

The Lavender Scare

A lesson plan developed by the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and brought to you as part of an Una Chapman Cox Foundation project on American Diplomacy and the Foreign Service

High School Grades 9-12

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Define the Lavender Scare and its connection to the Red Scare
- Develop objective awareness
- Understand the effect of the event on minority populations
- Understand the impact the event had on the Foreign Service, American government, and diplomacy
- Comprehend and analyze primary sources

Standards:

This unit is aligned with the following 2015 [Virginia Department of Education History and Social Science Standards of Learning](#)

- **United States History 1865 to the Present**
USII.1
*See “The Second Red Scare” Lesson Plan
- **The United States since World War II**
USII.8
*See “The Second Red Scare” Lesson Plan
- **Civics and Economics**
CE.1, CE.3, CE.4, CE.10
*See “The Second Red Scare” Lesson Plan
- **World Geography**
WG.1
*See “The Second Red Scare” Lesson Plan
- **World History and Geography: 1500 A.D (C.E.) to the Present**
WHII.1, WHII.12
*See “The Second Red Scare” Lesson Plan
- **Virginia and United States Government**
GOVT. 1, GOVT. 3, GOVT.11
*See “The Second Red Scare” Lesson Plan

Time required:

- One 45- minute class period

Background information:

The Red Scare and the hunt for communists fostered an environment of suspicion in which anyone could be targeted as a threat. However, a minority group that was especially under pressure consisted of homosexuals and others who were part of the LGBTQ+ community. Fearing that their controversial lifestyle would make them subject to Soviet exploitation, the State Department and congressional committees led by Senator McCarthy and other senior officials made it a point to expose any gay employees lest they fall under communist influence. This phenomenon focusing on the LGBTQ+ community became known as the Lavender Scare.

- If necessary, set the scene by providing the societal implications of being a part of the LGBTQ community during this time (was it accepted, was it legal, etc.?).

Lesson Preparation:

Materials:

- [Article: The “Lavender Scare:” Homosexuals in the State Department](#) | Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
- [Audio Clip: Homosexuals in the State Department, 1952](#) | Marquette University
- Oral History Lavender Scare Handout| Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
- Ambassador Robert F. Woodward Oral History excerpt | Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
- Ambassador Charles Anthony Gillespie, Jr. Oral History excerpt | Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
- [Video: Joseph McCarthy’s Downfall Was Accusing the Army of Communism](#) | Smithsonian Channel
- Optional: [Oral History Evaluation Sheet](#) | Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
- Optional: [Jan Krc Oral History](#) | Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
 - Provides insight into an FSO who faced an intense discrimination battle based on her sexuality. Possible discussion to be had regarding whether change has really been implemented regarding the LGBTQ+ community in government

Lesson Procedure:

Introduce Lavender Scare by providing background information. Students should already be somewhat familiar with the background from the previous classes.

[Lavender Scare](#): Another element of the Red Scare which did not target only alleged communists in the government but also targeted the LGBTQ community.

Listen to the [following clip](#) from Joseph McCarthy and discuss the following questions as a class:

1. Does McCarthy believe homosexuals are communists?
2. Why are they a perceived threat to the State Department?

ADST Oral History Activity

- Slightly different from the oral history excerpts provided in Class Two, this activity will be conducted individually by the students rather than in groups
- Provide half the students with the Woodward excerpt and the other half of the students with the Gillespie excerpt
- Provide the Lavender Scare Handout for them to write down their responses after reading the oral history excerpts
- After individual work is complete, ask the questions aloud for answers to be shared with the class
- Collect handouts at the end of class

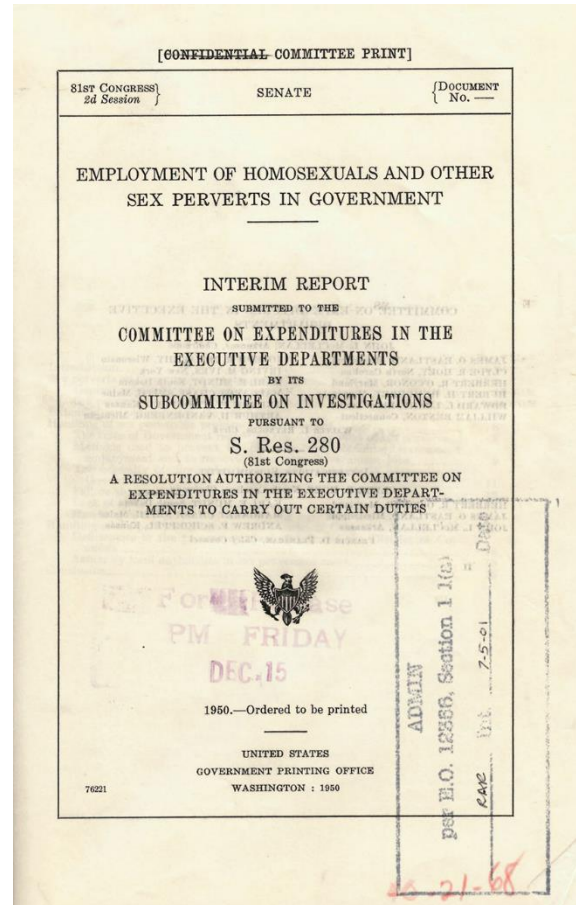
Ambassador Robert F. Woodward Oral History excerpt

WOODWARD: Well, actually, there were no communists in the ranks. There was no problem. Every charge and accusation was

very carefully looked into, so there were absolutely no communists. But the problem we did have, was that there was also a campaign on what the Republicans, at that time, considered their standards of morality. For example, there was a very deep-seated opposition to having any homosexuals in the Foreign Service. There was even a very, you might say, puritanical attitude toward anyone who was known to have had any extramarital affair. Or even an unmarried person who was known to have an affair or affairs.

Q: Affairs outside of...there was no such thing as live-in girlfriends, at least overtly.

WOODWARD: No, that was considered very taboo. One very able fellow was promptly



removed from the Foreign Service, just after Scott McLeod came in to be supervisor over personnel and security. He was a single man, he had never been married. The charge was that he had had, not only relations with loose women, but that in a very, very isolated post, and being a rather adventurous and exploratory type, and in the course of getting in the local call girls--and I can't imagine what kind of girls they were-- he got in a "call boy" one time. This, of course, was a heinous offense, and he was immediately removed from the Foreign Service, but he was a brilliant officer, and this was part of his adventuresome brilliance.

Q: I wonder if, to put it in context. In the first place, at that period of time, homosexuality was not, you might say--I don't know if it is the right term--but it certainly was not an accepted thing even beyond the right wing. I mean, within the Foreign Service, in what would pass for polite society.

WOODWARD: No. As a matter this would have been enough reason normally for questioning the further service of anybody who was known to be, even known in a local community, or generally suspected to be a homosexual. This would raise questions about his usefulness in the Foreign Service. So the Foreign Service Officers--there were a few, and some very, very capable men who were very much closeted homosexuals. This was, of course, the prevailing way of life of homosexuals at that time. They were usually closeted homosexuals, and not generally known even to some of their closest associates, as being homosexuals. We had two or three of those who were...it was almost tragic that we lost their services because they were doing such able work, and they were very widely accepted by the people of the community as being able, congenial, likable people. But we lost their services.

Source: [*Ambassador Robert F. Woodward Oral History, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training \(ADST\)*](#)

Questions:

1. If a homosexual was discovered in the State Department, what was the result on their service?
2. What other "lifestyle choices" raised red flags for the State Department?
3. How was a person's private life seen as a possible reflection on the State Department?

4. In your personal opinion, how do you think the Lavender Scare affected the LGBTQ community who worked for the State Department in the long term? What about the LGBTQ community in general?

Ambassador Charles Anthony Gillespie, Jr. Oral History excerpt

GILLESPIE: I learned when I came into security affairs that there were two sorts of secret or highly sensitive, investigative units – or maybe it was one unit with two parts in the State Department security system. One of these units had to do with real, honest to God, counterintelligence....

Either a separate unit or a part of the same unit dealt with nothing but homosexuality. I remember the first time that when I went into that unit and talked to two or three of the people assigned, I felt almost intimidated myself. They were briefing me on the unit's activities. There were special code words for the special kinds of investigations. These were formal investigations.

We use a code word system today on the distribution of sensitive policy messages. We have "NODIS," which means "no distribution outside the State Department." These security units also used "NODIS CHEROKEE," "NODIS GREEN," and so forth, which meant that the message dealt with a particular subject. It could involve China, and so forth. In any event, in the security investigative area, communications were labeled. I don't remember quite what the label was, but a certain label meant that it concerned a homosexuality case.

The whole idea was to develop enough information so that you could confront the individual and get him to agree that he was a homosexual, if that was what you believed. Then he would resign from the Foreign Service. If he didn't resign, you would pull his security clearance.

I was never directly involved with one of these cases. I don't know what it was really like to handle one. However, that confrontation technique as described to me was to face these people, get them to admit what they were, and then they would leave the Foreign Service. That was the whole idea.

It was a little more precise than looking for somebody who was unmarried or talked with a lisp, although those factors were never far away, because I think that people believed

in those days, as they probably have for some time, that in terms of our ethic in the United States, you could probably identify people like that. They were visible if you just looked hard enough.

Source: [*Ambassador Charles Anthony Gillespie, Jr., Oral History, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training \(ADST\)*](#)

Questions:

1. What does the presence of an investigative unit dedicated entirely to homosexual cases reveal about the severity of the issue, according to the State Department?
2. How do you think the secretive nature of the investigative unit affected the work environment for employees of any sexual orientation?
3. How might “hiding” one’s sexuality relate to “hiding” communist/anti-American leanings?
4. Why might a homosexual person being confronted by the investigative unit choose to resign, rather than try to continue to work? What are the greater effects of this on minority populations?

The Lavender Scare Handouts:

Name _____ Date _____

The Lavender Scare
Robert F. Woodward Oral History Questions

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Date _____

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Wrap Up:

McCarthyism Ends:

Securing power through his investigations, McCarthy moved from the State Department to the United States Army, saying there were communists in their ranks. His baseless attack on this respected institution, with no evidence, would ultimately begin his demise. Following the hearings, he would become censured by the Senate and virtually ousted from the political world.

Play [Joseph McCarthy's Downfall Was Accusing the Army of Communism - YouTube](#)

What Lessons Should be Learned? Answers could be something like:

- Often, hysteria and fear are based little on substantial fact
- Beware of political agendas
- Views, threats, and crisis, with perspective and rationale

Have We Learned these Lessons? Are there Similar Events Today? Answers could be:

- Muslim suspicion post 9/11
- Anti-Asian violence during COVID-19
- Anti-immigrant sentiment during the Trump administration

Final Discussion Question: Can you connect McCarthy's witch hunt to any other periods of history in which people were accused, and their reputations/lives destroyed? (The Salem Witch Hunts, Nazism, etc.) Can connections be made between McCarthy's bullying and attacks with today's cancel culture? How so?

Lesson Evaluation:

- When providing background and conclusion information, are students taking notes that help them comprehend the material?
- During the oral history activity, are students diligently reading the excerpts and filling out the handout to help organize their thoughts? Do they point to specific evidence when explaining their responses to the class?
- Are students able to conduct synthesis in which they have a deep enough comprehension of the lesson content that they can point to other similar instances in history? Do they identify important lessons that should be learned?

Credits:

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