



## PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

# The Lavender Scare with David K. Johnson

### JOHN D'EMILIO

When I was a very young boy, the high point of every week was Sunday afternoon. Our whole extended family—aunts, uncles, cousins—gathered at my grandmother’s house and spent the day together. When it was time to eat, everyone came to the dining room table, which had been extended to fit everybody. Grandma brought big bowls and large, steaming plates. Hands suddenly began reaching for the food, and soon everyone’s dish was full.

As a five-year-old, these Sunday meals were my chance to listen in to the world of adults. I learned about the garment factory where some of my aunts worked, and the hard job of my uncle who was a repairman at a housing project with hundreds of apartments. But most of all, I listened to them talk about politics. I remember the passion that those discussions seemed to unleash. And the name that everyone at the dining room table kept mentioning was Joe McCarthy.

This was the early 1950s, at the height of the Cold War. The fight against the Soviet Union and communism was covered daily by every newspaper. It was featured on the first television news shows, and Senator McCarthy seemed to be leading the fight. My family’s political views were very conservative, and he was a hero to them. He was going to save America!

By the time I was in graduate school studying history, two decades had passed. I had lived through the turmoil on college campuses in the late 1960s and had marched in many demonstrations against the war in Vietnam. The early Cold War itself had become history. And my views had become very different from my family’s.

As I read about the origins of the Cold War, there again was that name from those Sunday conversations. But now the label that historians were attaching to those times was “The McCarthy Era.” “The Red Scare.” Of course, the view that emerged from historical research painted a far more complicated picture than I had heard at my grandparents’ dining room table. The adults in my family were caught in the web of a panic that Joe McCarthy and other politicians were using to stifle political debate in the United States.

Yes, there were Americans who espoused ideas associated with communism. But the internal threat to the U.S. was largely fabricated to whip up fear. They created a climate of insecurity and a sense of danger. There was no serious threat to American democracy. And yet, McCarthyism and the Red Scare continue to define how that era is written about and described in history textbooks.

I was researching the origins of LGBT activism in the U.S. for my dissertation when I first learned about an aspect of this period that was significant but never mentioned during those Sunday dinners when I was a child. It's something that still doesn't get the attention it deserves in history textbooks. In addition to the fear of communism being stoked in those years—that federal government and the daily press led a crusade of moral panic, targeting a group described in a U.S. Senate report as “homosexuals and other sex perverts.” The FBI, national security officials, the military and the Department of Defense began actively searching for people who they variously labeled “moral perverts” or “degenerates” or “sex deviates.” Thousands upon thousands of Americans lost their jobs and had their careers destroyed. And the publicity this crusade received encouraged local police forces to pursue LGBT people in bars and on the streets of American cities. Long after Senator Joe McCarthy was silenced and disgraced, these attacks on LGBT people continued.

Some historians now describe this as “The Lavender Scare.” And while you may not have heard of it, it was actually bigger and lasted longer than the Red Scare and McCarthyism. It helped seal the closet doors of almost every LGBT person in the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s. It was more responsible than anything for making these decades the worst time to be queer in the United States.

Most history textbooks remain silent about this massive moral crusade that ruined the lives of so many and kept millions of Americans in a state of fear. But what might studying The Lavender Scare teach our students about the United States in the mid-20th century? How might we rethink the Cold War years—a major era in 20th-century history—if we better understood how moral panic was used to manipulate the public? Would we understand contemporary American politics better, if we recognized how the U.S. has used issues of sexuality and gender to whip up fear and hatred in the past?

I'm John D'Emilio. And this is *Queer America*, a special series from Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. LGBTQ history has been largely neglected in the classroom. But it's necessary to give students a fuller history of the United States and to help them understand how that history shaped the society they live in.

This podcast provides a detailed look at how to incorporate important cultural touchstones, notable figures and political debates into an inclusive U.S. history curriculum. In each episode, we explore a different topic—walking you through historical concepts, suggesting useful source material and offering practical classroom exercises. Talking with students about sexual and gender identity can be emotional and complex. This podcast is a resource for navigating those challenges, so teachers and students can discover the history and comprehend the legacy of queer America.

The Lavender Scare ruined the lives and careers of thousands of Americans in the 1950s and kept millions more in a state of fear for years to come. In this episode, historian David Johnson will explain the origins, unfolding and impact of this fear-based moral crusade. He will also explain how this dark moment in our history also gave rise to early LGBTQ activism. To help your students develop a more accurate and complex picture of Cold War America, here's David Johnson.

**DAVID K. JOHNSON**

In April 1958, Madeleine Tress was a 25-year-old, white woman beginning a promising career at the Department of Commerce. Her credentials were stellar. She had a B.A. from Georgetown School of Foreign Service and an M.A. in economics from NYU. But it was the height of the Cold War—the nuclear standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union. So like all government workers during the Cold War, her employment was conditional on passing a security investigation.

Tress remembered that she was wearing a pale blue suit and high heels when two Civil Service investigators brought her into their offices for questioning. “Ms. Tress,” one investigator began, “your voluntary appearance here today has been requested in order to afford you an opportunity to answer questions concerning information, which has been received by the U.S. Civil Service Commission.” The investigators then asked Tress to take an oath before they took her statement. This made Tress realize the seriousness of the situation, and so she asked if she could have an attorney. But the investigators refused. She began to answer mundane questions concerning her name, address, date of birth. They then asked her the question that would change her life. “Miss Tress, the Commission has information that you are an admitted homosexual. What comment do you wish to make regarding this matter?” Tress froze, she wondered which would be worse: admitting being gay or lying to federal authorities. So Tress said she had no comment and adamantly refused to discuss the matter. But the investigators were ready for that. They had more subtle questions for her. But, rather than face further investigations, the next day Madeleine Tress resigned.

I begin with this story of Madeleine Tress because it illustrates a fear that permeated Cold War society—not the well-known fear of communists, but a fear that homosexuals had infiltrated the federal government, that they posed a threat to national security and that they needed to be systematically removed from government service. It’s a fear we now call the Lavender Scare.

So to set the scene a little bit, this Lavender Scare happens after World War II—a time of many fears in American society. Despite an end of the war and a return to economic prosperity, the U.S. and the Soviet Union grew distrustful of one another. They amassed huge arsenals of nuclear weapons and pointed them at one another. It was a time famously when schoolchildren practiced “duck and cover” exercises in their classrooms—the only defense they had against potential nuclear annihilation. We were engaged in a cold war against what was termed “atheistic communism.” There was a fear that communist spies like Alger Hiss had infiltrated key government agencies like the State Department. And it was a time when politicians like Joseph McCarthy stoked fears of subversives undermining the U.S. government. But, as we’ll see, communists were not the only targets.

Many of you may remember the story of Joseph McCarthy. Before his rise to fame, he was a fairly obscure junior senator from Wisconsin. But in February 1950, he made a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, where he claimed to hold in his hand a list—a list of 205, card-carrying communists currently working for the State Department with the knowledge of the Secretary of State. It’s a fairly well-known moment in modern U.S. history, but few people remember that the charges kept changing. First there were 205, then there were 87, later there were 57. First they were card-carrying communists, then they were loyalty risks and then they were this more-amorphous “identity of security” risks.

McCarthy's colleagues demanded specifics. They essentially wanted to see this famous list. McCarthy, of course, was very reluctant to do that. There was really no list. But two weeks later on the floor of the Senate, he gave detailed information about what he was then calling "81 loyalty risks." Most of the cases were about people who belonged to the Communist Party, had belonged to other communist organizations, had read their literature, or in a few cases had acted as Soviet agents. But two of the cases stood out from the rest. They weren't about communists at all. They were about groups of homosexual State Department employees. And when McCarthy got to these two cases, each time he told a story that he thought illustrated and explained all of the other cases. He said, "You will find that practically every active communist is twisted mentally or physically in some way."

President Truman responded to these allegations. He and his administration denied that they employed any communist; that they had even fired any communists. But the Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, appeared a few weeks later on Capitol Hill. And he admitted under intense questioning that the State Department had fired 202 people that it considered to be security risks. And under even more intense questioning by McCarthy and his Republican allies, Dean Acheson's assistant admitted that, well, among these, 91 of them were homosexual. The State Department had fired 91 suspected homosexuals.

And it was this revelation that set off a Lavender Scare. It seemed to corroborate McCarthy's otherwise groundless charges. Rather than satisfying the public, it frightened them. They wanted to know, "Where did the 91 go?" And, "Are there any more?" And, "Did they go to other government agencies?"

People began to talk about the "lavender lads" in the State Department at a time when the color lavender was associated with homosexuality. Red, of course, was associated with communism. And pink was associated with people who might be sympathetic to the communist cause but not actual party members. So it set off this Lavender Scare, this systematic campaign, to find and remove all suspected gay men and lesbians from the federal civil service.

Mail poured in from all over the country to Capitol Hill, to the White House. Joseph McCarthy received over 25,000 letters of support. And the journalists who looked at them at the time said that the majority of people were concerned not with what was called "Red Infiltration," but three-quarters of the letter writers were shocked about the evidence of sex depravity in the State Department. President Truman's own advisers wrote him a memo warning that "The country is more concerned about the charges of homosexuals in the government than about communists."

So McCarthy had inflamed public concern, and there was a push to move the investigation away from communists towards investigating homosexuals. Politicians realized that they were, in effect, easier targets. There weren't many communists left in the government in 1950. But there were many homosexuals. And if they wanted to tar the Truman administration as "the party of subversives," this was the way to go. And pretty soon there was a move beyond the realm of political rhetoric into actual public policy.

In the summer of 1950, in response to all the public concern, Congress held hearings on what they called the "Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government." There were actually no other sex perverts, but it was a way to further label those homosexuals in the government. The committee was chaired by Senator Clyde Hoey of North Carolina. And the committee called all kinds of witnesses. They called members of military intelligence. They called law enforcement officials. They called representatives

of the CIA, which was then a fairly new federal agency. And all the witnesses unanimously testified that gay men and lesbians were vulnerable to blackmail, and therefore obviously a threat to national security. As the Hoey Committee wrote in its final report, it said, “The lack of emotional stability, which is found in most sex perverts, and the weakness of their moral fiber makes them susceptible to the blandishments of the foreign agent.”

The people in charge of the committee—the attorneys—wanted evidence of this claim that gay people were a threat to national security. But the witnesses couldn’t provide any evidence. They couldn’t find a single example of an American citizen who had betrayed government secrets under threat of exposure, of blackmail.

All they could point to was Colonel Alfred Redl. He was the head of Austrian intelligence at the time of World War I. And he was one of the most notorious double agents in history. He was a homosexual man. He betrayed his native country of Austria, gave away secrets to the Russians. There’s no evidence, however, that he was blackmailed into revealing secrets. He seemed to have done it for the money. But it was the only example they could come up with.

The Hoey Committee report is the story of how this rumor essentially became seen as a truth, established by Congress. And it was a report that was widely circulated. It was sent to American embassies all over the world, members of Congress, newspapers. It became the sort of standard document to prove that gay people were a threat to national security.

So here’s an exercise I sometimes give my students. I give them a copy of the Hoey Committee’s final report and ask them to assess the evidence that the Hoey Committee presents. And usually at first, they believe it. They think, “Yeah, that seems to make sense. Gay people in the ’50s; they’re afraid of being exposed; they were vulnerable to blackmail, therefore they’re a threat to national security.” Then I ask them about this one piece of evidence—the Colonel Redl story—the only piece of evidence that the committee had. I ask them, “What would you think if group X is considered a threat to national security based on the activities of one of its members 35 years ago in a foreign country?” Colonel Redl after all, his espionage that occurred during World War I, in Austria, 35 years prior to the Hoey Committee investigation. I also like to ask them, “What groups are currently considered threats to national security? And what sort of evidence do we have to base these claims on—that they pose a threat to national security?” Given the lack of evidence in the 1950s that gay people actually posed a threat to national security, we might ask, “What was the real motivation behind the Lavender Scare? What else was going on in American culture that would make gays and lesbians scapegoats?” I think it’s a good exercise for students because it’s a reminder that facts matter, or that facts should matter; that we shouldn’t base conclusions on hearsay, on assumptions, but on facts.

### JOHN D’EMILIO

This is *Queer America*, and I’m your host, John D’Emilio. You can learn even more about The Lavender Scare in a valuable collection of essays called *Understanding and Teaching U.S. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History*. This podcast is produced in partnership with the University of Wisconsin Press—publishers of this anthology, which was edited by Susan K. Freeman and my co-host, Leila Rupp. It is the first book designed for high school and university teachers who want to integrate queer history into their standard curriculum. From now until the end of the year, the University of Wisconsin Press is offering a 30 percent discount for *Queer America* listeners who order this collection. You’ll find a link to purchase

the book at [Tolerance.org/Podcasts](https://Tolerance.org/Podcasts). Just use the promotional code: QAPODCAST—all caps. Again, here is David Johnson.

### DAVID K. JOHNSON

As I said, the postwar period was a time of many fears. One of those was that America was in a state of moral decline, a fear that World War II had fostered an “anything goes” mentality, that it had disrupted family life, taken millions of men, drafted them, taken them out of their families, put them into same-sex environments and given them a kind of unprecedented freedom in American port cities and in some cases overseas.

So, there was this sense that American sexual standards were loosening, and many people were not happy with that. The sense that American moral standards were in decline was corroborated when Alfred Kinsey published his famous Kinsey Report. The Kinsey Report in 1947, on the sexual behavior of the human male, was the most extensive survey of American sexual practices ever conducted. And it seemed to confirm that American sexual behavior no longer conformed to Victorian standards. It showed high rates of premarital sex, extramarital sex and of homosexual conduct. And it led to this atmosphere of what historians have labeled a kind of postwar, sex-crime panic. This fear that sexual morality—and even sexual criminals—were threatening American families.

Fifteen states established commissions to study the problem. One popular magazine in 1950 wrote, “Once a man assumes the role of homosexual, he often throws off all moral restraints. Some male sex deviants do not stop with infecting their often innocent partners, they descend through sexual perversions to other forms of depravity, such as drug addiction, burglary, sadism, even murder.”

This fear of sex predators comes up in popular culture of the 1950s. We see it in the concern over comic books, particularly the concern over representations of Batman and Robin, many of whom thought posed a bad influence on children, that it mirrored the relationship of a gay couple. Hollywood also sealed this connection between homosexuality and crime with Alfred Hitchcock’s 1948 film *Rope*. Alfred Hitchcock, after all, was known for exploiting all kinds of people’s fears: fears of heights, fear of birds and in this case, the fear of the homosexual sex criminal. Alfred Hitchcock couldn’t indicate directly that this was what the film *Rope* was about, because the Hays Code was still in effect, which forbid Hollywood from openly portray homosexual characters.

It is a remarkable thing that one of the most influential forms of communication of the 20th century, motion pictures, was operating in the United States of America under a censorship code. The Hays Code is instituted in the 1930s as a form of self-censorship by the studios in order to avoid legal censorship by the federal government. And it lasts into the 1960s. One of the last vestiges of the Hays Code—one of the last things it’s not allowed to portray—is homosexuality.

But Alfred Hitchcock gave hints. Philip and Brandon lived together in a fashionable New York apartment. Philip is portrayed as artistic—an old code word for homosexual. And in the opening murder scene where Philip and Brandon kill a third man just for the fun of it, they’re shown together in a dark room struggling and breathing heavily. When their task is completed, they rest together in the dark. And Philip lights a cigarette. Warner Brothers promoted *Rope* as “The most excitement-filled love story ever told.” And it suggested to millions of Americans that even middle-class homosexuals, believing themselves to be

outside traditional moral constraints, could become criminal sexual psychopaths.

So with the Cold War perceived as a moral crusade against atheistic communism, moral issues became a key site in that struggle. The press suggested that communists were converting American youth to homosexuality to defeat us from within. Some even claimed that homosexuality was “Stalin’s atom bomb.” As Joseph McCarthy noted, “The great difference between our Western, Christian world and the atheistic communist world is not political, ladies and gentlemen. It is moral. The real basic difference lies in the religion of immorality invented by Marx, preached fervently by Lenin and carried to unimaginable extremes by Stalin. This religion of immorality will more deeply wound and damage mankind than any conceivable economic or political system.” This was a time, after all, when the United States added “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance to shore up American culture against this immoral menace.

By 1952, this fear of homosexual infiltration helped win a presidential election. The 1952 presidential election was the first such election since the rise of Joseph McCarthy and the Lavender Scare. And it pitted Democratic candidate Adlai Stevenson, former governor of Illinois, against the Republican candidate Dwight Eisenhower, former commander of the American troops in Europe.

Adlai Stevenson was portrayed as an intellectual egghead. Some press reports even said he had a “fruity voice.” He was the kind of man a lot of people wanted to remove from Washington, not to send there. He was a wealthy, urbane, former State Department official. And he was divorced, which in 1952 was considered a scandal. He was also rumored to be homosexual. Some said that that was the reason for his divorce. And the FBI spread a rumor that he had been arrested on a homosexual sex charge, that he was essentially a sex criminal. On the other hand, the Republican candidates—Eisenhower and his running mate Richard Nixon—were portrayed as regular guys, as God-fearing men, who were for morality. And their campaign slogan was, “Let’s clean house.” Let’s get rid of these undesirable people that the Truman administration has brought to Washington.

To call attention to the divorced status of their opponent, Adlai Stevenson, Eisenhower and Nixon made frequent joint appearances with their wives and children, or in the case of the Eisenhowers, their grandchildren. It was a way of pointing out to the public that if you voted for Adlai Stevenson, there would be no First Lady. And why was that? It brought the notion of Adlai Stevenson as a divorced and possibly homosexual candidate into the limelight. And it brought family values into American presidential politics.

So in 1960, the Democrats began to engage with this issue of family values. They jettisoned Adlai Stevenson as their candidate, and they picked a good family man—photogenic John F. Kennedy—as their running mate. People at the time said that Kennedy was a “Stevenson with balls,” which was to say a Stevenson with a photogenic wife and children.

So in 1952, when Eisenhower wins the election and becomes president of the United States, he implements his campaign slogan which was, “Let’s clean house.” And one of the first things Eisenhower does as president is sign an executive order changing Truman’s loyalty program and instituting a security program. He essentially institutionalized the Lavender Scare and added the term “sexual perversion” to the list of disqualifications for serving in the federal civil service.

A loyalty investigation under the Truman administration involved questions about one's political loyalty, one's current state of mind. It involves a willful desire to overthrow the government. Membership in the Communist Party, of course, is the most obvious example of that. Questions that might be asked in a loyalty investigation included "Have you ever been to a communist party meeting? Do you read the *Daily Worker*?" which was a communist newspaper; "Do you listen to Paul Robeson music?" Paul Robeson was a noted member of the Communist Party.

But the new security investigations that began under the Eisenhower administration had a different emphasis. The switch was away from questions of political loyalty to character, to suitability, to trustworthiness and to vulnerability to blackmail. So questions of security were not about one's desire to overthrow the government, but were about the possibility that, in the future, a government servant might commit a crime. So it involved someone who drinks too much, someone who talks too much or someone guilty of sexual perversion or homosexuality and therefore was vulnerable to blackmail.

In 1950s America, every government worker, every government contractor, was subject to a security investigation. Some estimates are that one out of five Americans were subject to a security investigation of some sort during the 1950s. So while the question, "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?" was the question we associate with the Cold War, another question was asked at least as frequently: "We have information that you are homosexual. What comment do you care to make?" That question was asked more often but quietly, behind closed doors.

### JOHN D'EMILIO

This is *Queer America*, and I'm your host, John D'Emilio. While we're busy launching this podcast, another Teaching Tolerance podcast is wrapping up its first amazing season. Hosted by Hasan Kwame Jeffries, it's a detailed look at how to teach important aspects of the history of American slavery in your classroom. You can find our sister podcast *Teaching Hard History: American Slavery* in iTunes. Or visit [Tolerance.org/Podcasts](http://Tolerance.org/Podcasts). Once again, here is David Johnson.

### DAVID K. JOHNSON

To give you a sense of what a security investigation was like, I'd return to the interrogation of Madeleine Tress, who was one of thousands of civil servants interrogated and forced to resign in this period. She had already been the subject of a full, field investigation, meaning the Civil Service investigators had already interviewed Tress's friends, neighbors and co-workers. So they had a lot of very specific questions for Tress. "Were you ever at the Redskins Lounge?"—a lesbian bar in Washington, DC. Figuring there was nothing illegal about going to a bar, she admitted she had been there. She said she enjoyed the orchestra there. But officials insisted she had gone there to make what they called "homosexual contacts." "Do you know Kate So-and-so?" dropping the name of a lesbian friend of hers. Thinking again that this was not illegal, Tress admitted to knowing these friends of hers—what officials termed "known homosexuals." Tress suggested it was their intellectual appeal that attracted her. Investigators, they got rather graphic, and they always wanted specific details on sexual acts.

In Tress's case they said, "How do you like having sex with a woman? You've never had it good until you've

had it from a man.” Eventually, Tress admitted to some homosexual activity in her youth but claimed she had broken away from it since coming to Washington. The typical tactic of people under extreme duress. But that was enough for them—just an admission that she had been to a gay bar, that she had associated with known homosexuals and admitted to at least one homosexual encounter. That was enough for them to fire her. At the end of the interrogation, she knew that she had only one option. The interrogation had been the most demeaning experience of her life. With World War II a fresh memory, Tress thought this was what it must have been like in Nazi Germany. The next day she submitted her resignation.

The Lavender Scare forced an untold number of such resignations—1,000 alone from the State Department, perhaps 5,000 or 10,000 throughout the federal government. A few men, fearing exposure and loss of career, even committed suicide. Drew Ference worked at the U.S. Embassy in Paris. It was his dream job. He lived there with his lover. But after a fairly brutal interrogation by State Department security officials, he came home to their apartment, turned on the gas and asphyxiated himself. The State Department hid the truth from Drew’s family. They claimed that Drew was despondent over his health, over some medical tests that had come back—making sure no links were made back to their federal interrogations. So they actively lied to the family. They covered up the connection between his interrogation over his sexuality and his suicide. It was only when Drew’s father got a congressman to intervene that the family learned the truth: that Drew had committed suicide after an interrogation by State Department security officials.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, a few fired gay employees began to fight back, to protest their dismissals. Frank Kameny, for example, was an astronomer with a Ph.D. from Harvard who was fired in 1957 from the Army Map Service for his homosexuality. He fought his dismissal, first administratively and then through the courts, trying to take his case all the way to the Supreme Court, but failed. So, he decided to enlist the help of others. And he formed an organization in Washington D.C. They called themselves the Mattachine Society. And slowly, they supported the case of other fired federal employees. They began to win these cases in court, and by 1969, they had won a case that forced the Civil Service Commission to change its policy.

Before Frank Kameny, as far as we know, all men and women fired for being gay from the federal civil service chose to walk away, chose to quietly resign. Frank Kameny did not choose to quietly resign. Frank Kameny chose to protest his dismissal. He didn’t understand it. He thought his off-duty romantic or sexual interest had nothing to do with his ability to perform his job for the Army Map Service. He was working for the government as an astronomer in 1957, right literally at the start of the space race, the time that Sputnik was launched. And the United States was behind in the space race. The United States needed astronomers to compete in that struggle. And Frank Kameny was one of only a handful of astronomers in the country—he had a PhD from Harvard—but they still dismissed him as a threat to national security.

He had real trouble finding any other employment because almost any job involving astronomy in the 1950s required a security clearance. And he couldn’t get one. He was forced into a corner and chose to fight his dismissal. He made an argument in federal court that said he was being discriminated against, similar to the way in which racial and religious minorities were being discriminated against—but this was not an issue of national security or blackmail, but it was an issue of civil rights.

And although he lost, he gathered others around him in this new organization—the Mattachine Society of Washington—and collectively they began to portray this as an issue of civil rights. And they did things like picket in front of the White House—openly—in 1965, which was a very courageous thing to do.

So though he lost his individual suit with the federal government, he became a kind of expert on security issues with the federal government. And other people who were fired from the federal government for homosexuality would call him up, and he would become their representative. He supported several fired civil servants in their fight with the Civil Service Commission and eventually won in court. The nice thing about the court system is that you have to prove that there’s a basis for a government policy. And the Civil Service Commission could not prove a connection between off-duty conduct and work performance. It could not prove any threat to national security from its gay employees. So he succeeded in changing federal government policy. So it was activism on the part of gay men and lesbians that ended the civil service policy; that ended the Lavender Scare.

The Lavender Scare offers several important lessons. It helps explain the multiple fears of the Cold War—how political and sexual fears were intertwined. It helps explain how, for example, the Reverend Billy Graham could praise Joseph McCarthy for “exposing the pinks, the lavenders, and the reds.” If we teach only about the Red Scare, we’re only telling part of the story of the Cold War. The Lavender Scare also provides students with a critical tool for understanding the struggle between two competing values—between freedom and security, something we still struggle with today.

Throughout U.S. history, we see groups considered threats to America. Threats to be controlled, or removed, or suppressed. Sometimes it’s based on skin color, sometimes national origin, sometimes religion, sometimes sexuality. Ask your students what group today is seen as a threat to national security and whether that threat is real or imagined? What is the evidence that it’s based on? Ask them what similarities they see between what happened during the Cold War and what’s happening today. And how would they resolve this tension between the desire for security and the desire for freedom?

### JOHN D’EMILIO

David Johnson is an associate professor of History at the University of South Florida. He’s co-editor of *The U.S. Since 1945: A Documentary Reader*, and author of *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government*. A documentary film based on the book is touring the country. To find out where you can see it, visit [thelavenderscare.com](http://thelavenderscare.com).

*Queer America* is a podcast from Teaching Tolerance, in partnership with the University of Wisconsin Press. They’re the publisher of the award-winning anthology *Understanding and Teaching U.S. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History*. In each episode, we’re featuring a different scholar to talk about material from a chapter in that collection. Use the code QAPODCAST—all caps—to get a 30 percent discount when you purchase the book through [Tolerance.org/Podcasts](http://Tolerance.org/Podcasts).

You’ll also find additional tools—including resources we’ve mentioned, episode transcripts and an LGBTQ Best Practices Guide to help your school create an inclusive curriculum and an open and respectful climate for dialogue among students and staff. Teaching Tolerance is a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center—providing free resources to educators who work with children from kindergarten through high school. You can also find those online at [Tolerance.org](http://Tolerance.org).

Thanks to Dr. Johnson for sharing his insights with us. This podcast was produced by Shea Shackelford, with production assistance from Russell Gragg. Kate Shuster is our project manager. Music in this episode is by Chris Zabriskie. So, what do you think? Let us know on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Review us in iTunes. And please, tell your friends and colleagues about this podcast.

I'm Dr. John D'Emilio, professor emeritus of history and of women's and gender studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago. And your host for *Queer America*.