

Inner Circle Discussion Questions

by Brad Meltzer

Author Bio: (Fantastic Fiction & Wikipedia)

Brad Meltzer was raised in Brooklyn and Miami. He is a graduate of the University of Michigan and Columbia Law School. **The Tenth Justice** was his first published work and became an instant New York Times bestseller. Brad currently lives in Florida with his wife, who's also an attorney.

Meltzer is one of the few authors to have books on the bestseller list for Fiction, Non-Fiction (History Decoded), Advice (Heroes for My Son and Heroes for My Daughter), Children's Books (I Am Amelia Earhart and I Am Abraham Lincoln) and even comic books (Justice League of America).

Meltzer hosts the History Channels TV series *Brad Meltzer's Decoded* and *Brad Meltzer's Lost History*.

Characters:

- **Beecher Benjamin White:** Archivist at the National Archives. His former fiancé is named Iris. Sisters are Leslie and Sharon.
- **President Orson Wallace:** Current president of the United States. Once governor of Ohio. Likes to visit the National Archives.
- **Dr. Palmiotti:** Doctor for the President. President's childhood friend.
- **Clementine Kaye:** Old middle school friend of Beecher. His first kiss. Needs help identifying her father. Her mom is Penny Marshall, a singer.
- **Nico Hadrian:** Former soldier who tried to assassinate the president. 2 years later did kill the first lady. Currently incarcerated in a mental hospital.
- **Orlando Williams:** Affable security guard who let Beecher and Clementine into a SCIF room. Dies of a "heart attack."
- **Dallas Gentry:** Archivist at the National Archives. "Superstar" of the archivists on staff. Nephew of Ronald Cobb, the Dallas' supervisor at the National Archives.
- **Rina Alban:** Archivist at the National Archives. Mousy woman.
- **Aristotle "Tot" Westman:** 72 year old archivist at the National Archives. The archivist who trained Beecher. Has a 1966 Mustang.
- **Minnie Wallace:** President's sister. Has a disease that makes her look masculine. Had a stroke 10 years ago.
- **Andre Laurent:** President's barber.
- **Dustin Gyrich:** Man who has been signing in to the archives for 150 years... usually at the same time as or just before the president.
- **Griffin "Eightball" Anderson:** Cleveland gang member who went missing 27 years before.
- **Daniel the Diamond:** Works in the National Archives as "the Preserver Extraordinaire".

Other Things to Know

- **Culper Ring:** Set of civilian spies put together by George Washington.
- **SCIF room:** Secure room that no electronics can record through. A number of these rooms can be found at the National Archives and around Washington.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. How does Meltzer's chapter structuring affect the pace of the novel? Does it add suspense, or is it disruptive?
3. How does Meltzer's use of verb tense contribute to the story? From Beecher's point of view the story is delivered mostly in present tense, but from the perspectives of other characters the story is largely in past tense. Why does Meltzer do this?
4. The National Archives are a setting for major action in the novel. Do they make a good setting for a thriller, or could Meltzer have done more with such a mysterious and historical locale?
5. Having learned about what an archivist does for a living, would that be a job you would want?
6. Has reading *The Inner Circle* made you think differently about politics in the U.S.? About the Presidents? About alleged assassins?
7. Is Beecher an unlikely hero? Is he a likeable hero? He's supposed to be a smart man; does he behave stupidly at times?
8. Gyrich signs into the Archives every time something "big" politically happens. What does that mean? Who is Gyrich working for?
9. Many of the characters in *The Inner Circle* have symbolic names or nicknames. How does this affect the way you felt about them? Meltzer considered the alternate name of Benjamin January for his main character; do you think that would have been a better fit than Beecher White?
10. In *The Inner Circle* characters are rarely who they first appear to be. How did the revelation of secrets and hidden agendas affect you as you read? Did it keep you turning pages, or did it become tiresome after a time?
11. Daniel the Diamond talks about invisible ink technology. Were the simple techniques for creating invisible inks known to you? Have you ever written a letter with lemon juice and then heated the paper to reveal the message? Is this something you'd try as an experiment?
12. Laurent (the barber) said "There was a real power that came with being faithful, but there is also something to be said about the greater good..." Which do you think Laurent was fighting for... faithfulness or the greater good? Did his actions reflect that?

13. Dallas says that reliable information is the one thing the president needs more than anything else. Do you agree?
14. Dallas never realizes he is working for the Plumbers, not the Culper Ring. How was he able to be deceived?
15. How much of what Clementine says and does do you think is true and how much is to get what she wants? (What she says about Beecher, her father, her cancer, Orlando?)
16. Do you think Clementine is just like her father? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
17. If you were Beecher and were given the opportunity to join the Culper Ring, would you?
18. The Inner Circle shares in the grand tradition of intellectual adventurers. On more than one occasion, Beecher is compared to Indiana Jones. Are the comparisons fair? Besides Indiana Jones, what other fictional characters have adventures like Beecher's – either in print or in film?
19. Is *The Inner Circle* too far-fetched? How does the incorporation of – and occasional manipulation of – U.S. history help to anchor the story?
20. What are your final thoughts on *The Inner Circle*? Do you think the Culper Ring still exists today?
21. The end of *The Inner Circle* is a cliffhanger – did it leave you wanting to read the next book in the Culper Ring series? Did you feel like you needed more closure at the end?
22. There are currently two additional books in this series. Will you read them? Will you read any of Meltzer's stand-alone novels?
23. Homeland Security asked Brad Meltzer to be a part of a Red Cell program. They grouped him with a Secret Service guy and a chemist, gave them a target... and the group would figure out how to destroy major cities in an hour. What would you do if the government asked you to assist in that type of program?

References:

- Brad Meltzer - <http://bradmeltzer.com/book/the-inner-circle/>
- Everyones Reading - <http://www.everyonesreading.info/TheInnerCircleDiscussionQuestions.pdf>
- Fantastic Fiction - <http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/m/brad-meltzer/>
- Goodreads - <https://www.goodreads.com/book/similar/11259924-the-inner-circle>
- Novelist - <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=204b2f35-c6d5-4b1b-9577-e1472e73691a%40sessionmgr198&hid=128&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=369242&db=neh>
- Wikipedia - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brad_Meltzer

If you liked Inner Circle, try...

- Lost Symbol – Dan Brown
- The Jefferson Key – Steve Berry
- The Librarian – Larry Beinhart
- Book of Spies – Gayle Lynds
- Inside Ring – Mike Lawson

Culper Ring Trilogy

1. The Inner Circle (2011)
2. The Fifth Assassin (2013)
3. The President's Shadow (2015)

Ordinary People Change World (Children's series)

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| ▪ I am Abraham Lincoln (2014) | • I am Helen Keller (2015) |
| ▪ I Am Amelia Earhart (2014) | • I am Martin Luther King, Jr. (2016) |
| ▪ I am Rosa Parks (2014) | • I Am George Washington (2016)
(with Christopher Eliopoulos) |
| ▪ I am Albert Einstein (2014) | • I am Jane Goodall (2016) |
| ▪ I am Jackie Robinson (2015) | |
| ▪ I am Lucille Ball (2015) | |

Stand-Alone Novels

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| • The Tenth Justice (1997) | • The Zero Game (2004) |
| • Dead Even (1998) | • The Book of Fate (2005) |
| • The First Counsel (1999) | • The Book of Lies (2008) |
| • The Millionaires (2002) | • The House of Secrets (2016) |