Development and Highlights of the Two-Party System

1787 - Federalist and Anti-Federalist parties emerge out of conflict over the ratification of the Constitution.

1796 - Federalists and Democratic-Republicans become the two established parties. Federalist John Adams becomes president.

1798 - Federalist Party splits over Adams’s refusal to declare war on France. High Federalists break with Adams and side with Alexander Hamilton.

1800 - Thomas Jefferson of the Democratic-Republican Party wins the presidency, marking the Federalists’ decline.

1800-1820s - Democratic-Republicans dominate U.S. politics until conflicts over banking, tariffs, and slavery shatter the party.

1828 - Democratic-Republican Party splits into two factions. President Andrew Jackson sides with the group calling themselves Democrats; the other group becomes the National Republican or “Whig” Party.

1832 - The first National Nominating Conventions are held for the Whig and Democratic Parties.

1850s - Internal conflict over slavery wracks the Democratic Party. Many Whigs join a new anti-slavery party, the “Republicans.”

1860 - Abraham Lincoln becomes the first Republican president.

1860-1932 - Republican Party dominates U.S. politics during the Civil War and until the Great Depression. Democrats hold presidential office only four times during this period.

1912 - Former President Theodore Roosevelt breaks with the Republican Party and forms the Progressive Party (Bull Moose Party). Roosevelt runs for president and gains a majority of Republican voters, but the Democratic candidate Woodrow Wilson wins the election. By 1917, the Progressive Party dies out.

1924 - A liberal coalition from both the Republican and Democratic Parties forms a second Progressive Party; it wins 16.5% of the popular vote in the presidential election. Its influence does not last beyond the election.

1932 - Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a Democrat, is elected president and serves four terms. Democrats become the majority party in the House of Representatives for the next 60 years.

1948 - A faction of liberal Democrats who disagree with both major parties forms another Progressive Party. It gains one million votes in the presidential election but their popularity fades following the election.

1968 - Former Alabama Governor George Wallace runs for president on the American Independent Party ticket. Supporting anti-desegregation policies, he wins 13.5% of the popular vote and 46 electoral votes from five states in the south.

1992 - Independent candidate Ross Perot challenges the two parties in the presidential election; he wins 18% of the popular vote.