Tammany Hall's William "Boss" Tweed, as portrayed by 19th century political cartoonist Thomas Nast

From Royal Rule to Public Finance

1665 - First Mayor
Governor Richard Nicolls appoints Thomas Willett the first "mayor of New York." For the next 156 years, the mayor will be appointed and have limited power.

1686 - Common Council
Governor Thomas Dongan divides New York City into six wards and creates a Common Council with an alderman and assistant alderman elected from each ward.

1820s - Property Qualifications Removed
In New York State, the right to vote is extended to all white males, regardless of whether they own or rent property.

1821 - Choosing a Mayor
The Common Council, which includes elected members, gains the authority to choose the mayor who will sit in City Hall. Previously, the state government appointed the mayor.

1834 - First Elected Mayor

An amendment to the state constitution provides for the direct popular election of the mayor. Cornelius W. Lawrence, a Democrat, is elected.

1846 - Voting Rights Rejected
New York voters reject a proposed amendment to the state constitution that would guarantee free blacks the same voting rights as whites.

1861 - Tammany Hall Emerges
Tammany Hall, which evolved from an organization of craftsmen into a Democratic political machine, gains control of Democratic Party nominations in the state and city.

1870 - Voting Rights
The 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified, giving blacks throughout the United States the same voting rights as whites.

1880 - Standard Ballot
In response to an era of political scandals, New York begins requiring the so-called "Australian ballot," a uniform ballot listing all candidates. To get on it, an office seeker would have to be nominated by a political party or submit nominating petitions, laying the groundwork for a system that persists to this day.

1890 - Primary Election
Because of perceived abuses in the way political parties select candidates, the New York State Legislature enacts a law that, for the first time, requires government to manage and pay for elections to select party officials who would then choose the party's candidates.

1892 - Voting Machine
The first voting machine, invented by Thomas Edison, is used in Lockport, New York in 1892. By the early 1920s, voting machines would be used for all general elections in New York City.

1894 - Bipartisan Control
The state establishes a system, in effect to this day, under which all election positions, from Board of Elections officials to poll watchers, must be divided equally between the two major parties.

Three suffragists casting votes in New York City around 1918.

1898 - Greater New York Formed
A new City Charter merges Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island into greater New York. All five boroughs now elect the mayor.

1915 - Suffragists Defeated
A referendum giving women the vote is defeated by city and state voters.

1920 - Suffragists Victorious
The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is signed into law, guaranteeing women throughout the United States the right to vote.

1965 - Opening the Polls
Congress passes the federal Voting Rights Act to ensure that no person is denied the right to vote on account of race or color.

1967 - A Black District
A suit brought under the Voting Rights Act leads to the creation of a majority black congressional district in Brooklyn. Previously, black voters had been divided among several predominantly white districts. In 1968, voters in the district elect Shirley Chisholm as the first black woman ever in the U.S. House of Representatives. Since then, congressional, state legislative and City Council districts have been drawn so as to ensure minority representation.

1969 - School Elections

Non-citizens who have children in public schools are given the right to vote in elections for members of community school boards.

1970 - Voting Rights in New York

The federal government determines that Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx must be covered under the federal Voting Rights Act because of low voter registration levels. As a result, the federal government has to approve any changes in voting practices in these boroughs, including redistricting. This would mean that any switch to nonpartisan elections would require clearance by the U.S. Justice Department.

1971 - Younger Voters

The 26th Amendment lowers the voting age in New York from 21 to 18.

1975 - Multilingual Ballots and Election Information

Amendments to the Voting Rights Act require that election information be provided in Spanish as well as English in Brooklyn, the Bronx and Manhattan.

1988 - Ethical Finance

The Campaign Finance Board is formed as part of a response to corruption in city agencies. Its goal is to limit the influence of private funds in city politics. Candidates participating in the program can receive public money for their election campaigns. In return, they must agree to a spending limit and full disclosure of their campaign finances.

1989 - End of Board of Estimate

The U.S. Supreme Court abolishes the Board of Estimate, which gave each borough president an equal vote. The court rules that this violates the principle of one person-one vote because the boroughs vary so much in population. A new charter eliminates the board and distributes the board's powers between the mayor and an expanded City Council. 1992 - Chinese Ballots

The city begins providing voting information in Chinese, and Spanish is added to Queens ballots.

1993 - Term Limits

City voters approve a ballot measure, backed by millionaire Ronald Lauder, that would limit citywide officials, including the mayor, as well as borough presidents and members of the City Council to two consecutive four-year terms.

1996 - Public Debate

A law is passed requiring candidates who run for citywide office and participate in the Campaign Finance Program to participate in a series of public debates in order to receive public matching funds.

Primary Day, September 11, 2001, One World Financial Center.

Photograph by Steven McCurry

1996 - Two Terms and You're Out
Voters reject a plan put forth by City Council Speaker Peter Vallone to delay the implementation of term limits and to allow officials three terms, instead of two.

2001 - Primary Date
The primary vote is originally scheduled for September 11. Voting begins that day but is halted after the attacks on the World Trade Center and postponed until September 25. With Primary Day always falling on the second Tuesday in September, some have urged the state to shift the election to keep it from ever falling on September 11. So far, such efforts have failed.

2001 - The Big Change
Because of term limits, all citywide officials and 37 of 51 City Council members are unable to run for reelection, creating the largest turnover in city history.

2003 - School Change
The state approves a law eliminating community school boards, replacing them with councils selected by parents.

2003 - Two More Years
The City Council adjusts the term limits law to allow some council members, who were elected in the middle of a term and would have had to leave office after serving fewer than eight years, to remain in their seats. The action cleared the way for Council Speaker Gifford Miller and four other members, who would have had to leave office in January, 2004, to seek re-election this November.