

THE LAVENDER SCARE

ARE YOU NOW
OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN
A HOMOSEXUAL?

analysis of today's most versatile word

"Loyalty"

In the 1950s, the increased visibility of gay and lesbian communities, along with a heightened fear of communism, brought about the greatest crackdown of gay and lesbian people in United States history. The American Psychiatric Association officially classified homosexuality as a mental disorder in its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual in 1952.

In 1953, President Eisenhower signed Executive Order 10450, banning gay and lesbian people from working for the federal government or any of its private contractors. More gay and lesbian people were fired from federal employment under homosexuality charges than for any other reason.

Guilty Plea

But the order had a far greater impact, as scores of gay and lesbian people simply quit their federal jobs rather than face an official inquiry. State and municipal governments as well as private employers followed the federal lead, creating blacklists of gay and lesbian people who could no longer find employment in their respective fields.

In trying to keep their sexual orientation hidden, gay and lesbian people were particularly vulnerable to extortion and violence. Victimized gay and lesbian people rarely filed charges out of fear of exposure or arrest. Perpetrators of violence against gay and lesbian people could even claim what would become known as a "gay panic defense," which justified any action, including murder, in the name of protecting oneself against a same-sex advance.

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Court Wednesday to a charge
of an infamous crime again
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