

MATTACHINE: A SERIALIZED STORY IN GAY HISTORY
EPISODE 4: "THE LAVENDER SCARE"



A podcast dedicated to exploring the overlooked, forgotten,
or often-untold stories in gay history.

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The original Mattachine Society jester logo is courtesy of ONE Archives at the USC Libraries.

In last week's episode we saw the Mattachine begin to thrive, despite differences with the newly created ONE Magazine. The magazine's success brought the attention of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and I left you with two FBI agents arriving on the front doorstep of Mattachine co-creators Chuck Rowland and Bob Hull. And I said we'd cover it "next week on *Mattachine*." And I will, but today I'll only be answering one question about it, before the agents even ring the doorbell. Because I'm sure many of you are wondering the same thing. And having that question answered will answer many more questions to come. It took me a long time to understand why it was the FBI. Why has the FBI become so interested in homosexuals? Why are they driven to investigate and take down harmless organizations? Sure, homosexual intercourse is illegal, but that can't be *it*. What is it exactly that prompted the Federal Bureau of Investigation to look in on a small, but growing, movement of homosexuals and put agents on the Mattachine co-founders' doorstep? Turns out, it's more than law enforcement. It is decades of social and political events that created paranoia about the safety of the United States. And that's not just paranoia about some women being intimate with women and some men being intimate with men. Yeah, people are uncomfortable with that. But that discomfort can be used to fan greater flames of fear. This week, we're going to leave those agents on Chuck and Bob's doorstep for a moment and take a quick departure from our familiar characters, and get to know the Mattachine's political foe: the FBI.

Welcome to *Mattachine*.

In the 1950s, the country is filled with paranoia and fear of communists – the **Red Scare**. This is the second Red Scare in the U.S., and it runs from around 1947-1957. But within that boom of paranoia, another witch hunt is underway. This hunt hasn't been named yet, but you might have heard it called **The Lavender Scare**. It will usually be mentioned in history books as if it's a small byproduct of the Red Scare. It will be largely overlooked. But the Lavender Scare harms far more people than Red. There are congressional hearings, executive agency security briefings, presidential executive orders, jobs lost and lives ruined. There's a postwar fear that America is in moral decline, and the government is working hard to bounce back. This fear is fueled by **FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover**, **Senator Joseph McCarthy**, and **Roy Cohn**, a closeted lawyer who will later defend Donald Trump in the 1980s against the Department of Justice when Trump refuses to rent his properties to people of color. But anyway. The records of the Lavender Scare's congressional investigations of gay employees won't be released until 2000. They're closed away from public knowledge for 50 years, yet another instance of our history hidden from us.

FBI historian Douglas Charles will point out that the FBI's surveillance of homosexuals wrote gay history, and the FBI's history. As they stalk queer culture, they create a record of the government's discovery of gays. And while the FBI is trying to manage crime in a desperate time, they will end up shaping the paranoid ways in which gay people live. Eventually, homosexuals will have no choice but to resist. Dale Jennings worries fighting for gay rights will bring out the Mattachine's own enemies, but the FBI hunting down gays will only encourage the fight for gay liberation.

Let's rewind. To before the Mattachine, before the FBI began this hunt, before Henry Gerber in Chicago, back to the beginning of the 20th century. U.S. culture is changing from an agriculturally driven nation to an industrial, interconnected society. Machines are driven by coal instead of water, animals, and people. Technological development makes the world more productive, without working so many people. Factories are booming, transportation is quickening, communication is becoming more instantaneous. Businesses organized along railroads and cities are flourishing. Factories are popping up everywhere, and as homosexuals venture out to them for work, they find each other just by socializing at work. Harry Hay works in these factories.

Two things allow homophobia to develop: U.S. citizens consider their values morally superior than those of the old world because their nation's founders obsessively regulated sex. And in the 1800s, gender roles solidified, teaching most people to believe women are weak and subordinate and men are strong and dominant. These ideas – the **moral superiority** of the new world and the **gender roles** – come together to enforce conservative perspectives that naturally work against the idea of same-sex couples.

For instance, 1918.

Right after the first World War. On a US Naval Base in Newport, Rhode Island there is a Chief Machinist who reports that he just caught navy men acting effeminate and using female nicknames, and, apparently, even wearing makeup. The report of this chief, Ervin Arnold, works its way up the chain to **Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt**. Roosevelt authorizes an investigation led by that Chief, Arnold, and the hospital welfare officer. The chief and the welfare officer hire young sailors as what they call "investigators." And they have these sailors seduce the suspected homosexuals, even though the sailors themselves identify as heterosexual. They take the men out on dates to dinner and take them home after and have sex with them – to climax. Then the sailors gather lists of half-baked evidence, which are used to arrest the homosexuals. 24 men are questioned over three weeks, and those 24 gay men don't know it's because of these so-called "investigators" until after they're found guilty. Most of them can't get lawyers. None of them are ever able to speak to those investigating sailors. There are charges of sodomy and scandalous behavior, two men are dishonorably discharged, two are released due to a lack of evidence, but most are found guilty and sentenced to 5-20

years in jail. The investigation even takes down the reverend at the YMCA where these men met because it happened on his watch, and he's effeminate, so...

So this is how homosexuality is viewed at the time. The sailors that Chief Arnold hired aren't also tried for having gay sex. Because, on these dates and during the sexual intercourse, the sailors were in the roles typically perceived as masculine, dominating, penetrative. So they aren't considered homosexual. Only the men in the role considered as "female" are seen as vile. Homophobia is based in misogyny. So take note, children. Those of you gays who put "masc 4 masc" on your dating profiles are, in fact, homophobes.

Anyway... Roosevelt denies knowing how Chief Arnold and the doctor caught these homosexuals. Historian Douglas Charles will point out in one of his books on the FBI that no matter what Roosevelt knew, he not only authorized the first major federal investigation of gays in U.S. history, but he'll also involve his presidency in a 1937 investigation that will kick off the FBI's homosexual witch hunt, which will last for decades.

That investigation is the kidnapping of a 10-year-old boy named **Charles Mattson**.



Late December of 1936. Charles and his young friends are unsupervised in his home when he's taken. The kidnapper was only seen by the children, so a profile is hard to draw up. A ransom is demanded for \$28,000. The kidnapper seems to think the family is wealthy, but they lost most of their money in the 1929 stock market crash. They can't pay the ransom.



Charles Mattson's killer is never found, despite Roosevelt's public promise that the FBI won't stop looking. They do keep looking until 1985, but the case will remain unsolved. This case is devastating for so many reasons, only one of which is that it sets off the FBI's systematic collection of information on gays, and their widespread witch hunt.

The country's reaction to this case is much different than a similar case in 1924 Chicago, about 12 years before. Two young college men murdered a 14-year-old boy simply to see if they could get away with it. And they were lovers. But that wasn't really something that was plastered all over the papers. It wasn't met with public outrage that this country was slipping into moral decline. These young men were actually pretty brilliant. They were wealthy university grads and one of them was headed to Harvard. The public perceived them as over educated, too rich, and undisciplined in religion. Their homosexuality wasn't an issue. But when Charles Mattson's similar case happens in the Depression, the country sees gender roles and sexuality in a much more rigid way.

Advocacy groups work to protect the children, and states have enacted sexual psychopath laws. These really just put homosexuals in prisons and mental institutions. As the government begins a sort of discovery of homosexuals, the country develops a perception of them based on information the FBI is releasing about these so-called "sex perverts."

And soon, they will not only be seen as predatory, but also as national security threats.

PERVERTS CALLED GOVERNMENT PERIL
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PERVERTS CALLED GOVERNMENT PERIL

**Gabrielson, G.O.P. Chief, Says
They Are as Dangerous as
Reds—Truman's Trip Hit**

If you're interested in the stories I'm telling here, please check out our show's website, mattachinepod.com, for a list of our sources. I can't give you all the incredible details from every single book in this show. The devil really is in the details, and some of the nitty gritty of how these lives were destroyed and how some of these people triumphed over the system is truly astounding. There are so many stories that need to be told, but there's simply not enough time in one show. Stories like how Hoover influenced and dispersed information about Roosevelt's homosexual Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles to take him down, and stories about the gay-baiting of David Walsh and Philip Faymonville to end their careers as well. (You can read about them in Douglas M. Charles's book *Hoover's War On Gays*.) This is a time in which two authors who specialize in crime – one of them a physician – write that the “homosexual will murder his victim during an act of sexual frenzy and afterwards rob him.” This era is a time when masculinity is threatened and people are lashing out – some things never change. Politicians define communist subversives as weak or effeminate and gays are seen as a direct threat to American manliness.

In the State Department, from 1947 through 1950, about 100 gay federal employees are fired each year. Their lives and careers are ruined. About 1000 people in the military are discharged every year as well. By 1951, while the Mattachine is growing, 60 federal employees per month are fired, and up to 2000 people per year in the military. And yet, did you learn about this in your high school history class?

The FBI and the local police begin to coordinate. They keep records on sexual deviants. They send the United States Postal Service to work monitoring deliveries to single men that are on their lists.

In August 1946, Senator Patrick McCarran sponsors a rider to a State Department bill that allows the Secretary of State to fire anyone they consider a security risk. Congress fears communist infiltration, and demands loyalty and tighter security. The State Department focuses in on anyone they think could be blackmailed into turning in government secrets to the Russian enemies. People with dirt that could be used as blackmail, the State believes, are drunks, adulterers, and homosexuals. Suddenly, the concern to purge gays from the government is newly invigorated and easily done, due to the **McCarran rider**.

February 1950. Not long after the McCarran rider. Joseph McCarthy gives a big speech. He brings fresh concern for gays in government jobs. By announcing that 205 card-carrying communists are working in the State Department, and his subsequent blurring of homosexuality and communism on the Senate floor, McCarthy incites a new type of sex panic.

This makes the State Department look really bad.

A week later, **Deputy Undersecretary John Peurifoy** goes before a congressional committee. He denies that the department employs communists, but says 202 security risks have recently been removed. Republicans see this as an opportunity to prove that **President Truman** can't protect the nation. The congressional committee questions Peurifoy for clarity. They want him to support McCarthy's charge, and embarrass the State Department under Dean Acheson and President Truman.

The **Secretary of State Dean Acheson** makes an appearance on Capitol Hill – for an entirely different subject – and press is all ears as **Senator Styles Bridges** asks, “Mr. Secretary, what do you consider a security risk?”

Acheson lists examples like spies, communists, people who leak classified info, Nazis. He explains what the State Department looks at when vetting new employees: “whether the person has, as a matter of character, any defect which would lead him into any of these difficulties,” he said.

Bridges asks, “Such as homosexuality?”

Acheson: “That would be included.”

Bridges: How many people have been removed due to the McCarran rider?

Acheson: One.

Bridges: “Now, how many other people that have been under investigation by the department have resigned?”

Peurifoy butts in for his boss: “In this shady category that you referred to earlier, there are 91 cases, sir.”

Bridges wants a more specific answer: “What do you mean by ‘shady category’?”

Peurifoy: “We are talking about people of moral weaknesses and so forth.”

Chairman Patrick McCarran adds, “Now, will you make your answer a little clearer, please.”

Peurifoy finally says, “Most of these were homosexuals, Mr. Chairman.”

The press explodes.

3750 Perverts Listed on Payroll

WASHINGTON, May 19 (UP)—Senate Republican Leader Kenneth S. Wherry said today that Washington police estimate here are 3750 sex perverts in the Government here.

In a report to a Senate Appropriations Subcommittee, Senator Wherry said police authorities testified that 300 to 400 State Department employees are "suspected or allegedly homosexual."

The Nebraskan also said that Washington police reported they have uncovered "what purported to be a plan of Communists to sabotage and damage" Washington in case of war with Russia; that a Red Fifth Column is using sex degenerates for subversive purposes; and that "there are 1000 bad security risks" in Washington.

The report gave no details on the purported plot to sabotage Washington.

U. S. POSTS QUIT BY 54 PERVERTS

WASHINGTON, April 25. (AP)—The state department told congress in testimony published today that 54 of its employees resigned last year while under investigation for sexual perversion.

Assistant Secretary Carlisle H. Humelsine said it was "determined" they were homosexuals. In the last four years, he said, there have been 144 such resignations. Two were women.

In addition Humelsine said that since 1947 14 employees quit or were fired as other kinds of "security risks."

Humelsine testified recently before a house appropriations subcommittee considering his department's budget. He made the point that the department has about 28,500 employees and that experts estimate that 4 per cent of the total population "may be homosexual or have homosexual traits."

In trying to ferret out such cases, Humelsine said the state department is working on the principle that homosexuals are suffering from "a type of illness" but that they are "also security risks and we want them off our rolls."

Senate Group Labels Perverts Dangerous Risks

WASHINGTON — (AP) — A Senate investigating group yesterday labeled sexual perverts as dangerous security risks and demanded strict and careful screening to keep them off the Government pay roll.

It said many Government agencies have not taken "adequate steps to get these people out of Government."

Filing a report to the Senate after a six-months investigation by an Expenditures Subcommittee, Chairman Hoey, Democrat of North Carolina declared:

"If Government agencies will investigate properly each complaint of sex perversion and thereafter follow the present adequate civil service rules, these perverts can be put out of Government and kept out."

Many perverts already have been ousted, Hoey said, and he pledged that his Subcommittee would keep a close check on the situation.

Peurifoy wanted to prove that security was effective. But everyone sees this as proof that sex deviates roam the government, making our country's secrets vulnerable to blackmail. Gays and communists become tied together. It becomes one of those things the party latches onto in their rhetoric against the other party, until no one can distinguish the two, and everyone assumes it's true. Articles fill the papers reporting on sexual perverts infiltrating the government, with headlines such as "Perverts Fleeing State Department." On the radio program *Meet the Press*, guests discuss "the 91" without defining who they're referring to. Everyone knows.

Peurifoy's admission boosts McCarthy's support by the public because it kinda proved him right. And if he was right about that, perhaps there are 205 card-carrying communists working for the government. Three-fourths of McCarthy's 25,000 letters from the public show concern about sexual deviants in government jobs. Only a quarter are writing to him about Red infiltration. His speeches continue to mention "communists and queers" together, and his approval rating soars, for a while, anyway. He beefs up his stories with new lies, and adds a story about a "flagrant homosexual" that had been reinstated in the government, and this man has friends who are also sexual deviants and "Soviet agents." It actually is making sense to people that both groups are blurred together, because both homosexuals and communists have underground subcultures the American people are beginning to discover. They both have literature, meeting places, cultural codes, and, even sometimes, bonds of loyalty to each other. The public considers both conditions psychological issues of morals developed from childhood. They assume that gays living together, secretly pairing up, is like the communists gathering in cells

together. The media speaks of the 91 as if they're getting together in a group to strategize in the halls of the State Department.

<h2>Senate Group Approves Sexual Perverts Probe</h2>	
<p>WASHINGTON — (AP) — An investigation of sexual perverts in all Federal agencies was unanimously approved by the Senate Expenditures Committee yesterday in a move to tighten the nation's security.</p>	<p>mark for blackmailers and likely tools of Communist conspirators.</p>
<p>The Committee, headed by Chairman McClellan, Democrat of Arkansas, voted 10 to 0 to provide \$25,000 for the inquiry. Quick Senate approval is expected.</p>	<p>Senator McCarthy, Republican of Wisconsin, has charged that the State Department is infested with both Communists and perverts. The Department has denied it. Assistant Undersecretary of State John Peurifoy disclosed some weeks ago that 91 sexual perverts had been fired from the Department.</p>
<p>Washington police officials have testified there are about 3,750 homosexuals on Government pay rolls in the nation's capital.</p>	<p>McCarthy, top-ranking GOP member of the Expenditures Committee, has announced he will not take part in the investigation in view of the charges he has leveled against the State Department.</p>
<p>PERVERTS ARE officially rated as bad security risks on the ground they are an easy</p>	

In one of many Senate debates, **Senator Kenneth Wherry** of Nebraska asks, "Can you think of a person who could be more dangerous to the United States of America than a pervert?" He states, "Wherever they may be employed in a department handling defense secrets, moral perverts are a security risk, because of their proximity to persons having security secrets and documents containing such information." He claims this blackmailing technique is a tool used often between fighting nations, though he has no evidence at all to prove it.

The blackmail theory is perpetuated by the press. And when there is press coverage, it's usually written with so many euphemisms for homosexuality it's practically written in code. They use phrases like "men of unconventional morality," "habits that make them especially vulnerable to blackmail," "weakness," "peculiarities," "morals problems," "moral weaklings," "undesirables," "unusual morals," "sexual misfits," "moral risks," mentions of Kinsey, and most of all, "security risks." Most people in the public assume a security risk or someone disloyal is just a lesser version of a communist. But there is a distinction: someone guilty of disloyalty is guilty of espionage or having connection to communist influence. Security risks are people who perhaps don't want to give away secrets, but could be coerced into giving them away. Security risks are also people who talk too much or drink too much, or both. But there is a double standard. You can drink and talk, just not too much. One homosexual encounter, though, and you're out. And out of the three – drinking, talking, and homosexuality – only one is actually illegal and kept on record, and the three are lumped together. A talkative drunk can be closely associated with homosexuals. Movies at this time depict alcoholics as repressed homosexuals, the

They look at the homosexual community the way they picture the communist community: a fast-moving network of moving information. They all know each other and work together with purpose. Robert wants to have a hearing on the matter. The interrogator tells him if he has a hearing, he will be outed to his father, an officer in the Army in Texas. The interrogator says everyone at his father's base will know that their officer has a "homo communist security risk" for a son. He threatens to out Robert to his entire family, in fact. But he won't do it if Robert names names of his homosexual contacts in the government and resigns quietly. He does. When gays are asked to resign, they don't put up a fight. What they are, they are guilty of being, and, because of the McCarran rider, it is illegal to be what they are: a security risk. But even outside the government, no matter what job a homosexual holds in the world, their dismissal from work is on the table. The federal government's behavior sends the first clear message out to America about how we view queer people in society: Not to be trusted.

**PROBE OF FEDERAL
PERVERTS OKEHED**

**Investigation Is Given
Approval By Senate;
Funds Available**

WASHINGTON, June 7—(AP)—
Without debate, the Senate today approved an investigation of alleged sexual perverts in government jobs in a move to tighten national security.

Homosexuals and other perverts are officially rated as poor security risks because they are sometimes the target of blackmail.

**SAYS U. S. PAYS
4000 PERVERTS**

**Policeman Tells Senators in
Sworn Testimony**

Chicago Tribune Service
WASHINGTON, March 29.—
Sworn testimony has been given a senate appropriations subcommittee that 4000 moral degenerates—men and women—are on the federal pay roll in the nation's capital.

Although hearings have been conducted in the utmost secrecy, it was learned that Lt. Roy Blick, head of the District of Columbia police squad, gave senators a documented history of depravity in the government bureaucracy which shocked his hearers.

The presence of homosexuals—men of perverted sex tendencies—in the state department has been widely known in Washington and openly admitted recently by Deputy State Undersecretary John E. Peurifoy. Ninety-one men of this type had been asked to resign, Peurifoy said, because they were regarded as security risks.

**Senate Unit
Advised To
Read Kinsey**

**Homosexual Data
Held Valuable For
Governmental Study**

The scientific and psychiatric phases and implications of the current congressional probe of homosexuality in the Federal Government are discussed in the light of the Kinsey report in a series of two articles. Following is the first:

By WADSWORTH LIKELY
Science Service Staff Writer

WASHINGTON, July 17—The Senate subcommittee investigating employment of "homosexuals and other moral perverts" by the Federal Government had better read the Kinsey Report before it goes very far.

The Foreign Relations Committee investigates McCarthy's claims about these State Department employees. The Chairman, Senator Millard Tydings, is on Truman's side. Tydings is ready to dismantle McCarthy's credibility. "Let me have him for three days in public hearings, and he'll never show his face in the Senate again." On the first day, Tydings immediately asks for the name of the State Department official McCarthy claimed was reinstated, this "flagrant homosexual" that McCarthy announced was reinstated in the government. Tydings actually knows this story is true, and he knows the name already: Joseph Panuch. But Panuch had been regarded as an anti-communist supporter of McCarthy. If McCarthy would name him, it would prove before the Senate and the world that McCarthy is protecting a homosexual, and his entire argument merging gays and communists would be discredited.

McCarthy refuses to answer the senator. He talks around the question, and makes himself appear to be a victim of Senator Tydings's relentless questioning.

Senator Ralph Brewster speaks up to Senator Tydings: "Does the Senator consider that the cases testified to by Mr. Peurifoy, of 91 sexual pervert or moral degenerates, are bad security risks?"

Tydings agrees, but points out that his committee is here to look into disloyalty, not security risks. Communists, not homosexuals. He's just trying to use a case of a homosexual as an example to prove that the two are mutually exclusive.

Brewster adds, "Their loyalty might be subject to undue influence."

Tydings agrees again, adding that heterosexuals could have the same issue. They could be blackmailed as well, and he would look into all of these cases.

Senate floor leader Kenneth Wherry – the guy who said "*Can you think of a person who could be more dangerous to the United States of America than a pervert?*" – he points out that 91 homosexuals have already come to the committee's attention.

Tydings counters that they have already been fired.

Wherry bucks, explaining the committee is responsible for current and former employees, and that these 91 should be brought before the committee to provide "leads" into cases of disloyalty.

The fight goes on into the next day, discussions dig into McCarthy's lack of evidence and vague charges, especially since he won't name this "flagrant homosexual" reinstated in the government. McCarthy points out another homosexual, arrested while cruising, who was dismissed from the State and then joined the CIA.

Tydings keeps trying to move the discussion back to communists, and push the homosexual issue into a category of mental health instead. "**I know there is a great desire to shift from Communists to homos,**" he says, angrily. "**I ask my colleagues to stop the continual heckling of the subcommittee about homosexuals and other matters of that kind.**" He insists he will look into this CIA employee. "**Obviously, a man may have the terrible disease which has been referred to, and yet may not be a party to foreign espionage or may not be a party to deliberately being disloyal to his Government.**"

Concern is expressed by senators that this might be a contagious disease, spreading and contaminating entire offices. "**The social stigma is so great,**" one of them explains, that blackmail has "**a regular practice of preying upon the homosexual.**" This is completely untrue. There is no evidence to support that someone has been blackmailed because of their homosexuality. And the great social stigma only exists because these people in high government positions are perpetuating it. But much of the committee believes that a gay person would sooner commit treason for a Russian spy than expose their own secret.

The public hearings end. Tydings is unsuccessful. McCarthy had started a movement, and much of the country generally believes the State Department is riddled with deviants running the government.

INQUIRY BY SENATE ON PERVERTS ASKED
By WILLIAM S. WHITE Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.
New York Times (1923-Current file): May 20, 1950;
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pg. 8

INQUIRY BY SENATE ON PERVERTS ASKED

Hill and Wherry Study Hears
There Are 3,500 Deviates in
Government Agencies

By WILLIAM S. WHITE
Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

The Federal Loyalty Review Board passes the buck to President Truman. They agree that the president should decide if a homosexual or alcoholic should be considered a security risk. The press latches onto this, criticizing the move. It seems that now, if Truman doesn't fire homosexuals, he would be seen as a protector of security risks. And if he does fire them, Congress would demand to know how they ended up working for the government anyway. Either way, Truman's administration would be seen as incompetent in this regard.



A cartoon of President Truman in the Washington Times-Herald

Columnist George Sokolsky asks: *Certainly Harry Truman cannot like either communists or homosexuals. Why does he protect them? Why does he fight for them?*

Indiana's *Muncie Star* reports: *The people know that hundreds of Communists and sexual perverts have been kicked out of Federal jobs. They also know that these people were hired while President Truman or President Roosevelt were in office.*

The public is beginning to see strong women in the Soviet Union, and the Soviet's use of childcare is also proof that communism is against the patriarchal family. If they're anti-family, or at least what many Americans consider a family should look like, then Russia must support the homosexual and maybe they're all working together. Russian support of homosexuality is somewhat true, because homosexual acts were decriminalized there... for a time. But as Stalin rose to power, he ordered mass arrests, believing that it was something of a sinful, lower-class pleasure of gluttony. A "bourgeois decadence," as historian David K. Johnson will describe it. The media pushes the rhetoric of gays and communists working as one, a magazine even reporting that homosexuality is "Stalin's Atomic Bomb."

People are concerned about America's survival. The group from my hometown of Evansville, Indiana called the American War Dads writes to McCarthy asking why these "vicious persons" are working in the State Department, and why they aren't replaced with "young men and women of sound Christian families." They worry about America's legacy "as a Christian Nation" and that morality will break down across the country.

A vice officer in D.C. testifies that thousands of "sexual deviants" are working for the government. Pressure builds.

Committee Chides U.S. For Employing Perverts

WASHINGTON — A Senate investigating committee today described sexual perverts as easy marks for foreign spies and said many federal agencies have been lax about routing such perverts out of government jobs. The group reported that in general it found "the same shortcomings and delinquencies" in the handling of the problem among congressional employes as it did with respect to workers in the executive branch of the government.

people, and the weakness of their moral fiber, makes them susceptible to the blandishments of foreign espionage agents," the subcommittee said. It declared specifically that Nazi and Communist agents have attempted to obtain information from federal employes "by threatening to expose their abnormal sex activities."

The group added that perverts also are "easy prey to the black-mailer." The committee quoted a report from the FBI that Rus-

Journalist Max Lerner writes, “This is a story in which only accusers and the hunters—Senate probers, security officers, police officials—get their names printed in the papers. The hunted remain anonymous—unspecified, uncounted, nameless men.” Homosexuals aren’t able to speak up and say I’m pro-American *and* homosexual. No one would believe it. While their lives are debated and overanalyzed all throughout the media and Washington, thousands of queer people are left unemployed and still in the closet. They are unseen enemies that blame can be placed on. A scapegoat. Just like Harry Hay said they would be. As the media reports the mass firings, Harry Hay is living in his Silverlake home with Anita and his daughters. These scapegoats need someone to represent them, or one day Harry will be one of them. He already sees himself as one of them.

Meanwhile, at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, rumors of **Director J. Edgar Hoover’s** sexuality are already circulating. What’s important isn’t necessarily whether or not Hoover is gay, because we’ll never know. But what stands out about the rumors are gender and sexual stereotypes of this time, things that influence the perseverance of the FBI. Hoover is a bachelor who lives with his mother, and will until she dies. He’ll be 43 when he finally lives on his own. He’s particularly close with his number two man at the FBI, **Clyde Tolson**. They dine together often and vacation together. Hoover will one day will most of his estate to Clyde Tolson, who will be buried near Hoover in the Congressional Cemetery. There’s no evidence to support the men are homosexual *or* heterosexual. Hoover holds to strict Victorian values that he pressures onto the U.S., so either way, he keeps any sexuality he might enjoy quiet. And when the rumors spread, he sends FBI agents to intimidate people who even suggest he’s gay. Sometimes he demands they sign a statement denying their claim. Hoover sends a Special Agent in Charge to a woman who made claims about his sexuality in her bridge club in Cleveland. The FBI SAC reprimands her and she’s intimidated into telling her bridge club at their next meeting that she was wrong and sorry. These stories go on and on.

Hoover biographer and FBI scholar Richard Gid Powers will write in his 1987 book *Secrecy and Power* that the work and friendship between Hoover and Tolson “was so close, so enduring, and so affectionate that it took the place of marriage for both bachelors,” like how some gay couples at this time own a business together in order to have a legal relationship. He’ll also cite the only suggestive evidence Hoover and Tolson were a couple: intimate photos Hoover took of Tolson sleeping. Some people will use this relationship to show gay people have always held high-up government jobs and they were effective leaders. Some will say the possibility of Hoover’s gayness as an example of internalized homophobia. And perhaps that is what drives him, but like I said, we’ll never know.

Though, if you want a look at what that hidden relationship might have looked like, check out the movie *J. Edgar*, written by Dustin Lance Black.



Hoover and Tolson

Anyway, if we look at Hoover and Tolson as a secret gay couple, or as just closeted men working together, we have to accept stereotypes as evidence. Another historian, Claire Bond Potter, will point out that Hoover's queerness isn't the point. He doesn't fit what is considered the normal role of a man. So he's queer either way, in the sense that he's different. The point is that rumors are spreading because homophobia is rampant. Even if he is straight, he likely would still do the same thing he's doing. He's participating... in encouraging homophobia... that already exists.



April 10, 1950, Hoover sends a list to the White House of 393 federal employees arrested in the area "on charges of sexual irregularities" in the past 3 years. This is an early version of **Hoover's FBI Sex Deviates Program**, much like his collection of information following Charles Mattson's kidnapping. Over the years following the Mattson case, Hoover and his FBI disseminated information gathered on homosexuals to offices throughout the government, giving them enough evidence to purge gay employees from their workplaces.

By that November, nearly 600 people are fired. The State Department alone is firing about one homosexual per day. That's more than double the amount of people suspected of disloyalty. The issue is discussed so often in the House and the Senate that one congressman says, *"I do not know what homosexuals are, but I never saw anybody get as much free advertising in the Congress of the United States in all my life."*

Many cases will be documented in books like the Charles volume on Hoover, but, as Charles will point out, it would be impossible to document the entire witch hunt within the FBI, particularly because the Sex Deviates Program File was destroyed in the late 70s. But because over 500 people are dismissed in 1953 alone for reasons listed as "security," rather than "loyalty," it's likely that most of those people 500 people in one year are gay. Throughout the Lavender Scare, when people are focused in on their fears created by the Red Scare, the number of people fired for being gay will far and away exceed the number fired for any real or fictitious connection with communism.

It began as a series of misunderstood stereotypes, turned into a political weapon, and became a moral panic throughout the country. It affects the life of every queer person in the closet or out, and a hate grows that will still affect queer lives... 70+ years later. The stigma of being queer in any way is pushed in books about lesbian strategies of gathering to corrupt schoolgirls, and pamphlets about how military homosexuals "raped" other men. One writer publishes a warning of "10,000 faggots" working the government, "honeycombed in high places with people you wouldn't let in your garbage wagons."

● **Morals Problem in State Clean-up**

(Second of eight articles on the Administration clean-up at Department of State)

WASHINGTON — This dispatch is intended to be neither a scandal story nor an expose. It merely presents the releasable and printable facts as given to this reporter by qualified authorities.

The danger in the morals situation in government, as has been explained many times before, is that a pervert is vulnerable to blackmail. Anyone discovered in those practices can be coerced — into, say, spying for an enemy country or disclosing U.S. government secret information—under threat of exposure. Exposure, of course, leads to firing.

There have probably always been some perverts in diplomatic service. It is a natural hiding place. Moving from country to country helps hide records.

In the 1930's the Inspection Service of the U. S. State Department began to get an increasing number of reports of perversion among overseas personnel. The reports ran the gamut from ministers to couriers. ↗

Up to January, 1951, these reports were regarded as something dealing with an individual's private life, and they were not explored. They were considered as negative suitability factors for promotion, but they were not considered as security factors.

Calls come in to the FBI offering tips. As I mentioned in episode 2, an unnamed informant finds quite a scoop. He finds he knows two communists, who are also homosexual. He calls the bureau to report that these two homosexual communists, Chuck Rowland and Bob Hull, are living together. The FBI marks their sexuality down in their files under "Health." The media treats homosexuality like it's an epidemic that the communists will use to take the country down, just like Paul Coates implied in his *Daily Mirror* column upon his discovery of the Mattachine. The FBI sees the reasoning in that, and they take Coates's implication seriously. They're quick to investigate the newly organized group, Mattachine. They employ snitches inside the organization, whose identities will mostly remain unknown. But not everyone. The informants hand in copies of the new ONE Magazine, created in part by Chuck Rowland, that homosexual communist. Director Hoover sends two agents to investigate Chuck. The Director is beginning to close in on an American enemy that will prove the connection between communists and homosexuals: Chuck Rowland and the company he keeps... the Mattachine.



A NOTE TO TEACHERS:

I talk during this series about how schools don't teach us gay history. If you learned anything about gay history in your school, you're one of the lucky few. This is changing because of programs like HISTORY UNERASED. Check out www.unerased.org. Not only is bullying still an issue, but nearly half of homeless youth are queer. 1 in 5 queer kids of color attempt suicide. Young queer kids are even more likely to drop out of school. This is why I'm talking about HISTORY UNERASED, not because this is a paid ad - it's not. This program is doing important work, and they're bringing educators in K-12 classrooms proper training and resources to include LGBTQ history and queer inquiry in Social Science classes, Fine Arts, and Health courses, among others. And language is always expanding for the queer community with new terms and complexities that educators want to understand and apply in their classrooms. For instance, how do I use the word "trans" properly? What does "nonbinary" mean? Teachers want to help students feel safe and understood by using the proper terminology, so the people at History Unerased are helping with that, too. If all kids in school learn about our history, then we can get rid of misperceptions about queer people and fix the real problems those misperceptions create: queer kids quitting school because they don't feel safe, homelessness, suicide. If you're an educator that wants to help your classroom be a safer space for your LGBTQ students, check out www.unerased.org for more information. You could save your student's life. You could improve the safety of your community. And you could teach your kids some fascinating history.