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Note:

These notes are designed to provide a context for viewing a performance of *The Laramie Project*. The articles and questions and activities are designed to give an insight into the play's beginnings; the play's context within the Matthew Shepard murder; and the play as a theatrical work.

Rather than being an analysis of the text, these notes are aimed at providing information which will lead to an exploration of the issues, process and ideas which form *The Laramie Project*.

1. Company B Belvoir

The originality and energy of Company B Belvoir productions arose out of the unique action taken to save the Nimrod Theater building from demolition in 1984. Rather than lose a performance space in inner city Sydney, more than 600 arts, entertainment and media professionals formed a syndicate to buy the building. The syndicate included nearly every successful person in Australian show business.

Company B is one of Australia's most prestigious theater companies. Under the artistic leadership of Neil Armfield, the company performs in major arts centers and festivals both nationally and internationally and from its home, Belvoir St Theater in Surry Hills, Sydney. Company B engages Australia's most prominent and promising directors, actors and designers to present an annual artistic program that is razor-sharp, popular and stimulating.

During the past few years artists of the calibre of Geoffrey Rush, Cate Blanchett, Jacqueline McKenzie, Noah Taylor, Richard Roxburgh, Max Cullen, Billie Brown, David Wenham, Deborah Mailman and Catherine McClements have performed on the Belvoir St Theater stage.

Sell-out productions like *Cloudstreet*, *The Judas Kiss*, *The Alchemist*, *The Diary of a Madman*, *Hamlet* and *The Small Poppies* have consolidated Company B's position as one of Australia's most innovative and acclaimed theater companies.

Up to 3,000 people a week pass through the Belvoir foyer to see a show at one of its two theaters, the Downstairs Theater which seats up to 80 people and the Upstairs Theater which seats up to 356 people. Company B also presents an annual season in the Downstairs Theater called B Sharp.

Belvoir St Theater Limited is the owner of Belvoir St Theater. Company B is the resident production company.

2. *The Laramie Project*

by Moisés Kaufman and members of the Tectonic Theater Project

directed by Kate Gaul

cast

Josef Ber

Mitchell Butel

Lynette Curran

Russell Dykstra

Eliza Logan

Tara Morice

Anthony Phelan

Alicia Talbot

set design Brian Thomson

costume design Jenny Irwin

lighting design Rory Dempster

composer/sound design Garth Paine

Stage Manager Rebecca Anderson, Assistant Stage Manager Kylie Mascord,
Singing Coach Daryl Wallis, Voice Coach John Higgins, Guitarist Simon
Patterson, WAAPA Secondment: Fiona Symonds

Photographer: Heidrun Löhr

3. ABOUT TECTONIC THEATER PROJECT AND MOISÉS KAUFMAN

Tectonic Theater Project is a New York-based non-profit theater company dedicated to exploring theatrical language and forms. Tectonic Theater Project's mission states that any project that they undertake as a company has two objectives: a) to examine the subject matter at hand, and b) to explore theatrical language and form. The company's production *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* opened for an Off-Broadway run in February 1997 but transferred to the Minetta Lane Theater in Greenwich Village, where it played to capacity houses. Other productions include works by Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Benjamin Britten and Sophie Treadwell.

Moisés Kaufman is a native of Venezuela but has lived in the United States since 1987.

In Venezuela he worked as an actor with the Thesipis Theater Ensemble, one of the country's prominent experimental companies. Since his arrival in New York he has founded and serves as artistic director of Tectonic Theater Project.

Kaufman also directs regularly with Working Classroom, a multiethnic arts program which showcases original work written and performed by natives of Albuquerque and New Mexico.

Kaufman and Tectonic Theater Project look for material which will push theatrical form. Kaufman says that he is "not looking for plays that are naturalistic or realistic" but material which all members of the company feel passionate about.

4. ABOUT THE LARAMIE PROJECT

a. Into the West: An Exploration of Form

By MOISÉS KAUFMAN

"After all, not to create only, or found only, / But to bring perhaps from afar what is already founded, / To give it our own identity, average, limitless, free." - Walt Whitman

There are moments in history when a particular event brings the various ideologies and beliefs prevailing in a culture into sharp focus. At these junctures, the event becomes a lightning rod of sorts, attracting and distilling the essence of these philosophies and convictions. By paying careful attention in moments like these to people's words, one is able to hear the way these prevailing ideas affect not only individual lives, but also the culture at large.

I think the trials of Oscar Wilde were such an event. When I read the transcripts of the trials (while preparing to write *Gross Indecency*), I was struck by the clarity with which those documents illuminated an entire culture. In these pages, one can see not only a community dealing with the problem that Wilde presented, but in their own words, Victorian men and women tell us, three generations later-about the ideologies, idiosyncrasies and philosophies that formed the pillars of that culture.

I believe that the brutal beating of Matthew Shepard was an event of this nature.

In the immediate aftermath of his beating and subsequent death, the nation launched into a dialogue that brought to the surface how we are thinking and talking about homosexuality, sexual politics, education, class, violence, privileges and rights, and the difference between tolerance and acceptance.

"Artists are recording our times, and the artists are the diaries of our time. In the future this is what society will look back on as a record of our time, what artists are saying." -Robert Wilson

The idea for *The Laramie Project* originated out of my desire to learn more about why Matthew Shepard was murdered; about what happened that night; about the town of Laramie. The idea of listening to the citizens talk really interested me. How is Laramie different from the rest of the country and how is it similar?

Shortly after this murder occurred, I posed the question to my company, Tectonic Theater Project: **What can we as theater artists do as a response to this incident? And, more concretely: Is theater a medium that can contribute to the national dialogue on current events?**

These concerns fall squarely within Tectonic Theater Project's mission. Every project that we undertake as a company has two objectives: **a) to examine the subject matter at hand, and b) to explore theatrical language and form.** In an age when film and television are constantly redefining and refining their tools and devices, the

theater has too often remained entrenched in the 19th-century traditions of realism and naturalism.

In this sense, our interest was to continue to have a dialogue on both how the theater speaks and how it is created. Thus, I was very interested in this model: a theater company travels somewhere, talks to people and returns with what they saw and heard to create a play.

At the time I also happened to run across a Brecht essay I had not read in a long time, *The Street Scene*. In it Brecht uses as a model the following situation: "an eyewitness demonstrating to a collection of people how a traffic accident took place." He goes on to build a theory about his "epic theater" based on this model. The essay gave me an idea about how to deal with this project, both in terms of its creation and its aesthetic vocabulary.

So in November 1998, four weeks after the murder of Matthew Shepard, nine members of Tectonic Theater Project and I traveled to Laramie, Wyoming. Fortunately, we had the revenues from *Gross Indecency* to help us respond quickly. (Ultimately, we would end up spending all of our revenue from the earlier play on this project.) For most of us, these were the first such interviews we had ever conducted.

We had many concerns before we left on that first trip. The gay and lesbian members of the company were from the outset quite afraid to travel to a town where such a brutal crime against a gay man had just occurred. Other members of the company were concerned with intruding where we didn't belong. Still others considered the ethics of conducting interviews about this incident (especially when the Shepard family was still grappling with the issue of maintaining privacy). All of these issues were discussed at length then, and for many, many months afterward. The company was not only learning a new way of working, but we were testing the limits of our ability to respect and trust each other and communicate with one another in productive ways.

One of the first things we noticed after a few days in Laramie was the fact that the diversity within our group was a great advantage. Some members were interested in the ranching community, others in the gay and lesbian community, others in getting to know more about Matthew Shepard, others in finding out about the lives of the perpetrators. So in a very natural way, we began to hear a rich and varied collection of community voices.

Upon our return to New York, Tectonic produced a three-week workshop to go through the nearly 80 interviews that we had conducted. For this workshop, company members transcribed over a hundred hours of tapes, selected the most important or relevant material, and presented it to the group. I encouraged everyone to "present the material," not just read it. And although the workshop was primarily dramaturgical in nature, a set designer and a composer were already involved.

The actor/dramaturgs very quickly started using costumes, props and other devices to convey to the rest of the group not only something about the person they had interviewed, but also something about the environment and the experience of the interview. I also noticed during this first workshop that the actor/dramaturgs had become personally invested in the people they had interviewed. This meant that they would argue strenuously for their character's voices to be in the play.

The workshop culminated in a reading, in front of an invited audience, of about 90 minutes' worth of loosely structured material. Hearing those texts read in front of an audience was a very powerful experience. It was at this point that I decided that we would continue returning to Laramie until the trial of the last perpetrator had occurred. I wanted to know more, listen more intently, follow these people over time. Thus began a year of trips and workshops.

A smaller group of Tectonic members returned to Laramie in April '99 for the trial of Russell Henderson. Unlike our first trip, which happened a month after the event, this time we were side by side with the media, experiencing firsthand what a town of 27,000 people feels like with media trucks parked at all of its motels and in the center of town.

When this group returned from Laramie, we did another workshop to look at the material we had gathered. It was then that I decided to form a writers' group (led by Leigh Fondakowski, with Stephen Belber, Greg Pierotti and Stephen Wanh) to assist me in going through the growing volume of material and organizing it. The group and I would engage in rigorous dialogue as to the content and direction of the play.

Having four writers contributing material and a team of dramaturgs strongly advocating for characters and themes made for a very rich process. Although at times this created difficult situations, it allowed me to make the most informed decisions about what would be in the play. It also generated a very exciting energy in the rehearsal room.

It was at this time that two organizations became pivotal to our work: Robert Redford's Sundance Theater Lab and New York Theater Workshop. Both these organizations housed us as we continued to workshop and develop the piece. Five more trips to Laramie and several other workshops would happen over the course of a year. We returned for the events commemorating the first year anniversary of Matthew's death. Another two trips would cover the trial of Aaron McKinney, and two more trips would take care of the last of the follow-up interviews. As the process continued, we reached more than 200 interviews in total.

At the end of McKinney's trial, I felt we were ready to stage a production. This story had taken place in the West, and it was important for us that we premiere our play in the West. This is why we accepted Donovan Marley's offer to do a production at his theater in Denver.

Because Laramie is only two and a half hours away, we were able to have the people we portray come to Denver to see the play (in addition to many other people from Laramie). That was another strange and magnificent part of this journey.

The experience of working on *The Laramie Project* has been one of great sadness, great beauty and, perhaps most importantly, great revelation- about our nation, about our ideas, about ourselves. Many questions have been answered, and many more will be posed. And that is a good thing.

American Theater, New York, May/June 2000

b. NYTHEATER.COM REVIEW

By Martin Denton

May 17, 2000

Union Square Theater

The Laramie Project is the most significant new work of this theater season; and it's the most significant work of theater currently playing in New York City. Artistically, it's magnificent - a thrilling and adventurous blend of story-telling, documentary journalism, and spellbinding theatrical showmanship. Thematically - culturally, socially and politically - it's monumental: an exploration of how we, as individuals and as members of a society, can find meaning in a world from which meaning is being progressively and systematically stripped away. *The Laramie Project* asks how America at the turn of the millennium can make sense of experience, and offers itself as a sublimely compelling answer to its own question. If you care about the theater, if you care about the world you live in - *The Laramie Project* will speak profoundly and directly to you. It is not to be missed.

The *Project* begins, as it began, on November 14, 1998, about a month after Matthew Shepard died in a hospital in Fort Collins, Colorado, following a brutal and senseless attack by two young men who claimed he had come on to them sexually. Moisés Kaufman, who gained attention with his play *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*, and ten members of his Tectonic Theater Company, set off for Laramie, Wyoming, where Shepard had lived and been murdered, in search of understanding and in search of a play. Over the course of a year - an eventful one that included the trials of both of Shepard's assailants and numerous media-grabbing brouhahas in Laramie and elsewhere protesting, pro and con, the hatreds and bigotries that underlay the crime, Kaufman and his collaborators interviewed dozens of people in Laramie, recorded personal observations about the case and the process in journals, and documented the facts and artifacts related to the Shepard case that were blazing a trail through the national media and into public consciousness and posterity.

And they made a play: this play, which charts the journey of ten questing souls in search of, not truth, exactly, *insight* about the human condition. *The Laramie Project* tells the story of the Shepard killing and its dramatic aftermath, but that's not what it's about. No, *The Laramie Project* is a living testament to tolerance and learning: a chronicle of bearing witness and of gaining understanding. The Tectonic team comes to Laramie as prepared to judge as we come to this play, there really does seem to be an overriding plot, here, that separates right from wrong, that identifies the good guys and the bad guys. But human contact, manifestations of this profound business of living, makes for more complicated theater than the media circus that we and they lived through just a year and a half ago. Sure there are a few villains, institutional ones, mostly, like some organized religions and, especially, the international media complex. But mostly there are stories, sometimes guileless, sometimes self-serving, always astonishingly personal, of human beings struggling to make sense out of something that makes no sense. And doing so in the face of a cultural establishment that seems determined to reduce it all to soundbite-sized nonsense.

Act Three of *The Laramie Project* begins at Matthew Shepard's funeral. As the lights come up, we see a few rows of simple, hard-backed wooden chairs, on which are seated members of the company, all dressed in black, some holding umbrellas. (It snowed the day Shepard was buried.) The immediate connection is to *Our Town*, and it's not at all accidental: *The Laramie Project*, like that earlier play, is very much a celebration of the spirit of ordinary people. Faced with a tragedy of incomprehensible horror, how does a family, a community, a culture deal with their experience? What is learned? What survives?

The remarkable third act of this play focuses squarely on these questions, moving us from the more simplistic interpretations of political and religious leaders to the more lasting, complex conclusions drawn by the people of Laramie who actually lived with the Shepard case day in and day out. The most emotional moment in *The Laramie Project* is not one of the obvious climactic ones drawn from the public record, but instead the one where Laramie policewoman Reggie Fluty, who was exposed to Shepard's contaminated blood while tending to his wounds, learns that she is HIV-negative. "I stuck my tongue right into my husband's mouth," she cries jubilantly in a burst of spontaneity a thousand times more compelling than any prepared plea for mercy or hospital pronouncement could ever hope to be.

I can't imagine the kind of visceral impact that seeing this show must have on the people whose voices are so faithfully recreated in it. I can't imagine, either, how the actors, writers and other creative people who built and shaped *The Laramie Project* can manage to perform it night after night: the emotion in this play is absolutely palpable, and it builds to a heart-stopping climax as the piece progresses and then ends. Writer-director Kaufman, who is a character but not a performer in the show, must now be regarded as one of the key visionary creators of theater in America today. His collaborators, Leigh Fondakowski (also a character but not a performer), and Stephen Belber, Amanda Gronich, John McAdams, Andy Paris, Greg Pierotti, Barbara Pitts, and Kelli Simpkins (all participants and actors in the piece), are all doing astonishing work here, deserving of the most lavish commendation. Kudos, too, to performer Mercedes Herrero, set designer Robert Brill, costume designer Moe Schell, lighting designer Betsy Adams, video/slide designer Martha Swetsoff, and composer Peter Golub, all of whom have made important contributions to the seamlessly brilliant work of art that *The Laramie Project* finally is.

As someone who attends theater almost every day of his life, I ask myself frequently why theater matters. *The Laramie Project* reminds us, exhilaratingly and compellingly, why it's so necessary for us to come together, as an audience/community, to share stories that help us understand who we are. What happened to Matthew Shepard can never be fully understood or explained. But what happened to the people who created and who have been touched by this extraordinary show gets reaffirmed, powerfully, every night that *The Laramie Project* is performed.

C. *THE LARAMIE PROJECT*

Author/s: Charles Isherwood

Issue: May 22, 2000

The facts surrounding the death of Matthew Shepard, the gay college student whose brutal murder shocked the country in 1998, came quickly to light, but as the sad, sober and gripping new play *The Laramie Project* so vividly illustrates, the essential mystery at the heart of the tragedy, how hate is born and nurtured in the backstreets of a friendly American town, will never be solved.

During the year and a half following Shepard's murder, members of Moisés Kaufman's Tectonic Theater Project, the company best known for the Off Broadway smash *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*, traveled to Laramie, Wyoming, home to both the victim and his killers, and conducted more than 200 interviews with a cross-section of the town's citizens. *The Laramie Project*, directed by Kaufman with the input of the performers, who served also as dramaturges or writers, is a theatrical collage of excerpts from these interviews, interspersed with commentary drawn from the journals of the actor-writers themselves.

Over the course of its 2 1/2 hours (including two brief intermissions), the play lays out all the ugly details of the murder, and the subsequent convictions of the killers, Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson. It is not, however, a dramatization of these events, but rather an investigation into their meaning from the perspective of the men and women who bore witness to them.

Although it is never sensational, *The Laramie Project* is a harrowing evening of theater, and its bleak subject matter may hamper its box office appeal. But the rapt silence of a near sellout audience at a preview would seem to indicate that something nourishing has been excavated by Kaufman and his committed collaborators from the tragedy.

The voices of Laramie are more varied than the media snapshots that emerged in the aftermath of the crime might have indicated, and they are captured in all their divergent colors by the capable, appealing cast of eight, who each portray several different Laramie citizens as well as themselves or another member of the Tectonic Theater Project. There are a lesbian professor, a Muslim university student, a rancher and a local reporter, as well as people more directly connected to the events: the limo driver who used to drive Shepard to gay bars in Colorado; the cocky, genial bartender at the Fireside Lounge, where Shepard met his killers; friends and acquaintances of McKinney and Henderson, who remember them as unexceptional, somewhat awkward kids who gave few indications of harboring such violent hate.

Smarmy preachers we might expect, and we hear one blandly denounce the crime while morbidly adding the hope that Shepard saw fit to reflect on "his lifestyle" in the agonizing hours he lay bleeding to death, tied to a fence on the outskirts of town. But there are also the eloquent sympathies of the Catholic priest who stepped forward to lead a vigil for Shepard as he struggled for life in the hospital, and who registers his disgust at the timidity of other religious leaders who withheld their support while waiting to see which way public opinion was moving.

The performers never stoop to caricature, and if we are occasionally encouraged to chuckle at an inflection or an odd turn of phrase, there's never the sense that the interviews have been punched up or manipulated to increase their theatrical effect or score an easy point against the speaker, even when the speaker is, for example, the wife of a highway patrol officer who never knew Shepard and yet says, "I think he flaunted it," before quickly adding, "... but nobody deserves that." Closed minds are in fact rare, and they are so casually included among a wide array of more sympathetic and often anguished reactions that we can assume they haven't been either exaggerated or unduly emphasized to punch audience outrage buttons.

The Laramie Project is minimally aestheticized. Kaufman's direction is clean and economical, more a matter of editing than anything else. Robert Brill's set and the lighting design of Betsy Adams are low-keyed, as is Peter Golub's haunting music.

The cruelty of the murder, who can forget reports describing Shepard's tears tracing trails down his blood-covered face? , was such that the play's recollection of its gruesome details threatens to overwhelm all solace or uplift that our hearts instinctively hope for at the theater. *The Laramie Project* isn't so much a work of art as a piece of artfully presented reportage, and it cannot both tell the truth and give us release. It doesn't attempt any pat explanation of the killers' motivations: When we finally witness McKinney's banal, offhand confession, it sheds little light on the roots of such inhuman cruelty.

But there is comfort to be found in the chorus of Laramie voices quietly mourning the loss of a boy they never knew, as well as the innocence of their town. That loss of innocence, of course, is the essential and most profoundly disturbing revelation of *The Laramie Project*.

d. 'PROJECT' TO BE SCRAPPED

By MICHAEL RIEDEL

THE reviews and the puffy advance media hype that greeted *The Laramie Project*, **Moisés Kaufman's** off-Broadway docudrama about the murder of Matthew Shepard, were the kind that bring huge smiles to the faces of producers and their investors on opening night.

The Post called the play "an amazing piece of theater that uses delicacy, broadness and horror to shape a world."

The New York Times said it was "enormously good-willed, very earnest and often deeply moving."

Even New York magazine's notoriously demanding **John Simon** got on the bandwagon, proclaiming the show "a terrific piece of theater, history and life."

Alas, those accolades did not translate into ticket sales, and on Saturday, after a run of just over three months, *The Laramie Project* will fold up shop at the Union Square Theater.

The red ink is gushing upward of \$700,000, making the play one of the costliest off-Broadway flops of the year (some, but not all, of the loss will be offset by a film deal with HBO).

The failure of *The Laramie Project* - which Kaufman put together from interviews with the residents of the Wyoming town where Shepard was murdered - is an example of how tough it is to sell a serious play these days, especially in the summer, when New York theatergoers seem to favor lighter fare.

Though the ad campaign was designed to make the show sound uplifting, *The Laramie Project* had the feel of spinach theater - important, yes; good for you, too; but ultimately, not much fun.

"People perceived the subject matter to be brutalizing," Kaufman said yesterday. "We were not able to overcome that."

Some people involved in *The Laramie Project* say its failure also illustrates the pitfalls of having a creator double as a producer. Kaufman, who scored an enormous hit in 1996 with *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*, had total control over "*The Laramie Project*," and made some mistakes a more experienced and detached producer might have avoided.

Kaufman, sources say, insisted on opening *The Laramie Project* in May - shortly after the show played a successful and much-hyped tryout in Denver - over the objections of other members of the production team.

"Everybody told him to wait till the fall, but he wouldn't listen," one company member said. "He didn't want to lose momentum."

As every seasoned producer knows, spring is the worst time to open an off-Broadway show. That's because the theater world is in the grip of Tony Award fever during spring. And since the Tonys honor only Broadway, off-Broadway gets short shrift in the theater press.

Kaufman also did not want to cut his show, even though it was in three acts and lasted almost three hours. Producers generally believe audience attention spans are too short these days for three-act plays.

Kaufman says acting as his own producer "was not an issue at all. It wasn't like I was making all the decisions. I was working with a very talented co-producer, **Roy Gabay.**"

Gabay, who has managed several off-Broadway shows, did not return a message yesterday, but one person involved with *The Laramie Project* bluntly said, "Roy couldn't do anything without consulting Moisés. It was Moisés' show. Period."

Though *The Laramie Project* failed in New York, Kaufman thinks it will have a long life elsewhere. Theaters in San Francisco, Washington and Los Angeles are planning to produce it.

And, of course, there is the HBO movie, which Kaufman is writing and directing. He says it will air sometime next year.

NYPPost, Friday, September 1, 2000

Questions and Activities

- Tectonic Theater Project developed *The Laramie Project* for themselves. How can another company make the play their own?
- What was the process Tectonic Theater Project followed while developing the *The Laramie Project*? Is this process something that could be followed while developing a group devised project for the HSC?
- Moisés Kaufman states that the aim of Tectonic Theater Project is to produce works that explore theatrical language and form. What does this mean? What theatrical language and form were explored in *The Laramie Project*? Is the theatrical language and form transferable between different productions?
- Research an individual or event. Devise your own play around this person or event.
- The two reviews of *The Laramie Project* are full of praise for the production yet the play closed in New York after only a short season. Why do you think some plays continue to play and others shut down? Is it as the author of *Project Scrapped* says, “it is important and good for you but not much fun?” Does theater have to be fun? What does this say about audiences?
- Write your own review of the Company B production.
- Collect the reviews of the Company B production and compare them to the New York reviews.
- Is *The Laramie Project* an important piece of theater? Why?

5. ABOUT LARAMIE

In May 1868, Laramie was a tent city awaiting the tracks which were to bind the nation together. The tracks were laid through town that month and the dusty encampment quickly became a permanent community of 3,000 people.

Like other western railway towns, Laramie had a few upstanding citizens, a few stockmen who came to town every so often, and a whole lot of rowdies, rustlers, gamblers, thieves and transient riffraff. However, before the year was out, a group of town leaders organized a vigilante posse and chased most of the badmen out of the city. Then most of the rest of the population departed for newer railway towns and Laramie was left with 1,500 residents.

What to See & Do

Today, Laramie is Wyoming's third-largest city, and a university town, with the University of Wyoming being the state's only four-year college. The number of students today (10,000) far surpasses the original population of the early railway town. Most of the university buildings are constructed of Wyoming sandstone. Amateur and professional geologists should visit the university's **Geological Museum**. Located in the east wing of the Geology Building, the museum shows the geological history of what is now Wyoming over the past two billion years. The museum contains a skeleton of a giant Brontosaurus.

Another historical highlight of the city is **Wyoming Territorial Park**, at the Snowy Lake exit of Interstate 80. The park includes a museum inside the former **Wyoming Territorial Prison** (built in 1872). The displays commemorate the fur trading and mountain man era, Laramie's railroad days and the period since statehood. During the summer months, the park stages entertainment and arts and crafts shows.

Day Trips from Laramie

A particularly fine scenic drive leads through the **Medicine Bow Range** (also called the Snowy Range) southwest of Laramie via Highway 130, with the road re-joining Interstate 80 at Walcott, west of Rawlins. The route first passes Centennial, climbing to **Snowy Range Pass**, at 10,800 feet. Recreation areas throughout the mountain drive include campgrounds, picnic areas and fishing sites. The road passes several crystal lakes and passes under several 12,000-foot peaks which give the Medicine Bows their nickname, the Snowy Range. The 94-mile loop makes an extremely scenic alternate route if you're

westbound from Laramie, or a superb day drive , returning to Laramie via Interstate 80.

Another scenic route (Highway 210) leads through the **Medicine Bow National Forest**, east of Laramie, to **Curt Gowdy State Park** and Cheyenne. To get to Highway 210, drive southeast from Laramie on Interstate 80.

There is a private campground in Laramie, plus several public campgrounds in the national forest to the east.

Where to Eat

The **Cowboy Bar and Grill**, at 309 South 3rd Street offers family dining in a Western atmosphere, with a dining room and cocktail lounge.

Another western-style restaurant is the **Cavalryman Supper Club**, located 1.75 miles south of I-80 on Highway 287. It features prime rib, seafood and steaks. The club also has a cocktail lounge.

Where to Stay

Sunset Inn, 1104 So. 3rd St., (307) 742-3741

This motel features some cooking units, as well as a cocktail lounge, pool, TV and pets are allowed (\$ to \$\$).

Camelot Motel, I-80 at Snowy Range Exit, (307) 721-8860

A budget-priced motel allows pets but has no cooking facilities. 33 units with TV and phones (\$).

Annie Moore's Guest House, 819 University, (307) 721-4177

Six bedrooms sharing 4 baths are to be had in this bright BandB which is close to downtown and the university (\$\$).

Two Bar Seven Ranch, (307) 742-6072

Located about 30 miles south and west of town (take US 287), this historic ranch offers many activities in a lovely mountain setting. Open year-round. Write Box 67-W, Tie Siding WY 82084,

Riverside Campground

Off I-80 at Curtis and McCue Streets. Features tenting near the Laramie River, playground, laundry, store, and full hook-ups.

For more information  in Laramie and area,
go to the home page of the [Albany County Tourism Board](#).

Questions and Activities

- What impression of Laramie does *The Laramie Project* give?
- How well do you think the production presented an image of Laramie?
- What theatrical techniques were used in the production to create an impression of Laramie?
- At the time of the murder, the press made much of Laramie being a “cowboy” town – do you think this is true? What is your perception of “cowboy”?
- Do you think the murder would have received so much media attention if it had taken place somewhere else?
- In what different ways can a piece of theater give an impression of time and place? How well do you think this was achieved in *The Laramie Project*?
- How would you represent your local area in a piece of theater? (Think about characters you would use, set design, costume design, dialogue etc.)
- The members of Tectonic Theater Project interviewed vast numbers of Laramie residents. Do you think the play captured a variety of residents’ voices? Do you think the play gave a balanced view of Laramie?

(From *The Laramie Project*)

REBECCA HILLIKER: You have an opportunity to be happy in your life here. I found that people here were nicer than in the Midwest, where I used to teach, because they were happy. They were glad the sun was shining. And it shines a lot here.

- What were the different points of view put forward in the play?
- Play a game of Action Chinese whispers. How different was the last person’s actions from the first person. Why do you think they were different? Do you think that a person’s upbringing and beliefs determine how they view an action or an event?
- Were any of the characters in the play changed by the events in Laramie?
- Do you think that these changes were needed to give the play a sense of resolution?

6. ABOUT THE ISSUES

- a. ~~NYPost, Friday, September 1, 2000~~

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Why One Murder Makes Page One and Another Is Lost in the News Briefs

Matthew Shepard becomes an apparent media martyr for being gay, but the rape and murder of a 13-year-old boy by two men doesn't even make a ripple. Are news organizations operating under a double standard?

As the aftermath of Matthew Shepard's murder last October played out — culminating Thursday with the sentencing of Aaron McKinney to two life sentences — an equally disgusting crime was committed in Arkansas, where two men raped and killed a 13-year-old boy. That incident received relatively little coverage, while Shepard leaves a story that will probably endure for years to come as a symbol of intolerance and lowest-common-denominator conformity.

So when TIME.com started getting e-mail from people wondering why the media weren't paying more attention to the Arkansas incident, we decided to examine whether we and other media outlets had been guilty of some sort of unfairness. (Actually, the media did pay attention, if only at the lack of ink the story generated. As an editorial in the conservative Washington Times fumed, if Shepard had become a cause célèbre, why didn't this rate the same treatment?) Could it be because we in the the media elite were unwilling to publicize crimes committed by homosexuals because it didn't suit our agenda? The next stop in that line of reasoning was clear: That news is controlled by a bunch of gay-loving liberals only too happy to wield a double standard.

What was that story we supposedly buried? According to news reports — and there were indeed news reports, both locally and on the national newswires — Davis Don Carpenter, 38, and Joshua Macave Brown, 22, from Benton County, Ark., participated in the rape and murder of Jesse Dirkhising, a 13-year-old from Prairie Grove. Brown strapped the boy to a mattress and stuffed underwear in his mouth, held in place with a bandanna, and repeatedly sodomized him while Carpenter watched. The boy died from asphyxiation.

A red herring worth addressing at the outset is the failure to distinguish between homosexuality and pedophilia, which creates a false parallel at the core of the Times' argument. A double standard would be in effect had the media ignored a situation where two gay men killed a straight man for being straight. But sex with children is a crime regardless of the sexes involved, and is not synonymous with homosexuality. Brown and Carpenter were roommates, and the details of their relationship have not been revealed, but evidence taken from their house — handwritten fantasy scenarios involving children, as well as diagrams and instructions on how to sedate, tie up and position a child — indicates a strong interest in pedophilia.

The most salient difference between the Shepard case and this one, however, is that while Shepard's murderers were driven to kill by hate, the boy's rape and death was a sex crime. It was repulsive, unconscionable — and the predictable pastime of perverted criminals. It was the kind of depraved act that happens with even more regularity against young females, and, indeed, if the victim had been a 13-year-old girl, the story would probably never have gotten beyond Benton County, much less Arkansas. (There is, of course, a double standard there.) Matthew Shepard died not because of an all-too-common sex crime, but because of prejudice.

Essentially, Shepard was lynched — taken from a bar, beaten and left to die because he was the vilified "other," whom society has often cast as an acceptable target of abuse; Dirkhising was just "another" to a pair of deviants. And while child abuse is unfortunately no big news, lynching still is. Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson were not satisfying some animalistic sexual impulse, they were bullies who gratuitously killed someone out of hate for being different than they were. It wasn't about them, it was about Matthew Shepard. Because they dramatically reflected some of society's darkest influences — an acceptance of the persecution of gays — the media saw fit to hold the case up as an example. No one could justify the behavior of Dirkhising's assailants; there is no "pedophile rage" defense. But many in our society think that beating up gays is justifiable, and place the blame on the victims. And while such attitudes may change, sexual deviancy is timeless.

The reason the Dirkhising story received so little play is because it offered no lessons. Shepard's murder touches on a host of complex and timely issues: intolerance, society's attitudes toward gays and the pressure to conform, the use of violence as a means of confronting one's demons. Jesse Dirkhising's death gives us nothing except the depravity of two sick men. There is no lesson here, no moral of tolerance, no hope to be gleaned in the punishment of the perpetrators. To be somehow equated with these monsters would be a bitter legacy indeed for Matthew Shepard.

Questions and Activities

- Do you agree with this article?
- Why do you think the media seized on this case in particular?
- Can you think of any similar events that have attracted the same kind of publicity? Do they have anything in common?
- How are the media portrayed in *The Laramie Project*? What role do you think the media should play in an event like this?
- Do you think the media had any responsibility to the people of Laramie in the same way that the members of the Tectonic Theater Project might have had?
- Do you think the case would have been reported differently if it had happened in Australia?
- Think of a news event that has received similar media attention (e.g. the shootings at Columbine High School in the USA) – think of how you would make a piece of theater out of the event.

(from *The Laramie Project*)

BILL MCKINNEY: “Had this been a heterosexual these two boys decided to take out and rob, this would never have made the national news. Now my son is guilty before he’s even had a trial.”

- Compare newspaper stories in different newspapers. Do they differ? In what way? Why?
- Is the media interested in telling the facts or are they just interested in creating their own version of events?
- There has recently been movies and books which have the media creating events and issues. For example *Wag the Dog* (movie) and *The Brethren* (book). Do you think it is possible for the media to sway public opinion?

b. LARAMIE PROJECT FULL-LENGTH MOVIE

The Associated Press

L A R A M I E, Wyo., Aug.9 — HBO will produce and air a full-length movie based on the murder of gay University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepard.

New York City playwright Moisés Kaufman will write the movie adaptation of his play *The Laramie Project*, a docudrama about the Shepard murder, said Chris Wiger of the Denver Center Theater.

The play has been performed nearly 100 times in Denver and off-Broadway in New York City.

The movie will be filmed in Laramie within the next year, Wiger said. The cast has not been chosen.

Decision Questioned

Jim Mickelson, part-owner of the Fireside Bar in Laramie, does not like the idea of a movie.

“I don’t think Laramie needs a movie like that,” he said. The Fireside Bar is the place where Shepard met the two men who later beat him and left him to die outside of Laramie in October 1998.

Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson are both serving life terms in the Wyoming State Penitentiary for the killing.

Shepard’s murder became a rallying point for supporters of hate crimes legislation nationwide.

Questions and Activities

- How do you think a TV/movie version of events would differ from the stage version?
- If you were making a TV version of the play, how would you film it – what would you add, what would you cut, how would you portray the landscape, would you show the murder etc.?
- Video an improvisation in your drama class and then watch it? Were there differences in the “live” version and the video version? Why do you think this happened? How is the director of a film able to focus the viewer’s eye? Can a stage director have the same amount of control?
- Which medium do you think is more powerful, TV or theater, and in what way?

(from *The Laramie Project*)

FATHER ROGER: I will trust you people that if you write

a play of this, you know, you say it right, say it correct. I

think you have a responsibility to do that.

- Do you agree with Father Roger’s statement? How do the responsibilities of the Australian company playing in Sydney differ from those of the Tectonic Theater Project who originally performed the play in America?
- Imagine that you had travelled to Laramie to speak to its inhabitants about the events surrounding Matthew’s murder – what questions would you want to ask? Are there any issues that you would have liked to see explored in the play that were left out?
- Think about an event/incident that has happened in your school recently. Interview people who were at the event/incident. How did the views of the event/incident differ?

c. The reluctant activist

Judy Shepard talks about her struggles to accept her son Matthew's homosexuality, his brutal murder and the unwanted celebrity she decided to use on behalf of gay rights.

BY DAVE CULLEN

Judy Shepard tried to resist the unwanted celebrity her son Matthew's brutal murder thrust upon her last October. But after months of quiet grieving, she researched gay rights activist groups, and approached four targeted groups in May.

"I think maybe I could do something to help you," she recalls saying. "I have a voice now, people seem to want to hear what I have to say."

And indeed they do. This unlikely housewife from Wyoming has grabbed the media spotlight, with a raft of projects timed to coincide with the anniversary of her son's killing, and the capital murder trial of his accused killer, Aaron McKinney, here in Laramie. Shepard has just completed a speaking tour, she headlined the premiere of the documentary *Journey to a Hate Free Millennium*, and she also taped three public service announcements produced by the Human Rights Campaign and the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN).

The GLSEN spot began heavy rotation on MTV last week, reaching 30 to 45 million youth, according to the network. Judy Shepard is spliced between shots of students shouting "homo," "faggot" and "queer," and Matthew's picture followed by the words "murdered / because he was gay / end / hate." In the spot she appears timid, emotional and vulnerable, exactly as she comes off in person: "The next time you use words like these, think about what they really mean."

Shepard sat down with Salon News this week to discuss her struggles to accept her son's sexuality, her conflicted feelings about his status as gay-bashing poster boy, and the impact his death has made on progress toward gay acceptance. As an activist, her objectives seem primarily cultural rather than political, she talks about equal treatment rather than equal rights, for instance. And though she's appealed to Congress to pass hate crimes legislation, most of her efforts have been channeled into humanizing gays and changing cultural attitudes, primarily among kids.

"I think education is where we have to start," she said. "Kids go to school to learn how to behave in society. There's a way you behave at home, and then there's a way you behave with everybody else. And if we don't start doing that in the schools soon, it's harder to do as an adult.

"GLSEN is a wonderful way to do it," Shepard continued, "because not only do they incorporate the problems that gay children face, but the problems that all children face in being talked about in school."

GLSEN reports its membership as 30 to 35 percent straight, the remainder gay. The group has conducted teacher trainings in several thousand schools over the past five years, but Shepard's death has dramatically improved access. "Five years ago it was incredibly difficult to get into the schools," GLSEN spokesman Jim Anderson said. "Now, schools are calling us."

"I think what it's done is make the teachers and administrators more aware of the problem," Shepard said. "But it's a slow process. School boards are notoriously conservative and set in their ways, and don't want to do anything, especially open the door to the least bit of controversy."

A handful of large states have begun to make schools take violence against gays seriously. Two weeks ago, Gov. Gray Davis signed the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act, making California the fourth state to extend protections based on sexual orientation to students in its public schools.

Another entry point has been students themselves, who have organized gay-straight alliance groups in nearly 500 schools. That number has nearly doubled in the past year, Anderson said, with organizers repeatedly citing Shepard's murder as the galvanizing event. "I think because he was young, and his murderers were young, people made a connection," Anderson said.

Late last month, GLSEN released its first "school climate" survey, conducted among 496 gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students across 32 states. Ninety-one percent reported hearing words like "faggot," "dyke," or "queer" regularly at school, 69 percent experienced direct verbal harassment and 24 percent suffered physical harassment. Far more troubling was that more than a third heard those remarks from faculty or staff, and that their peers were actually more likely than faculty or staff to intervene.

"I sort of get the feeling that teachers and administrators feel that they grew up with that teasing in school, and they made it through, they treat it almost as a rite of passage," Shepard says. "We survived it, you can survive it. This is how you grow." She shakes her head incredulously: "Oh, ignorant people! Kids have scars, from being teased because they had big ears. What kind of scars do they have from being teased because they're black, or gay?"

One of Shepard's biggest surprises has been the overwhelming support she's received from clergy and churches. "The mail they send me is like a hundred to one positive. It's incredible." She was especially surprised to learn that major churches like the Catholics and Episcopalians have groups like Dignity and Integrity "to help their gay parishioners."

She's under no illusions about the overall tenor of parts of the Christian community, but she's optimistic about change. "There are people of the same church that feel that it's totally wrong [to reach out to gays]," she said. "But the fact that the churches have these organizations, I think that's a great step forward. It was surprising how much positive mail said, 'We've never addressed this issue in our church before, but we address it now. We had a service for Matt, and we talk about it in our youth group, and we talk about it in our bible study.' That's great!"

One of the greatest indignities her family suffered since the murder was Rev Fred Phelps' Baptist church picketing the funeral with signs picturing "Matt in Hell." They returned in April to picket the courthouse in Laramie when Shepard and her husband Dennis came to testify at the sentencing of Russell Henderson.

But that time prominent anti-gay crusader Rev. Louis Sheldon flew in from Washington to denounce Phelps, and local minister Rev. Ivan Byrd tore into Phelps' son in a high-decibel shouting match. When Phelps got set to return to town for the

trial of Aaron McKinney, I decided to visit Byrd's tiny Redemption Chapel, and what I saw validated Judy Shepard's optimism about change.

I found a tiny little congregation huddled inside a reinforced trailer, on a dirt road alongside the switching yard of the U-Pac Railroad. Crumbling sidewalk in front, half-eaten deer carcass out back, fervent born-again congregation inside. In between the laying on of hands, and the dancing in the aisles praising the name of Jesus, the organist called out with a prayer request.

"I have a prayer request for the Baptist group from Kansas picketing Matthew Shepard," she declared. "Now I don't believe in homosexuality in any way, shape or form, but it's not up to us to condemn these people to hell."

"Amen!" came the response from the congregation. "Amen!" I saw disapproving head-shaking all around me. "It's horrible what they're doing," an elderly voice said behind me.

Shepard laughed at the back-handed compliment, when I told her about my visit to Redemption Chapel. But we agreed it was more tolerance than we could have hoped for a year ago. Not quite the reaction either of us would like, but at least these people are beginning to see gays as humans. What's the chance Russell Henderson or Aaron McKinney ever heard someone like Rev. Sheldon calling on Christians to treat gays compassionately?

"I do receive vitriolic mail from the Bible Belt," Shepard said matter-of-factly. "But I also got a lot of mail that says 'While I don't agree with the homosexual lifestyle, no one should do what they did to your son.' OK, I'll take that. I agree with you, that's a step forward."

But Judy Shepard is still uneasy about her son's emergence as worldwide gay-bashing poster boy. "I feel very conflicted about it, that's the best way of putting it," she said.

She resents some of the invasion of privacy, and closely guards access to her surviving son, which thus far the media has respected. But she's pleased with the awareness it's brought to the problem. "The gay community didn't need it, but the straight community needed it, to see what gay people were going through."

She also worries about the backlash the gay sympathy seems to be generating in some circles. Jeffrey Montgomery, spokesman for the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, says the number of gay-bashings seems to be holding relatively constant, but "what we're seeing has been a marked and terrible increase in the severity, viciousness and brutality of the crimes."

"I think some people are feeling more threatened now," Judy said. "I'm just hoping it's a last gasp."

While Matthew's death forced millions of Americans to accept the reality of gay bashings, Shepard thinks many still believe it was an isolated incident. According to Montgomery, there have been 28 more gay-bashing murders since Matthew Shepard's bludgeoning, but only two of the most ghoulish received even modest national attention: Billy Jack Gaither had his throat slashed, his head cracked open by an ax-handle and his body burned on kerosene-soaked tires in Alabama in February; and two weeks later, Henry Edward Northington was decapitated, his severed head carried

a mile from his body to be placed on a busy footbridge in a common gay cruising area.

Shepard was shocked to learn of those 28 murders. "We should all know about these deaths," she said. "It's unfortunate that the media isn't reporting them."

Thanks to her activism in the last six months, Judy Shepard has joined Betty DeGeneres, Ellen's mother, as a sort of National Gay Mom, our picture of the quintessential straight mother comfortable with her gay child.

But Shepard smiles at that characterization, since she admits she had to struggle with Matt's sexuality. "There's a grief that comes because the life you expected isn't going to happen," she said. "But at the same time, you realize that, as a parent, you don't raise your children to be an extension of what you want. Letting go of that is really important. I think part of the problem lies with the fact that a lot of parents are ignorant of the gay community, and what it's really about. Because what they are exposed to is the stereotypical picture."

Shepard has also worked closely with Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) this past year, and found the universal concern among parents is fear for their children's safety. "It's a larger element for parents of gay kids, because the fear and ignorance and maybe even the hate manifests itself in a more violent way. There is a climate in this country that sort of makes it OK to be homophobic. The jokes and the stereotypical portrayal seem to make it OK. And that's what scares parents, because nobody says 'Don't do that; that's not right.'"

While it seemed strange that Shepard spent the anniversary of her son's death promoting a documentary about hate crimes, she actually asked the film's producers to debut it that day, knowing she would have to speak at the premiere, appear at the press conference and conduct interviews much of the day. She says she's used these opportunities as a way to engage her grief productively. "If I didn't have a focus and a goal, I'd just be hiding under the covers."

Her husband Dennis has not been so lucky, she said. "As a family, we decided something needed to be done by us. And I was elected, because Dennis needed to work in Saudi Arabia," where he is a safety engineer for an oil company. The differences in the way they've grieved were apparent at the April sentencing, where Judy and Dennis testified back to back. Judy was calm, betraying anger only at the very end, more sad at the loss of her boy than angry with the man who'd taken him from her. But Dennis was openly seething with fury.

She acknowledged the disparity. "As far as grieving at a different rate than Dennis, yes, I'm doing it in a different way because I talk about it all the time. Probably that puts us in different places, but I think that's a good thing, because we can share with each other what we're going through, and it gives us each a different purpose. He's also really frustrated at not being able to do more, because he's in Saudi Arabia. If he were in this country, he'd be right beside me doing everything I do. He's really frustrated about it."

Judge Barton Voight's gag order prohibits her from discussing the McKinney trial directly, but she said she's eager to put all the legal travails behind her. "It will be a relief to have it over. A relief yes, but not a resolution."

Questions and Activities

- Do you think the playwright was right to leave the mother's voice out of the play?
- How would the play be different if she had been included?
- Do you think Matthew's parents were right to spare Aaron McKinney from the death penalty?

(from *The Laramie Project*)

DENNIS SHEPARD: I would like nothing better than to see you die Mr McKinney. However this is the time to begin the healing process. To show mercy to someone who refused to show any mercy.

"The Laramie Project ostentatiously declines to represent Matthew Shepard onstage. This choice ingeniously sidesteps sentimental images while at the same time giving the play a mysteriously satisfying spiritual dimension. The unseen presence is much more powerful than the overly familiar depiction of a crucified figure."

Town in a Mirror, American Theater, New York, May/June 2000

- Do you think the playwright was right in not representing Matthew Shepard on stage? Why? Does it make the play more "universal" in its themes by not representing Matthew Shepard on stage? How?
- Did you feel an unseen presence in the play?
- Do you think you get to know Matthew Shepard in the play? Is this important? Is it more important to get to know the other characters?
- Create your own improvisation about a person and an event with the main protagonist in the play. Repeat the improvisation without this person – having people talk about the person etc. What is the effect of both versions?

- The actors play a variety of characters from Laramie in the play and sometimes play themselves and other members of the Tectonic Theater Project? Why do you think the play is written like this? How did the play make clear who was speaking?

d. A Chaplain's Reflection

I saw on the news today that Matthew Shepard died. He was the 21 year old man from Wyoming who was beaten and tortured and left to die for no reason other than he was a homosexual. This tragic murder has raised a national debate again, the kind of periodic soul-searching our society goes through whenever a crime of hate startles us into awareness. The burning of Black churches, the bombing of innocent people, the death of a shy young man from Wyoming: these events suddenly shake us out of complacency and remind us that fear, prejudice and rage are always the shadows just beyond the light of our reason. And so people suddenly start to speak out. There are voices of outrage and grief. Voices of sorrow and demands to know why such a thing could happen. And predictably, there are also defensive voices: the governor of Wyoming trying to explain why his state has no laws to protect people from hate crimes and the leadership of what is called the Christian "right wing" trying to explain why their national ads against homosexuality don't influence people to commit such violence against gays and lesbians. In the days to come, these many voices will fill our media and the cultural consciousness it imprints until we are once again lulled into the more familiar patterns of our lives, dozing off as a nation until the next tragedy rings the alarm of despair.

As the chaplain for our own community, I would like to invite us all to consider Matthew's death in another way. Not through the clamour or denials, not through the shouts or cries of anger: but rather, through the silence of his death, the silence of that young man hanging on his cross of pain alone in the emptiness of a Wyoming night, the silence that ultimately killed him as surely as the beatings he endured. Silence killed Matthew Shepard. The silence of Christians who know that our scriptures on homosexuality are few and murky in interpretation and far outweighed by the words of a savior whose only comment on human relationships was to call us to never judge but only to love. The silence of well meaning educated people who pretend to have an enlightened view of homosexuality while quietly tolerating the abuse of gays and lesbians in their own communities. The silence of our elected officials who have the authority to make changes but prefer to count votes. The silence of the majority of "straight" Americans who shift uncomfortably when confronted by the thought that gays and lesbians may be no different from themselves, save for the fact that they are walking targets for bigotry, disrespect, cheap humor, and apparently, of murder.

Crimes of hate may live in shouts of rage, but they are born in silence. Here at Trinity, I hope we will all listen to that silence. Before we jump to decry Matthew's senseless death or before we seek to rationalize it with loud disclaimers: I hope we will just hear the silence. A young man's heart has ceased to beat. Hear the silence of that awful truth. It is the silence of death. It is the silence that descends on us like a shroud. At Trinity, as in Wyoming, we are men and women surrounded by the silence of our own fear. Our fear of those who are different. Our fear of being identified with the scapegoat. Our fear of taking an unpopular position for the sake of those who can not stand alone. Our fear of

social and religious change. Our fear comes in many forms but it always comes silently. A whispered joke. A glance to look away from the truth. A quick shake of the head to deny any complicity in the pain of others. These silent acts of our own fear of homosexuality are acted out on this campus every day just as they are acted out every day in Wyoming. Through silence, we give ourselves permission to practice what we pretend to abhor. With silence, we condemn scores of our neighbors to live in the shadows of hate. In silence, we observe the suffering of any group of people who have been declared expendable by our society.

As a person of faith, I will listen, as we all will, to the many voices which will eulogize Matthew Shepard. I will carry that part of our national shame on my shoulders. But I will also listen to the silence which speaks much more eloquently still to the truth behind his death. I will listen and I will remember. And I will renew my resolve never to allow this silence to have the last word. Not for Matthew. Not for gay men or lesbian women. Not for any person in our society of any color or condition who has been singled out for persecution. Not in my church. Not in my nation. Not in Wyoming. And not at Trinity College.

The Right Reverend Steven Charleston
Chaplain, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut USA
Assistant Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut

Questions and Activities

- Do you agree with the Reverend Stephen Charleston?
- Discuss the different religious points of view put forward in the play.
- Many newspaper reports of the case described Matthew as having been “crucified” on the fence, (he was not) and used other religious imagery to describe him. Why do you think they did this?
- Kate Gaul, the director of the Belvoir’s production of *The Laramie Project* is keen to keep away from all religious imagery. Do you think she is right?

STEPHEN MEAD JOHNSON: Conservative Christians use the Bible to show the rest of the world it says here in the Bible. And most Americans believe, and they do, that the Bible is the word of God, and how you gonna fight that?

7. Internet Links

NSW Lesbian and Gay Anti Violence Project

www.kbdnet.net.au/avp

Varying news reports on the case

www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Stonewall/2878/funeral.html

www.cnn.com/us/9911/04/gay.attack.verdict.02

www.hrc.org/hrc/hrcnews/1999/991018.html

www.cnn.com/us/9911/03/gay.attack.verdict.01/

www.cnn.com/us/9810/15/gay.student.vigils/index.html

www.cnn.com/us/9910/11/shepard.01/

www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/stonewall/2878/carman.html

www.cnn.com/us/9905/11/hate.crimes/

www.cnn.com/us/9910/26/shepard.trial.02

The Laramie Project

www.thelaramieproject.com

www.theater.com/news/public/newsbrief.asp?newsid=7037

(with rehearsal pictures from the original production)

Laramie

<http://userpages.aug.com/bdobson/laramie2.html>

(some interesting historical photographs of the town)

www.onroute.com/destinations/wyoming/laramie.html

www.laramie-tourims.org

(official Laramie tourist office website)

Matthew Shepard

www.mattshepard.org

(tribute site with lots of useful links. Good links for hate crime statistics and legislation discussions.)

www.dailynews.yahoo.com/full_coverage/us/matthew_shepard_murder

(very useful site with a huge list of links covering all aspects of the case)

First chapter of *Losing Matt Shepard: Life and Politics in the Aftermath of Anti-Gay Murder* by Beth Loffreda, Columbia University Press

www.nytimes.com/books/first/l/loffreda-shepard.html

www.wiredstrategies.com/shepardx.html

(another huge list of links)

www.worldzone.net/international/mattshepard/index.html

(an international resource guide, with some interesting religious articles)

Hate Crimes

www.hatecrime.org

8. Further Reading/Viewing

Plays

Corpus Christi, Terrence McNally

Gross Indecency, the Three Trials of Oscar Wilde, Moisés Kaufman

Angels in America, Tony Kushner

Books

Losing Matt Shepard: Life and Politics in the Aftermath of Anti-Gay Murder by Beth Loffreda, Columbia University Press

Brecht on Theater, translated by John Willett

Close Range, Annie Proulx

Plain Song, Kent Haruf