



The Letters of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. , Andrew Schlesinger (Editor) , Stephen C. Schlesinger (Editor)

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This extraordinary collection gathers the never-before-seen correspondence of a true American original—the acclaimed historian and lion of the liberal establishment, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

An advisor to presidents, two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, and tireless champion of progressive government, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., was also an inveterate letter writer. Indeed, the term “man of letters” could easily have been coined for Schlesinger, a faithful and prolific correspondent whose wide range of associates included powerful public officials, notable literary figures, prominent journalists, Hollywood celebrities, and distinguished fellow scholars.

The Letters of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. reveals the late historian’s unvarnished views on the great issues and personalities of his time, from the dawn of the Cold War to the aftermath of September 11. Here is Schlesinger’s correspondence with such icons of American statecraft as Harry Truman, Adlai Stevenson, Hubert Humphrey, Henry Kissinger, Bill Clinton, and, of course, John and Robert Kennedy (including a detailed critique of JFK’s manuscript for Profiles in Courage). There are letters to friends and confidants such as Eleanor Roosevelt, John Kenneth Galbraith, Gore Vidal, William Styron, and Jacqueline Kennedy (to whom Schlesinger sends his handwritten condolences in the hours after her husband’s assassination), and exchanges with such unlikely pen pals as Groucho Marx, Sammy Davis, Jr., and Bianca Jagger. Finally, there are Schlesinger’s many thoughtful replies to the inquiries of ordinary citizens, in which he offers his observations on influences, issues of the day, and the craft of writing history.

Written with the range and insight that made Schlesinger an indispensable figure, these letters reflect the evolution of his thought—and of American liberalism—from the 1940s to the first decade of the new millennium. Whether he is arguing against the merits of preemptive war, advocating for a more forceful policy on civil rights, or simply explaining his preference in neckwear (“For sloppy eaters bow ties are a godsend”), Schlesinger reveals himself as a formidable debater and consummate wit who reveled in rhetorical combat. To a detractor who accuses him of being a Communist sympathizer, he writes: “If your letter was the product of sincere misunderstanding, the facts I have cited should relieve your mind. If not, I can only commend you to the nearest psychiatrist.” Elsewhere, he castigates a future Speaker of the House, John Boehner, for misattributing quotations to Abraham Lincoln.

Combining a political strategist’s understanding of the present moment with a historian’s awareness that the eyes of posterity were always watching him, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., helped shape the course of an era with these letters. This landmark collection frames the remarkable dynamism of the twentieth-century and ensures that Schlesinger’s legacy will continue to influence this one.

The Letters of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. Details

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From Reader Review The Letters of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. for online ebook

Jennifer says

This guy was brilliant.

Kme_17 says

I receive this as a first read. This one is a definitely a history lesson. I learned a lot about Schlesinger and his thoughts on politics. I did like some of the letters show his sense of humor. However this was a very detailed book which is wonderful however sometimes there is a little bit to much detailed. It is a very interesting book however and those who are interested in history or politics will love this book.

Martin says

Outstanding book. American needs him back. This is an excellent view of the history of the latter half of the 20th century-and he is an excellent writer.

thewanderingjew says

Arthur Schlesinger Jr. lived through tumultuous times of financial decline and enormous prosperity that were coupled with an era of brutal wars and extended peace. Although the book begins decades ago, it exposes the same rank political partisanship of today. A Liberal, Schlesinger is positive that any election of a Republican will doom the country, if not his party, as well. Everything is viewed as conspiracy and everything done by the other side is evil. Anyone who disagrees with the liberal view is wrong and will come to their senses in the future. He sees the political campaigns as riddled with crudeness and negativity. The book reads like the who's who of liberal politics and will inform the reader in myriad ways through the letters, the footnotes and the comments. It reads like a history book, but is less dry, although it is not a page turner, by any means. It needs to be read slowly in order to absorb all of the information. For a historian, it might be old hat, but for the layman, the book is eye-opening. It sure shows that politics has remained as corrupt and malignant as ever.

Schlesinger's liberalism is emphasized from the beginning of the book, however, in some ways it seems a bit different than today's more radical progressive ideas. He believes in individual rights and the right to privacy. Today, as the government moves more and more to control our civil rights, regulate our choices and monitor our phones, we have lost a good deal of both of those policies he supported.

He went to Phillips Exeter and claimed it was conservative. Today, most academic institutions lean totally to the left, unless there is a religious element to the school. I was surprised to read that his paternal grandfather was Jewish, but I don't believe that much of that religion was left in his background in any other way than the adherence to liberal views.

He believed that the democrats had cornered the market on civil rights, yet it was the republicans who ultimately supported an end to slavery and the democrats who supported the KKK, including the Democrat, Senator Byrd, who served for years and was reelected until his death. For the Southern Democrats, slavery

was integral to their economy. It was the Democrat, Woodrow Wilson, who segregated Washington DC and Eisenhower, the Republican, who desegregated it. I remark about these historic events merely to point out that there is often a selective memory on the part of many Democrats, as well as Republicans, when they want to make their case and prove their point about their policies. They have a belief in an ideology, but perhaps a blindness to the actual facts.

In an era in which letter writing has become a lost art, losing out to the sound bite and the mobile telephone, it is refreshing to look back to a time when the written word had value and import. Arthur wrote countless letters which have preserved the history of his experience and the experience of this country. The first letter featured in the book is a letter home to the family at large, to tell them about the day the war ended in Europe, and to describe the ensuing celebrations which were over the top, but probably necessary and warranted after so many years of fighting.

The footnotes on some pages are longer than the text and it can be distracting, although between the letters and the footnotes it is a terrific history of the country from 1946 until his death from a liberal/progressive point of view. Perhaps the times were not as bitter and divisive as they are today, but the seeds for this schism were definitely being sown.

Schlesinger had many ideas which fly in the face of the liberal views of today. He was against direct talks with Russia, but the current Obama administration wants direct talks with many countries in which we have adversarial relationships, Iran being one. At times, he seemed to believe that liberals supported policies simply to appear to be on the side of social justice, regardless of the issue involved. However, he found himself in opposition to anything resembling Republican values, considered them useless. He favored academics, like Obama, not businessmen in high positions. He believed academics would be better fund raisers since they were more familiar with the product they were selling!

He believed that the failure of democratic polices was not due to the quality of the policy, but a result of an ignorant public that didn't understand the reasons behind them and needed to be educated, which does not seem that different from the popular view of today's White House, especially with regard to The Affordable Health Care Act and immigration reform.

Although I have not quite finished the book, I wanted to put something on paper so others might decide to read it. It is definitely an education into liberal policy and a window into the minds of the strong liberals of his time. What goes round comes around, and politics remains the same. Eleanor Roosevelt, in her column, wrote, probably tongue in cheek, that she never thought Stevenson was a socialist and asks, "did you"? The same question has been asked today, of our current President.

Roger says

The Letters give you a history lesson of sorts of liberalism in America from the late 1940s to the 1990s. Schlesinger was in the forefront of the the liberal movement in the US. He corresponded with Presidents to movie stars and the average American. Schlesinger was a leading historian of the US and advisors to the political campaigns of many. Interesting insights on his advice and perspective of events of the times.

Aisling says

Nothing is more compelling than reading the personal letters of an iconic figure. This book is a most impressive collection of private letters written by a man who loved to write. The letters span from 1945-2006 and are to and from more notables than I can list here (but many American political figures, many in the entertainment and literary fields and of course to family). To me this was a rare glimpse into history. What makes this book great is the prologue, the incredibly detailed footnotes and a comprehensive index. Where it

falters--slightly--is in length. I wonder if it might have been better to separate political and personal letters? For those wishing to learn about Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., this book will be invaluable. For those wishing just to read first hand accounts of history as it happened, this may prove too long. Four and three quarters stars--I'll round up.

Heath says

A delightful romp through 20th Century United States history through the eyes of one of the giants of liberal thought.
