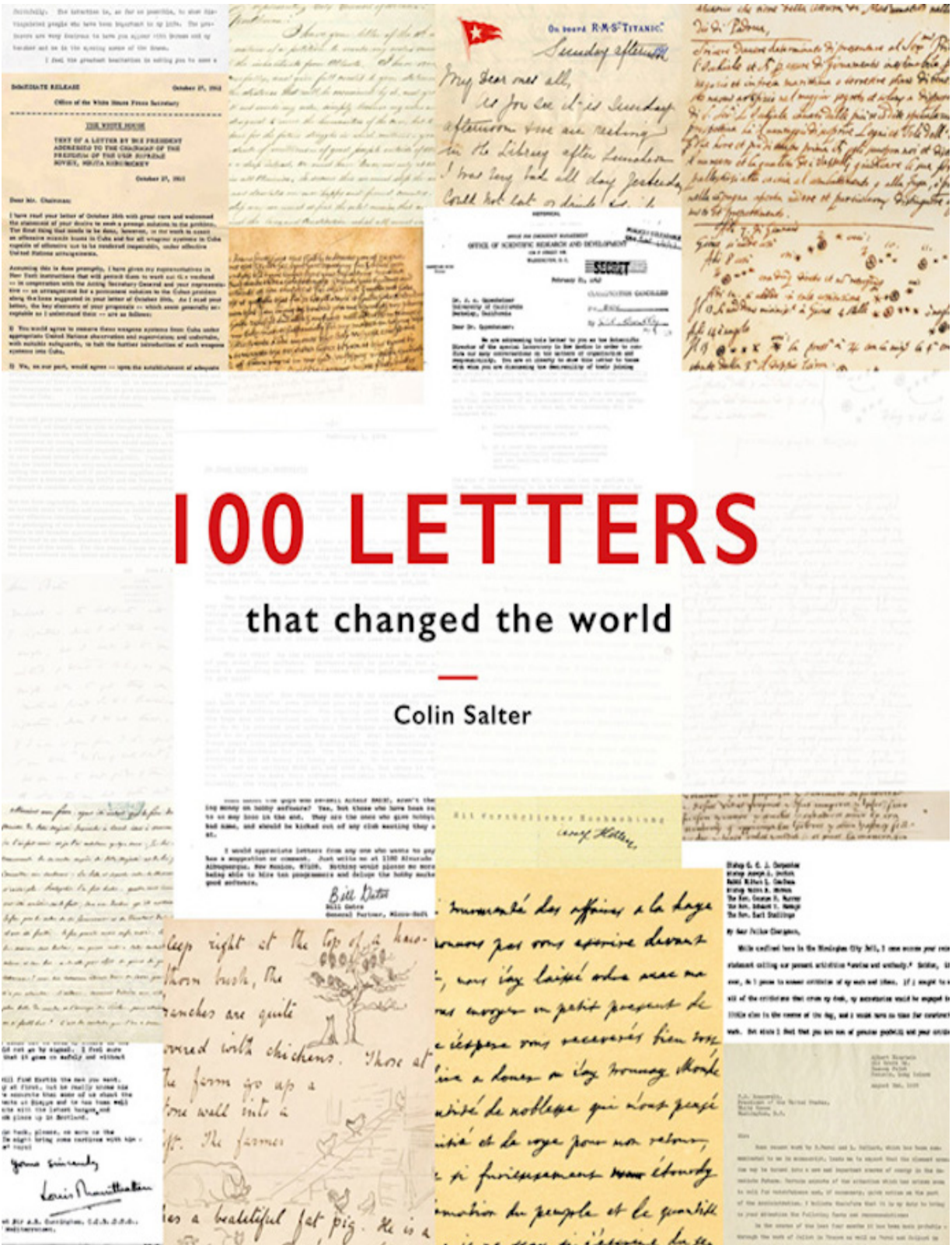




100 LETTERS

that changed the world

Colin Salter

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A montage of many of the letters included in the book.

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- 1939 Eleanor Roosevelt takes a stand against the Daughters of the American Revolution
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- 1962 On the brink of war, Khrushchev sends a conciliatory letter to Kennedy
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- 1965 Che Guevara tells Fidel Castro he wants to continue the fight
- 1973 James McCord writes to Judge John Sirica after the

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- 1976 Ronald Wayne sells his 10 per cent share in Apple for \$800
- 1976 Bill Gates writes an open letter to computer hobbyists who are ripping off his software
- 1991 Michael Schumacher crosses out 'the' and becomes World Champion
- 1999 Boris Yeltsin admits running Russia was tougher than he expected
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- 2003 Dr David Kelly admits he was the source for critical BBC report
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- 2010 Chelsea Manning writes to Wikileaks with a data dump
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Introduction

Ever since the spoken word evolved into its written form, letters have played a significant part in history. Some have played a pivotal role and shaped the fate of nations, others have recorded momentous events, while many have simply given us an insight into what it was like to live in times past.



On board R.M.S. "TITANIC."

Sunday afternoon 1912

My Dear ones all,

As you see it is Sunday
afternoon & we are resting
in the Library after Lunch.
I was very bad all day yesterday,
Could not eat or drink, & sick
all the while, but today I have
got over it. This morning I
& I went to church & she was so
pleased they sang "Oh God our
help in ages past; that is her
Hymn she sang so nicely, so
she sang out loud, she is
very bonny. She has had a
Rice Ball & a box of Toffee

Letters from the ill-fated transatlantic liner RMS Titanic have often turned up at auctions and commanded high prices. Ironically RMS is short for Royal Mail Ship.

Edinburgh,
Scotland
2019

Dear Reader,

I thought it was a good time to write you a short letter. This book is all about letters from history – letters from figures great and small. Within these pages you will find private letters, public letters and open letters; letters to be obeyed, disobedient letters; first letters, chain letters, last letters, lost letters, telegrams, and a couple of important messages sent on the eve of battle.

They may or may not have changed history, but all have historical significance. Pliny the Younger's eyewitness account of the 79 AD eruptions of Vesuvius didn't change history, but his letters to Tacitus describing the event have provided archaeologists with a vivid insight for the excavations at Pompeii and Herculaneum. His uncle, Pliny the Elder, died during the catastrophe, and his report was so accurate that his name is remembered by modern volcanologists when they speak of Plinian eruptions.

Other letters are much more intimate in their contents. Here you will find an example of Henry VIII's courtly letters to the latest love of his life, Anne Boleyn; letters that curiously ended up in the Vatican in Rome. They also include Pierre Curie's first attempt to make his partnership with his future wife Maria (later, Marie) more than merely a scientific collaboration. After her spell as a student in Paris she returned home to her native Poland to continue her work there. He wrote her an impassioned letter and she came back to Paris.

Marie Curie is not the only scientist to have received a letter which ultimately led to world-changing scientific breakthroughs. The routine letter which advised a young Charles Darwin that there was a place as Naturalist on the surveying vessel HMS *Beagle* was an ordinary piece of correspondence, but as a result of that five-year trip he developed his theory of Natural Selection. There are letters from technological pioneers, including one from Galileo in 1609 describing the moons of Jupiter, which he had just seen through his telescope, and the telegram from the Wright Brothers immediately after their historic first flight. Leonardo da Vinci's 1480 CV and covering letter to the Duke of Milan includes career highlights you won't find on any other CV.

Elsewhere you can read the letter that gave J. Robert Oppenheimer the go-ahead to develop the atomic bomb, which is interesting for the fact that it doesn't mention the atomic bomb. If that was Oppenheimer's beginning, his end was the letter from William Borden which accused him of being a Communist spy. And the consequences of his work – nuclear weapons – nearly brought the world to extinction, averted only by the correspondence between Nikita Khrushchev and President Kennedy to resolve the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

Oppenheimer wasn't a spy; but espionage is a theme that runs through much of the book. You can read about the scandal of letters secretly passed to Ben Franklin which revealed the true opinion of Britain's governor of the Massachusetts colony; and you can read the letter from George Washington commissioning America's first spy ring. The book also contains the letter suggesting that one of

Britain's most notorious spies, Guy Burgess, had passed through his Communism phase, as if it were a childhood illness.

Britain's own spy network was well established by the sixteenth century, when it uncovered letters of collusion between Mary, Queen of Scots and a group plotting to assassinate Queen Elizabeth I of England. There's also the story of the Bletchley Park codebreakers who wrote directly to Winston Churchill begging for more resources to help break the Germans' Enigma code; work which would eventually turn the tide in favour of the Allies in World War II.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
DIVISION OF LANGUAGE SERVICES

(TRANSLATION)

LS NO. 45989
T-85/T-94
Russian

[Embossed Seal of the USSR]

Moscow, October 23, 1962

Mr. President:

I have just received your letter, and have also acquainted myself with the text of your speech of October 22 regarding Cuba.

I must say frankly that the measures indicated in your statement constitute a serious threat to peace and to the security of nations. The United States has openly taken the path of grossly violating the United Nations Charter, the path of violating international norms of freedom of navigation on the high seas, the path of aggressive actions both against Cuba and against the Soviet Union.

The statement by the Government of the United States of America can only be regarded as undisguised interference in the internal affairs of the Republic of Cuba, the Soviet Union and other states. The United Nations Charter and international norms give no right to any state to institute in international waters the inspection of vessels bound for the shores of the Republic of Cuba.

And naturally, neither can we recognize the right of the United States to establish control over armaments which are necessary for the Republic of Cuba to strengthen its defense capability.

We reaffirm that the armaments which are in Cuba, regardless of the classification to which they may belong, are intended solely for defensive purposes in order to secure the Republic of Cuba against the attack of an aggressor.

His Excellency
John Kennedy,
President of the United States of America

6711
1.
DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 11652, Sec. 3(E) and 5(10) of (E)
State Dept Bulletin 1795
By [illegible] Date 11/27/73

One of the most critical letters from history, sent by Russian leader Nikita Khrushchev to John F. Kennedy during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

Wars are history's ugly landmarks – the milestones through time which change the lives of millions. The first letter in the book is an impertinent reply to an ancient Greek army demanding the surrender of its enemy Sparta. Elsewhere there are letters between allies (for example Roosevelt and Churchill, Hitler and Mussolini) and enemies (Napoleon of France declaring war on Alexander I of Russia), and between winners and losers. General Sherman's letter to the citizens of Atlanta during the Civil War is a very human acknowledgment of the necessary horrors of war, while the telegram reporting the bombing of Pearl Harbor is stark in its brevity.

There are more personal accounts of war, too. Sullivan Ballou's loving letter to his wife Sarah was found among his possessions after his death at the First Battle of Bull Run in 1861. Poet Siegfried Sassoon's outspoken letter to his commanding officer during World War I may have helped him to survive the conflict. John F. Kennedy's celebrated letter-on-a-coconut certainly saved his life when he was stranded on a Pacific Island after his patrol boat was sunk.

Modern espionage is as likely to be corporate or political as military. James McCord admitted the extent of his involvement in the Watergate Affair in a confessional letter which blew the scandal wide open. The whistleblower is a modern phenomenon and this book includes letters from those who exposed malpractice at institutions as diverse as Enron and the National Security Agency.

Often at personal risk, these individuals have always brought about change and a new transparency which benefits us all.

In Britain, weapons inspector Dr David Kelly admitted in a letter to the Ministry of Defence that he had expressed misgivings about the veracity of a 'dodgy dossier' assembled to aid Tony Blair's call to arms for the Iraq war. Once the news of that letter was in the public domain he was hounded by press and politicians alike. The fallout tainted the careers of all involved and drove him to take his own life. Suicide notes can be grimly fascinating, and we have included Virginia Woolf's achingly sad last letter to her husband, as well as what was meant to be the last letter from French poet Baudelaire to his mistress. Despite stabbing himself in the chest he managed to miss any vital organs and survived to write his best work.

FROM THE PRIME MINISTER



10, Downing Street
Whitehall.



I wish the "Salute the Soldier" Campaign every success.

It provides an opportunity for the whole nation to demonstrate the pride and affection we all feel for the men in the British Armies. During this year they will be engaged in nearly every theatre of war throughout the world in what we hope may prove to be the decisive stages in this great conflict.

I have no doubt that through this Campaign we shall proclaim once more the whole-hearted devotion of the people of Great Britain united in support of those ideals for which our men go out to fight.

Winston Churchill

**SALUTE
THE SOLDIER**



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Better known for his rousing speeches than his letters, during World War II Churchill wrote a letter to support the Salute the Soldier campaign to raise funds for military equipment.

Other arts are represented in the book. The roots of Beatrix Potter's popular Peter Rabbit books are in a letter she wrote to a young friend; Vincent van Gogh tried to explain his art to his brother Theo in a letter; and a letter from Mozart to his wife illustrates the frenzy of his final days of urgent composition. Pop music has largely replaced the classical repertoire in the public's hearts. It's incredible to think that the Beatles received a rejection letter from Britain's leading record company at the start of their career.

Oscar Wilde is here too, but not for a letter with a string of witty *bon mots*. He wrote a celebrated letter from Reading Gaol, where he was forced to reflect on his wild living. Martin Luther King Jr. also found time in prison to write a long letter, in defence of the crime of civil disobedience for which he had been locked up. Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, a member of the feminist Russian punk group Pussy Riot, wrote philosophical letters during her detention for hooliganism which consider the vital role of public protest.

My lord after my most humble recommendations this shall be to you to grace
as I am not bound my humble thanks for the great pains and travail that to
grace doth take in forwarding by to my name and great diligent love to bring
to pass generally the greatest thing that is possible to me to my great liking
and in especial remembering the marriage and betrothal I undenyngly
to his highness/and for you I do bite my self never to have desisted by my dayes
that you should take this great pains for me yet daily of to goodness I do praye
by all my friends and though that I have not knowledge by them the daily
proof of to doth doth declare to me and my prayer toward me to be
true none good my lord to desist may comfort as yet for as much as
it is in my power to requite you but all only to my good not the which
I assure you that after this matter is brought to pass you shall find me
as I am bound in the mean time to be to you my self and to be to be
what thing in this world I can in my power to do you please in you
shall find me the gladdest woman in the world to do it and to
be to the great grace of me thing I make you full promise to be to be
to have it and that is my heart love undenyngly desiring my life
and being fully determined to good grace never to change this
purpose I make amend of this my pen and to be to be to be
praying other lord to send you much increase of honors to long life
to the hand of her that deserveth to grace to keep this letter
as preserving from one that is most bound to be

To the noble and
valiant prince

Anne Boleyn

The neat handwriting of Queen Anne Boleyn, writing to thank Cardinal Wolsey for promoting her marriage to Henry VIII.

King and another famous prisoner, Nelson Mandela, wrote letters as part of the centuries-long fight for civil rights for Africans and

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Colin Salter is a history writer with degrees from Manchester Metropolitan University, England and Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh, Scotland. He is the author of three books in the series *Science Is Beautiful*, which looks at microscopic images of human, animal and plant life. His most recent publications are *Remarkable Road Trips*, *The Moon Landings: One Giant Leap*, *100 Books That Changed the World* and *100 Speeches That Changed the World*. He is currently working on a memoir based in part on letters written to and by his ancestors over a period of two hundred years. His most prized possession is a letter to his great great great uncle from the leader of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution, thanking him for his support. "To hold such a letter," Colin says, "is to touch history."

Publisher's note: Unusual, outdated, or erroneous spelling and terminology have been retained in the featured transcripts in order to accurately reflect the source material.