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David K. Johnson. *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. xii + 277 pp. $30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-40481-3.

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The Second Red Scare's Fraternal Twin

For decades historians have scrutinized the victims, proponents, and schemes of American Cold War internal security politics, most of which have been subsumed under the imprecise term "McCarthyism." Few, however, have taken serious notice of the closely related yet distinct and insidious Cold War persecution of homosexuals during the 1950s and beyond. Among those who have looked at this topic, but only as part of larger studies, are John D'Emilio in his important book *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (1983), Robert Dean in *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (2001), and Athan Theoharis in *Chasing Spies: How the FBI Failed in Counterintelligence but Promoted the Politics of McCarthyism in the Cold War Years* (2002).[1] 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, which, in its scope, is vaguely reminiscent of Robert Murray's 1955 classic, *Red Scare*, on how the U.S. government came to focus on gays as "security risks" who were often considered on a par with or more of a threat than suspected communists and fellow travelers.[2] Imbued with this kind of simplistic perception, members of Congress and national security bureaucrats found it necessary to purge systematically gays and lesbians from all manner of government positions. While most historians of the Cold War have marginalized the persecution of gays as part and parcel of McCarthyism, Johnson rightly points out that the so-called Lavender Scare–a term used to distinguish the purge of gays from suspected communists since the former were associated with the color lavender in the 1950s–was actually deeply ingrained in fifties culture, pre-dated McCarthyism, and long outlived it. Johnson further argues that the government's repressive action significantly helped to unite gays and lesbians through a shared repressive experience, and this, ironically, helped to spur the modern gay civil rights movement.

Johnson begins his book, which was adapted from his Northwestern University Ph.D. dissertation (2000), with Senator Joseph McCarthy's declaration in West Virginia that he had a list of 205 known communists in the State Department. Significantly, Johnson points out that two of these cases were unique in that they involved so-called "sexual deviance" rather than the alleged political corruption that so interested McCarthy. By focusing specifically on these two cases involving homosexuals, Senator McCarthy had focused attention on gays in government and thereby linked them to the security issue involving suspected communists. The State Department, seeking to avoid becoming too deeply entangled in McCarthy's charges, freely admitted that it had dismissed some 202 "security risks," and when pressed on what this meant, Deputy Undersecretary of State John Peurifoy stated that 91 of these were homosexuals. Seeking to capitalize on such a sensational revelation in order to embarrass the Truman administration, Republicans employed the "91" to illustrate the "infiltration" into the State Department of "sexual perverts" who were regarded as security risks because Soviet agents could blackmail them. Johnson notes that at this point the gays-in-government issue, while initially politically motivated, quickly took on a life of its own, moving beyond partisan politics.

Johnson keenly observes that the language of the U.S. Senate's 1947 McCarran rider, which gave the secretary of state authority to dismiss any employee at his discretion, included not only communists but specifically homosexuals, a fact overlooked by many Cold War historians. Thereafter not only were suspected communists actively purged from the State Department, but also homosexuals who comprised a separate group considered to be morally weak and on par with drunkards, criminals, and financially corrupt persons. Effectively, the removal of gays from government, while initially linked to communists, became a distinct focus of internal se-

curity bureaucrats that paralleled the hunt for suspected communists and leftists. Facilitating this unique hunt for gays were the similarities in behavior exhibited by both gays and communists. Both groups seemed to move in secretive underworlds (gays due to public attitudes towards homosexuality in the 1950s), both had specific locations in which to meet, and both had their own literature and sense of common loyalty. Yet distinguishing the two groups were the numbers uncovered by government investigators. For years investigators had hunted high and low for communists in government and when this failed their expectations, suspected leftists came under scrutiny. But investigators' efforts to uncover actual or suspected homosexuals proved far more successful and, indeed, far outstripped the discovery of alleged communists and their allies.

Johnson further sets the so-called Lavender Scare in historical context by looking back at the history of Washington, D.C., and gays there, revealing that prior to the 1950s, metropolitan Washington had, in fact, been fairly accepting of homosexuals. Many gays and lesbians were attracted to the city by opportunities created with the advent of the New Deal and Second World War and their requisite vast bureaucracies. Yet by the late 1940s, amid a growing suspicion that America's moral sense was weakening, homosexuals received a new focus. Increased penalties were added to metropolitan sex crimes, for example, while the government sought to curtail homosexual liaisons in Washington's parks via its so-called "Pervert Elimination Campaigns." Johnson explains this new post-war crackdown on homosexuals as a reaction to the fact that gays, previous to this time, had experienced a period of relative toleration and were therefore visible as easy moral targets. This set the stage for the later and more intrusive repression of homosexuals which was particularly distinctive in that it had occurred simultaneously with the fears, anxieties, and growing internal security apparatus of the Cold War.

Amid growing public focus on gays and lesbians, and the parallel government hunt for suspected homosexuals, the State Department in 1950 began systematically removing gays not out of a national security rationale but out of embarrassment. Then a month after the revelation of the 91 homosexuals in the State Department, the purge of gays was extended to other federal departments. Driving this desire to purge gays from government positions was Senator Kenneth Wherry, Republican from Nebraska, who held hearings on the issue where alleged experts testified, including police lieutenant Roy Blick who offered elaborately concocted testimony on the numbers of gays in government. But what makes Wherry central to Johnson's thesis is the fact that, whereas McCarthy had linked gays to communists, Wherry had linked them to government bureaucracy, thereby ensuring an expansion of the Lavender Scare. This resulted in the initiation of a full-fledged government investigation into the gays-in-government issue.

A most interesting contribution of Johnson's study is his reconstruction of the efforts by Senator Clyde Hoey, Democrat from North Carolina, to lead an extensive Senate investigation into the popular homosexual issue. Johnson had access to the previously sealed Hoey Committee executive session transcripts which were only declassified in 2000. We learn that although Hoey was sympathetic to McCarthy's cause, he disapproved of the tactics of the junior senator from Wisconsin. As a result, Hoey sought to keep his investigation muted. And though the Truman White House tried to manage Hoey's work, attempting to place the emphasis on the medical aspects of homosexuality rather than the security aspects to lessen the political ramifications, Hoey's committee nevertheless remained independent, choosing to focus on security issues. Driving forward the security issue was Hoey's chief counsel, an ex-FBI agent, who, as a former member of the FBI, perhaps had an interest in promoting gays as security risks. By 1951, for example, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover had instituted a "Sex Deviate" program to furnish executive, legislative, and judicial officials with information relating to the activities of gay government employees.[3] While mentioning this counsel's roots, Johnson does not address whether the FBI might have quietly provided the committee with information, something the FBI regularly did with both McCarthy and HUAC. But Johnson cannot be faulted for this given the FBI's intricate methods for hiding the release of such information and the destruction of FBI files, and especially since the Hoey Committee and its final report pre-dated Hoover's conception of the formal "Sex Deviate" program. But the importance of the Hoey investigation, in a larger sense, lies in the fact that it had propelled the Lavender Scare forward to become government-wide policy.

As Johnson observes, the Lavender Scare long outlived the Second Red Scare, and during the Eisenhower administration the purge of gays from government reached its peak and became institutionalized. In his memoirs, Eisenhower commented that he perceived gays as unintentional security risks. And at this point, another former FBI agent headed up the State Department's Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs to ferret out suspected homosexuals, employing, among other things, lie detectors. Moreover, the purge even expanded

beyond the American government when State Department officials sought to extend it to the United Nations and even coordinated with British police officials.

The last part of Johnson's book examines how the government's repressive actions against gays, utilizing the familiar guilt-by-association and naming-names tactics employed against suspected communists, led many to unite in order to fight discrimination. He notes how the shared experience of being fired simply for being gay drew some into the Washington gay sub-culture, leading many to begin to identify themselves not solely by gender but by sexual identity. Johnson then examines the organizing of the national Mattachine Society and the Mattachine Society of Washington (MSW). The latter organization, led by Frank Kameny, who was an astronomer fired by the federal government for being gay, took the new approach of social action to publicize gay issues. And while the efforts of the MSW are generally overshadowed by the more well known Stonewall incident, Johnson argues that the MSW's fight to end civil service discrimination buttressed the later gay civil rights movement.

David Johnson's book is, indeed, 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 for those who did not conform to 1950s society and beyond. 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.

Notes

[1]. John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Robert Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); and Athan Theoharis, *Chasing Spies: How the FBI Failed in Counterintelligence but Promoted the Politics of McCarthyism in the Cold War Years* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002).

[2]. Robert Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955).

[3]. See Theoharis, *Chasing Spies*, pp. 177-179.

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