

# 10

BY JASON HENSEL

Meetings  
that

Rocked  
the World

Meetings, conferences, conventions—when people get together, the opportunity to change the world is always at hand. Sure, a lot of the world’s advancements (or backslides) started with an idea or invention by one person, but most of the time help was supplied down the line.

And even with the emergence of online meeting technology, in the end it’s the face-to-face meeting that contributes the most to causes of change.

“[Change] is not going to happen on Facebook,” said author Thomas Friedman during a recent lecture at the University of Texas at Arlington. “The real action is in the cloakroom.”

Face it, a meeting is more than how many people can fit in a room or what pre- or post-event activities can be planned. A meeting is anything that gives space for ideas to grow, dreams to unfold and action to be taken.

# 1

## Marco Polo Meets Kublai Khan (1274)

**MARCO POLO WAS SIX YEARS OLD** when he took his first trip to Cathay (China) with his father and uncle, who were already notable explorers, having reached China and the Mongol dynasty in 1266. Polo was 17 before he returned.

It took the Polos three-and-a-half years to travel from their home in Venice, Italy, to the Kublai Khan's court in China in 1274.

"When the Great Khan saw Marco, who was then a young stripling, he asked who he was," Polo wrote. "'Sir' said Messer Niccolo, 'he is my son and your liege man.' 'He is heartily welcome,' said the Khan. What need to make a long story of it? Great indeed were the mirth and merry-making with which the Great Khan and all his Court welcomed the arrival of these emissaries. They stayed at Court and had a place of honor above the other barons."

Kublai favored Polo, who was a gifted storyteller, and appointed him to high administrative posts that sent him on diplomatic trips to neighboring countries Burma and India, as well as the rest of China. Polo stayed and worked in Kublai's court for 17 years and arrived back home to Venice in 1295 after a long and hard journey by sea and land.



### Why It Matters: *The Travels of Marco Polo*

Travel writers are forever indebted to Polo's book, which is one of the first travelogues and certainly one of the world's most popular books. Its details of the Far East influenced European mapmakers and future explorers, such as Christopher Columbus, who was inspired by the book to find a western route to the same lands Polo wrote about.

"If you had to pick one event that marked the definitive opening of the East to the West, it would have to be the first encounter between the youthful Marco Polo and the mature emperor of the Mongols, Kublai Khan," said historian Laurence Bergreen, author of *Marco Polo: From Venice to Xanadu*. "The ensuing collaboration between the Venetian and the ruler of the largest land-based empire in history fostered global trade and an exchange of knowledge, but more than that, it inspired the creation of Marco Polo's *Travels*, one of the most influential and beguiling books ever written. As a result, Marco Polo became a one-man Renaissance."

# 2

## The International Olympic Committee (1894)

**PIERRE DE COUBERTIN**—a French teacher and historian—dreamed of a world competing in sport, rather than war, and after attending the games of the Wenlock (England) Olympian Society in 1890, he believed that reviving the ancient Olympic Games could fulfill that dream.

The Wenlock games were one of many attempts at re-establishing old Greek competitions. Other attempts included L'Olympiade de la République in France from 1796 to 1798 and the Olympic Games sponsored by philanthropist Evangelos Zappas in Athens, Greece, in 1859.

On June 23, 1894, de Coubertin organized a congress at Sorbonne University in Paris to vocalize his ideas about how an international sporting event could support peace and communication. It was then decided that the first modern Olympic Games would be played in 1896 in Athens, and in order to organize the event, the International Olympic Committee was formed.

### Why It Matters: *The Olympic Games*

What started in 1896 in Athens with approximately 240 participants representing 14 nations became more than 10,000 athletes representing more than 200 countries at the 2008 Olympic Summer Games in Beijing. The games, though not free from controversy and political posturing, are the best example of how different countries and cultures can cooperate, grow and learn from each other. Plus, opening and closing ceremonies can be high entertainment that even George Lucas can't top.





# 3)

## John Lennon Meets Paul McCartney (1957)

**THE QUARRYMEN WERE A SKIFFLE BAND** based in Liverpool, England, formed in 1956 by John Lennon and several friends. The popular group primarily played parties, contests and school dances. But it was July 6, 1957, that dictated the band's fate and changed rock music forever.

On that Saturday, the Quarrymen played a St. Peter's Church party, first on a flatbed truck in a float procession and then a second set on a stage behind the church. In between sets, Lennon's friend, Ivan Vaughan, introduced him to Paul McCartney, who was impressed by Lennon's ability to adlib lyrics on stage. During their chat, McCartney showed Lennon how he tuned his guitar and sang several songs for him.

It's safe to say they were mutually impressed. Lennon suggested to a band mate that they invite McCartney to join the Quarrymen. McCartney did and made his debut with the group on Oct. 18, 1957, at The New Clubmoor Hall in Liverpool. The next year, McCartney convinced Lennon to let guitarist George Harrison join the band.

### Why It Matters: The Beatles

Sure, Elvis Presley was still the King, and American Bandstand dancers were moving to the likes of Ike & Tina Turner. But when the Beatles hit U.S. shores in 1964, musicians became more than performers or entertainers—they became gods. That initial meeting between Lennon and McCartney also paved the way for everlasting Beatles-influenced songwriting and recording techniques around the world, from Michael Jackson to sampling to backward recordings.

# 4)

## The Fifth Solvay International Conference (1927)

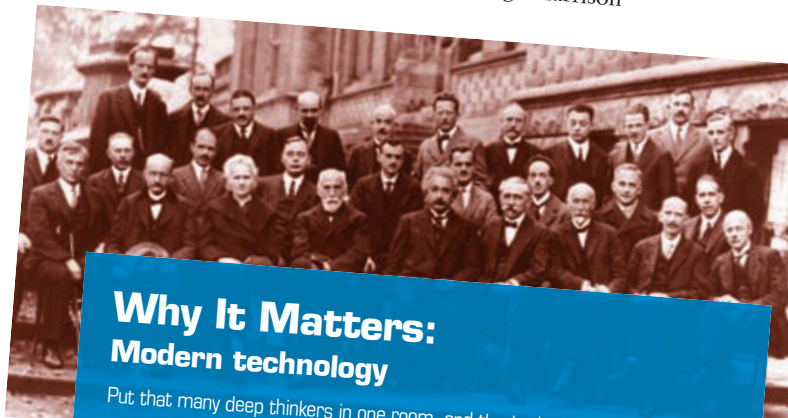
**IN 1911, ERNEST SOLVAY**, a Belgian chemist, organized the first Solvay Physics Conference, whose attendees included high-profile scientists such as Marie Curie, Albert Einstein and Max Planck. Einstein was the youngest person to attend the conference, and 16 years later he became one of the event's biggest-name attendees.

In addition to Einstein, other notables at the 1927 conference in Brussels, Belgium, were past and future Nobel Prize winners Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg and Erwin Schrödinger. The 29 attendees were there to discuss newly formulated theories about quantum mechanics, of which Einstein and Bohr famously had opposing opinions.

"God does not play dice," Einstein said on Heisenberg's "Uncertainty Principle."

"Einstein, stop telling God what to do," Bohr replied.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 100



### Why It Matters: Modern technology

Put that many deep thinkers in one room, and they're bound to come up with at least one thing that could change the world.

"The fifth Solvay conference was by any standards an important and memorable event," wrote Dr. Guido Bacciagaluppi—a senior research fellow at the Centre for Time at the University of Sydney (Australia)—in *Quantum Theory at the Crossroads: Reconsidering the 1927 Solvay Conference*. "In the official history, [it] went down (perhaps together with the Como meeting) as the occasion on which the interpretational issues were finally clarified."

It is this conference that started the ball rolling on what would later be the foundations for explaining subatomic behavior and modern technology (e.g., lasers, transistors, diodes, etc.). Let's just say, if you've ever used a light switch, you can thank quantum mechanics.

# 10 Meetings that Rocked the World



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 86



UN PHOTO

## 5) Dumbarton Oaks Conference (1944)

### Why It Matters: The United Nations

The Dumbarton Oaks Conference laid the foundation for creation of the United Nations, an organization that includes 192 member states and promotes international peace, human rights and social and economic development. Though not immune to controversy, the United Nations' aim for peaceful cooperation around the world is a goal only the most cynical criticize.

#### REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE U.S.,

the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the Republic of China met from Aug. 21 to Oct. 7, 1944, in a mansion in Washington, D.C. Their goal—originally set in motion at the Moscow Conference in 1943—was to create an international organization that would maintain peace after World War II. Like the previous League of Nations, the new organization would include a general assembly, a security council, an international court of justice and a secretariat.

“The purposes of the Organization should be,” the Dumbarton Oaks Proposal reads, “1. To maintain international peace and security, and to that end

to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace and the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means adjustment or settlement of international disputes which may lead to a breach of the peace; 2. To develop friendly relations among nations and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace; 3. To achieve international co-operation in the solution of international economic, social and other humanitarian problems; and 4. To afford a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the achievement of these common ends.”

## 6) Ray Kroc Meets Dick and Mac McDonald (1954)

**DICK AND MAC MCDONALD** were already doing a brisk business with their restaurants in California and Arizona when Ray Kroc, a traveling salesman pedaling five-speed milkshake multi-mixers, visited them in San Bernardino, Calif., in 1954.

He had heard that they were using eight of the mixers and he wanted to see them first hand. But what really impressed him were the restaurant's effectiveness and its limited and low-price menu of hamburgers, cheeseburgers, French fries, soft drinks and milkshakes. The McDonald brothers' assembly

line “Speedee Service System” and 15-cent burgers were so financially successful that lines of people snaked out the restaurant's doors.

“Something was definitely happening here, I told myself,” Kroc wrote in his autobiography, *Grinding It Out*. “This had to be the most amazing merchandising operation I'd ever seen.”

Kroc immediately met with the McDonald brothers and pitched them the idea of having him open more restaurants

across the country. He opened his first one in Des Plaines, Ill., in 1955. By 1959, there were 100 McDonald's in the U.S., and in 1961, Kroc bought all the rights from the McDonald brothers for US\$2.7 million.



### Why It Matters: McDonald's

Kroc's insight and gumption turned a small-scale franchise into one of the world's most recognizable brands. McDonald's is routinely criticized for forcing American culture onto non-U.S. countries. But, really, when it serves French fries this tasty, how can you not give in and embrace some good ol' U.S.A. fast food?

# 7) The Hampton Court Conference (1604)

**IN 1603, JAMES VI OF SCOTLAND** ascended to the English Throne, and with that came several petitions, most notably the Millenary Petition, which asked James to establish a complete Church of England reformation. To settle differences between Puritans and the Church of England's bishops, James called for a three-day conference in January 1604 at Hampton Court Palace.

On day one, James met with the church's bishops about issues such as confirmation ceremonies, excommunication and baptism, of which there was much division. For example, when Bishop of Peterbor-

ough Thomas Dove suggested that sand be used instead of water out of necessity, James replied, "A turd for the argument, he might as well have pissed on them."

The second day found the Puritan contingent meeting with James, but no agreements were settled on. James, however, did agree with one point suggested by John Reynolds,



## Why It Matters: The Authorized King James Version

Pieced together by 47 scholars, this version of the Bible was published in 1611 and greatly influenced the English language. "The literary effect of the King James version at first was less than its social effect; but in that very fact lies a striking literary influence," wrote Cleveland Boyd McAfee, D.D., in *The Great English Classic: A Study of the King James Version of the Bible and Its Influence on Life and Literature*. "For a long time it formed virtually the whole literature which was readily accessible to ordinary Englishmen. Our fathers got their phrases from one great book. Their writing and their speaking show the effect of that book."

president of Corpus Christi College in Oxford—the idea of a new translation for the Bible.

James met with the bishops and Puritans on the third day and decided that the new Bible version should be co-created between committees meeting at Cambridge, Oxford and Westminster.

**THE WORLD ANTI-SLAVERY CONVENTION** met in London in 1840, and a few U.S. groups chose women as representatives. Following a long discussion, the female representatives were seated in the balcony, roped off from the view of men at the convention.

It was up in the balcony, though, that Elizabeth Cady Stanton met Lucretia Mott. Together, they later organized a convention to discuss women's rights.

Held in Seneca Falls, N.Y., July 19-20, 1848, the convention publicly presented a *Declaration of Sentiments*, drafted by Stanton and based on the U.S. *Declaration of Independence*. Stanton's declaration says that all men and women are created equal and that the document's signers would go about any means to right wrongs done to women.

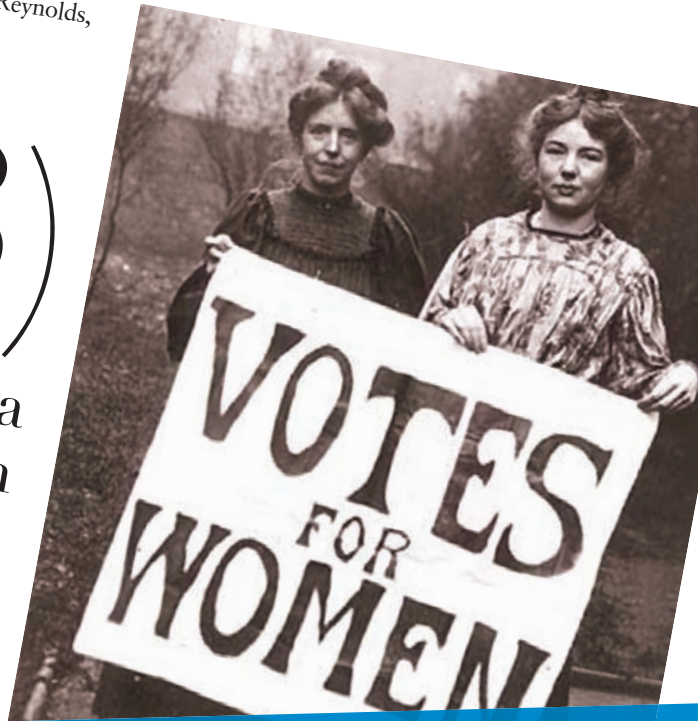
"The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her," Stanton wrote.

Wrongs toward women included disfranchisement, no participation in creating laws, the taxing of property and the giving of a married woman's wages and property to her husband. Also, some professions and higher education opportunities were denied to women.

The document was debated and ultimately signed by 100 of the 300 women that attended the conference. After the meeting, it was published as a pamphlet.

# 8)

## The Seneca Falls Convention (1848)



## Why It Matters: Women's rights

"This convention initiated the beginning of the organized women's rights movement in the U.S.," said Judith Wellman, Ph.D., professor emerita at the University of Virginia and author of *The Road to Seneca Falls*. "It set the model for conventions as the major organizing force for the woman's rights movement. It set an agenda (including the equality of women in politics, the law, marriage, the family, work, education, religion and personal respect) that engaged Americans nationwide from 1848 to the present. This meeting is the best known gathering of women in U.S. history, and the *Declaration of Sentiments* remains the single most important woman's rights document in U.S. history."

# 9) The Black Hand Secret Society (1911)

**SOME ORGANIZATIONS ARE CREATED** out of altruistic ideals, such as Amnesty International or the Red Cross. And then there are those that form out of malice, such as the Black Hand secret society. Formed in Serbia by 10 men in May 1911, the society's main goal was to create a greater Serbia, even if it involved violence.

"To realize the national ideal, the unification of all Serbs," the society said. "This organisation prefers terrorist action to cultural activities; it will therefore remain secret."

A member of the Serbian Army, Col. Dragutin Dimitrijevic, established himself as leader of the Black Hand. Dimitrijevic's primary concern was to liberate Serbia from Austro-Hungary.

In 1911, Dimitrijevic and the society plotted to assassinate Emperor Franz Josef, but the plan failed. The society, 2,500 members strong by 1914, then planned to assassinate Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne.



## Why It Matters: World War I

From its beginning, the Black Hand wanted nothing more than to free Serbia. When Gavrilo Princip assassinated Ferdinand in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, in June 1914—coordinated by Danilo Ljic, a Black Hand member—neither he nor the society had any idea it would lead to a war that would cause more than 40 million deaths. They, like many others, simply wanted independence. Imagine what would have happened if they tried to achieve it in a non-violent way.

Discuss these and other influential meetings at [www.mpiweb.org](http://www.mpiweb.org).



# 10) The Baghdad Conference (1960)

**PETROLEUM HAS BEEN KNOWN OF** and exploited by humans for more than 4,000 years. For example, asphalt was used for construction in the Fertile Crescent, oil wells were drilled in China in 347 A.D. and Baghdad's streets were covered in tar in the 8th century.

In the early 20th century, oil fields were established worldwide in countries such as Canada, Mexico and the U.S. By the 1950s, oil overtook coal as the world's primary fuel source.

With the establishment of the U.S. Mandatory Oil Import Quota Program in 1959, the amount of imported oil into the U.S. was

severely limited, with preferences to imports from Canada and Mexico. By excluding oil from the Persian Gulf, prices dropped, causing concern among some of the world's top oil-producing states.

Venezuelan Energy and Mines Minister Juan Pablo Pérez Alfonzo and Saudi Arabian Energy and Mines Minister Abdullah al-Tariki urged government representatives from Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela to hold the Baghdad Conference Sept. 10-14, 1960.

The meeting's main objective was to discuss crude oil production and to work on better communication among the invited countries.

**one+**

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## Why It Matters: The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)

The world doesn't run on love; it runs on oil (at least for now), and OPEC controls and influences member states' oil production and policies. Formed during the Baghdad Conference, OPEC has played a role in many conflicts since its creation because, unlike the Greeks who fought over beautiful women, countries today fight over land and what's beneath it.

