seven hours of deliberation, the jury found her not guilty due to insanity. Although the case became fodder for late night comedians, it also brought increased attention to the issue of domestic violence, and ‘bobbittize’ entered the medical lexicon.

LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) rights and wrongs

As with women and ethnic minorities, identity politics of the 1990s encouraged gay Americans to ‘come out’ as a politically oppressed community seeking redress. In March 1990, AIDS activists in NYC founded Queer Nation to increase LGBTQ visibility and to combat homophobia. Their defiant chant, ‘We’re here! We’re Queer! Get used to it!’ became a rallying cry.

In 1997, comedienne Ellen DeGeneres made television history by coming out herself on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and as her character on her popular sitcom, *Ellen*, becoming the first lesbian lead in television history. The episode attracted 42 million viewers and garnered DeGeneres an Emmy, a Peabody, a GLAAD award and a *Time* magazine cover.³⁷ The following year, NBC premiered *Will and Grace*, featuring a gay lawyer and straight interior designer as roommates, which ran for eight seasons, earning 16 Emmy Awards.

Despite increased visibility of gay Americans in popular culture, Gay Rights were forcefully opposed by the Christian Coalition (founded in 1989 by Pat Robertson) and an increasingly conservative Republican ‘right wing’. The decade saw the implementation of both the ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy for US military service (1994), which prohibited military personnel from discriminating against or harassing homosexual or bisexual service members, as long as they remained ‘closeted’, and the passage of the Defense of Marriage Act (1996), which defined marriage for federal purposes as the union of one man and one woman and allowed states to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages granted under the laws of other states.³⁸ What *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich labelled the ‘homophobic epidemic’ of 1998 culminated in October of that year with the brutal murder of a young gay man, Matthew Shepard, in Laramie, Wyoming.³⁹ This murder, along with the horrific murder of African-American James Byrd, Jr by white

supremacists in Jasper, Texas, also in 1998, led to the passage in 2009 of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which expanded the 1969 United States federal hate-crime law to include crimes motivated by a victim's actual or perceived gender, race, sexual orientation or disability.

Science and technology

Silicon Valley

The 1990s saw the rise of the internet, a mechanism for connecting computers anywhere in the world, allowing unprecedented dissemination of information among individuals and heralding a worldwide technological and cultural transformation comparable to that following Gutenberg's invention of moveable type in the fifteenth century.⁴⁰ America entered the 'information age', personal computers became ubiquitous, a globally linked network of resources that could be accessed via the internet called the World Wide Web debuted and internet use increased from 14 per cent in 1995 to 46 per cent by 2000.⁴¹ In 1993 the computer services company Mosaic, followed by Netscape, offered the public a quick and easy way to 'browse' the web. Netscape went public in 1995, was overtaken by Internet Explorer and eventually was acquired by the global media corporation AOL. By the mid-1990s, pocket-sized 'mobile phones' and affordable digital cameras appeared. The online auction site now known as eBay debuted in 1995 as AuctionWeb. Google, which offered users a method for searching the internet, was founded in 1998. By the late 1990s, 10,000 websites were being created daily, and billion-dollar, internet-inspired deals transpired at a rate of thirty per day.⁴² By the end of the decade, movies recorded on DVDs replaced those recorded on videotape, and portable devices played music in MP3 (digital audio) format.

The technology boom was born in the southern San Francisco Bay Area, thereafter known as 'Silicon Valley', the land of high-tech innovation and dot.com tycoons. The giant among the new technobillionaires was Microsoft mogul Bill Gates. Founded in 1975 by Gates and Paul Allen, Microsoft was a computer software company that developed and sold computer operating systems. In 1998, the

US Justice Department filed an antitrust suit against Microsoft, involving a plan to divide it into two companies. After years of legal battle, Microsoft avoided a break-up order by modifying some of its business practices.⁴³

One of the major Silicon Valley stories of the decade was the return of tech entrepreneur Steve Jobs as CEO of Apple Inc., a company he had co-founded in 1976 to sell the Apple II, a personal computer primarily designed by Jobs's partner Steve Wozniak. In 1985, a power struggle within the company led to Jobs's resignation. After leaving Apple, Jobs founded NeXT, which developed computers for higher education and business markets, and helped fund and develop the animation studio Pixar. His triumphant return to Apple in 1996 brought the corporation from the verge of bankruptcy to the height of economic and cultural influence. It would become the world's largest and most profitable IT corporation in the twenty-first century, introducing the iMac, iTunes, the iPod, the iPhone, the iPad, Apple Stores and the iTunes Store.

Genetics

In 1997, scientists in Scotland introduced the world's first cloned mammal, a domestic sheep named Dolly. A year later, scientists in Hawaii announced the creation of dozens of cloned mice, and Japanese scientists reported the cloning of eight calves from the cells of a single cow. In 1998, maverick geneticist J. Craig Venter, impatient with the slow progress of the US government's Human Genome Project, announced his own plan to map and publish the entire human genetic code within three years, founding Celera Genomics to do so.⁴⁴

Biotechnologists at the multinational, agrochemical corporation Monsanto made headlines in the development of genetically engineered crops; 'GMO' (genetically modified organisms) entered the vocabulary, and GMO foods appeared in American grocery stores in 1994. By 1999, over 100 million acres worldwide had been planted with genetically engineered seeds, and in 2000 *Time* magazine introduced the GMO controversy that would heat up in the twenty-first century. Were GMOs a miracle that would solve world hunger – or a toxic time bomb (fuelled by capitalist greed) that would destroy the eco-system?⁴⁵

Space

Even as Americans heralded cyberspace as the 'new frontier', the launching of the Hubble Space Telescope in 1990 ushered in a 'new chapter of humanity's exploration of the universe',⁴⁶ sending back to earth high-resolution images from undreamed-of depths in space, leading to breakthroughs in astrophysics and astronomy. Other developments in the realm of astrophysics included the discovery of 'dark matter' (invisible, inferred from gravitational effects and generally believed to comprise 27 per cent of the total mass-energy of the universe), the discovery of the comets Hayakutake (by Yuji Hayakutake) and Hale-Bopp (by Alan Hale and Thomas Bopp, independently) and, in 1998, the landing of the robotic spacecraft Mars Pathfinder on Mars.

Everyday life

Population and demographics

In the 1990s, an ever-expanding US population grew older, more ethnically diverse and more urban. The population grew from 248.4 million in 1990 to 281.4 million by 2000, a 13.2 per cent increase, the largest in US history.⁴⁷ By the end of the decade, the median age in the US was 35.3, the highest median age on record, with a population of 35 million who were 65 or over.⁴⁸ The Latino population increased from 22.4 to 35.3 million. By 2000, three states (California, Hawaii and New Mexico), and the District of Columbia, had majority 'minority' (i.e. non-white) populations. Throughout the decade, approximately 80 per cent of Americans lived in metropolitan areas.⁴⁹

Religion

Although, according to a Gallup poll, 82 per cent of Americans identified as Christian throughout the decade,⁵⁰ a Pew Research study discovered a 'reversal of increased religiosity observed in the mid-1990s' and 'declines in traditional social attitudes' including 'greater public acceptance of homosexuality and less desire for

women to play traditional roles in society',⁵¹ trends that had begun in the previous decade and would continue into the twenty-first century. According to Gallup, religious identifications for other groups also remained relatively stable throughout the decade (with 8–11 per cent identifying as unaffiliated and 7–8 per cent as Jewish, Muslim or 'other').⁵²

Domestic economy

Median income grew from \$52,623 in 1990 to \$57,843 in 2000. In 1990, the median price of a house was \$125,000; a new car, \$16,950; a gallon of petrol, \$1.34; a dozen eggs, \$1.09; a loaf of bread, \$0.70.⁵³ The average ticket price for a movie varied from about \$4.25 at the start of the decade to around \$5 by the close of the decade.⁵⁴ The high-tech boom, however, had its socio-economic downside, factoring into America's increasingly expanding expectations for 'the good life'. In 1998, sociology professor Juliet B. Schor reported that technological advances had vastly expanded the list of things Americans 'absolutely have to have', including home computers, answering machines, microwaves and car and home air conditioning. For the more affluent, sport utility vehicles, urban spas, personal trainers, limousine rides, computer equipment and 'McMansions' (large, showy homes) were becoming *de rigueur*. Schor cites a 1994 poll revealing that the 'dreams-fulfilling' income for Americans had doubled since 1986 (from \$50,000 to \$102,000).⁵⁵ By the end of the decade, the number of American households with a net income of more than \$10 million had quadrupled, and the ultimate mark of material success in America was elevated from *millionaire* to *billionaire* status.⁵⁶

Fads

Increasingly, high-tech 'toys' and equipment were popular with teens and adults, including personal computers and printers, mobile phones, pagers, discman players, home video games (Nintendo, Sega, Gameboy) and the file-sharing programme Napster. Fads for children included Pogs, Beanie Babies, Pokémon, Power Rangers, American Girl Dolls, Tamagotchi 'virtual' pets (a high-tech version of the pet rock), Furbies, Tickle-Me Elmo, troll dolls, My Little

Pony, Koosh Balls, Supersoakers, rollerblading, McDonalds Happy Meals, Ring Pops and Pop Rocks.⁵⁷

Education

Public school enrolment at the elementary level (pre-kindergarten through to grade eight) rose from 29.9 million in autumn 1990 to 34.2 million in autumn 2003. Public school enrolment at the secondary level (grades nine through to twelve) rose from 11.3 million in 1990 to 15.1 million in 2007.⁵⁸ Maths and reading scores for US students improved slightly over the decade (after a dip in the previous decade), drop-out rates declined and, in 1992, 69 per cent of seniors planned to attend college, compared with 39 per cent a decade earlier. In 1990, 40 per cent of graduating seniors enrolled in four-year colleges or institutions (42 per cent by 2000). It was the decade in which college students joined the technological revolution, as computer labs and internet research became the norm.

The decade also witnessed a number of troubling trends: US seniors tested on general mathematics and science scored well below the international average;⁵⁹ the debate over teaching 'creation' as well as evolution to explain human origins continued throughout the decade; and metal detectors, police presence and routine locker searches became common in schools across the country as threats and acts of violence increased.⁶⁰ Despite efforts throughout the decade to increase diversity in US schools (for example, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1990), schools became increasingly more separated by race in the 1990s.⁶¹ Another disturbing development among undergraduates was the steadily increasing number seeking help for mental health concerns, including substance abuse, eating disorders, anxiety, depression and thoughts of suicide.⁶² Meanwhile, college tuition costs rose steadily; in 1990, tuition for full-time undergraduates averaged \$2,900 at public four-year institutions and \$12,000 at private not-for-profit institutions. By 2000, the averages had risen to \$4,300 and \$15,900, respectively.⁶³

Media

It would be impossible to overstate the pervasive impact of print and electronic media on everyday life in the 1990s. According to a government report, the average American worker devoted about nine hours a day to media: four hours and nine minutes for television; three hours listening to radio, mainly in a car; 36 minutes for recorded music; and 28 minutes for print reading (daily newspaper). In 1991, adult consumers spent \$108.8 billion – about \$353 per person – to receive news and entertainment via these means, and advertisers spent \$80 billion to advertise their products through the media.⁶⁴

Culture

Cultural expression in the 1990s both reflected and shaped the prevailing social context – race, class, sexuality and shifting gender roles infused the form and content of all cultural genres. Culture was also significantly characterized by an increased blurring between ‘low’ and ‘high’ categories of cultural forms and by the increased transference of the marginal into the mainstream, from ‘subculture’ to ‘mass culture’, as theatres, art galleries, museums and other performance spaces across the nation opened their doors to ever more diverse producers and consumers of cultural products. The decade witnessed such an increased blurring of former distinctions between ‘popular’ and ‘elite’ cultural expression that such categories, by the end of the decade, were virtually meaningless.

Music

The 1990s was a golden age for music in America. Traditional genres, like pop-rock and country, enjoyed a renaissance, new subgenres emerged and independent record labels and artists commanded attention. *Rolling Stone* writer Brian Hiatt has described the 1990s as

richer, funnier and weirder than [previously considered] ...
[with] fake grunge bands writing better songs than some of the

real ones, Eighties holdovers U2 and R.E.M. reaching creative peaks with *Achtung Baby* and *Automatic for the People*, Metallica and the Black Crowes co-existing on MTV, Phish tending to the Deadhead nation after Jerry's passing – and Vanilla Ice and MC Hammer ceding their pop thrones in a few short years to Dr. Dre, Snoop and Eminem.⁶⁵

The first multi-musical-genre Lollapalooza was held in 1991 featuring alt-rock, metal and mixed-genre bands Jane's Addiction, Siouxsie and the Banshees, Living Colour, Nine Inch Nails, Fishbone, Ice T and Body Count, Butthole Surfers, Rollins Band, EBN and Violent Femmes.

Women enjoyed unprecedented success in all genres, including pop stars Britney Spears, Mariah Carey, Celine Dion, Whitney Houston and the Spice Girls; country stars Dixie Chicks, Faith Hill and Reba McEntire; rappers Sister Souljah, Lil' Kim, Lauryn Hill and Queen Latifah; and genre-defying folk/blues/rock blenders Liz Phair, Sheryl Crow, Tracy Chapman, Sinéad O'Connor and the Indigo Girls. The pop-rock/singer-songwriter movement was linked to third wave feminism and was perhaps best represented by Alanis Morissette's multi-platinum 1995 album *Jagged Little Pill*.

Country music continued to build on the 1980s momentum, increasingly blurring lines between country, rock, pop and folk genres. *Country Weekly* magazine debuted in 1994. The CMT cable music video series, begun in the 1980s, grew in popularity and in its resemblance to MTV and VH1. Garth Brooks dominated country music, becoming one of the bestselling recording artists of all time. Billy Ray Cyrus's 'Achy Breaky Heart' started a dance craze in 1992. Tim McGraw shot to the top of the charts with his debut album, *Not a Moment Too Soon* (1994), and his marriage in 1996 to country music singer Faith Hill, whose hit single 'This Kiss' went platinum in 1998, created a country music power couple. Other popular country artists of the decade included Reba McEntire, The Judds, Alan Jackson, Shania Twain and Toby Keith.

The movement from subculture to mass culture was particularly pronounced in the rise of gangsta rap and grunge as the most influential genres of the era. Grunge emerged in the 1980s as part of Seattle's underground, alternative rock scene. Described by a local producer as 'Seventies-influenced, slowed-down punk music',⁶⁶ grunge was developed by young and vaguely rebellious white