

In God We Trust: McCarthyism, the Lavender Scare, and Christian Evangelicalism in the 1950s

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This presentation explores the relationship between the persecution of LGBTQ+ employees of the federal government (The Lavender Scare), the rise of modern Christian evangelicalism, and the anti-communist sentiment of McCarthyism at the beginning of the Cold War. These events directly influenced each other during this time and gave rise to mainstream public concerns and stereotypes often still perpetuated today. By examining the original congressional orders, laws, and ordinances passed by the House or Representatives and Washington D.C. police during the late 1940s and 1950s we can understand the enormous prejudice placed upon members of the LGBTQ community within the government at the time. The rise of American nationalism following the conclusion of the Second World War, the beginning of the Cold War, and the rise of Christian evangelical right all contributed heavily to the “morality crisis” of the early Cold War. This presentation also looks into how ordinances and acts barring non-straight employees of the federal government were promoted and enforced both within the government and by local and federal police and government agencies. The personal accounts of the persecution members of the LGBTQ community faced became the beginning of a movement that would span decades and into the present day as bigotry is still prevalent. The McCarthy era gave a new political meaning to American conservative Protestantism as a bastion of morality and decency while utilizing anti-communist fears to subjugate marginalized people.