

THE LARAMIE PROJECT: TEN YEARS LATER

AN EPILOGUE



PHOTO: TIM CHESNUT

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Tectonic Theater Project gratefully acknowledges the Rockefeller Foundation, Time Warner and HBO for their generous support of this Audience Guide.



INTRODUCTION TO THIS GUIDE



KEN FRIEDMAN

“It’s a fallacy to try to define Laramie the way one would describe an individual. There are 27,000 people in Laramie. There are at least 27,000 Laramies.”

—MOISÉS KAUFMAN, CREATOR OF
THE LARAMIE PROJECT

The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later

WRITERS Moisés Kaufman,
Leigh Fondakowski,
Greg Pierotti, Andy Paris
and Stephen Belber

DRAMATURG Jimmy Maize

Audience Guide to *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*

WRITERS [Bennett Singer](#) and
[Ellen Gordon Reeves](#)

DESIGN [ShapiroDesign](#)

Tectonic Theater Project

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR Moisés Kaufman
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR Greg Reiner

On October 12, 2009, audiences in more than 130 cities in the United States and abroad will attend the premiere of *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later — An Epilogue*. This publication is designed to enhance audience members’ experience at the theater; offer background and context; and guide students, teachers, parents and other community members as they engage in discussion of—and reflection on—this groundbreaking piece of theater.

Between now and October 12, this Web guide will be updated and expanded weekly to include:

- Background on the town of Laramie and on *The Laramie Project*
- Brief history of Tectonic Theater Project and description of its unique process of creating innovative, cutting-edge theater using interviews and other documentary elements
- Information essential to understanding the Epilogue, including:
 - Timeline
 - Synopses
 - Character identification
 - Analysis of theatrical elements
- Discussion questions and activities linked to key themes and concepts in the Epilogue, to be conducted before and after audiences attend the October 12 performance
- Primary-source document analysis with links to the sources
- Resources, reviews and reactions

THE EPILOGUE: OVERVIEW



COURTESY MATTHEW SHEPARD FOUNDATION

“ I don’t know what the hell [Matthew] was trying to do, but I beat him up pretty bad. Think I killed him. ”

—AARON MCKINNEY, IN A TAPE-RECORDED CONFESSION TO THE ALBANY COUNTY, WYOMING, SHERIFF’S DEPARTMENT

In October 1998, on the outskirts of Laramie, Wyoming, a 21-year-old gay college student named Matthew Shepard was savagely beaten, tied to a fence and left to die in the frigid night. Characterized as a hate crime, the murder became a watershed historical moment in civil rights in America. In the aftermath of Shepard’s death, Moisés Kaufman and members of Tectonic Theater Project made six trips to Laramie; over the course of 18 months, they conducted more than 200 interviews with residents of the town. Using interview transcripts, court documents and media reportage as source material, they created *The Laramie Project*, a play that chronicles how the community grappled with the slaying. The play won numerous awards and is one of the most-performed pieces of theater in America today. It was made into a film for HBO and has been seen by more than 30 million people across the country.

Ten years later, in the fall of 2008, company members Moisés

Kaufman, Leigh Fondakowski, Greg Pierotti, Andy Paris and Stephen Belber returned to Laramie to interview the same people. These interviews focus on how Laramie has changed: politically, socially, religiously and educationally. Using “Moment Work,” Tectonic’s unique approach to developing plays, the new interviews have been crafted into an Epilogue to *The Laramie Project*.

On October 12, 2009—the 11th anniversary of Shepard’s death—*The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later* will premiere simultaneously in New York, Laramie and more than 130 cities across America and around the world. The New York production will be performed by the original cast members of the play and film, while other participants include professional regional theaters, community groups, high schools and universities. To assist artists in performing the play, Tectonic company members will travel the country prior to the October 12 premiere and conduct workshops with partners as they set up their productions. For a list of performance sites, visit www.laramieproject.org.



HBO

“One of the things that was very clear from the start is the question of how does one measure change. Is it in the number of public monuments that have been erected? Is it in the number of laws that have been passed? Is it in the number of people whose views have been changed?”

—MOISÉS KAUFMAN, CREATOR OF
THE LARAMIE PROJECT

In conjunction with the premiere, an **interactive community** has been launched at www.laramieproject.org where participants can blog, upload video and photos, and share their experiences in preparing and presenting the Epilogue in their communities. The members of Tectonic Theater Project will be active participants in the online community, offering participants feedback and encouragement as the project develops.

Tectonic Theater Project and its Mission

Since its founding in 1991, Tectonic Theater Project has used theater to instigate national debate with productions including *The Laramie Project*. Tectonic focuses on watershed historical moments—times when the ideas, beliefs and ideologies that are the pillars of a certain culture at a certain time—surface around a specific event. “When this happens,” says Tectonic’s Artistic Director Moisés Kaufman, “the event itself operates as a lightning rod that allows us to see clearly, for a brief time, what ideas that society is made of. The issues in the Epilogue are just as relevant now as they were in 1998. These last 10 years have not been the best 10 years for social change—not only for the gay and lesbian community, but also for any issue of social justice. As an artist, I feel like the question is: ‘What can theater do now in America? How can we play a role in the national dialogue?’”

GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION

The following guidelines, developed by the editors of *Teaching Tolerance*, can help ensure that discussion of *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later* remains constructive:

- Participants should agree on a set of ground rules that will steer the discussion. Ask for input on what these principles should be. Examples include a commitment to confidentiality and to respect others, a ban on the use of slurs, and an agreement that only one person will speak at a time.
- When discussing issues related to sexual orientation, it is imperative that participants and moderators resist the urge to place lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender youth, those who are perceived to be LGBT, or those with LGBT friends or family members in the spotlight. Participants will enter into the conversation as they feel comfortable.
- It is the moderator’s role to establish as comfortable a setting as possible and to establish a forum for a free and respectful exchange of ideas. Special care must be taken to ensure that those holding a minority view are not vilified by those on “the other side.” The moderator should also pose questions to help keep the conversation on track.
- For an activity and handout on how to discuss controversial issues—focusing on the pervasive putdown “You’re so gay!”—visit www.tolerance.org/activity/controversial-issues.

FACTS AND RUMORS:

Understanding the events that led to a brutal killing—and assessing its legacy

“ It’s not that I think Matt was meant to be murdered or that Henderson and McKinney were driven by anything other than their own hatred when they killed my son. That’s certainly not the case. It’s just that, after things went so horribly off track that night—in that typical local bar in that typical American town—it seemed to all of us that somebody, something, or some power stepped in to, as much as possible, set things right. ”

—JUDY SHEPARD,
MATTHEW SHEPARD’S MOTHER,
IN HER NEW BOOK,
THE MEANING OF MATTHEW

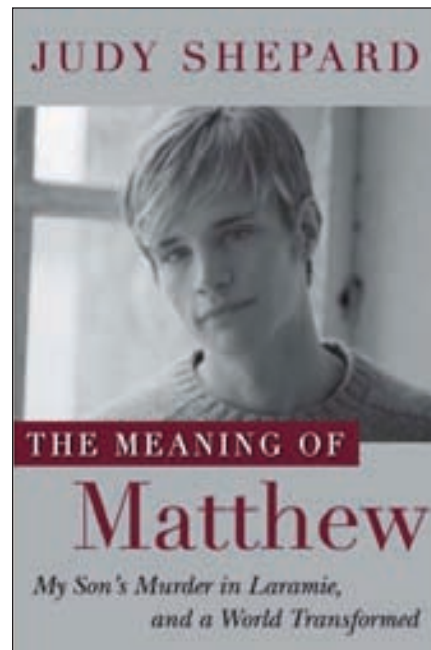
A good first step in preparing to see *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later* is to brainstorm with the group about **prior knowledge and pre-conceptions** about the murder of Matthew Shepard.

Brainstorm and list answers to the following questions:

1. What do you know about Matthew Shepard and the events surrounding his death in Laramie, Wyoming, in October 1998? How did you learn this information? Name your sources.
2. Have you seen *The Laramie Project* in play or film form? What do you remember most? Make a distinction in the discussion between facts and speculation or rumor, and between primary and secondary sources. What have you learned about the case since?
3. What is a hate crime? List recent and historical examples.

LAWS AGAINST HATE: **The Meaning of Matthew**

Read “11 Years After Shepard’s Death, Mom Pushes for Hate-Crime Law,” *USA Today’s* recent article about Matthew Shepard’s mother Judy and her new book, *The Meaning of Matthew: My Son’s Murder in Laramie and a World Transformed*. (The article is online at www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2009-09-07-shepard_N.htm.) Then discuss the following questions:



FOR DISCUSSION

1. What facts about Matthew Shepard’s murder are reported in this article? What controversies have arisen over the facts of the case?
2. What do those who claim Shepard’s murder was not a hate crime believe happened? What evidence exists to the contrary?
3. How have Judy Shepard and Dave O’Malley been transformed by the death of Matthew Shepard? How are they attempting to turn the tragedy into positive action?
4. According to the article, what is the Matthew Shepard Act? What impact would this new law have on the prosecution of hate crimes?
5. What is the history of this legislation? On what basis have opponents objected to it?
6. Where does the Obama Administration stand on federal hate-crime legislation?

PREVIEWING THE SCRIPT:

“That’s what we’re famous for”

After reading and discussing the *USA Today* article presented on page 5 of this guide, consider this excerpt from the script of *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*.

Excerpted Moment: Two Guys at the Strip Mall

NARRATOR: Company member Greg Pierotti.

GREG PIEROTTI: One of the first things we did when we got to Laramie this time was walk around the town conducting informal interviews. Talking to two guys at the strip mall on Third, I ask: What do you remember about the Matt Shepard story?

GUY 1: I’ve only been here four months. The only thing I know about it is I remember it from the news when it happened. He took me out where it happened.

GUY 2: Yeah, I just brought him out to the area there, out by Walmart.

GREG PIEROTTI: You showed him the fence?

GUY 2: Well, you know, just to that area out there. They took the fence down.

GREG PIEROTTI: They took it down?

GUY 2: Oh yeah.

GREG PIEROTTI: Really? The fence ... where Matt Shepard was killed?

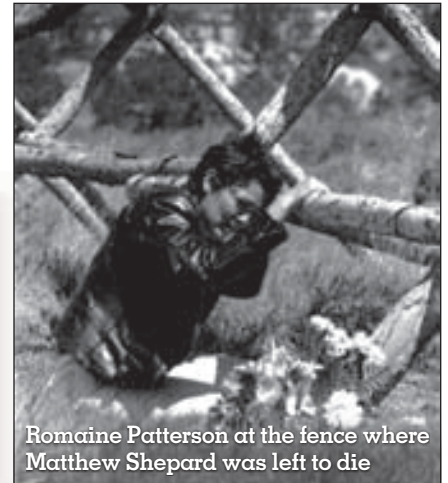
GUY 2: Definitely. It’s gone. For a while now.

GREG PIEROTTI: Why did they take it down?

GUY 2: The owners didn’t want people coming on their property. People still do, though, even though it’s gone. They got “no trespassing” signs all over the place out there.

GREG PIEROTTI: So, why’d you bring him out there then?

GUY 2: Because that’s what we’re famous for.



Romaine Patterson at the fence where Matthew Shepard was left to die

NANETTE MARTIN

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What and where is the fence? What makes it significant?
2. Who is Greg Pierotti and why is he surprised that the fence is gone? What is the explanation for its disappearance?
3. Discuss what Guy 2 means when he says, “That’s what we’re famous for.” Is this how Laramie will always be known? To what extent should the town be allowed to forget and move on?
4. What is the difference between fame and notoriety? What does it mean that the fence is gone and yet people still visit the site? Should there be a memorial at the site or elsewhere in Laramie, given that the land where the fence stood is privately owned?
5. What kind of memorial would you propose to honor the memory of Matthew Shepard? What would it look like? Consider modern memorials and controversies over them: the Vietnam Memorial in Washington DC, Ground Zero, Columbine, the FDR Memorial and others—including those in your community.



KEN FRIEDMAN

“ My friend Matthew created more change in his death than he may have ever achieved in his life. He was one man. One man that knew he could change the world. He serves as a reminder to all of us that as one person we too can create a change in our community and schools. ”

—ROMAINE PATTERSON,
MATTHEW SHEPARD’S BEST FRIEND

WHEN EVENTS BECOME LIGHTNING RODS

In this excerpt from the introduction to *The Laramie Project*, playwright Moisés Kaufman explains where the idea for this play came from:

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 this 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...

The brutal murder of Matthew Shepard was an event of this kind. In its immediate aftermath, the nation launched into a dialogue that brought to the surface how we think and talk about homosexuality, sexual politics, education, class, violence, privileges and rights, and the difference between tolerance and acceptance.

The idea for The Laramie Project originated in 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?

For Discussion

As you learn more about Laramie, consider these questions:

- How is Laramie similar to and different from your own community?
- Could a hate crime happen in your community—or has your community experienced hate crimes?



SHAWN TIBB

DEALING WITH CONTROVERSY

While *The Laramie Project* is presented in theaters and schools nationwide for its artistic and academic value, the play often attracts controversy that takes on a life of its own. An article in *USA Today*—published on March 16, 2009, and available online at www.usatoday.com/news/education/2009-03-16-teacher-laramie_N.htm—reported:

[In January 2009] Debra Taylor showed students at Grandfield High School [in Grandfield, Oklahoma] *The Laramie Project*, a 2002 film based on the play of the same name, about the murder of Matthew Shepard. The students soon decided to film selected scenes themselves for an in-class project.

Taylor, 50, knew the project was controversial with strong language, but got her principal’s permission. A few weeks into it, the principal told her to stop production. After students protest-

ed, she held a 20-minute ceremony in a nearby park in which students wrote their thoughts and rolled them into helium balloons, then released them.

The next day, Taylor says, Superintendent Ed Turlington canceled the class. After she complained to a school board member, Turlington put her on paid leave and recommended that she be fired. The school board approved her resignation...

Activities for Writing and Research

1. What makes *The Laramie Project* controversial? Why do you think it has become one of the most-performed plays in America?
2. Imagine that you could interview Debra Taylor, Ed Turlington and students in Ms. Taylor’s class. What questions would you ask?
3. As you watch the Epilogue, note how and why the interpretation of events surrounding Matthew

Shepard’s death has changed. What factual evidence is presented in the Epilogue regarding Shepard’s killing?

4. Choose a “lightning-rod issue” that has divided your class, school or community. What are the facts? According to whom? Write your own summary of the facts, then create an alternate version from the opposition. Discuss.
5. Identify an issue in the news that has sparked controversy. Using the Web and other sources, find articles, blog posts and other commentary that present the varying sides of the controversy. Which facts are agreed upon by different sides? Where do the facts and interpretations differ? (Example: Consider the address to students that President Obama delivered on September 8, 2009.)
6. Choose a lightning-rod issue in your own life. Write about it and share with a partner if you choose.



“ I cannot mention anyone who has done more for this community than Matthew Shepard. ”

—FATHER ROGER SCHMIT,
CATHOLIC PRIEST IN
LARAMIE, WYOMING, 1998

THE ROAD TO LARAMIE

10 WAYS TO PREPARE FOR VIEWING THE EPILOGUE

- 1 Read or re-read the script of *The Laramie Project*.
- 2 See the HBO film version of *The Laramie Project*. How do the script and film versions differ? For discussion questions, context and activities related to the film, visit www.timeclassroom.com/laramie
- 3 Read these background articles on the Epilogue:
 - **Has Anything Changed?** www.newsweek.com/id/163027
 - **Laramie Killing Given Epilogue a Decade Later** www.nytimes.com/2008/09/17/theater/17laramie.html?pagewanted=2&r=1
 - **Back to Laramie** www.advocate.com/Arts_and_Entertainment/Theater/Back_to_Laramie
 - **The Meaning of Matthew: An Excerpt** www.advocate.com/Arts_and_Entertainment/Books/The_Meaning_of_Matthew_An_Excerpt
- 4 Note which sites are participating in the Epilogue premiere on October 12, 2009. See the list under the “Find a Performance” tab at www.LaramieProject.org. Consider partnering with a site in your state, or choose another site and create a “pen pal” e-mail correspondence.
- 5 Monitor local and national media in the next few weeks for stories about the Epilogue and anniversary; articles about hate crimes; and coverage of legislative issues surrounding domestic partner rights and same-sex marriage. Research and report on your state’s policies on these issues.
- 6 Plan times for your class or community to engage in the activities and discussions suggested in this guide.
- 7 Read and discuss the quotations presented in this guide. Do research to find additional quotes about the impact of Matthew Shepard’s killing on Laramie and/or about the Epilogue. Share your findings with your class or group.
- 8 Assign each participant or small group of participants one or more themes, moments and/or characters to trace and report on before and after October 12, 2009.
- 9 Brainstorm ways to become part of the online community at www.LaramieProject.org. If photography is permitted at your site, plan to videotape or take digital photos of your rehearsals, performance and/or residencies.
- 10 Come up with a list of questions you’d like to ask the creators of the Epilogue. Share your questions with the online community at www.LaramieProject.org.

THE LARAMIE PROJECT: TEN YEARS LATER

AN EPILOGUE

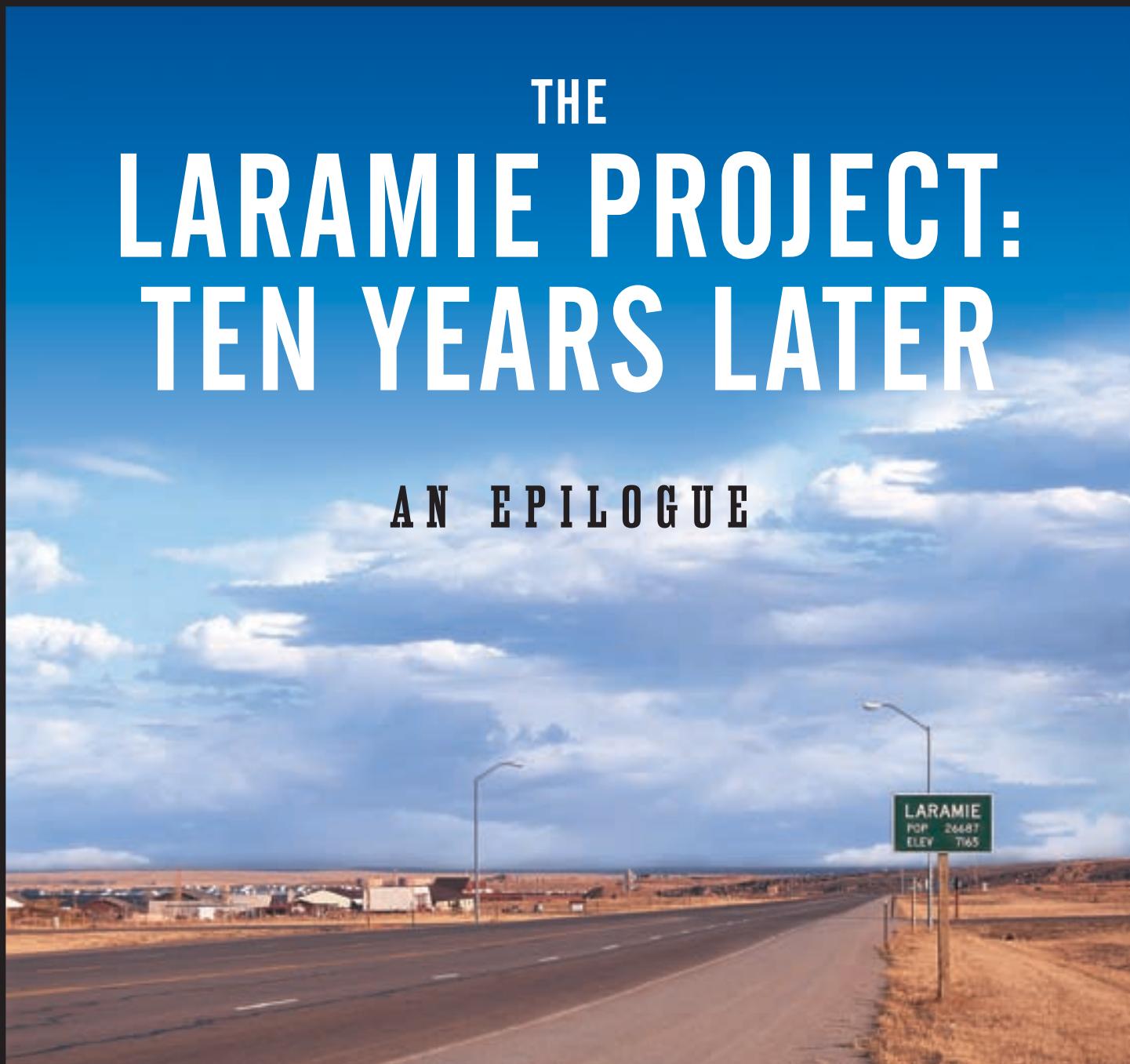


PHOTO: TIM CHESNUT

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Tectonic Theater Project gratefully acknowledges the Rockefeller Foundation, Time Warner and HBO for their generous support of this Audience Guide.



LARAMIE: 'AN OUTDOOR TOWN WITH AN OUTLAW PAST'



MATTHEW TRUMP

“There’s so much space between people and towns here, so much time for reflection.”

—REBECCA HILLIKER,
UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING PROFESSOR,
QUOTED IN *THE LARAMIE PROJECT*

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Tectonic Theater Project

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Laramie, Wyoming—which calls itself “An Outdoor Town with an Outlaw Past”—is famous for its rugged mountains, sprawling prairies and Wild West traditions. Situated in southeastern Wyoming, 130 miles north of Denver and 7,200 feet above sea level, the town is home to some 27,000 residents and to the University of Wyoming, the school Matthew Shepard attended before his murder in 1998.

Founded in the mid-1860s, Laramie is named for Jacques LaRamie, a trapper who was one of the first Europeans to reach the American West. In addition to the city of Laramie, the trapper also lends his name to a mountain range, river, county and U.S. Army fort.

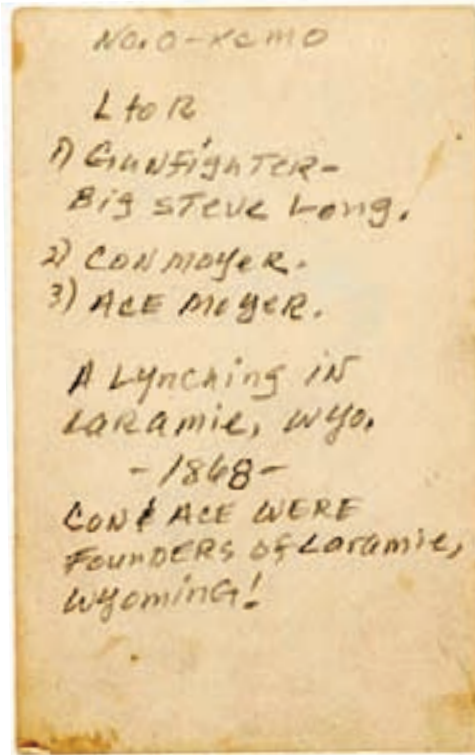
In its early days, the town of Laramie was “ungovernable,” in the words of its first mayor, M.C. Brown, who lasted just three weeks on the job before quitting in 1868. Brown was the object of threats from three half-brothers—“Big” Steve Long, Ace Moyer and Con Moyer—who owned a saloon called Bucket of Blood. The brothers took the law into their own hands, forcing settlers to turn over their property deeds to them. Those who resisted were shot; by October 1868, Long had killed 13 men.

Albany County’s first sheriff, N.K. Boswell, organized a vigilance committee, and on October 28, 1868, led a group of armed men into Bucket of Blood. After overpowering the three brothers,

LARAMIE LYNCHING: This rare photo documents the hanging of Steve Long, Con Moyer and Ace Moyer in October 1868.

“Now, after Matthew, I would say that Laramie is a town defined by an accident, a crime We're a noun, a definition, a sign. We may be able to get rid of that ... but it will sure take a while.”

—JEDADIAH SCHULTZ,
LARAMIE RESIDENT,
IN A 1998 INTERVIEW



Boswell and his men lynched them. A number of other lynchings followed. It took this kind of violence for Boswell to impose a degree of law and order on Laramie.

A year later, in 1869, the Wyoming Territory was organized. In its first session, the Wyoming legislature passed a bill giving women equal political rights—including the right to vote. As the first state to grant this right to women, Wyoming became known as the Equality State. Five female Laramie residents made history in 1870 when they became the first women in the world to serve on a jury. And because Laramie was the first Wyoming town to hold a local election, a Laramie native was the first woman in the United

States to cast a legal ballot when she voted in September 1870.

Laramie's early businesses included a slaughterhouse, a brickyard, a brewery, a glass-blowing plant and a plaster mill. Several railroads were based in Laramie, and in 1886 Governor Francis E. Warren signed a bill that established the University of Wyoming (UW). Laramie was selected as the site, and UW opened there in 1887. The university, the only four-year institution in the state, has grown dramatically and now has a student body of 13,000. Since 2003, UW has hosted the Shepard Symposium for Social Justice, an annual event held to honor Matthew Shepard's memory by focusing on strategies to eliminate inequality and promote justice.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you been to Laramie or have you seen *The Laramie Project* play or film? What actual or imagined images of Laramie have you retained?
2. What are your impressions of Wyoming, and where do these impressions come from? What other depictions of Wyoming have you seen or read about? (Consider *Brokeback Mountain*, other films and news reports.)
3. Why is Wyoming known as the Equality State? In what ways was the state a trailblazer?
4. What is your reaction to the 1868 photograph and caption shown above? What connections do you see between Laramie's history as described in this section and the Matthew Shepard case?

LARAMIE THEN AND NOW: MEASURING CHANGE

Consider the following descriptions of Laramie in 1998 and 2008. Some of these comments come from Laramie residents; others come from outsiders who visited the town and shared their impressions. How might your community or neighborhood be described by visitors or journalists? When you watch the Epilogue, listen for the ways that Laramie residents describe their own town, in contrast to and in concert with the perceptions of outsiders.



NALETTE MARTIN / NEW LIGHT MEDIA



HBO

Journal Entries: 1998

These excerpts are drawn from the script of the original Laramie Project.

COMPANY MEMBER

GREG PIEROTTI: We arrived today in the Denver airport and drove to Laramie. The moment we crossed the Wyoming border I swear I saw a herd of Buffalo. Also, I thought it was strange that the Wyoming sign said: WYOMING—LIKE NO PLACE ON EARTH instead of WYOMING—LIKE NO PLACE ELSE ON EARTH.

COMPANY MEMBER

BARBARA PITTS: We arrived in Laramie tonight. Just past the WELCOME TO LARAMIE sign—POPULATION 26,687—the first thing to greet us was Walmart. In the dark, we could be on any main drag in America—fast-food chains, gas stations. But as we drove into the downtown area by the railroad tracks, the buildings still looked

like a turn-of-the-century western town. Oh, and as we passed the University Inn, on the sign where amenities such as heated pool or cable TV are usually touted, it said: HATE IS NOT A LARAMIE VALUE.

Reporters: 1998

NEWSPERSON 1: Laramie, Wyoming—often called the Gem City of the Plains—is now at the eye of the storm.

NEWSPERSON 2: The cowboy state has its rednecks and yahoos, for sure, but there are no more bigots per capita in Wyoming than there are in New York, Florida or California. The difference is that in Wyoming there are fewer places to blend in if you're anything other than prairie stock....

NEWSPERSON 4: People would like to think that what happened to Matthew was an exception to the rule, but it was an extreme version of what happens in our schools on a daily basis.



THE FIRESIDE BAR,
where Matthew Shepard met
Aaron McKinney and Russell
Henderson on October 7, 1998.

“Laramie hasn’t done much worse or better on gay rights than most other places around the country, so who am I to come in and expect Laramie to be reaching some goal that my own state hasn’t attained?”

—TECTONIC COMPANY MEMBER AND NEW YORK RESIDENT GREG PIEROTTI, IN A 2008 JOURNAL ENTRY

Laramie 2008

In these excerpts from the Epilogue, residents and visitors describe Laramie ten years after Matthew Shepard was killed.

“My gut reaction is that Laramie is a somewhat better place to be than it was ten years ago, but I don’t know how to tell the story of the past ten years without having to think about both what we’ve done, but also what we haven’t done.”

—BETH LOFFREDA,
UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING PROFESSOR

“Arriving into town off Highway 80, I am surprised by how much the town has grown. There is an explosion of new development on the east side. At least three brand new hotels and several strip malls. Walmart has been replaced by Super Walmart.”

—LEIGH FONDAKOWSKI,
MEMBER OF TECTONIC THEATER PROJECT

“Things are going really well and the coffers are filling. Now, some of these communities they’re drilling in are just getting hammered in terms of the environment—the goose that’s laying the golden egg is crapping all over you, but it’s still producing golden eggs.”

—JEFFREY LOCKWOOD
LARAMIE RESIDENT

“How has Laramie changed? These days in Wyoming with the coal-bed methane boom and—the energy industry—like Dick Cheney sold half our state to Halliburton. But people don’t seem to mind.”

—MATT MICKELSON,
FORMER OWNER OF THE FIRESIDE BAR,
WHERE MATTHEW SHEPARD
MET HIS ASSAILANTS.
(THE BAR HAS BEEN SOLD AND
RENAMED JJ’S.)

“On the surface things have changed here—just look around you at the physical growth. But whether or not we have changed the underlying culture of Wyoming at all—I don’t know.”

—REBECCA HILLIKER, THEATER
PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

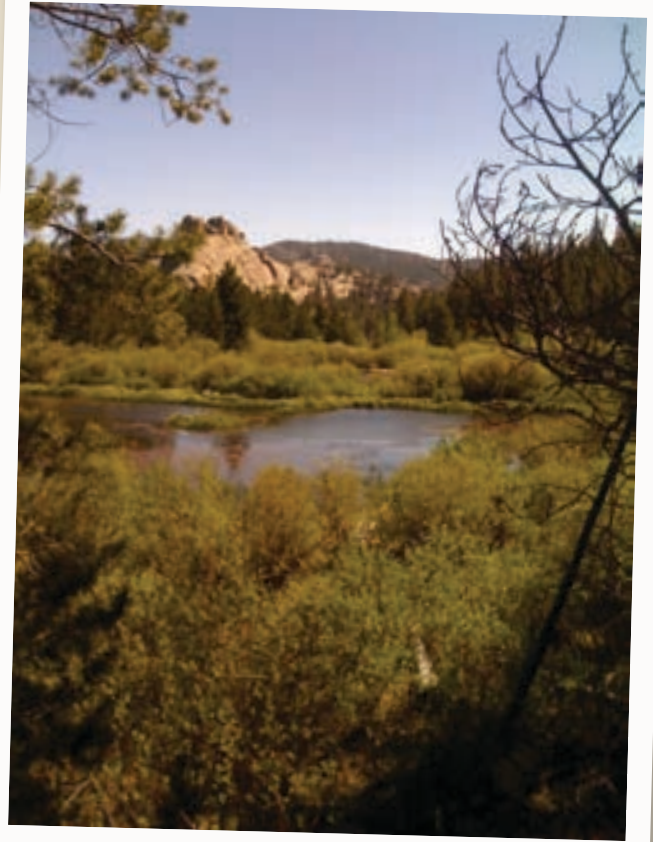
“I think the people who were outraged by Matthew Shepard’s murder are still outraged. I think that hardcore Wyoming faction who said: ‘That little faggot got what he deserved’—they’re still right here and they’re still teaching their children the same thing.”

—ZACKIE SALMON,
LARAMIE RESIDENT

ONE VISITOR'S *Impressions*

Andy Paris, one of the writers of *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*, shared these photos from his trips to Laramie. He offered this background on the images:

"The photos on the prairie are from my walk with [Laramie resident] Jonas Slonaker just outside of Laramie. The ones that are more wooded and mountainous are from my walk with [UW professor] Beth Loffreda in Vedauwoo, a national park between Laramie and Cheyenne. I think the pictures speak for themselves. They are the most succinct answer I've found for people who ask, 'Why does anyone live in Laramie?' Obviously there are many reasons, but this is what everybody talks about first and what is universally acknowledged."





"When I am out and about in Nature around Laramie, I feel free from the bondage and limitations of my small form and am connected to something greater than myself. When I weigh things on the scales in my mind concerning where I want to be and live, the space and nature around Laramie is always Number One on the list. I can drive in any direction from town, and in 10 to 30 minutes be all alone out on the prairie, in the foothills, or in the mountains by a lake or stream, under a tree, or in the full force of the wind. I didn't know Matthew so I don't know what his connection to the land of Wyoming was or if he felt a strong bond to it like I do. However, I do know that the land, the space and the wind were able to absorb and disperse his pain."

—JONAS SLONAKER, UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING ADMINISTRATOR AND OPENLY GAY RESIDENT OF LARAMIE

FOR DISCUSSION OR WRITING

1. According to the residents quoted on pages 4 and 5, how have Laramie in particular and Wyoming in general changed since 1998?
2. What are your reactions to the statement by Jonas Slonaker and to the photos taken by Andy Paris? Does seeing these images make you want to live in or visit a place like Laramie? Why or why not?
3. If your computer can play video, go to <http://media.visitlaramie.org/flash/player> and watch the videos that are presented there. How does Laramie present itself? What image does the town project through these videos?
4. If you were setting out to measure how your town had changed over the course of the last ten years, what would you look for? What questions would you ask? To whom would you talk? Brainstorm a list.
5. As you watch the Epilogue, keep in mind Beth Loffreda's remark that she can't think about the story without reflecting not only on what has been done but on what has not been done, and Rebecca Hilliker's observation that while Laramie may have changed physically, she's not sure how much the underlying culture of Laramie has changed. How would you describe your own neighborhood or community, physically and politically, now and ten years ago? How has it changed and/or grown? How is it changing now? How would you describe its "underlying culture" then and now? What do you think it will look like in ten years? What kind of changes, concrete and abstract, happen over time naturally in a community? How can change be brought about intentionally? If your community has had a watershed moment, consider its short-term and long-term effects.

EXPANDING LAWS AGAINST HATE: THE SHEPARD ACT



NANETTE MARTIN

“One of my highest personal priorities ... is to do everything I can to ensure this critical legislation finally becomes law.”

—U.S. ATTORNEY GENERAL ERIC HOLDER, AT A JUNE 2009 SENATE HEARING ON THE MATTHEW SHEPARD ACT

Hate crimes—also known as bias-motivated crimes—are committed when a perpetrator targets a victim on the basis of his or her perceived race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, nationality, age, gender, gender identity or political affiliation. The role of these personal characteristics (or the *perception* of these characteristics) in motivating the offender is the primary difference between hate crimes and other criminal acts.

Forty-five states and the District of Columbia impose extra penalties for certain types of hate crimes. Thirty states and the District of Columbia have enacted laws that punish hate crimes based on sexual orientation. Wyoming is one of five states that have no hate-crime legislation. State Representative Mike Massie of Laramie has sponsored several anti-bias bills in the Wyoming legislature, but all have failed because of lawmakers’ objections to the inclusion of enhanced penalties for crimes based on sexual orientation. “I am so angry over the fact that it never passed,” Massie said, because Americans outside the state can wonder whether “Wyoming tolerates this kind of thing.” (See the map on page 10 for a state-by-state breakdown of hate-crime laws.)

The Federal Level

Congress passed a national hate-crimes law in 1969; this measure imposes additional penalties for crimes based on a person’s race, color, religion or national origin

when the victim is engaging in a federally protected activity, such as voting or attending school.

The **Matthew Shepard Act** (officially known as the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act, or LLEHCPA) would expand this law to include crimes motivated by a victim’s perceived or actual sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or disability. The bill would also remove the requirement that the victim be engaging in a federally protected activity.

Beyond this, the Shepard Act would give federal officials the power to investigate hate crimes that local authorities elect not to pursue; provide new funding to help state and local agencies prosecute hate crimes; and require the FBI to record statistics on hate crimes committed against transgender people. (Statistics for the other targeted groups are already recorded.)

Arguments Pro and Con

The Shepard Act has a long history of debate in the U.S. Congress. On April 2, 2009, Representative John Conyers of Michigan introduced the measure into the House of Representatives for the fifth time. In urging support for the bill, House Democratic Leader Steny Hoyer declared: “Hate crimes motivated by race, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, and identity or disability not only injure individual victims, but also terrorize entire segments of our population and tear at our nation’s social fabric.”

Judy and Dennis Shepard, 1998



MARLETTE MARTIN / NEW LIGHT MEDIA

HATE CRIMES BY THE NUMBERS

77,000 Total number of hate-crime incidents reported by the FBI between 1998 and 2007—nearly one hate crime for every hour of every day over the span of a decade

7,624 Total number of hate crimes reported in 2007 (the latest year for which figures are available)

4,337 Number of hate crimes in 2007 determined to be motivated by racial bias

1,472 Number of hate crimes in 2007 motivated by religious bias

1,299 Number of hate crimes in 2007 motivated by sexual-orientation bias

Opponents of hate-crime legislation argue that it stifles free speech. James Dobson, founder of the conservative lobbying group Focus on the Family, spoke out against the Shepard Act, contending that it would “muzzle people of faith who dare to express their moral and biblical concerns about homosexuality.” Supporters of the Shepard Act counter this concern by pointing to language in the bill that protects free speech. Explains House Speaker Nancy Pelosi: “The bill does not limit First Amendment rights of free speech and religious expression. The bill only applies to bias-motivated crimes of violence and does not impinge on freedom of speech or religious expression in any way.”

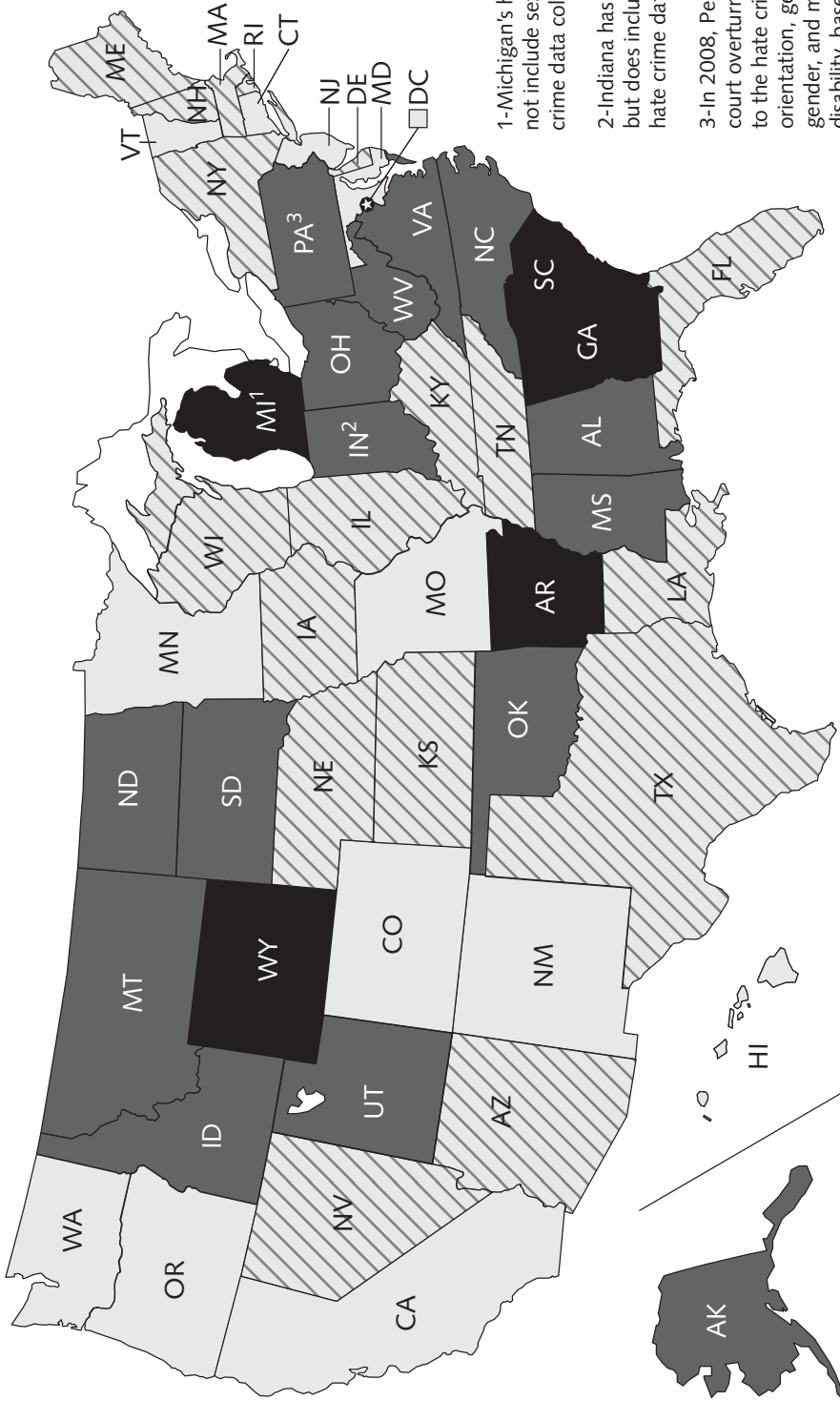
On October 8, 2009, the House voted 281 to 146 to pass the Shepard Act, which has been attached to a bill authorizing \$680 billion in new funding for the Defense Department. Observers expect the measure to pass the Senate before being sent to President Obama, who has vowed to sign it. Pelosi said the timing of the House vote was appropriate. “Monday [October 12] is the 11th anniversary of the murder of Matthew Shepard,” she noted, “and we want in the same week of that tragic event to call the public’s attention once again to people acting upon their hatred in a violent way.” For her part, Judy Shepard is hopeful that the bill will finally make it through Congress and become law. Her reason is simple: “Those two boys thought it was okay to hate and do that to Matt.”

FOR DISCUSSION

1. On the federal level, what sort of crimes are currently covered by hate-crime legislation? What does this legislation do?
2. What is the Matthew Shepard Act and what changes would it bring to America’s legal system?
3. According to the map on page 10, what states have enacted laws that impose additional penalties for crimes based on a victim’s real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity? What states have no hate-crime legislation? What kinds of hate crimes, if any, are covered by laws in your state?
4. Who is James Dobson and why does he object to hate-crime legislation? What is your reaction to the sign pictured on page 8?
5. Through additional research, find at least two editorials or opinion pieces for and against the Matthew Shepard Act. Share the pieces with a partner and discuss: What arguments do the writers make to support their case? Which points do you find most persuasive? Least convincing? Why?
6. What is the status of the Matthew Shepard Act? Where does President Obama stand on this legislation?
7. Do you think *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later* has the potential to influence the views of citizens and lawmakers as they consider expanding hate-crime legislation? In what ways can a piece of theater affect the world of politics? Discuss.

Hate Crime Laws in the U.S.

This map was last updated on: July 14, 2009



1-Michigan's hate crime penalty laws do not include sexual orientation, but hate crime data collection laws do.

2-Indiana has no hate crime penalty laws, but does include sexual orientation in hate crime data collection.

3-In 2008, Pennsylvania's highest court overturned the 2002 amendments to the hate crimes law that added sexual orientation, gender identity, ancestry, gender, and mental and physical disability, based on the procedural way the legislation was passed by the legislature, not the content of the law.

States with hate crime laws that include crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity—12 states & the District of Columbia
California, Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Vermont, Washington

States with hate crime laws that include crimes based on sexual orientation—18 states
Arizona, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Wisconsin

States with hate crime laws that do not include crimes based on sexual orientation or gender identity—15 states
Alabama, Alaska, Idaho, Indiana², Mississippi, Montana, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania³, South Dakota, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia

States that do not have hate crime laws that include crimes based on any characteristics—5 states
Arkansas, Georgia, Michigan¹, South Carolina, Wyoming

THE LARAMIE PROJECT: A CHRONOLOGY

COURTESY ROMAIN PATTERSON



COUNTERING HATE: In April 1999, Romaine Patterson, a close friend of Matthew Shepard, founded Angel Action, an organization dedicated to peaceful demonstration.



Russell Henderson, left, and Aaron McKinney were convicted of murdering Matthew Shepard.

DECEMBER 1, 1976

Matthew Shepard is born in Casper, Wyoming.

SEPTEMBER 1996

Shepard begins his studies at the University of Wyoming, where he majors in political science.

OCTOBER 7, 1998

Shortly after midnight, Shepard meets Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson at the Fireside Bar in Laramie. After posing as gay men and offering Shepard a ride home, McKinney and Henderson rob him, pistol-whip him, tie him with rope and stretch him along a fence on the outskirts of Laramie.

OCTOBER 7, 1998

Eighteen hours after the beating, a biker finds Shepard tied to the fence, brutally beaten and unconscious. The biker initially mistakes Shepard for a scarecrow.

OCTOBER 8, 1998

McKinney and Henderson are arrested and arraigned on charges

of kidnapping, aggravated robbery and attempted first-degree murder.

OCTOBER 12, 1998

Shepard dies at Poudre Valley Health Center after five days in a coma.

NOVEMBER 1998

Members of New York City's Tectonic Theater Project arrive in Laramie to conduct interviews for a play that examines the effects of Shepard's killing on the town.

APRIL 5, 1999

Henderson pleads guilty to felony murder and is sentenced to two consecutive life sentences.

NOVEMBER 4, 1999

At his trial, McKinney invokes the "gay panic defense"—the argument that he was driven to temporary insanity by Shepard's alleged sexual advances. McKinney and Henderson's girlfriends testify under oath that their boyfriends plotted beforehand to rob a gay man. McKinney is convicted of first-degree felony murder and second-degree murder. He is spared the death penalty after a speech by Dennis Shepard, Matthew's father, and receives two consecutive life sentences.

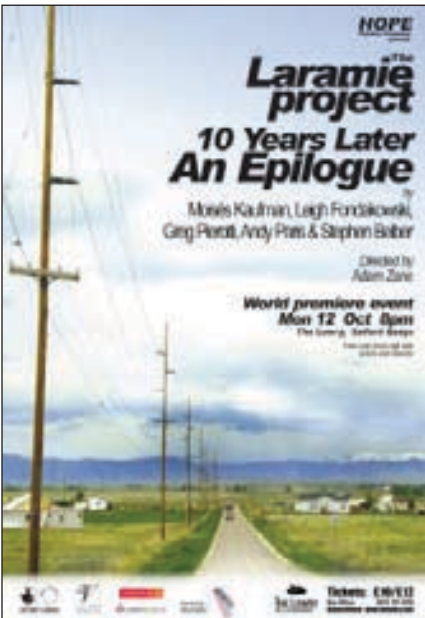
FEBRUARY 2000

The Laramie Project play opens at the Denver Center Theater.



EVOLUTION OF THE EPILOGUE:

Tectonic Theater Project company members Andy Paris (left) and Greg Pierotti (third from left) participated in readings of the Epilogue script during the summer of 2009.



INTERNATIONAL IMPACT: Hope Theatre Company in Manchester, England will present one of the approximately 150 performances of *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*.

MAY 2000

The play moves to The Union Square Theater in New York City.

NOVEMBER 2000

The play debuts in Laramie.

MARCH 2002

The Laramie Project film premieres on HBO.

2003

The University of Wyoming renames its annual Social Justice Symposium to honor Matthew Shepard.

NOVEMBER 26, 2004

ABC's *20/20* airs a segment entitled "Matthew Shepard: Secrets of a Murder" featuring interviews with McKinney and Henderson. Reporter Elizabeth Vargas states in the introduction to the segment that "money and drugs motivated [the killers'] actions that night, not hatred of gays."

FALL 2008

Members of Tectonic Theater Project return to Laramie to

interview local residents on the 10th anniversary of Shepard's death.

NOVEMBER 4, 2008

University of Wyoming professor Catherine Connolly becomes the first openly gay or lesbian member of the Wyoming legislature; Barack Obama is elected America's 44th President. Obama pledges to support the Matthew Shepard Act, which would expand federal hate-crimes laws to include crimes motivated by a victim's actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or disability.

SEPTEMBER 2009

Judy Shepard, Matthew's mother and an active campaigner on behalf of federal hate-crime legislation, publishes a new book, *The Meaning of Matthew: My Son's Murder in Laramie, and a World Transformed*.

SEPTEMBER 24, 2009

Rep. Jim McDermott of Washington State introduces House Resolution 777 "honoring all those participating in a production of *The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later* in remembrance of Matthew Shepard." To view the full text of this resolution, see pages 12 and 13 of this guide.

OCTOBER 12, 2009

The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later—An Epilogue premieres in approximately 150 cities around the world. More than 1,000 actors participate in this event, which is seen by tens of thousands of audience members.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES RESOLUTION 777



111TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. RES. 777

I

Honoring all those participating in a production of “The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later” in remembrance of Matthew Shepard.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 24, 2009

Mr. McDERMOTT (for himself, Ms. BALDWIN, Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts, and Mr. POLIS of Colorado) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary

RESOLUTION

Honoring all those participating in a production of “The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later” in remembrance of Matthew Shepard.

Whereas Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old student at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, Wyoming, was beaten and tortured, tied to a wooden fence, and left for dead, due to his sexual orientation;

Whereas Matthew Shepard died as a result of his injuries on October 12, 1998, in a Colorado hospital, surrounded by his loving family and friends;

Whereas the highly acclaimed play “The Laramie Project” was written in reaction to the murder of Matthew Shepard, based on hundreds of interviews conducted by members of the Tectonic Theater Project with residents of Laramie, journal entries of Project members, and news reports;

Whereas “The Laramie Project”, since its first performance in 2000, has been among the most performed plays in America;

Whereas on Monday, October 12, 2009, on the 11th anniversary of Matthew Shepard’s death, dozens of theaters across the United States will simultaneously debut an 80- minute epilogue to “The Laramie Project” entitled “The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later”;

Whereas the writers of the “The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later”
are Tectonic Theater Project members Moisés Kaufman, Leigh
Fondakowski, Greg Pierotti, Andy Paris, and Stephen Belber;

2

Whereas “The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later” focuses on the long-
term effects of the murder of Matthew Shepard on the town of
Laramie, Wyoming, exploring how the town has changed and how
the murder continues to reverberate through the community; and

Whereas “The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later” will be performed
in New York at Lincoln Center’s Alice Tully Hall, and at over 100
other theaters in all 50 States, including the Seattle Repertory
Theater; the Arena Stage in Washington, DC; Cuyahoga
Community College in Cleveland, Ohio; Lied Center for the
Performing Arts in Lincoln, Nebraska; Williams Theatre in
Tulsa, Oklahoma; and the Berkeley Repertory Theater; and will
also be performed in Canada, Great Britain, Spain, Hong Kong,
and Aus-tralia: Now, therefore, be it *resolved*, That the House of
Representatives —

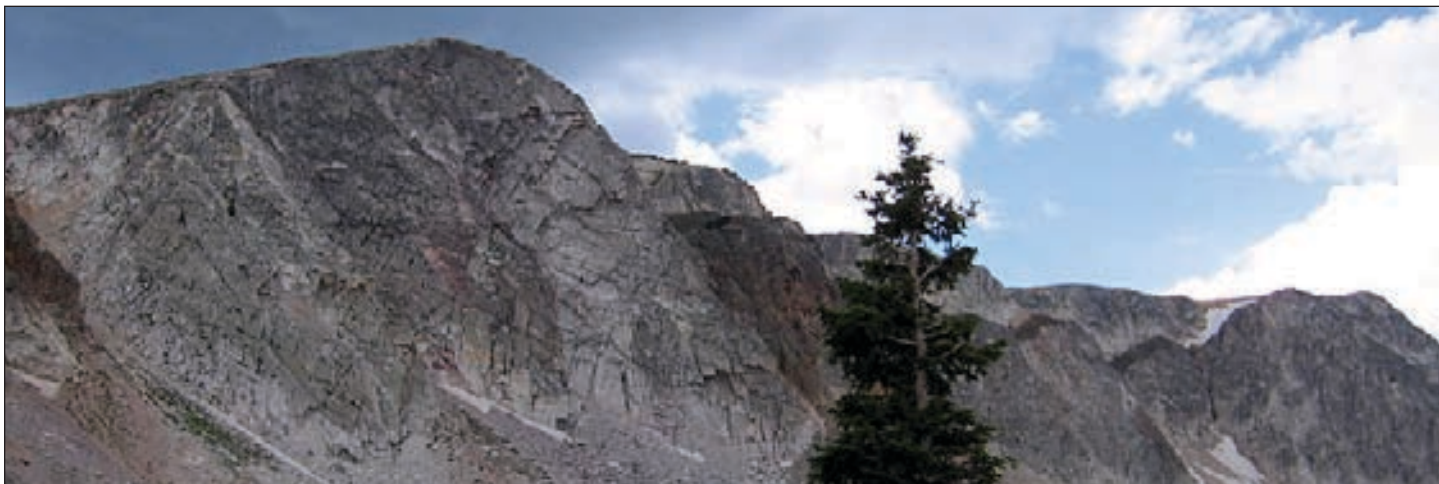
1 (1) honors all those participating in a produc-
2 tion of “The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later” in
3 remembrance of Matthew Shepard;

4 (2) expresses its continuing condemnation of all
5 violent acts motivated by hatred, including the tor-
6 ture and murder of Matthew Shepard, and com-
7 mends the involvement of all Americans in building
8 a more civil and tolerant society; and

9 (3) congratulates the participants and patrons
10 involved for continuing to engage in activities that
11 raise awareness of hate crimes in our society.

○

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION



Books

Kaufman, Moisés and the Members of Tectonic Theater Project. *The Laramie Project* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001). The script of the original *Laramie Project* play, now one of the most frequently performed works of theater in America.

Loffreda, Beth. *Losing Matt Shepard: Life and Politics in the Aftermath of Anti-Gay Murder* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). Loffreda, a professor at the University of Wyoming, analyzes the impact and media coverage of Shepard's killing, paying particular attention to issues of class, race, homophobia and gender.

Patterson, Romaine. *The Whole World Was Watching: Living in the Light of Matthew Shepard* (New York: Advocate Books, 2005). An account of one woman's journey into international political activism.

Shepard, Judy. *The Meaning of Matthew: My Son's Murder in Laramie, and a World Transformed* (New York: Hudson Street, 2009).

Matthew Shepard's mother shares her story about her son's death and the decision she made to become an international gay rights activist.

Videos

The Laramie Project (2002, 97 min.). Directed by Moisés Kaufman, this HBO film chronicles a town forced to confront itself in the reflective glare of the national spotlight. Cast includes Steve Buscemi, Kathleen Chalfant, Peter Fonda, Janeane Garofalo, Laura Linney and Christina Ricci.

ABC News 20/20: The Matthew Shepard Case (2004, 44 min.). This controversial and widely discredited report argues that money and drugs, not hatred of gays, motivated Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson to kill Matthew Shepard.

In the Life: Setting the Record Straight. This PBS newsmagazine offers an in-depth rebuttal of the arguments made in the 20/20 piece on Matthew Shepard, examining the sources and methodology to discover what was missing from ABC's

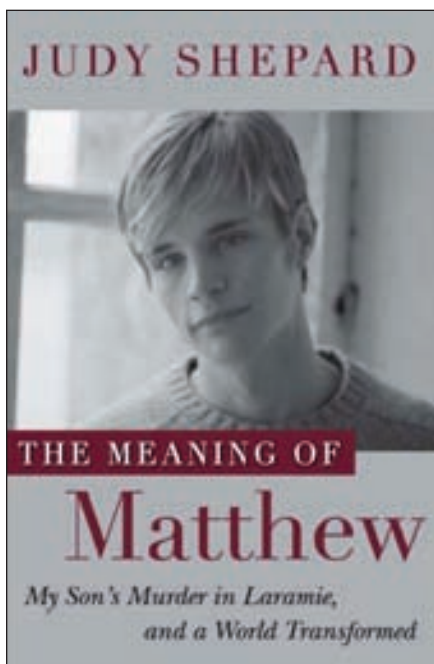
report. Podcast available for viewing at <http://www.inthelifevtv.org/html/episodes/27.html>

Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin (2003, 84 min.). This award-winning portrait of the "unknown hero" of the civil rights movement illuminates the life and work of an African American activist, strategist and mentor to Martin Luther King Jr. who dared to live as an openly gay man. <http://rustin.org>

Licensed to Kill (1997, 77 min.). Profiles men whose hatred of gay men led them to commit murder. www.deepfocusproductions.com/licensed_to_kill.php

Milk (2008, 128 min.). An Academy Award-winning feature film, starring Sean Penn and directed by Gus Van Sant, about Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official in America, who was assassinated in 1978.

The Times of Harvey Milk (1984, 87 min.). An Academy Award-winning documentary on Harvey Milk.



“The one skill that I think we’ve all developed over time, and that we definitely had a crash course in, is just listening. Listening and stepping back with our own points of view and actually letting somebody speak his or her truth.”

—GREG PIEROTTI, MEMBER OF THE LARAMIE PROJECT WRITING TEAM, QUOTED IN AN ONLINE INTERVIEW AT MATTHEW’S PLACE

Websites and Organizations

<http://www.laramieproject.org>

The online community of *The Laramie Project*, featuring blogs, photos, videos and forums.

<http://www.matthewshepard.com>

Resources and news from the Matthew Shepard Foundation, which works to replace hate with understanding and acceptance. “Matthew’s Place” features extensive information on Matthew Shepard’s life and legacy.

[http://www.matthewshepard.org/site/PageServer?pagename=VoicesTectonic Theater Project](http://www.matthewshepard.org/site/PageServer?pagename=VoicesTectonicTheaterProject)

In-depth interview with the team of writers who created *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*.

www.timeclassroom.com/laramie

Student magazine, teacher’s guide and resources from TIME Magazine to accompany HBO’s *Laramie Project* film.

<http://www.readromaine.com/site/laramie.htm>

Romaine Patterson’s website, with background on Angel Action and gallery of *Laramie Project* photos.

www.tolerance.org

Readings, activities, free teaching kits and resources to combat hate and promote tolerance.

www.glsen.org

Materials for teachers and students from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network.

www.glaad.org

Resources and action campaigns from the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation.

www.partnersagainsthate.org

Extensive information on hate crimes.

http://www.adl.org/combating_hate

Tools to fight bigotry from the Anti-Defamation League.

<http://www.visitlaramie.org>

Background on Laramie, including videos on history and culture, from the Albany County Tourism Board.

www.uwyo.edu The University of Wyoming’s website.

Articles and Periodicals

<http://www.laramieboomerang.com>

The Laramie Boomerang, providing local Laramie news. To read a five-part series published on the 10th anniversary of Shepard’s death, click on the Archives link, then enter “Matthew Shepard” in the Advanced Search field and October 2008 in the date field.

www.nytimes.com/2009/09/27/magazine/27out-t.html

New York Times Sunday Magazine cover story on teens who come out in middle school.

<http://content.usatoday.com/topics/topic/Matthew+Shepard>

Collection of all *USATODAY.com* coverage of Matthew Shepard, including articles, videos, photos and quotes.

THE LARAMIE PROJECT: TEN YEARS LATER

AN EPILOGUE



PHOTO: TIM CHESNUT

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Tectonic Theater Project gratefully acknowledges the Rockefeller Foundation, Time Warner and HBO for their generous support of this Audience Guide.

Time Warner

HBO

TECTONIC
THEATER PROJECT

EXAMINING MOMENTS FROM *THE LARAMIE PROJECT: TEN YEARS LATER*

The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later is created from a series of “moments,” or units of theatrical time. The moments are not presented in strict chronological order, but they are juxtaposed with one another to form a compelling dramatic arc. To learn more about Tectonic Theater Project’s “Moment Work” technique, see the box at right.

As you watch the Epilogue, take note of each of the 31 moments within the play. If you are working in a group, consider assigning a moment (or more than one if necessary) to each member or small group of members. A list of the play’s 31 moments appears on page 3; moments to study may be assigned alphabetically or by writing moment titles on slips of paper and drawing them out of a hat. Ask each member or group to track the moment and report on it using the questions on page 3.



Tasmania’s ReAct Theatre presented a production of *The Laramie Project* in 2008.

WHAT IS MOMENT WORK?

Tectonic Theater Project uses a technique known as Moment Work to develop plays. By combining primary-source material drawn from interviews, documents and other sources, the writers create pieces of theater based on “moments,” or units of theatrical time, as opposed to traditionally delineated scenes and acts. Both *The Laramie Project* and the *Epilogue* were created this way.

In his introduction to *The Laramie Project*, Moisés Kaufman explains:

When writing this play, we used a technique I developed called ‘moment work.’ It is a method to create and analyze theater from a structuralist (or tectonic) perspective. For that reason, there are no “scenes” in this play, only “moments.” A “moment” does not mean a change of locale, or an entrance or exit of characters. It is simply a unit of theatrical time, which is then juxtaposed with other units to convey meaning.

Even without conventional scenes, *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later* still has identifiable elements of theater. There is a setting—Laramie, Wyoming—although it is not denoted by backdrops and decorated sets. There are characters who appear and reappear; there is a plot with a beginning, middle and end; and there are themes and motifs running throughout the piece.

The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later

WRITERS Moisés Kaufman,
Leigh Fondakowski,
Greg Pierotti, Andy Paris
and Stephen Belber

DRAMATURG Jimmy Maize

Audience Guide to *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*

WRITERS [Bennett Singer](#) and
[Ellen Gordon Reeves](#)

DESIGN [ShapiroDesign](#)

[Tectonic Theater Project](#)

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR Moisés Kaufman
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR Greg Reiner



A poster from Theatre Cedar Rapids' production of *The Laramie Project*.

“ We talk a lot, within the company, about the poetry of the vernacular. How ordinary people have certain turns of phrases or they articulate things in ways where literally it’s like poetry. You can feel it in the moment, you experience it in the moment; you almost can’t wait to put it on stage. ”

—LEIGH FONDAKOWSKI,
MEMBER OF THE LARAMIE PROJECT
WRITING TEAM

Moments in Focus: Questions To Consider

What is the title of your moment? Why do you think this title was chosen? What would you rename it?

What characters appear in your moment? Have you encountered them before? Discuss the reliability of each speaker, his or her biases, and his or her stance or opinion. Do you agree or disagree with anything being said?

What happens in your moment?

What do you take away from your moment? What struck you most? Why do you think the writers chose to include this material in the Epilogue?

What, if anything, don’t you understand about your moment? What questions do you have?

How does your moment relate to the moments immediately before and after it? To other moments?

Consider the process by which the moment was created. What is the value of hearing the actual words of Laramie residents? Recall places in the script where the play “announces itself”—that is, points at which the making of the play is incorporated into the play itself. For example, company members talk about wanting to interview people. And in Act II, Greg Pierotti says to Aaron McKinney, “So you know we wrote a play and you are a character in it?,” to which McKinney responds: “Yeah, I heard about it. I heard about it but I never saw it. I don’t know what I say in it.”

MOMENTS IN THE EPILOGUE

(Please note: This list is subject to change in performance.)

ACT I

The Light This Fall

Good Energy

2nd and Garfield

Strip Mall

Third and Custer

Reggie and Marge

Safe Pocket

Boomerang #1: Deb Thomsen

Measuring Change #1

Bench Dedication

Father Roger

Lucy Thompson

Next Generation

20/20

Smarter Than That

Romaine Patterson

Boomerang #2: “Our View”

Visible Markers

Boomerang #3: The Story We’ve
Told Ourselves

Shame

Potluck

The Investigating Officers

ACT II

Russell Henderson

Institutional Change

Language of Delay

Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA)

Measuring Change #2

Remorse

Aaron McKinney

Judy Shepard

Legacy

WRITING A REVIEW OF *THE LARAMIE PROJECT: TEN YEARS LATER*



MEDIA FRENZY: Both *The Laramie Project* and *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later* chronicle the media's role in constructing the story of Matthew Shepard's death.

BILL WILLIAMS

““ [*The Laramie Project*] portrays an American town with grace, truth, theatrical economy, compassion, wit, despair and love. [It proves that] theater can serve as witness to our deeds. It's we who must answer one by one, for what we all create and what we destroy together.””

—FROM A [SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE REVIEW](#) OF THE ORIGINAL *LARAMIE PROJECT*

Theater critics across the country and around the world may be reviewing the October 12 premiere of *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*. You may choose to write your own review of the performance at your site. Whether you read the critiques of others or write an analysis of your own, there are several theatrical elements and terms with which you should be familiar (see list on page 5).

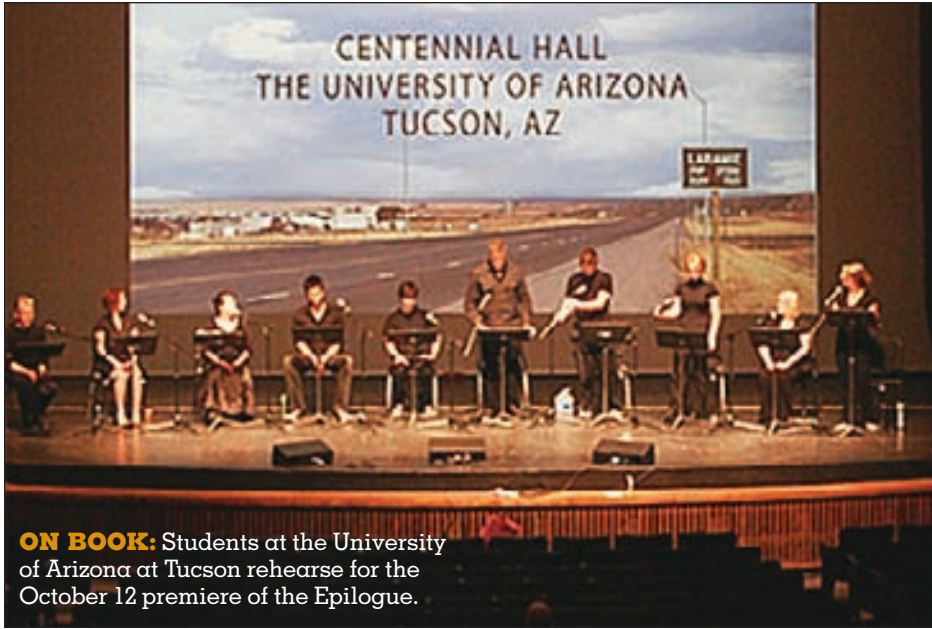
A good reviewer always supports his or her opinions with facts, descriptions, reasons and specific details. Bear in mind that a “reading” is just that: a reading of a script by actors without elaborate sets, staging, costuming, or props.

As you watch on October 12, note the following at your site. How are the actors dressed? Is it clear who is portraying which characters? What denotes a new moment? What kind of program is offered, if any? Who is the director?

Producer? Lighting designer? Is there a special set, costumes or props? How is lighting used?

What themes and ideas does the play tackle, and what impact does it have on you? What do you see as the message of the play? What choices has the director made in presenting the Epilogue? What is your opinion of the pacing of the production? Are there moments that you find particularly moving? Powerful? Sad? Funny? Surprising?

To see sample reviews of the original *Laramie Project* play and film, go to www.google.com and type in “Laramie Project” and “reviews” in the search field. You’ll find hundreds of critiques there. Once you’ve expressed your own opinions on paper, see what others had to say after October 12, 2009, by searching for local, national and international reviews of the Epilogue.



ON BOOK: Students at the University of Arizona at Tucson rehearse for the October 12 premiere of the Epilogue.

TERMS AND PEOPLE TO KNOW AND WATCH FOR

The following terms, people and places are all related to *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*. Look up each one before or after you see the play.

- Epilogue
- Structuralist
- Tectonic
- Hallie Flanagan/The Federal Theater Project
- Hate Crime
- Code Yellow
- “Tweaking”
- Meth
- Mormons
- Excommunication
- Definitions of tolerance and acceptance
- Definitions of shame and remorse
- Folklorist
- Reaction Formation
- Homophobia
- Rumor
- Urban Myth
- *Brokeback Mountain*
- Esther Hobart
- Nellie Taylor Ross
- Tom Buchanan
- Dave Freudenthal
- Nature versus nurture
- Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA)
- Prop. 8
- House Joint Resolution 17
- The Matthew Shepard Act
- *Ice Man*
- Dolly Parton
- *Our Town*
- “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”

ELEMENTS OF THE THEATER

Consider these terms as you watch the performance and write your review.

Blocking: Instructions that actors use to know exactly where they are supposed to be on stage at all times

Cast: People who perform in a show

Characters (*dramatis personae*): People in the play portrayed by actors

Costumes: Clothes worn by the cast

Company: Cast and crew and any other people who work on a show

Director: Person who provides the vision of how a show should be presented, who works with the actors on their roles, develops the blocking/staging, and is in charge of rehearsals

Dramaturg: Person who advises a playwright and director on the creation and editing of a script (the text of the play).

Lighting Designer: Person who designs the lighting for a show and works with the director to get desired effects

Narrator: Company member who explains and/or comments on the action

On Book: When company members read from their scripts

Playwright: Author of a play (dramatist)

Props: All the items used in a play to tell the story, not including the scenery or costumes; short for “properties”

Set: Setting of the stage for each act and all the physical things that are used to change the stage for the performance

Setting: Where the play unfolds

Theme: Main idea explored in the play

VOICES OF A COMMUNITY: STUDYING THE CHARACTERS IN THE EPILOGUE



BILL WILLIAMS

HATE AND HOPE: Characters in both *The Laramie Project* and the Epilogue share their views on an array of social issues—and on the process of creating change.

Divide up the character list below (presented here in alphabetical order according to first name) and assign each person several characters to follow throughout the play.

After viewing *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*, identify each character and his or her role in events as they unfold. Assess the reliability of each character in terms of his or her role, background and biases. Do you agree or disagree with any of your character's stances and opinions? Explain.

Aaron McKinney: Convicted murderer of Matthew Shepard

Andy Paris: Member, Tectonic Theatre Project

Ben: Laramie resident, guest at dinner party

Beth Loffreda: Professor, University of Wyoming, author of the book *Losing Matt Shepard*

Catherine Connelly: Professor, University of Wyoming

Chairman Childers: Conservative Representative in Wyoming legislature

Clerk in Wyoming legislature

Cowboy at health clinic

Current students at University of Wyoming campus

Dave O'Malley: Retired Laramie police officer, lead investigator on the Matthew Shepard case for Laramie Police Department

Deb Thomsen: Editor of the *Laramie Boomerang*, local Laramie newspaper

Dennis Shepard: Father of Matthew Shepard

Father Roger Schmit: Catholic priest at the Catholic Newman Center in Laramie at the time of Matthew Shepard's murder

Gene Pratt: Russell Henderson's Mormon home teacher

George: Laramie resident, guest at dinner party

Glen Silber: Producer, *20/20*

Governor Dave Freudenthal: Governor of Wyoming

Greg Pierotti: Member, Tectonic Theater Project

Jan Lundhurst: Laramie resident

Jedediah Shultz: Laramie native, character in the original play; university theater student now living in NYC and pursuing an acting career

Jeffrey Lockwood: Laramie resident

Jerry Parkinson: Dean of the Law School, University of Wyoming, advocate for domestic partner benefits

Jim Osborne: Friend of Matthew Shepard, Laramie resident

Jim: Laramie resident, guest at dinner party

John Dorst: Professor, University of Wyoming, folklorist and Laramie resident

Jon Peacock: Matthew Shepard's former academic advisor

Jonas Slonaker: Openly gay Laramie resident

Judy Shepard: Mother of Matthew Shepard

Leigh Fondakowski: Member, Tectonic Theater Project

Lucy Thompson: Grandmother of convicted murderer Russell Henderson

Marge Murray: Mother of police officer Reggie Fluty

Matt Michelson: Former owner of the Fireside Bar

Moisés Kaufman: Artistic Director, Tectonic Theater Project

Narrator

Other representatives of Wyoming legislature

Peterson: Republican Representative in Wyoming legislature

Rebecca Hilliker: Theatre professor, University of Wyoming

Reggie Fluty: Police officer who found Matthew Shepard at the fence

Rental car agent in Laramie

Rob DeBree: Albany County Sheriff's department, investigator on the Matthew Shepard case

Romaine Patterson: Friend of Matthew Shepard, gay activist

Russell Henderson: Convicted murderer of Matthew Shepard

Shoppers at a strip mall in Laramie

Stephen Belber: Member, Tectonic Theater Project

Susan Swapp: Laramie resident
University official

Zackie Salmon: Laramie resident and advocate for domestic-partner benefits at University of Wyoming

IMPRESSIONS OF MATTHEW: THEN...

Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old student at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, became a national symbol following the brutal beating that led to his death on October 12, 1998.

His murder became a rallying point in the national campaign against hate and homophobia. Raised in Casper, Wyoming, Matthew was a political-science major with an interest in theater. He hoped to enter politics or to become a diplomat.

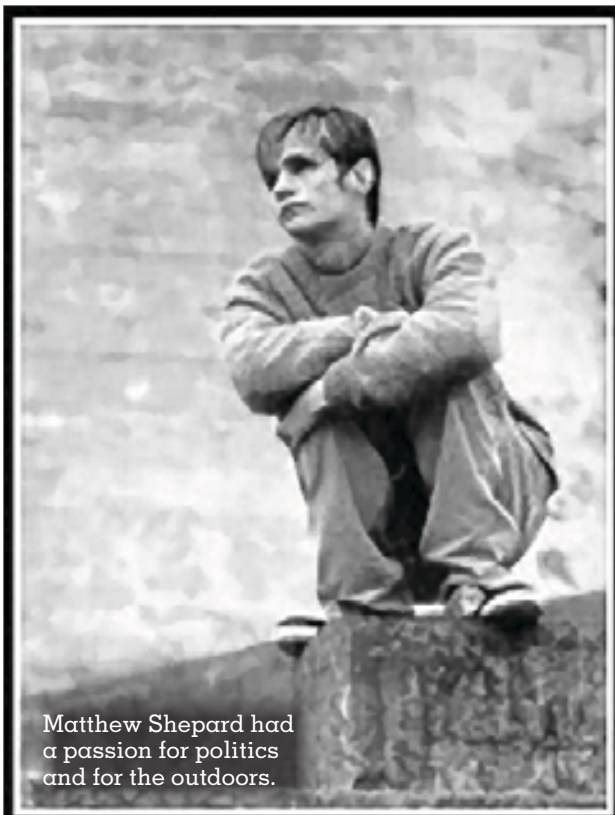
An avid outdoorsman, he had a passion for camping, hunting, fishing and skiing. His parents, Judy and Dennis Shepard, spoke of their son's compassionate nature: "If this had happened to another person," said Dennis Shepard, "he would have been the first person to offer his help, his hope and his heart to the family."

In *The Laramie Project*, the writers

made the decision not to include Matthew as a character who appears on stage. How is he evoked in the original *Laramie Project* and in the Epilogue? What have you learned about Matthew? What are your sources? How reliable is the information you have? Consider these impressions of Matthew from *The Laramie Project* (1998):

"We never called him Matthew, actually. Most of the time we called him 'Choo-choo.' You know, because we used to call him Mat Chew, and then we just called him Choo-choo. And whenever I think of Matthew, I always think of his incredible beaming smile. I mean, he'd walk in and he'd ... smile at everyone ... he just made you feel great But Matthew definitely had a political side to him ... I mean, he wanted to get into political affairs ... that's all his big interest was, watching CNN and MSNBC, I mean, that's the only TV station I ever saw his TV tuned in to. He was just really smart in political affairs, but not too smart on like common sense things ... So he moves to Laramie and goes to school ... I did hear from Matthew about forty-eight hours before his attack. And he told me that he had joined the gay and lesbian group on campus, and he said he was enjoying it. You know, he was getting ready for Pride Week and what not. I mean, he was totally stoked about school—yeah, he was really happy about being there."

—ROMAINE PATTERSON,
CLOSE FRIEND OF MATTHEW SHEPARD



Matthew Shepard had a passion for politics and for the outdoors.

GINA VAN HOOF

“Matthew was very shy when he came in. To the point of being somewhat mousy, I’d almost say. He was having some difficulties adjusting, but this was home for him and he made that quite clear. And so his mousiness, his shyness gave way to a person who was excited about this track that he was going to embark on. He was just figuring out wanting to work on human rights, how he was going to do that. And when that happens this person begins to bloom a little bit. He was starting to say, ‘Wow, there are opportunities here. There are things I can do in this world. I can be important.’ And in retrospect—and I can only say this in retrospect, of course—I think that’s where he was heading, towards human rights. Which only adds to the irony and tragedy of this.”

—JON PEACOCK,
MATTHEW SHEPARD’S ACADEMIC ADVISOR

“I cannot imagine anyone who has done more for this community than Matthew Shepard.”

—FATHER ROGER SCHMIT,
CATHOLIC PRIEST IN LARAMIE

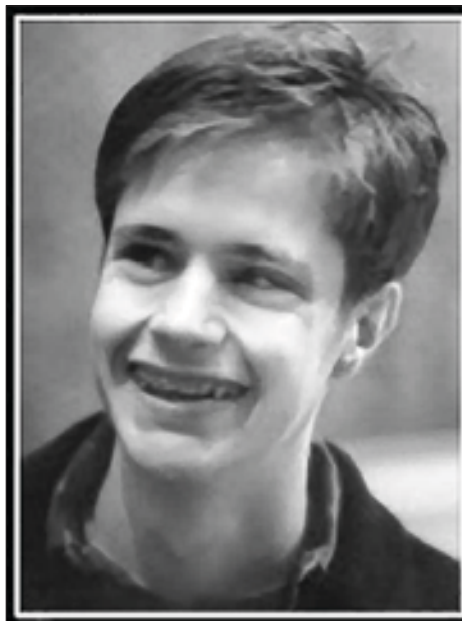
...AND NOW

As you watch the Epilogue, make a distinction between **fact** on the one hand and **rumor** or **speculation** on the other. How much do we know about Matthew Shepard from the text of the Epilogue? What impressions of him as a person do you glean from the Epilogue? What false allegations are levied against him? What questions remain? How can you find answers to those questions?

Now read the following quotation from Romaine Patterson. Discuss the dichotomy she talks about. Why do you think the writers chose this text as the last statement of the Epilogue?

“Over the years I’ve kind of defined Matthew in two ways. There’s Matt who I knew and the good friend that I had, and then there’s Matthew Shepard. And Matthew Shepard is very different from Matt. Matthew Shepard is this iconic hate crime that has happened in our history, and Matthew Shepard is not necessarily about Matt, it’s about a community’s reaction, it is about the media that followed, it is about the crime, but it’s not about Matt. And that was a distinction that I had to make, making my way through this storm over the years, so that I could hold on to who Matt was to me personally, but also to recognize the importance of Matthew Shepard, and that story, and how it was told and will continue to be told throughout the years.”

—ROMAINE PATTERSON,
CLOSE FRIEND OF MATTHEW SHEPARD



Portraits of Matthew Shepard.

SCRIPT ANALYSIS: EXCERPT AND ACTIVITIES



Front page of *The Laramie Boomerang*, November 5, 2008.

On the tenth anniversary of Matthew Shepard's death, the *Laramie Boomerang* published an editorial entitled "Laramie Is a Community, Not a 'Project.'"

1. Read the following excerpt from the Epilogue script about a letter to the editor that Laramie resident Jonas Slonaker wrote to the *Boomerang* in response to the editorial. Discuss Slonaker's outrage at the editorial and his thoughts when his rebuttal goes unpublished. You may want to assign roles and act out the scene or stage a reading of these two moments.
2. Visit the *Laramie Boomerang's* website at www.laramieboomerang.com and read the five-part series published on the tenth anniversary of Shepard's death. Click on the Archives link, then enter "Matthew Shepard" in the Advanced Search field and October 8 in the date field.
3. Write your own letter to the editor of the *Boomerang* or to your local newspaper after seeing the Epilogue. You may choose to focus on the performance, to discuss issues raised by the play in general, or to share your thoughts on the way these issues are playing out in your community.



MOMENT: BOOMERANG #2—"OUR VIEW"

NARRATOR

Company member Andy Paris

ANDY PARIS

Over the course of our stay in Laramie, there had been a couple of articles printed in the *Laramie Boomerang* about the upcoming anniversary of Matthew's death. These were the articles that the editor Deb Thomsen had mentioned to Moisés. This morning, I got a call from Jonas Slonaker. And he said,

JONAS SLONAKER

Did you see the paper today? You've got to read the editorial. You're not going to believe it, it's called: "Our View. Laramie is a community, not a 'project.'"

NARRATOR

An excerpt from an editorial written in the *Laramie Boomerang*, Sunday,

October 12, 2008: the anniversary of Matthew Shepard's death.

BOOMERANG EDITOR (STANDS)

The recent news story in *The Boomerang* looking back to the brutal murder of Matthew Shepard 10 years ago has drawn a wide range of reactions from this community. The biggest reaction has come from those who don't understand why this anniversary qualifies as news.

Some callers have requested that their paper delivery be held during the week that the series of stories was being published. Others have accepted that the local newspaper had to do a story about the anniversary given the national notoriety but wished that the coverage could have been less detailed and displayed more discreetly.

JONAS SLONAKER

Can you believe that?

BOOMERANG EDITOR

A far smaller number of messages have come from people who wanted much more exhaustive reporting.

Direct observation and discussion with the wide range of local residents tells us that Laramie is like most communities but more tolerant than most. That doesn't mean there aren't prejudiced or bigoted people here. There are. But those people don't define Laramie, and it is infuriating for those of us who consider this our home to be labeled because of the actions of a few questionable characters.

That label is particularly galling in this case because the crime in question has been portrayed in the national media as a homophobic attack and as a hate crime because Matthew Shepard was homosexual. But no one can know that motivation except for the two men who committed the crime.

COURTESY JONAS SLONAKER



Jonas Slonaker

“ The Matthew Shepard murder flies in the face of who we are, the story we’ve told ourselves, and so you’ve either got to radically adjust your story or you’ve got to throw out the data. And so far what we’ve done is throw out the data.”

—JEFFREY LOCKWOOD
LARAMIE RESIDENT

JONAS SLONAKER

Andy, they had a trial and it was established as a hate crime. That’s why they had a trial. That’s what a trial is for, so that we can learn these things!

BOOMERANG EDITOR

Police records certainly seem to indicate that this was a robbery that went very bad.

JONAS SLONAKER

What police records are they referring to? A robbery? I tie you up and smash your head in because I want to rob you? It’s absurd! And this is Laramie’s main newspaper.

BOOMERANG EDITOR

But those who wanted to label Laramie as a bigoted town in the Wild West didn’t let the facts get in the way of their stories. So who then is guilty of intolerance and perpetuating stereotypes? (*SITS*)

JONAS SLONAKER (ANGRY)

A robbery gone bad over drugs, I mean, what? It’s just crazy. And that’s denial. That’s some kind of massive denial.

When I saw this I was so furious and so insane I wanted to leave Laramie.

ANDY PARIS

Jonas wrote a letter to the editor.

JONAS SLONAKER (STANDS)

“Many citizens of Laramie want to move on, but denial isn’t the best way to accomplish that.

There is no disgrace for Laramie in acknowledging that part or all of the motivation in the murder of Matthew Shepard was homophobia. NO, the crime certainly does not define Laramie. How we react to the crime, how we talk about it, and if we do or don’t do anything to prevent this from happening again does define Laramie.” (*SITS*)



MOMENT: BOOMERANG #3—THE STORY WE’VE TOLD OURSELVES

JONAS SLONAKER

I waited all week for the Laramie *Boomerang* to print my letter.

NARRATOR

Jonas Slonaker.

JONAS SLONAKER

And it finally got to the next Sunday and it never appeared. And there was a letter from a guy lamenting the fact that not enough people are coming to the football games and I was like, ‘Well, jeez, there’s plenty of room for my letter (*fighting tears*); they just didn’t do it. And I said to my partner Bill, we’re in this little world where everything’s OK like in our neighborhood and in our jobs, but there’s all these people around us that are thinkin’ this shit. And I had to go out to the prairie, I drove out and screamed until my throat hurt. I just had to get it out of me. It really broke my spirit when they refused to print my letter. What am I gonna do with this? You know, what AM I gonna do with this?

JEFFREY LOCKWOOD

Laramie had this moment.

NARRATOR

Jeffrey Lockwood.

JEFFREY LOCKWOOD

There was a moment of self-reflection, but it was just too frightening. The Matthew Shepard murder flies in the face of who we are, the story we’ve told ourselves, and so you’ve either got to radically adjust your story or you’ve got to throw out the data. And so far what we’ve done is throw out the data.

THE BIG PICTURE: **SYNTHESIZING WHAT YOU HAVE SEEN**



Consider these “big-picture” themes, motifs and questions before or after you view the Epilogue. Each of the topics below can form the basis of a class discussion or writing project.

How has the story of Matthew Shepard’s death changed over time? What factors have contributed to this shift? What is “revisionist history”? How and why has the history of Shepard’s death been rewritten over time?

Does Laramie have the right to be “left alone” and to “move on” as a community, as some characters put it? What is the line between forgetting, remembering and moving on? What roles do shame, remorse,

guilt, denial and forgiveness play in various characters’ willingness to remember or to forget—or to remember selectively?

Discuss the role of folklore in society. As audience members, how can we distinguish between fact, fiction, speculation and rumor in the play? What perspective does folklorist John Dorst offer on these questions within the Epilogue?

What do you see as the pros and cons of theater or literature based on history? Must everything be “true” within a piece drawn from documentary elements?

What role has the media played in creating and conveying (accurately

or inaccurately) the story of Matthew Shepard? What role does it continue to play? What is the responsibility of the media in telling stories such as Matthew Shepard’s that have national and international impact?

Discuss the boundaries of friendship when one friend leads another down a dangerous path. What does it mean to be a leader? A follower? At what point do you risk a friendship to obey your own conscience?

What does the play say about the American ideal of “liberty and justice for all”? How close is Laramie—and the nation as a whole—to achieving this ideal? Are we closer now than we were in 1998? Explain.

THE LARAMIE PROJECT: TEN YEARS LATER

AN EPILOGUE



PHOTO: TIM CHESNUT

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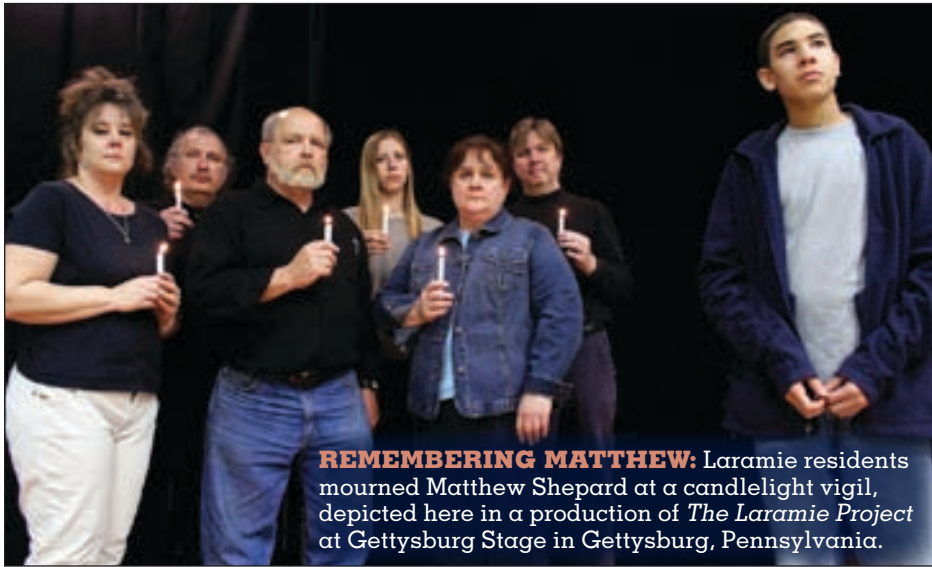
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ILLUMINATING A COMPLEX STORY:

Ambitious Questions, Inspiring Answers in a Groundbreaking Play



REMEMBERING MATTHEW: Laramie residents mourned Matthew Shepard at a candlelight vigil, depicted here in a production of *The Laramie Project* at Gettysburg Stage in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

BILL D'AGOSTINO

This is the fourth installment in a four-part Audience Guide to *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*. Be sure to review the previous three installments for additional context, discussion questions and activities. The guide—available at www.laramieproject.org in pdf format—is organized as follows:

Part 1:
Preparing To See the Epilogue

Part 2:
Issues and Themes in Focus

Part 3:
Viewing and Analyzing the Epilogue

The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later

WRITERS Moisés Kaufman,
Leigh Fondakowski,
Greg Pierotti, Andy Paris
and Stephen Belber

DRAMATURG Jimmy Maize

Audience Guide to *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*

WRITERS [Bennett Singer](#) and
[Ellen Gordon Reeves](#)

DESIGN [ShapiroDesign](#)

[Tectonic Theater Project](#)

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR Moisés Kaufman
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR Greg Reiner

In 2008, members of Tectonic Theater Company went back to Laramie to answer several ambitious questions. To what extent did they succeed in finding answers to these questions? And what was most surprising about what they discovered?

In a project overview, Tectonic stated: “The Epilogue will look at what has and has not changed in Laramie since Matthew Shepard’s 1998 murder. It will also explore how people construct stories and tell

history, both on an individual level and on a societal level. The Epilogue aims to examine how our own personal narratives and the narratives of our communities get constructed.

“From a theatrical perspective, we wanted to participate in this great experiment reminiscent of The Federal Theater and Hallie Flanagan. They used to perform the same play in dozens of theaters across the country simultaneously. This nationwide performance event is a nod to that period. But also an event that poses the question, ‘Can theater play a role in the national dialogue in this manner?’

“The murder of Matthew Shepard had such seismic impact on this small town in America that the company wanted to try to observe what, if any, were the long-lasting effects of such a crime. What does a town look like 10 years after an episode of this magnitude? Have the attitudes changed? The mythologies? Has change occurred that’s concrete and lasting?”

AFTER LARAMIE: GENERAL QUESTIONS AND THEMES TO DISCUSS POST-PERFORMANCE

- In your own words, recount what happens in the play.
- Brainstorm your own list of themes raised in the play.
- What was most moving to you? Did anything make you cry or laugh out loud?
- What surprised you most?
- What, if anything, confused you?
- What questions would you ask the actors if you could? The director? The writers?
- If you could interview the characters (the real people), what would you ask?
- Which theatrical aspects of the production were most memorable? Why?

FROM HATE TO HOPE: THE LEGACY OF MATTHEW SHEPARD



ANGEL ACTION: Romaine Patterson, a close friend of Matthew Shepard, organized a series of peaceful demonstrations against anti-gay protesters.

MANETTE MARTIN / NEW LIGHT MEDIA

“ You know where I started realizing what a hate crime was, was when gay kids were moving out of town after this happened. . . . These kids were dropping out of school—not just kids, but adults too—and leaving Laramie because of what happened to Matt. And that fear, I started realizing—that’s terroristic. ”

—DAVE O’MALLEY,
LEAD INVESTIGATOR ON THE
MATTHEW SHEPARD CASE

The House of Representatives’ passage of the **Matthew Shepard Act** on Thursday, October 8, 2009—just four days before the 11th anniversary of Matthew Shepard’s untimely death—is but one example of the important and powerful legacy Matthew Shepard has left behind.

In his introduction to the original *Laramie Project*, playwright Moisés Kaufman notes that in the immediate aftermath of Matthew Shepard’s brutal murder,

“[T]he nation launched into a dialogue that brought to the surface how we think and talk about homosexuality, sexual politics, education, class, violence, privileges and rights, and the difference between tolerance and acceptance.”

What does Kaufman mean when he talks about the difference between

tolerance and **acceptance**? Find dictionary definitions of the two terms and discuss. Name some things (concrete and abstract) that you tolerate and some that you accept. How can you move from tolerance to acceptance? Should you? Are there circumstances under which it might be dangerous to move from tolerance to acceptance?

Ten years later, how has this conversation evolved? Turn to pages 4 and 5 and consider the interview excerpts, “outtakes” and diary entries about realizations and new ways of thinking prompted by the tragedy. How has each individual quoted here changed? How has seeing the performance changed your thinking? After viewing the Epilogue, what other concrete changes can you point to within the Laramie community—in people, places and institutions?

A COMMUNITY REFLECTS



180 Degrees from Then to Now



“You know, quite frankly before all of this happened, that’s how I believed, pretty homophobic. And as a result of what happened to Matt, I was thrust into a situation where I had to interact with the gay community. And from where I was then to where my mind lays and my heart lays now, is 180 degrees. What I learned real quickly is that what I had been doing over my whole life is

precluding a really fine group of individuals from friendship. Why does it take a young man like Matt getting killed for me to start losing my ignorance? You know? Because that’s what it took.

“You know where I started realizing what a hate crime was, was when gay kids were moving out of town after this happened, you know? ... I mean people get killed in liquor store robberies all the time, [and] I don’t think twice about going in and buying a six-pack of beer. But these kids were dropping out of school—not just kids, but adults too—and leaving Laramie because of what happened to Matt. And that fear, I started realizing—that’s terroristic. And that’s what a hate crime does to a community.”

—DAVE O’MALLEY, LEAD INVESTIGATOR ON THE SHEPARD CASE, NOW RETIRED

Jabbing Our Conscience



“I think Matthew’s legacy is alerting people to how sinful so much of our society’s attitude is toward people who are different. Matthew sort of jabs the conscience of our society. And says: ‘Are you a bigot? Are you prejudiced? Are you biased?’

“... I’m much more courageous now than I was before Matthew. Matter of fact, I wouldn’t have been saying to you some of the things I am saying today if it wasn’t for Matthew Shepard. I talk about sexual identity a lot more now. I don’t talk about it every Sunday, but I do talk about it whenever the scriptures enable it to happen.

“As a matter of fact, just the other Sunday, I said, ‘You know, what if you knew the person next to you was gay? Would you welcome them into our community as long as they sit in the back or a safe distance? Or would you say, *I welcome you into our pew, come, come.*’”

—FATHER ROGER SCHMIT, CATHOLIC PRIEST IN LARAMIE AT THE TIME OF MATTHEW SHEPARD’S MURDER

Shock and Awe



“I’ve really come to understand the kind of power that my voice carries. In *The Laramie Project* I said that I wanted to be an activist and I went to work for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), and there I got a sense of what it was like to work for a national activist organization. Now I lecture at schools and colleges. And I am forever in shock and awe when I go to a high school today and I see kids who were mere children when Matthew died and there is this kind of hope—these kids have the determination to make sure this doesn’t happen again. And they want to create change and they feel empowered. So it may not be the adults that are necessarily the ones who are benefiting from Matthew’s story but it’s these younger generations. Ten years later, I can honestly tell you, there are times that I wish I wasn’t the ‘friend of Matthew Shepard’—I wish I could just be Romaine again, but that Romaine is long gone and this is reality. And you know, even when I’m the most tired and the most fed up of dealing with it, I also sit down and

recognize: I may be tired, and I may not want to talk about Matthew any more, but by talking about Matthew, good things happen, good change is happening.”

—ROMAINE PATTERSON, FRIEND OF MATTHEW SHEPARD, ACTIVIST, RADIO HOST

Daughter of an Angel



“The change here in Laramie, I would say, really happened when the kids, the next generation, couldn’t remember what happened directly any more. The kids who were in junior high or in later elementary school when Matt was killed, they still had a pretty good connection with the experience. But the kids who were my daughter’s age at the time, in pre-school, or even younger, they don’t have that connection.

“My oldest daughter is 15 now, and she has this wonderful friend, this boy, and they were on the bus together, and these kids say to her friend, ‘Oh we should just tie you to a fence on the outskirts of town.’ These boys said that to this other boy ...

“But my daughter reported them. My daughter—who is the daughter of an angel—reported them. Ten years ago when I stood as an angel against the hatred of Fred Phelps, I did it for my daughter, in honor of my daughter. I needed my daughter to be raised in a world without hate; I needed to know that young men can grow up and young women can grow up and be treated safely.

“And I am very proud of her for saying, ‘We’ve got to report this,’ and she took it right to the principal and the principal pulled those boys right in. This was something that was taken very seriously in Laramie. Nobody would ever say now, ‘Boys will be boys.’”

—NIKKI ELDER,
LARAMIE HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER AND
PARTICIPANT IN ANGEL ACTION

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Using the quotations presented here as a starting point, discuss the ways in which Matthew Shepard’s death has changed people, places and institutions.
2. According to the Epilogue, which people, institutions and practices have been resistant to change?
3. How do characters in *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later* stand up to hatred, intolerance and violence? Who strikes you as most and least accepting? Who strikes you as most courageous? Why?
4. Who is Dave O’Malley and how does he define hate crimes? What is your response to this definition?

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE: ONE WRITER'S OBSERVATIONS

Greg Pierotti, a member of Tectonic Theater Project and one of the writers of *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*, shared the following journal entry in which he reflects on his return to Laramie in 2008 and on the process of bringing about social change.



Greg Pierotti

“It occurred to me during that walk that in many ways I had changed very little—still feeling deeply connected to Matt, deep grief for his murder, and for the emotional and violent abuse that has fallen on me and millions of others just because we are gay.”

—GREG PIEROTTI,
MEMBER OF THE LARAMIE PROJECT
WRITING TEAM

September 2008

My thoughts as I fly back from Laramie.

I was in Laramie in June just visiting with Beth Loffreda and a few other folks. This was before the Epilogue project started. During that visit, I got a haircut at the barbershop on Grand and Fourth Street. Beth came with me, and the barber kept referring to us as boyfriend and girlfriend. I did not correct him.

At a certain point in his banter, he said Laramie had a reputation among outsiders. I was seized with anxiety thinking I could not let inaccuracies about Matthew's story pass as easily as those about my own sexuality. But he moved on without mentioning Matt.

When we left the barbershop, Beth (who cares so much about the story and has lived here the whole time) told me she had had the same fear. She also told me that now many in Laramie had reverted to misunderstanding the event as a drug deal gone bad. I was appalled.

In the Epilogue, we knew we wanted to focus in large part on how Laramie and the people of Laramie have changed. A few weeks before going to Laramie, I interviewed Father Roger and was amazed by how little he'd changed. He was as passionate and vocal about the human rights and dignity of "our gay brothers and sisters" as he was when we first met him. I remember as I spoke to him being worried that he wasn't having enough of a dramatic arc for our Epilogue. I also remember being sort of horrified by the fact that I was thinking such a thought

I had my interview with Jonas [Slonaker]. At the time of the murder, he was accidentally outed without his permission by a reporter in the local news. The night of the Unitarian vigil, he met Bill and they fell in love. They've been together 10 years. And they have consciously strived in all that time to be out in every area of their lives. When I first met Jonas, he was quite bitter about the homophobia that he felt existed in Laramie and Wyoming. But now he is relaxed and happy. It seemed to me quite human and natural that he would be happier after finding a supportive and loving relationship and no longer felt he needed to pretend he was someone he was not in any arena of his life.

The irony was so apparent to me. The homophobic factions in mainstream society frown upon gay people for lacking substance, lacking the ability to commit, for being promiscuous, not having "values"—and then deny us the

stabilizing influence of straight society's institutions and all the privileges that accompany them. Then when people like Jonas and Bill defy the odds and find commitment and stability in the face of all this hatred and institutionalized homophobia, it turns out that they respond in the same way that many straight people do, and better than a lot. Bill and Jonas are flourishing....

From there I tried a few man-on-the-street interviews. Nobody I talked to was thinking about the anniversary at all. This was definitely a change from last time we were here for the work, when nobody was talking about anything else. The folks I talked to weren't saying it was a hate crime, they weren't saying it was a drug deal. They just weren't saying anything about it at all.

After a few of these attempts, I tried to find where the fence had been. I wandered in the bright prairie but found nothing. It occurred to me, though, during that walk that in many ways I had changed very little—still feeling deeply connected to Matt, deep grief for his murder, and for the emotional and violent abuse that has fallen on me and millions of others just because we are gay....

Finally I interviewed Beth and then I interviewed Rob DeBree of the Sheriff's department. These two people have been working hard on a regular basis to create change and a better environment for gay people—Beth at the University and Rob in the Sheriff's office. It occurred to me that their deep commitment to the laborious and often boring daily work of creating social and political change correlated directly to the depth with which they were confronted by Matt's suffering and the suffering of his friends and community. When we are touched by pain, we develop compassion and connect with others. When we stay comfortable and keep suffering at a distance, it is easy to become complacent, apathetic and disinterested.

It occurs to me that political change is difficult because it is made by individual commitment to change and a willingness to put personal comfort aside for the happiness of others. The fact that political change has not yet happened in Laramie shouldn't be seen as particularly damning of the town, but more as indicative of the very universal habits of laziness and commitment to comfort that most of us human beings struggle with. Individual change and the individual commitment to put personal comfort aside to help others are rare. If we want change, we each have to dig deep and make a private commitment to be bored, tired, frustrated and never give up. Without at least a small group of people making this daily commitment, it is going to be a very long, slow road.



Cover of *The Laramie Project* DVD

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Who is Greg Pierotti and what changes and transformations does he chronicle in this journal entry? Of these observations, which do you find most striking? Why?
2. Why do you think Pierotti chose not to let the barber know that he is gay? How does Pierotti describe his personal connection to Matthew Shepard?
3. Why was Pierotti "sort of horrified" at his reaction to the conversation he had with Father Roger? What tensions does this journal entry reveal between Greg Pierotti as an artist and as a person?
4. What does Pierotti see as the connection between being touched by pain and engaging in efforts to bring about social change? Have you had a personal experience that led you to take political action? Discuss.

‘OUR MOST IMPORTANT TEACHERS’:

Examining the Interviews with Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney



TEN YEARS LATER: Russell Henderson, left, and Aaron McKinney (pictured here in 1998) agreed to be interviewed by members of Tectonic Theater Project for the Epilogue.

“ I do have remorse,
but like I said, for all the
wrong reasons. ”

—AARON MCKINNEY,
IN AN INTERVIEW WITH
TECTONIC THEATER COMPANY
MEMBER GREG PIEROTTI

“ I just wish I could ...
change what I did. ”

—RUSSELL HENDERSON,
IN AN INTERVIEW WITH
TECTONIC THEATER COMPANY
MEMBER STEPHEN BELBER

Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney—the Laramie residents convicted of murdering Matthew Shepard—were not interviewed for the original *Laramie Project*, though statements they made to the police and in court are quoted in the play. Near the end of *The Laramie Project*, Father Roger Schmit declares:

“I think right now our most important teachers must be Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney. They have to be our teachers. How did you learn? What did we as a society do to teach you that?”

For *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*, Stephen Belber and Greg Pierotti conducted a series of interviews with Henderson and McKinney, respectively.

Some months after Stephen Belber spoke with Russell Henderson’s grandmother and wrote to him at her advice, he received this reply:

Dear Mr. Belber,

I got your letter and I’ve considered your proposal to talk with me and I’ve decided that I will do it.

As you know, I’ve been reluctant to talk to anyone. But I think if there is something I might say that will help someone else to understand or to maybe help them not make the same mistakes I did, then it will be worth it.

I must admit that I’m not the best with words so I don’t know how much I will be able to help but I will tell you that I will be honest with you

I haven’t read or seen the play but maybe once you finish this new part of it you could send me a copy of it.

Respectfully,
Russell

RUSSELL HENDERSON

The following excerpts come from Stephen Belber's interview with Russell Henderson:

Russell Henderson: I was one of those guys who was brought up with values, but I actually believed them. I believed the values, I was raised not to hurt people and I agreed.

Stephen Belber: So why'd you go along with Aaron that night?

Russell Henderson: At first I told Aaron I didn't want to. I kept saying no. But he kept wanting to, so finally I just went along ... I guess I'm more of a follower. And he's a leader. So I just went along Let's just say I tried to stop him but I didn't try enough. You know what I mean? It's mostly just, you know, shame. That I didn't do more ... I wish I'd have stopped him. I made the wrong choice to go along with it from the beginning; I made the wrong choice to tie him up, I made the wrong choice not to get help. I've thought a lot about it, about every single thing I did; and I just wish I could ... change what I did.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does Russell Henderson talk about the choices he made on the night of Matthew Shepard's beating? What does he wish he had done differently?
2. What do we learn about Henderson's background from his "victim empathy" letter? How does he say he has changed since the killing? Do you believe him?

AARON MCKINNEY

When Greg Pierotti asks for Father Roger's help in convincing Aaron McKinney to agree to an interview, Father Roger offers this advice:

Father Roger: I think Aaron is not finished finalizing his experience of remorse. And remorse is something we ALL need to think about. So you ask him about that. And, Greg, do him justice ... You get to know him, Greg. Let him teach you what it's like to be Aaron McKinney, okay?

Below is an excerpt from Greg Pierotti's interview with Aaron McKinney:

Greg Pierotti: And what if Father Roger were here with us. Could you look him in the eye and honestly tell him you don't feel remorse for Matt?

Aaron McKinney: I'd have to. I would never wanna have to do that. You know how I feel about Father Roger. But I couldn't look him in the eye and not ... I'd have to tell the truth. I do have remorse, but like I said, for all the wrong reasons. For my dad. For ending up in here. For getting Russ stuck in here.

Greg Pierotti: But you think those are the wrong reasons?

Aaron McKinney: If I could go back and not be the one who killed him I would But I am better off in here, myself. I'm doin' way better in here than I ever was out there. I met guys in here with a real sense of honor. Out

there, people'll stab you in the back for a nickel bag. Besides, I am a criminal. I should be around criminals. I always was drawn that way... I remember crawling through people's doggie doors when I was eight years old to steal.... I don't know why, but I was always like this. Nature trumps nurture.

Like my brother's not like me at all. Works hard, going to school. He's a really good kid; he definitely is a totally different kind of person than me ... So like they say ... nature trumps nurture.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. How did you feel when McKinney asks, "I said that?" when he hears parts of the trial transcript? How does he describe Russell Henderson?
2. Why does McKinney feel he is "better off in [prison]"? What does he mean when he says that "nature trumps nurture"? Do you agree?
3. For what does McKinney express remorse? How does he explain his lack of remorse for killing Shepard? How does his sense of guilt and remorse differ from that of Henderson?
4. Why does McKinney consider himself "the poster child for hate-crime murders"? What is your reaction to his statement that "[Matthew] needed killin'"?
5. In what ways are Henderson and McKinney our "most important teachers"? What lessons have you learned from them?

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY: **STANDING UP TO HATE AND HATE CRIMES**



JUREK DURCZAK

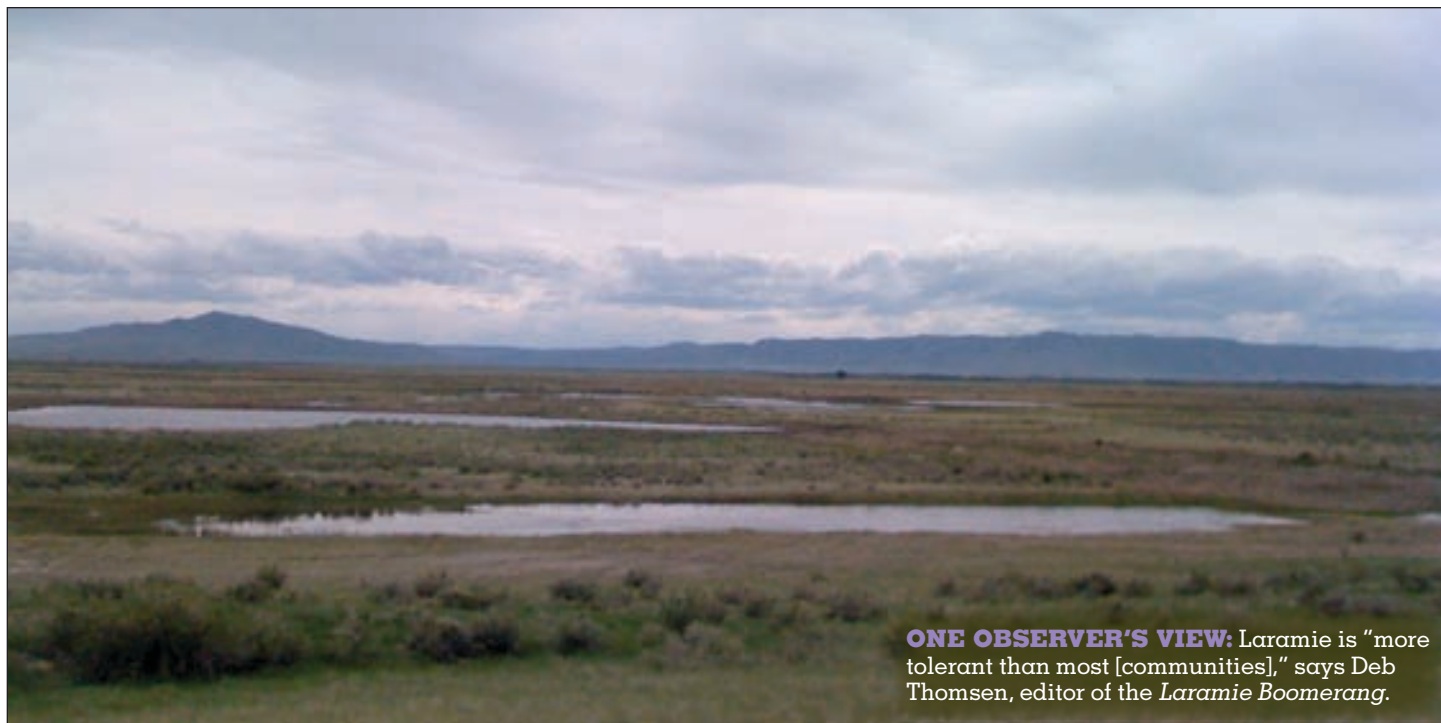
“It’s hard when you’re very ashamed of yourself to stand up and say, ‘Yeah, we screwed up.’ Instead we start making excuses, and pointing the blame at somebody else or others—we do that as individuals, we do it as a community, we do it as a nation. And that’s what I think we’ve done.”

—REGGIE FLUTY, LARAMIE POLICE OFFICER WHO FOUND MATTHEW SHEPARD TIED TO THE FENCE

ACTIVITIES AND INVESTIGATIONS

- 1. Taking a stand.** Have you been in a situation in which you needed to stand up against intolerance, bigotry, hate or a hate crime? What did you do and say? What made it hard? What made it easy? Describe your experience in writing.
- 2. Countering intolerance.** With your class or community, come up with your own guidelines for dealing with bullying, hate speech, intolerance and/or violence. Consider language and jokes that are harmful and hurtful. As a starting point, see the worksheet entitled “Create Your Own Laramie Project” on page 3 of the teacher’s guide online at www.timeclassroom.com/laramie. Review and expand the list of steps you can take to promote understanding and improve your community.
- 3. Investigating hate.** Learn more about the 1993 killing of Brandon Teena in Nebraska; the 1998 dragging death of James Byrd in Jasper, Texas; or a hate crime that occurred in your own state. What do these incidents have in common with the murder of Matthew Shepard? How did each community respond?
- 4. A mother’s mission.** “I’m just doing ... what a mother does when you hurt her children. I don’t think I’ve done anything spectacular,” says Matthew Shepard’s mother Judy. Find out more about Judy Shepard’s work on behalf of a national hate-crimes law. Consult her new book, *The Meaning of Matthew*, as well as online resources in your research. Do you agree with her assessment that “I really haven’t accomplished anything yet, other than maybe talk to people around the country about losing my son”?
- 5. Polling your community.** In a TIME/CNN poll conducted in 1998, 68% of Americans said an attack like the one on Matthew Shepard could happen in their community. Design and conduct your own survey to answer this question for your community and, more generally, to assess local residents’ views on lesbian and gay civil rights. Share your findings and suggestions for creating a hate-free community with local media.

DIGGING DEEPER: ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES AND EXPLORATIONS



ONE OBSERVER'S VIEW: Laramie is "more tolerant than most [communities]," says Deb Thomsen, editor of the *Laramie Boomerang*.

CONNECTING TO THE ISSUES

1. The nature of rumor. John Dorst, the folklorist featured in the Epilogue, says: "People will back away very quickly if they're putting forward a rumor type thing and you question it further. When you do push back, you are violating the 'convention of rumor.' People inevitably back away. The convention is that you DON'T contend it. That's one of the reasons that it can circulate as sort of this vague, 'I don't know where I heard this.' It's just sort of in the air. It's just around. That's the nature of rumor." Discuss a rumor that has surfaced and circulated in your community. Do you know how it originated? How did it grow? Has it been contended? Resolved? Describe a time you have been either the originator, the disseminator, the contender or the object of a rumor.

2. The climate in your community. "I would be afraid to walk down the street and display any sort of affection for my [female] partner. You don't do that here in Laramie," says Zackie Salmon in *The Laramie Project*. How are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people treated at

your school or in your community? What would happen if a same-sex couple held hands on your campus or attended a school dance? How are people treated who are considered "different" in any way? What concrete steps can you propose to make your campus or community a safer place?

A LOOK IN THE MIRROR

It takes effort to see our own prejudices as clearly as others do. Human-rights experts recommend starting with our speech and thought patterns. Am I quick to label "rednecks" or "liberals"? Do I tell gay jokes? Am I careless with gender descriptions?

Here are some other questions to ask yourself: How wide is my circle of friends? How diverse is my holiday card list? How integrated is my neighborhood? Why is that? Do I belong to clubs that exclude? How often am I in the minority? Do I have the courage to ask a friend not to tell a sexist, racist or homophobic joke in my presence? How can I go out of my way to know people who are different?

—ADAPTED FROM TOLERANCE.ORG



'IT HAPPENED HERE': Zubaida Ula, depicted above in a *Laramie Project* production at Cal Poly Theatre, makes this point as she reflects on the killing of Matthew Shepard.

“ We don’t have a hate-crime law on the books [in Wyoming], but the conversations that go on in our locker rooms, in the hallways at schools, on the playgrounds, in our living rooms and places of worship—that to me is progress. ”

—JIM OSBORNE,
FRIEND OF MATTHEW SHEPARD

THINKING ABOUT THEATER

3. Create your own program notes.

What program notes, if any, were offered at the Epilogue performance you attended? What other background would you find useful for future audiences? Investigate and create such a set of program notes.

4. Dramaturg for a day. October 12, 2009, marks the premiere of *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*. Tectonic plans to develop the play further and share it with other communities. Are there changes, additions or deletions you would suggest?

5. Design your own poster for a future production of *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*. What images, symbols and text would you incorporate? Why?

6. Biographical sketches. While the “characters” in *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later* are portrayed by actors, it is important to remember that they are real people who agreed to be interviewed. Choose one of the major characters about whom you’d like to know more. Use the Internet to research and write a one-page biographical sketch.

THE POLITICS OF CHANGE

7. The debate over same-sex marriage. Consider the speeches given in the Epilogue by state representatives Childers and Peterson during the debate on Wyoming’s “defense of marriage” bill. What argument

does each make? How does Peters’ personal experience bear on his vote? In the end, Wyoming’s DOMA bill failed—though same-sex marriage is still illegal there. What are the laws on same-sex marriage in your state? Has a defense-of-marriage law been enacted?

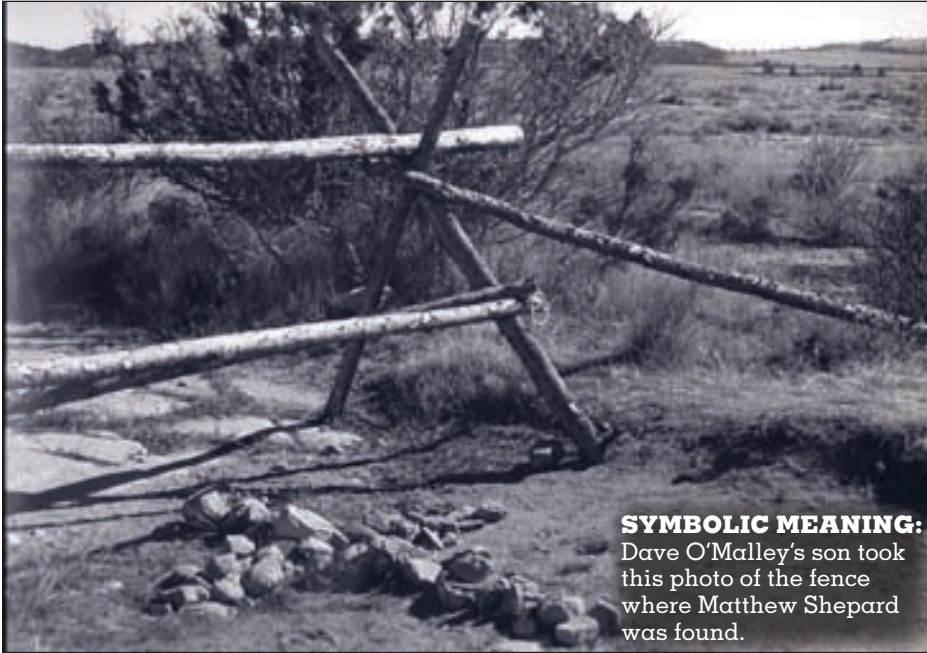
8. Out in politics. In 2008, Catherine Connolly became the first openly gay or lesbian member of the Wyoming legislature. Does your city, town or state have openly gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender politicians? How have they been received in the community? What impact have they made?

9. Barack Obama and change. In what ways are gay and lesbian Americans treated as second-class citizens in America? Consider the federal Defense of Marriage Act, the military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, and federal anti-discrimination laws. Where does President Obama stand on gay rights? What steps has he taken to honor campaign promises on this issue?

10. Continuing the dialogue. Go to the Laramie online community at www.laramieproject.org. Read some of the comments. Choose one comment that resonates with your experience and one that does not reflect your personal opinions. Write responses to each one, trying to consider both sides of the case. Ask a partner to read them before deciding whether to post them on the website.

SIGNPOSTS OF CHANGE: **VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE MARKERS**

COURTESY DAVE O'MALLEY



SYMBOLIC MEANING: Dave O'Malley's son took this photo of the fence where Matthew Shepard was found.

“ I remember one older man—spent thirty years in the military—had to be in the closet through the whole thing. And Matt's death had a huge impact on him . . . and one day he just showed up, and I took him out to the fence. ”

—DAVE O'MALLEY,
LEAD INVESTIGATOR ON THE
MATTHEW SHEPARD CASE

Of all the symbols related to the story of Matthew Shepard, the fence is arguably the most iconic. Review page 6 of Part 1 of the Audience Guide, which presents the section of the Epilogue script in which we first learn that the fence has been taken down. What does its disappearance mean to Laramie's consideration of its past and conception of its future? Three participants in *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later* shared their thoughts.

COMPANY MEMBER ANDY PARIS:

We heard that when they took the fence down, the pieces were incorporated into other fences. So no one knows where the original pieces are.

LARAMIE RESIDENT JONAS

SLONAKER: I remembered where the place was and I would still go back, and it's ... yeah. The fence is gone. Ten years later and the fence is gone ... and ten years of snow and rain have washed through there. I mean it's just a place, in the end I guess. And I decided not to go any more. I had to let it go.

DAVE O'MALLEY, LEAD INVESTIGATOR ON THE SHEPARD CASE:

This is a photograph of the fence that my son took, and some people had been out and kind of made a little memorial there and ... I don't know how many people came to town when I was still working at the police department to visit the fence. But I remember one older man—spent thirty years in the military—had to be in the closet through the whole thing. And Matt's death had a huge impact on him. He was from Vermont and one day he just showed up, and I took him out to the fence. I did that with several people; it was important for them. It was important enough for them to come all the way to Laramie to see it! You know?

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Apart from the fence, what other “visible markers” of the tragedy have disappeared?
2. What markers of change, both tangible and intangible, have appeared in Laramie?
3. What changes do you predict will occur in Laramie over the next decade?

REVELATIONS

In his introduction to *The Laramie Project* in 2002, Moisés Kaufman wrote:

“The experience of working on The Laramie Project has been one of great sadness, great beauty and, perhaps more importantly, great revelations—about our nation, about our ideas and about ourselves.”

After seeing the Epilogue, what revelations have you had about our nation and its ideas—and about yourself?