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Association for Academic Surgery

The 1990s and the Association for Academic Surgery



David I. Soybel, MD, FACS*

Department of Surgery, The Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine, Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, Hershey, Pennsylvania

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ABSTRACT

This lecture reviews the progress of the Association for Academic Surgery during the 1990s, a decade of sweeping innovations in technology, communication, and biomedical sciences; a well as a decade of transition in the demographics of surgical trainees; and a decade of new and previously unimagined possibilities for new directions in academic surgical careers.

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The 1990s was an era of disruption, most especially in technology. One needs only to look at the launch of the Hubble telescope in 1990 and its astonishing images, such as “Pillars of Creation,” to appreciate that the decade began with a promise of previously unimagined experiences. Before delving into the domain of technology and its consequences, however, I wanted to set the stage by looking at the way in which events in the world and American society were reported. The 1990s was bookended by George H.W. Bush being President at the beginning and his son George W. Bush being President at the end, and a lot happening in between (Fig. 1), internationally and domestically. Internationally, communism and the

Warsaw Pact ended. Acts of terrorism became more sophisticated and the threats posed by organizations such as Al-Qaeda were coming increasingly close to home. Domestic news cycles were consumed with stories about sexual harassment by the powerful, images of community rage over racial profiling, and increasing polarization in arguments over the role of government in medical, personal, and family decisions. By comparison, it must be acknowledged that the problems of Academic Surgery seemed pretty small.

Against this backdrop of what was happening globally and domestically were rapid advances in technology and personal access to it. Just about everything that we now do with

* Corresponding author. Department of Surgery, Penn State College of Medicine, 500 University Drive, PO Box 850, Mail Code H149, Hershey, PA 17033. Tel.: +1 717 531 5272; fax: +1 717 531 0884.

E-mail address: dsoybel@pennstatehealth.psu.edu.

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The 1990s Timeline: News Cycles

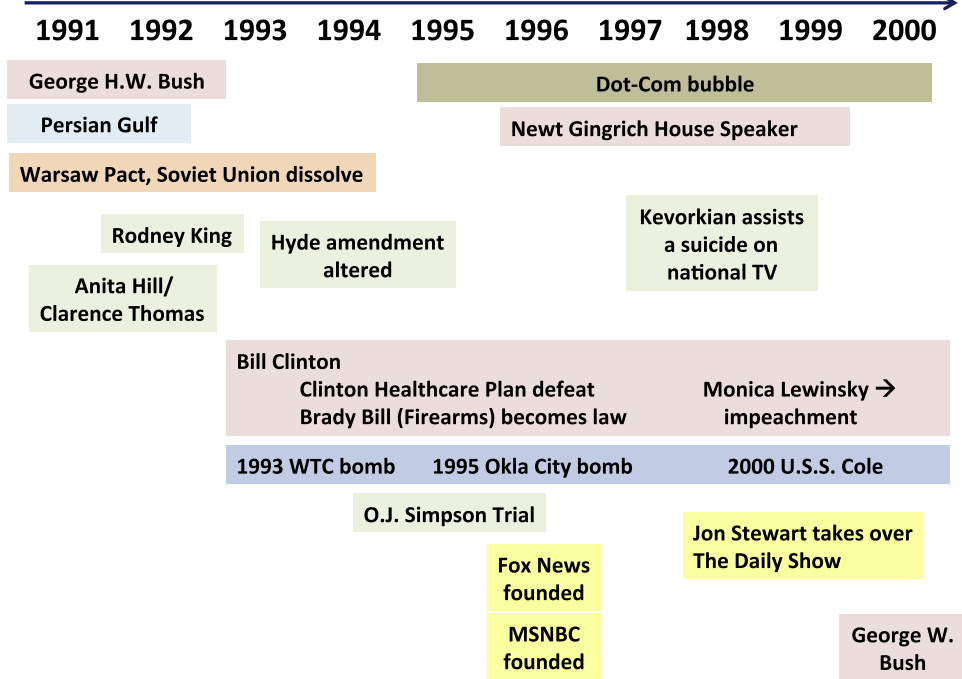


Fig. 1 – 1990s news cycles. WTC, World Trade Center. (Color version of figure is available online.)

technology was initiated or first publically imagined in the 1990s (Fig. 2). Tools such as the internet, memory cards, webcams, and hand-held devices were introduced. Sony PlayStation came in the mid-1990s. The first Bluetooth phones came in 2000, along with the first camera phone. The possibilities of technology for information storage, communication, and games seemed without boundaries. Google was

founded in 1996, with the clearest promise yet that whatever you wanted to know, or needed to know, could be found in your computer or hand-held. The media picked up on technology as the story itself. *Wired* magazine was founded in 1993. IBM’s Deep Blue beat Garry Kasparov, a master in chess, and we all believed that Y2K might be a threat. Professor Clay Christensen from Harvard Business School coined the term

The 1990s Timeline: Technology

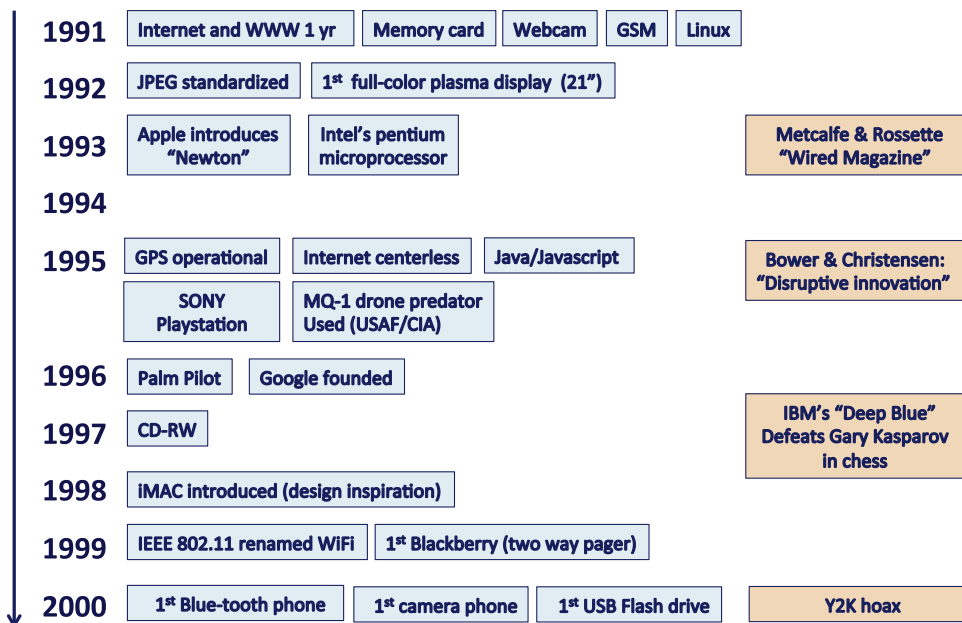


Fig. 2 – 1990s rapid advances in technology. (Color version of figure is available online.)

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