



American LGBTQ+ liberation from day 1 to Stonewall.

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Season 2, Episode 7A: “Destroy A Citizen”

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The original Mattachine Society jester logo is courtesy of ONE Archives at the USC Libraries.

This transcript includes text from real homophile-era publications, letters, organizational documents, et cetera. These texts contain **identifying terms** that may now be out of date.

AUDIO: typewriter

FRANK KAMENY: To Mr. Harris Ellsworth, Chair of the Civil Service Commission:
Your letter of **October 27, 1958** is completely inadequate as a reply to mine of October 2. As a citizen, rather than as an appellant, I raised a number of points in that letter, as I request a proper reply to them—as it is my right so to request and to receive—and promptly so....

In two weeks, Mr. Ellsworth, my unemployment compensation will run out. Largely through your actions, I have no prospect of a suitable job. My financial resources are completely exhausted. At that time, therefore, I plan to cease eating entirely, and to starve to death; as you enjoy your Christmas dinner, you might keep in mind that, through your actions, one of your fellow human beings will be about to die. I hope you enjoy the role of executioner. I am not being melodramatic, nor am I exaggerating the situation; I see absolutely no other course of action except for that indicated two paragraphs below....

When you speak seek to destroy a citizen, you do it with a most relentless thoroughness!! You are apparently about to succeed with your destruction—in the most literal sense—in this case.

There is only one alternative to complete starvation, which I have thus far been able to discover—one which has been recommended to me by a number of completely loyal citizens. It is an alternative, however, which I find most repugnant and distasteful. Since, to all intents and purposes, the US government has declared me *persona non grata*, it has been suggested that I offer my services to other governments. As disagreeable as this course of action may be, I must confess that a stomach which has only occasionally been properly filled in the past eight months, and which has before it only the prospect of totally and permanent emptiness, is a powerful incentive toward overcoming even such formidable obstacles as learning the Russian or some other language...

...I am reaching a state where I will not have the wherewithal to supply myself with food, shelter, and clothing. As I stated above, I *wish* to be of use to the country; I *can* be of service to the country. I need only to be allowed to be so!

Most sincerely and desperately yours,

Franklin E. Kameny

HOST: While the nation watches the newest develops of the Cold War, the formation of NASA, and the rise of Fidel Castro, no one looks to the nameless firings of “sexual perverts” from government work anymore. It’s routine. Frank lives on mashed potatoes and two hot dogs per day while his bills pile up. Just a few weeks later, he follows up again:

FRANK KAMENY: [angrier than ever] **January 3, 1959**. To Mr. Harris Ellsworth, Chair of the Civil Service Commission:

You go right on throwing competent, highly trained scientists and others out of the government, and make them completely unavailable for work elsewhere, on inane, trivial, irrelevant,

irrational, outmoded grounds of so-called suitability, and through the application of meaningless, erroneous, logically baseless 'security' criteria. You drive them to starvation, into other fields, or out of the country... As a case in point, as a qualified scientist in a field in which there is a severe shortage of manpower, jobless, I am existing on less than 25 cents' worth of food per day and will be able to do that only until the less-than-\$2 which I have to my name, as my total financial resources, is gone. This is hardly the proper utilization of available trained manpower.

HOST: The stamp to mail this letter alone cuts into his dwindling budget. And suddenly again, the *Washington Post* reports the many firings:

AUDIO: typewriter

REPORTER: It is cause for worry when even one loyal American not only may lose his job but also may bear an inescapable stigma under a system which lacks the safeguards of due process so basic to American justice.

FRANK KAMENY: Dear Secretary of Defense Neil McElroy:

As a citizen, I am appealing to you, as the appropriate government official, for assistance in a matter in which I feel that I am being unjustly and improperly treated by your department, to the detriment of the nation as well as of myself; a situation of which I have been able to obtain no rectification at lower level....

Let me say, first of all, that this is not a matter involving the loyalty provision of the security system, in any sense or aspect whatever. No slightest question has been raised on that issue, and I have, in fact, been given a 'clean bill of health' in that regard.

The entire matter centers around a minor, trivial, totally unimportant, and insignificant incident in my personal background; an incident having nothing to do with my competence as an astronomer, or as a scientist; one having nothing to do with my qualities as a 'security risk,' or with my ability to safeguard, properly, any information entrusted to me. It involves a purely ritualistic, unreasoning, irrelevant, needless insistence upon harsh and rigid interpretation of not completely rational regulations.

It seems illogical and ridiculous, to put it mildly, that one minor, trivial, and totally unimportant incident in a man's life should be permitted, on a purely formalistic basis, to stand in the way of his being allowed to put much-needed to hard-to-find abilities, interests, and technical training to the use of nation and society.

The country needs astronomers. The need exceeds the entire supply by a factor of several hundred percent. There are positions open at Cape Canaveral and elsewhere which I am almost tailor-made to fill, and for which the number of qualified candidates is well-nigh nil; positions for rule-bound insistence upon adhering to the letter of unreasonable and unnecessary regulation, I find myself, at present, barely able to keep body and soul together, doing a job which could be done by anyone with a good high-school education. Is this the best manner in which we can utilize our available, technically-trained manpower?!

What I ask in this case is what any citizen of this country should feel that this is entitled to: to be considered *as an individual*. I ask that someone authorized to do so, with sufficient flexibility of

personality and psychology, and with adequate discretionary powers, consider whether I am a security risk—NOT whether, under precisely the same circumstances, John Doe or James Smith would be security risks, but whether Franklin E. Kameny *is* a risk. I ask to be considered not as a faceless statistic, but as an individual person—as one expect to be considered in a democracy, as distinguished from a totalitarian state. I ask that you consider ME, and not just a disconnected fact or two about my background....No one has examined *ME*—the matter has been handled as if I were an inanimate, insensate object, to be talked about, but not talked with.

I have been an applicant for a number of positions; my potential employers in these positions very much wanted me, but found themselves not permitted to employ me. I am thus appealing to you to resolve this impasse; at this stage, only you can....

I look forward to hearing from you promptly and constructively on this matter, and trust that, to the advantage of all, and to the disadvantage of none, arrangements leading to the issuance of the necessary security clearance will quickly be forthcoming.

Thank you.

Most sincerely yours,
Franklin E. Kameny

JOHN HANES JR.: Mr. Kameny, So long as this is the attitude of our society—and you are well aware that it is, as expressed both formally in laws, regulations and ordinances, and informally in the average reaction of people toward homosexuals—the homosexual is automatically a security risk because of the social and emotional pressure to which he is subject from society...

HOST: Kameny hires an attorney. They file his case with the U.S. district court for an injunction against the Army Map Service. The U.S. attorneys are granted a summary judgment in favor of Kameny's firing. Kameny appeals for a proper hearing, not a summary judgment. It's denied. Anyone can be fired at any time for security measures, the judge points out. That's the McCarran Rider (Season 1, episode 4). Kameny tells his lawyer he's ready to take the case to the Supreme Court. His lawyer refuses the futile effort, but he leaves Frank with a copy of the Supreme Court rules. Exhausted, but not broken, Frank writes to his mother:

AUDIO: writing

FRANK KAMENY: If the world and I differ on a matter, I will give the matter very careful second thought. If the world and I still differ, then I am right, and the world is wrong, and the world can go on its way as long as it doesn't get in my way. But if it does, there's going to be a fight, and I'm not going to be the one who backs down. I won't be trampled upon with a hob-nailed boot.