

# The clinton administration: history and impact



Bill Clinton was the 42nd U. S. president, belonging to the Democratic Party. He served in office from 1993 to 2001. Prior to that, he was governor of his home state (Arkansas). Despite a few major international conflicts, scandals, and domestic problems, America generally enjoyed an era of peace and prosperity during his presidency. Unfortunately, Clinton came into office with relatively little experience in foreign affairs, particularly at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the uncertainties the post-Cold War world produced (Riley, Russell L, *Miller Center*). As a result, a number of foreign policy crisis came about which greatly challenged Clinton's abilities as a statesman. One of these events that greatly tested foreign policy was the Somali Conflict. Weeks before Clinton took office, the previous President, George H. W. Bush had sent American troops into Somalia. According to Stephen Knott, a political expert as well as professor, "What began as a humanitarian mission to combat famine grew into a bloody military struggle, with the bodies of dead American soldiers paraded through the streets of the capital, Mogadishu on October 1993" (Knott, Stephen, *Miller Center*). Although public support for the American mission greatly diminished, Clinton's announcement of a full withdrawal of U. S. forces, ultimately led to the resignation of Secretary of Defense Les Aspin and created the impression of a President ill-prepared for foreign affairs. The second major test of foreign policy, arguably the most consequential, was the Rwandan genocide. In April 1994, the vast, ethnic, and government-sponsored, killing spree broke out in Rwanda killing an estimated 800,000 Tutsi and their defenders. With the failure in Somalia happening only a year prior, neither the United States nor the United Nations was incentivised to move aggressively to stop the slaughter (Power, Samantha, *The Atlantic*). Clinton was heavily criticized for

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not acting quickly and decisively to stop the violent deaths of Rwandans and thus a new approach to international affairs, a policy his advisers called the “doctrine of enlargement” was birthed. This doctrine enacted the idea of expanding the community of market democracies around the world, embracing free trade, multilateral peacekeeping efforts and a commitment to intervene in world crisis situations when practical. This policy came into effect in 1999, when Clinton moved with NATO to begin a massive bombing campaign against the Serbian government to end its “ethnic cleansing” of Albanians in the Kosovo region (Mandelbaum Michael, *Foreign Affairs*). This consequently reinstated America as the international peace-force, as well as the American public regaining confidence in Clinton. As for Domestic policy, the major policy passed by Clinton’s administration was the ‘The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act.’ Essentially, this act gave states control of welfare, ending six decades of federal government control of the programs. In the destruction of the previous model, Clinton created something new: the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, or TANF, which transformed the financing and benefit structure of cash assistance. With this Act, Clinton promised to “end welfare as we have come to know it” (Pilon, Mary, *History.com*). *Although Clinton himself was a democrat, this policy correlated much more with republican ideology therefore it was easily* passed by the Republican-dominated Congress. Although the Republican-controlled congress proved positive when he wanted to pass more right wing acts like the aforementioned TANF, it also significantly decreased the power of Clinton’s own party as well as reducing his already bad popularity. The ‘Republican take-over,’ although had been in the works since the Reagan administration, actually came about as a result

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of Clinton's unpopularity in the form of 'The Contract with America' (Gayner, Jeffrey, *The Heritage Foundation*). Moreover, the fact that Democrats just a year prior, controlled both branches of the Congress together along with the White House yet failed to make substantive policy changes in 1993 and 1994 greatly facilitated the political changes in November 1994. Although Clinton won re-election in the 1996 election, the Republicans still retained their congressional majorities and thus he easily became a target for impeachment during the Monica Lewinsky scandal (Kennedy, Lesley, *History.com*).

Although the Monica Lewinsky Scandal nearly had the president impeached for perjury and obstruction of justice by the Republican-lead House of Representative, he was acquitted by the Senate and finished his second term in the White House with strong public approval ratings. Furthermore, despite the Scandal as well as Clinton's mis-steps, Clinton's campaign promise to form a cabinet "that looked like America" was met ("Bill Clinton: Domestic Affairs." *Miller Center*). Clinton went on to name three women to cabinet positions as well as putting women in several other important posts and African Americans. As for the Supreme Court, he appointed Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer. Interestingly, the most consequential supreme court case of Clinton's presidency, *Clinton v. Jones*, directly involved the president. In this court case it was established that in a unanimous vote, "that the Constitution does not grant a sitting President immunity from civil litigation except under highly unusual circumstances" (*Clinton v. Jones*, 520 U. S. 681 (1997), *Justia Law*).

Under Clinton's Presidency, the US economy generally experienced a time of prosperity. Although Employment in the goods-producing industries dried up slightly, the private service-producing industries accounted for nearly 90 percent of the job growth in the 1990s(Hatch, Julie, and Angela Clinton, *Growth in the 1990s: a Retrospect* ). Furthermore, all major industry divisions within the service-producing sector employed more workers therefore growth was especially strong in the services division. The mining industry, however, lost nearly a quarter of its workforce during the 1990s, losing around 40.6 percent of the workforce, while oil and gas extraction lost around 88,100 workers. Despite this, the Clinton era was a period of unprecedented growth as, productivity in the United States had risen sharply, Globalization was in full swing through along with NAFTA, and the dot-com bubble had not popped yet(Stiglitz Joseph, *The Atlantic* ).

Furthermore, Clinton enacted contractionary fiscal policy by cutting off welfare recipients after five years and requiring them to work after two years. Additionally, he also raised taxes with the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 and the Deficit Reduction Act, which raised the top income tax rate from 28 percent to 36 percent for those earning more than \$115,000, and 39.6 percent for income above \$250,000(Kimberly Almadeo, *The Balance* ). Furthermore, It increased the corporate income tax from 34 percent to 36 percent for high-revenue corporations. Collectively, these economic policies lowered the deficit from \$290 billion in 1992 to \$203 billion by 1994. By 1999, the rising tax revenues from the economy had generated a surplus of \$124 billion(Riley, Russell L, *Miller Center* ). Moreover, surpluses amounting to \$1.5 trillion were then predicted for the first decade of the 21st century. Equally important, the pace of economic growth and low

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inflation combined with historically low interest and unemployment rates, positioned the American economy as “ the world’s strongest and most robust”(Riley, Russell L, *Miller Center* ) .

Although Bill Clinton did not serve as president for the whole decade, he did serve for a significant chunk of it. The 90s, emblematically, can be described as the decade of radical change. Two beacons of the 90s theme of change that still permeate in today’s cultural fabric are the Hip-Hop Revolution as well as the Internet Renaissance. Although Hip-Hop has been around since the 70s, it was not until the 90s that it reached the mainstream. Hip-hop, however, is more than a music genre, it is a culture that has shaped America over the past two decades. Hip-Hop, again, was not just a music genre, it was a way in which the experience of Black America was expressed. It was a direct response to the socio-economic issues as well as political issues that had been swept under the rug after the civil rights movement. Additionally, Hip Hop culture in itself was a counter-culture that can be viewed as “ traditionally marginalized groups, turned discontent from injustices into productive protest through the restructuring of social attitudes and opportunities by means of musical expression” (Odenthal, Kathleen, *Spinditty* ). Through Hip Hop reaching the mainstream, the experience of the Black Community, as well as commentary on political and socio-economic issues was vocalised and highlighted throughout the world. It’s influence spread across the United States, impacting politics as well as media through the increased black faces in an industry that had been dominated solely by white people(Odenthal, Kathleen, *Spinditty* ). Hip-hop’s impact was so extensive that it did not stay localized in the U. S., but spread across the

world as the themes in hip-hop are relevant to many societies. The Hip-Hop revolution greatly epitomised the decade's theme of change as it showed that even the most oppressed of peoples could have their voices heard as well as rise to change the cultural fabric of society (and even the world). Similar themes of social change in this decade were expressed through the freeing of Mandela in 1990, and the fall of the Berlin wall in 1991. In these two situations, through activism, as well as action, a significant social change was brought about.

The advent of the 'civilian internet' however, was arguably the biggest change of the decade. The internet revolution was heralded as the second industrial revolution and led to the dot-com boom. With the creation of Windows 95, desktop computing became very common (Gewirtz, David, *ZDNet*). Consequently, blogging became a very popular past time, as well as profession for many people. With this, the spread of information, as well as the diversification of media sources, rapidly increased. In 1996, Hotmail appeared on the web offering users an email account hosted online where emails can be accessed anywhere, at anytime. This, evidently, changed the way people communicated and paved the way for Social Media. The internet also marked the advent of free information, as anyone could easily access anything on the internet and thus educational opportunities were greatly enhanced with a wealth of knowledge now placed at the fingertips of any wired individual. In fact, "Surfing the net" became a pastime in and of itself (ushistory.org, *Living in the Information Age*). Although the internet brought about plethora of drawbacks such as hate groups using the Internet to expand their bases and easily available pornography, it also allowed people

to educate themselves quickly on almost any matter. And with this additional source of education, people were no longer just mindlessly conforming, but also thinking and questioning structures of society. A movie that came out in the late 90's and best encapsulates the impact of the internet is *The Matrix*. The radical shift that the internet brought in the way humans receive information, interact, and even behave is emblematic of the decades overarching theme of change.

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