

Dear members of the Awards Committee

I am submitting Adriana-Isabel Ruivo's research paper for one of the research essay-awards.

Adriana-Isabel wrote her paper entitled "The Mobilization of Moral Regulation: The LGBT Purge and Homophobia as a National Security Practice" in HIST 1086 6.0 (Vice and Bad Behaviours in North America). Adriana-Isabel's paper explores a dark chapter in recent Canadian History. Adriana analyzes state repression during the 1950s and 1960s in Canada. Her paper focuses on the members of the LGBTQ. I am impressed by Adriana-Isabel's assignment. This is a well-researched and well-argued paper. You will find a description of the assignment at the end of my paragraph.

Regards,

Marcel

Marcel Martel, History Department

Written assignment 2: Writing an historical plaque (25% of the final grade)

The Ontario Heritage Trust has a program of historical plaques that are designed to commemorate various aspects of Ontario history. On these plaques, there is a short text – about 100 words- that explains the relevance of an individual, group of people, place or event. Please have a look at the Ontario Heritage Trust's website and look at the database.

<https://www.heritagetrust.on.ca/en/pages/programs/provincial-plaque-program>

Instructions

You will select a topic. Your topic could be an event, a place, an individual or a group of people that relate to vice in Canadian or American history. You will explain why you have chosen this topic, and you will justify the historical significance of your topic.

Based on comments from your tutorial assistant, you will write a 100-word plaque about the historical significance of your topic. Your plaque cannot exceed **100 words**. Also, you will include a research paper, in which you describe the event, place, individual or group of people, assess the historical significance, and include 2 or 3 illustrations.

You will present your proposal and your plaque in a tutorial during one of the last four weeks of the term. Your presentation should be around 5 minutes, which will give time for feedback from the class.

Your research paper should be double-spaced. Subheadings are acceptable for this paper.

The Mobilization of Moral Regulation: The LGBT Purge and Homophobia as a National
Security Practice

Adriana-Isabel Ruivo

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HIST 1086

Marcel Martel

April 3, 2025

Introduction

“Mr. Speaker, today we acknowledge an often-overlooked part of Canada’s history. Today, we finally talk about Canada’s role in the systemic oppression, criminalization, and violence against the lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, and two-spirit communities,” – these were the words spoken by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as he delivered a formal apology to LGBTQ2+ Canadians in November of 2017.¹ The long overdue apology marks a turning point in Canadian LGBTQ2+ history, as the government of Canada sought to amend one of the darkest moments in Canadian history – The LGBT Purge. Between the 1950s and 1990s, LGBTQ2+ individuals were deemed national security threats as a part of the Canadian government’s response to Cold War tensions.² National security measures transformed into an ideological practice which served to uphold heteronormative hegemonies within Canadian society. The RCMP launched an intense surveillance and investigation process, particularly targeting LGBTQ2+ federal public service workers and members of the Canadian armed forces. By the end of the purge, the RCMP’s list of alleged and confirmed homosexuals contained 9,000 names.³ Many of those listed were demoted, forced to resign or transferred-out of their positions. The RCMP’s investigations were life-ruining; along with losing their jobs, many individuals lost their close personal relationships, communities and lives due to the emotional turmoil of being socially outcast. Commemoration of Trudeau’s 2017 apology must involve a comprehensive understanding of the LGBT Purge.

¹ Government of Canada, “Apology to LGBTQ2 communities”, accessed April 3, 2025, <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/free-to-be-me/apology-discrimination-individuals-families-communities.html>

² Ron Levy, “Canada’s Cold War Purge of 2SLGBTQ2+ from Public Service,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, October 3, 2018, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/lgbtq-purge-in-canada>

³ Gary William Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile, *The Canadian War on Queers : National Security as Sexual Regulation*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 3.

This paper will be structured in four parts: first and foremost, the LGBT Purge will be contextualized in relation to the dominant socio-political discourse of the Cold War era. The second component of this paper will analyse how the characterization of LGBTQ2+ individuals as possessing “character weakness” is rooted in relations of power and social control, which were ultimately reflected in institutional practice. The third section of the paper will highlight the consequences of the purge, drawing on testimonies from victims themselves to showcase their struggles and resistance. The last section will focus on Prime Minister Trudeau’s apology and its aftermath: how did the Canadian government compensate the victims of the LGBT Purge, and what are the limits of forgiveness?

Cold War Politics and the ‘subversive homosexual’

The construction of LGBTQ2+ individuals as sexual threats was shaped through various socio-historical factors which sought to uphold heteronormative hegemony within Canadian society. Canadian historian Erin Gallagher-Cohoon writes, “The construction of homosexuality as a sexual, social, and political danger is an important component of Cold War rhetoric, but it is not so unique to the Cold War period [...]”⁴ Dominant discourses had long categorized homosexuals as ‘sexual deviants’ for decades prior to the emergence of the Cold War. However, it was the convergence of these long-held perceptions of sexual deviance with Cold War rhetoric that fostered the unique socio-political climate that spawned the LGBT Purge. Cohoon continues, “The Cold War era was unique however, because of the confluence of homosexuality with Communism.”⁵ The defection of Soviet cipher clerk Igor Gouzenko in 1945 sparked immense concern amongst Canadian policy makers that government institutions had been infiltrated by Communist spies. This followed Gouzenko’s claims that a Soviet spy ring had been operating in

⁴ Erin Gallagher-Cohoon, “Illegal Loves and Sexual Deviancy: Homosexuality as a Threat in Cold War Canada,” *Constellations* 4, no. 2 (2013), 361.

⁵ Gallagher-Cohoon, “Illegal Loves and Sexual Deviancy, 361.

Canada. In March of 1948, operating under orders of the Security Panel, the RCMP began to conduct security probes into members of federal public service.⁶ The investigative process typically only involved a simple record check in order to grant federal civil servants security clearance; however, the RCMP were advised to conduct field investigations if considered necessary. The Security Panel had only tasked the RCMP with conducting the investigations, and they were not given the authority to grant or deny a security clearance.⁷ Unfortunately, further inquiry into the internal processes of the investigations revealed that RCMP officers were often the ones evaluating investigative data and advising final decisions. Elusive protocol meant that RCMP officers had complete discretion throughout the security-vetting process, and investigations rapidly began to infringe on the private lives of citizens.

The first set of RCMP security reports published in 1949 revealed that 87 per cent of the reports were initiated due to ‘character weakness’ rather than political subversion.⁸ However, the character weaknesses or ‘moral flaws’ cited in the 1949 report primarily consisted of gambling, drinking and adultery – homosexuality was not mentioned whatsoever in early investigative reports. It was not until the late 1950s that the notion of ‘character weakness’ became almost completely homosexualized. In the late 1950s, the Security Panel released a statement which claimed that the Soviets, “follow a consistent policy of searching out and exploiting character weaknesses [...] persons with character weakness are always afraid of exposure to their families [...] and therefore must be regarded as susceptible to blackmail.”⁹ By the late 1960s, homosexuality occupied 90 percent of the character weakness category within RCMP

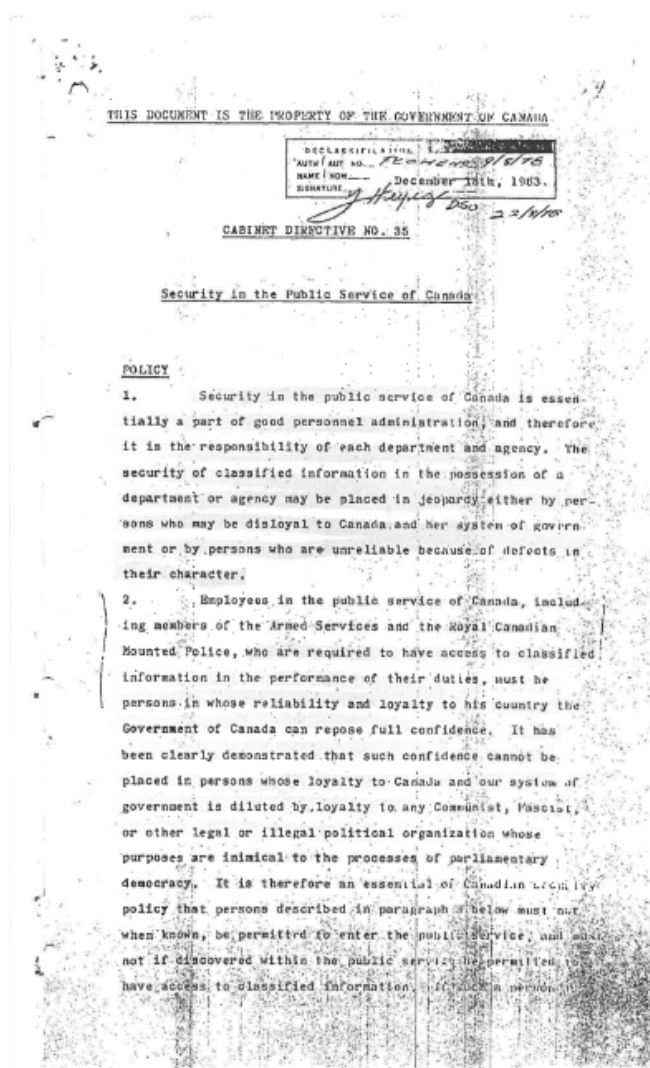
⁶ Daniel J Robinson and David Kimmel, “The Queer Career of Homosexual Security Vetting in Cold War Canada,” *The Canadian Historical Review* LXXV, no. 3 (1994), 322.

⁷ Robinson and Kimmel, *The Queer Career of Homosexual Security Vetting in Cold War Canada*, 322.

⁸ Robinson and Kimmel, *The Queer Career of Homosexual Security Vetting in Cold War Canada*, 324.

⁹ Kinsman and Gentile, *The Canadian War on Queers*, 47.

investigative reports.¹⁰ Homosexuality had transformed from a sexual threat into a national security risk throughout the course of the Cold War era.



¹⁰ Kinsman and Gentile, *The Canadian War on Queers*, 47.

Image retrieved from: Ken Setterington, *Righting Canada's Wrongs: The LGBT Purge and the fight for equal rights in Canada*, (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company LTD., Publishers, 2022, p. 21). Government policy reads "Employees in the public service of Canada, including members of the Armed Forces and the Royal Canadian Mountain Police, who are required to have access to classified information in the performance of their duties, must be persons in whose reliability and loyalty to his country the Government of Canada can repose full confidence."

National Security: Power and Social Control

The LGBT Purge revealed the dangerous realities of national security in which relations of power and social control are brought to the forefront. Dominant literature has characterized the Cold War through political tensions and proxy wars between the West and East. However, the Cold War also revealed internal tensions within Canadian society. The Cold War prompted the West to launch numerous ideological campaigns against political and social otherness.¹¹ This argument is central to Gary Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile's book titled *The Canadian War on Queers*, in which they claim that the Cold War was not only about defending Western capitalism against Soviet Communism but, "it was about pushing back and weakening the struggles of working-class and oppressed peoples."¹² The defense of capitalism was intrinsically linked to its supporting ideologies — whiteness, gender essentialism, the nuclear family, and heteronormativity. The Canadian nation-state was built on these ideologies and hegemonic relations of power; therefore, anything that possesses the ability to challenge or resist existing ideologies are considered a threat to national interest. The LGBT Purge signified that national security had gone far beyond economic and militaristic protection, as it served as an agent of moral regulation.

The mobilization of moral regulation during the Cold War began as an ideological construct which rapidly gained legitimacy through institutional enforcements. The systemic campaign against homosexuality involved the elimination of LGBTQ2+ individuals from the

¹¹ Kinsman and Gentile, *The Canadian War on Queers*, 22.

¹² Kinsman and Gentile, *The Canadian War on Queers*, 22.

federal public service sector and Canadian Armed Forces. The RCMP, which later joined forces with the SIU, used intense surveillance methods in order to identify LGBTQ2+ service members. Individuals suspected of being LGBTQ2+ were subject to having their phones tapped, being followed by undercover officers, and harassment.¹³ Additionally, the government actively funded research that sought to acquire methods of ‘scientifically’ detecting homosexuality.¹⁴ This ultimately led to the invention of the ‘fruit machine’, which ‘tested’ the sexuality of subjects through showing erotic images and monitoring their pupils to detect arousal. The ‘science’ behind the fruit machine was rooted in assumptions that gay men and lesbians were psychologically abnormal.¹⁵ The use of the fruit machine by key Canadian security organizations was a completely dehumanizing practice. LGBTQ2+ Canadians lived in constant fear of surveillance and interrogation, as these practices permeated every aspect of their professional and personal lives. RCMP officers routinely targeted gay bars and bathhouses, infiltrating spaces that were meant to foster feelings of safety and belonging. Once officers identified an individual as ‘homosexual,’ they used intimidation tactics, including physical force, to pressure victims into revealing the identities of other LGBTQ2+ individuals. It is estimated that nine thousand lives were devastated by the LGBT Purge, as victims had their careers destroyed, lost their communities, and endured long-term psychological trauma.¹⁶

Humanizing the LGBT Purge: Victim Stories and Testimonies

Merely analysing policies and practices alone does not capture the devastating impact that the LGBT Purge had on LGBTQ2+ Canadians. The methods of surveillance and

¹³ Daniel De Gobbo. “Reckoning with Queer History: The Canadian ‘LGBT Purge’ Case and the Limits of forgiveness,” *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 62, no. 1 (2025), 6.

¹⁴ Levy, “Canada’s Cold War Purge of 2SLGBTQ2+ from Public Service.”

¹⁵ Gary Kinsman, “‘Character Weaknesses’ and ‘Fruit Machines’: Towards an Analysis of Anti-Homosexual Security Campaign in the Canadian Civil Service,” *Labour (Halifax)* 35, no. 35 (1995): 131-61. <https://doi.org/10.2307/25143914>.

¹⁶ “About,” LGBT Purge Fund, accessed April 3, 2025, <https://lgbtpurgefund.com/about/>.

interrogation used by the Canadian government, RCMP and SIU traumatized its victims. The LGBT Purge stripped LGBTQ2+ Canadians of their rights and freedoms, denying their voice and sense of belonging in society. This section will highlight the stories and testimonies of those victimized by surveillance and interrogation throughout the LGBT Purge, bringing survivor voices to the forefront.

Within the public service sector, LGBTQ2+ employees were aware of the ongoing investigations happening around them, and they deliberately acted in ways to deter any sort of suspicion regarding their sexuality. These individuals were forced to live their daily lives in fear of being outed, as the consequences were life-ruining. The highest intensity of RCMP surveillance practices was felt within the DEA.¹⁷ In 1959, the DEA had fired nearly all of their homosexual employees. The RCMP went to great lengths to pressure and intimidate DEA officials into purging their fellow colleagues and friends. The public service sector became increasingly unsafe for LGBTQ2+ individuals, as “A climate of mistrust, betrayal, fear and suspicion [...]” permeated its departments.¹⁸ John Wendell Holmes was among the thousands of LGBTQ2+ Canadians whose careers were destroyed by the LGBT Purge. Holmes disclosed his sexual orientation to the RCMP following intense speculation and surveillance, which ultimately led to his forced resignation from the DEA in 1960.¹⁹ Along with the devastating impact on his career, the LGBT Purge caused Holmes severe mental turmoil. Holmes experienced frequent nervous breakdowns due to the trauma he endured during the RCMP’s investigative process. Unfortunately, Holmes was far from being the only individual who suffered lifelong consequences of the LGBT Purge. In his testimony for *The Canadian War on Queers*, Steve, an employee of the DEA from 1964 to 1970, expressed that the fear experienced by LGBTQ2+

¹⁷ Kinsman and Gentile, *The Canadian War on Queers*, 131.

¹⁸ Kinsman and Gentile, *The Canadian War on Queers*, 132.

¹⁹ Levy, “Canada’s Cold War Purge of 2SLGBTQ2+ from Public Service.”

Canadians during the purge was life altering: “Somebody I know very well and... actually he’s about to retire, I think that has shaped his whole life [...] I think it’s prevented his ever having a relationship of any significance.”²⁰

The effects of the LGBT Purge were life-shattering. Although the LGBT Purge is commonly conceptualized as an issue of the past, victims continue to grapple with the lasting physical, emotional and psychological impacts of the purge. This paper alone cannot fully capture the extremity of what these individuals experienced. Beyond the federal public service, LGBTQ2+ Canadians throughout society were dehumanized and outcast due to the Canadian federal government's policies. In some of the most severe cases, victims were physically and sexually assaulted by government officials and RCMP officers in a heinous method of intimidation.²¹ It was not uncommon for victims of the LGBT Purge to take their own lives, as they were made to feel as if there was no place for them in Canadian society. The Canadian government must forever be haunted with the gruesome reality that their policies cost lives.

Official apology and the limits of forgiveness

The Canadian government officially apologized for the systemic discrimination of LGBTQ2+ Canadians during the LGBT Purge in November of 2017. In order to preserve its image as a tolerable nation, the Canadian government had spent two decades attempting to rid itself of this particularly dark period of its history. However, the LGBT Purge gained mass media attention in 2015 as a result of the ongoing resistance of LGBTQ2+ Canadians. Following Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s election in 2015, a group of LGBTQ2+ activists banded together to form the “We Demand an Apology Network.”²² The establishment of the network sparked mass resistance, and frequent meetings between LGBT Purge victims and the Federal government took

²⁰ Kinsman and Gentile, *The Canadian War on Queers*, 144.

²¹ Del Gobbo, “Reckoning with Queer History,” 9.

²² Del Gobbo, “Reckoning with Queer History,” 13.

place. In the first half of 2017, the national class action *Ross et al. v Her Majesty the Queen* was filed.²³ The settlement of \$145 million was based on the recognition of harm caused by the Canadian government, individual compensation, reconciliation, and preventative measures to ensure this level of systemic discrimination against LGBTQ2+ Canadians is never repeated. Trudeau delivered his formal apology three days after the proposed settlement was reached. This apology marked Canada's first formal recognition of the systemic discrimination of LGBTQ2+ Canadians, as the Prime Minister stated, "It is our collective shame that Canadians who identified as [LGBTQ2+] were unjustly treated – fired from jobs, denied promotions, surveilled, arrested, convicted, and vindictively shamed because of their sexual orientation or gender identity."²⁴ Although it took the Canadian government two decades to meaningfully acknowledge the LGBT Purge, the persistence and resistance of LGBTQ2+ Canadians amounted to the long overdue apology and settlement.



Image: Adrian Wyld, *Justin Trudeau wipes his eye while he is applauded as he delivers a formal apology to LGBT people in Canada*, Nov 28 2017, photograph, The Canadian Press, House of Commons Ottawa, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/homosexual-offences-exunge-records-1.4422546>.

²³ Del Gobbo, "Reckoning with Queer History," 13.

²⁴ Del Gobbo, "Reckoning with Queer History," 15.

The apology sparks important questions regarding the limits of forgiveness. What LGBT Purge victims and LGBTQ2+ Canadians are seeking is reconciliation, and though it is a step toward this goal, an apology alone is not reconciliation. Though it would be unreasonable to claim that the 2017 apology was disingenuous with no evidence to support this claim, it is also just as harmful to remain uncritical of the apology and ongoing path to resistance. Legal scholar, Martha Minow, is critical of the effectiveness of political apologies, as she states, “perhaps the most troubling are apologies that are purely symbolic and carry no concrete shifts in resources or practices to alter the current and future lives of survivors of atrocities.”²⁵ The Canadian government claimed that they would take the necessary measures to ensure that systemic discrimination against LGBTQ2+ Canadians would end, but have they followed through with this promise? An external review of the RCMP conducted in 2020 revealed that the culture of the organization remains deeply homophobic.²⁶ In fact, most of the government's action towards reconciliation has been focused on monetary compensation, and it has done little to address how homophobia is deeply embedded in Canadian institutions. The LGBT purge has been legally settled since 2017, but the path to reconciliation remains long.

Conclusion

The LGBT Purge revealed that national security has the ability to turn into something very sinister and powerful. During the Cold War, national security policies were constructed through ideological beliefs surrounding homosexuality and sexual deviance. The LGBTQ2+ community became an enemy of the state, leading to an intense surveillance and interrogation campaign against LGBTQ2+ members in the federal public service and Canadian Armed Forces. The LGBT Purge devastated the lives of its victims, and the consequences continue to be felt

²⁵ Del Gobbo, “Reckoning with Queer History,” 28.

²⁶ Del Gobbo, “Reckoning with Queer History,” 34.

today. The Canadian government issued their formal apology to LGBTQ2+ Canadians in November of 2017, but this apology has only served as a mere recognition of past injustices. Homophobia continues to play an active role in many Canadian institutions, including the RCMP. In order for reconciliation to be achieved, those in power must make concrete changes to eradicate homophobia from Canadian institutions and organizations.

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Historical Plaque

Apology For The LGBT Purge



On November 28th, 2017, Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau delivered a historic apology to members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community for the Canadian government's role in the LGBT purge. Between the 1950s to early 1990s, LGBTQ+ Canadians were victims of an intense surveillance and investigation process launched by the RCMP as a response to national security concerns during the Cold War. LGBTQ+ individuals were unjustly labeled as subversive, warranting their removal from civil service and the Canadian Armed Forces. The 2017 apology marked Canada's first acknowledgment of the systemic oppression, criminalization, and violence against LGBTQ+ Canadians during the Cold War.