

## The Lavender Scare <sup>[1]</sup>

The **Lavender Scare** <sup>[2]</sup> was a moral panic that spread throughout the United States primarily after World War II. The Lavender Scare was related to the national Red Scare, but its subject was gay and lesbian Americans rather than Communists. The belief put forth was that their "immoral lifestyle" made them more likely to be "subject to foreign espionage" (or spying). The Lavender Scare led to mass firings and discrimination against gay and lesbian Americans posing as a matter of "national security." The Lavender Scare also had close connections to North Carolina.

Prominent North Carolinians who were involved in the Scare were **Josephus Daniels** <sup>[3]</sup>, **Clyde Hoey** <sup>[4]</sup>, and **James Webb** <sup>[5]</sup>. Josephus Daniels, along with future president Franklin Roosevelt, was involved with the 1919 Newport Scandal. It promoted fears about gay men in the government and military. Clyde Hoey led the 1950 Hoey Committee. It investigated people in the United States government suspected of being gay. The Committee's findings informed many of the actions of United States presidents during the Lavender Scare. James Webb oversaw two government departments, the Department of State (1949-1952) and NASA (1961-1968). During the height of the Lavender Scare, each of these organizations fired many gay employees. Though unlikely, it remains unclear whether Webb had any role in the firings.

Discrimination began to take large-scale effect during Roosevelt's presidency. It grew to its most significant periods during the presidencies of Truman and Eisenhower. According to the White House, 5,000-10,000 people were fired or resigned from employment in the federal government as a result of the Lavender Scare. Between 1947 and 1961, more people were fired for their orientation than for their associations with the Communist Party. People who were interrogated and fired as part of the Lavender Scare also often died by suicide.

Echoes of the Lavender Scare can still be felt across our society today. This ongoing debate spans all government levels, from local city councils to the federal government. As of May 2023, over 520 different pieces of legislation (along with seventy new laws) have been issued across the United States, including North Carolina. Resources like information and medical care of LGBTQIA+ Americans are the primary targets of the new legislation.

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### Glossary:

*Discrimination*: to treat someone differently, usually unfairly. Common forms of discrimination include race, sex, sexuality, religion, age, and ability.

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### Guided Reading Questions:

1. Why were people targeted during the Lavender Scare?
  2. Name one North Carolinian who was involved in the Lavender Scare. What did they do?
  3. Name one president who was involved in the Lavender Scare.
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### **From:**

[ANCHOR: A North Carolina History Online Resource](#) [20]

### **Authors:**

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### **Copyright Date:**

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### **People:**

[Josephus Daniels](#) [3]



[22]

[Clyde Hoey](#) [4]

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[James Webb](#) [5]

**For Teachers:**

Lavender Scare Lesson Plan (Grades 9-12) [23]

from the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training

The Lavender Scare and McCarthyism (Grade 11) [24]

from the University of California - Berkeley

**Primary Sources:**

ao 18	2211
1	Senator Smith. It seems to me that 105 is a very large
2	number for the number of employees in the State Department
3	service, and I am wondering how there could be so many if the
4	usual investigation is made of every employee before they are
5	taken on.
6	Mr. Humelsine. Of course, Senator, that is over a three-
7	year period, in fact, going into the fourth year.
8	Senator Smith. Is not that quite a good number?
9	Mr. Humelsine. I do not believe so. I believe if you
10	would take it against any statistics that you can get or
11	"gestimates" on this as far as, say, the national average is
12	concerned, I think you would find it pretty low.
13	Senator Smith. I wonder if your investigation should be
14	tighter.
15	Mr. Humelsine. In our investigations now we make a very
16	careful investigation from this standpoint. We have changed
17	our investigating techniques considerably because of the re-
18	cognition of this problem.
19	To give you an example of that -- we are very careful now
20	and alert to things that at one time were meaningless to us
21	from the standpoint of investigation. If an individual would
22	say, "Well, this is a very fine person but they seem to have
23	prissy habits." -- Well, there are certain statements like
24	that that individuals you are interviewing will not face up to
25	directly, but they will give a hint as to it. Well, our people

from Judith Atkins, National Archives and Records Administration

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LGBTQIA+ Studies: A Resource Guide <sup>[11]</sup>

from the Library of Congress

**Artifacts:**



<sup>[6]</sup>

Senators Herbert O'Connor, Clyde Hoey, and Margaret Chase Smith in 1949. The next year, they served as investigators on the Hoey Committee. Image courtesy of the National Archives.

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