**Liar, Temptress, Soldier, Spy  
by Karen Abbott**

**About the Book**

Karen Abbott, the New York Times bestselling author of Sin in the Second City and “pioneer of sizzle history” (USA Today), tells the spellbinding true story of four women who risked everything to become spies during the Civil War.

Karen Abbott illuminates one of the most fascinating yet little known aspects of the Civil War: the stories of four courageous women—a socialite, a farmgirl, an abolitionist, and a widow—who were spies.

After shooting a Union soldier in her front hall with a pocket pistol, Belle Boyd became a courier and spy for the Confederate army, using her charms to seduce men on both sides. Emma Edmonds cut off her hair and assumed the identity of a man to enlist as a Union private, witnessing the bloodiest battles of the Civil War. The beautiful widow, Rose O’Neale Greenhow, engaged in affairs with powerful Northern politicians to gather intelligence for the Confederacy, and used her young daughter to send information to Southern generals. Elizabeth Van Lew, a wealthy Richmond abolitionist, hid behind her proper Southern manners as she orchestrated a far-reaching espionage ring, right under the noses of suspicious rebel detectives.

Using a wealth of primary source material and interviews with the spies’ descendants, Abbott seamlessly weaves the adventures of these four heroines throughout the tumultuous years of the war. With a cast of real-life characters including Walt Whitman, Nathaniel Hawthorne, General Stonewall Jackson, detective Allan Pinkerton, Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln, and Emperor Napoleon III, Liar, Temptress, Soldier, Spy draws you into the war as these daring women lived it.

**About the Author**:

Abbott is a featured contributor to Smithsonian magazine's history blog, Past Imperfect, and also writes for Disunion, the New York Times series about the Civil War. A native of Philadelphia, where she worked as a journalist, she now lives in New York City with her husband and two African Grey parrots, Poe and Dexter.

**If you enjoyed this book*:***

* The Woman Who Would Be King by Kara Cooney
* Rebel Yell by S.C. Gwynne
* American Jezebel by Eve LaPlante
* Capital Dames by Cokie Roberts
* The Scarlet Sisters by Myra MacPherson

**Discussion Questions**

1. How many in the group recall learning about Belle Boyd, Elizabeth Van Lew, Rose O’Neal Greenhow, or Sarah Emma Edmonds prior to this book? Given their individual stories, is that surprising? Why do you think this is?

2. Author Karen Abbott specifically did not want to write about a single individual, instead repeatedly calling on the word tapestry to describe the weaving of multiple stories. Why do you think she chose these four women specifically?

3. Which of the four primary characters most fascinated you or elicited the strongest connection for you? Why?

4. What factors might influence how we respond to each character? Did the affiliation with North or South matter to you? Personality? Circumstances? Traditional bias toward how women should behave?

5. For each of the four women, what were the most memorable escapades? How effective was each in advancing her cause?

6. Did you feel you had good sense of what in their pasts led these women to these roles? Did any surprise you?

7. What made the women more effective as spies than their male counterparts?

8. How did the women turn societal assumptions or traditions regarding gender to their advantage?

9. How would you describe each character’s relationships with the men in their lives?

10. Which of the supporting characters made an impression? For instance, what did you think of the parts played by Jerome Robbins or Mary Bowser?

11. Is each word in the title intended to correspond to one of the women, or does it hold a different message?

13. The author’s intention was that this history read like a novel. How successful was she? What qualities support or contradict that intent?

14. What is gained by intertwining the four stories in a chronological structure? Would you have preferred to focus on one character at a time in four sections?

16. Most everyone studies the Civil War, but hardly any are taught about Civil War spies, much less women as spies. Why not? What is the value of history instruction beyond battles and traditional leaders? Would you argue for better inclusion of stories like these in general histories?