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Brooke Yung

Trinity University, byung@trinity.edu

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Brooke Yung
Dr. Turek
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Red-Lavender Colorblindness:

Institutionalized Oppression and Gay Life in America

On December 15, 1950, a Senate Investigations Subcommittee printed their interim report on an unprecedented and vaguely salacious task: “to determine the extent of the employment of homosexuals and other sex perverts in Government.”¹ Tentatively navigating the web of legal, moral, and medical approaches to conceptualizing homosexuality, this subcommittee sought to identify and terminate employees indulging in same-sex relations. Not only did this document verify the government’s belief in the undesirability of homosexuality—depicting it as a “problem” in need of “dealing with”—it captured the prevailing association of homosexuality with subversive activity, a mentality signature to the 1950s.²

In discussing the challenge of accurately recognizing homosexuals, the subcommittee evidenced a particular wariness of those who appeared heterosexual. They affirmed that the danger lay not in “the overt homosexual” or those who curbed their deviant inclinations, but in the “very masculine” gay men and the gay women with “every appearance of femininity.”³ The capacity to mimic heterosexuality, to actively practice and conceal perversion, frightened the Senate members; this subversive quality too closely resembled the attributes of communist infiltrators supposedly lurking in government offices. In this way, the subcommittee subtly drew a disturbing parallel between homosexuality and communist subversion. This evolution of traditional standards of homophobia took root in American society, feeding off the paranoia propagated by politicians eager

¹ US Congress, Senate, Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., 1950, S. Rept. 241, 1.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

to spot the commie on the payroll. Seeking to profit by the public's anxieties, the notorious McCarthy and his cronies recklessly cited a vast number of subversives infecting the government, effectively launching a national high-stakes blame game. The tense atmosphere of the Red Scare set the stage for a new panic, attuning the government to lavender-tinged treachery simmering beneath the surface.

However, our modern vantage point informs us that there was no intrinsic association of homosexuality with communist subversion in the 1950s. Prevalent assumptions of the Lavender Scare notwithstanding, sexuality and leftist political ideation are not essentially connected. Yet, the absence of such a correlation raises a new, and perhaps more interesting question: what was the actual relationship between American-Russian relations and homosexuality?

The Soviet regime played a definite role in shaping gay life in America, but not quite in the way that policy makers of the 1950s fearfully envisioned. Contrary to the assumptions underlying national defense initiatives, communist agents did not habitually exploit the vulnerability of morally debilitated sexual deviates.⁴ Neither were gay men and women inherently subversive by virtue of their sexuality. But, a profound fear of these possibilities pervaded American society, causing a sudden outbreak of red-lavender colorblindness. The contrived kinship of communism and aberrant sexuality primarily arose as a politically expedient means of compromising the Truman administration and enforcing a strictly heterosexual, capitalist American identity. Yet, these political machinations had an unintended outcome—by playing upon public fears, orchestrators of the Lavender Scare dragged the gay community out of the political closet and into the fore of the United States' public anxieties. That level of visibility permitted previously disjointed communities of gay men and women to coalesce into a unified front, leading to the formation of an unprecedented national identity. While the conflation of communism and homosexuality resulted

⁴ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 92.

from paranoia and political plotting, it enabled a genuine shift in American gay history. From this brutal saga of fear-induced discrimination arose a national gay consciousness, one that sought an identity borne not of politicized ostracization and perceived perversity, but of vitality and love. Ironically, this identity, much like the community it served, arose from comparable circumstances of political oppression in the prolific artist Tom of Finland's work.

Far from erupting organically, the Lavender Scare burst into existence as an engineered accessory to the Red Scare. Certain Republican politicians orchestrated this wave of panic so as to further discredit the Truman administration, characterizing his leadership as critically lax in both morality and competency.⁵ These fearmongers employed a barrage of incendiary rhetoric in their efforts to conjure the desired outrage and opposition; yet, curiously, their critiques focused on homosexuality more as a political transgression than a moral lapse. At the inception of the Lavender Scare in 1950, Republican National Chairman Guy George Gabrielson equated homosexuals to "subversives," describing them as "traitors working against their country."⁶ In this narrative, not only was homosexuality a violation of God's order, but a violation of governmental stability.

Without specifically enumerating the traitorous qualities inherent to homosexuals, Gabrielson went on to associate them with communist subversives. While this move seems arbitrary, it worked as a somewhat natural ideological extension. Homosexuality existed in opposition to heteronormativity, just as communism existed in opposition to capitalism. As both heteronormativity and capitalism constituted vital aspects of the mid-twentieth century American identity, communists and homosexuals fell in together under a single antithetical umbrella. By

⁵ John D'Emilio, "The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America," in *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, ed. Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 227.

⁶ "Perverts Called Government Peril," *New York Times*, April 19, 1950, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/111406723?accountid=7103>.

promoting a reductive definition of the American identity, Gabrielson and other ringleaders of the Red/Lavender Scare categorized deviations as automatically un-American, and thus automatically suspect. Political alarmists played upon this line of thought, exacerbating public fears of the comrade under the bed (or should I say, under the sheets) and situating homosexuality as a threat equal to that of communism itself. Gabrielson, like other politicians, explicitly assured American citizens of this dread certainty, claiming that “sexual perverts who [had] infiltrated our government” were “as dangerous as the actual communists.”⁷

Though Gabrielson primarily sought to undermine the public’s faith in President Truman’s liberalism for his own party’s gain, his depiction of the homosexual incursion resonated with the nation on a more personal level. The Lavender Scare was largely a product of the Republican Party’s campaign to discredit the Truman administration, but its rapid onset reflected a very real terror pervading society. To the American public, communism was not merely an alternative form of governance; it was a voracious ideology diametrically opposed to their own, a combative threat to their livelihood. The iron grasp of the Soviet Union seemed to creep inevitably onward through Eastern Europe, an insatiable machine consuming independent state after state. Its totalitarian ideation existed in direct violation of the American democratic ideal. Its atheistic stance offended America’s Christian base. Its economic structure irreconcilably clashed with American capitalism. Thus, the continued dissemination of Soviet power entailed the degradation of the American way of life.

According to the popular vision of the 1950s, homosexuality bore the same destructive power. In this line of thought, same-sex relationships completely undermined the traditional family unit, as at this moment in time marriage and children were available exclusively to heterosexual

⁷ “Perverts Called Government Peril,” *New York Times*, April 19, 1950, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/111406723?accountid=7103>.

couplings. Much of the family's value stemmed from its capacity for self-propagation, and by extension its capacity to perpetuate the established social order. The social security afforded by the family unit assumed a heightened significance in the ideological battlefield of the Cold War, making "the inherited values of the past relevant for the uncertain present and future."⁸ As these "inherited values" were vastly heteronormative, pre-existing biases against same-sex relationships intensified. Americans generally endorsed a vision of "family as rooted in time-honored traditions" of heterosexuality so as to "[allay] fears of vulnerability" in a time of tenuous ideological warfare.⁹ They supposed that in a heterosexually structured social environment, citizens could easily reproduce and indoctrinate their offspring into the system, whereas homosexual romances were counterproductive if not outright toxic to society.¹⁰

Those who perceived homosexuality as detrimental to the nation chiefly drew upon conservative Christian mores, which held sex between members of the same gender as a "spiritual affliction."¹¹ The religious majority claimed that heedless sexual indulgence was paramount to ignoring God's will, a transgression that spelled biblical disaster for the society that allowed it to proceed unchecked. Clinging to its Christian ties in the face of the atheist Soviet menace, the American public sought to target compromising secular elements in their society.¹² Within this hyper-religious context, homosexuality functioned not only as a failure of the American family, the bulwark against ideological decay, but as a failure of Christian tenets, America's moral backbone. To religious members of the public, homosexuality presented an unpardonable threat to the United States' moral integrity, constituting a danger to rival that of the Soviet Union.

⁸ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 31.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁰ Jeni Loftus, "America's Liberalization in Attitudes Toward Homosexuality, 1973 to 1998." *American Sociological Review* 66, no. 5 (2001): 762-82.

¹¹ Elizabeth Fee, "Venereal Disease," in *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, ed. Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 178.

¹² Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 249.

Politicians likewise sought to address their apprehensions over the potential disintegration of a heterosexual society by constructing excuses for the marginalization of gay citizens. In the popular imagination, homosexual men were “weak willed” and lust filled, constantly “pleasure seeking.”¹³ Wildly susceptible to seduction or blackmail, as they would “[stop] at nothing to gratify their sexual impulses,” gay men presented the perfect target for communist agents’ covert intelligence operations.¹⁴ Gay women, on the other hand, intimidated the public for their dangerous independence and contempt for traditional femininity. Much like communist women, lesbians “mocked the ideals of marriage and motherhood” that the United States relied upon.¹⁵ This sick mentality would lead them to assist in the degradation of the American family unit as they pursued Sapphic pleasure over their feminine duties. Worse, lesbians possessed the alarming propensity to morph into “mannish” career women like those commie girls, “[showing] few of the physical charms of women in the West.”¹⁶ In this way, political leaders converted flat stereotypes of homosexuality into presumably legitimate reservations for their disbarment from government employment and public life.

In fabricating justifications for homophobic policies, American politicians confirmed an institutionalized bias against actively gay citizens for possessing subversive behaviors. However, rather than dispatching the homosexual menace, this political oppression aided in the development of a national gay consciousness. By designating the object of governmental discrimination, a nation actually forces the group in question into political and cultural definition. In the case of the United States, the Lavender Scare permitted “homosexuality [to assume] significantly greater visibility” than in previous generations.¹⁷ Police officers and FBI agents rooted out tightly knit gay

¹³ D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 49.

¹⁴ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 92.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 22.

¹⁷ John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 52.

microcommunities in horrific raids; but, once brought to light, these groups became “seedbeds for a collective consciousness.”¹⁸ By roughly drawing gay men and women out of bars, small social groups, and dim cruising spots, law enforcement forcibly enlarged the previously “exclusively private” homosexual spaces.¹⁹ Encouraged by such brutal measures, vocal opponents of homosexuality actually “broke the silence surrounding the topic,” bringing gay men and women to national attention.²⁰ Ironically, these efforts to discourage the homosexual population essentially “hastened the articulation of a homosexual identity.”²¹ In attempting to quash sexual deviation, fearmongering politicians inadvertently made homosexuality into a political topic, providing gay men and women the opportunity to realize a national consciousness.

However, this consciousness initially manifested not from a sense of community, but from a feeling of common persecution. The general public and legal system harshly condemned homosexuality, distinguishing the burgeoning group by its medical and moral insolvencies. Print media of the 1950s advanced the notion of same-sex attraction as “an illness” that “can be treated successfully,” if properly quarantined.²² Public health committees perceived homosexuality not only as a disease in of itself, but as an element in the “increases in salacious literature and venereal disease” occurring in urban areas.²³ Aside from its physically deleterious effects, homosexuality supposedly served as an “aberration” of morality in its departure from Christianity’s heteronormativity.²⁴ For these reasons, legislators such as Senator John H. Hughes advocated the

¹⁸ John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 33.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 52.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Robert Trumbull, “Homosexuals Proud of Deviancy, Medical Academy Study Finds,” *New York Times*, May 19, 1964, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/115548803?accountid=7103>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Emma Harrison, “Women Deviates Held Increasing,” *New York Times*, December 11, 1961, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/115301084?accountid=7103>.

continued criminalization of “deviate sex,” as legal prohibitions on such behavior served “as an expression of society’s disapproval.”²⁵

Though initially defined by their presumed medical and moral deficiencies, members of the gay community sought to transcend the boundaries of the public and law’s narrow-minded conceptions. This popular image of the homosexual as a sick, spiritually depraved individual in need of legal intervention constituted neither a desirable nor accurate identity for gay men and women. Therefore, the American gay community soon transitioned into a collective effort to construct a cohesive, positive identity for itself.

As the Lavender Scare raged on in the United States, an unassuming veteran in Helsinki quietly balanced a clean public image with a scandalous private avocation. By the light of day, Touko Laaksonen worked as a respectable advertising executive. As the night fell, Laaksonen cast off his mask of heterosexuality and devoted himself to what he affectionately called his “dirty drawings.”²⁶

Initially undertaken as a hobby in his teens, these sketches of preposterously muscled men immersed in “the tumbles of rough sex” rapidly became a life-long passion.²⁷ Largely influenced by his service in the Finnish army during World War II, Laaksonen styled his hypersexualized figures’ raiment and positioning after his enemies: the Soviet invaders and Wehrmacht. The romping, vigorously copulating men in his drawings typically appeared in militarized clothing, controversially appropriating symbols of totalitarian oppression as emblems of their own power. In a technique perhaps even more evocative of his authoritarian muses, Laaksonen consistently

²⁵ John Sibley, “Overhaul Urged for Penal Code,” *New York Times*, March 17, 1964, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/115693363?accountid=7103>.

²⁶ “Tom of Finland: A Short Biography,” Valentine Hooven III, Tom of Finland Foundation, <https://www.tomoffinlandfoundation.org/foundation/touko.html>.

²⁷ John Rechy, “Tom of Finland: Sexual Liberator?,” *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* 13, no. 2 (March-April 2006): 31, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=19973822&site=ehost-live>.

depicted his figures as engaged in heated S&M, with the dominant figure totally overpowering his partner. Yet, without exception, the men in Laaksonen's sketches exude an undeniable joviality. No matter the turbulence of their activity, each man looks upon his partner with sincere affection, suggesting a tenderness that sweetens the roughness of sex.

While the post-war atmosphere of Finland proved far too tense to permit domestic publication of Laaksonen's work, an American muscle magazine entitled *Physique Pictorial* provided a viable avenue to mainstream media. Laaksonen broke out of obscurity in the spring of 1957, when one of his lumberjack drawings made the cover, establishing the newly dubbed "Tom of Finland" as the preeminent purveyor of homoerotic art.

Though his dirty drawings began as a pornographic exercise, they gradually evolved into a lustful expression of Tom's sexual fantasies and greater aspirations for the gay community. In Tom's eyes, his sexualized subjects emblemized the true gay identity; he exclusively depicted "free and happy gay men" who were "as handsome, strong, and masculine as any other men," defying popular perceptions of male homosexuality as furtive and effeminate.²⁸ Seeking to defeat such stereotypes, Tom lovingly crafted a fantasy world in which "those damn queers" so often subject to the public's vitriol simply did not exist.²⁹

The spirit of Tom's work profoundly resonated with his new audience in the United States. Fresh off the heels of the Lavender Scare, the American gay community sought to resist the bigoted labels foisted upon them in a political panic—and these drawings offered a compelling way of redefining themselves. Within the corpus of Tom's art, homosexuality was "celebrated, proudly performed, never hidden" from public view.³⁰ Challenging the expected attitudes of the time, "there

²⁸ John Rechy, "Tom of Finland: Sexual Liberator?," *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* 13, no. 2 (March-April 2006): 31, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=19973822&site=ehost-live>.

²⁹ Guy Snaith, "Tom's Men: The Masculinization of Homosexuality and the Homosexualization of Masculinity at the End of the Twentieth Century," *Paragraph* 26, no. ½ (March 2003): 77, doi:10.3366/para.2003.26.1-2.77.

³⁰ John Rechy, "Tom of Finland: Sexual Liberator?," *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* 13, no. 2 (March-April 2006): 31, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=19973822&site=ehost-live>.

[was] never a trace of shame” marring the activities of Tom’s subjects.³¹ They pursued their pleasures with pure enjoyment, imbuing same-sex attachments with the wholesomeness previously denied by moral naysayers. As contemporary artist Silvia Prada puts it, Tom of Finland’s work created “a huge utopic fantasy” of gay acceptance, one that deftly combatted the oppressive reality outside the page.³²

Tom’s drawings staked a visual claim upon the identity gay men craved, one constituted of vitality, love, and masculinity. To men such as Robert Pierce, “Tom’s work wasn’t pornography, it was salvation,” a way of escaping the shackles of internalized homophobia.³³ Hungry for this liberation and keen to embrace its sexual perks, groups of gay men in America began to model themselves according to Tom’s characters. The tight leather, motorcycle caps, and jackboots of these dirty drawings soon became “a blueprint for the appearance of gay men in the latter part of the twentieth century.”³⁴ With the ubiquity of this outfitting came the easy identification of other gay men within the community. This form of “gaydar” could “pick out at a hundred paces whether a man was gay or straight just by external signs,” simplifying courtship rituals and strengthening hypermasculine visions of homosexuality.³⁵ In this way, the “leatherman” look popularized by Tom’s drawings extended beyond the realm of fetishism to form an affirmative codified visual identity for gay men in the United States.

³¹ Ibid.

³² “Tom of Finland: Freedom Through Fetish,” Andrew Nodell, *Women’s Wear Daily*, last modified December 21, 2017, <https://wwd.com/eye/lifestyle/tom-of-finland-freedom-through-fetish-11079953/>.

³³ Guy Snaith, “Tom’s Men: The Masculinization of Homosexuality and the Homosexualization of Masculinity at the End of the Twentieth Century,” *Paragraph* 26, no. ½ (March 2003): 78, doi:10.3366/para.2003.26.1-2.77.

³⁴ Guy Snaith, “Tom’s Men: The Masculinization of Homosexuality and the Homosexualization of Masculinity at the End of the Twentieth Century,” *Paragraph* 26, no. ½ (March 2003): 79, doi:10.3366/para.2003.26.1-2.77.

³⁵ Guy Snaith, “Tom’s Men: The Masculinization of Homosexuality and the Homosexualization of Masculinity at the End of the Twentieth Century,” *Paragraph* 26, no. ½ (March 2003): 81, doi:10.3366/para.2003.26.1-2.77.

By emitting a “positive message of respect, tolerance, and sexual freedom,” Tom proposed an alternative approach to conceptualizing homosexuality as love, not delinquency.³⁶ Yet, as mentioned prior, much of his imagery paradoxically found inspiration in symbols of totalitarian oppression. Contrary to critics such as John Rechy, this stylistic choice did not arise as a “suggestion of gay self-loathing”—such a conclusion exists in complete violation of the jovial spirit effused by Tom’s men.³⁷ Rather, as one reviewer noted in 1989, Tom “conjures up images of authority not to worship at their feet, but to subvert them” for his subjects’ gain.³⁸ Tom alluded to tyrannical political bodies so as to rob them of their potency, and reallocate it to the men in his drawings. In their (apparently very capable) hands, such symbols served as a costume with dramatic “transformative power,” allowing these men to reconfigure emblems of “legendarily heterosexual homophobic forces” as a weapon of gay empowerment.³⁹ While Tom’s work only represented a highly specific faction of the gay community, essentially erasing lesbians and non-binary queers from the narrative, it triggered a broader cultural phenomenon that impacted the entire community.⁴⁰

While this has made for “a more complicated discourse than those that are the concern of standard smut,” it returns this discussion to the surprisingly positive impact of political repression on the development of marginalized identities.⁴¹ Tom’s aforementioned tactic bears a strong resemblance to the origin story of the community in which his drawings first found fame. Tom of

³⁶ “Tom of Finland: Freedom Through Fetish,” Andrew Nodell, *Women’s Wear Daily*, last modified December 21, 2017, <https://wwd.com/eye/lifestyle/tom-of-finland-freedom-through-fetish-11079953/>.

³⁷ John Rechy, “Tom of Finland: Sexual Liberator?,” *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* 13, no. 2 (March-April 2006): 32, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=19973822&site=ehost-live>.

³⁸ Guy Snaith, “Tom’s Men: The Masculinization of Homosexuality and the Homosexualization of Masculinity at the End of the Twentieth Century,” *Paragraph* 26, no. ½ (March 2003): 85, doi:10.3366/para.2003.26.1-2.77.

³⁹ John Rechy, “Tom of Finland: Sexual Liberator?,” *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* 13, no. 2 (March-April 2006): 32, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=19973822&site=ehost-live>.

⁴⁰ **Note from the author: While I initially intended to delve into the implications of such an erasure, I lacked the space necessary to adequately address such a vast and complicated issue. Therefore, I have refined the scope of this study to the men specifically represented in Tom’s drawings.**

⁴¹ Guy Snaith, “Tom’s Men: The Masculinization of Homosexuality and the Homosexualization of Masculinity at the End of the Twentieth Century,” *Paragraph* 26, no. ½ (March 2003): 85, doi:10.3366/para.2003.26.1-2.77.

Finland's work repurposed symbols of oppression to restore power to the traditionally oppressed, much as gay men and women in the United States repurposed their public persecution to form a cohesive whole. Labeled as communists for their supposedly subversive nature, the homosexual population assumed this conferred power to collectivize and found galvanizing unity therein. In a political environment designed to dominate and denigrate perceived deviates, the gay community transformed its sanctioned image of depravity into a positive identity of pride. Putting the theory behind Tom's sketches into lived experience, the American gay community reconfigured the terms of their oppression, achieving national solidarity and consequently empowerment in the midst of an institutionalized assault on their liberties.

With the conflation of political anxieties and threatening identities arises a kind of cultural power. American policy makers of the 1950s did not realize this, and sought only to employ prevailing homophobic sentiment as a political weapon during the Red Scare, triggering the Lavender Scare. Fearmongering politicians endeavored to connect the straight-passing, active homosexual to the looming Soviet threat out of political expediency, justifying themselves with faulty rationales. Viewed as inherently subversive and immoral aside from their potentially red sympathies, gay men and women in the United States found themselves subject to a massive campaign of institutionalized homophobia. However, this widespread effort to target sexual deviates unwittingly produced a burgeoning national gay consciousness—and this newfound community would not be satisfied with its definition by deficiencies. Instead, they looked to the gay-positive work of Finnish artist Touko Laaksonen, the notorious Tom of Finland, to codify an affirmative identity characterized by unapologetic visibility. Ironically, Tom's personal history and artistic choices similarly reflected the scars of a national terror of totalitarian incursion. Yet, within Tom's sketches, symbols of authoritarian domination redistribute their power to the original objects of

oppression, just as the American gay community secured their emancipation in the midst of sociopolitical persecution.

Thus, there truly was a viable connection between homosexuality and communism; just not one resembling that which Republican politicians projected or the American public feared. Public attempts to process the Soviet totalitarian threat, both in the United States and in Finland, drastically impacted the developmental trajectory of American gay life. Homosexuality and authoritarianism share an odd and complicated history—rather than impeding the development of a marginalized community, political and social oppression paradoxically spurred the solidification of an American gay consciousness and the codification of its visual identity.

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Brooke Yung

Research Thing Application

February 3 2020

“Red-Lavender Colorblindness: Institutionalized Oppression and Gay Life in America”

Research Process Narrative

My interest in the relationship between the Red and Lavender Scares first took shape after reading John D’Emilio’s “The Homosexual Menace” in Dr. Turek’s course on US Society and Politics. I became deeply fascinated by the seemingly arbitrary connection of Communism with homosexuality, seeking to unravel the layers of anxious political ideologies to arrive at an understanding of color-blind dogmatism. In order to deconstruct this conflation of subversion and sexuality, I merged primary information from government reports and newspaper articles with notable secondary scholarship to arrive at a nuanced analysis of the Lavender Scare’s role within a larger narrative of ideological crisis.

Naturally, I began my study with the seminal Senate Report 241 (1950). More recognizably entitled “Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government,” this document verified the government’s association of “deviant” sexual practices with subversive activity, situating same sex relations within a matrix of legal, moral, and medical disapprobation. I sought to contextualize this presumed correlation by examining popular cultural commentary of the era, which drew me to the Coates Library’s digital archives to explore articles from the *New York Times*. The article “Perverts Called Government Peril,” published in the same year as Senate Report 241, revealed the Republican party’s tendency to scapegoat minorities as a means of fomenting domestic resentment and accruing support in their campaign against the Truman administration. Guy George Gabrielson, the Republican National

Chairman at the time, depicted the homosexual infiltration of government as Truman's great failure of morality and security. His frequent diatribes on the matter constituted an insincere gesture, one aiming to propagate a politically expedient message of fear and comfortable intolerance.

I resorted to Elaine Tyler May's research on the ideological significance of the nuclear family in the nuclear age to examine the impact of Gabrielson's efforts in the personal sphere. She insightfully situates the home as a critical battlefield in the Cold War, an arena in which issues of race, gender, sexuality, and religion assume a heightened significance. Within this context, proper gender performance equates to ideological defense, rendering any deviation from "normalcy" paramount to cultural treason.

Once I outlined the framework for this ideopolitical agenda, I returned to John D'Emilio's work for reference. As the preeminent scholar of gender and queer studies, D'Emilio's brilliant analysis in *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* proved invaluable to my study. Within this remarkable work, D'Emilio traces the trajectory of gay life in America from the 1950s through the Civil Rights movement, offering a coherent narrative of its cultural evolution. D'Emilio eventually mentions the classic "leatherman" look characteristic of gay men in the 1960s, providing photographs of men in the Castro. This compelling imagery reminded me of Finnish artist Tuoko Laaksonen's drawings. His works revolve around positive visibility for the gay community, crafting a virile, hypermasculine, jovial image of male homosexuality that shaped generations of gay men's approach to self-expression.

Seeking to incorporate this work into my narrative, I consulted John Rechy's rejected forward for a collection of Tom of Finland's drawings. Editors of this proposed volume

withdrew Rechy's essay for its unapologetic scrutiny of a controversial element in Tom's work: the use of totalitarian symbols signature to the Soviet regime. As a former devotee of Tom's "leatherman" style, Rechy brings a fascinating perspective to the table. He discusses the positive transformative power of such costumery, but notes that the incorporation of oppressive symbols may indicate a subconscious hatred of the gay identity. I highly disagreed with this conclusion, and referenced Rechy's ideas in order to set up a counter argument advocating these symbols use as a means of gay empowerment.

Historian Guy Snaith supported my view in "Tom's Men: The Masculinization of Homosexuality and the Homosexualization of Masculinity at the End of the Twentieth Century." Here, he provided valuable insight into the extent of Laaksonen's impact on the formulation of homosexuality as positive social performance. Andrew Nodell corroborated this point in "Tom of Finland: Freedom Through Fetish," compiling several moving quotes on the significance of Tom of Finland's work. Referencing the thoughts of gallery owners, contemporary artists, and members of the LGBTQ+ community, he crafts a compelling narrative of Tom's impact upon the gay identity through the integration of authoritarian symbols.

By synthesizing information from political and private life in the 1950s with modern commentary, I resolved that the kinship of communism and aberrant sexuality was not totally contrived. Though this association arose from suspect political expediency, the Lavender Scare effectively dragged the gay community out of the political closet and into the fore of the United States' public anxieties. That level of visibility permitted previously disjointed communities of gay men and women to coalesce into a unified front, leading to the formation of an unprecedented national identity born not of politicized ostracization and perceived perversity, but

of vitality and love. Tom's role in articulating this identity further attests to political persecution's ironic hastening of the collective expression of marginalized identities.