

## WHY DO THEY DO IT?

### MATTHEW SHEPARD



On October 9, 1998, a bicyclist was passing through a rural area in Laramie, Wyoming. When he glanced over, he thought he saw a scarecrow tied to a ranch fence. He stopped and realized that the form was not a scarecrow but the burned, battered, and nearly dead body of Matthew Shepard.

Shepard was a 22-year-old student at the University of Wyoming. Prior to his vicious assault that evening, he attended a meeting of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered Association. Later, he went to a bar. While he was drinking a beer, two men approached Shepard. The two men stated that they were gay; Shepard also indicated that he was gay. Just after midnight, the two men, Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney, lured Shepard to Henderson's pickup truck. They beat Shepard inside the truck and then pulled into an isolated part of a rural subdivision. They tied Shepard to a fence and pistol-whipped him with a .357 magnum handgun "while he begged for

his life." They stole his wallet and shoes and left him there, where he was discovered by the bicyclist about 18 hours later.<sup>25</sup>

Five days after he was found tied to the fence, Shepard died from his injuries.<sup>26</sup> Henderson pled guilty and received two consecutive life sentences. McKinney was found guilty of felony murder and received two consecutive life terms without the possibility of parole. Shepard's death resulted in outrage across the country; many called for the need to develop federal hate crime legislation. As one writer noted in a New York Times opinion piece,

In a nation sickened by the gratuitous thuggery of his murder, he may do much to dispel the stubborn belief in some quarters that homosexuals are not discriminated against. They are. Hatred can kill. . . . [H]is death makes clear the need for hate-crime laws to protect those who survive and punish those who attack others, whether fatally or not, just because of who they are.<sup>27</sup>

#### THINK ABOUT IT:

1. What could be done to prevent these types of hate crimes to occur?
2. Why did Henderson and McKinney brutally kill Shepard?