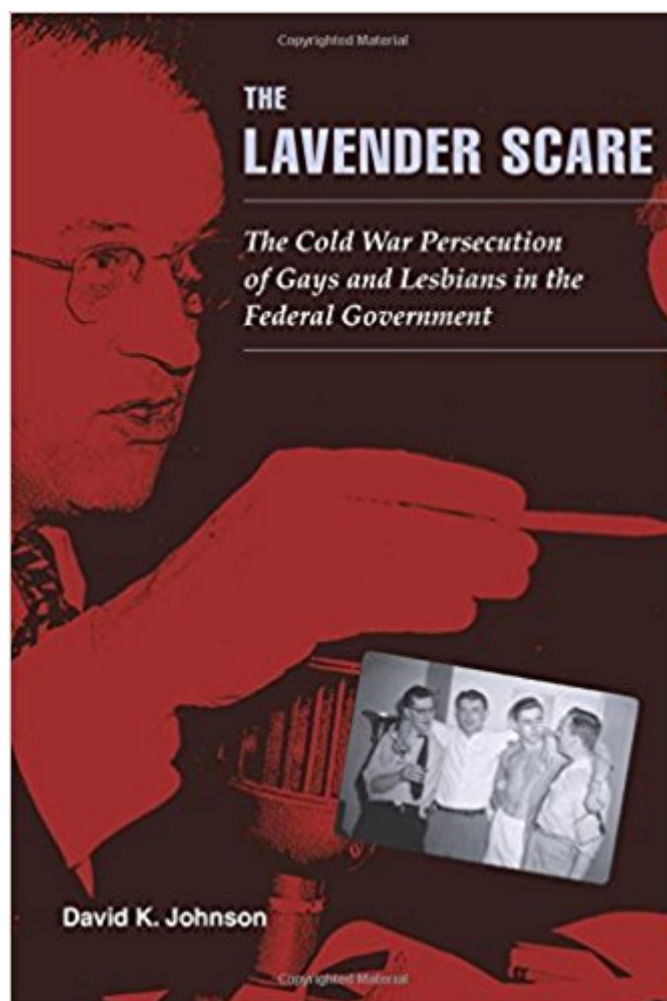


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The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution Of Gays And Lesbians In The Federal Government



Synopsis

In Cold War America, Senator Joseph McCarthy enjoyed tremendous support in the fight against what he called atheistic communism. But that support stemmed less from his wild charges about communists than his more substantiated charges that "sex perverts" had infiltrated government agencies. Although now remembered as an attack on suspected disloyalty, McCarthyism introduced "moral values" into the American political arsenal. Warning of a spreading homosexual menace, McCarthy and his Republican allies learned how to win votes. Winner of three book awards, *The Lavender Scare* masterfully traces the origins of contemporary sexual politics to Cold War hysteria over national security. Drawing on newly declassified documents and interviews with former government officials, historian David Johnson chronicles how the myth that homosexuals threatened national security determined government policy for decades, ruined thousands of lives, and pushed many to suicide. As Johnson shows, this myth not only outlived McCarthy but, by the 1960s, helped launch a new civil rights struggle.

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Customer Reviews

"A valuable contribution to our understanding of the Cold War and those who became victims of the national security state. It highlights well, and in a very readable form, the origins and continuity of the gay rights movement which are located in the fight against the federal government's anti-gay policies." — [H-Net Reviews in the Humanities and Social Sciences](#) --(H-Net Reviews in the Humanities and Social Sciences) "Dr. Johnson has provided today's generation with disturbing details of the maltreatment that U.S. security agents visited upon thousands of loyal American

citizens, people who endured vile campaigns against their well-being, conducted by their own government. The Lavender Scare has great current significance as a work of history because it exposes the anti-gay fear-mongering that Republicans initiated during the Cold War Era....a stellar work, one of the most important published gay histories there is."-•Gay Today (Raj Ayyar Gay Today)"A gripping study of sanctioned homophobia in the McCarthy era and a celebration of the stubborn fight by a pre-Stonewall few that ultimately won rights for many, and of a cultural and sexual underground that survived even at the height of an unrelenting homophobia spanning the presidencies of Truman through Nixon."-•Richard Labonte, Book Marks "David Johnson's engrossing study of the persecution of gays and lesbians during the Cold War, complete with a comprehensive picture of the gay culture that flourished in Washington, is an important addition to a subject all too often ignored."-•Dallas Morning News "The hoary rhetoric about the supposedly treasonous/treacherous nature of homosexuality that the historian David K. Johnson documents in his fine new book can initially strike a reader as amusing. The homophobic fulmination of various McCarthy-era senators and representatives he quotes are fatuous, if not ludicrous. But as The Lavender Scare goes on to reveal, the jaw-dropping extent of the federal government's persecution of its gay and lesbian employees in the '50s and '60s turns amusement into rage."-•Kevin Riordan, Washington Blade "By demonstrating the extent to which gay history is part of mainstream history, [Johnson] continues the important academic endeavor of bringing the margins to the center."-•Fiona Paton, American Quarterly "The Lavender Scare provides a superb overview of this period in American history. . . . It's a must-read for gay and lesbian federal employees, and would serve as an excellent text for college or graduate-level courses in history, sociology, political science, or gay studies."-•Lawrence Reynolds, Gay & Lesbian Review "Keenly observed and elegantly written, with a sense of mystery and suspense indicative of the era, Johnson's book will reorient scholarship on the Cold War as it models a more complex method for integrating queer community history with economic and political history."-•John Howard, GLQ "The Lavender Scare is a very readable and valuable work that clarifies the relationship between the Cold War and national security interests, and those victimized by the need to preserve said security. . . . This work will take its place beside those of George Chauncey and Allen Berube, and every serious student of 20th century American history should own it."-•Aaron L. Bachhofer, Archives of Sexuality "What does it say about the historical profession that it has taken nearly 30 more years to tell this story? Fortunately, David K. Johnson has done so with intelligence, sensitivity, and grace. We are all in his debt."-•Ellen Schrecker, American Communist History "Johnson's work assures that we shall never again be

able to think about the anticommunist crusade without acknowledging its fierce counterpart that affected the lives of so many people." —Leila J. Rupp, *Journal of American History*

"Fifty years ago, gays confronted a degree of policing and harassment that is almost unimaginable to us today, and which now is almost entirely forgotten. David K. Johnson's *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* is a heart-wrenching reminder that homosexuals faced brutal employment discrimination and endless police hostility." —David J. Garrow, *Los Angeles Times*

"A riveting history of gay-baiting in the McCarthy era" —*In These Times* (*In These Times*)

"Johnson's dazzling social and political history puts the Cold War persecution of gays and lesbians center stage to highlight how the social and cultural anxieties around gender and sexuality dovetailed with the nation's state-building project in the post-World War II era." —Steve Valocchi, *American Journal of Sociology*

"An important book, one that promises to reorient the historical scholarship on the Cold War." —Robert J. Corber *American Historical Review*

"By utilizing an impressive array of primary sources and integrating political, social, and cultural history, historian David Johnson provides us with a much needed, in-depth analysis. . . . A valuable contribution to our understanding of the Cold War and those who became victims of the national security state. It corrects certain misconceptions about the targets of McCarthyism to reveal that homosexuals were a unique focus in a parallel witch hunt to those who did not conform to 1950s society and beyond." —Douglas M. Charles, *H-Net Reviews*

"An important work of gay scholarship that proves, once and for all, that the Lavender Scare was not a minor adjunct of the Red Scare, but a major government campaign in its own right. . . . The Lavender Scare is more than a great work of history. It is a cautionary tale." —Jesse Monteagudo, *The Weekly News*

The McCarthy era is generally considered the worst period of political repression in recent American history. But while the famous question, "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?" resonated in the halls of Congress, security officials were posing another question at least as frequently, if more discreetly: "Information has come to the attention of the Civil Service Commission that you are a homosexual. What comment do you care to make?" Historian David K. Johnson here relates the frightening, untold story of how, during the Cold War, homosexuals were considered as dangerous a threat to national security as Communists. Charges that the Roosevelt and Truman administrations were havens for homosexuals proved a potent political weapon, sparking a "Lavender Scare" more vehement and long-lasting than McCarthy's

Red Scare. Relying on newly declassified documents, years of research in the records of the National Archives and the FBI, and interviews with former civil servants, Johnson recreates the vibrant gay subculture that flourished in New Deal-era Washington and takes us inside the security interrogation rooms where thousands of Americans were questioned about their sex lives. The homosexual purges ended promising careers, ruined lives, and pushed many to suicide. But, as Johnson also shows, the purges brought victims together to protest their treatment, helping launch a new civil rights struggle. The Lavender Scare shatters the myth that homosexuality has only recently become a national political issue, changing the way we think about both the McCarthy era and the origins of the gay rights movement. And perhaps just as importantly, this book is a cautionary tale, reminding us of how acts taken by the government in the name of "national security" during the Cold War resulted in the infringement of the civil liberties of thousands of Americans.

I've always been fascinated by the McCarthy era. It always seemed to me that the nation teetered on the brink of totalitarianism for several years during the 1950s. Fortunately, the nation managed to pull itself back from the brink. In *The Lavender Scare* author David K. Johnson sheds light into the dark corner of the McCarthy era and uncovers a time when the federal government targeted gay and lesbian employees for prosecution and firing because it was believed that simply being gay made them more vulnerable to blackmail by foreign agents. (It doesn't seem to have occurred to the government that a straight married man involved in an affair stood the same risk of blackmail.) Wisconsin Sen. Joe McCarthy often gets credit for starting the "lavender scare" along with the witch hunts seeking to oust current and former Communists from the government. However, as Johnson points out, McCarthy actually had little to do directly with the anti-homosexual purges. But in the mind of the public in the 1950s McCarthy was forever linked with the lavender scare because the public did not see the distinction between the issues of disloyalty posed by Communists and the potential security risks posed by gays and lesbians. The anti-gay purges began in the State Department but soon spread to all federal offices as well as private companies that held government contracts. While Washington, D.C. had a reputation for tolerance before World War II, the post-war years saw that tolerance reversed. Vice officers busted hapless men for as little as making eye contact in bars, in parks and on the street. Law enforcement agencies were only too happy to share their arrest reports with government officials. Gays and lesbians were arrested at private dinner parties and interrogated to identify their friends. When a gay employee was identified, Civil Service investigators were called in for coercive interrogations. During the darkest days of the lavender scare many gays and lesbians simply "disappeared." Some moved back to their home

towns in the hope their shame wouldn't follow them. Some had to take menial jobs because the careers they had prepared for were forever barred to them. Some chose to end their own lives. And some found a new calling. Among them were Harry Hay, founder of the Mattachine Society in California and Frank Kameny who founded the Mattachine Society of Washington. Kameny especially comes across as a hero. Once an astronomer who was working under a government contract, when rumors of his homosexuality began to spread he was called Washington and fired. He began a court fight that ultimately proved futile, but along the way he gained the courage to come out as a gay man and speak publicly about the devastation of the government's anti-gay purges. I've encountered references to the anti-gay purges in various histories of the time that I read. *Lavender Scare* is the first book I've ever read to deal specifically with the subject. It seems well researched and a work of solid scholarship in addition to being a very readable book.

I am reviewing this book based on the Kindle version. The only problem I have with the Kindle version is that the footnotes, which in a book like this are very important, are not directly accessible as with other Kindle books. I can see the footnote number, but cannot click on the number to get to the actual note. I hope the producers of this book will correct this problem. As for the content, this well written book was an eye opener for me. The author lays out the events in a manner that makes clear how the homosexual panic took hold as a tool for the Republicans wanting to oust a Democratic president and cast aspersions on the New Deal. It also reveals how some in the press used it as a means to improve their circulation by playing on the public's fear of the gay/lesbian "other". When I was taught about the McCarthy era there was NO information provided about the attack on the gay/lesbian community. This book is the only one to bring this dark period of hysteria into the cold light of day where I hope we will learn some important lessons. This book and *Making Gay History* are the two books I recommend to friends who want to learn about LGBT history. The two books are complements in that *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Book review): An article from: *The Historian* covers in detail one period of LGBT history that has been all but lost, yet, it was important in driving the events presented in *Making Gay History* far more than the Stonewall incident. Both make great gifts and recently my book club decided to make *The Lavender Scare* our monthly read. I gave this only four stars because the Kindle footnotes are not live. Given the importance of the footnotes, live notes are important because they provide easy access to the footnotes in a way that is conducive to maintaining reading flow. Without the live footnotes I've been forced to use a second kindle to maintain access to the foot notes. Should the authors release a

version with live footnotes i will change my review to 5 stars.

Detailed accounting backed by first hand accounts, newspaper articles of the day, the Congressional Record including previously unavailable access to the reports of the Hovey Commission of the horrors of the dark ages for gay people in the U.S.A. A must read for any one who wants to know the depths of depravity that the government is capable of descending in persecution of minorities ... sexual, gender and racial.

Very well researched, this book tells a little-known facet of our history. How many attitudes were shaped by the Republicans in their pursuit of LGBT people to use as political fodder? The book is a must-read.

I remember growing up and reading in the newspaper of McCarthyism in full swing. The US government, especially the State Department, was exceptionally hostile to gays. There were witch hunts. Being gay was equalled with being communist, and this was during the Cold War. People lost their jobs, guys killed themselves when outed, these were terrible un-accepting times for gays. It's hard to comprehend how much things have changed for the better. Fascinating history, well-written.

I got my degree in history, and yet somehow I managed to make it until my senior year before I even discovered that this event happened. The Red Scare is a well-known period, but this book illuminated another side of it that is severely overlooked in most courses, lectures, books and documentaries. I would have to rate the book highly just for bringing it to light, but the fact that it's well-written is a nice bonus, too.

Great price and interesting read for my needs.

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