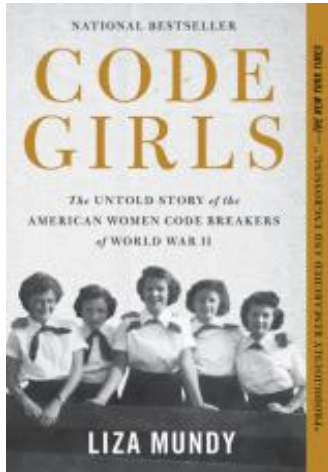


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# Code Girls: The Untold Story of the American Women Code Breakers of World War II

by Liza Mundy

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## About the Book

**CODE GIRLS** is the award-winning national bestseller about the American women who secretly served as code breakers during World War II --- a "prodigiously researched and engrossing" (*New York Times*) book that "shines a light on a hidden chapter of American history" (*Denver Post*).

Recruited by the U.S. Army and Navy from small towns and elite colleges, more than 10,000 women served as code breakers during World War II. While their brothers and boyfriends took up arms, these women moved to Washington and learned the meticulous work of code-breaking. Their efforts shortened the war, saved countless lives, and gave them access to careers previously denied to them. A strict vow of secrecy nearly erased their efforts from history. Now, through dazzling research and interviews with surviving code girls, Liza Mundy brings to life this riveting and vital story of American courage, service and scientific accomplishment.

## Discussion Guide

1. What particular skills and characteristics did the Army and Navy look for in the women recruited to their code-breaking programs? How were stereotypes about women employed or challenged in the recruitment effort?
2. How did World War Two affect personal and romantic relationships? What were Americans' attitudes toward marriage then --- and did those attitudes change at all for the "code girls" generation?
3. Why do you think Dot Braden and Ruth "Crow" Weston became such great friends? If they had met in other circumstances or in peacetime, do you think they would have gotten along just as well?
4. Consider the various motivations Mundy cites for the women who signed up as code breakers. Do you think they

differed from those of the men serving in America's military then?

5. Some of the code girls were affected by the extended secrecy of their work. How might keeping secrets, however necessary, affect a person's relationships or her identity in the world?

6. What were the particular successes and struggles of Agnes Driscoll? Why might she have eventually resorted "to extreme measures to retain her authority"?

7. What does it mean that the organizational hierarchy of Arlington Hall was relatively "flat"? How was this beneficial to the code girls?

8. Frank Raven, while acknowledging the skills of the "damn good gals," also concluded that many of the code girls were "damn pretty gals." What effect might this statement and the perspective of people like Raven have had on the women and their work?

9. Barnard's Virginia Gildersleeve noticed in the marching WAVES "a remarkable cross section of the women of the United States of America, from all our economic and social classes...and from all our multitude of racial origins and religions." What might have caused such diversity and cooperation, and how do you think this changed after the war, if at all?

10. What were the challenges for many of the women after the war?

11. Why do you think these women's contributions to cryptanalysis remained a secret for so long?

12. Mundy suggests that "many of the code-breaking women...advance[d] the feminist movement." Do you agree?

13. In January 2016, the American armed services finally lifted a ban on women serving in positions of direct combat. What challenges do you think women still face in the military today?

## Author Bio

Liza Mundy is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *THE RICHER SEX: How the New Majority of Female Breadwinners Is Transforming Sex, Love and Family* and *MICHELLE: A Biography*. She has worked as a reporter at the *Washington Post* and contributed to numerous publications, including *The Atlantic*, *TIME*, *The New Republic*, *Slate*, *Mother Jones* and *The Guardian*. She is a frequent commentator on countless prominent national television, radio and online news outlets, and has positioned herself at the prestigious New America Foundation as one of the nation's foremost experts on women and work issues.

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