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The Social Contract: Duty and Discrimination in Public Service

A Thesis Portfolio by

Brian Corteville

Chapman University

Orange, CA

Wilkinson College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in War, Diplomacy, and Society

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Committee in charge:

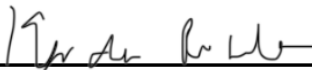
Kyle Longley, Ph.D., Chair

Kyndra Rotunda, J.D.

Mateo Jarquín, Ph.D.

The thesis of Brian Corteville is approved.

Kyle Longley
Kyle Longley, Ph.D., Chair


Kyndra Rotunda, J.D.

Mateo Cayetano Jarquin Digitally signed by
Mateo Cayetano Jarquin
Date: 2023.12.15
11:05:32 -08'00'
Mateo Jarquin, Ph.D.

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Duty and Discrimination in Public Service

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ABSTRACT

The Social Contract:

Duty and Discrimination in Public Service

by Brian Corteville

What do citizens owe the government? And conversely, what does the government owe its people, particularly those who volunteer for military or public service? The works in this portfolio attempt to answer these questions and delve into the social contract between the American government and its citizens, often through the lens of sexual orientation. Using original correspondence from the Center for War Letters at Chapman University as well as existing works concerning Don't Ask, Don't Tell and the Lavender Scare, the collected essays aim to tell the story of everyday Americans who answered the call to public service only to find indifferent or even hostile treatment by government they sought to serve. Through poor planning or discrimination, the U.S. government routinely violated its oath to its people at key points throughout the nation's history, but this portfolio demonstrates how dedicated citizens strove to update and improve the social contract in order to produce the more perfect union promised in the nation's constitution.

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Introduction

“And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.”¹ With the soaring rhetoric of his inaugural address of 1961, President John F. Kennedy inspired a generation of Americans to consider civic action and public service for the betterment of the country. While this is undoubtedly the line most familiar to Americans, the speech is peppered with exhortations for his countrymen to come together out of a sense of patriotism and loyalty- not as a call to arms, but to unite in a new struggle against “the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself.”² The Kennedy Administration parlayed these words into action over the following years, creating and implementing new programs such as the Alliance for Progress to promote economic progress in the Western Hemisphere and the Peace Corps to send idealistic American volunteers overseas to assist in development projects and foster person-to-person ties. Americans may have felt themselves in a new era, one in which public service, community, and cooperation were to supplant old ideals of individualism and a laissez-faire approach by the federal government.

However, President Kennedy’s rhetorical flourishes merely recast in a new light the social contract that has governed relations between the government and the people since the founding of the United States. This implicit agreement between the American people and their government spells out the rights and duties that each side owes to the other- the government provides security, social stability, and limited forms of welfare, while citizens agree to pay taxes, serve on juries, and otherwise consent to the legitimacy of the state. Kennedy’s enthusiastic call for a renewed public commitment to this social contract masked an ugly truth hidden beneath its

¹ Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. President's Office Files. Speech Files. Inaugural address, 20 January 1961.

² Ibid.

idealistic veneer: that his government planned to continue a long tradition of discriminating against certain Americans who responded to his call for public service. In April 1953, Kennedy's predecessor in the White House, Dwight Eisenhower, issued Executive Order 10450 which banned from federal government service those individuals suspected of drug addiction, criminal behavior, and "sexual perversion," widely understood to mean homosexuality.³ For gay and lesbian Americans, an identity that was only beginning to take shape at the time, the social contract was abrogated- only heterosexuals and those willing to go to great lengths to conceal their sexual orientation were welcome to unite in the struggle against the common enemies of humankind.

The essays in this portfolio explore the social contract between the American government and its citizens, often through the lens of sexual orientation. What does the government owe its people, particularly those who volunteer for military or public service? How much planning and organizational preparation must the government undertake before sending Americans off to war? What rights do Americans have when grappling with perceived and real discrimination and mistreatment by the very government they pledge to serve? And finally, how has this treatment affected not only the mental health and wellbeing of those banished from government service, but also the overall foreign policy trajectory of the United States? The works in this portfolio attempt to answer these questions and provide historical context for the complex interplay between American citizens and their elected leaders. Through poor planning or discrimination, the U.S. government routinely violated its oath to its people at key points throughout the nation's history, but dedicated citizens strove to update and improve the social contract in order to produce the more perfect union promised in the nation's constitution.

³ Executive Order 10450 (1953) <https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-order/10450.html>

Although the first essay predates the Kennedy Administration by six decades, it still touches on the social contract – specifically, the mishandled war preparations of the McKinley Administration for the Spanish-American War of 1898 and the Volunteer soldiers who suffered as a result. As the American public clamored for war following the sinking of the *U.S.S Maine* in Havana harbor in February 1898, the McKinley Administration rushed to acquire sufficient rifles and materiel for a force to exact revenge on Spain and liberate the downtrodden Cuban people. Volunteer regiments began to arrive at centralized camps in Florida and Georgia without guns, tents, or medical supplies, and the McKinley Administration lacked sufficient ships to transport them to the battlegrounds in Cuba and Puerto Rico. The troops on the front lines reported a wide discrepancy between the modern rifles used by the Spaniards and the antiquated cast-offs they carried.

The lack of planning for the war effort was readily apparent to the Volunteer troops, and in many cases caused them to question the very patriotism that compelled them to respond to the call to arms. Soldiers in domestic camps and on the front lines suffered from easily-preventable diseases provoked by the tropical climate or the poor sanitation of the camps. As one Michigan soldier wrote home, “the Spaniards ... with their Mauser rifles and smokeless powder, they had great advantage over our men. What a shame that this, our glorious country, can't arm its men equal to downtrodden Spain!”⁴ Another soldier in Cuba reported to his local hometown paper, “You people at home have no idea of the suffering that has and is being endured by this army.”⁵

⁴ Orrin Bowen to Jeannette Dean, 12 July 1898. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

⁵ *Iron Mountain Press*. August 18, 1898.

<https://www.uproc.lib.mi.us/dclpdf/LH%20File%202/SPANISH%20AMERICAN%20WAR%20-%20Cummings.pdf>

The troops themselves refrained from criticizing the government directly, but the poor condition of the soldiers upon their return to the United States shocked their families and “formed the unshakable conviction that men who had risked all for their country had been betrayed by those in power.”⁶ Public calls for accountability rocked the McKinley Administration, which hastily convened several boards and commissions to study the failed war appropriations effort and the effect of tropical diseases on the troops. “Our boys had been treated inhumanly by the representatives of the government they were fighting to support,” wrote one Michigan newspaper in a blistering editorial. “There can be no excuse for such dastardly treatment of heroes.”⁷ This perceived breach in the social contract motivated the American public to demand proper conditions for those who volunteered for military service and expect that the U.S. government would use due diligence in planning for future conflicts that might put American soldiers in harm’s way.

The second essay in the portfolio continues to explore the social contract between the U.S. government and the men and women who volunteer for military service, specifically homosexual servicemembers. Government discrimination against gays in the military can be traced back to the very founding of the United States, as George Washington personally signed off on the dismissal of a lieutenant for attempted sodomy and perjury in 1778. Attempts to prevent those engaging in homosexual conduct from joining or serving in the military continued for the next two centuries, until Bill Clinton campaigned on a promise to lift the ban in the 1992 elections. Facing unexpected blowback from Congress and outright insubordination from the

⁶ Cosmas, Graham A. *An Army for Empire: The United States Army in the Spanish-American War*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971), 265.

⁷ *Iron Mountain Press*. September 1, 1898.

<https://www.uproc.lib.mi.us/dclpdf/LH%20File%202/SPANISH%20AMERICAN%20WAR%20-%20Cummings.pdf>

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the newly-elected President Clinton settled on a purported compromise that ultimately became known as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.”

While the new policy represented a minor step towards progress in that it penalized conduct, i.e. homosexual actions, rather than a person’s identity, it still became weaponized by the military bureaucracy and was used to oust tens of thousands of gay and lesbian servicemembers from the armed forces. Because the men and women affected by the policy often remained anonymous, the American public remained unaware of the severe toll that DADT took on the mental health of servicemembers – both those forced to lie about their sexual orientation to continue their military service and those ultimately discharged under the policy. Americans who patriotically volunteered for military service found that the government labeled a feature of their core identity, their sexual orientation, as a mental disorder and lumped homosexual acts together with “other perverse sexual practices.”⁸ Gays and lesbians were presented as threats to the broader military due to their general perception as untrustworthy, even though under DADT they were forced to lie about their sexual orientation as a condition of employment with the U.S. military.⁹

Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell represented another breach of the social contract, as each of the 13,000 men and women discharged under the policy represented an overt example of governmental discrimination based not on the individuals’ skills and abilities but their sexual orientation. As the military studies the mental health of its troops, specifically the stress of repeated deployments during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan coupled with the effects of post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injuries, it must also incorporate the psychological toll that

⁸ Agnes Gereben Schaefer, “A Comparative Analysis of the Military Bans on Openly Serving Gays, Lesbians, and Transgender Personnel.” *Managing Sex in the U.S. Military*, 145.

⁹ Gary Lehring, *Officially Gay: The Political Construction of Sexuality*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 93.

DADT imposed on gay and lesbian troops. The repeal of DADT in 2011 was a step towards repairing and updating the social contract, and ensuring that all those who asked what they could do for their country were afforded the opportunity to serve free from discrimination.

The third essay continues to study the relationship between the government and its homosexual citizens, but this time focusing on public servants in the federal bureaucracy. Before Eisenhower issued the now-infamous E.O. 10450, Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WI) used the specter of homosexuals and communists in government service to revive his political career and warn of the supposed menace that these twin threats posed. During the ensuing Lavender Scare, hundreds of federal employees were dismissed or resigned under duress due to their suspected “moral weakness” of homosexuality. The government justified its actions by claiming that homosexuals posed a threat to national security because they could be blackmailed by America’s adversaries into divulging the nation’s secrets. However, neither the Eisenhower Administration nor a series of specially-formed Congressional committees ever produced evidence to support this claim.

By purging homosexuals (and suspected homosexuals) from the federal payroll, the government once again breached the social contract by overtly discriminating against a group of citizens due only to their sexual orientation. The third essay also explores how the Lavender Scare may have affected the foreign policy of the United States. Precise figures for how many gay and lesbian public servants lost their jobs are unavailable, but historians estimate that between 5,000 and 10,000 Americans were directly affected by E.O. 10450 and similar policies. Through a series of case studies, the essay explores three prominent homosexuals in government service, and how the circumstances of their involuntary resignations may have subtly altered the trajectory of the nation’s foreign policy. The Lavender Scare was a tragic and unnecessary

policy cloaked in the rhetoric of national security, which affected not only the men and women prevented from serving their government but to the nation as a whole as it warped the social contract that binds the government and its people.

The final essay is a reflection on the “new history” approach that helps illuminate the interaction between the government and its citizens. Only by reframing history away from its traditional top-down approach and refocusing on the human element can one gain a greater appreciation of the effects that government decisions can have on individuals. Through several different readings and projects over the course of the War, Diplomacy, and Society program, students were able to view the interaction between these three elements through different prisms and begin to rethink the basic tenets of the social contract. The individual citizens who inhabit American history now have the opportunity to have their stories told, and historians can judge if the sacrifices they make for the public good are matched by a government that appreciates their contributions.

Essay #1: Michigan and the Spanish-American War: Patriotism and Duty Amidst a Mishandled War

Across Michigan, talk of war was in the air. In the days following the sinking of the *USS Maine* in the Havana harbor on February 15, 1898, the American public clamored for war with Spain. President McKinley launched a formal investigation of the explosion in order to ascertain its causes, but an impatient nation goaded on by a sensationalist press advocated for immediate military action. The scars from the Civil War just a few decades prior had only begun to heal, but a veritable wave of patriotic fervor swept the country, both in the North and in the states of the former Confederacy alike. Russell Alger, the Secretary of War and former Governor of Michigan, later fondly recalled the “splendid spectacle of the country’s response to the government’s ultimatum to Spain ... It was spontaneous and practically universal; it was sincere and enthusiastic.”¹⁰

That the explosion was later determined to likely have been accidental and not an act of war by Spain made little difference in those heady days. Alger continued that “public sympathy with the insurgent Cubans had become the popular test of human kindness, and protest against war the unanswerable proof of unchristian indifference ... A popular demand for intervention had attained serious proportions and could be resisted only with extreme difficulty.”¹¹ The McKinley Administration acceded to the calls for war emanating from Congress and harnessed the patriotism of the American public to rush the nation into a war it hadn’t planned for and was ill-equipped to wage. Given the war’s short duration, eventual victory by the United States, and relatively low casualty count, the conflict largely entered the history books as a “splendid little war.” However, such a superficial view glosses over the hidden victims of the war; namely, the

¹⁰ Russell Alger, *The Spanish American War*, (New York: Harper and Bros, 1901), 6.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 2.

Americans who patriotically volunteered their service to an Administration that knew their sacrifice was unnecessary yet still put them in harm's way. The mismanagement of the war caused many Americans to reassess their patriotism and begin to demand accountability and increased transparency from the government in times of war.

The Build-Up to War

The small town of Girard in the central part of Michigan was no outlier to this wave of pro-war fervor. Girard in the late 1800s was a small agricultural community of 1,200 inhabitants in which many men worked as farmers or in other associated professions like blacksmith or trader, while young people with ambition worked as teachers or sought higher education. Contemporaneous news reports described an active and engaged citizenry in small towns across the state eager to discuss current events. As a small Michigan newspaper described shortly after the *Maine* explosion, "The clock is about to strike the hour of twelve and ... everywhere people are discussing the great problem of the hour and talk it over and discuss it man to man. They come together in the hotel, on the streets and in the drug stores and plunge into the discussion with all their will and with the greatest sincerity."¹² No one followed events more closely than members of the Michigan National Guard, who divided their time between service in the state militia and pursuing their professions. After three decades of peace following the Civil War, they likely never imagined that they would be called to fight on far-off tropical islands. When war was declared, over 4,000 Michiganders began the process of saying goodbye to their friends and families to gather at the hastily-assembled Camp Eaton near Island Lake and await further instructions. "It was a sight never to be forgotten," the *Detroit Free Press* breathlessly

¹² *The Daily Tribune*. April 4, 1898.
<https://www.uproc.lib.mi.us/dclpdf/LH%20File%202/SPANISH%20AMERICAN%20WAR%20-%20Cummings.pdf>

described. “From business windows [we] looked down on a surging sea of people to which there flowed as between living banks a steady current of blue, the men of the Michigan National Guard ... and the crowd that bid them God-speed.”¹³

Throughout the war, Jeannette Dean, a 21-year-old schoolteacher from Girard, corresponded by letter with four men from her hometown who were mobilized as volunteer soldiers. The men were polite and respectful to Jeannette, in line with the letter-writing etiquette and gender mores of the time, and the familiarity of the discourse and the fact that they were all the same age suggest that they may have been schoolmates. When war broke out, Frank Ackerman was studying education in nearby Chicago and thus mobilized with an Illinois regiment that was later sent to the front lines near Santiago, Cuba. Orrin Bowen was working as a schoolteacher in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and in a pre-war letter he commiserated with Jeannette about the low pay of their common profession and complained about the high rent he paid for an apartment near his school.¹⁴ As Orrin is the only one of the four who corresponded with Jeannette before and after the war, less is known about the lives of Fred Bidwell and J.P. Speer. However, census records show that they worked as farmers after the war, so this was likely their pre-war profession as well.¹⁵ The letters suggest that Orrin and Fred were close friends who enlisted in the same company of the 32nd Michigan Volunteer regiment, which remained in Florida for the duration of the war. J.P. joined the 31st Michigan Volunteer regiment, which was sent to a training camp in Georgia and likewise never saw combat in the

¹³ *Detroit Free Press*. April 27, 1898. <http://harris23.msu.domains/event/1898-michigan-national-guard-called-up-for-service-in-spanish-american-war/#:~:text=On%20April%2024%2C%201898%2C%20Gov,incliding%20malaria%20and%20yellow%20fever.>

¹⁴ Orrin Bowen to Jeannette Dean, 14 November 1897. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

¹⁵ Jephtha Pierson Speer. “United States World War I draft registration cards, 1917-1918.” <https://ancestors.familysearch.org/en/LZ4D-1LC/jephtha-pierson-speer-1876-1964>

Caribbean. Whether university students, teachers, or farmers, the thousands of Michiganders who joined the state militia put their lives on hold, believing that it was their duty to respond to their nation's call.

In a nation swept up in the fervor of pro-war sentiment, letters written by soldiers to their friends, families, and significant others are an important tool for understanding public opinion and how the war affected everyday Americans. "New military historians" study collections of war letters like those written by the men from Girard in order to understand the motivations of volunteer soldiers and the experience of combat.¹⁶ In their letters to Jeannette, the men from Girard conveyed nuanced thoughts about the war. Frank Ackerman recounted in one letter "I haven't heard a man say he wished he hadn't enlisted, but of course we will all be glad when the war is over."¹⁷ Orrin Bowen flatly stated, "I do not like [solider life] very well, but I think it is my duty to be here. I shall stay till the war is over or till I am disabled."¹⁸ Orrin asked Jeannette whether she believed the belligerent actions of the United States were entirely justified, noting that he had met many men, presumably at the camp, who thought differently.

However, the men's true thoughts about the war are unknown, as military censors monitored the letters and sought to prevent details of the war effort from reaching home and getting published in local newspapers. Fred Bidwell admitted in one letter, "I can't write much war news as we are forbidden to, especially anything that will get in the papers. All suspicious looking letters are opened and they cut out all they don't want sent."¹⁹ Soldiers' private musings in their letters back home were often shared with friends and neighbors or even published

¹⁶ Thomas E. Rodgers, "Civil War Letters as Historical Sources," *Indiana Magazine of History*, June 1997, 105-110.

¹⁷ Frank Ackerman to Jeannette Dean, 1 July 1898. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

¹⁸ Orrin Bowen to Jeannette Dean, 17 May 1898. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

¹⁹ Fred Bidwell to Jeannette Dean, 04 June 1898. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

verbatim in the local papers. What the men from Girard chose to commit to paper also likely reflects a degree of self-censorship in order to conform to the prevailing views back home. The men could hardly question the war overtly when local papers reported, that “every man of his company is just itching to grasp his musket and march to the front. The young men of today are just as patriotic as those of 1861, and a majority of them know more about military matters than did the old boys in blue.”²⁰ Whatever their personal thoughts on the war’s merits, the men believed it was their duty to report for service. All Orrin asked of Jeannette in return was that she use her position to “teach ‘the young idea’ how to wave the stars and stripes with more vigor than ever.”²¹

Patriotism and War

At the time of the Spanish-American War, patriotism was woven into the social fabric of small towns like Girard. However, patriotism had a variety of meanings, and the experience of war often changed Americans’ perceptions of what exactly patriotism entailed. In a 1895 address to the graduating class of Harvard University, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., a future Supreme Court justice, praised as “true and adorable” the “faith ... which leads a soldier to throw away his life in obedience to a blindly accepted duty, in a cause which he little understands, in a plan of campaign of which he has no notion, under tactics of which he does not see the use.”²² Sixty years earlier, however, the French writer and observer Alexis de Tocqueville, who traveled extensively in the United States, found much nuance in the democratic patriotism among Americans when contrasted with the more basic instinctive patriotism of his

²⁰ *The Daily Tribune*. February 21, 1898.

<https://www.uproc.lib.mi.us/dclpdf/LH%20File%202/SPANISH%20AMERICAN%20WAR%20-%20Cummings.pdf>

²¹ Orrin Bowen to Jeannette Dean, 17 May 1898. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

²² Jonathan M. Hansen, *The Lost Promise of Patriotism: Debating American Identity, 1890-1920*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), ix.

homeland. Whereas instinctive patriotism automatically springs forth at birth to tie a person to the land where he or she was born, democratic patriotism is cultivated by reason through active participation in democratic structures. This patriotism, he wrote, was “less generous perhaps less ardent, but more creative and more lasting; it is engendered by enlightenment, grows by the aid of laws and the exercise of rights, and in the end becomes, in a sense, mingled with personal interest.”²³ The Declaration of Independence clearly enumerates rights that Americans enjoyed by virtue of their citizenship, but leaves unstated the duties that are natural corollaries of these rights. Americans may organically love their country, but at the same time reserve judgment about the actions and decisions of its government.²⁴

However, in 1898 the sensationalist press had so strongly made the case for the noble cause of freeing the downtrodden Cuban people from the oppression of the cruel Spanish that public opposition to the war was practically nonexistent. In the years leading up to the war, Cuban governor Valeriano Weyler instituted the “reconcentration” policy, which attempted to deny Cuban rebels the support of the rural population by rounding up villagers and forcing them into fortified zones near major cities. Thousands of Cubans died of starvation and disease in these crowded prison camps, and the ensuing lack of agricultural production devastated the island’s economy.²⁵ So entwined was the cause of Cuban liberty with the war effort that the very trains that transported volunteer soldiers from across Michigan to the central staging point at Camp Eaton were festooned with large banners declaring “Remember the Maine” (left unprinted was the second half of the phrase: “To Hell with Spain”).²⁶ Local newspapers describe how

²³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 251.

²⁴ Walter Berns. “On Patriotism.” *National Affairs*, Spring 1997, 24.

²⁵ Graham A. Cosmas, *An Army for Empire: The United States Army in the Spanish-American War*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971), 79.

²⁶ 1898 : *Michigan National Guard Called Up for Service in Spanish-American War*, Michigan Day by Day. 24 April 2018. <http://harris23.msu.domains/event/1898-michigan-national-guard-called-up-for-service-in-spanish->

residents of small towns in Michigan and elsewhere hung Weyler in effigy and set the dummies on fire as they sent the men off to war.²⁷ In a sign of how widespread support for the war was, even an avowed socialist like Eugene Debs could argue that it was the duty of American workers to come to the aid of their counterparts in Cuba, and that indeed “anything less would be un-American and a national shame.”²⁸

Although the official justifications for the war from Washington focused on the atrocities committed by Spain against the Cuban people, many Americans (including the men from Girard) believed that the war was a fresh opportunity for the nation to come together under a common purpose and heal the wounds from the Civil War. As they traveled by train from Michigan to assembly camps in Florida and Georgia, the men marveled at the different scenery and relished the opportunity to view sites of significant Civil War battles. Upon reaching Lookout Mountain, Tennessee, which Union troops captured in 1863 during an attempt to break a Confederate siege of nearby Chattanooga, Orrin Bowen wrote, “I couldn’t tell you how it felt as the train stopped for a moment, and we looked upon that historic mound ... My respect for the soldiers arose higher than ever and gave me an example, which please God I hope to follow if occasion gives demand.”²⁹ Although the men were all born after the Civil War ended, they clearly drew inspiration from the example set by Union soldiers, many of whom were friends or relatives given the relative recency of the Civil War. Orrin Bowen later described the warm response they received upon reaching the states of the former Confederacy and expressed some degree of

[american-war/#:~:text=On%20April%2024%2C%201898%2C%20Gov,incl%20malaria%20and%20yellow%20fever.](#)

²⁷ *The Daily Tribune*. April 27, 1898.

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²⁸ Berns, “On Patriotism,” 136.

²⁹ Orrin Bowen to Jeannette Dean, 26 May 1898, Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

surprise. “At every station [women] greeted us with cheers, and I think their presence and actions has [sic] formulated a feeling among the soldiers which will do much to help win the victories.”³⁰

Aside from buoying the spirits of the soldiers, this reception convinced the men that the war effort was an opportunity for the nation to create a new sense of patriotism and pride in the United States through shared endeavor. Orrin Bowen further commented, “I was particularly pleased to see the expressions of patriotism given us so heartily all through the South. [This] shows that the ill feeling toward the North is hurriedly becoming a thing of the past. I think the mingling of young Northern and Southern troops will make firm the social relations of the peoples.”³¹ Expressions of North-South unity aside, the men clearly preferred Michigan, commenting in their letters on the flat, empty terrain they passed through and once even remarking that “Some of the boys said if they owned Florida & Hell they would rent Florida and move to H___.”³² Despite their home state pride, the soldiers appreciated the opportunity to travel to the South, interact with their erstwhile enemies of the former Confederacy, and find common ground as a nation.

A Mishandled War Effort

While the men from Michigan and other states volunteered for military service in the belief that their service was necessary to the broader war effort, the true story of war planning in far-off Washington was much more complex. When Congress approved \$50 million on March 7, 1898, ostensibly for national defense but also to signal to Spain the seriousness with which the

³⁰ Orrin Bowen to Jeannette Dean, 24 June 1898, Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

³¹ Orrin Bowen to Jeannette Dean, 26 May 1898, Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

³² Fred Bidwell to Jeannette Dean, 27 May 1898, Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

United States viewed the situation in Cuba, war planners lacked a strategic vision from the White House. Historians have since unraveled the web of competing interest groups and conflicts of personality at the top echelons of the McKinley Administration and focus much of the blame on the President himself. As Graham Cosmas writes, “Cautious and taciturn, [President] McKinley never revealed – even to his Cabinet – his ultimate plans for Cuba. Never, during the weeks of preparation, did he give the armed services any specific instructions about how to use the new defense fund.”³³ In the months following passage of the funding, the Army failed to utilize the money to accumulate necessary supplies and plan for a large mobilization, believing that the war would be fought mainly on naval terms. Additionally, Secretary Alger claimed that since Congress appropriated the funds for defense, his department could not begin to plan any offensive operations and instead concentrated on shoring up coastal defenses against a possible attack from Spanish naval forces. Of the Quartermaster, Commissary, and Medical departments, Alger somewhat implausibly claimed that “not one of these, under the President’s interpretation of ‘national defense,’ had been permitted to take a step outside of normal routine” and begin to amass supplies like weapons, uniforms, tents, or medical kits.³⁴

After the official declaration of war, the War Department determined it needed to exponentially scale up the number of regular troops. War planners estimated that they needed approximately 75,000 to 100,000 regular troops to serve in an auxiliary function to support naval operations in the Caribbean and Pacific, a three- to fourfold increase from peacetime numbers.³⁵ However, individual states successfully lobbied Congress to instead incorporate state militias wholesale as Volunteer regiments, as state officials could then control the lucrative patronage

³³ Cosmas, *An Army for Empire*, 74.

³⁴ Alger, *The Spanish American War*, 11.

³⁵ Cosmas, *An Army for Empire*, 95.

system of doling out officer commissions and volunteers could serve alongside friends and acquaintances from their home states. When President McKinley then issued his first call for Volunteers, military officials were surprised to learn it would be for 125,000 men in order to allow the state National Guards to be incorporated into the war effort in their entirety. A subsequent call for 75,000 additional volunteers, coupled with expanded ranks of regular enlisted soldiers, swelled total numbers to almost three times what the military believed it needed to achieve its objectives. Secretary Alger later admitted that the huge national mobilization was largely unnecessary, as 136,000 of the volunteers never left the United States.³⁶

Volunteer regiments, ostensibly equipped and clothed by the individual states, arrived in centralized camps wholly unprepared and without proper supplies. The Volunteer regiments from Michigan appear to have been relatively well-equipped by the state, arriving with sufficient uniforms and supplies but without rifles. This lack of weapons was well-known back home, with local papers declaring “MICHIGAN MUST WAIT – Not enough Springfield rifles to go around.”³⁷ Secretary Alger noted a cable from the camps that specifically mentioned the Michigan volunteer regiment that included Orrin Bowen and Fred Bidwell. “Several of the volunteer regiments came here [Tampa] ... without arms, and some without blankets, tents, or camp equipage. The 32d Michigan, which is among the best, came without arms.”³⁸ The War Department scrambled to rapidly procure sufficient rifles and materiel not only for additional regular troops but also countless ill-equipped Volunteers from states with even less foresight than Michigan. The men from Girard expressed gratitude when Michigan Governor Hazen

³⁶ Alger, *The Spanish American War*, 19.

³⁷ *The Daily Tribune*. March 9, 1898.

<https://www.uproc.lib.mi.us/dclpdf/LH%20File%202/SPANISH%20AMERICAN%20WAR%20-%20Cummings.pdf>

³⁸ Alger, *The Spanish American War*, 67.

Pingree traveled to Florida to meet the men of the 32nd Regiment in person, and when they captured a bald eagle near camp they even named it Pingree in the governor's honor.³⁹ Had they known that they had state officials like the Governor to thank for being sent to the heat, dirt, tedium, and general insalubriousness of the camp, they may have commemorated Pingree's visit in a less wholesome way.

The varying quality of rifles offered another visible example of the lack of war planning, evident even to the volunteer troops in the camps or on the front lines in Cuba. At the outset of the war, the U.S. government had in its possession sufficient .30 caliber Krag-Jorgensen rifles for only the regular troops in the U.S. Army- these 5-shot bolt-action rifles fired a new smokeless powder and represented the latest technology available in Europe. However, the volunteer regiments were forced to use old .45 caliber Springfield rifles, a single-shot breechloader that fired charcoal powder. Cosmas notes that "many of these Springfields were Army cast-offs, worn out and likely to explode in their users' faces when fired."⁴⁰ The lack of smokeless powder, as well as the antiquated rifles for the Volunteer regiments, "constituted a serious drawback, as was illustrated in the Santiago campaign," wrote Secretary Alger with understatement.⁴¹ When regular and Volunteer regiments fought pitched battles around the city of Santiago, the disparity between the Spanish troops' state-of-the-art weapons and the Americans' old rifles became starkly apparent and challenged the staunch patriotism of the enlisted men. Orrin Bowen related in one letter the feedback he heard from wounded soldiers returning from Cuba to the Port of Tampa. "The Spaniards ... with their Mauser rifles and smokeless powder, they had great advantage over our men. What a shame that this, our glorious

³⁹ Orrin Bowen to Jeannette Dean, 24 June 1898, Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

⁴⁰ Cosmas, *An Army for Empire*, 12.

⁴¹ Alger, *The Spanish American War*, 13.

country, can't arm its men equal to downtrodden Spain!"⁴² A sense of futility began to creep into the letters sent home, as Orrin stated, "I doubt if the 32nd Mich ever sees active service at the front. We have the old model rifle and this battle before Santiago has shown their inability."⁴³ The men saw their wounded fellow soldiers returning from Cuba "a bloody-looking lot," and woefully concluded that many casualties were due to this technological disparity. Orrin Bowen was likely expressing a widely-held view when he wrote, "we as soldiers are not to blame for our out-of-date rifles, or for the fact that we are spending the time idly on Florida sand" but he refrained from specifying where this blame should fall.⁴⁴

The Soldiers' Experience

Despite the decidedly spartan conditions in domestic camps in Florida, the men from Girard displayed remarkable good cheer and high morale. Fred Bidwell wrote, "You folks don't know what hot weather is if you were down here with it from 90 to 110 in the shade and you had to run through palm and cactus brush you might call it hot."⁴⁵ Orrin Bowen added, "a fine, black dust is continually in the air and it is almost impossible to keep clean."⁴⁶ But the men were quick to reassure Jeannette that despite the dirt and dust they sought to keep clean, and even asserted that swimming in the sea was one of the men's favorite pastimes. They also enjoyed church services and regular musical performances at the YMCA, as quite a few of the assembled volunteers were singers or musicians. While other men drank alcohol, gambled, or associated with local women of ill repute, her correspondents claimed to want no part of such tawdry

⁴² Orrin Bowen to Jeannette Dean, 12 July 1898. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Fred Bidwell to Jeannette Dean, 1 July 1898. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

⁴⁶ Orrin Bowen to Jeannette Dean, 26 May 1898. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

activities. Orrin Bowen succinctly stated, “Camp life in the army is a low, vulgar one. The ordinary conversations carried on in the tents during the evening is of a nature disgusting to one who respects the good and pure in human life. Still, there are many good Christian men here.”⁴⁷ The only other complaints reported by the men were the abundance of “queer-looking” chameleons, the monotony of the rations, which often prominently featured hard tack along with a cup of coffee and rice and beans, and the tedium of suspended animation as they anticipated the much-awaited call to be sent to war. J.P. Speer summed up the frustrations of many Volunteers when he wrote of his desire to finally leave Camp Chickamauga, GA, and be sent to Puerto Rico, as he was “tired of being a tin soldier.”⁴⁸

Michigan soldiers on the front lines in Cuba grappled with not only poor planning and enemy fire but also the very real risk of tropical diseases. Perhaps trying to assuage concerns of friends and family back home in Michigan, Frank Ackerman reported to Jeannette from the front lines in Santiago that “the condition of the soldiers is very good considering the circumstances. Everything is covered with dirt and blood and this makes eating and sleeping very uncomfortable.”⁴⁹ However, this good cheer masked a dire sanitary situation at camps in Cuba. Despite the urging of Surgeon General George Miller Sternberg, a world expert in yellow fever, not to invade Cuba during the rainy months when “yellow jack” spread widely, President McKinley and his advisors disregarded his advice- with predictable results.⁵⁰ “Many of the Americans are dropping,” Frank wrote from Cuba, “some from the effects of Spanish bullets,

⁴⁷ Orrin Bowen to Jeannette Dean, 4 June 1898. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

⁴⁸ J.P. Speer to Jeannette Dean, 15 June 1898. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

⁴⁹ Frank Ackerman to Jeannette Dean, 16 August 1898. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

⁵⁰ Cosmas, *An Army for Empire*, 105.

some from heat, and some with fevers. There are 156 cases of yellow fever near Siboney.”⁵¹ He later continued, “There are over five hundred patients now in this hospital with new arrivals every day. I have had what is termed Mountain Fever, a sort of malaria to which nearly all have been subjugated.”⁵² Secretary Alger later expressed frustration with President McKinley’s decision to favor haste over proper planning, writing that “if history, as well as our own experience, has proven anything, it has certainly demonstrated what was already known to the War Department before the war with Spain: that operations in the tropics by unacclimated troops during the rainy season are invariably accompanied by epidemics and great mortality.”⁵³

For every soldier like Frank who optimistically tried to put the best face on the situation that he could, others reported great hardship and suffering in Cuba. Frank cheerily announced in one letter, “Think I am thoroughly seasoned now and can endure the bad weather very well. Never felt better in my life, only I get a little homesick once in a while.”⁵⁴ However, Michigan papers published the letter of another soldier who wrote of the deadly building of roads in Cuba to support troop movements. “Many of the Michigan boys who were marched away from Santiago that day met a worst [sic] death than from Spanish bullets. They were digging in the malaria breeding jungles and swamps and it was as if they had been digging their own graves.”⁵⁵ In his company alone twelve soldiers had already died while digging roads while others continued to suffer from sickness. When a colonel visited the company, “he found that on every

⁵¹ Fred Ackerman to Jeannette Dean, 15 July 1898. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

⁵² Frank Ackerman to Jeannette Dean, 2 August 1898. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

⁵³ Alger, *The Spanish American War*, 42.

⁵⁴ Frank Ackerman to Jeannette Dean, 2 August 1898. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

⁵⁵ *Iron Mountain Press*. August 25, 1898.

<https://www.uproc.lib.mi.us/dclpdf/LH%20File%202/SPANISH%20AMERICAN%20WAR%20-%20Cummings.pdf>

countenance, almost without exception, despair was written.” When he tried to cheer up the men, “they sat around him, their hands resting on their knees and their heads bowed upon them, and none of them were seen to smile or speak a word.” The soldier continued, “When the colonel returned to this tent he broke down and couldn’t restrain the tears as he thought of the condition of the men he had just left.” Yet another soldier summed up the experience of many of his fellow Michiganders sent to Cuba, writing, “This has been the hardest warfare for hardship that any army could possibly endure... You people at home have no idea of the suffering that has and is being endured by this army.”⁵⁶

The War Ends

When Spain sued for peace in August 1898 after only ten weeks of hostilities, many soldiers expressed a mixture of relief, excitement to return home, and disappointment that they didn’t get the chance to claim glory on the battlefield. “Am I glad the war is over?” wrote Orrin Bowen, “Yes. Are you not? Truthfully, I am disappointed, yet glad that no more blood will be shed. I had quite an idea of seeing active service when I left home, but as all is now over, I am anxious to get back to old Michigan.”⁵⁷ A few of them expressed regret in their letters to Jeannette that they were forced to delay plans to return to school to study law, or that they simply missed out on opportunities to go camping with their friends or horseback riding with local Girard girls. Frank Ackerman’s letters described the business potential in a post-war Cuba given the island’s natural abundance, but he lamented that his lack of Spanish hindered his prospects to

⁵⁶ *Iron Mountain Press*. August 18, 1898.

<https://www.uproc.lib.mi.us/dclpdf/LH%20File%202/SPANISH%20AMERICAN%20WAR%20-%20Cummings.pdf>

⁵⁷ Orrin Bowen to Jeannette Dean, 16 August 1898. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

make it rich. In the end all four men returned to Michigan following the end of their enlistment and resumed their prior lives.

According to census records, after the war Fred Bidwell returned to Girard and resumed farming, married a local teacher, and later dabbled in fertilizer sales and poultry trading.⁵⁸ J.P. Speer moved to a small town near Girard, eventually married at the relatively late age of 45, and remained a farmer his entire life.⁵⁹ Frank Ackerman presumably finished his studies and worked as a teacher in various cities in Michigan and Illinois, eventually becoming a professor at a teachers college in rural Wisconsin.⁶⁰ Orrin Bowen, who had the most robust correspondence with his friend Jeannette, embarked on the biggest set of changes. Abandoning the low wages of a schoolteacher, after the war he decided to enroll in law school in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and later became a lawyer. Nothing ultimately came of his admittedly flirtatious correspondence with Jeannette. Although he was unfailingly polite in his prose, he unabashedly proclaimed that he would like nothing more than a life with a girl like her. After the war she agreed to a double date with another two friends, but Orrin later cancelled their rendezvous citing too much schoolwork. The disappointment was palpable, as Jeannette later relayed a message to Orrin through a common lady friend, “She said to tell you that she believed in the destiny of fate.”⁶¹ Ultimately fate did not smile fondly on romantic prospects for the two of them, and their once-lively correspondence soon ceased. Census records show that Orrin married another woman not long after, eventually had at least one child, and ironically enough moved his family to Florida, the state he once derided as “low, flat, and undesirable to one of northern breeding.” By all

⁵⁸ 1930; Census Place: *Coldwater, Branch, Michigan*; Page: 1A; Enumeration District: 0010; FHL microfilm: 2340712

⁵⁹ 1930; Census Place: *Adams, Hillsdale, Michigan*; Page: 1A; Enumeration District: 0002; FHL microfilm: 2340728

⁶⁰ 1930; Census Place: *Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin*; Page: 4B; Enumeration District: 0010; FHL microfilm: 2342305

⁶¹ Orrin Bowen to Jeannette Dean, 21 February 1899. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

accounts the relocation was a wise career move, as the census reported the value of his Florida home as \$35,000, or \$620,000 in today's dollars.⁶² For her part, Jeannette never married, remaining a schoolteacher in Michigan throughout her long life. She moved to the larger town of Kalamazoo in later years, and even took a trans-Atlantic trip via steamer ship with colleagues. This "handsome" and "extraordinary girl" became an "old maid teacher" as Orrin jokingly predicted in his letters.⁶³

Calls for Accountability

As the soldiers returned home to Michigan from the domestic camps, local newspapers reported families in shock at the upon seeing the poor condition of the men. "Our boys had been treated inhumanly by the representatives of the government they were fighting to support. Treated worse than cattle in a foreign land, they were shipped home with hardly sufficient rations to sustain life," wrote one Michigan paper in a blistering editorial. "There can be no excuse for such dastardly treatment of heroes – and every one of the lads is a hero."⁶⁴ The prevalence of yellow fever and malaria in the domestic camps quickly became a national scandal, and newspapers wrote scathing editorials calling for accountability. Cosmas writes that "the spectacle of American boys suffering by the thousands and dying by the hundreds in camps on their own country's soil while under the care of their own government shocked and angered the public."⁶⁵ Surgeon General Sternberg quickly stood up a Typhoid Board in August 1898 to study the "health-threatening atmosphere" of the camps and determine the causes. After months

⁶² 1930; Census Place: *St Petersburg, Pinellas, Florida*; Page: 11A; Enumeration District: 0001; FHL microfilm: 2340064

⁶³ Orrin Bowen to Jeannette Dean, 26 June 1898. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA

⁶⁴ *Iron Mountain Press*. September 1, 1898.

<https://www.uproc.lib.mi.us/dclpdf/LH%20File%20/SPANISH%20AMERICAN%20WAR%20-%20Cummings.pdf>

⁶⁵ Cosmas, *An Army for Empire*, 275.

of research, the board largely concurred with Secretary Alger's later conclusion that "generically described, the cause of the sickness was CAMP POLLUTION; specifically, the cause was due to ignorance or neglect on the part of officers coupled with the inexperience of the newly enlisted soldiers."⁶⁶ The board further determined that much of the blame lied with line officers at the camps, particularly those of the Volunteer regiments who had not been sufficiently trained in proper military camp hygiene. Additionally, these officers often disregarded the advice of military medical officers, who strenuously called for improvements in camp design in line with the latest scientific findings about the spread of tropical diseases but who ultimately lacked the authority in the hierarchical camps to implement the changes.⁶⁷ As medical historian Vincent Cirillo deftly summarized, "medical officers lacked authority, line officers lacked interest, and no one was accountable."⁶⁸ The Typhoid Board's findings highlighted the role of military hygiene and sanitation in maintaining an effective fighting force, ensuring that military planners could avoid such preventable mistakes in future wars.

A similar situation developed as soldiers still ill with tropical diseases began to return from Cuba to an as-yet-unfinished camp near Montauk, on Long Island. The camp's proximity to large population centers on the Eastern seaboard provided the public an opportunity to see the large-scale suffering of the affected soldiers first-hand. Cosmas writes that "the condition of these fever ships from Santiago gave dramatic notice to the American people that something had gone wrong with the Army's administration."⁶⁹ Americans who read about or even visited the camps "formed the unshakable conviction that men who had risked all for their country had been

⁶⁶ Alger, *The Spanish American War*, 412.

⁶⁷ Vincent Cirillo, *Bullets and Bacilli: The Spanish-American War and Military Medicine*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 77.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 151.

⁶⁹ Cosmas, *An Army for Empire*, 254.

betrayed by those in power.”⁷⁰ The ensuing public relations disaster forced the McKinley Administration to appoint a War Investigating Commission under the direction of Maj. Gen. Grenville Dodge, a respected war hero and industrialist. At the time, the President declared that Americans were “entitled to know whether or not the citizens who so promptly responded to the call of duty have been neglected or maltreated by the Government to which they so willingly gave their services.”⁷¹ The Dodge Commission, as it came to be popularly known, faced some degree of suspicion from opposition newspapers which feared a partisan whitewash in the run-up to important midterm elections. However, the Commission conducted its investigation in an exhaustive and impartial manner, winning over even the most hostile newspapers that opposed its formation.⁷² The Commission proposed several lasting reforms, including increasing the number of medical officers and trained female nurses, as well as streamlining procurement and transportation practices in the Army. With the formation of these boards and commissions, a newly emboldened public began to advocate for the wellbeing of soldiers whom they entrusted to the government’s care, and an active press ensured that this public pressure translated into official efforts to identify solutions and implement reforms.

The Fate of Secretary Alger

Secretary Alger also returned to Michigan after the war, although not quite as quickly or voluntarily as the men from Girard. The wave of public opprobrium that accompanied the return of fever-stricken soldiers to the United States ultimately settled on Alger, faulting him with every aspect of insufficient war planning or haphazard execution regardless of whether he was truly the culprit. Cosmas writes that “officers who served under him in the War Department respected his

⁷⁰ Ibid, 265.

⁷¹ Ibid, 283.

⁷² Cirillo, *Bullets and Bacilli*, 103.

patriotism, his devotion to the Army, and his concern for the welfare of the common soldier,” but prior to the war he lacked any experience relevant to managing a major federal department in wartime.⁷³ *The New York Times* regularly called for Alger’s removal, urging President McKinley to replace him with a “serious” Secretary of War, and “Algerism,” fairly or not, became a byword for corruption and incompetence in government.⁷⁴ Historians have concluded that Secretary Alger was merely implementing orders given by President McKinley and responding to the advice of generals in the field, but he quickly became a political liability for the McKinley Administration and the entire Republican party. Secretary Alger refused to resign and President McKinley was reticent to fire him, believing that doing so would amount to a public admission of failure during the war. When Alger became embroiled in a factional Michigan political matter and appeared to be aligning himself with McKinley’s foes within the Republican party, the President seized the chance to demand his resignation.

Alger returned to Michigan to a parade of well-wishers and retired from public life to write a score-settling account of the war. However, Alger was soon due for a second act and emerged from the political wilderness in 1902 when Governor Pingree appointed him to an open Senate seat. Until his death in 1907 Alger defended his tenure as War Secretary and through his memoirs appealed to the public’s sense of patriotism to extend the benefit of the doubt to a well-intentioned War Department. “Should war ever again come upon this country and find it so totally unprepared as it was in 1898, I hope that those who have been so profuse in their criticisms, and eager to discover faults, may have the patriotism and pride of country to rise

⁷³ Cosmas, *An Army for Empire*, 58.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 279.

above personalities, and, instead of striving to tear down, may endeavor to strengthen the hands of those upon whom the burden may fall.”⁷⁵

A Changed Patriotism and the Rise of Accountability

Across America the experience of war changed the meaning of patriotism for many who participated. After his time at the helm of a chaotic war effort, Secretary Alger believed that patriotism entailed public patience with a cumbersome bureaucratic machinery that was doing its best. Many newspapers which had previously advocated for war seemingly overnight began issuing patriotic calls for accountability on behalf of the soldiers who they deemed had been mistreated by the government. For commentators like the socialist Eugene Debs, the collection of imperial territories won by the United States in the peace treaty with Spain undermined the war’s noble aims. He soon soured on the national endeavor and criticized the alleged patriotism of war hawks as embodying the self-interest of a plutocratic elite intent on profiting from the new lands belonging to the United States.⁷⁶ Similarly, in 1900 the philosopher William Everett bemoaned the transformation of patriotism from “a generous and laudable emotion” into “a paramount and overwhelming duty to which everything else ... must give way.”⁷⁷

For individual soldiers like Orrin Bowen, their unquestioning loyalty to the war effort was shaken by the lack of modern weaponry and the military disadvantage this posed. Soldiers who witnessed conditions in Cuba and met the people they were sent to liberate began to question the underlying justifications for the war. In letters home and to the press, many commented on the island’s greenery and natural beauty, but others concluded that “[Cuba] is a dirty, filthy place ... the Cuban’s [sic] are low-lived devils, and they will steal anything they can

⁷⁵ Alger, *The Spanish American War*, vi.

⁷⁶ Hansen, *The Lost Promise of Patriotism*, 151.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 151.

get their hands on ... I tell you it makes me tired to think that the civilized white people of the U.S. should come over here to fight for such a dirty, low lot of people.”⁷⁸ Even Frank Ackerman questioned the character of the freedom-seeking Cubans, deeming them as untrustworthy as the Spanish and criticizing “their inferior intelligence and state of refinement.”⁷⁹ The Spanish-American War, far from being a mere footnote of American history, began a national reckoning around the meaning of the word patriotism. American citizens began to question what their rights and duties were within the body politic, and what treatment the government owed its soldiers during armed hostilities abroad.

Regardless of their rank, Michiganders served in the Spanish-American War out of a sense of duty. The War Department that mobilized the Michigan Volunteer regiments was admittedly unprepared for the massive task of equipping and arming such a vast crush of eager recruits, yet Secretary Alger reported working 12- to 14-hour days doing his best to implement ever-changing guidance. The men from Girard sent to domestic camps found them to be dirty, unhygienic, and prone to deadly outbreaks of tropical diseases. That the camp conditions could have been easily improved if Volunteer officers had heeded the advice of military medical staff only adds to the tragedy of the almost 700 Michiganders who were needlessly mobilized but perished from disease without possibly even making it out of the United States. Michiganders sent to the front lines in Cuba fared even worse- “It’s a great wonder that any of us came back alive,” one Michigan soldier noted to his local newspaper. “It was a good thing for us that we got away from Cuba when we did. Had we remained ten days longer half of the men of the

⁷⁸ *Iron Mountain Press*. September 1, 1898.

<https://www.uproc.lib.mi.us/dclpdf/LH%20File%202/SPANISH%20AMERICAN%20WAR%20-%20Cummings.pdf>

⁷⁹ Frank Ackerman to Jeannette Dean, 15 July 1898. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

regiment would have been dead [from disease].”⁸⁰ Only three men from the Michigan regiments ultimately died in combat, while 698 died of diseases like malaria and yellow fever.⁸¹ Among 6,893 total officers and enlisted men in 5 Michigan regiments, these deaths represent over 10% of the total who participated in the war.⁸²

The men from Girard, however, were lucky. Many Michigan soldiers told “pitiful tales of hardship and neglect, of sickness and starvation,” but Jeannette’s correspondents not only survived but described their overall wartime experience in positive terms.⁸³ They unquestioningly answered their country’s call, traveled to the far-off states of the former Confederacy or even Cuba, established camaraderie with their fellow recruits, and emerged unscathed from enemy bullets or deadly diseases. As Orrin Bowen concluded, “In the past year I have traveled a good many miles and Branch County is for me the most desirable of them all. I hope you will travel South and see what a poor country it is, and perhaps you would then realize more than ever what a very splendid country Girard is.”⁸⁴ For the men from Michigan who served in the Spanish-American War and survived, their patriotic participation brought them not a life-changing transformation but a greater appreciation for friends and family, for peace, for Michigan, for home. Thanks to an engaged citizenry and an active free press, future generations of Michigan soldiers would be spared from the poor planning and preventable diseases that made

⁸⁰ *Iron Mountain Press*. September 1, 1898.

<https://www.uproc.lib.mi.us/dclpdf/LH%20File%202/SPANISH%20AMERICAN%20WAR%20-%20Cummings.pdf>

⁸¹ 1898 : *Michigan National Guard Called Up for Service in Spanish-American War*, Michigan Day by Day. 24 April 2018. <http://harris23.msu.domains/event/1898-michigan-national-guard-called-up-for-service-in-spanish-american-war/#:~:text=On%20April%2024%2C%201898%2C%20Gov,includin%20malaria%20and%20yellow%20fever.>

⁸² “Michigan Volunteers in the Spanish-American War,” *Michigan Family History Network*. <http://www.mifamilyhistory.org/spanam/>

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Orrin Bowen to Jeannette Dean, 25 September 1898. Frick (Edwin G.) Spanish-American War correspondence (2016-017-w-r) Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

the Spanish-American War far from splendid. The war, however, produced lasting reforms in the military bureaucracy and ensured that later Presidents remained attentive to patriotic calls for accountability from the families of those they sent into harm's way.

Essay #2: The Hidden Effects of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” on the Mental Health Crisis in the U.S. Military

As the nation grapples with the aftermath of the “forever wars” in Iraq and Afghanistan, the media and scholars are shining a much-needed spotlight on the mental health of the men and women serving in the U.S. military and veterans. Scholars have documented a marked increase in diagnoses of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) as a consequence of the wars, and noted the military’s sometimes faltering attempts to address these newly-identified challenges to the long-term wellbeing and mental health of servicemembers. At the same time, journalists have highlighted the experience of soldiers who were forced into repeated, lengthy deployments overseas and the challenges this posed to military families.

However, another persistent issue that often goes overlooked is the lingering effects of the discriminatory policy commonly known as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT), which forced gay and lesbian troops to conceal their sexual orientation at risk of discharge from the military. This policy created an atmosphere of constant fear and panic among gay and lesbian troops forced into the closet, and also destroyed the careers and livelihoods of the hundreds of soldiers discharged every year solely based on their sexual orientation. Because the policy forced the men and women it affected into silence, its victims lacked a voice and a platform to call attention to its harmful effects on the mental health of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) servicemembers. As new military historians continue to study the mental health crisis within the military and the shocking rise in suicides among active-duty troops and veterans, it is important to also take into account the hidden victims of DADT and how officially-sanctioned discrimination negatively affected the morale and wellbeing of the military as a whole.

The U.S. military has taken a variety of approaches to homosexual conduct among its troops throughout the history of the United States. The first recorded case of homosexuality dates back to the Continental Army, when Lieutenant Friederick Gotthold Enslin was literally drummed out of Valley Forge following his court-martial in 1778.⁸⁵ Although the concept of homosexual orientation did not yet exist, he was convicted of attempted sodomy, or “unnatural” sexual penetration, and perjury after it became known that he had sexual relations with a private in his regiment and was found to have falsely denied it later. George Washington personally approved the Lieutenant’s dismissal, adding his “Abhorrence and Detestation of such Infamous Crimes” in the order, although it is unclear if he is referring to attempted sodomy or perjury, and later scholars have suggested that the sexual relations at issue were non-consensual, drawing the General’s ire.⁸⁶

Despite this early case, sexual matters were largely left unaddressed throughout much of the early history of the American armed forces, with occasional discharges falling under broader “offenses” such as “perverted” or “unnatural” acts, conduct “prejudicial to good order and discipline,” or even “conduct unbecoming an officer and gentleman.”⁸⁷ Only in 1917 did the Army revise its *Manual for Courts-Martial* to include sodomy as an explicit offense, defining the act extremely broadly to include bestiality, anal sex, and oral sex, regardless of the gender of the participants, the participant’s active or passive role, or even whether the act was consensual or not. During the 1920s, the burgeoning psychiatric profession began to consider homosexuality as a feature of a person’s identity rather than merely a set of behaviors or conduct, and the Army

⁸⁵ Nathaniel Frank, *Unfriendly Fire: How the Gay Ban Undermines the Military and Weakens America*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2009), 1.

⁸⁶ Megan Gackler, “The Court Martial of Friederick Gotthold Enslin.” June 1, 2021. <https://www.18thcenturypride.com/the-court-martial-of-friederick-gotthold-enslin/>

⁸⁷ Frank, 2.

created screening standards for homosexuality in order to weed out those it deemed to have psychiatric defects or effeminacy, traits it deemed undesirable for its soldiers.⁸⁸

With a new awareness of homosexuality as a sexual orientation, in the years after World War II the U.S. military began to discriminate more directly against homosexuals (or suspected homosexuals) as people rather than punish soldiers for individual acts of sodomy. Gays and lesbians were declared “unsuitable for military service,” and officially banned from all branches of the armed forces, regardless of homosexual actions or declarations. This posture was codified in 1950, when Congress created a Uniform Code of Military Justice that prohibited “unnatural carnal copulation,” or anal or oral sex among heterosexuals or homosexuals alike, with a maximum punishment of five years of hard labor and dishonorable discharge without pay.⁸⁹

In case any doubt remained as to the military’s stance on gays and lesbians in uniform, the Carter Administration in its waning days issued a new policy that flatly declared that “homosexuality is incompatible with military service.” Without any supporting facts or evidence, the policy stated that the presence of homosexuals “adversely affects the ability of the armed forces to maintain discipline, good order, and morale ... and to prevent breaches of security.” The policy largely mirrored public sentiment towards gays and lesbians, and during the 1980s the military expelled 17,000 individuals under the policy.⁹⁰

During his campaign for president in 1992, Bill Clinton explicitly promised to lift the ban on gays and lesbians in the military as one of his first acts. However, after taking office his plan to issue an executive order to this effect ran into unexpected headwinds from the Joint Chiefs of

⁸⁸ Andrew Byers, “The U.S. Army’s Management of Sexuality at Home and Abroad, 1898-1940.” *Managing Sex in the U.S. Military: Gender, Identity, and Behavior*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2022), 32.

⁸⁹ Frank, 9.

⁹⁰ Gregory M. Herek, “Social Science, Sexual Orientation, and Military Personnel Policy.” *Out in Force: Sexual Orientation and the Military*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 7.

Staff and in Congress. Colin Powell, then the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was adamantly opposed to lifting the ban, citing unspecified negative effects on military morale and unit cohesion, and took the unprecedented step of making his case directly to the press, galvanizing public opposition to the move.⁹¹ He found an ally in Sam Nunn, the Democratic chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who in 1993 led sensational and well-publicized committee hearings on the topic in which hand-selected witnesses laid out a comprehensive and biased case against a change in Department of Defense (DOD) policy.⁹²

Facing a loss of public and institutional support (and a threat by Powell to resign if the ban was lifted), President Clinton ultimately retreated on his campaign promise and in 1993 announced a purported compromise that became known as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” Under the new policy, which was later written into law by Congress, new recruits were no longer asked about their sexual orientation but once in service they could be discharged for homosexual conduct, even if it occurred off-base.⁹³ The Clinton Administration presented the policy as a compromise, and some noted that it shifted the focus from sexual orientation, or identity, back to homosexual conduct, or actions. However, the Congressional definition of “conduct” included “statements that demonstrate a propensity to engage in homosexual acts,” meaning that little changed on a practical level, confusion reigned over its proper implementation, and discharges of admitted or suspected homosexuals actually increased.⁹⁴ Aside from codifying discrimination into law, DADT forced gay and lesbian servicemembers to lie, obfuscate, and conceal their identities in order to preserve their careers. The policy produced a climate of fear within the

⁹¹ Frank, 70.

⁹² Ibid, 87.

⁹³ Peter D. Jacobsen, “Sexual Orientation and the Military: Some Legal Considerations.” *Out in Force*, 39.

⁹⁴ Gary Lehring, *Officially Gay: The Political Construction of Sexuality*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 138.

military, as both gay and straight soldiers had to worry about accusations of homosexuality spurring invasive investigations, and later exacerbated the mental health crisis stemming from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

At a fundamental level, the military's ban on service by gay and lesbian Americans affected their mental health because it labeled a feature of their core identity, their sexual orientation, as a mental disorder and lumped homosexual acts together with "other perverse sexual practices."⁹⁵ A common justification for excluding gays and lesbians from the military is the argument that they are intrinsically unable to control their sexual desires. Placing avowed homosexuals in the same barracks (and showers) with heterosexual soldiers was seen by the military brass and judges as a recipe for conflict and even sexual assault due to homosexuals' gross immorality or psychopathology.⁹⁶ In 1953, a Court of Military Appeals stated without evidence that "a person who practices homosexuality is likely to assault for the purpose of satisfying his perverted sexual cravings."⁹⁷ The Carter Administration persisted in its policy declaring that homosexuality was incompatible with the military despite the fact that the American Psychiatric Association had removed "homosexuality" from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)* more than 8 years prior.⁹⁸

Much of the debate during the implementation of DADT presented gay and lesbian Americans as one-dimensional caricatures defined solely by their sexuality, and the Nunn-led Congressional hearings further established the stereotype that homosexual men and women were sexual predators unfit for group settings.⁹⁹ Gays and lesbians were presented as threats to the

⁹⁵ Agnes Gereben Schaefer, "A Comparative Analysis of the Military Bans on Openly Serving Gays, Lesbians, and Transgender Personnel." *Managing Sex in the U.S. Military*, 145.

⁹⁶ Lehring, 90.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 95.

⁹⁸ Schaefer, 177.

⁹⁹ Theodore R. Sarbin, "The Deconstruction of Stereotypes: Homosexuals and Military Policy." *Out in Force*, 182.

broader military due to their general perception as untrustworthy, even though under DADT they were forced to lie about their sexual orientation as a condition of employment with the U.S. military.¹⁰⁰ Through decades of being told by the U.S. government that they were sexual deviants not to be trusted among other patriotic American soldiers, gays and lesbians struggled to reconcile the stance of the government they swore to serve with their own identities as Americans.

By forcing homosexual and bisexual soldiers to conceal their sexual orientation, DADT hindered their ability to relate authentically with their friends, coworkers, neighbors, and others and to be their true selves. Research has shown that self-disclosure of a person's identity is beneficial to a healthy social life and friendships, while "consistent nondisclosure" can cause feelings of loneliness and social isolation.¹⁰¹ Many soldiers who were affected by DADT described the psychological toll of leading a double life, policing their speech, mannerisms, and correspondence while in professional, military settings and strictly compartmentalizing evidence of homosexual relations within their social lives. One combat medic recalled the "additional burden of stress" that DADT caused him during his deployment. Stationed at a remote combat outpost and unable to confide his sexual identity to his peer soldiers with whom he felt strong bonds of friendship, he stated that "an incredibly important piece of my personal life is hidden from those closest to me. My strongest friendships are based on nontruths."¹⁰² An Army flight surgeon recalled being inculcated with the importance of integrity, leadership, and trust in her role, but realizing, "I am living a lie. I'm lying to my patients. I *am* a lie," and questioning how

¹⁰⁰ Lehring, 93.

¹⁰¹ Gregory M. Herek, "Why Tell if You're Not Asked? Self-Disclosure, Intergroup Contact, and Heterosexuals' Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men." *Out in Force*, 199.

¹⁰² Josh Seefried, *Our Time: Breaking the Silence of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011), 51.

long she could continue serving in the military with this dissonance between her professional and personal selves.¹⁰³ Yet another lieutenant in the Air Force recalled the first time he entered the Air Force Academy and saw the honor code cast in iron on a campus wall: “We will not lie, steal, or cheat, nor tolerate anyone among us who does.” After he secretly began dating another man in his squadron, he described developing a “hidden second life” and constantly misleading people. “My life became inconsistent, deceptive, sometimes dishonest.” After listening to a training course that stressed the importance of integrity, he recalled feeling terrible and wanting to hide his face in his hands and cry.¹⁰⁴ The microtraumas of each individual act of concealment and dishonesty in their personal lives only accumulated for gays and lesbians in the military, for whom trust and integrity are often core features of their professional identity.

Aside from the unseen emotional effects of creating and maintaining a double life, some soldiers worried about the very real risk of harassment or physical assault from others should their sexual orientation become known. During the Nunn hearings, one retired marine described the “queers, cowards, and thieves rule”, allegedly a mainstay of the Marine Corps at the time, in which any marine in these categories would be isolated or even go “over the side,” i.e. murdered by his peers.¹⁰⁵ Another sailor in the Navy recalled that after rumors began to spread about his homosexuality, his “thoughts flashed back to stories [he] had heard about [his] dad getting jumped and beaten while on deployment to Europe for suspicion of being gay.” He was concerned not only about his physical safety, or lack thereof, but also being thrust into unemployment and losing his life’s career.¹⁰⁶ Countless soldiers and sailors suffered from a

¹⁰³ Ibid, 14.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 155.

¹⁰⁵ Frank, 106.

¹⁰⁶ Seefried, 98.

constant fear that rumors or accusations would lead to their discharge, resulting public shame, or ostracism from their families.¹⁰⁷

Soldiers who did experience harassment or assault from homophobic peers or even superiors found that they had little to no recourse within the military bureaucracy. Under DADT, male victims of sexual violence were deterred from reporting it to superiors fearing that they would then be the subject of an investigation into their homosexuality that could lead to their dismissal.¹⁰⁸ Before state-level laws outlawing consensual sodomy were overturned by the Supreme Court in *Lawrence v. Texas* in 2003, reporting a sexual assault could even lead to criminal charges against the victim in some jurisdictions.¹⁰⁹

With no assurance of confidentiality within the military, gay and lesbian servicemembers grappling with mental health issues found that they were unable to talk to therapists, doctors, or chaplains about their issues lest their homosexuality be reported. While doctor-patient, therapist-patient, and clergy-parishioner privilege are standard or even legally protected in the civilian world, many servicemembers are unaware that in the military ranks invasions of privacy and breaches of confidentiality are allowed under the rubric of need to know. This lack of confidentiality is problematic, as therapists have shown that without such protection individuals are unlikely to enter treatment and the care that is provided is of limited utility.¹¹⁰ One Marine corporal describes how after a consultation session about his sexuality with a naval psychologist, the psychologist reported the exchange to the patient's commander, who promptly initiated a discharge investigation against him. "It's like a mine field," the corporal wrote, "and you're just

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 74.

¹⁰⁸ Kellie Wilson-Buford, "Problematic Policies and Far-Reaching Consequences: Historicizing Sexual Violence in the U.S. Military." *Managing Sex in the U.S. Military*, 207.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 220.

¹¹⁰ Jeffrey E. Barnett and Timothy B. Jeffrey, "Issues of Confidentiality: Therapists, Chaplains, and Health Care Providers." *Out in Force*, 260.

wandering in this mine field because they don't advise you what the rules are. The military is basically waiting for you to step on that mine.”¹¹¹ A Navy captain described how after he found out that a former partner died of HIV he was left without support by the military to deal with his deep depression. “I knew I needed to talk to someone ... I certainly could not go to medical and ask to speak to a therapist. There are lots of support systems for [straight] service members ... For a gay man in the military who has lost a partner, there is nothing.”¹¹² DADT created a climate in which gays and lesbians lived in constant fear, yet at the same time deprived them of mental health resources and counseling available to their heterosexual counterparts that might have helped them navigate the policy, complications in their lives, and their identities.

Exacerbating the frustrations of gay and lesbian servicemembers, DOD never bothered to provide evidence that DADT was necessary, or that the presence of gays in the military would have a demonstrably negative impact on unit cohesion or military readiness. In fact, when the few studies that the military did conduct showed that the policy lacked a justification other than animus towards homosexuals, the military sought to bury the results. In 1987, a study commissioned by the Personnel Security Research and Education Center (PERSEREC), a Pentagon research wing, uncovered no justification for gays to be excluded from the military and even suggested that the policy was unnecessary and damaging. The final report concluded that in relation to job performance, a soldier's sexual orientation was as irrelevant as the fact that he or she was right- or left-handed. Top military leaders ordered the report destroyed, and salvaged copies only later became public during later court cases challenging the ban.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Frank, 200.

¹¹² Seefried, 81.

¹¹³ Frank, 119.

The Rand corporation was commissioned by DOD in 1993 to study the issue further and determined that sexual orientation was “not germane” to a soldier’s ability to serve. The report further stated that the ban on homosexuals in the military could be lifted without major problems as long as the policy had the support of senior leaders and was implemented with clear guidelines for the troops. Unsurprisingly, said senior leaders disagreed with the report’s findings and would have successfully buried the report had copies of it not been leaked to *The New York Times*.¹¹⁴ The very existence of DADT prevented the military from conducting further studies as to how many members of the military were affected or how open service by homosexuals would impact unit cohesion, as gays and lesbians in the military were naturally disinclined to reveal their sexual orientation to military researchers. That military leaders neglected to provide empirical evidence for the ban’s utility, and even sought to disregard or destroy reports that did not fit their preconceived notions, was added insult to injury to gays and lesbians dealing with the serious mental health effects of DADT.

Another aggravating factor for gays and lesbians in the military was observing the experience of foreign militaries, which were successfully lifting their antiquated bans on homosexuals at the same time that the United States was implementing DADT. By the time the ban was finally lifted by President Obama in 2010 and became official policy the following year, twenty-four countries had no formal ban on gay or lesbian servicemembers, a number which has only risen in the following decade.¹¹⁵ As early as 1993, the Government Accounting Office (GAO) was asked by the Senate to study the experience of foreign militaries that had dealt with incorporating openly-serving homosexuals among their ranks. This and two concurrent reports by other entities concluded that other countries were able to lift their bans on homosexuals

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 114.

¹¹⁵ Frank, 137.

without any of the anticipated problems with unit cohesion, morale, recruitment, and retention among the troops. By all major metrics, once the new nondiscriminatory policies were implemented via strong leadership and clear guidance, the inclusion of homosexual troops was largely a nonissue for the countries studied.¹¹⁶ In contrast, when the British Ministry of Defence studied DADT during a review of its own policies, it found that the policy was a “disaster” that “hadn’t worked,” and was generally “unworkable” and “hypocritical.”¹¹⁷

The flimsy rationale for DADT suffered further when the United States began participating in multinational military units such as the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan following the 2001 invasion. American soldiers served alongside their counterparts from Canada, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and other allies that allowed homosexuals to serve openly in the armed forces. By all accounts the units worked together seamlessly, and the presence of homosexual soldiers from allied nations produced none of the issues with cohesion, morale, and privacy that American military leaders direly predicted when justifying DADT.¹¹⁸

Finally, if the Pentagon wished to determine what the practical effects of allowing homosexual soldiers to serve openly, it needed to look no further than its own ranks. During times of war, the military has implemented what is known as a stop-loss policy, in which servicemembers are retained or their obligations are extended beyond their original contracts. After the end of World War II when fewer overall troops were needed, the rate of discharge for homosexuality increased threefold, only to decline sharply at the onset of the Korean War.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Paul A. Gade, David R. Segal, and Edgar M. Johnson, “The Experience of Former Militaries.” *Out in Force*, 126.

¹¹⁷ Frank, 145.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 159.

¹¹⁹ Jacqueline E. Whitt, “Formal Regulation, Cultural Enforcement: Managing Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression in the U.S. Military.” *Managing Sex in the U.S. Military*, 177.

During the Gulf War in 1991, thousands of troops who were known to be gay were sent to the front lines only to be discharged from the military upon their return to the United States.¹²⁰

Under the Bush Administration, the Pentagon once again issued a stop-loss order as the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan intensified and troops were badly needed in the field. Because DADT was still in force, even an open declaration of homosexuality would not prevent a soldier's deployment- however, he or she could later be discharged upon return. Retaining gay and lesbian servicemembers during times of war and allowing them to serve only further undermined the Pentagon's justification that DADT was necessary to maintain morale and unit cohesion.¹²¹

At the same time that the military was forcing gay and lesbian troops out of the military for no other reason than their sexual orientation, recruitment issues forced them to admit underqualified members who lacked a high school diploma, failed basic aptitude tests, admitted to former drug abuse, or even had extensive criminal records. In 2006, the military issued moral waivers to allow 753 ex-convicts to enlist, while at the same time discharged 742 qualified gay and lesbian troops under DADT.¹²² Gay and lesbian troops clearly noted that military leaders could choose to retain them in times of war, yet still have no compunction about dismissing them in favor of underqualified new recruits when it suited their recruitment goals.

The harmful effects of the U.S. military's ban on gays and lesbians serving openly cannot be understated. It is estimated that during the life of DADT alone, more than 13,000 service members were discharged from the military due solely to their sexual orientation. While this may represent a tiny fraction of the total size of the military, accounting for less than one-tenth of one percent of the active-duty force, for each of the men and women affected the discharge was a

¹²⁰ Lehring, 111.

¹²¹ Frank, 228.

¹²² Ibid, 244.

tragedy and an overt example of governmental discrimination based not on their skills and abilities but their sexual orientation. Although in many cases the honorable discharges allowed them to retain pensions, benefits, and access to veterans services, they still abruptly lost their livelihoods, were outed to friends and family, were prevented from patriotically serving their country, or were dealt a blow to their mental health.

The recent sharp increase in active-duty suicides within the military has been well-documented, as by 2010 there was approximately one suicide per day and the overall rate exceeded that of the civilian population.¹²³ While the increase is often attributed to the stress of repeated deployments during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan coupled with the effects of post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injuries, less discussed is the psychological toll that DADT imposed on gay and lesbian troops. One perverse side effect of the ban is that while it drove an untold number of LGBT men and women to suicide, the military was unwilling or unable to collect exact statistics on the population. Only anecdotal accounts exist for gay and lesbian servicemembers who took their own lives rather than be discharged or publicly outed, and the exact number of DADT's victims are unknown and relegated to the closet in perpetuity.¹²⁴

The end of DADT in 2011 and the ability of LGBT Americans to serve openly in the U.S. military proceeded much as in other countries where bans were lifted: as a stunning anticlimax. Despite the warnings of DADT proponents that allowing homosexuals among the ranks would prove disastrous to the military as an institution, six months after the policy was rescinded President Obama, the Defense Secretary, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff all certified that the repeal did not have a negative impact on military readiness, effectiveness,

¹²³ David Kieran, *Signature Wounds: The Untold Story of the Military's Mental Health Crisis*. (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 214.

¹²⁴ Seefried, 115.

unit cohesion, morale, and recruitment.¹²⁵ Other groups of scholars who studied the end of DADT came to a similar conclusion, even stating that “if anything, DADT repeal appears to have enhanced the military’s ability to pursue its mission.”¹²⁶ Although not directly addressed in these reports, the mental health of gay and lesbian servicemembers also improved, as they no longer feared rumors, threats, and intrusive investigations that could all end their careers.

The stories of the men and women affected by DADT are still only beginning to be told, as for 17 years the policy silenced an entire population within the military. Over the decade since repeal, the values of acceptance and equality for LGBT Americans have taken root within the military. Personal narratives of gay and lesbian servicemembers serve to document the poisonous environment created by DADT and express hope for a brighter future in which soldiers are judged solely on their abilities and not on their sexual orientation. As one Navy sailor aptly concluded, “To all the gay and lesbian service members past and present, I salute you. I salute you for the anguish you imposed on yourself. I salute you for the turmoil others imposed on you. I salute you for the countless nights you lay awake crying. I salute you for your desire to serve our great nation. Let us always remember the words of former U.S. senator Barry Goldwater: ‘You don’t have to be straight to be in the military; you just have to be able to shoot straight.’”¹²⁷

¹²⁵ William A. Taylor, *Military Service and American Democracy: From World War II to the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2016), 166.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 167.

¹²⁷ Seefried, 116.

Essay #3: Diplomacy in the Closet: How the Lavender Scare Distorted U.S. Foreign Policy

“In this shady category that you referred to earlier, there are ninety-one cases, sir,” noted Undersecretary of State John Peurifoy during testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee on February 28, 1950.¹²⁸ These seemingly innocuous words dramatically altered the relationship between the U.S. government and federal employees and ultimately disrupted U.S. foreign policy for decades. Peurifoy, head of the State Department’s security program, referenced the “shady category” of Department employees classified as “security risks”- members of Communist or Nazi organizations, those engaged in espionage or who shared classified information, and those the Department deemed to have character defects. The ninety-one cases cited by Peurifoy fell in the latter category: homosexuals or suspected homosexuals whose resignation the State Department had requested due to concerns that their supposedly weak moral character was incompatible with government service.

These comments sparked a congressional frenzy led by Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WI) to identify and root out homosexuals from the federal bureaucracy in the name of national security, assisted by an overzealous FBI and pliant department heads. By the end of the year, nearly six hundred federal civil servants resigned under duress, a phenomenon retrospectively dubbed the “Lavender Scare” after a similar push to eliminate employees with communist sympathies known as the “Red Scare.” Previous works have documented how the Lavender Scare directly affected the thousands of individuals who ultimately resigned or were fired from the federal government, stalling their careers and jeopardizing their livelihoods. However, the

¹²⁸ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Appropriations, *Making Appropriations for the Departments of State, Justice, Commerce, and the Judiciary for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1951*, 81st Cong., 2nd Sess., 1950, 615.

ensuing anti-homosexual fervor also impacted the State Department as an institution and significantly distorted U.S. foreign policy for decades.

The roots of governmental discrimination against homosexuals extend back to America's founding, but the Lavender Scare crystallized and institutionalized these prejudices. Laws forbidding sodomy and same-sex sexual relations existed in every state, but few discussed homosexuality in polite society. However, in 1948 two landmark books catapulted the issue of homosexuality from whispered innuendos into mainstream discourse. Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* was the first major American novel with a homosexual protagonist, an all-American athlete who has a youthful dalliance with a male friend and later struggles to navigate the clash between his sexual orientation and society's prejudices. Vidal's depiction of secret homosexual encounters and attempts by some gay men to marry women for appearances unsettled many Americans, yet Vidal's tight prose and the book's scandalous subject matter kept it at the top of best-seller lists.¹²⁹

Similarly, Alfred Kinsey's study of human sexuality, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, introduced America to the concept that instead of a homosexual-heterosexual binary, most American men found themselves on a graduated scale between the two extremes. The book also claimed that thirty-seven percent of males had at least one homosexual experience in their lives, even those who later chose an exclusively heterosexual lifestyle.¹³⁰ These books launched a revolution in American perceptions of sexuality, but also thrust homosexuals into the spotlight at an inopportune moment, just as a budding Cold War rivalry emerged between two competing ideologies of communism and capitalism.

¹²⁹ Shinkle, Peter. *Ike's Mystery Man: The Secret Lives of Robert Cutler*. (Hanover: Steerforth Press, 2018), 38.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Thus in 1948 popular culture formed the impression that Americans were secretly surrounded by homosexuals at a time when newspapers were breathlessly reporting on communist infiltrators who posed a threat to their way of life. A common perception was that homosexuals, like communists, hid their true selves, formed a secret cabal complete with coded words and gestures, and maintained a double life to infiltrate American institutions. Some imposed this idea onto the insular State Department and judged its officials as weak and effeminate, more prone to delicate negotiations than advancing a muscular foreign policy. They concluded that diplomats, more accustomed to effete European dinner parties than the masculine rigors of military life, formed a certain form of freemasonry and suggested the existence of an international clique with its own language, culture, and divergent loyalties.

Such perceptions abounded in the press of the time. An influential article from the period concluded that “by the very nature of their vice,” homosexuals “belong to a sinister, mysterious, and efficient international” that later became known colloquially as the “Homintern.”¹³¹ These perceptions were brought into focus during the proceedings of the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1948, in which the urbane State Department official Alger Hiss was accused of associations with communism. In a hearing laden with homosexual innuendo, Whittaker Chambers, an acquaintance of Hiss’s and a confessed former communist, declared, “Mr. Hiss represents the concealed enemy against which we are all fighting.”¹³² That Hiss was later convicted of perjury during an ensuing investigation for lying about providing secret documents to Chambers served as conclusive proof to many of the insidious threat of communists in government. By 1950, the public believed the infiltration to be so complete that

¹³¹ Waldeck, R.G. “Homosexual International,” *Human Events*, April 16, 1952, 1.

¹³² Kirchuk, James. *Secret City: The Hidden History of Gay Washington*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2022), 99.

one right-wing columnist declared that “an all-powerful, supersecret inner circle of highly educated, socially highly-placed sexual misfits in the State Department” pulled the true levers of foreign policy.¹³³

Both associations, communist and homosexual, seemed to reveal underlying psychological issues that made individuals unfit for government service or inclusion in mainstream American society. In February 1950, Senator McCarthy made a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, to a Republican women’s group and claimed that the State Department contained “205 card-carrying communists.” When asked to substantiate these claims, a few weeks later he led the Senate in a detailed run-down of eighty-one alleged “loyalty risks” in the State Department, which at the time could mean either homosexuals or communists. Lumping both groups together, Senator McCarthy claimed that “these very unusual individuals ... were active members of Communist-front organizations” and concluded without presenting evidence that some were “active Soviet agents.” McCarthy highlighted a supposed conversation he had with a top intelligence official, who claimed that “there is something wrong with each of these individuals ... practically every active Communist is twisted mentally or physically in some way.”¹³⁴

The conflation of homosexuality and communism had an effect. By inserting this anecdote in between descriptions of two homosexual State Department employees, McCarthy suggested that homosexuality was a kind of psychological disorder that led an individual to communism. McCarthy’s quest to rid the U.S. government of these twin menaces set the stage

¹³³ Lewis, Gregory B. "Lifting the ban on gays in the civil service: federal policy toward gay and lesbian employees since the Cold War." *Public Administration Review*, vol. 57, no. 5, Sept.-Oct. 1997, pp. 387+

¹³⁴ *Congressional Record*, February 20, 1950, pp. 1961.

for both the widely known Red Scare against communist sympathizers but also the less-discussed Lavender Scare against suspected homosexuals.

A week after McCarthy's spectacle in the well of the Senate, Secretary of State Dean Acheson traveled to Capitol Hill to testify about the State Department's annual appropriation. During his testimony, he described the Department's security program and explained that "security risks" applied to those who engaged in espionage, divulged classified information, or maintained membership in communist or Nazi organizations. In addition, he included persons with any "defect" in character such as homosexuals. During follow-up questioning by the senators, Deputy Undersecretary for Administration John Peurifoy volunteered the information of the ninety-one individuals in the "shady category" of homosexuality.

Confirmation that dozens of so-called sexual perverts had so recently worked at the State Department exploded like a bombshell in Congress and the news quickly spread across the country. Newspaper columns, op-eds, and letters to the editor widely discussed the issue of the "lavender lads" at the State Department, with one headline blaring "Perverts Fleeing State Dept." Republicans in Congress capitalized on this public shock to assail the Truman Administration, and McCarthy latched onto the issue to reinvigorate his political career. A prominent Wisconsin Republican and McCarthy supporter told local allies, "Our party is finally on the attack and should stay there. And best of all, we may get rid of many Communist sympathizers and queers who now control policy."¹³⁵

The Truman Administration, caught on its heels by the congressional proceedings, began to accelerate a campaign to root out suspected subversives that they had started several years prior. In 1947 the same Senate Appropriations Committee had warned Secretary of State George

¹³⁵ Johnson, David K. *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 20.

Marshall of an alleged communist plot to infiltrate the U.S. government and place its agents in positions of trust. The committee sought to assist the State Department with efforts to protect itself by adding the “McCarran Rider” to that fiscal year’s appropriations bill, which permitted the secretary to use his “absolute discretion” to terminate any employee in the interest of national security.¹³⁶ In response, Marshall created the Personnel Security Board to vet department employees for perceived vulnerabilities in loyalty or security and screen out employees with character weaknesses. Such weaknesses, which could include “habitual drunkenness, sexual perversion, moral turpitude, financial irresponsibility, or criminal records,” could potentially lead an individual toward associating with a subversive group.¹³⁷

While homosexuality represented just one among many factors deemed as character weaknesses, in practice the Department focused its efforts almost exclusively on rooting out communists and homosexuals. Thus the ninety-one individuals mentioned by Peurifoy who resigned under duress as “security risks” were precisely those who were alleged to be homosexuals. A State Department security officer confirmed to Congress in 1951 that he did not know of any employees terminated due to alcoholism despite the condition’s explicit inclusion as a character weakness, and “security risk” became synonymous with homosexuality in the eyes of government officials.¹³⁸

The label of “security risk” reflected the widespread belief that homosexuals, by virtue of their very essence, could be blackmailed by America’s enemies to turn over the nation’s secrets. As sodomy was illegal throughout the United States, individuals engaging in sexual relations with others of the same gender were committing crimes, a fact that adversaries could use against

¹³⁶ Departments of State, Justice, Commerce, and the Judiciary Appropriations Act, 5 U.S.C. § 652 (1952).

¹³⁷ Johnson, 21.

¹³⁸ U.S. Congress, House, *Department of State Appropriations for 1952*, Hearings, Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, 82nd Cong., 1st sess., March 2, 1951, 397.

them for recruitment purposes.¹³⁹ Indeed, laws of the time were so restrictive against the supposed immorality of those caught in homosexual encounters that some states even mandated involuntary commitment to mental institutions.¹⁴⁰

That no homosexual American had ever been publicly known to be blackmailed into revealing state secrets (and has not since) was irrelevant for the moral crusaders in Congress and the Truman Administration committed to weeding out allegedly subversive elements.¹⁴¹ A prominent senator expressed a common viewpoint that “blackmailing of moral perverts ... is a long-established weapon among nations plotting aggression” without providing any evidence supporting his position.¹⁴² Subsequent studies showed the link between homosexuality and blackmail to be nonexistent. In 1991 the Department of Defense studied the 117 American citizens suspected of espionage since 1945 and found that while six of them were homosexual none blamed the espionage on a threat of blackmail.¹⁴³

Regardless of the paucity of evidence to justify the “purge on the Potomac,” several Congressional committees were formed specifically to study the issue of homosexuals in government service and ensure that those forced to resign for homosexuality did not obtain employment in other government agencies. Just a few weeks after Peurifoy’s revelation, Senator Kenneth Wherry (R-NE) launched an investigation into “the infiltration of subversives and moral perverts into the executive branch of the United States Government.”¹⁴⁴ Wherry fantastically

¹³⁹ Charles, Douglas M. *Hoover’s War on Gays: Exposing the FBI’s “Sex Deviates” Program*. (Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 2015), 94.

¹⁴⁰ Charles, 72.

¹⁴¹ Johnson, 9.

¹⁴² U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the Investigations of the Junior Senator of Nebraska, a member of the Subcommittee Appointed by the Subcommittee on Appropriations for the District of Columbia, on the Infiltration of Subversives and Moral Perverts in the Executive Branch of the United States Government*, S. doc 4179, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., 1950, (hereafter Wherry Report), 11-12.

¹⁴³ Sarbin, Theodore R. *Homosexuality and Personnel Security*. (Monterey: Defense Personnel Security and Research Education Center, 1991), 30.

¹⁴⁴ Wherry Report, 1.

claimed that the Russians had acquired a list of global homosexuals compiled by Hitler, which they sought to use to extort secrets out of government employees.

The star witness of Wherry's hearings, Lt. Roy Blick of the Washington, DC, vice squad, asserted that 5,000 homosexuals lived in the nation's capital with an estimated three-quarters of them federal employees. Although Blick later confessed that he based the figures not on verifiable statistics but his own guesses and personal calculation, the news sent new shockwaves through the press, with *Newsweek* publicizing the claim under the title "Homosexuals United."¹⁴⁵ Despite the lack of evidence, Wherry used these figures to illustrate the need to counter Soviet attempts to entice female civil servants "into a life of Lesbianism" and pushed the incipient purge as an attempt to prevent the sabotage of U.S. seaports and major cities.

Senator Claude Hoey (D-NC) led the second major Congressional attempt to justify the ongoing purges, which lasted throughout the spring of 1950. An old-school legislator who venerated decorum and tradition, Hoey sought to prevent his effort from turning into a "circus" and insisted on private hearings. He also tried to prevent female Senator Margaret Chase Smith (R-ME) from participating, fearing that the presence of a "lady" would stifle debate. Sen. Smith persisted, and Hoey later complained that he wanted to ask additional questions from some witnesses but did not wish to offend her female sensibilities.¹⁴⁶ Notably, Sen. McCarthy recused himself from the hearings, although historians still debate the reasons why. *The New York Times* reported at the time that McCarthy "bowed out of the inquiry to avoid being in a position of judging his own accusations," but such professional courtesy strains credibility. A more likely conclusion is that McCarthy sought to avoid a "boomerang effect" of calling attention to his own

¹⁴⁵ Johnson, 79.

¹⁴⁶ Adkins, Judith. "These People Are Frightened to Death: Congressional Investigations and the Lavender Scare." *Prologue Magazine*, Summer 2016, Vol. 48, No. 2.

status as a bachelor and rumors surrounding the sexual orientation of his chief counsel Roy Cohn.¹⁴⁷

To decide on the compatibility of homosexuality and government service, the Hoey Investigation heard from officials at federal agencies, law enforcement officers, and medical professionals- but no actual homosexuals. The main controversy centered on attempts by the committee to gain access to the personnel records of executive branch agencies to compile a master list of “sex deviants” to ban from the government. The Army, Navy, and State Department indeed maintained lists of individuals who had resigned or been fired for homosexuality, but the Truman Administration resented the intrusion on executive authority and prohibited the agencies from disclosing such information.

After months of hearings, the committee once again failed to find a single instance of a foreign government blackmailing a homosexual into divulging state secrets. Nonetheless, it concluded that their continued employment threatened national security. With the conclusions of the Hoey Committee, the Lavender Scare thus expanded beyond the State Department to the entire federal workforce. Per the committee’s report, the same moral weakness that made homosexuals vulnerable to blackmail also rendered them “unsuitable” employees with weak moral fiber and emotional instability, even flatly stating that “one homosexual can pollute a Government office.” The committee’s findings, which concluded that there was “no place in the U.S. Government for persons who violate ... accepted standards of morality” thus formalized the official opposition of the U.S. government to homosexuality and sought to represent a national consensus that they posed a threat to national security.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Marquez, Hugo. “Persecution of Homosexuals in the McCarthy Hearings: A History of Homosexuality in Postwar America and McCarthyism.” *Fairmount Folio: Journal of History* 12 (2010), 76.

¹⁴⁸ U.S. Congress, Senate, *Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government, Interim Report*, 81st Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Document 241.

The findings of the Wheeler and Hoey investigations set the stage for the FBI to expand and strengthen the Sex Deviates Program first established in 1937, which played the central role within the federal government in collecting and disseminating information about homosexuals to ensure their exclusion. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover arranged for the fingerprints of all individuals arrested nationwide for “sex crimes” to be forwarded to the FBI and cross-checked against the fingerprints of all applicants for federal employment. Hoover testified that the program had succeeded in weeding out “mental cases, murderers, thieves, sex deviates, and other criminally inclined misfits.”¹⁴⁹ The Bureau also collected written allegations, newspaper articles, and other information regarding homosexuals to be placed in an individual’s file. Hoover partnered closely with Lt. Blick of the DC vice squad to enhance information-sharing resulting from the squad’s so-called Pervert Elimination Campaign targeting homosexual activity in Lafayette Park, a notorious cruising spot across from the White House. Under Hoover’s watch, the U.S. government centralized and institutionalized its efforts to target and exclude homosexuals from federal employment and codify it into official policy.

During the next presidential campaign in 1952, outright discrimination against homosexuals intensified. The Republican Party chose the slogan “Let’s Clean House” and promised to continue its efforts to rid the federal government of communism, corruption, and sexual perversion. The party portrayed both its presidential and vice-presidential candidates, Gen. Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon, as “regular guys” who were “for morality” while Hoover circulated rumors that Democratic candidate Adlai Stevenson, a wealthy, educated, former State Department official, was homosexual.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on the Department of Justice, *Hearings for the Department of Justice Appropriations for 1952*, 82nd Cong., 1st sess., February 15, 1951, 311.

¹⁵⁰ Theoharis, Athan. “How the FBI Gaybaited Stevenson,” *Nation*, May 7, 1990, 1.

After winning the election, Eisenhower immediately began fulfilling his campaign promises by implementing a new security system for government employment. If prior administrations emphasized political loyalty among public servants, Executive Order 10450, signed by President Eisenhower in April 1953, shifted the focus to general suitability and character assessments for federal employment. Among the factors that would disqualify a candidate such as drug addiction and criminal behavior, the order specifically added “sexual perversion,” widely understood to mean homosexuality.¹⁵¹ Previously, only the State Department and the military agencies conducted such suitability reviews as part of a background check- E.O. 10450 extended the ban on homosexuals to the entirety of the federal government, even small agencies or the National Gallery of Art. Prior rules required an employee to be found “disloyal” before termination, but Eisenhower’s order allowed agency heads to fire employees in the name of national security on the mere suspicion or allegation of homosexuality and regardless of whether or not any supposed wrongdoing had occurred.¹⁵²

The consequences of E.O. 10450 immediately rippled through the federal government. Fear spread throughout the executive branch, as each agency began delving into the personal lives of its employees and conducting intensive investigations based on prior arrests, associations with other known homosexuals, or mere suspicions. The State Department immediately sent a memorandum to every U.S. embassy emphasizing the need to address the homosexual problem, and sent inspectors overseas with training in “methods used in uncovering homosexuals.” Department recruiters operated with instructions to “do everything possible to ferret out

¹⁵¹ Executive Order 10450 (1953) <https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-order/10450.html>

¹⁵² Shinkle, 126.

individuals with homosexual tendencies before final selection,” although the criteria for doing so remained ambiguous.¹⁵³

R.W. Scott McLeod, the new head of the State Department Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs, created the “Miscellaneous M Unit” to investigate allegations of homosexuality. McLeod declared to Congress that “the campaign toward eliminating all types of sex perverts from the rolls of the department will be pressed with increased vigor.”¹⁵⁴ Under the “Gestapo mentality” of his tenure, the M Unit engaged in eavesdropping, opened employees’ mail, and cultivated secret informants within the Department. For McLeod’s team, evidence or suspicion of one homosexual encounter at any point in the employee’s life would lead to expulsion, as in his reasoning it provided sufficient grounds for blackmail by one of America’s adversaries.

Regardless of an individual’s sexual orientation, news of an investigation by the M Unit provoked fear among employees. If the unit developed any suspicions about an employee or applicant’s moral fiber, they confronted the individual and offered a polygraph examination. Although some employees tried to “beat” the polygraph, others chose to resign immediately rather than undergo an invasive investigation that included interviews with former employers, friends, associates, and family members. Security officials would pose intimate and detailed questions to these close contacts, effectively outing the employee as a homosexual regardless of whether he or she actually engaged in homosexual acts.

The M Unit’s investigations proved to be devastatingly effective. One security official reported in 1953 that 80 percent of homosexual interrogations ended in confessions.¹⁵⁵ Refusal

¹⁵³ Johnson, 75.

¹⁵⁴ U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, *Departments of State, Justice, and Commerce Appropriations for 1954*, 83rd Cong., 1st sess., March 20, 1953, 102-3.

¹⁵⁵ Johnson, 129.

to answer questions constituted a sign of guilt equivalent to an admission. Furthermore, M Unit investigators threatened to publicly reveal the individual's homosexuality unless they identified other homosexuals within the Department. Their coercive methods proved so efficient that by 1956 the unit reported only one individual suspected of homosexuality who refused to resign. The Department terminated the employee anyway under the McCarran Rider and the Civil Service Commission denied his appeal.¹⁵⁶

Most employees, however, chose to resign to spare themselves and their families from the embarrassing publicity of a termination. Security officials often collected reams of personal information or sometimes sordid details or allegations during their investigations, and threatened to make even uncorroborated information public, to induce the employees to "voluntarily" resign.¹⁵⁷ Others chose to continue to work despite a possible future investigation hanging over them like a sword of Damocles. One Washington resident recalled a neighbor working for the Navy whom investigators followed to local gay bars. "He finally quit," said the resident. "They didn't force him to quit. He knew it was coming because they started to question him."¹⁵⁸ While these resignations were technically voluntary, they resulted from the fear and repression of the Lavender Scare.

While mere resignation from one's employment may seem benign on the surface, it often had devastating personal consequences. First, the federal government was the nation's largest employer during the time of the Lavender Scare and by far the largest in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. The loss or denial of a security clearance also meant that accused homosexuals could not work for defense companies with government contracts, a workforce of

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Charles, 355.

¹⁵⁸ Johnson, 167.

more than three million workers in the 1950s. The “lavender letter” extended even to employment as seaport workers or citizens volunteering at government-sponsored conferences. Licensing boards for many professions also refused to admit homosexuals, and private employers outside of the government sector quietly restricted their employment. Some estimated that a dismissal or resignation from the government for suspected homosexuality would preclude an individual from almost 20% of the total jobs in the nation’s economy.¹⁵⁹ Many faced long-term unemployment or underemployment, forced into jobs that were not commensurate with their skills. One graduate of Georgetown University who found himself barred from public service emphasized, “You get a good education and you end up doing menial work.”¹⁶⁰

Some individuals, when faced with public stigma or the end of their careers, chose instead the drastic option of suicide. Peter Szluk, a State Department security officer during this time, later admitted “The only thing I regret in my campaign to rid the State Department of [sodomites]” was “when within minutes, and sometimes maybe a week, they would commit suicide.”¹⁶¹ Anecdotal evidence reveals that at least one employee shot himself on the Washington street directly in front of the State Department after being forced to resign. Others leapt from bridges or hung themselves in their residences not long after being separated from the State Department. Another employee of the U.S. Embassy in Paris, France, endured two days of interrogation before admitting to homosexual activities. Faced with certain dismissal and return to the United States, he committed suicide in his government-provided housing.

The State Department recognized the psychological harm that the intrusive investigations and interrogations caused for its employees, but not only failed to take mitigating steps but even

¹⁵⁹ Lewis, 387+.

¹⁶⁰ Johnson, 157.

¹⁶¹ Johnson, 158.

actively sought to cover up their role in these deaths. In 1953, the Deputy Undersecretary of State for security affairs admitted to Congress that the Department knew of several employees “that have done away with their lives after we discharged them.”¹⁶² While exact numbers of suicides linked to the Lavender Scare are impossible to ascertain, Washington newspapers of the time reported many more cases of single, male federal employees who committed suicide than may be expected otherwise.

The full extent to which the Lavender Scare terrorized homosexuals and suspected homosexuals remains unclear, as personnel records often omitted that a resignation occurred under threat of an investigation. Peter Szluk recounted, “To this day nobody knows who some of the people were that I got rid of because they were sodomites. I would protect [that information] because so many of them had families.”¹⁶³ Before congressional committees in 1951, State Department officials indicated that they had separated 144 employees for homosexuality, and two years later they added another 402. As late as the 1960s, when State Department officials appeared before congressional appropriations committees they were obligated to disclose how many homosexuals had been fired in the previous year. As one irate reader wrote to the *Washington Post* in 1968, “The State Department sacrifices homosexuals, annually, to propitiate the House Appropriations Committee, and to gain money from them.”¹⁶⁴

Historians estimate that throughout the span of the Lavender Scare the State Department terminated over 1,000 employees for suspicions of “sex perversion.” By October 1953, the Civil Service Commission reported that they had investigated 58,791 individuals across the federal

¹⁶² U.S. Congress, Senate, *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Historical Series*, vol. 5, 83rd Cong., 1st sess., February 5, 1953, 87.

¹⁶³ Johnson, 76.

¹⁶⁴ “Letters to the Editor,” *Washington Post*, June 10, 1968, A-20.

government, firing 843 and accepting the resignations of 2,283 more.¹⁶⁵ As statistics show that State Department dismissals constituted twenty percent of the total number, some have estimated that the government terminated as many as five thousand suspected homosexuals during the time of the Scare.¹⁶⁶ Others put the total of employees who lost their jobs just in the 1950s at seven thousand to ten thousand individuals.¹⁶⁷ The Sex Deviates File maintained by the FBI contained approximately 330,000 pages of material covering thousands of individuals, although its exact composition is unknown because the FBI obtained approval in 1977 to incinerate the entire collection.¹⁶⁸

Corresponding to the federal government purging American homosexuals from vast swaths of the national workforce, it was also actively worked to prevent foreign homosexuals from entering the United States. In early years of federal immigration policy, homosexuals with a conviction for sodomy could be barred for having committed a crime of moral turpitude, defined as that “which is so far contrary to the moral law, as interpreted by the general moral sense of the community, that the offender is brought into public disgrace ... or is deprived of social recognition by good living persons.”¹⁶⁹ Other so-called sexually degenerate immigrants were excluded or deported as “public charges” who would be an economic burden on the nation. The general consensus of the early 21st century was that a lack of economic resources could lead to perversion, and thus perversion was a major indicator of poverty, criminality, and vagrancy.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ Shinkle, 126.

¹⁶⁶ Johnson, 166.

¹⁶⁷ Kirchuk, 184.

¹⁶⁸ Charles, 109.

¹⁶⁹ Memo from the Office of the Solicitor, Department of Commerce and Labor, 1908, file no. 51924/27, box 303, Records of the INS, RG 85.

¹⁷⁰ Canady, Margot. *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 25.

At the height of the Lavender Scare, Congress swept away such vague categories for excluding homosexuals and specifically codified the practice within the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. Concerned with the threat of infiltration by communists and other subversives into the United States, Congress sought to protect national security and vital interests by carefully limiting the temporary admission to the United States and permanent immigration of foreign aliens.¹⁷¹ Along with restrictive quotas on certain nationalities, the law also formally classified homosexuals as “psychopathic personalities” to specifically deny their entry into the United States. Foreigners who had engaged in homosexuality now had to cross a perilous bureaucratic gauntlet to travel to the United States- from a visa application form that specifically asked if they were “sexual deviants,” to consular officers who could refer them to a state psychiatrist for evaluation because of their appearance, to customs officials at the port of entry who had discretion to deny admission based only on a suspicion of homosexuality. Aliens ultimately bore the burden of proof of “normal” heterosexuality, with the knowledge that lying about their sexual orientation or past activities was sufficient grounds for deportation.

Exact statistics of how many individuals were denied entry into the United States for suspected homosexuality do not exist- much as government investigators coerced State Department employees into confessions and secured “voluntary” resignations, immigration inspectors allowed such aliens to choose “voluntary departure” from the United States rather than a formal deportation. Countless other foreigners, wary of the government’s intimidating tactics, chose not to apply for visas or travel to the United States. With immigration policy representing the most visible projection of U.S. government presence to everyday foreigners, the homophobia baked into the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act sent a clear signal of U.S.

¹⁷¹ The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (The McCarran-Walter Act), 8 U.S.C., § 1101 (1952).

priorities. Interestingly, Congress passed the Act over the veto of President Truman. However, his statement of opposition to the bill focused on the racial quotas it codified into federal law and remained silent on the legislation's equivalency of homosexuals and psychotic personalities.¹⁷²

Compared to the Red Scare, the current historiography of the Lavender Scare is relatively thin. The seminal study of the phenomenon is *The Lavender Scare*, published in 2004 by David K. Johnson- indeed, via the work's title he is widely credited with inventing the very term Lavender Scare as a complementary counterpoint to the Red Scare.¹⁷³ Johnson documents the history of governmental discrimination against gays and lesbians, culminating in their exclusion from the federal workforce as subversive elements. The work also explores how the government's binary viewpoint transformed homosexual acts into an essential element of a person, thereby unwittingly creating a homosexual identity and launching the gay rights movement. Such is the deference to this work that other historians explicitly state that they focus on topics other than the federal civil service's anti-homosexual purge because of the comprehensive way that Johnson has already presented the history.¹⁷⁴ Thus the few other works dealing with the Lavender Scare approach the topic from other angles, focusing on how discrimination was carried out by specific agencies like the FBI, how it affected certain homosexual government officials like Bobby Cutler (discussed below), or how it transformed the social fabric of Washington, DC. Heretofore left unexplored is the impact that the Lavender Scare had on U.S. foreign policy, and how it distorted the nation's external relations for decades.

¹⁷² "Veto of Bill to Revise the Laws Relating to Immigration, Naturalization, and Nationality." June 25, 1952. <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/182/veto-bill-revise-laws-relating-immigration-naturalization-and-nationality>

¹⁷³ Haynes, Suyin. "You've Probably Heard of the Red Scare, But the Lesser-Known, Anti-Gay 'Lavender Scare' is Rarely Taught in Schools." *TIME*, December 20, 2020.

¹⁷⁴ Canady, 14.

Much of the difficulty of such a foreign policy-centered approach lies in the fact that almost every government employee who either resigned or was terminated continues to remain anonymous. The cumulative effect of 5,000 to 10,000 resignations or terminations is impossible to quantify or study, as each individual brought a unique skillset, background, or talent that left the workforce and diminished the State Department's overall capacity to pursue its goals. Students of the Lavender Scare can study only a few specific examples, due to the officials' high-profile jobs, access to the president, or relative notoriety at the time. A review of these men and the circumstances of their government service provides a jumping off point for assessing the policy's effect on U.S. foreign policy.

The first such case pre-dates the formal start of the Lavender Scare launched by McCarthy but serves as an interesting case study of the intersection of homosexuality and government service in the pre-war era. Sumner Welles was an influential member of President Franklin Roosevelt's inner circle and his most trusted advisor on Latin America. After passing the Foreign Service exam with distinction, Welles rose precipitously through the ranks of the State Department. When he became the head of the Department's Latin American Affairs division at the age of twenty-eight, Welles became the youngest person ever to lead a regional bureau.¹⁷⁵

Welles enjoyed close ties to the Roosevelt family, even carrying the bridal train of Eleanor Roosevelt during her wedding to Franklin, and used this social proximity to the president to become an influential confidant on world affairs. Roosevelt wanted the sophisticated and urbane Welles as his Secretary of State, but in order to appease his Democratic coalition he instead chose Cordell Hull, a relatively unrefined Southerner. Welles instead

¹⁷⁵ Kirchick, 14.

accepted the position of undersecretary of state- as the second most senior official in the State Department, Welles substituted for Hull in his frequent absences and many viewed him as the de facto leader of the agency.¹⁷⁶ Consequently, Welles and Hull maintained icy relations and an uneasy rivalry at the top of the State Department, a toxic personal relationship that later haunted Welles when his behavior courted scandal.

In September 1940, Welles joined the president and numerous cabinet secretaries and members of Congress for the funeral of a former speaker of the house in Alabama. Traveling by train, the men enjoyed the services of the dining car, where Welles and other administration officials drank heavily. Upon returning to his private cabin, Welles allegedly propositioned not just one young Black train porter but three, offering money in exchange for sexual favors. The men declined his offer. A short time later on a train to Cleveland for a speaking engagement, Welles once again allegedly propositioned a series of porters, all of whom resisted his entreaties. Word of these scandalous propositions soon reached Washington, where senators opposed to Roosevelt's policies tried to convince sympathetic journalists to publish the rumors. However, journalistic mores of the time prevented reporting on the sexual escapades of prominent men, even those preying on young men while on government business.¹⁷⁷

Hull also began a campaign to discredit his rival, and enlisted the support of William Bullitt, a one-time assistant to Hull and later U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union and France who also resented Welles's access to the President. Bullitt requested an audience with Roosevelt, in which he repeated the canard that Welles represented a threat to national security because foreign powers could blackmail him with the rumors, and even characterized Welles as

¹⁷⁶ "Foreign Relations: Diplomat's Diplomat," *TIME*, August 11, 1941.

¹⁷⁷ Welles, Benjamin. *Sumner Welles: FDR's Global Strategist: A Biography* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1997)

“worse than a murderer.”¹⁷⁸ After a fruitless two-and-a-half-year campaign by Hull and Bullitt against Welles, the situation culminated in a July 1943 meeting in the Oval Office when Hull threatened to resign if Welles remained in his position. The loyal Roosevelt was willing to turn a blind eye to such indiscretions as long as the work of diplomacy proceeded unhindered, and replied that he recognized human frailties in his associates.

However, when Republican senators began threatening an investigation of Welles’s behavior, Roosevelt was unwilling to publicly defend his aide and feared a fracture within the Democratic Party. Roosevelt ultimately requested Welles’s resignation in August 1943. On his last day at the State Department, Welles confronted Hull about his secret machinations to engineer his ouster. Hull declared that he based his actions on the “perverted personal habits” of Welles, and that his continued employment would represent “the greatest national scandal since the existence of the United States.”¹⁷⁹

While direct links cannot be drawn between Welles’s departure and actual historical events, one can look at his illustrious career and wonder what path the Roosevelt Administration may have taken had he remained in the top echelons of the foreign policy establishment. With his departure, the State Department lost a foremost expert on Western Hemisphere affairs and a strong advocate for friendly, cooperative relations with Latin American countries. Welles was a key architect of the Good Neighbor policy and advocated for a policy of non-intervention in the affairs of other countries, military neutrality, free trade, and lowered tariffs. As Welles wrote to Roosevelt, “The creation and maintenance of the most cordial and intimate friendship between the United States and other republics of the American Continent must be regarded as a keystone

¹⁷⁸ Kirchick, 40.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 90.

of our foreign policy."¹⁸⁰ Welles was also the author of what became known as the Welles Declaration, which expressed solidarity with the Baltic nations and pledged that the United States would not recognize their illegal occupation by the Soviet Union. The Declaration underscored U.S. support for democratic self-government and opposition to armed intervention against sovereign states.¹⁸¹

As WWII approached, Welles was the lead drafter of the Atlantic Charter, which reinforced an American commitment to a post-war world order that emphasized security and self-determination. Welles once again had the ear of Roosevelt to advocate for an internationalist U.S. foreign policy that promoted free markets and sought the elimination of trade barriers as a means to ensure stability and prevent future conflicts.¹⁸² Towards the end of the war, Welles also pushed for official confirmation of German atrocities against Jews and ensured the news' widespread dissemination.¹⁸³ As one of the few high-level officials seen as sympathetic to the plight of the Jews subjected to the extermination policies of Nazi Germany, some have suggested that had he stayed in the State Department he could have influenced the Roosevelt Administration to accept more refugees following the war.¹⁸⁴

The White House lost its most direct link with the State Department. After Welles's departure, Roosevelt continued his practice of ignoring Hull, depriving the diplomatic corps of influence within the administration in the run-up to war. One historian characterized Welles's

¹⁸⁰ Welles to FDR: "A Memorandum on Inter-American Relations," January 10, 1933, box 149, folder 1, Welles papers, FDRL.

¹⁸¹ "Celebrating the 80th Anniversary of the Welles Declaration." Prepared Floor Remarks by U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa. July 23, 2020

¹⁸² O'Sullivan, Christopher D. *Sumner Welles, Postwar Planning, and the Quest for a New World Order: 1937-1943*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

¹⁸³ "Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of this Government in the Murder of the Jews," initialed by Randolph Paul for the Foreign Funds Control Unit of the Treasury Department, January 13, 1944.

¹⁸⁴ Kirchick, 92.

resignation as “the worst possible thing at the worst possible time” as Hull and his advisors were relegated to second-class status in decision-making.¹⁸⁵ Only Welles maintained Roosevelt’s trust and could be counted on to implement White House proposals in the foreign policy bureaucracy. Cabinet officials knew that Hull was often out of the office attending to his ill health and was incapable of supervising his staff or running a complex bureaucracy. Without Welles’s knowledge and administrative talent, the Roosevelt Administration was left with the abnormally sensitive and vindictive Hull at the helm of America’s foreign policy.

Finally, Welles’s resignation “had a devastating effect on the State Department” and morale within the institution, as the agency lost its champion of “Pan-American solidarity and the Good Neighbor policy.”¹⁸⁶ As a sign of the “profound distress” that Welles’s ouster caused throughout Washington, a British diplomat reported on “a nation-wide feeling of discomfort and suspicion about the ‘inside story’ of Welles’s removal,” with him perceived as a martyr sacrificed to a “reactionary clique” within the Department.¹⁸⁷ As the first government official forced from his job due to homosexuality, Welles’s case set an awful precedent that empowered not only rivals like the Hull-Bullitt clique but other critics in government service, Congress, and the press to pursue their own aims by capitalizing on the homosexual issue.

In another important case, Bobby Cutler, a long-term advisor to President Eisenhower and the nation’s first National Security Advisor, suffered under the Lavender Scare in a different way. After advising the Eisenhower presidential campaign on Massachusetts politics, in 1952 Cutler became Eisenhower’s personal secretary, writing speeches for the candidate and serving as a sounding board for political advice. Cutler quickly became one of Eisenhower’s closest

¹⁸⁵ Gellman, Irwin F. *Secret Affairs: Franklin Roosevelt, Cordell Hull, and Sumner Welles*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 332.

¹⁸⁶ Morgan, Ted. *FDR: A Biography*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 684.

¹⁸⁷ O’Sullivan.

confidants and even a dear personal friend, all the while studiously concealing his own homosexuality.

After winning the election, Eisenhower tasked Cutler with reforming the National Security Council and turning the body into the central clearinghouse for debate and policy papers for the president. As the Lavender Scare enveloped Washington, DC, in the early days of the Eisenhower Administration, Cutler ironically enough played a key role in the drafting and implementation of Executive Order 10450, which sought to eliminate so-called “sex perverts” from the federal government.¹⁸⁸ In existing correspondence to gay friends or in his own diaries, Cutler displayed no remorse about the policy’s effect on homosexuals like himself and instead concentrated his efforts for the Eisenhower Administration on national security, nuclear weapons, and anti-communist efforts.

The prevailing homophobia underlying the purges of homosexuals at the time meant that closeted government officials like Bobby Cutler chose to maintain a strict compartmentalization between their personal and professional lives and enforce a stark line of secrecy between the two. In his role as National Security Advisor, Cutler developed a reputation among the Washington press as “untouchable, unreachable, and unquotable.” Although he was one of a few men who had direct, informal access to the president and knew more about national security than anyone except the president himself, he was “one of the most elusive men in Washington.” A profile by *The New York Times* described him at the time as “deliberately remote” who “avoids people” and typically “dines alone” after a grueling day at the White House.¹⁸⁹ Bobby maintained a small

¹⁸⁸ Shinkle, 125.

¹⁸⁹ Leviero, Anthony. ["Untouchable, Unreachable and Unquotable": That sums up Robert Cutler, the President's alter ego on the National Security Council, where 'cold war' policy is hammered into shape". *The New York Times*, January 30, 1955.](#)

coterie of gay friends and associates who led similarly closeted lives, but famously kept legendarily long hours at work and neglected his private life.

Coincidentally, the boardinghouse where Bobby resided on H St. near the White House was next door to the Lafayette Chicken Hut, a well-known piano bar that catered to a gay clientele. Even though he could likely hear the lively music from his apartment, Cutler certainly never patronized the establishment, as the FBI routinely targeted its clients and Cutler feared the professional consequences of a visit. Strangely enough, Cutler served as the liaison between FBI Director Hoover and the White House, and in one meeting he and Hoover discussed the topic of the Chicken Hut. As Hoover was known to spread allegations of homosexuality against rivals in the government whether or not substantiated, Cutler may have at times felt himself to be in Hoover's crosshairs. However, the two men maintained cordial and productive relations and given Cutler's access to the president, some believe that Hoover personally protected Cutler to fend off any allegations concerning his own status as a confirmed bachelor.¹⁹⁰

Although allegations about Cutler's sexual orientation never went public, he preemptively resigned his position in 1955 before Eisenhower's re-election campaign began in earnest. In his resignation letter, Cutler expressed dismay with the actions of "certain Republican Senators," namely McCarthy, and cited "personal and private concerns" that Eisenhower "was familiar with." Although the president described Cutler's departure like "losing [his] right arm," he accepted his advisor's resignation. If rumors had been circulating in the capital or if Hoover kept a file on Cutler within his personal Sex Deviates File, then Eisenhower may have acceded to Cutler's resignation to avoid any scandals that could imperil

¹⁹⁰ Shinkle, 162.

his re-election.¹⁹¹ Tellingly, just weeks after Eisenhower was duly re-elected Cutler rejoined his Administration and resumed his duties as National Security Advisor.

The very secrecy that Cutler so assiduously maintained ultimately damaged his reputation and effectiveness within the government. After the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in October 1957, a shocked American public faulted the Eisenhower Administration for failing to disclose what it knew of Soviet technology and placed much of the blame on Cutler. “Mr. Cutler is well known as an advocate of the most extreme kind of secrecy about government operations,” opined *The Washington Post* in an editorial.¹⁹² Another prominent columnist went further, naming Cutler “as a symbol of what has gone wrong with the American government. For Cutler has been a key figure in the Eisenhower Administration’s ‘Daddy Knows Best’ policy.”¹⁹³ He concluded that American society was put in danger if the government concealed essential facts from the people, an argument that would continue to resonate in the decades ahead. While it is impossible to know if Cutler so zealously embraced secrecy as a consequence of his efforts to conceal his own sexuality, it set into motion a tendency to over-classify reams of governmental information and sparked a continuing debate over the role of transparency. One can wonder if a different individual, one who could more freely live as his true self, would have set the same precedent towards secrecy at the National Security Council, the nerve-center of governmental decision-making.

Within a few months of Sputnik’s launch, Cutler wrote to President Eisenhower stating his intention to resign, citing ill health and the strenuous demands of the job. However, in the letter he continued “then there are other bothersome things (like untrue, but repeated press stories

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 203.

¹⁹² *The Washington Post*, October 31, 1957.

¹⁹³ “Cutler and Candor.” *Medford Mail Tribune*, November 25, 1957.

that I shield you from the facts!) which aren't worth going into.”¹⁹⁴ While Cutler refrains from mentioning rumors that may have been circulating about the bachelor mystery man's sexual orientation, this may have constituted a bothersome thing that pushed him from government service. After a brief stint in the world of Boston banking, Cutler decided to return to government service and accepted Eisenhower's request to head the Inter-American Development Bank. Already in his 60s, he enjoyed this “last performance” securing loans for development projects but after only two years he determined that the hectic schedule and frequent travel were too much for him and resigned.

By the time of his resignation as National Security Advisor, Cutler had embarked on a tempestuous and mostly unrequited love affair with Skip Coons, a handsome Naval intelligence officer many decades his junior. Although the men formed a close bond through Washington dinner parties among their circle of closeted gay friends and trips to Europe together, the affair tormented the conflicted Cutler, overwhelmed by passion for the first time in his life. Dissecting his every interaction with Skip in laboriously documented journals, Cutler recognized his decades of repressing his sexuality through long hours devoting himself to Eisenhower and government service. “Why must I flee to loneliness or Washington and try to drown this pain in work, instead of love?”¹⁹⁵

Cutler's decision to accept the position at the helm of the IADB was largely in order to take his mind off of Skip, who had finally made clear that he did not envision a relationship. One cannot help but feel sympathy for the tragic character of Cutler, the man responsible for the executive order expelling gays from the very government service that he used for decades to repress his own sexuality and emotions, only to come to terms with them too late. In his journal,

¹⁹⁴ Shinkle, 264.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 315.

Cutler concluded of his failed relationship with Skip, “This love was the last great spasm of my life. It has failed ... I am too old to be loved, too selfish to be loved, too demanding.”¹⁹⁶

Even into the 1960s the Lavender Scare continued to haunt those at the top echelons of power in Washington. This included Walter Jenkins, a trusted aide and personal friend of President Lyndon Johnson since his early days in politics. In the run-up to the 1964 elections, Jenkins consumed several drinks at a party for *Newsweek* near Capitol Hill and told his wife he was returning to the White House to work. In reality, Jenkins visited a basement restroom at the local YMCA notorious for anonymous homosexual activity. When the DC vice squad arrested Jenkins in flagrante delicto with another man, they shared the details with the FBI, who immediately alerted the White House. After confirming the details of the incident involving his longtime aide, Johnson said, “I just can’t believe this.”¹⁹⁷ Underscoring his incredulity, he later told a biographer, “I couldn’t have been more shocked about Walter Jenkins if I’d heard that Lady Bird had killed the Pope.”¹⁹⁸

News of the arrest, as well as a previous arrest in 1959 for the same acts in the same restroom, quickly spread to both the press and to Republicans, who immediately began to criticize the Johnson Administration for allegedly covering up the prior incident. While some advisors, including Lady Bird Johnson, advocated for a humane approach to Jenkins that recognized his many decades of service to the president, other advisors convinced Johnson to fire him immediately.¹⁹⁹ Jenkins checked himself into a hospital after the arrest, blaming his

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 312.

¹⁹⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, conversation with Abe Fortas, October 14, 1964, tape WH6410.08, program no. 6, citation number 5876, LBJL via the Miller Center, University of Virginia.

¹⁹⁸ Dallek, Robert. *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times 1961-1973*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 180.

¹⁹⁹ Folder, "Jenkins Investigation," Aides Files of Mildred Stegall, Box 29A, LBJ Presidential Library, accessed March 06, 2023, <https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/aides-stegall-b29a-f03>

indiscretion as a result of overwork and stress, and soon thereafter submitted his resignation upon Johnson's request.

Given Jenkins's high profile and the proximity of his arrest to the presidential elections, one might have expected that the Jenkins affair would produce political shockwaves. However, Johnson's Republican opponent, Barry Goldwater, refrained from mentioning the incident directly during his campaign, limiting himself to oblique pledges to maintain "the highest morality" in the White House.²⁰⁰ When pressed by reporters off the record, Goldwater expressed his disdain for using the arrest for political ends, stating "What a way to win an election. Communists and cocksuckers."²⁰¹ Other Republican leaders demonstrated less restraint, attacking Jenkins by name and hoping that the scandal would reflect poorly on Johnson's judgment in the advisors he selected for sensitive positions. However, even the indirect attacks backfired on the Goldwater campaign, as the public largely expressed sympathy with the downtrodden and overworked Jenkins. Polls reflected little damage to the Johnson campaign due to the affair, and he went on to win the election in a landslide.

Despite Johnson's victory in the election, the departure of his longtime aide deeply affected the president. For years following the incident, Johnson insisted in private that the Jenkins arrest was a GOP frame-up and vowed that "some day we will prove it."²⁰² Johnson and his advisors sincerely believed that Republican operatives disguised as waitstaff at the *Newsweek* party may have drugged Jenkins, pointing to his claims to not remember any events of the night

²⁰⁰ Goldman, Eric F. *The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 251.

²⁰¹ Dallek, 181.

²⁰² Goldman, 250.

preceding his arrest. Regardless of whatever sympathy Johnson had for his trusted confidant and friend, he never spoke to Jenkins again during his presidency.²⁰³

While Jenkins did not work in a role that was explicitly tied to foreign affairs, his arrest further extended the trope that homosexuals in government roles inherently posed a security risk. In the fallout of the arrest Johnson wondered whether there was “any chance that anybody could have been getting any secrets from him” and ordered an intensive review of all White House employees.²⁰⁴ In response, Hoover reported that the FBI had uncovered no security breaches related to Jenkins or anyone else, but given the vitriolic press attacks Johnson concluded that homosexuals were “possible sources of embarrassment at the White House” and continued the discriminatory policies of his predecessors.²⁰⁵

Jenkins’s departure deprived the President of a key advisor who routinely provided candid advice. One White House staffer later recounted that “it was a very major blow to Lyndon Johnson” that “may ultimately have led to all of his troubles in the presidency.” Another aide agreed, saying “I’ve often thought that a great deal of the President’s difficulties in the White House can be traced to the fact that Walter had to leave.” Because Johnson was deprived of the “stabilizing force” that Jenkins provided, the aide mused whether “all of history might have been different if it hadn’t been for that episode.”²⁰⁶ The “troubles” and “difficulties” these aides obliquely referenced are almost certainly the Johnson Administration’s gradual escalation of the war in Vietnam, which Jenkins’s moderating counsel may have prevented.

²⁰³ Watson, W. Marvin with Markman, Sherwin. *Chief of Staff: Lyndon Johnson and His Presidency*. (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004), 72.

²⁰⁴ Johnson, 198.

²⁰⁵ Charles, 278.

²⁰⁶ Oral history transcript, George E. Reedy, interview 1 (Ic), 12/20/1968, by T.H. Baker, LBJ Library Oral Histories, LBJ Presidential Library, accessed March 06, 2023, <https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/oh-reedyg-19681220-1-74-239-c>

Focusing on high-profile individuals does not detract from the thousands of other individuals whose resignations or terminations also affected the trajectory of U.S. foreign policy. It is important to note the enormous scope of the Lavender Scare, which affected all federal employees, whether gay or straight. Every employee was subject to an intrusive investigation if the FBI or State Department M Unit came upon rumors or allegations about their sexual orientation. The Lavender Scare thus helped instill a deep conservatism within the federal government and a pernicious tendency towards groupthink, as employees feared speaking out or creating rivals who could anonymously denounce them. The State Department as an institution suffered from the allegations of communist or homosexual infiltration, as the public perceived America's oldest cabinet agency as filled with weak and effeminate bureaucrats who were insufficiently committed to America's progress and security.

One can only wonder if the Lavender Scare abetted or intensified the militarization of foreign policy during the Cold War, as State Department officials deferred to their colleagues at the Defense Department, CIA, or National Security Council. The government's policies victimized up to ten thousand homosexuals and suspected homosexuals through discrimination disguised in the mantle of national security, affecting their careers, livelihoods, and social networks, and even in extreme cases pushing them to take their own lives. However, this institutionalized homophobia also represented a larger loss for U.S. foreign policy: the squandered talent of countless hardworking, patriotic American men and women, who counseled Presidents, streamlined government decision-making, and promoted the principles of equality and freedom that the nation was founded upon.

As James Kirchick notes in the conclusion of his work *Secret City*, a comprehensive study of the intersection of homosexuality and political power in Washington, DC, the silently

devastating consequences of the Lavender Scare are counted not just in “the careers ruined and the lives cut short, but something vaster and unquantifiable: the possibilities thwarted.”²⁰⁷ One must look at not only the ten thousand men and women separated from public service due to their sexual orientation, but also the young men and women who recognized their own secret and concluded that a career in the Foreign Service, for a government that actively sought to exclude them based on their sexual orientation, was a path best not taken. Kirchick concludes, “How many other patriotic Americans declined to run for public office, withheld their mastery of a foreign language, refrained from applying their hard-earned scientific knowledge, or forwent serving their country in myriad other ways solely because of its hostility to the way they loved other people?”²⁰⁸

While the unnamed victims of the Lavender Scare may never have their stories told, the main protagonist of Vidal’s *The City and the Pillar* encapsulates the conflicting emotions and frustrations of many closeted gay men in 1940s America. The young athlete Jim debates with his lover Paul and the bartender of a New Orleans gay bar about the men’s inability to live authentically due to conservative societal mores and government disapproval via anti-sodomy laws.

Jim could see that Paul was angry. “Why should any of us hide? What we do is natural, if not ‘normal,’ whatever that is. In any case, what people do together of their own free will is their business and no one else’s.”

The [bartender] smiled. “But do you have the nerve to tell the world about yourself?”

Paul sighed and looked at his hands. “No,” he said, “I don’t.”

“So what can we do, if we’re all too frightened?”

²⁰⁷ Kirchick, 652.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

“Live with dignity, I suppose. And try to learn to love one another, as they say.”

“Fair enough,” said the [bartender] ...

“Do you really care?” asked Jim. “Do you really care that much about the rest of the world?”

Paul shrugged. “Sometimes, yes. Sometimes I care very much.”²⁰⁹

What men like Jim and Paul wanted more than anything was precisely what the Lavender Scare denied them and countless others: the ability to live with dignity, and the opportunity to be themselves free from governmental discrimination.

²⁰⁹ Vidal, Gore. *The City and the Pillar*. (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1948), 94.

Essay #4 : Reflections on Old and New Historical Approaches

On the first day of class, a new master's student in history may find himself presented with a perspective with which he was previously unfamiliar: the growing dichotomy of "new" history versus "old" history. If he naively believed that there was one, unified approach that historians and other writers of history followed, he would be quickly disabused of the notion upon learning of the various approaches now available: from new military history to new narrative, social, and cultural histories. While each new history varies slightly from its peers, they all share an emphasis on telling history "from below"- rather than focusing on the mechanics of war, or the biographies of great men and women, they give agency to the common people who inhabit much of history. They broaden their treatment of history by using new methodologies or novel primary sources and are unafraid to tackle complex topics from a new or even controversial angle. As one new military historian summarized, "reinterpretation, if based on genuine understanding and an open acknowledgement of what has come before, is one of the glories of the discipline of history."²¹⁰ Historians are encouraged to focus on the accessibility of their written narratives, using prose that is "descriptive rather than analytical and whose central focus is on man, not circumstances," and focus on "the particular and specific rather than the collective and statistical."²¹¹ More than an amalgamation of historical facts, the works of these "new" historians highlight a theme and an argument that engage the reader as they inform. The student quickly learns to appreciate the fresh perspective of the "new" historical works, which shine in comparison with their sometimes staid "traditional" counterparts.

²¹⁰ Paret, Peter. "The New Military History." *Parameters* 21, no. 1 (1991).

²¹¹ Davidson, James West. "The New Narrative History: How New? How Narrative?" *Reviews in American History* 12, no. 3 (1984): 322-34.

Throughout the War, Diplomacy, and Society program, I have most enjoyed the opportunity to reframe my approach to American history through the lens of this “new history” approach. The most effective works included in the coursework were those that shifted the focus away from key figures within the government or military or significant historical events and toward the everyday people who actually inhabit history as their lived experience. A fitting introduction to this reframing was William Taylor’s book, *Military Service and American Democracy*. He attempts to answer fundamental questions in any society: who serves in the military, and what is the most equitable means to distribute this burden? Taylor points out that “all Americans should accept the principle that every citizen who enjoys the protection of a free government, owes and should freely give his personal services to the defense of it.”²¹² After presenting an overview of the many differing opinions regarding how the military should recruit, both in times of war and peace, Taylor details the history of the related concepts of Universal Military Training and national service as a way to ensure that every American contributed his or her service without the fiscal burden of an expanded military.

Taylor also details how the U.S. military became a force for social change through efforts to incorporate African-Americans, women, and members of the LGBT community into its ranks. The relatively smooth integration of Black soldiers during the Korean War served as a model for the rest of society- Taylor notes that the Justice Department used this integration to support its position that desegregation in U.S. public schools would result in minimal disruption to society. This progressive move predated by a decade the Civil Rights Act and other legislation to ensure equal civil rights for all racial groups in America. However, it was shocking to see how efforts to incorporate women into combat roles lagged far behind societal views of gender equality.

²¹² William Taylor, *Military Service and American Democracy: From World War II to the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2016), 35.

Taylor's treatment of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) policy was very compelling, as he charted how President Clinton's campaign pledges to allow homosexuals to serve openly in the military quickly encountered fierce resistance among the top brass at the Pentagon. Many in the LGBT community believe that the President sold them out with a false compromise, but I noted with interest how hard Clinton fought for equality and even sought to add "Don't Pursue" as a third leg of the policy. While the policy was a disappointment for many, it did represent incremental progress by focusing on the actions, or conduct, of individual soldiers rather than their sexual orientation, or character. As a whole Taylor's work provides an excellent overview of the relationship between War and Society and how we as a nation arrived at the current situation in which the vast majority of the burden falls to a tiny minority of American society.

Other works which rightfully highlight the human element of history were *Shadows at Dawn* by Karl Jacoby and *Napalm: An American Biography* by Robert Neer. In former, Jacoby skillfully utilizes four unique narrative perspectives to recount the history and culture of the Tucson, Arizona region and presents an unusually well-rounded narrative that incorporates Native voices that historians have often overlooked. Jacoby demonstrates how memory and the historical record itself can be weaponized to further victimize oppressed peoples, such as the Apaches. Through a compelling account of an infamous massacre of Apaches and the tribe's forced assimilation into American society, Jacoby demonstrates how the very scope of history effects a type of violence on the unique cultures of indigenous peoples.

By presenting *Napalm* as a biography, Neer personalizes the substance and provides a history of how it was transformed by the U.S. military into a lethally effective fighting tool. He then deftly introduces the reader to Phan Thi Kim Phuc, the young Vietnamese victim of a napalm attack immortalized in a Pulitzer Prize-winning photo in 1972 called "The Terror of

War.” She serves as an anti-hero (or hero, depending on the perspective) in the larger story of napalm, as her suffering marked an inflection point in how napalm transitioned from a celebrated war hero to a villain to be banished. Neer uses this juxtaposition between napalm and its most famous victim to tell a larger story of how the American public began to take a more active role in opposing the war in Vietnam due to its devastating effects on civilians.

In the course entitled “The Soldier’s War,” I also appreciated the opportunity to delve into Chapman University’s collection of war letters and use them to explore soldiers’ individual experiences of war. Through these first-hand accounts written by the men and women serving in the military throughout history, students were able to gain a fuller understanding of their wartime experiences. I selected a collection of the letters of four Michigan soldiers to their common friend during the time of the Spanish-American War and came away with surprising findings. As only one of the four soldiers actually made it to the front lines in Cuba, the vast majority of the letters dealt with the tedium and minutiae of mobilization into centralized staging camps in Florida and Georgia. There, soldiers grappled with a sense of futility while they awaited transportation to the front, and documented the monotonous food, lack of entertainment, and poor conditions of the camps. They had ample time to express their thoughts about traveling in the former Confederacy just a few decades after the Civil War and admitted to feeling homesickness for their friends and family in Michigan. A student of the war could find that of the 700 Michigan soldiers who perished during the war, only three died from combat-related wounds. But only by reading these letters does one get a sense of the true dangers of the war: poor sanitation and tropical diseases. Researching and writing this paper based on the war letters was a meaningful way to understand the reality of war from the soldiers’ perspective and how it affected their views of the United States and its government’s policies.

Finally, I also appreciated the flexibility given to the students during various courses to choose the topics of study most of interest to us. For the two independent study courses, I chose the twin themes of Don't Ask, Don't Tell and the Lavender Scare. While both dealt with discrimination against gay and lesbian members of the military or the broader federal government, they differed in unique ways. My interest in the mental health consequences of DADT on LGBT servicemembers stemmed from a Zoom meeting that our class held with David Kieran, author of a book called *Signature Wounds* which studies the military's mental health crisis. In response to my question about whether he had considered including a chapter on DADT in his book, Mr. Kieran expressed surprise that he hadn't considered it and stated that he wished I had asked him the question before the book's publication. I thus set out to write the "missing" chapter that might be worthy of inclusion in his thoughtful and otherwise comprehensive study. By studying DADT through the lens of the men and women directly affected by governmental discrimination, it illuminated to me just how pervasive and deleterious the policy was on ordinary servicemembers. As speaking out about the policy often meant losing one's job and ability to serve America, the men and women affected by DADT are often anonymous. However, I was pleased that I could include several testimonials in my research and further provide a platform for those who chose to oppose the policy from within and fight for equality within the armed forces.

I've always had a strong interest in the Lavender Scare and its effects on gay and lesbian employees of the State Department, and I am very thankful that the War, Diplomacy, and Society program allowed me to research the topic in more detail. Most of my colleagues, both gay and straight, are shocked to learn that the State Department continued to harass and dismiss gay and lesbian employees in our lifetimes (Bill Clinton finally overturned the policy denying security

clearances to homosexuals in 1995). I sought to understand from where the impetus arose to remove patriotic public servants from their positions due only to their sexual orientation, and what effects this had, both on an individual and national level. As with DADT, the vast majority of the victims of this governmental discrimination remain anonymous, making a systematic study of the policy difficult. However, case studies of a handful of prominent gay public servants provided insight into the strictly compartmentalized double lives that these men lived in order to maintain their livelihoods. Although this often came at a steep cost to their personal lives and their ability to forge authentic relationships outside of the workplace, their sense of duty to a particular president or to the nation often overrode their personal concerns. Thanks to the new historical approach to the recent works highlighting the Lavender Scare, I was able to see the policy on a human level and explore its devastating consequences for those it affected.

In conclusion, it is only through the “new history” approach that one is able to appreciate the interplay between War, Diplomacy, and Society. Both War and Diplomacy, far from being amorphous ideas that exist in a vacuum, are composed of individual actors pulled from the broader ranks of American Society. This program allowed students to appreciate the complex dynamic from various viewpoints and question what parts of Society choose to, or are allowed to, make key decisions in War and Diplomacy and to study the effects of these decisions on Society. When scholars view American diplomatic and military history through different prisms, whether based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, the narrative that they create is a reflection of that prism. The result is a comprehensive history that spans the spectrum of the lived experiences of individual Americans, a history that continues to evolve and one that merits and demands the continued attention of programs like War, Diplomacy, and Society.