



Inquiry Question

Were the 1950s truly the “dark ages” for gay Americans as some historians have claimed?

Standard

11.10

11.11

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Daniel Diaz, UCLA History-Geography Project

Content Standards

11.10 Students analyze the development of federal civil rights and voting rights.

11.11 Students analyze the major social problems and domestic policy issues in contemporary American society.

CCSS Standards: Reading, Grades 10-11

RH 1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

RH 3: Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RH 6: Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

RH 8: Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

RH 9: Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

CCSS Standards: Writing, Grades 10-11

WHST 1: Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.

A) Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences the claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

CCSS Standards: Speaking & Listening, Grades 10-11

SL 1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

B) Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.

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C) Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

D) Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

Overview of Lesson

Students will analyze 6 - 10 (or more depending on the class) primary and secondary sources. These sources will serve as historical evidence for students as they determine their response to the inquiry question. After students read and annotate each source, they will then collaborate and create a DBQ Poster. The DBQ poster process requires students 1) to sort the sources into 2 or more categories, 2) to consider all historically relevant content and 3) construct a group thesis that directly answers the inquiry question.

Sources

- A. *The Ladder*, 1957
- B. Congressional Report, 1950*
- C. “Interview with Rose”, 1997
- D. *Passionate Anxieties*, 2006
- E. Interview with Henry Hay, 2012
- F. Letter from James Barr Fugaté, 1954
- G. *Passionate Anxieties*, 2006
- H. Letter from Thomas to ONE Magazine, 1958
- I. Letter from Russell to President Eisenhower, 1954
- J. “What about the DOB?”, 1959
- K. *Los Angeles Times*, 2015
- L. “Dear Mom and Dad”, 1960
- M. *Passionate Anxieties*, 2006

* Source A refers to homosexuals as “sex perverts”. Considering that this may cause some students to feel embarrassed, shocked, etc., you may want to use the edited version of Source A which excludes the term “sex pervert”. This alternative version is distinguished by the *

** Teachers who are still learning about LGBTQ history, may want to consider reading the **Some Historical Context...A Teacher Resource** section of the lesson prior to teaching it. It provides a nice summary of the Lavender Scare as well as some background on the historiography around the inquiry question.

Procedures

* Consider which documents (if you do not plan on using them all) you will provide to your students. We recommend using either 6, 8, or 10

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documents. Make sure that the documents provide students with a balance of both perspectives on the inquiry question.

1. Make copies of Source A and be sure to remove the sourcing information (*The Ladder*, 1957). In groups of three or four have students use a **Write Around strategy** to have students make observations about the source. *Source A is from a cover to a magazine known as The Ladder. The Ladder was created by the Daughters of Bilitis, which was one of America's first lesbian activist groups. The “mask” imagery is key. The term was frequently used by “homophile movement” of the 1950s. Many of the documents included in this lesson make references to the metaphorical wearing of masks and/or “passing” as straight. These were survival tactics used by gay Americans in the 1950s. In a sense, this cover is suggesting that The Ladder represented a safe space for Lesbians to be themselves without judgment, or worse, persecution.*
2. **Debrief** the Write Around with students to get at the purpose of the source. Why was this person wearing a mask? How do you interpret the look on the person's face? How can the year help us determine the message of this magazine cover? Does the title of the magazine help us better understand the imagery on the cover? What other information might you need to better understand the imagery on this magazine cover represents?
3. Next, explain to students that Source A comes from a 1950s gay magazine called “The Ladder”. The images on the covers were purposefully kept innocuous to avoid punishment under the Comstock Law of 1873 (items deemed offensive or lewd were not allowed to be mailed).
4. The teachers will review the objectives of the lesson and also introduce the inquiry question: **Were the 1950s truly the “dark ages” for gay Americans as some historians have claimed?** Explain that the term “dark ages” is used to generalize the experiences of gay men and women in the 1950s. It has a negative connotation and implies that because of the “Lavender Scare”, gay Americans were not free nor were they safe.
5. The teacher will next show a video clip about the 1967 Black Cat Tavern protests, which preceded the more famous Stonewall Protest in New York in 1969. Many historians believe that the gay rights movement began in Los Angeles after this event. It offers a nice summary of the event and also makes use of terrific primary sources. The narrator, Wes Joe, also does a good job of placing the event in its historical context. Here is the link to the video clip: <https://www.kcet.org/shows/lost-la/the-black-cat-harbinger-of-lgbtq-civil-rights>
6. Next, debrief the video with students. Clear up any questions or misconceptions they might have.
7. Next, provide some historical context for this lesson in the form of a timeline or short lecture focusing on the “Lavender Scare”. The teacher may also consider spending a class providing some

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additional readings or giving a lecture that will provide students a good historical grounding for the gay rights or “homophile movement” in the 1950s. Key Terms include:

- a. The Homophile Era (1940s-1950s)
 - b. Gay Liberation (1960s-1970s)
 - c. The Comstock Law, 1873
 - d. The Lavender Scare
 - e. Hoey Commission, 1950
 - f. FBI’s Sex Deviate Program
 - g. Mattachine Society
 - h. Daughters of Bilitis
 - i. ONE Magazine
 - j. “Blue Discharge”
8. Review the timeline with students and also review key terms that students will need to know during this lesson.
 9. Check for understanding. This can be done in various ways. The teacher can have students do a pair share and respond to the following question, “What was the homophile movement?” and/or “what was life like for many gay Americans in the 1950s?”
 10. Teacher reviews the inquiry question and then models an annotation strategy using one of the documents from this packet. The teacher can model the annotation strategy using a document camera or projecting a Word version or PDF of the document on his white board. Simply walk through the annotation and ask students to observe what you do and make the same annotations on their document
 11. Next, pass out a different document to your class and have them annotate it on their own. Walk around and provide feedback as students work.
 12. Pass out the remaining 4, 6, or 10 (or all) documents to your students. Explain to them that they will form groups (we recommend teams of 2 or groups of 4), read and annotate the remaining documents and then create a DBQ Poster.
 13. Students form teams or groups and begin the process of reading and annotating the remaining documents. Consider assigning rotating roles for group. For example, for the first document, student A will be the reader, student B will identify the purpose, student C will determine the point of view, etc.
 14. Remind students that each document represents evidence that will help them answer the inquiry question, “**Were the 1950s truly the ‘dark ages’ for gay Americans as some historians have claimed?**” Students need to read each document with this question in mind and identify whether the sources they read are evidence that support this claim or are evidence that do not support this claim. Some students may not be sure about a

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particular document, in this case encourage them to place that in the “undecided” or “to an extent” category.

15. After about 20-25 minutes, pass out the DBQ Poster Directions. Have students turn their attention to you and review the DBQ Poster process. Answer any questions.
16. Next have each team send one student over to where the butcher paper/large post-it notes are located in your classroom and have them bring back the sheet to their team/group.
17. Students will work on sorting the documents, creating a list of accurate historical facts and annotating the remaining documents.
18. Students will cut and glue the documents onto their DBQ Poster-being sure to label each section accordingly, for example. “Evidence for/Evidence Against”.
19. As students do this, the teacher circulates the classrooms and makes sure that students are interpreting the documents correctly.

Assessment

Each team/group will collaborate and create a thesis. The thesis will be written at the bottom of the team/group’s DBQ Poster. This can be done using the Thesis strategy students are most familiar with. As an extension activity, consider having students write a written response that provides more analysis connected to their thesis.

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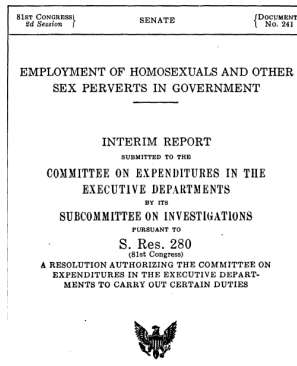
Source A: *The Ladder*, October 1957



Source: ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archive, <http://one.usc.edu/>

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Source B: Congressional Report, “Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government”, December 15, 1950



The primary objective of the subcommittee in this inquiry was to determine the extent of the employment of homosexuals and other sex perverts in Government; to consider reasons why their employment by the Government is undesirable; and to examine into the **efficacy** of the methods used in dealing with the problem...

Those charged with the responsibility of operating the agencies of Government must insist that Government employees meet acceptable standards of

Vocabulary

personal conduct. In the opinion of this subcommittee homosexuals and other sex perverts are not proper persons to be employed in Government for two reasons; first they are generally **unsuitable**, and second, they **constitute** security risks...

...Aside from the criminality and immorality involved in sex perversion such behavior is **contrary** to the normal accepted standards of social behavior...Most of the authorities agree and our investigation has shown that the presence of a sex pervert in a Government agency tends to have a **corrosive** influence upon his fellow employees...

The lack of emotional stability which is found in most sex perverts and the weakness of their **moral fiber**, makes them **susceptible** to the **blandishments** of the foreign **espionage** agent.

Efficacy: the ability to produce the desired result

Unsuitable: not appropriate

Constitute: to be or have the status of a particular thing

Contrary: the opposite

Corrosive: to slowly destroy or undermine something
“Moral Fiber”: strength of character; firmness of purpose

Susceptible: easily influenced affected by something

Blandishments: to use flattery and other temptations to persuade somebody to do something

Espionage: the act of spying

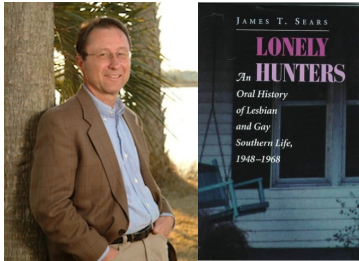
Source: US District Court, Northern District of California,

<https://ecf.cand.uscourts.gov/cand/09cv2292/evidence/PX2337.pdf>

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Source C: “Interview with Rose”, *Lonely Hunters: An Oral History of Lesbian and Gay Southern Life, 1948-1968*, James T. Sears, 1997

James T. Sears is an American historian who focuses on LGBTQ history, in particular LGBTQ history in the South. He has written or edited 20 books.



It was a wonderful time to be gay. It was a very carefree, fun time. Everyone always camped. Everyone was always laughing. We just laughed our way through the fifties and sixties.... Everything was a musical comedy. ... It was just so much fun! I would love to go back to those times!

Source: ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archive, <http://one.usc.edu/>

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Source D: Excerpt from *Passionate Anxieties: McCarthyism and Homosexual Identities in the United States, 1945-1965*, Craig M. Loftin, 2006

Craig M. Loftin is American Historian whose focuses on LGBTQ history. He teaches at Cal State Fullerton.



It is unclear when the FBI began its **surveillance** of homophile organizations, but it was well underway by the time *ONE* published its first issue in 1953. An important consequence of the 1950 lavender scare in Washington, D.C., was the establishment of the FBI's "Sex Deviate Program," which was launched on June 20, 1951.

Vocabulary

Surveillance: continually observation of a person or group, especially one suspected of doing something illegal

Apex: the highest point

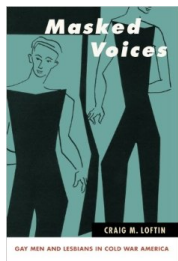
This program was designed to keep track of homosexuals and to prevent their employment by the government. Robert Dean has written that FBI director J. Edgar Hoover "sat at the **apex** of an 'information' gathering pyramid that reached into local police agencies and vice squads throughout the nation." The FBI destroyed the records of the Sex Deviate Program in 1977, so the full extent of FBI surveillance of homosexuals will never be known.

Source: *ONE* National Gay and Lesbian Archive, <http://one.usc.edu/>

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Source E: Interview with Henry Hay, Founder of the Mattachine Society; Excerpt from *Masked Voices: Gay Men and Lesbians in Cold War America*, Craig M. Loftin, 2012

Craig M. Loftin is American Historian whose focuses on LGBTQ history. He teaches at Cal State Fullerton.



“The anti-Communist witch-hunts were very much in operation [in 1950]; the House Un-American Activities Committee had investigated Communist

“**subversion**” in Hollywood. The **purge** of homosexuals from the State Department took place. The country, it seemed to me, was beginning to move toward fascism and McCarthyism; the Jews wouldn’t be used as a **scapegoat** this time – the painful example of Germany was still too clear to us. The Black organizations were already pretty successfully looking out for their interests. It was obvious McCarthy was setting up the pattern for a new scapegoat, and it was going to be us – Gays. We had to organize, we had to move, we had to get started.”

Vocabulary

Subversion: activity undermining the government

Purge: to get rid of opponents

Scapegoat: somebody who is made to take the blame for others

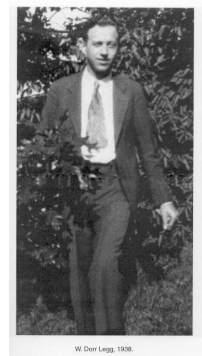
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Source F: Letter from James Barr Fugaté to Dorr Legg, December 3, 1954

James Fugaté (pictured with his dog) was an author and activist in the “homophile movement” of the 1950s where he used the pseudonym James Barr to protect himself from authorities. Dorr Legg was also an activist in the “homophile movement”. He founded the magazine ONE. Fugaté’s letter to Legg comes on the even of his agreeing to be photographed for ONE and identified as “James Barr.”



“Do you honestly believe the FBI hasn’t secured every name and address by the simple means of photographing one of your monthly mailings when you brought it into the Post Office? Or are you **naive** enough to suppose that there isn’t a fat file on each of you (and me) and your activities in spite of your pseudonyms? Remember, we do live in a Police State. McCarthy’s revelations did much to open our eyes about the methods and disregard for rules of the secret police”



Source: ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archive, <http://one.usc.edu/>

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Source G: Excerpt from *Passionate Anxieties: McCarthyism and Homosexual Identities in the United States, 1945-1965*, Craig Michael Loftin, 2006

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For many gay men and lesbians in the 1950s and early 1960s, a “blue discharge” from the military—that is, a dishonorable, undesirable, or general military discharge due to homosexuality (printed on blue paper, **hence** “blue ...severely limited their professional options in civilian life. One man told sociologist John Colin Williams in the late 1960s,

I had applied for a job at G.E. (General Electric) and I told them about my discharge. He said he could have hired me if I had served my time in prison for murder but not with that discharge. The Emporium (a department store) told me, we’re sorry, we don’t employ homosexuals. I tried to get a job with a trucking firm but they asked about the discharge. Wherever you go that discharge hangs over your head. Eventually it forced me into an occupation I hate.

Lesbians were **subject** to the same unfair **proceedings** as gay men. One lesbian, self-described as “career-driven” and “**gung-ho**” about the Air Force, explained in *America’s Working Women: A Documentary History* that she was “like a lamb to slaughter” during the proceedings against her. “During their interrogation sessions, they would produce a whole list of names. They must have had a whole goddamn **squadron** of names,” she explained. After refusing to name any names, she became the focus of a **court-martial**. “Once the ‘court-martial’ was in session, nobody read me any rights, told me I could have a defense **counsel**, or that it was my

Vocabulary

Hence: because of this
Subject: somebody who receives treatment or is the focus of an activity
Proceedings: an action or course of action
gung-ho: wholeheartedly enthusiastic and loyal; eager; zealous
Squadron: air force unit (or other military unit); a group
Court-martial: a military trial
Counsel: a lawyer
WAF: Women in the Air Force; an organization created in 1948

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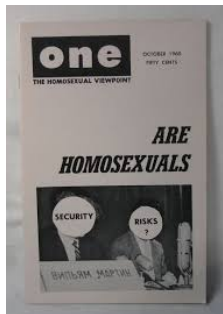
right to have somebody on that board representing me.” They asked her a series of questions, such as “Did I realize that I was a security risk being homosexual?... The entire process took about fifteen minutes.” She was given an opportunity to make a statement; in her defense, she said “I don’t think I deserve this, to be released, to be discharged from the service, because I feel that my record speaks for itself, that I have never done anything injurious or harmful to anyone else.” After a few minutes of conferring, the board told her she was to receive a “general discharge.” Compared to other cases, a “general” discharge was lenient, but it was still tragic because she had planned on devoting her life to the military to become “a thirty-year **WAF**

Source: *ONE* National Gay and Lesbian Archive, <http://one.usc.edu/>

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Source H: Letter from “Thomas” to *ONE* magazine, March 27, 1958

ONE magazine often published letters from its readers related to certain issues or questions posed by the magazine that related to the concerns of gay Americans.



I was discharged from the services because of being a homosexual, and of course thought my life was ruined. Well, I got hold of myself and found by using the excuse of being in school I could explain away the years in the service. To explain away the **4-F draft card** was easy—a bad back, which no one can prove differently.

I have met quite a number of men who have ‘gay discharge’ records from the services. Most have stopped worrying about it and done something for themselves. But there are still some who are afraid to try to get away from the past and look to the future.

There are plenty of jobs which don't ask for service records. As long as you have filled your time in the service they hire you. I was one of three hundred and fifty discharged at the same time, so there must be a lot of men with UD [undesirable] discharges running around.

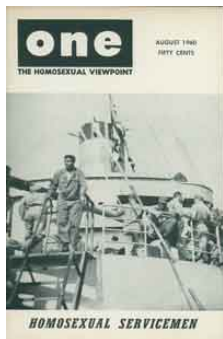
Vocabulary
4F draft card: a 4-F status is given to someone who is not fit for military service due established physical, mental or moral standards

Source: *ONE* National Gay and Lesbian Archive, <http://one.usc.edu/>

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Source I: Letter from “Russell” to President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1954; published in *ONE* magazine on March 21, 1960

ONE magazine often published letters from its readers related to certain issues or questions posed by the magazine that related to the concerns of gay Americans.



My father and grandfather were both naval officers during World War I. They fought to help keep this nation free from the enemys of freedom. When I got out of high school, I joined the United States Army to help defend my country against all our enemys. I was a proud, proud person wearing the Army uniform. I was proud to go anywhere my country sent me.... After 9 months I was relieved from serving my country for the rest of my life. They told me that my kind of people was not good enough for this country's service, now or ever.

It was then I began to take a second look at my country. I began to see we don't have the freedoms our forefathers fought for. We were supposedly given the right to be heard, but we have been silenced.... When we try to stand up for our rights, we our shoved down deeper into the barrels of slavery....

My people have fought and died for this country. They wanted to have the freedoms promised us. We all want peace and understanding, but we haven't received either one.

I am a homosexual: a person who loves his own sex. People say it's wrong for me to be this way, I have been this since I was a child. I believe that God has the right to give the greatest gift of life and that is the love of life for his fellow man. It is a God granted gift that no man or women has the right to take it from another person.

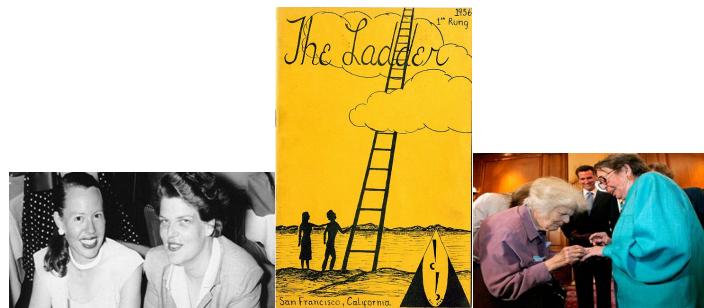
I was worried at one time for being what I was, but then I decided to pray for help and the answer was given to me. Live your life clean and decent and give your Love to the one you think deserves it. Live your life together and be joyful and happy with life.

Source: *ONE* National Gay and Lesbian Archive, <http://one.usc.edu/>

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Source J: WHAT ABOUT THE DOB?, from *The Ladder*, 1959

The Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) was the first lesbian civil and political rights organization in the United States. It was formed in San Francisco in 1955 by 8 women including Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon. Martin and Lyon were the first gay couple to legally marry in 2008. *The Ladder* was the official magazine of the DOB.



What About the DOB?

The Daughters of Bilitis, Inc.; is a non-profit organization which was founded prior to election in 1955 and incorporated under the laws of the state of California in 1957. Established as a women's organization for the purpose of promoting the integration of the homosexual into society...

“Organized Homosexuals?”

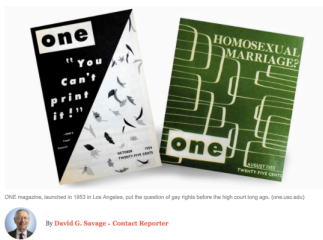
The DOB membership is comprised of women interested in the problems of the homosexuals in our society – some mothers, some heterosexual women and of course, Lesbians themselves. The Lesbian who joins would tend to be the thoughtful, public spirited, responsible type, for the organization places particular emphasis on helping her to understand herself and her relationship to society. If this means “organized homosexuals”, then it is an organization for social, not anti-social, ends.

Source: *We are Everywhere: A Historical Sourcebook of Gay and Lesbian Politics*, 1997

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Source K: “Supreme Court faced gay rights decision in 1958 over ‘obscene’ magazine”, David G. Savage, *The Los Angeles Times*, January 11, 2015

David G. Savage has covered the Supreme Court and legal issues for the Los Angeles Times since 1986. In this article he recounts the story behind the 1958 *ONE, inc. v. Olesen* case.



The road to gay rights at the U.S. Supreme Court began not in San Francisco or New York, but in a small downtown Los Angeles office, where volunteer

writers and editors in 1953 launched a new "magazine for homosexuals. "ONE, as it was called, offered thoughtful articles, defiant editorials...." The first issue was sold in bars in the Los Angeles area for 25 cents, about the price of a draft beer," said Michael C. Oliveira, an archivist at the

...Yet in an era when FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover was **routing** out "sex deviants" from the government and homosexuality was a crime in every state, the journal quickly drew negative attention, culminating with a U.S. Post Office ban of the magazine as "obscene." The cover story of the first issue censored by the postmaster proved decades ahead of its time, asking "Homosexual Marriage?"

...The result was a little-noticed, one-line Supreme Court ruling in 1958 that didn't mention the word "homosexuality" and was largely forgotten until recently, but nevertheless scored the first gay rights victory at America's highest court.

Vocabulary

Routing out: to force or drive out

Hailed: celebrated

Seminal: influential

Pro Bono: done for the public good without any payment or compensation

Ribbed: a comment or action meant as a joke or to tease

Rebuffed: to reject an offer, advance or approach made by somebody

Undeterred: persevering in something despite setbacks

Contend: to state something

Subjected: somebody who receives treatment or is the focus of an activity

Obscene: indecent

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Fifty-seven years later the high court is expected to revisit the gay rights issue, deciding soon whether to hear a case to determine whether gays and lesbians have a constitutional right to marry nationwide.

But the story of ONE vs. Olesen, **hailed** by the gay rights movement as a forgotten landmark, remains "the **seminal** gay rights case in America" because it extended free speech protection to the gay press, said Jonathan Rauch, a scholar at the Brookings Institution. "It put gay people on the path to freedom." Eric Julber, now 90 and living with his wife in Carmel, Calif., is a surprising hero in the ONE saga. A new attorney with an interest in civil liberties, he was asked to write an article for ONE about the threat of government censorship and how to avoid it. His piece, titled "You Can't Print It!," became the cover story of the October 1954 issue — and the second target of a postal service seizure. Julber, who was 30 at the time, promptly agreed to represent the magazine's editor **pro bono**....Few other legal experts at the time agreed. Fellow attorneys **ribbed** him for representing a gay journal and predicted no judge would take his side. Even the American Civil Liberties Union office in Los Angeles **rebuffed** him...**Undeterred**, Julber filed suit against Los Angeles Postmaster Otto Olesen, **contending** the seizure of the magazine violated the constitutional principles of free speech and equal protection. His suit contended ONE was **subjected** to discriminatory treatment because of prejudice against gays.

Federal judges in California were not ready to approve this type of magazine. U.S. District Judge Thurmond Clarke in Los Angeles handed down a two-page opinion in March 1956 upholding the Post Office's decision that ONE was "non-mailable matter."

...Julber persuaded ONE's founding editors, Dale Jennings and Don Slater, to appeal the 9th Circuit's decision to the Supreme Court. "They agreed to pay my expenses to travel back to Washington. That's the way you had to do it then. I took along a copy of the magazine," he recalled...He told them the rulings by the California-based judges reflected an intense prejudice against homosexual people and predicted the Supreme Court would take a "rational view of the matter." Julber wrote a petition asking the high court to consider, for first time, whether homosexuality could be openly discussed in literature without being automatically banned as obscene...Lower courts had allowed publications advocating nudism and polygamy, he argued. So why had the 9th Circuit "singled out and discriminated against" ONE because it dealt with homosexuality, he asked.

...several Supreme Court law clerks read Julber's petition — as well as the magazine itself — and advised the justices it was not **obscene**. "This was an easy one for the liberal justices. It was a speech case," recalled Norman Dorsen, who was then a law clerk to conservative Justice John Marshall Harlan and would go on to lead the national ACLU from 1976 to 1991. But even the conservatives were not in favor of censorship practiced by the Post

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Office. "The conservatives on the court then...were not like the real conservatives we have now. They were more tolerant," he said...After taking several votes, the justices decided on a simple, one-line ruling issued on Jan. 13, 1958, reversing the 9th Circuit decision.

...USC law professor David Cruz said the ONE decision was most important not as a matter of legal doctrine but because of "its on-the-ground effects."

"By protecting ONE," he continued, "the Supreme Court facilitated the flourishing of a gay and lesbian culture and a sense of community at a time when the federal government was purging its ranks" of suspected gays.

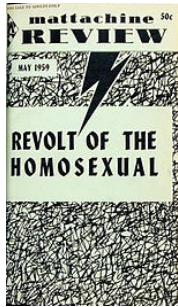
...Though his high court victory garnered little attention at the time, Julber said he was proud of what he had accomplished. "I always thought it was a major case because it said homosexuals had a right to express their own views and a right to their own literature."

Source: The Los Angeles Times, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-court-gay-magazine-20150111-story.html>

Inquiry Question: Were the 1950s truly the “dark ages” for gay Americans as some historians have claimed?

Source L: “Dear Mom and Dad”, Letter to the Denver Mattachine newsletter IV, May 5, 1960

The Mattachine Society was one of the earliest “homophile organizations” in US History. It was founded by Harry Hay in 1950.



How wonderful it must be to walk down the street hand in hand, proud of the one beside you. How wonderful to touch the cheek of the one you love in a crowded place. To live openly and with freedom with one you choose. Instead it must all be kept inside. We are burdened by guilt heaped upon us by a hostile world. We must be careful to wear a mask when away from our own kind. It is not an easy way to live. I hope you don't find it too alien that we experience the grandest emotion, love.

Source: ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archive, <http://one.usc.edu/>

Inquiry Question: Were the 1950s truly the “dark ages” for gay Americans as some historians have claimed?

Source M: Excerpt from *Passionate Anxieties: McCarthyism and Homosexual Identities in the United States, 1945-1965*, Craig Michael Loftin, 2006

Craig M. Loftin is American Historian whose focuses on LGBTQ history. He teaches at Cal State Fullerton



Wearing a mask—passing as heterosexual in other words—was not a negation of an individual’s homosexual identity. It was a practical strategy to avoid the penalties of gay visibility; it reinforced a sense of homosexual identity during these years. Passing as heterosexual was a masquerade; it was a mass deception compelled by mass anxiety... The masks offered protection, a **front** for the **hostile** heterosexual world. The masks allowed gay people to survive the **work-a-day** world while they searched for, and increasingly found, one another... These years indeed were an “age of anxiety,” but for gay men and lesbians, their anxiety rested on the fact that gay and lesbian communities existed, were substantial in size, and that gays and lesbians gave serious thought and reflection to the meaning of their sexual identities. Ultimately, McCarthy and his followers failed to **eradicate** homosexuals from public life. The masks of secrecy that homosexuals adopted proved an effective response for surviving the McCarthy era.

Vocabulary

- Front:** a cover for illegal activities
Hostile: showing or feeling hatred enmity, antagonism or anger towards somebody
Work-a-day: everyday life
Eradicate: get rid of something completely

Source: ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archive, <http://one.usc.edu/>

Inquiry Question: Were the 1950s truly the “dark ages” for gay Americans as some historians have claimed?

Some Historical Context... A Teacher Resource

The Lavender Scare

Police raids of gay bars, military discharges for homosexuality, and job firings of known homosexuals were hardly unique to the 1950s. A homosexual scandal embarrassed the U.S. Navy shortly after World War I, and in the late 1930s, homosexuals became targets of a “sex-crime panic” when police cast a wide net in their hunt for child molesters and serial rapists. The major distinction of the post-World War II era was the way that homosexuals were constructed as a threat to national security in an era of atomic anxiety over the Cold War and nuclear weapons. Joseph McCarthy, along with a handful of other politicians, publicly made the case that homosexuals jeopardized national security because their low moral character made them more susceptible to blackmail and thus more likely to divulge government secrets to Soviet spies. This premise was largely hypothetical, but it infused an unprecedented level of anti-homosexual sentiment in American politics. During the sex-crime panic of the late 1930s, for example, only five states adopted “sexual psychopath laws;” from 1949 to 1955, in contrast, twenty-five states enacted such laws and applied them more aggressively and deliberately against homosexuals.

Homosexual purges in government bureaucracies, especially the State Department, represented the epicenter of a broader wave of crackdowns against homosexuals that were occurring throughout American society. To some degree, “the lavender scare,” as one historian has called the purges in government, represented a backlash to the growth and expansion of gay communities after World War II. It targeted far more people than the “red scare” itself. For example, from 1947 to 1953, twice as many individuals were fired and blacklisted from the State Department for suspected homosexuality compared to suspected allegiance to communism. The lavender scare accelerated dramatically in 1950 following Senator Joseph McCarthy’s famous February 9 speech in Wheeling, West Virginia. This speech came at a moment of unprecedented panic over national security, shortly after China’s conversion to communism, the Soviet Union’s acquisition of atomic weapons, and the sentencing of alleged spy Alger Hiss on perjury charges. In the speech, McCarthy declared that 205 subversive individuals had worked for the State Department (later revising the figure to fifty-seven, then eighty-one). On February 20, 1950, McCarthy was called before the Tydings Committee of the U.S. Senate to substantiate these accusations. He cited two cases that, in his words, were “not important insofar as communistic activities are

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concerned,” but shed “light on some rather unusual mental aberrations of certain individuals in the [State] Department,” including one who was “flagrantly homosexual.”

In April 1950, the Republican National Chairman mailed a newsletter to 7000 Republican Party workers explaining “Perhaps as dangerous as the actual Communists are the sexual pervert who have infiltrated our Government in recent years.” A subcommittee of the Committee of Expenditures in the Executive Department, known as the “Hoey Committee,” convened in June 1950 for five days of testimony from police, legal, and medical authorities on the subject of “sex perverts” in government. The committee’s final report, published in December, 1950, concluded that

those who engage in acts of homosexuality and other perverted sex activities are unsuitable for employment in the Federal Government. This conclusion is based upon the fact that persons who indulge in such degraded activity are committing not only illegal and immoral acts, but they also constitute security risks in positions of public trust.

In the wake of the hearings, governmental agencies compiled and exchanged lists of alleged homosexuals. Government agencies were pressured to produce numbers confirming their vigilance, and homosexual firings jumped from about five per month to sixty per month during 1950. Meanwhile, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) launched a “Sex Deviate Program” to ensure that gay people remained blacklisted from government jobs. During the next fifteen years, thousands of homosexual employees were quietly forced to resign and blacklisted from government work. David Johnson noted, “The total number of men and women affected by the anti-homosexual purge is incalculable” because of variation in policies, enforcement, and language from department to department. In the months following Senator McCarthy’s February 1950 Tydings committee testimony, McCarthy continued to associate homosexuals with communists but then abruptly dropped the homosexual issue in public. In private, closed-door hearings, McCarthy continued to use homosexuality in efforts to discredit political opponents after 1950...

Dark Age or Golden Age?

There was nothing inevitable about gays and lesbians getting caught up in the postwar anticommunist hysteria. Homosexuals became convenient scapegoats for anticommunist crusaders because of broader historical developments in the meaning of sexual identity. Gay and lesbian communities took shape in the U.S. during the rise of urbanization and industrialization during the nineteenth century. As cities grew, small groups of individuals that sexologists labeled “homosexuals” staked pieces

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of urban public space and created a visible culture by the turn of the century. The massive World War II mobilization spread the concept of homosexual *identity* across the nation, beyond specific urban subcultures. Despite military efforts to expel homosexuals during the war, the war emboldened gays and lesbians to begin to think of themselves as a national community and a national minority. The release of the Alfred Kinsey's best-selling *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* in 1948, which reported unexpectedly large amounts of homosexual activity in American society, accelerated this process. At roughly the same moment that gays and lesbians were forging a national minority consciousness, the country plunged into widespread anxiety over the threat of communism, nuclear weapons, and extermination.

Previous descriptions of gay and lesbian life in the 1950s, derived from court, police, and medical records as well as oral histories, favor what might be called a “dark age” interpretation. This interpretation portrays postwar gays and lesbians as lonely, scared, isolated, and invisible individuals who fell victim to techniques such as mass police arrests and involuntary lobotomies, while many fell into depression and some committed suicide. The “dark age” interpretation has multiple origins. Tabloid journalism in the 1950s discussed only the most sensational aspects of gay life; paperback novels and exposés published during the 1960s similarly emphasized the darker aspects of gay life. Psychological case studies, a major source of published information about homosexuality in these years, cast a stigma of pathology onto their portrayals of homosexual lives. In the 1970s, gay and lesbian scholars wrote in the darkest terms about life “before Stonewall” as a stark contrast to the more liberated 1970s.

Alongside this “dark age” interpretation exists a less dominant counter-narrative describing the 1950s as a “golden age” for gays and lesbians. Since the rise of gay liberation in the late 1960s, many gay men and lesbians remember the 1950s with nostalgia. “I was free as a bird in the fifties,” recalled another lesbian. There was tremendous excitement over the growth of gay communities and the rise of homosexuality as a social identity during these years. Studies that analyze the United States more broadly during the 1950s rest upon a similar dark age/golden age dichotomy. The golden age interpretation of postwar America emphasizes economic prosperity, middle class expansion, and the rise of suburbia. According to this interpretation, the 1950s were a simpler time when common sense prevailed and American society “worked.” The golden age interpretation has been well represented in American popular culture and by conservative politicians. Academic historians, however, prefer a darker interpretation of the 1950s. This interpretation emphasizes the fear, paranoia, hysteria, and stifling conformity of the era. Scholars who adopt this interpretation emphasize the ways that American prosperity favored certain groups at the expense of others. African Americans, for example, encountered terror and racism when they tried to move to lily-white suburbs. These interpretations emphasize the blandness of postwar consumer culture, suburban status anxiety, and reckless wars in Korea and Vietnam.

Inquiry Question: Were the 1950s truly the “dark ages” for gay Americans as some historians have claimed?

Source: Excerpt from *Passionate Anxieties: McCarthyism and Homosexual Identities in the United States, 1945-1965*, Craig Michael Loftin, 2006

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The DBQ Poster:

Inquiry Question (Prompt): [Write out inquiry question/prompt here.]

Category 1

Category 2

Primary Source
Includes visible annotations and/or responses

Primary Source
Includes visible annotations and/or responses

Brainstorm List
Make a bullet-point list of any relevant outside facts that pertain to the topic and/or years. Try to come up with a list of 8-10 facts. Review lecture notes, texts, flashcards and other sources that may assist you in completing the brainstorm list

Primary Source
Includes visible annotations and/or responses

Primary Source
Includes visible annotations and/or responses

Thesis:

Create a “Chicken Foot” or write out the thesis your group collaborated on. Be sure it directly addresses the prompt and can be supported with the evidence (primary sources).

Inquiry Question: Were the 1950s truly the “dark ages” for gay Americans as some historians have claimed?

DBQ Poster Step-by Step Directions

- ❑ Read the DBQ inquiry question (prompt) and determine what the question is asking.

- ❑ Consider the historical context and brainstorm a list of what you already know about the time period. Create this bullet-point list on a separate, half-sheet of paper.

- ❑ Get out your highlighter and read and analyze the documents. Annotate using the annotation strategy that your teacher has asked you to use.

- ❑ After you have analyzed and categorized the documents you will need to create a preliminary thesis. Your thesis must answer the inquiry question. Be sure to write your thesis in the format that your teacher has asked you to practice.

See the other side of this sheet to see a model of a DBQ poster