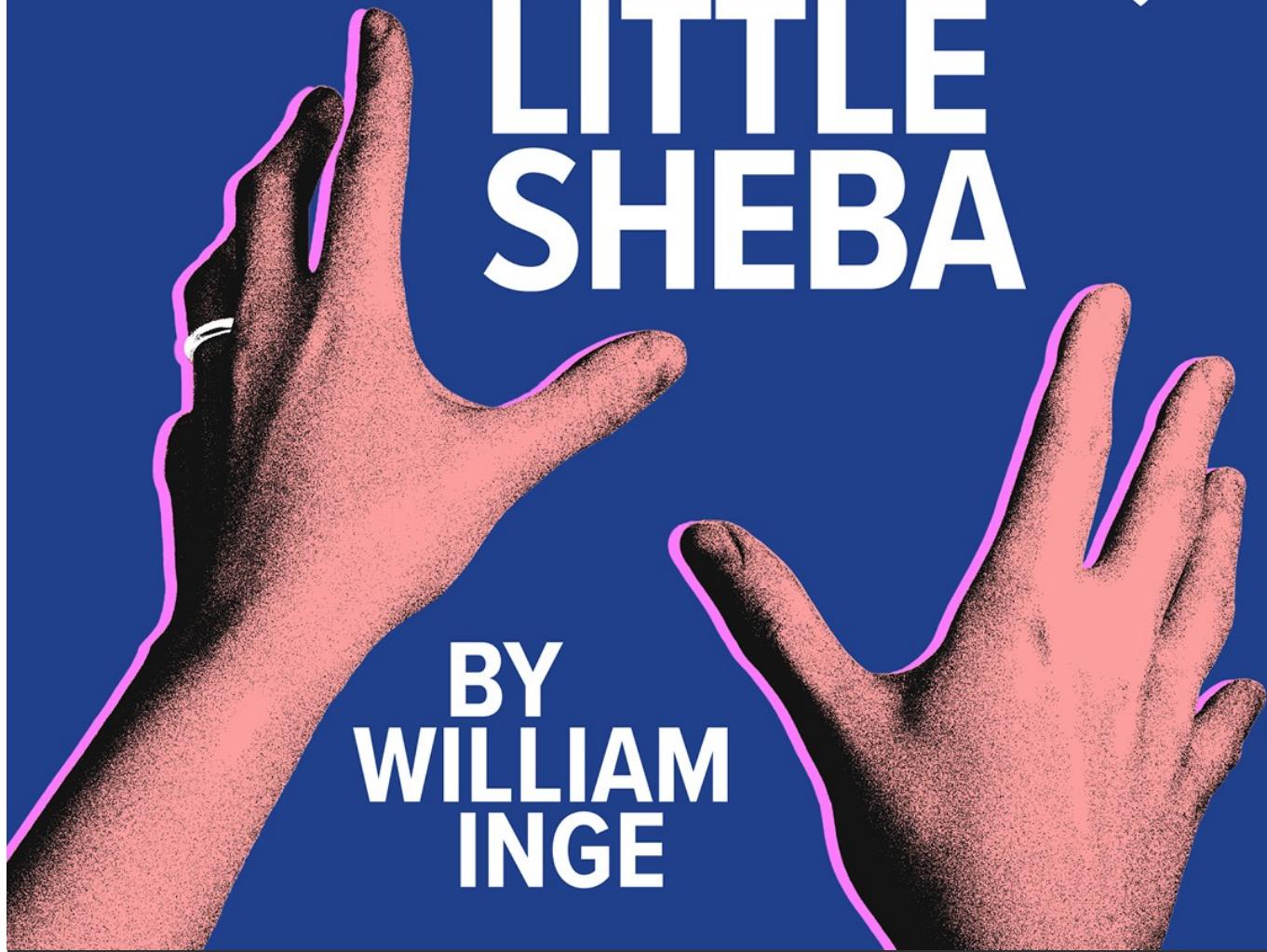


# COME BACK, LITTLE SHEBA



BY  
WILLIAM  
INGE



**BACKSTAGE** GUIDE

A publication of **COMMUNITY SERVICE**  
at **AMERICAN BLUES THEATER**

## BACKSTAGE CALLBOARD

# COME BACK, LITTLE SHEBA

by William Inge  
directed by Elyse Dolan\*

### FEATURING



Justin Banks



Maya Lou Hlava\*



Philip Earl Johnson\*



Joslyn Jones\*



Cisco Lopez\*



William Rose II\*



Ethan Serpan



Zack Shultz



Gwendolyn Whiteside\*

Midwest town. Forced into marriage due to an unexpected pregnancy, former beauty queen Lola and recovering alcoholic Doc live a quiet life of heartbreak and regret until Marie, a young college student, becomes their border.

\*Ensemble member or artistic affiliate of American Blues Theater

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# NOTE FROM EXECUTIVE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR **GWENDOLYN WHITESIDE**



Gwendolyn Whiteside (Exec. Artistic Director)

Welcome to American Blues Theater's continuation of our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary season.

Written in 1950, one might assume William Inge's domestic drama *Come Back, Little Sheba* is a dusty period piece from the distant past. When considering it for this season, our ensemble was startled by its relevance. Inge depicts a dysfunctional marriage set in an inequitable era. Currently, women's rights, choices, and autonomy are being clawed back to a mythical time of nostalgia under the guise of traditional family values. Who defines the traditions and values for America?

There's a maxim that may apply to this backslide – *from thinking to talking to actions*. When verbal, physical, and sexual abuses toward women are normalized, we see active legislation creep back onto the People's floor. Legislatively speaking, we see the bars of that misogynistic cage start to erect again.

Complicating matters, there's an abundance of social media influencers who romanticize cleaning, cooking, childcare, homeschooling, and subservience to husbands in the modern

tradwife movement. **To be clear, no one diminishes the women who serve and sacrifice for their families every day. It is some of the hardest work out there.** We applaud every mother, auntie, grandmother, sister, and friend who supports and uplifts their families – chosen or birthed. We also acknowledge that in 2026, a single-income "ideal" is far out of reach for most. But we must be careful *not* to romanticize the inequity and imbalance onto women.

Here are a few realities of the 1950s American woman: only white women were guaranteed the right to vote; no woman could take out a loan, credit card, or sign a lease without a man co-signing; a married woman couldn't get a job without her husband's permission – and even then, *he* had legal control of her earnings; she couldn't own her own business; she couldn't get birth control without a man's assistance; her reproductive rights didn't exist; she wasn't legally protected against marital violence; she couldn't initiate divorce.

In the seventy-five years since Inge penned this play, one would think women would have more autonomy than present-day. We present *Come Back, Little Sheba* to the next generation in hopes to illuminate the realities of a bygone era so we, as a society, don't stumble too far into the same darkness again.

– Gwendolyn Whiteside

P.S. In 1998, I began my journey with American Blues Theater as the high school waitress in William Inge's *Bus Stop*. Returning to another Inge play in our 40th anniversary season is an honor and artistic challenge of my lifetime.

# INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR **ELYSE DOLAN**

We asked ensemble member **ELYSE DOLAN** (director) a few questions about her work on 'Come Back, Little Sheba.'

## **WHAT DREW YOU TO THIS PROJECT?**

When I first read this play, I was struck by how modern it felt. Though written 75 years ago, the struggles & pressures that Lola, Doc, & Marie face in this piece—loss & infertility; a marriage abraded by addiction; the scrutiny & judgement of a woman's sex life—are still deeply relevant today. Plus the opportunity to collaborate with Wendy & Phil (both attached to this project from conception) was impossible to turn down!

## **AS AN ENSEMBLE AND STAFF MEMBER OF AMERICAN BLUES, YOU'VE SEEN THE WORK OF MANY OF YOUR FELLOW ARTISTS IN THE CAST. WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO WITH THIS TALENTED BUNCH?**

I'm thrilled to have so many ensemble members, artistic affiliates, and past collaborators in the cast, especially as we celebrate our 40th season here at American Blues! One of the great gifts of working at an ensemble theater is the level of earned trust between artists. It's especially valuable on a show like *Come Back, Little Sheba*, which requires a great deal of emotional vulnerability from its actors. With performers of this caliber working on their "home turf" – I have no doubts that the audience is in for an unforgettable experience.



## **WITHOUT REVEALING TOO MANY SECRETS, WHAT WILL SURPRISE THE AUDIENCE ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION?**

It's going to be up-close & personal. We've chosen to stage this piece in our black box studio theatre to heighten the immediacy of the piece. This isn't a mid-century museum exhibit. We want audiences to sit in the Delaney's parlor and experience the emotional wallop of this show firsthand.

## **WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON NEXT?**

As a director, I'm collaborating with *Sheba* cast member Maya Lou Hlava once again on a reading of *The Best Damn Thing* by Hanna Kime, here at American Blues. As Associate Artistic Director, I'm helping produce the remainder of our current season and our soon-to-be-announced season 41!

# INTERVIEW WITH ACTORS PHILIP EARL JOHNSON & GWENDOLYN WHITESIDE

We asked award-winning ensemble members **PHILIP EARL JOHNSON** (Doc) and **GWENDOLYN (WENDY) WHITESIDE** (Lola) a few questions about 'Come Back, Little Sheba.'

## HOW DID YOU PREPARE PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY, AND/OR MENTALLY FOR YOUR ROLE?

**PHIL:** The main aspect that I felt like I needed to address with Doc is the duality of his nature. On the surface he is, in generic terms, a good guy. He is a guy with an amiable smile who has a minute to talk with anyone he happens to meet; a midwestern gentleman with charm, but also with a selfish confidence. Underneath all of that is an emotional landscape littered with a lifetime of unfulfilled dreams and sadness. The preparation to tell this man's, and the play's story has been one of figuring out how to keep a lid on the turmoil he lives with while letting the audience see that it is there. Then later when they definitely see it, to allow myself to travel in the truly barren terrain, the raw emotional desperation that pours out of him, the residue of the battle he is fighting against the potent and ugly demons that haunt him. In order to do that, I have to be ready to be exposed both mentally and emotionally.

**WENDY:** Once we programmed *Sheba* in the Studio, we knew the space's intimacy would ignite the powder keg of women's oppression and repression, while serving as a cage. Physically, it's always been my practice to take on a character's rhythms, shape, gait, and posture. Building a character's physicality is my favorite part of the creative process. Lola isn't as active as I am, so for the last year I adopted a sedentary life style. I stopped walking ~15 miles a week, ate huge portions, and increased my body weight by 25%. I leaned so much into self-neglect that my family voiced their concern, and I had to share what I was doing. The extra weight definitely impacted my energy and joints. I also missed the endorphins that helped with regulation. Emotionally and mentally, it's important to show Lola as a fully-lived, complex person. I have a great deal of empathy for her and don't judge her actions (or inactions) due to the misogyny she faced and her limited options of the era.



Philip Earl Johnson in *The Columnist* (2017) and Gwendolyn Whiteside in *Grounded* (2014), both at American Blues.

## WHAT SURPRISES YOU ABOUT YOUR ROLE?

**PHIL:** That I am even doing it mostly! I haven't done a play since before the pandemic. I turned down all opportunities for doing a play (the two I was willing or able to do didn't happen for me) since 2019. I have been focusing on my other performances and shows full time since then. I am also surprised by how much Doc doesn't say, things he could say but doesn't, the tolerance he has, and tries to maintain, for the others in his home. He is a pretty straight arrow with a fairly clear picture of how he believes people are supposed to behave. This helps him stay calm. His cultural status quo is being challenged in the play but he tries to accept, against his beliefs, what's going on which stirs up some strong emotional reactions. He could say a whole lot more but he chooses not to and that doesn't really work for him.

**WENDY:** I'm surprised by her strength and ability to use charm to deescalate. I was aware of her underlying depression, but I hadn't considered how much masking she does. Her lightness isn't a lack of intelligence; it's an attempt to recalibrate the room. It's easy to dismiss Lola, but she is a formidable woman who is a survivor.

# INTERVIEW WITH ACTORS PHILIP EARL JOHNSON & GWENDOLYN WHITESIDE

## PHIL AND WENDY ARE RETEAMING SINCE THEY LAST APPEARED IN THE JOSEPH JEFFERSON AWARD NOMINATED PRODUCTION ON CLOVER ROAD. WHAT DRAWS YOU TO COLLABORATE TOGETHER?

**PHIL:** I believe the driving force is trust and encouragement. We both have a strong commitment to telling the unvarnished version of people involved in conflict and don't have to apologize for that. For me, there is a sense that, in this country, there is a strong need to find likability. And it makes sense, in a way. Audiences are more attuned to likable characters. I think I'm more interested in characters that are trying to live in a place of love but fall into fear and make unlikable choices. Those characters challenge the empathy of the audience. I think Wendy and I are both interested in that murkiness of human behavior, people trying, though sometimes not hard enough, and making questionable decisions. We encourage the kind of choices that create conflict while trusting that we both have the same goal. We can try things and take chances without fear.



Philip Earl Johnson and Gwendolyn Whiteside in *On Clover Road* (2019) at American Blues.

**WENDY:** Phil is one of the best actors I've ever seen. To share scenes with him is electrifying because he is so present and honest. I've built my Lola around Phil's Doc. Now, I can't imagine doing this role with anyone else because of the years of trust we've built on & off-stage. We have a shorthand, and I feel completely safe to be vulnerable. Also, I love that he challenges and pushes me to go more in depth with my characters.

## WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON NEXT?

**PHIL:** I'm always working on the next stand-up comedy show I'm going to do and the book I'm working on. So, lots of writing. I would like to set aside more time to do plays, but we will see. Hopefully something creative comes up. I always seem to be busy, but I'm more open to the possibility now.

**WENDY:** I'm directing *Always...Patsy Cline* with ensemble members Liz Chidester (Patsy) and Editha Rosario-Moore. I'm also thrilled to work with music director and ensemble member Michael Mahler again. It'll be such a joy to be in the room with their brilliance. We're all excited to introduce the next generation to Patsy's music.

# DESIGNERS' CORNER: SCENIC DESIGN

*Scenic Designer Shayna Patel shares her design and some details about her vision for 'Come Back, Little Sheba.'*

**"This set is designed to play with the idea that Lola is trapped, imprisoned, in this home and this life. The lack of walls reveal the cage built around her, locking her in, yet leaving her exposed and vulnerable. We really want the audience to feel immersed, to feel like they are sitting in the home watching as the characters' lives unfold."**

*- Shayna Patel, Scenic Designer*



*Come Back, Little Sheba* scenic rendering by Shayna Patel

# DESIGNERS' CORNER: COSTUME DESIGN

*Costume Designer Lily Walls shares a sneak peek of some of her inspiration collages for 'Come Back, Little Sheba.'*



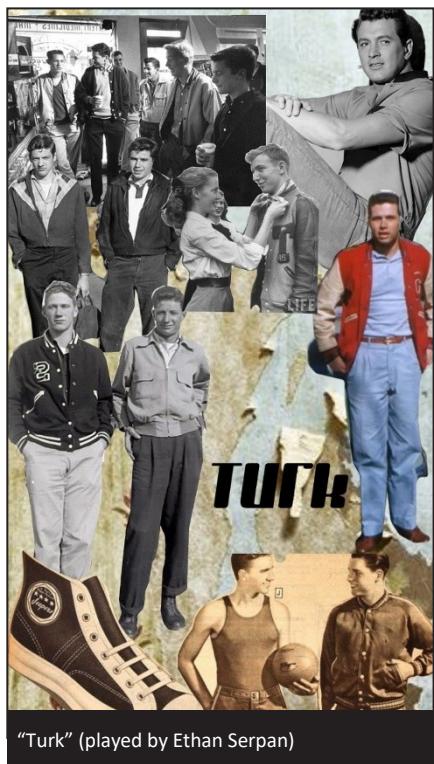
"Lola" (played by Gwendolyn Whiteside)



"Doc" (played by Philip Earl Johnson)



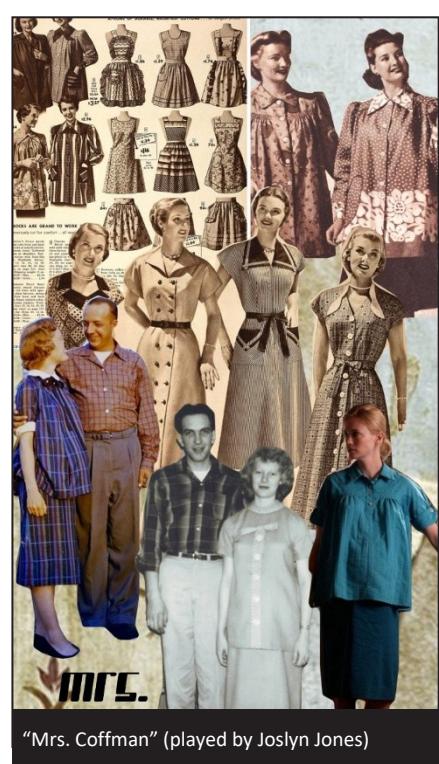
"Marie" (played by Maya Lou Hlava)



"Turk" (played by Ethan Serpan)



"Bruce" (played by Justin Banks)



"Mrs. Coffman" (played by Joslyn Jones)

# ABOUT ALCOHOLISM

Playwright William Inge struggled with alcoholism and joined Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in 1947. When writing 'Come Back, Little Sheba' in 1950, he allegedly based the character of Lola on the wife of one of his AA peers, making this play personal in many ways.

## WHAT IS ALCOHOL USE DISORDER?

Alcohol use disorder (often called alcoholism) is a common medical condition. People with this condition can't stop drinking, even if their alcohol use upends their lives and the lives of those around them. Alcohol use disorder can be mild, moderate or severe. While people with this condition may start drinking again, studies show that with treatment, most people are able to reduce how much they drink or stop drinking entirely.

## HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

The American Medical Association recommends a two-drink daily limit for men. Heavy drinking in this population is five or more drinks in one day or 15 or more drinks in a week. Women should limit drinking to one drink a day. Heavy drinking in this population is four or more drinks a day or eight drinks a week.

## WHAT CAUSES ALCOHOL USE DISORDER?

Researchers don't know all the reasons why someone develops it, but have identified the following factors:

- **Genetics:** Studies show people with a family history of alcohol use disorder have an increased risk of developing it.
- **Mental health conditions:** Having conditions like depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may increase your risk of alcohol use disorder.

## WHAT ARE TREATMENTS FOR ALCOHOL USE DISORDER?

The treatments depends on the situation. If the condition is severe, a healthcare provider may recommend inpatient medical treatment or residential rehabilitation. Other treatments are:

- **Behavioral treatment:** This treatment focuses on counseling that changes your drinking behavior. You may work with addiction counselors or psychologists.
- **Medication:** The U.S. Food & Drug Administration has approved naltrexone and acamprosate as alcohol use disorder treatment. Topiramate and gabapentin can also decrease cravings in some people.
- **Support groups:** Support groups are a way to connect with others who understand your situation.



 Cleveland Clinic

# ABOUT ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

**Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)** is a global, peer-led mutual-aid fellowship focused on abstinence-based recovery from alcoholism through its spiritually inclined Twelve Steps. AA's Twelve Traditions, besides emphasizing anonymity and being free to all with no governing hierarchy, position AA as non-promotional, non-professional, as well as unaffiliated while having no politics or a creed members must swear to. In 2021 AA estimated it was active in 180 countries with nearly two million members, 73% located in the United States and Canada.

AA dates its origin to a 1935 Ohio meeting between Bill Wilson (Bill W) and Bob Smith (Dr. Bob). (Members often go by first name and last name initial to stay anonymous.)

Having met through the Christian revivalist Oxford Group, they continued under its aegis to fellowship with other alcoholics until forming what became AA. In 1939 the fellowship introduced its Twelve Steps with the publication of *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How More than One Hundred Men Have Recovered from Alcoholism*. Informally called "the Big Book", later editions amended the subtitle with "*Thousands of Men and Women*".

The Twelve Steps are a suggested, ongoing self-improvement program to abstain from alcohol through the aid of personally defined, but not required, "God as we understood Him". The steps begin with an acknowledgment of powerlessness over alcohol and the unmanageability of life due to alcoholism. Subsequent steps emphasize rigorous honesty, including the completion of a "searching and fearless moral inventory", acknowledgment of "character defects", sharing the inventory with a trusted person, making amends to individuals harmed, and engaging in regular prayer or meditation to seek "conscious contact with God" and guidance in following divine will. The final step, the 12th, focuses on maintaining the principles of recovery, sharing the message with other alcoholics, and participating in "12th Step work," such as peer sponsorship, organizing meetings, and outreach to institutions like hospitals and prisons.



Bill Wilson (Bill W.) and Bob Smith (Dr. Bob) - the co-founders of Alcoholics Anonymous

## AL-ANON FAMILY GROUPS

Al-Anon Family Groups is an international mutual aid organization for people who have been impacted by another person's alcoholism. In the organization's own words, Al-Anon is a "worldwide fellowship that offers a program of recovery for the families and friends of alcoholics, whether or not the alcoholic recognizes the existence of an alcohol-related problem or seeks help."

Al-Anon was co-founded in 1951, 16 years after the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous, by Anne B. and Lois W. (wife of AA co-founder Bill W.). Before the formation of Al-Anon, independent groups of families of alcoholics met. "Bill thought the[se] groups could be consolidated and that Lois should be the one to take it on."

# TIMELINE OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE U.S.

*Written in 1950, Lola, Marie, & Mrs. Coffman—the women of 'Come Back, Little Sheba'—sit in a unique place in women's history: some rights have been granted (to white women), but many more are yet to come. Below is a timeline of notable events in U.S. women's history beginning with the suffrage movement of the late 19th century.*

## **MAY 15, 1869**

Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton found the National Woman Suffrage Association, which coordinated the national suffrage movement. In 1890, the group teamed with the American Woman Suffrage Association to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association.



Susan B. Anthony

## **OCTOBER 16, 1916**

Margaret Sanger opens the first birth control clinic in the United States. Located in Brownsville, Brooklyn, her clinic was deemed illegal under the "Comstock Laws" forbidding sharing information about birth control, and the clinic was raided on October 26, 1916. When she had to close two additional times due to legal threats, she closed the clinic and eventually founded the American Birth Control League in 1921—the precursor to today's Planned Parenthood.



Margaret Sanger (photo Los Angeles Times, restored by Adam Cuerden)

## **APRIL 2, 1917**

Jeannette Rankin of Montana, a longtime activist with the National Woman Suffrage Association, is sworn in as the first woman elected to Congress as a member of the House of Representatives.

## **AUGUST 18, 1920**

Ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is completed, declaring "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." It is nicknamed "The Susan B. Anthony Amendment" in honor of her work on behalf of women's suffrage.



Rosa Parks

## **FEBRUARY 16, 1945**

The Alaska Equal Rights Act is signed into law. The act is the first state or territorial anti-discrimination law enacted in the United States in the 20th century. Elizabeth Peratrovich, a Tlingit woman who was Grand President of the Alaska Native Sisterhood, spearheaded the effort to end discrimination against Alaska Natives and other non-white residents.

## **DECEMBER 1, 1955**

Black seamstress Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat to a white man on a bus in Montgomery, Ala. The move helps launch the civil rights movement.

## **MAY 9, 1960**

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approves the first commercially produced birth control pill in the world, allowing women to control when and if they have children. Margaret Sanger initially commissioned "the pill" with funding from heiress Katherine McCormick.

# TIMELINE OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE U.S.

## JUNE 10, 1963

President John F. Kennedy signs into law the Equal Pay Act, prohibiting sex-based wage discrimination between men and women performing the same job in the same workplace.

## JULY 2, 1964

President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act into law; Title VII bans employment discrimination based on race, religion, national origin or sex.

## AUGUST 6, 1965

President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into law. Designed to enforce voting rights protected by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution, the Act sought to secure the right to vote for racial minorities throughout the country, especially in the South.

## JUNE 23, 1972

Title IX of the Education Amendments is signed into law by President Richard Nixon. It states "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

## JANUARY 22, 1973

In its landmark 7-2 Roe v. Wade decision, the U.S. Supreme Court declares that the Constitution protects a woman's legal right to an abortion. In June 2022, the Supreme Court overturned the ruling.

## JULY 7, 1981

Sandra Day O'Connor is sworn in as the first woman to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court, after being nominated by President Ronald Reagan.

## SEPTEMBER 13, 1994

President Bill Clinton signs the Violence Against Women Act as part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, providing funding for programs that help victims of domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, stalking and other gender-related violence.

## JANUARY 24, 2013

The U.S. military removes a ban against women serving in direct ground combat positions.

## JULY 26, 2016

Hillary Clinton becomes the first woman to receive a presidential nomination from a major political party.

## JANUARY 20, 2021

Kamala Harris is sworn in as the first woman and first woman of color vice president of the United States. "While I may be the first woman in this office, I will not be the last," Harris said after getting elected in November.



Sandra Day O'Connor



Hillary Clinton



Kamala Harris

# THE “TRADWIFE” MOVEMENT: A RETURN TO THE 1950S?

*A subculture of women known “tradwives” evoke the aesthetics and supposed values of the 1950s in their online content, while ignoring many of the realities of the time for women: rampant domestic abuse, very few legal protections, and no financial independence. The below article by Harmeet Kaur for CNN examines the tradwife movement. It has been edited here for length. You can read the full article [here](#).*

On certain corners of the internet, a segment of women is exhibiting a nostalgia for an era it has never known.

These millennials and zoomers glamorize the aesthetics of 1950s Americana, donning retro fit-and-flare dresses and posting vintage illustrations of aproned housewives placing dinner on the table.

Their politics, too, hearken back to that of the post-World War II boom (at least, for those who were straight, White and middle class). In their ideal society, men are the providers, women are the homemakers and the nuclear family is the holy grail.

These young women belong to a small subculture called “tradwives.” Short for traditional wives, tradwives aren’t your average stay-at-home moms. They sneer at what they consider to be modern-day feminism, with its girlbosses and its ungratifying grind, and wax lyrical about the value of traditional gender roles. Crucially, they promote submission to one’s husband, sometimes evoking fundamentalist Christian principles in their beliefs.

As tradwives showcase their idyllic, domesticated lives on social media, implicit is the message that today’s women and girls are being “red pilled” by the feminist movements that promise to liberate them – and that true security and fulfillment can be achieved by reverting to certain norms of the past.

## THEIR IDEAS AREN’T PARTICULARLY NEW

Women who advocate for strictly traditional gender roles aren’t a new phenomenon – anti-feminists in the early 19th and 20th centuries resisted women’s suffrage, and some activists in the late 20th century opposed the Equal Rights Amendment.

What sets tradwives apart from their predecessors is the visibility those social media platforms afford them, said Catherine Rottenberg, an associate professor at the University of Nottingham whose work examines neoliberal feminism.

Tradwife influencers package their ideas about the natural

order of things into blog posts and bite-sized content and, in some cases, monetize their efforts. One shares pudding recipes and etiquette tips alongside posts titled “Your husband should always come first!” and “Men are not toxic: A year of advocating traditional family values.”

“The movement, more generally, depends on savvy entrepreneurial women like these, who – through their social media activities, classes, courses, advice books and products – advocate and popularize tradwifehood as a desirable choice and identity,” Rottenberg [shares].

She added, “Far from rejecting neoliberal capitalism, the tradwife movement is deeply embedded in it.”

## TRADWIVES REFLECT AN ANXIETY AROUND SOCIETAL SHIFTS

[Less than a decade] after #MeToo sparked a global conversation around sexual violence, sexism and power, it might seem puzzling that a life of traditional gender roles and submission to a male partner is resonating with some young women.

But in longing for the culture of 1950s domesticity, these women are responding to our current political moment, said Rottenberg. While the “Lean In,” girlboss movement of the early 2010s encouraged women to do more and work harder, critics characterized it as elitist and out of touch. By the time the pandemic hit, women were up against an “always-on” work culture, stagnating wages and an eroded social safety net – with a now worsening caregiving crisis. In a society where women already shoulder the majority of unpaid domestic work, staying home to focus on the household full time might be preferable – though also a privileged choice.

Rather than recognizing crises of child care and overwork as structural problems, tradwives typically point the finger at feminism, Rottenberg said. It’s not particularly surprising that tradwives consider themselves to be anti-feminists, given that their fixed notions of gender and glorification of “alpha males” are precisely what many feminists have long fought against. But as Rottenberg sees it, the tradwife

# THE "TRADWIFE" MOVEMENT: A RETURN TO THE 1950S?

response reflects a particular failing in western liberal feminism rather than feminism writ large.

"Liberal feminism advocated for middle-class women to join the workforce as part of an emancipatory agenda," Rottenberg wrote. "But if the workplace is toxic, and makes us sick, then entering the workplace doesn't feel very emancipatory."

In championing so-called traditional values, tradwives also push against aspects of modern society, including hookup culture and the objectification of women. The idea of a man who protects and provides for his wife, then, might offer women a sense of control and stability, Rottenberg adds – though it's worth noting that fixed gender roles in the 1950s did not offer relief from domestic abuse or overwork.

## TRADWIFE CONTENT IS BEING ADOPTED BY THE FAR RIGHT

While tradwives are already a niche subculture, an even smaller faction of them are using tradwife content to spread more insidious ideas, says Annie Kelly, a journalist and researcher with expertise in anti-feminist and far right digital cultures.

Kelly describes the overlap between tradwives and far right movements as something of a Venn diagram. While there are some tradwives, including women of color, who simply hold conservative beliefs on the roles men and women should occupy in relationships, she said some on the alt right use tradwife aesthetics to recruit White women into

the movement. Such influencers promote a contempt for modernity and feminism, as well as "a desire for an idealized and implicitly coded White past," she said.

Some tradwife accounts, for example, use rhetoric that nod to White nationalist ideas such as "replacement theory." One tradwife influencer who goes by "Wife With A Purpose" came under fire in 2017 for reportedly issuing a "White baby challenge," in which she encouraged her followers to have as many White babies as her.

Many tradwives also share the far right's views on LGBTQ relationships, using phrases like "the natural order" in reference to gender roles. Some promote homeschooling to avoid exposing their children to progressive ideas about sex education and gender identity, Kelly added.

Tradwives speak to an anti-modernity sentiment that has been bubbling up in internet culture and beyond for years – and the aesthetics and politics of anti-modernity go beyond tradwife circles, [Kelly] noted.

"Conditions for young people are quite bad, frankly," said Kelly, nodding to the slower economic growth that younger generations face today. "This pushes young people into a tendency to look back at the past with rose-tinted glasses."

But this romanticized view of the past, Rottenberg said, is "completely fictive."

"All they need to do is to read Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* to see that their yearning for a simpler life is misplaced."



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



## NAMI CHICAGO

Since 1979, NAMI Chicago has fought for families and individuals impacted by mental health conditions. They promote community wellness, break down barriers to mental health care and provide support and expertise for families, professionals and individuals in Chicago and beyond.



## THE FAMILY INSTITUTE AT NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

The Family Institute brings together a diverse group of leading therapists to provide behavioral health care to children, adults, couples and families across the lifespan. They tailor treatment to match the client's unique needs and goals, integrating feedback from clients through measurement-informed care.

### AMERICAN BLUES THEATER **SEASON 40**

A poster for the play "Things with Diaz Friends". It features a red background with a white wine glass on the left containing a small boat. The title "THINGS WITH DIAZ FRIENDS" is written in white, with "WITH DIAZ" in a smaller font. The American Blues Theater logo is in the top right corner.

World Premiere  
AUG 29 - OCT 5, 2025

A poster for the play "It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!". It features a red background with a Christmas wreath and a red ribbon. The title "It's a Wonderful Life" is written in a large, cursive white font, with "Live in Chicago!" in a smaller white font below it. The American Blues Theater logo is in the top right corner.

24th Annual Production  
NOV 21 - DEC 28, 2025

A poster for the play "Come Back, Little Sheba". It features a blue background with two hands reaching towards each other. The title "COME BACK, LITTLE SHEBA" is written in white, with "BY WILLIAM INGE" in a smaller white font below it. The American Blues Theater logo is in the top left corner.

Reimagined Classic  
FEB 6 - MAR 22, 2026

A poster for the musical "Always... Patsy Cline". It features a black background with a white portrait of Patsy Cline. The title "Always... Patsy Cline" is written in white cursive script across the bottom. The American Blues Theater logo is in the top left corner.

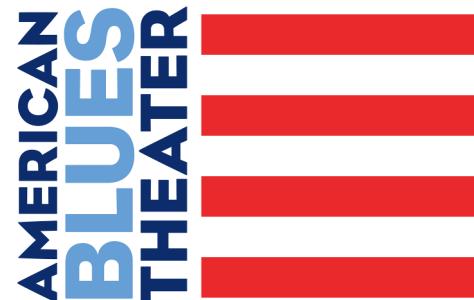
Hit Jukebox Musical  
MAY 1 - JUNE 7, 2026

Visit [AmericanBluesTheater.com](http://AmericanBluesTheater.com) for more information

# ABOUT AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

## MISSION

American Blues Theater is an Ensemble of artists committed to producing new and classic diverse stories that ask the question: "What does it mean to be American?"



## VALUES

American Blues Theater does our *part* –

Pragmatism – we get things done, making steady progress in all areas of theater making.

Altruism – we make art in service of others, strengthening communities through compassion, care, and creativity.

Resilience – we meet obstacles with imagination, transforming struggles with growth and renewal.

Teamwork – we invest in collaboration and build toward a shared future.

## ABOUT US

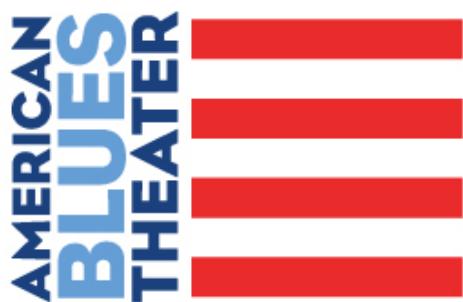
Winner of the prestigious National Theatre Company Award from American Theatre Wing (Tony Awards), American Blues Theater is a non-profit arts organization that produces high-quality productions with a focus on stories that are relevant, timeless, and inclusive to the American spirit.

American Blues Theater is **committed to developing new work as more than half of the productions are world and Chicago premieres**. Play development programs include the nationally-recognized *Blue Ink Award*, commissions, readings, and the annual *Ripped Festival* of short plays.

American Blues Theater **believes in teamwork both on and off-stage**. A leader in community engagement for decades, the theater matches each play's themes with other non-profits' missions to raise awareness.

In addition to producing plays, American Blues Theater **offers a range of free services**, including continuing education programs, writing instruction and matinees for Chicago Public Schools, dramaturgical materials, and post-show discussions to widen access in the community.

American Blues Theater and its artists have earned 246 Joseph Jefferson Awards and nominations, 44 Black Theater Alliance Awards, and numerous industry accolades, including nomination and awards for the Pulitzer Prize, Academy Awards, Tony Awards, Golden Globes Awards, Emmy Awards, and more.



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American Blues Theater sits on the original homelands of the Council of Three Fires (Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa). Read full land acknowledgment at [americanbluestheater.com/location](http://americanbluestheater.com/location).