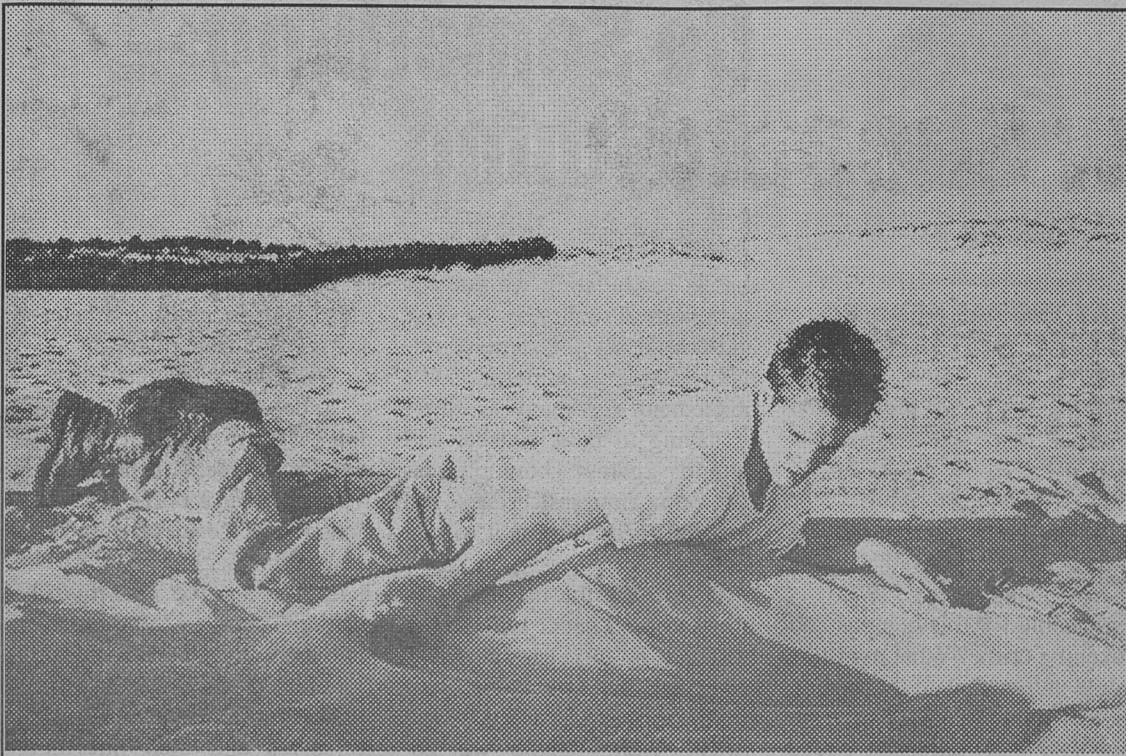


# REACTIONS TO THE TRAGEDY



*"The brutal murder of Matthew Shepard is far from the first anti-gay murder, and it is with sadness and outrage that I admit that it will not be the last."*

## President Clinton's Statement

I was deeply grieved by the act of violence perpetrated against Matthew Shepard of Wyoming.

The Justice Department has assured me that local law enforcement officials are proceeding diligently to bring those responsible to justice. And I am determined that we will do everything we can and offer whatever assistance is appropriate.

Hillary and I ask that your thoughts and your prayers be with Mr. Shepard and his family, and with the people of Laramie, Wyoming. In the face of this terrible act of violence, they are joining together to demonstrate that an act of evil like this is not what our country is all about. In fact it strikes at the very heart of what it means to be an American and at the values that define us as a Nation. We must all reaffirm that we will not tolerate this.

Just this year there have been a number of recent tragedies across our country that involve hate crimes. The vicious murder of James Byrd last June in Jasper, Texas and the assault this week on Mr. Shepard are only among the most horrifying examples. Almost one year ago I proposed that Congress enact the Hate Crimes Prevention Act. Our Federal laws already punish some crimes committed against people on the basis of race or religion or national origin, but we should do more. This crucial legislation would strengthen and expand the ability of the Justice Department to prosecute hate crimes by removing needless jurisdictional requirements for existing crimes and by giving Federal prosecutors the power to prosecute hate crimes committed because of the victim's sexual orientation, gender, or disability. All Americans deserve protection from hate.

There is nothing more important to the future of this country than our standing together against intolerance, prejudice, and violent bigotry. It is not too late for Congress to take action before they adjourn and pass The Hate Crimes Prevention Act. By doing so they will help make all Americans more safe and secure. ▼

## NGLTF: Struggle Must be Focused, Not Narrow

The following is a statement by National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Director Kerry Lobel read at the national vigil.

Hundreds of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people have been murdered simply for who they are, simply because they are different. In our grief, let us remember some of them:

We remember Brandon Teena, a transgender teenager in Nebraska who was murdered for crossing gender lines.

We remember Rebecca Wight who was murdered on the Appalachian Trail because she made love with a woman.

We remember Scott Amedure of Michigan who was murdered after his appearance on the Jenny Jones show because he said he had a crush on a straight man.

We remember Brian Wilmes of San Francisco who this year was viciously beaten to death outside a gay bar by a man screaming anti-gay epithets.

We remember Tyra Hunter, mocked by D.C. emergency workers as she lay critically injured simply because she was transgendered.

And we remember countless others targeted for violence on the street and in our schools. We have lost so many lives to violence. Anti-gay violence is a fact of life

for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people in America. Anti-gay violence has become an American tradition. It is a shameful tradition. It is a tradition that must end. The men who killed Matthew Shepard committed vile and evil acts. But Matthew Shepard's death is not only about Laramie. Matthew Shepard's death is not about Wyoming. Matthew Shepard's death is not about cowboys. Matthew Shepard's death is not about macho men.

Matthew Shepard's death is about a society that devalues gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. Matthew Shepard's death is about a society that does not accept gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people as full human beings. Matthew Shepard's death is about institutional discrimination perpetrated by all three branches of our government. Matthew Shepard's death is about a Supreme Court that upheld the criminalization of us. Matthew Shepard's death is about a Congress that condones discrimination against us in its refusal to pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act and in its blatant discrimination against the ambassadorial nomination of openly gay James Hormel. Matthew Shepard's death is about a President who condemns hate violence but still signed the anti-

gay Defense of Marriage Act. Matthew Shepard's death is about a society that consciously and purposefully excludes gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people from religious life. Matthew Shepard's death is about a society that calls us criminals for loving each other.

Whether we are gay teenagers, harassed and beaten in high school; adults who are compared to kleptomaniacs by the leader of the Senate; mothers who lose custody of our children because we are lesbians; or employees who are afraid to put pictures of our partner on our desks, we are all the target of homophobia.

We all live with hatred and fear, whether we live in Laramie or Little Rock, in San Francisco or Washington, DC. In America's smallest towns and largest cities we live with the specter of fear over our shoulder, because we live in a society that debates whether we have a right to exist. Whether it's ignoring, killing, curing, or discriminating, the point is still erasure. We are not equal and we are not safe. And it is this reality that fuels our passion for justice.

Nearly all of America has expressed outrage at the killing of Matthew Shepard. Americans, perhaps, are feeling some of the pain we feel every day. We are grateful for your attention and your outrage, America. But, we ask, where have you been? Where

have you been, America, for the 18 victims of anti-gay murder last year? And where will you be, America, when this story of Matthew Shepard grows old? Where will you be, America, when the next gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender person is murdered because of who they are?

Where will you be, America, when another TV or newspaper ad runs claiming that gay people should change — that we should not be able to exist simply as we are? What will you say the next time you hear an anti-gay joke? How will you vote on the ballot measure in your state that would deny basic equality — nothing more and nothing less — for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people? Where have you been, America? More importantly, America, where will you be?

Our struggle must be focused but it must not be narrow. We cannot expect others to be there for us if we are not there for them.

Tonight, I ask all of you recommit yourselves to repealing sodomy laws in every state, to passing hate crimes and civil rights laws in every state, and to working for school safety in towns and cities across America. We must let this outrage spark a renewal of our spirits and of our commitment to work for equality for every American. ▼

to hurt us and they are working hard to influence legislation, to speak in schools, to spread their venom. It is so important to be aware of them and to speak out.

I am hoping that next year's QUEER Town Meeting is a public forum that focuses on the voices of people living in Vermont. I did not attend this year. The agenda looked bland and uninteresting. Maybe I shouldn't say anything since I wasn't there but my impression is that the radicalism just wasn't there.

Radicalism scares some people but it also brings change.

■ It's interesting reading everyone's reactions to this. Mine was numbness, like I'd just been punched in the stomach. I feel like I should be angry at the two who are accused of doing this. But somehow, I'm not. Just deeply sad, I guess.

So I've been trying to send whatever positive energy I can to Matthew. We also have to try to

channel some of that energy to those two who did this. There is something deeply wrong not just with them but with the society in which such an incredible act of hatred, violence and bigotry can actually happen. That's what we have to work on, I believe.

What made me angry was reading reactions by the right wingers accusing the HRC and other groups of using the crime to push for hate crimes legislation. If this is not reason enough,

what in God's name is?? President Clinton and Richard Gephardt damn well better use this occasion to push that bill. Shame on them and the rest of Washington for spending so much time on the inane Monica Lewinsky triviality instead of focusing on this and so many other badly needed issues. This should have been law by now, anyway.

So the message in all of this is that we must not let this pass qui-

etly. We must be with those who stood outside the hospital where Matthew is recovering with candles in hand, at least in spirit if not in fact. We must participate. Be out. Vote. Question candidates. That's why we feel secure in Vermont. We're not afraid to demand that our public figures do the right thing. We must do the same on a national level. We have power, political and spiritual. Let's use it. ▼

