


# Laramie, Wyoming



**NOT  
IN OUR  
TOWN**  
NORTHERN  
CALIFORNIA

## When Hate Happens Here



## KQED 9

Matthew Shepard was an openly gay, 21-year-old student at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, Wyoming. On the night of October 6, 1998, Shepard was at a local bar near campus. He was lured from the bar by two men, 22-year-old Aaron McKinney and 21-year-old Russell Henderson, who told him they were gay. Shepard was driven to a remote area east of town, where McKinney and Henderson robbed him of \$20 and his shoes. Shepard was then tied to a rail fence, beaten, pistol-whipped and left for dead in near-freezing temperatures.

A cyclist found Shepard some 18 hours after the attack, at first mistaking him for a scarecrow. The badly beaten Shepard was unconscious and suffering from hypothermia. He was taken to a hospital in Colorado, but he never regained consciousness and died five days later.

Both McKinney and Henderson were accused of kidnapping, robbery and murder. Both pleaded not guilty. They were to be tried separately, with Henderson's trial scheduled to be held first, in March 1999. But Henderson changed his plea to guilty, thus avoiding the trial and a possible death sentence. He was sentenced to two consecutive life terms and is not

eligible for parole. McKinney went to trial in November 1999 and was found guilty of felony murder, second-degree murder, kidnapping and aggravated assault. Felony murder carries with it a possible death sentence. During the sentencing stage of the trial, McKinney offered a plea bargain to avoid the possibility of being sentenced to death. The prosecution accepted his plea bargain, and the convicted killer was sentenced to two life terms in prison with no chance of parole or appeal.

No hate crime charges were ever filed in the murder of Matthew Shepard; police believed that robbery was the primary motive in the attack. Nonetheless, the murder of Shepard brought the issues of gay bashing and homophobia into the national spotlight. People all over the country expressed support for gay and lesbian issues. Two films were made, *The Laramie Project* and *The Matthew Shepard Story*, and each won numerous awards. The rail fence to which Shepard was tied, where he was left for dead, has been declared a nationally protected monument. The case also prompted President Clinton to renew attempts to extend federal hate crime legislation to include gays. These efforts were rejected by the Republican majority in the House of Representatives in 1999.

### LESSON PLAN

President Clinton's attempts at change were rejected by a Republican-controlled House in 1999. The way people view and vote on a social issue may be greatly influenced by the political party with which they are affiliated. Find a newspaper article that focuses on an issue around which the division of public opinion is primarily rooted in the two major political parties. Summarize the article and explain your own stance on the issue.

Resource: [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com)

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