



Denver Center
Theatre Company

Inside

Out

A STUDY GUIDE

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FEBRUARY 2000

U S WEST World Premiere

THE LARAMIE PROJECT

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**THE DENVER
POST**

Soon after Matthew Shepard's murder and all the media attention it generated, the Tectonic Theater Project arrived in Wyoming to interview Laramie's residents and to record their reactions and feelings. Laramie's students, police, medical personnel, religious representatives, bar patrons and employees, people who knew Matthew and people who did not were interviewed. Tectonic Theater Project has invested a year in the *Project*. The resulting work resembles a diary, but this particular diary records and dramatizes the thoughts of a population and gives a voice to a city in shock and reeling over this murder and its aftermath.

TECTONIC THEATER PROJECT

Tectonic Theater Project was established in 1991. Its first production, *Women in Beckett*, was a collection of all of Samuel Beckett's short plays for women: *Rockaby*, *Not I*, *Footfalls* and *Come and Go*. A cast of women aged 65-80, who drew from their considerable life experience to inhabit Beckett's characters, performed the plays. After the success of this production, Tectonic Theater Project was incorporated as a not-for-profit organization.

The Project went on to produce works by emerging playwrights such as Naomi Iizuka (*Coxinga* and *Marlowe's Eye*), stage classics such as Beckett's *Endgame* and Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal*, and a highly-acclaimed production of Franz Xaver Kroetz's *The Nest*. *The Nest*, with its hyper-real diorama of a set and its imaginative use of puppetry (brought to life by acclaimed puppeteer Basil Twist), was named one

"...this particular diary records and dramatizes the thoughts of a population and gives a voice to a city in shock..."

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of the ten best productions of the 1994-95 season by *The Village Voice*.

Continuing its mission to explore theatrical form and language, Tectonic Theater Project committed two years to the development of *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*, a new play written and directed by Artistic Director Moisés Kaufman. In the play, trial transcripts and other source material are used to explore the condemnation of Wilde to two years in prison for "gross indecency with male persons." The play caused a popular and critical sensation when it opened in New York in the spring of 1997. *Gross Indecency* transferred to off-Broadway and ran for more than 18 months. Tectonic's production was mounted by the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles (February-March 1998) and enjoyed a six-month run at Theatre in the Square in San Francisco, as well as successful productions in Toronto, Plymouth and the West End in London. The play has also been produced by more than 40 regional theatres, including the Court Theatre in Chicago, the Alley Theatre in Houston, the Huntington in Boston, Seattle's Intiman Theatre, the Studio Theatre in Washington and Denver Center Theatre Company. International productions include: Germany, Scandinavia (at Ingmar Bergman's theatre), Australia, Israel, South Africa, Hungary and Paris. Tectonic Theater Project received an Outer Critics Circle Award as the original producer of the play.

Tectonic Theater Project has now completed a year-long exploration of the October 1998 murder of University of Wyoming student, Matthew Shepard, which included four trips to Laramie, several New York workshops and participation in the Sundance Theatre Institute.

The Laramie Project is built on the techniques developed by Tectonic over the years and used most effectively in the case of *Gross Indecency*. This approach to creating theatre consists of a rigorous process of research, writing, acting, designing and directing, all working together over time in an experimental environment. ■

MOISÉS KAUFMAN

Mr. Kaufman is the founder and Artistic Director of Tectonic Theater Project, a New York City-based company dedicated to exploring theatrical language and forms. For Tectonic, he has directed *Women in Beckett*, *In the Winter of Cities*, his adaptation of Tennessee Williams' later one-acts, *The Nest*, *Marlowe's Eye*, among others.

For *Gross Indecency*, Mr. Kaufman won the Lucille Lortel Award for Best Play, the Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Off-Broadway Play, the Garland Award (Los Angeles) for Best Play, the Carbonell Award (Florida) for Best Play, the Bay Area Theater Critics Circle Award for Direction, the GLAAD Media Award for New York Theater and the prestigious Joe A. Callaway Award for Direction given by his peers in the Society of Stage Directors and

Choreographers. The published version of *Gross Indecency* won the Lambda Book Award.

Moisés Kaufman was born and raised in Caracas, Venezuela. Of Russian-Jewish descent, he attended a yeshiva (an orthodox Jewish school) through high school. Many times, he and his family visited New York where the young man was exposed to the performing arts. At an international theatre festival in Caracas, he attended experimental works by Jerzy Grotowski, Tadeusz Kantor and Peter Brook.



photo by Jerry Shapiro

Mr. Kaufman entered college in Venezuela and was a founding member of Thespis Theater Ensemble, one of Venezuela's pre-eminent experimental companies. He spent the next five years performing in it and toured Latin America and Europe. During that time he completed his studies, graduating as a business major. In 1987, he moved to New York to undertake graduate studies in theatre. In June 1999, he was named Artist of the Year by Venezuela's Casa del Artista, a national award voted on by artists from a wide variety of fields. ■

HATE CRIMES

Congress defines hate crime as "a crime in which the defendant intentionally selects a victim, or in the case of a property crime, the property that is the object of the crime, because of the actual or perceived race, color, national origin, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation of any person."¹

According to FBI sources, the types of crimes committed have remained fundamentally the same since 1995. Seventy percent of the reported hate crimes are crimes against people and include: murder, rape, aggravated and simple assault, and the most common type, intimidation. Thirty percent of the crimes reported are crimes against property including: robbery, burglary, larceny, theft, motor vehicle theft, arson, and the most common type of property crime, vandalism.

Perpetrators of hate crimes do not always belong to hate groups. In a study done in Los Angeles, only five percent of the offenders were members of an organized hate group. The rest of the offenders had no outstanding arrest records but the perpetrators of extreme hate crimes tend to have a history of anti-social behavior. Most offenders are young people who fail to see anything wrong with their actions. Personal prejudices, which seem to be the determining factor for whether one will commit a hate crime or not, are usually rooted in one's environment. ■

1998

10/6: Matthew Shepard is picked up at the Fireside Bar in Laramie from which he is taken to an area near the Sherman Hills subdivision, tied to a fence, robbed, beaten and tortured.

10/7: Shepard is found by two bicyclists who call 911 at a nearby home. He is taken to a local hospital and then transported to Poudre Valley Hospital in Fort Collins, Colorado.

10/8: Suspects Russell Henderson, Aaron McKinney, Chastity Pasley and Kristen Price are arrested for the crime.

10/9: Henderson and McKinney are arraigned in Laramie's Albany County courthouse on three felony counts of kidnapping, aggravated robbery and attempted first degree murder. Pasley and Price are charged as accessories after the fact to attempted first degree murder.

Colorado Pride, a gay and lesbian organization, holds a candlelight vigil on the steps of the Colorado state capitol building.

10/10: Five hundred people attend a candlelight vigil outside Poudre Valley Hospital in Fort Collins, CO.

Wyoming Governor Jim Geringer, President Clinton and House Speaker Newt Gingrich condemn the attack.

Petition of "Civil Rights and Minority Issues," which urges state representatives in Wyoming to pass a hate crimes law, is circulated in Laramie.

10/11: National Coming Out Day.

10/12: Matthew Shepard dies at 12:53am without regaining consciousness.

Charges against Henderson and McKinney are upgraded to first-degree murder.

10/13: A second candlelight vigil is held in Fort Collins after the negative reaction to the scarecrow in the Colorado State University Homecoming parade, which carried the words "I'm Gay" on it.

Henderson and McKinney appear in District Court to hear the upgrading of charges against them.

The City Council of Laramie issues a proclamation deploring the crime.

10/15: Westboro Baptist Church members of Topeka, Kansas and their pastor, Reverend Fred Phelps, issue a statement that they will protest homosexuals at Shepard's funeral.

10/16: Matthew Shepard's funeral is held at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Casper, WY. Residents of the town form a human wall to shield the Shepherd family from Reverend Phelps and his group of protesters.

The Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 1998 dies in Congress.

10/19: Four thousand protesters disrupt traffic on 5th Avenue in New York City after a rally for Shepard

turns into a melee. Several protesters are arrested because they did not have a permit to march.

Memorial services are held at the University of Wyoming.

11/14: Anti-hate seminar is held at the University of Wyoming.

12/2: Henderson and McKinney plead guilty to the Shepard killing in the Albany County district court.

1999

1/4: The parents of Matthew Shepard, Denis and Judy, don't want their son's death to further a political agenda. The story airs on *Dateline NBC* on February 5.

2/26: The proposal to create a bias crime task force in Wyoming dies in the state senate committee.

3/24: Judy Shepard speaks at a news conference in Washington, D.C. organized by the Human Rights Campaign and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. She urges the U.S. Congress and state legislatures to enact statutes on hate crimes. The nephew of James Byrd Jr., another victim of a hate crime, is also present.

3/25: Jury selection begins in the trial of Russell Henderson.

4/5: Russell Henderson goes on trial in Laramie. The district judge is Jeffrey Donnell; the public defender is Wyatt Skaggs and the Albany County attorney is Cal Rerucha.

4/6: Henderson enters a guilty plea of felony murder and kidnapping in exchange for two life sentences with no possibility of parole.

Louis P. Sheldon, chairman of the Traditional Values Coalition, denounces Reverend Fred Phelps and his followers for picketing Henderson's trial with their "God Hates Fags" signs.

4/21: The International Hate and Violence Education Foundation announces plans for a hike to raise awareness about hate-motivated violence. The trek starts on July 25 in Seattle and ends in Fort Collins on October 12.

5/5: McKinney's lawyers will not seek a change of venue.

5/11: McKinney's lawyers ask for a trial delay. They need more time and blame prosecutors for negative publicity.

5/25: Chastity Pasley is sentenced to two years in prison for helping Henderson dispose of Matthew Shepard's bloody clothing.

5/25: With Judy Shepard's permission, Brent Scarpo and Martin Bedogne of Denver begin production on the film, *Journey to a Hate Free Millennium*, the story of Matthew Shepard. Post production takes place at Denver Center Media.

5/28: The trial of Aaron McKinney is pushed back from August 9 to October 11.

6/2: Elton John sings in a concert against hate at the University of Wyoming's Auditorium Arena.

Beneficiaries include the Matthew Shepard Foundation, the Gay and Lesbian and Straight Educational Network among others.

6/25: In a radio interview, Aaron McKinney says he doesn't hate gays.

8/26: Jurors in the *Jenny Jones* talk show trial of Jonathan Schmitz in Pontiac, Michigan, say the crime wasn't one of passion. Schmitz was sentenced to 25 years in prison for killing Scott Amedure, who declared on the show he found Schmitz attractive. In this second trial, Schmitz was found guilty of second-degree murder and could face a possible life sentence.

9/18: Judy Shepard addresses gay and lesbian journalists in Atlanta. She says her son "was not a saint," but "opened the eyes of America" to the problem of violence against gays.

10/10: The Shepards and the Byrds speak out for a Hate Crimes Prevention Act.

10/11: Jury selection begins in the McKinney trial.
National Coming Out Day.

10/12: Defense attorneys, Jason Tangeman and Dion Custis, say their trial strategy will be to convince the jury McKinney was high on drugs and alcohol.

Hikers for Hope reach Laramie.

Phelps and his anti-gay group protest.

The screening of *Journey to a Hate Free Millennium* is held at the University of Wyoming.

Gay activists decry Reverend Jerry Falwell's urging of gays to renounce homosexuality.

10/13: Judy Shepard is interviewed in the national press as an advocate for gay rights.

President Clinton urges Congress to pass a "hate crimes" bill.

10/25: McKinney's trial begins. The testimony of the bicyclists that found Shepard tied to the fence and the homeowner who called 911 is heard.

Falwell calls for a truce with gays.

10/26: At the trial, the coroner says Shepard may have suffered for hours.

10/27: The bartender at the Fireside Bar says McKinney was sober before the attack.

10/28: Judge Barton Voight will not allow a "gay panic" defense because it is not supported by Wyoming law.

10/29: Russell Henderson does not testify in McKinney's trial.

McKinney describes the Shepard beating.

The jury hears his taped confession. Prosecution rests.

11/1: Defense rests.

11/3: McKinney is found guilty of first-degree felony murder and second-degree murder.

11/4: McKinney is sentenced to two consecutive life sentences without the possibility of parole. This sentence was reached when defense attorneys approached the prosecutor, Cal Rerucha, and the parents of Matthew Shepard. Both gave their consent.

"I would like nothing better than to see you die, Mr. McKinney, but now is the time to heal," Denis Shepard.

SOURCES

The Denver Post

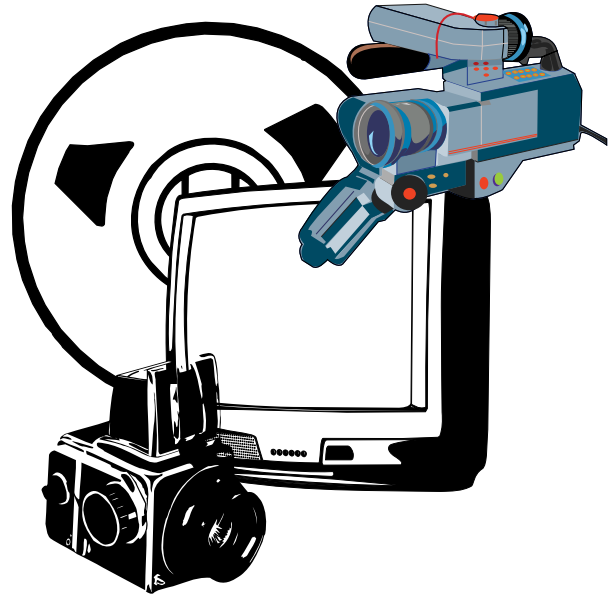
The Denver Rocky Mountain News

Web site: Colorado Pride Center.org.

www. Wired Strategies.com./shepard/htm/

G A Y P A N I C D E F E N S E

The defense in Aaron McKinney's trial wanted the jury to accept the fact that McKinney had a homosexual encounter when he was young and was under the influence of both drugs and alcohol when he alleged Shepard made a pass at him. Supposedly, these actions coupled with McKinney's own homophobia and fear that he might be gay created a "gay panic" and a rage



sufficient to result in the death of Matthew Shepard.

The judge ruled that this defense constituted a form of "diminished capacity" or "temporary insanity" which are not valid under Wyoming law.

MATTHEW SHEPARD THE MEDIA SYMBOL

In an article entitled "Comparison of the Media Attention Given to the James Byrd, Jr. and Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes," the author, Masumi Molina, searched online for newspaper articles about the two crimes. She found substantially more information on the Matthew Shepard murder. After reading the accounts, she found that in Byrd's murder, more attention was focused on the perpetrators, their convictions and how the death affected the town rather than the victim himself. That was not the case for Matthew Shepard. The victim and his personal life were given more attention than that of the perpetrators. She felt "the fact that this college student was homosexual was key to the media attention."² Molina concluded that

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the Shepard case was a triggering event focusing attention on the larger story, which was “hate crimes” legislation.

On the website for the Triangle Foundation and its supporters, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Jane Stevenson described the site of the murder as “located in a desolate expanse in the middle of an embryonic housing development.”³ She was especially awestruck by the fence where his body was found, which she feels has become a symbol of violence in our culture. She dismisses those who insist that Shepard’s murder was the result of a botched robbery; in her opinion, the site is too far outside of Laramie and too difficult to reach for the killers to want just a wallet. “Now after the journey to the Fence, I am positive beyond any question that McKinney and Henderson had more than mischief in their plan....”⁴ *The Nation* magazine of July 12, 1999 also pointed out the site of the crime and how it was “strangely religious.”⁵ Long flat stones that looked like altar stones surround the fence and the fence, itself, looked like a site “for a holy sacrifice.”⁶

Madeleine Lecocq wrote of “Passion Week” in *Weird Sisters* of October 1998. She finds the name “Matthew Shepard” a good name for a martyr. “Matthew Shepard. The Good Shepard. Tied and crucified, arms outstretched, feet shoeless, bleeding and alone. ...He is beaten and crucified by the petty thieves themselves instead of hung beside them. But they are all doomed in the act.”⁷ She reports that Matthew wanted to change the world and enrolled at the University of Wyoming as a political science major to follow his dreams. “Perhaps he mysteriously realized his destiny. He would indeed transform the struggle for human equality and compassion through an act only he could contribute.”⁸

Richard Lacayo, writing in *Time* magazine of October 26, 1998, says that Matt’s death resonated with the public because gay issues have become more mainstream. “A lot of gay businessmen are New Democrats. A lot more people are dealing with gays in their families.”⁹

U.S. News and World Report writer Betsy Streisand wrote in the October 26, 1998 issue that violence in big cities is a constant. But for America in smaller cities like Laramie, with a homicide rate of 0.00, such brutal crimes are wrenching. “Pistol whipped, tortured, then lashed to a fence and left for dead, Shepard suddenly became a symbol of growing violence against gays.”¹⁰

Jon Barrett of *The Advocate* (November 24, 1998) wrote about Matthew’s slight size and cheerful personality during his life. But, “in death Shepard became the lost brother of gay men and lesbians across the country who were suddenly united in a devastating grief for a man they had not heard of just a week before.”¹¹ The writer goes on to say that the media attention was immense because of a confluence of events. Matt’s body was discovered a day before the Center for Reclaiming America, a coalition of religious-right groups, unveiled a series of TV spots and

print ads touting “ex-gay” ministries. The incident also occurred less than a week before National Coming Out Day on October 11 and the launch of the annual Gay Awareness Week at the University of Wyoming, where Shepard was a gay activist. In addition, the coverage would not have been possible without years of work by gay activists who helped raise the consciousness of journalists and editors about gay bashing.

Matthew’s murder also coincided with debate about “hate crimes” legislation. James Brooke reported in the *New York Times* of October 13, 1998 that the crime “fanned outrage and debate throughout the nation. Gay leaders hope Mr. Shepard’s death will galvanize Congress and state legislatures to pass hate crime legislation to broaden existing laws.”¹²

“The news media knows that young, beautiful people cut down in their prime resonate with the public—and thus sell more papers and magazines and bring in higher television ratings,” writes Michelangelo Signorile on Advocate.Com.¹³ He warns, however, that other gays and lesbians have been killed and their deaths go unnoticed in the press.

Finally, Brent Scarpo, director and co-producer of *Journey to a Hate Free Millennium*, a documentary about Matthew’s life and death, says that tragedies like Matthew’s reflect dark phenomena. “It’s not a gay thing; it’s not a black thing or a Jewish thing. It’s a hate thing.”¹⁴ ■



The name Wyoming came from the Delaware Indians and means “the end of the plains.” It has the distinction of being the only state in the union that is composed of land acquired from four sources, the Louisiana Purchase, the Texas Annexation, Oregon Country and the Mexican Cession. Wyoming became a state in 1890, the 44th to be admitted to the Union. To meet the voting population for statehood, the Wyoming Constitution gave women the right to vote. Thus, it became known as “the Equality State.”

Laramie is located in Albany County and was named in the 1820s for an early trapper, Jacques La Ramee, who built a cabin at the junction of the Laramie and Platte Rivers. After he was killed in the area, his name was given to Fort Laramie, Laramie Mountain Range, Laramie Peak, Laramie River and the town of Laramie. The first permanent settlement in the area was Fort Sanders built in 1866, two miles south of the present city. In 1868, Red Cloud and the Sioux nation agreed to a peace treaty with

“It’s not a gay thing; it’s not a black thing or a Jewish thing. It’s a hate thing.”¹⁴

the settlers. That same year the Union Pacific railroad began to travel across Southern Wyoming. The railroad's chief surveyor, General Grenville Dodge, chose the site and name of Laramie. At this time, the city's government began.

Laramie, a community at the end of the railroad tracks, attracted lawless scoundrels of all kinds. When the first passenger train came to Laramie in 1870, the town already had 23 saloons, one hotel and no churches. But the community began to change with the opening of the Wyoming Territorial Prison in 1873 and the establishment of the University of Wyoming in 1886. At this time, the city's main economy was the railroad, ranching and the timber industry.

Today, the economy of Laramie relies upon the University of Wyoming. Other major employers are Foster's Inc. (hotels, restaurants), Iverson Memorial Hospital, Medicine Bow National Forest, Mountain Cement Co., Mountain West Farm Bureau Insurance, Wal-Mart and Wyoming Technical Institute. The median household income is \$26,749, which is below the U.S. median income of \$39,831. What makes the area attractive to businesses are the low property taxes, the low utility costs, the absence of corporate or inventory taxes and no personal state income tax.

The population of Laramie is 27,185. Ninety-one percent of the people are white; 0.7 percent are black; 2.7 percent are Asian/Pacific and 5.6 percent are Latino. The average household size is 2.26 individuals. The population by age distribution shows 22.3 percent are 20-24 years old, 24.3 percent are 25-44 years, 18 percent are 45-64, and 7.2 percent are 65-84.

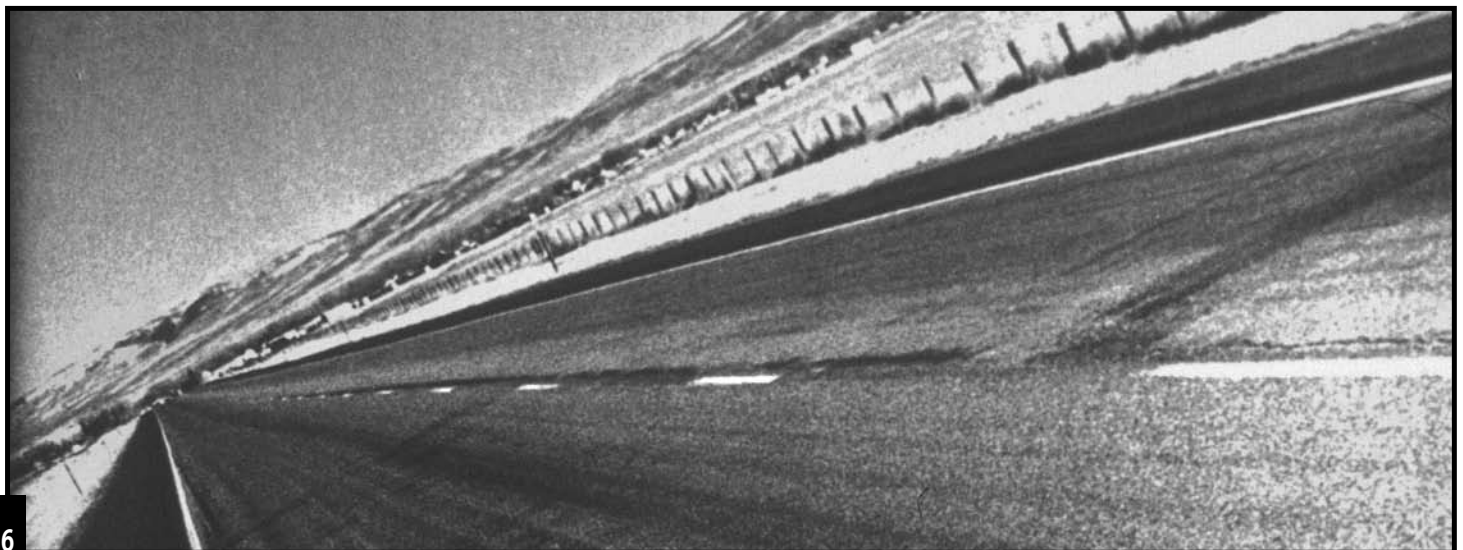
The Chamber of Commerce touts Laramie as an Education Center with the presence of the University of Wyoming, Laramie County Community College, Wyoming Technical Institute and the fact that Wyoming ranks second in the nation for students graduating high school. It also points out a number of cultural benefits: the University's theatre, art museum, entomology museum, anthropology museum, geology museum and American Heritage Center, among others.

Donna Minkowitz, in her article "Love and Hate in Laramie," published in *The Nation* magazine, gives a

different picture of the town. She claims Laramie is Wyoming's most progressive community. Despite the middle class statistics given, she points out that wealthy people move to Laramie from other states by the score because of the low tax rates and cost of living. The town is full of boutiques and restaurants that cater to them. But there is an underside to the story. The perpetrators of Matthew Shepard's murder, Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney, both 21, lived in west Laramie. When Russell's mother froze to death in January 1998 outside of a bar, few people were surprised. "Russell and his mom, a hotel maid, lived in a part of Laramie that is home to many of the people that work at the boutiques, restaurants, hotels and houses that the University [of Wyoming] people enjoy. The government doesn't even pave the streets there. It doesn't plow west Laramie when it snows; the falling down trailers and junked cars can wait until it melts."¹⁵

Her article addresses the argument that Laramie is intensely absorbed in the "haves" and ignores the "have-nots." When McKinney and Henderson entered the Fireside Bar, they encountered a man smaller than they who was the same age, but was wearing stylish clothes, shiny patent leather shoes, had bleached hair and a clean shaven face. What's more, he could pay for their drinks and had once hired a limousine to transport his friends to gay bars in Fort Collins.

Matthew's offer to buy their drinks was interpreted as a pass and, "his wealth threatened to put [McKinney and Henderson] on the bottom where they had always been, but this time, in relation to a tiny, femmy boy."¹⁶ While the media focused on the backwardness and homophobia of rural people in their reporting of the Shepard murder, Minkowitz feels Laramie is a college town obsessed with status. "The uneducated and poor are especially despised here because of the sense that they contribute to the image [of dumb yokels]."¹⁷ Laramie, in its progressiveness, has fostered the same pockets of wealth and poverty, the same violence and victimhood that big cities experience. And maybe Wyoming, "the Equality State," isn't as equal as it once was. ■



MEDIA ATTENTION AND ITS EFFECT ON LARAMIE

In the wake of Matthew Shepard's murder and funeral, the media descended upon Laramie and sent a message to the rest of the country that angered many Wyoming residents. "The Wild West setting of the murder augmented the standard media narrative: of course, the coverage implied, Wyoming macho frontier culture is closed-minded, bigoted and homophobic—what else could it be?" writes Robert O. Blanchard in *Reason* magazine.¹⁸ He reports an NBC reporter stood outside Wild Willies Cowboy Bar and said, "Hate is easy to find here."¹⁹ On October 8, 1998, *The New York Times* printed an editorial that read: "Laramie, the home seat of [Wyoming] University, is a small town with a masculine culture."²⁰ On October 10, the Associated Press' E.M. Smith interviewed a University of Wyoming student who said: "—This is a cowboy place. People aren't exposed to homosexuality. They're too closed-minded."²¹ That same night, the *NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw* ran a segment in which reporter Roger O'Neil interviewed a bar patron who said, "Gays get what they deserve."²² This statement incited a local uproar and reporter O'Neil was confronted by several residents while still on assignment in Laramie. He became defensive and replied: "I won't waste my time trying to clean up a town's mess. ...For five years in a row hate crimes legislation has been declined by the state. I don't think Wyoming deserves a positive picture."²³ Later O'Neil was interviewed about his statements; he did not apologize but explained that the comment by the bar patron was selected over others because, on technical grounds, it had better sound and lighting than the other interviews.

Such intrusive media attention caused extreme outrage in Laramie. As Dr. Daniel Klein observed: "It was strange and disorienting for those of us in Laramie to be the focus of intense national publicity. For a while, we eclipsed the President and Kosovo as the top news story."²⁴ Everyone in the community and state was devastated by the

killing, but they were also shocked over the murder of a 15 year-old pregnant girl in 1997, and the rape and killing of an eight year-old girl in northern Wyoming the following summer. Why hadn't these crime generated national coverage? Was it because Shepard was gay, and, as a result, fit into a news campaign for hate crimes legislation?

Writers, both in state and out, rushed to Wyoming's and Laramie's defense. Matthew Ashment, a student at the University of Wyoming, wrote: "...My family has lived in Wyoming for several generations now and I fit the description of a 'good -ol'-boy'. I am a white male heterosexual. I have a gun rack on my pickup and I hunt and fish whenever I can. ...We are some of the most laid back, helpful people you'll ever meet. ...Helping people in trouble is ingrained into the Wyoming mentality as deep as the snow drifts in January. It's a major part of who we are, and what we believe."²⁵ Robert Blanchard was quick to point out Wyoming's history. "...Wyoming was the first state to grant women the right not only to vote but to own property and hold office; it elected the nation's first female governor in 1924; it ratified the Equal Rights Amendment in 1973; ...and that in the 1990's more than 70 percent of its voters rejected anti-abortion initiatives."²⁶ Finally, Steve Lopez wrote in *Time* magazine: "The cowboy state has its rednecks and yahoos, for sure, but there are no more bigots per capita in Wyoming than in New York, Florida or California."²⁷

A year after the Shepard murder, some of the media representatives revisited Laramie. Philip DuBois, President of the University of Wyoming, reported that the University and Laramie's public schools had overhauled their anti-harassment policies. Some residents had examined their attitudes and beliefs deeply and felt they were more tolerant of others. Phil Curtis, a writer for *The Advocate*, reported the town had been changed by the experience. He quoted Reverend Stephen Johnson who said: "...Matt's murder is the defining moment in the history of Laramie and Wyoming. ...It has forced Laramie to look at gay issues. And while that examination will be a long process, once it has begun, it cannot be stopped. Before you can change attitudes about orientation, there has to be an awareness and an acceptance that the issue is there. And that didn't take hold in Wyoming until Matt's murder."²⁸ ■

1. *The Laramie Project* is based upon actual interviews conducted with the citizens of Laramie.

Activities



Ask students to interview a relative, neighbor, or older friend about the community in which they live. Ask them how the community has changed in the time they have lived there. What major changes (political,

social, economic, artistic, or industrial) have taken place that affected the community? Do they remember any events that had a particular impact upon the community? How diverse do they feel the community is now compared to when they first lived there? How do they predict the community will change in the future?

After the interview, write a monologue, speech, essay, or short story about that person's view of his/her community. You may wish to supplement your writing with historical research about the town or city. Perform or read your writing to the class.

2. *The Laramie Project* is about the effect an important event has upon the citizens of a town. Choose a current or historical event that may have deeply affected people's lives such as the end of slavery, the Vietnam War, or the Columbine shootings. With a partner, write a scene between two people, they may be real or fictitious, discussing how the event will change their lives. Be sure to develop your characters by answering the following questions: What are your characters' occupations? Where do they live? What is their socio-economic status? What was their life like before the event? How will it change now that the event has occurred? Rehearse the scene with your partner and perform it for the class.

Activities 1 & 2 above contribute to the Colorado Model Content Standard # 2. Reading and Writing. Students write and speak for a variety of purposes.

3. This study guide contains a time-line of the Matthew Shepard murder from the beginning through the end of the trial of the perpetrators. Select another historical event such as the Civil War, the Women's Suffrage Movement, the Civil Right's Movement, the founding of Colorado, or the development of theatre. Create a time-line for the event delineating the reason for its beginning and end. Be sure to include all of the individual events that had an impact upon the larger picture. Challenge yourself to find other events either political, social, or artistic that were not directly related to the event, but might have influenced it in some way, i.e., the invention of the steam engine, the telegraph or birth

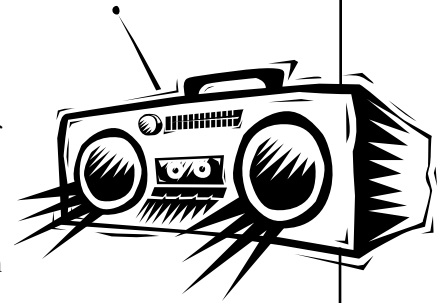
control. Examine and explain your choices.

The above activity contributes to Colorado Model Content Standard # 1.2. History. Students use chronology to organize historical events and people and Standard # 1.3. History. Students use chronology to examine and explain historical relationships.

4. Choose an issue that interests you such as education, abortion, civil rights, or the arts. Over a set period of time, for example two weeks or a month, collect current events regarding the issue. You may use magazine and newspaper articles, T.V. or radio news reports,

interviews, or arts events (movies, theatre, music, visual arts) related to the issue. At the end of the process, write an essay predicting how these events will change the history of the issue.

Collect all of your information in a notebook and create a booklet informing others about the issue.



5. As you learned from *The Laramie Project*, people living in the same community may have as many differences as similarities. Pretend that your classroom is a giant map of the U.S. or of your state. Instruct each student to stand in the area in which s/he was born. Then, challenge the students to find at least three things that they have in common with others standing in the same area. You may also categorize the students by the time of year in which they were born, gender, race, religion, or whether they are the oldest child in their family, the youngest, in the middle, or an only child. Each group will share their commonalities with the rest of the groups and discuss how these facts might have impacted their personality.

6. After seeing the play, put up a map of the world in your classroom. Locate and mark Laramie, Wyoming on the map. Over the next few weeks, encourage students to collect site-specific current events about other places in the world. Ask them to research a short history of each location. These locations may be countries, cities, towns or regions. Have each student mark the location of the events on the map and explain what they have learned about that place. What did they learn about the location's culture, population, government, religion/s, industry, geography, history, etc.? Encourage the students to follow the news of the event in order to witness how it will make an impact upon that location's history.

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7. After you see *The Laramie Project*, read a traditional play; you might try the works of Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, William Shakespeare, Eugene O'Neill, or Anton Chekhov. Then, make a list comparing and contrasting the two forms of theatre. Include in your list similarities and differences in narrative style, character development, plot progressions, and theatrical elements such as sets, costumes, props, lighting and sound. Analyze how the process of writing a play such as *The Laramie Project* would differ from that of a traditional play.

8. In groups of four or five, instruct the students to choose a group of people that have something in common. They may be members of a particular race, religion, gender, popularity group, age, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, or occupation. Encourage the groups to make a list of traits that that group has in common. After sharing their lists with the class, identify and discuss those items that are facts and those that are stereotypes. Be sure to explain that all people have prejudices sometimes without even realizing them. Ask if they ever feel acts of prejudice committed against them because of their age, race, personal beliefs, or popularity. Conclude by discussing ways the students can eliminate prejudice in their own minds. ■

- 22. Blanchard, p. 37.
- 23. Blanchard, p. 37.
- 24. Klein, p. 235.
- 25. Ashment, website.
- 26. Blanchard, p. 35.
- 27. Lopez, p. 38.
- 28. Curtis, p. 48.

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- 1. University of California at Davis website.
- 2. Molina, U.C. Davis site.
- 3. Stevenson, [woo @ glaad. org](http://woo@glaad.org).
- 4. Stevenson.
- 5. Minkowitz, p.22.
- 6. Minkowitz, p.22.
- 7. Lecocq, p. 15.
- 8. Lecocq, p.15.
- 9. Lacayo, p. 35.
- 10. Streisand, p. 23.
- 11. Barrett, p. 28.
- 12. Brooke, p. 8.
- 13. Signorile, [advocate. com](http://advocate.com).
- 14. Savage, p. 48.
- 15. Minkowitz, p. 18.
- 16. Minkowitz, p. 22.
- 17. Minkowitz, p. 21.
- 18. Blanchard, p. 35.
- 19. Blanchard, p. 35.
- 20. Blanchard, p. 35.
- 21. Blanchard, p. 37.

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