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The Smearing of Joe McCarthy: The Lavender Scare, Gossip, and Cold War Politics

**Andrea Friedman**

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Friedman, Andrea, "The Smearing of Joe McCarthy: The Lavender Scare, Gossip, and Cold War Politics," *American Quarterly* 57 (December 2005): 1105–29. One could easily translate Friedman's account into the analytical terms that McCoy has described. 15. McCoy, *Policing America's Empire*, chap. 9. 16. On this point, see *ibid.*, 12. John Krige has also recently commented on scholars' failure to recognize the significance of the national security state in the regulation of research in science and engineering fields. Krige, "Regulating the Academic 'Marketplace of Ideas': Commercialization, Export Cont Was Joe McCarthy a bellicose, shameless witch-hunter who whipped up hysteria, ruined the reputation of innocents, and unleashed a destructive carnival of smears and guilt-by-association accusations? Were McCarthy and McCarthyism the worst things to happen to American politics in the postwar era? Winner of three book awards, *The Lavender Scare* masterfully traces the origins of contemporary sexual politics to Cold War hysteria over national security. Drawing on newly declassified documents and interviews with former government officials, historian David Johnson chronicles how the myth that homosexuals threatened national security determined government policy for decades, ruined thousands of lives, and pushed many to suicide. Before the Cold War, there was little panic about closeted gays and lesbians in the federal workforce, at least outside of the military. Homosexuality, which was declared a mental illness by the American Psychological Association in 1952, was merged into the larger gendering of global relations. It was perceived as a threat not just to the family, but to the state and to civilization itself. But by early 1950, when Wisconsin Senator Joe McCarthy made his sensational (and false) charges that dozens of communists were working in the State Department, the Department already had two investigators

working to expose and purge homosexuals from the bureaucratic ranks. The stated reasoning was that homosexuals were security risks because they were subject to blackmail. The "Lavender Scare" was a moral panic during the mid-20th century about homosexual people in the United States government and their mass dismissal from government service. It contributed to and paralleled the anti-communist campaign known as McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare. Gay men and lesbians were said to be national security risks and communist sympathizers, which led to the call to remove them from state employment. It was thought that gay people were more susceptible to being manipulated by Joe McCarthy and the Red Scare. "We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty. We must remember always that accusation is not proof and that conviction depends upon evidence and due process of law. We will not walk in fear, one of another. We will not be driven by fear into an age of unreason, if we dig deep in our history and our doctrine, and remember that we are not descended from fearful men--not from men who feared to write, to speak, to associate and to defend causes that were, for the moment, unpopular." ~ 3. To further the conversation, project slide 2 of the "McCarthy and the Cold War" Power Point, which features the political cartoon "Fire!" by famous political cartoonist Herb Block. Instruct students to silently examine the cartoon and then discuss:

- What do you see?