Reflective Essay

My research paper includes analysis on why and how the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) discriminated against gay and lesbian employees from the 1950s to the 1980s. The University of Maryland provided me with several resources in order to complete my research. I became interested in the "Lavender Scare after learning about it in my freshman HIST211 course. I continued researching it in my sophomore HIST208 course. LGBTQ+ history has always been a focus in my major and is important to my own identity, too. In signing up for my HIST408 senior seminar on the history of the CIA, I felt that there must be a connection between the Lavender Scare and the CIA. I had already read about the State Department's participation in the Lavender Scare and, since the CIA is also a part of the National Security State, I thought it was likely that the CIA had also discriminated against LGBTQ+ Americans. However, I noticed that I hadn't learned about the CIA's role in it and, in doing preliminary research for this paper, didn't find much mention of it. The Lavender Scare is an under-discussed issue in history, and the CIA's role was even more, so I wanted to help contribute to the historiography. I also thought it was an important topic to research after I learned from my professor, Dr. Colleen Woods, that the CIA had recently begun a hiring campaign targeted at LGBTQ+ individuals.

I began my research in the fall of 2022 by looking through primary sources on the CIA's database to confirm that it was possible for me to research this. Once I established that there was enough primary source information, I began reading more secondary sources. I checked out several books from McKeldin Library on the Lavender Scare and the CIA. One of the most helpful of these books was David K Johnson's *The Lavender Scare,* which I relied on heavily as a reference. Dr. Woods also directed me to an online resource called "Muckrock," an organization that is invested in increasing government transparency using the Freedom of

Information Act, which was helpful in offering an analysis of CIA documents that discussed homosexuality.

To find secondary sources through the library, I used several search terms including “Lavender Scare and Central Intelligence Agency" and “homosexual and Central Intelligence Agency.” I also looked for a specific case of an employee being fired, so I searched “Carmel Offie and homosexual.” I found my secondary sources, physical books, by searching the library’s collection. My most used resource to find primary sources was the CIA’s own database, “Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room.” I unsuccessfully searched several databases through the library website, including Academic Search Ultimate, LGBTQ+ Source, and America: History & Life with Full-Text, for information on the Lavender Scare and the CIA. My search terms included “homosexual or homosexuality or lesbian or gay or LGBTQ or queer and CIA or Central Intelligence Agency" with few results. In searching for sources through the CIA database, I often chose the word “homosexual” only, which I found to be a common word used to refer to gay men and lesbians both in the primary sources and in secondary sources. When applicable, I used specific names to search through the database.

My professor, Dr. Woods, was the greatest help and impact on my paper. She encouraged me to take breaks when I could and to organize my sources chronologically. Dr. Woods believed in my paper from the start and always supported any direction I was interested in exploring, while guiding me towards a path that made sense for my argument. She offered suggestions for secondary sources and different ways to structure my paper. I am grateful for the support and encouragement from Dr. Woods, not only in researching and writing this paper, but also for guiding me to be a better historian and analyst. I did also seek help from the LGBT studies librarian on the process of requesting primary sources through interlibrary loan.

My first step in evaluating primary sources was to look at the date and the type of source. Since my paper's timeline included four decades, it was important for me to monitor the practices of or reactions to the CIA over time to track any changes. It was hard to decide to stop looking at primary sources and know which ones to include. I knew that bias would be present in each source I read, whether because of homophobia or former LGBTQ+ employees' bad experiences with the CIA. Additionally, the CIA's database included sources like newspaper articles, rather than just internal documents. Newspaper articles, interviews, and Congressional hearings gave me insight into how the American public reacted to or perceived the CIA's practices, which was important in balancing perspectives. Primary sources not written by the CIA revealed the thoughts of CIA employees who spoke out against discrimination.

I learned while researching this paper that it was okay for me to take breaks and get stuck. I also learned how important it is to be organized while researching. I organized my sources chronologically and used keywords to make the sources easier to find. I understood the importance of examining each primary source thoroughly and looking deeper into any unknown aspect of them. The most important thing I learned was how it was crucial to pick a topic I was genuinely interested in, which made it fun. These lessons will have prepared me for my goal of returning to get my master's degree and pursuing my desired career of working as a professional historian doing research or working in a museum or archive.

One thing I would have changed about my research would be to investigate more secondary sources through the library. I wish that I was able to utilize the library for more of my research and would have taken more time to scour each of the databases that the library had to offer. Requesting primary sources through interlibrary loan was something I considered doing, but the immediacy of the sources I found through the CIA's database proved to be more

practical. If I could imagine something I would change, it would also be for more of the primary sources I was looking for to be available through the library and its databases.