

**Communicating through Code: Elizebeth Friedman's Crackdown on Nazi Spy Rings  
during WWII**

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Group Website

Word Count: 495

### **Choosing Our Topic**

Our selection process was long-winded. We first sought out events in history that would best fit the theme “Communication in History: the Key to Understanding”, and agreed on the Zimmerman Telegram. However, after extensive research, we concluded that while it was a topic with ample sources, we could not relate to it on any level and thus ceased research altogether. Not long after, KeQing chanced upon a comic about Elizebeth Friedman. The comic detailed Friedman’s work cracking the complex codes of infamous mobsters in the Prohibition era, but exempted other aspects of her life. After more investigation into her background, we discovered her involvement in the dismantling of spy rings in World War II, which not only aligned with this year’s theme but took place in a similar setting to our first topic.

### **Conducting Our Research**

We started research where most did, internet databases. Using the information from available websites, we were able to create a vague timeline of the events that ensued. The comic that led us to this topic also referenced *The Codebreaker*, a PBS show from the program *American Experience*. This documentary not only gave us a detailed look into Friedman’s life, but also allowed us to divide the information we already obtained into more manageable chunks. The interviews in the show also directed us toward the books of experts, which we used as a jumping-off point for more primary and secondary sources. From that point on, our goal was to collect as many resources from the time period as possible, like newspaper articles and photographs, which would allow us to get a greater understanding of Elizebeth Friedman’s story.

### **Planning Our Project**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the chances of us meeting up and consolidating our sources was low. This meant doing a documentary, exhibit or performance was not ideal, so we chose the one remaining option. Sneha had previously built a website using Weebly, but since NHD had created a new interface, both of us had to learn from scratch. We watched multiple tutorials on how to construct one, and eventually got the hang of it. We individually collected and researched, then shared our findings through a Google Meet. Although the pandemic came with a lack of motivation and difficulty communicating, the interest we both had in the topic was more than enough to offset it.

### **Connection to the Theme**

The work of Elizebeth Friedman during World War II connects to the theme “Communication in History: the Key to Understanding” through her relaying of messages to the FBI to prevent Nazi spies from overturning the balance in the Western Hemisphere. Her quick decoding allowed the Allies to remain aware of the Germans’ political motives and clandestine U-boat attacks, eventually resulting in the continent declaring war against Axis powers. Friedman not only contributed to the establishment and refinement of military intelligence, but being one of the only women in the field also set the standard for future female cryptanalysts.