

Millennium Milestones

The 100 Most Significant Events of the Last Thousand Years

Reducing the millennium to a laundry list of highlights cannot pretend to be a definitive or accurate exercise. Note that only events judged to have *world* significance are included. Apologies for the inevitable bias toward Western as well as twentieth century events—we are all prisoners of our own history. For a less whirlwind glance at the last thousand years, see our [Millennium Timeline](#).

- 1066—[Norman Conquest](#) of Britain
- 1095—Pope Urban II calls for the [Crusades](#)
- 1100s—[Angkor Wat](#) is built
- 1206—[Genghis Khan](#) begins creation of largest land empire in history
- 1215—[Magna Carta](#) signed
- 1260—[Chartres Cathedral](#) consecrated
- 1271—[Marco Polo](#) begins travels to Asia
- 1273—[Thomas Aquinas](#)'s *Summa theologica*
- 1300s—[Renaissance](#) begins in Italy
- 1347—[Bubonic plague](#) (Black Death) spreads in Europe
- c.1387—[Chaucer](#)'s *Canterbury Tales*
- 1399—[Tamerlane](#) begins last great conquest
- 1438—[Incan Empire](#) formed in Peru
- 1455—[Gutenberg](#)'s movable-type printing press produces the Bible
- 1492—[Columbus](#) reaches the New World
- 1509—[Michelangelo](#) begins painting Sistine Chapel
- 1513—[Machiavelli](#)'s *The Prince*
- 1517—[Martin Luther](#) initiates Reformation
- 1519—[Aztec Empire](#) at height as Spanish arrive
- 1520—[Suleiman I](#) “the Magnificent” presides over the Ottoman Empire's greatest period
- 1522—[Magellan](#)'s expedition circumnavigates the globe
- 1543—[Copernicus](#) postulates a [heliocentric universe](#)
- 1582—[Pope Gregory XIII](#) reforms [calendar](#)
- 1603—[Shakespeare](#)'s *Hamlet*
- 1605—[Cervantes](#)'s *Don Quixote*, first modern novel
- 1609—[Galileo](#) makes first astronomical observations with a telescope
- 1637—[Descartes](#) publishes *Discours de la méthode*
- 1643—[Taj Mahal](#) completed
- 1664—[Newton](#)'s theory of universal [gravitation](#)
- 1667—[Milton](#)'s *Paradise Lost*
- 1684—[Leibniz](#)'s [calculus](#) published
- 1690—[Locke](#)'s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*
- 1721—[Bach](#) completes the Brandenburg Concertos
- 1755—[Johnson](#)'s *Dictionary of the English Language*
- 1760—[Industrial Revolution](#) begins in England
- 1762—[Rousseau](#)'s *The Social Contract*

- 1764—[Mozart](#) (aged eight) writes first symphony
- 1769—[Watt](#) patents first practical [steam engine](#)
- 1776—U.S. [Declaration of Independence](#); [Adam Smith](#)'s *Wealth of Nations*
- 1787—[U.S. Constitution](#) signed
- 1789—[French Revolution](#) begins
- 1792—[Wollstonecraft](#)'s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*
- 1796—[Jenner](#) discovers [smallpox vaccine](#)
- 1808—[Beethoven](#)'s *Fifth Symphony*
- 1815—Battle of Waterloo crushes [Napoleon](#)
- 1819—[Bolívar](#) defeats Spanish forces at Boyacá
- 1826—Niepce takes first [photograph](#)
- 1833—[Slavery abolished](#) in British Empire
- 1842—Long uses [first anesthetic](#) (ether)
- 1859—[Darwin](#)'s *On the Origin of Species*; Lenoir builds first practical internal-combustion engine
- 1862—[Pasteur](#)'s experiments lead to germ theory; Salon des Refusés introduces [impressionism](#)
- 1867—Japan ends 675-year [shogun rule](#)
- 1876—[Bell](#) patents the telephone
- 1879—[Edison](#) invents electric light
- 1880s—Europe colonizes [African continent](#)
- 1885—World's [first skyscraper](#) built in Chicago
- 1893—[New Zealand](#) becomes first country in the world to grant [women the vote](#)
- 1895—Lumière brothers introduce [motion pictures](#); [Marconi](#) sends first radio signals
- 1897—Herzl launches [Zionist movement](#)
- 1900—[Freud](#)'s *Interpretation of Dreams*
- 1903—[Wright brothers](#) fly first motorized airplane
- 1905—[Einstein](#) announces theory of relativity
- 1907—[Picasso](#)'s *Les Femmes d'Alger* introduces cubism
- 1911—[Rutherford](#) discovers structure of atom
- 1913—[Ford](#) develops first moving [assembly line](#)
- 1914—[World War I](#) begins
- 1916—[Sanger](#) founds international [birth control movement](#)
- 1917—[Lenin](#) leads the [Bolshevik Revolution](#)
- 1918—Global "[Spanish flu](#)" epidemic
- 1922—[Joyce](#)'s *Ulysses* published
- 1927—[Farnsworth](#) demonstrates working model of a [television](#); [Lemaître](#) proposes [big bang theory](#)
- 1928—[Fleming](#) discovers [penicillin](#)
- 1929—[Hubble](#) proposes [theory of expanding universe](#); U.S. stock market crash precipitates global depression
- 1936—[Keynes](#)'s *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*
- 1939—[Hitler](#) invades Poland; [World War II](#) begins
- 1942—Nazi leaders at [Wannsee Conference](#) coordinate "[final solution to the Jewish question](#)"
- 1945—[Atomic bombs](#) are dropped on [Hiroshima](#) and [Nagasaki](#); [first electronic computer](#), ENIAC, is built; [Arab League](#) launches modern [pan-Arabism](#)
- 1946—First meeting of [U.N. General Assembly](#); [Churchill](#)'s "Iron Curtain" speech marks beginning of [cold war](#)
- 1947—[Gandhi](#)'s civil disobedience movement leads to an independent India
- 1949—Communist victory in [China](#) under [Mao Zedong](#)
- 1950s—[Abstract expressionism](#) introduced
- 1953—Watson, Crick, and Franklin discover [DNA's structure](#)

- **1954**—[Brown v. Board of Education](#) begins unraveling of [U.S. racial segregation](#)
- **1957**—Russia launches [first satellite](#), *Sputnik I*
- **1959**—[Mary and Louis Leakey](#) uncover [hominid fossils](#)
- **1969**—Armstrong and Aldrin [walk on the Moon](#); [Internet](#) (ARPA) goes online
- **1980**—[Smallpox](#) eradicated
- **1981**—Scientists identify [AIDS](#)
- **1989**—[Fall of Communism](#) in Eastern Europe
- **1991**—[Breakup of Soviet Union](#); [apartheid ends](#) in South Africa