Significant Presidential Elections

1796- John Adams-becomes 2nd president of US/peaceful transition between presidents
After George Washington retirement, there was no unanimous choice for president. The presidential election of 1796 demonstrated that the fledgling democracy could work. One man stepped aside, and a peaceful election occurred resulting in John Adams as president. One side effect of this election which would become more significant in 1800 was that due to the electoral process, arch-rival TJ became Adams' Vice President. Significance: The election proved that American electoral system worked.

1800- Thomas Jefferson defeats John Adams- Jefferson Revolution/peaceful transition between TWO parties
This presidential election is the most significant in US history because of its far reaching impact on electoral policies. The Electoral College system from the Constitution broke down allowing Burr, the VP candidate to be in contention for the presidency against Thomas Jefferson. It was decided in the House after twenty-six ballots. Significance: The 12th Amendment was added changing the electoral process. Further, a peaceful exchange of political power occurred (Federalists out, Democratic-Republicans in.)

1824- Four Way Race (JQA, Henry Clay, Crawford, Andrew Jackson)/ Corrupt Bargain / JQA Wins /All Dem-Rep Parties
The Election of 1824 is known as the 'Corrupt Bargain'. The lack of an electoral majority resulted in the election being decided in the House. It is believed that a deal was made giving the office to JQA in exchange for Henry Clay becoming Secretary of State. Significance: Andrew Jackson won the popular vote, but lost because of this bargain. Significance: The election's backlash catapulted Jackson to the presidency in 1828. Further, the Democratic-Republican Party split in two.

1828- Jackson wins- Democratic Party
The presidential election of 1828 is often pointed to as the 'rise of the common man'. It has been called the 'Revolution of 1828'. After the Corrupt Bargain of 1824 when Andrew Jackson was defeated, an upwelling of support arose against back room deals and candidates chosen by caucus. At this point in American history, the nominating of candidates became more democratic as conventions replaced caucuses. Significance: Andrew Jackson was the first president not born of privilege. The election was the first time that individuals began to fight against corruption in politics.

1860- Four way race-Lincoln wins/Begins Civil War
The presidential election of 1860 demonstrated the necessity of taking a side on slavery. The newly formed Republican party adopted an anti-slavery platform that led to a narrow victory for Abraham Lincoln, arguably the greatest president in US history and also set the die for session. Individuals who once associated with the Democratic or Whig parties yet who were anti-slavery realigned to join the Republicans. Those who were pro-slavery from the other noncommittal parties joined the Democrats. Significance: The election of Lincoln was the straw that broke the camel's back and led to the secession of eleven states.

1896- McKinley (R) vs. William Jennings Bryan- McKinley wins backed by Robber Barons (JP, Rockefeller, and Carnegie)
The presidential election of 1896 demonstrated a sharp division in society between urban and rural interests. William Jennings Bryan (Democrat) was able to form a coalition that answered the call of progressive groups and rural interests including the indebted farmers and those arguing against the gold standard. McKinley’s victory was significant because it highlights the shift from America as an agrarian nation to
one of urban interests. Significance: The election highlights the changes that were occurring in American society at the turn of the 19th century.

1877- **Compromise of 1876- Hayes gets White House if Reconstruction Ends**
This election ranks higher than other disputed elections because it is set against the backdrop of Reconstruction. Samuel Tilden led in popular and electoral votes but was one shy of the necessary votes to win. The existence of disputed electoral votes led to the Compromise of 1877. A commission was formed and voted along party lines, awarding Hayes (Republican) the presidency. It is believed that Hayes agreed to end Reconstruction and recall all troops from the South in exchange for the presidency. Significance: The election of Hayes meant the end of Reconstruction.

1912- **Taft (R), Teddy Roosevelt (Progressive), Wilson (D), and Debs (Socialist)- Wilson wins/Slimmest margin of victory**
The reason why the presidential election of 1912 is included here is to show the impact that a third party can have on the outcome of an election. When Roosevelt broke from the Republicans to form the Bull Moose Party, he hoped to win back the presidency. His presence on the ballot split the Republican vote resulting in a win for the Democrat, Woodrow Wilson. This would be significant because Wilson led the nation during World War I and staunchly fought for the 'League of Nations'. Significance: Third parties cannot necessarily win American elections but they can spoil them.

1932- **Roosevelt wins Presidential election and Democrats win Congress- New Deal**
Another shift in political parties occurred with the presidential election of 1932. FDR’s Democratic Party came to power by forming the New Deal coalition that united groups that previously had not been associated with the same party. These included urban workers, northern African-Americans, Southern whites, and Jewish voters. Today’s Democratic Party is still largely comprised of this coalition. Significance: A new coalition and realignment of political parties occurred that would help shape future policies and elections.

1960- **Kennedy vs. Nixon- Kennedy wins by slim margin/1st TV Debates**

1968- **Humphrey (D) (after LBJ refuses, Kennedy shot), Nixon (R), and Wallace (I)- Nixon wins/ Law and Order**

1972- **Nixon defeats McGovern- Watergate Scandal**

1980- **Reagan- Resurgence of Conservatism (Republican Party)**

2000- **Bush (R) defeats Al Gore (D)**
The Election of 2000 came down to the Electoral College and specifically the vote in Florida. Because of the controversy over the recount in Florida, the Gore campaign sued to have a manual recount. This was significant because it was the first time the Supreme Court got involved in an electoral decision. It decided that the votes should stand as counted and the electoral votes for the state were awarded to George W. Bush. He won the presidency without winning the popular vote. Significance: The after-effects of the 2000 election can still be felt in everything from constantly evolving voting machines to greater scrutiny of elections themselves.