

Dramaturgy Resource Packet
The Laramie Project



**By Moises Kaufman and the members of Tectonic
Theater Project**

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Packet for Production/Educational Use Only

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Moisés Kaufman and Tectonic Theatre

Kaufman Biography

Moisés Kaufman is the founder and artistic director of Tectonic Theater Project, an award-winning director and playwright, and an activist-in-art. In recognition of his contributions to the theater and to international conversations about social justice, he has received numerous professional and humanitarian honors. Moisés is an Obie and Lucille Lortel award winner, a 2002 Guggenheim Fellow in Playwriting, winner of the 2002 Humanitas Prize, and has been nominated for Tony, Emmy, and Drama Desk awards. He was awarded the 2015 National Medal of Arts from President Barack Obama, which he accepted in a 2016 ceremony at the White House.



Moisés was born in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1963, and he grew up surrounded by the city's thriving international performance scene. He studied with several theater companies at home and then, in 1987, moved to New York City to complete his education at New York University. He attended NYU's groundbreaking Experimental Theatre Wing, where he deepened his investigation of the role of text in the creative process and his love of challenge in theatrical structure. When he finished school in 1991, Moisés founded Tectonic Theater Project with his husband, Jeff LaHoste. Many of their first collaborators came from Moisés's artistic circle at the Experimental Theatre Wing.

Tectonic's early productions were a natural expansion upon the themes that had absorbed Moisés in his studies: structurally difficult plays demanding extensive problem-solving in stagecraft. He found his path to creative maturity though, in applying that passion for form and experimentation to his own new work, most notably 1997's critically acclaimed *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*, which ran off-Broadway for a year and a half. *Gross Indecency* gained Moisés and the company national recognition and its success enabled them to travel to Laramie, Wyoming to pursue their next undertaking.

That next work, *The Laramie Project* (which Moisés wrote in collaboration with members of Tectonic after an extensive community-based research process), is an examination of the cultural conflict surrounding the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard. It opened at the Denver Theater Center in March 2000 and moved to New York shortly thereafter. *TIME* called *Laramie* "one of the 10 best plays of 2000," and it was nominated for the Drama Desk Award for Unique Theatrical Experience. It was also recently selected by the *New York Times* as one of their "25 Best American Plays Since 'Angels in America'" and remains among the most

performed plays in the United States each year. In 2002, Moisés co-wrote and directed HBO's film adaptation of *The Laramie Project*, which garnered two Emmy Award nominations—Best Director and Best Writer.

In the years since *Gross Indecency* first brought his methods to wider attention, Moisés has continued to refine his devising process with Tectonic, always with an aim toward using the powers unique to theater to explore primary sources and understand underrepresented stories—old and new. His writing and adaptation credits include *33 Variations* (2007), *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later* (2008), *One Arm* (2011), and *Carmen* (2013-2016); as artistic director he has also guided the development of Anushka Paris-Carter and Andy Paris's *Uncommon Sense* (2017).

Moisés is also a dedicated teacher. Since 2000, he and the company's teaching artists have been sharing Tectonic's techniques in lectures, training labs, and educational residencies. In 2018, he co-wrote *Moment Work: Tectonic Theater Project's Process of Devising Theater* (Vintage), a comprehensive introduction to his theatrical principles and the company's creative tools.

On Broadway, Moisés has directed the 2012 revival of *The Heiress* with Jessica Chastain, the Tony-nominated *33 Variations* with Jane Fonda, Rajiv Joseph's Pulitzer Prize finalist *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* with Robin Williams, and Doug Wright's Pulitzer- and Tony Award-winning *I Am My Own Wife* with Jefferson Mays. He recently helmed the off-Broadway revival (Second Stage) and Broadway transfer of Harvey Fierstein's *Torch Song*.

Other directing credits include the world premiere of the new musical *Paradise Square* at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, *The Tallest Tree in the Forest* with Mark Taper (Brooklyn Academy of Music), *The Nightingale* (La Jolla Playhouse), *The Common Pursuit* (Roundabout), *Macbeth* with I Schreiber (Public Theater), *This Is How It Goes* (Donmar Warehouse), Tennessee Williams's *One Arm* (New Group and Steppenwolf Theatre Company), *El Gato con Botas* (New Victory Theater), *Master Class* with Rita Moreno (Berkeley Repertory Theatre), and *Into the Woods* (Kansas City Repertory Theatre).

Most recently with Tectonic, Moisés has written and directed the workshop premiere of *The Album (Here There Are Blueberries)* at Miami New Drama in June 2018. It is in ongoing development with Tectonic, as are the new works *Treatment & Data* and *Las Aventuras de Juan Planchard*.

From: https://www.tectonictheaterproject.org/?page_id=13637

The Company and Moment Work

Based in New York City and guided by founder and artistic director Moisés Kaufman, Tectonic Theater Project develops new plays using the company's trademarked theater-making method, Moment Work™, and through a rigorous process of research and collaboration in a laboratory environment.

Since its founding in 1991 the company has created and staged over twenty plays and musicals, including *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*, *The Laramie Project*, Doug Wright's Pulitzer Prize-winning *I Am My Own Wife*, and the Tony Award-winning *33 Variations*.

From: <https://www.tectonictheaterproject.org>

The following is from the Tectonic Theatre Project's website – the "our" and "we" are them referring to themselves and their company.

MISSION AND VALUES

Tectonic Theater Project is a developmental company that creates and produces works for the stage that rigorously explore theatrical language and form. Based in New York City, we build plays from the ground up and bring new life to existing scripts on stages across the United States and around the world.

Our core values are **courage** and **risk taking, innovation, theatricality, social & political change**, and **egalitarianism**: everyone has a voice in the creation of new work.

TECTONIC TODAY

Tectonic develops new plays and reimagines existing scripts using the company's trademarked theater-making method, Moment Work™, in a collaborative laboratory environment.

With typically 5-10 projects in some phase of development at any time, the company partners with developmental labs, producing theaters, and commercial partners to realize their work on the stage. Over the years producing partners have included La Jolla Playhouse, Berkeley Repertory Theater, BAM, Arena Stage, Center Theater Group, Denver Center Theater, and Kansas City Repertory, among many more.

Artistic Director, Moisés Kaufman has stated that, "art is a great prism through which we can understand history and current events." In 2009, President Obama

invited the company to witness the signing of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act at the White House, recognizing Tectonic's contribution to the national dialogue around LGBTQ+ hate crimes. President Obama awarded Moisés the National Medal of Arts in 2016 for "his powerful contributions to American Theater," and with appreciation for how the company "continues to move audiences with its bold portrayals of contemporary social issues."

Tectonic is devoted to creating dazzlingly theatrical works for the stage that foster vibrant dialogues with our audiences and radical empathy in our global community.

TECTONIC'S HISTORY

A passage from *Moment Work: Tectonic Theater Project's Process of Devising Theater*

Moisés Kaufman and his husband, Jeffrey LaHoste, founded Tectonic Theater Project in 1991. They had known for a while that they wanted to start a company, but the final push came from the brilliant Arthur Bartow, who was dean of NYU's Tisch School of the Arts while several original Tectonic members were at ETW, and who had always been very complimentary of their student work. When Moisés decided to leave school and asked Bartow about getting work, Bartow told him straight out: "No one will hire you. You should start your own theater company." This was shocking, coming from someone who had been so supportive, but he went on: "The things you're interested in, the questions you're asking, nobody will pay for you to dig into those. You have to create your own theater company so you can do the work you need to do." Moisés considers this the best advice he has ever received. The mission of the resulting company was to "create work that explores theatrical language and forms."

As is the case for many new theater companies, our early years were challenging. We often rehearsed in the dining room of Moisés and Jeffrey's apartment, folding up the dining table then bringing it back for dinner. And we were producing work in what are now romantically called "non-traditional spaces" around Manhattan: church basements and decrepit back rooms in bars. The work was strong, but no one knew us and many times there were more actors on stage than audience

members in seats. (One night we performed Franz Xavier Kroetz's *The Nest*—which is a two-character play—and we had one audience member.) However, that sense of anonymity also gave us great freedom and an exhilarating sense of adventure.

We spent our early years staging existing experimental works, engaging in creative dialogue with writers we admired. We produced plays by Samuel Beckett, Franx Xavier Kroetz, Sophie Treadwell, and Naomi Iizuka, and we workshopped the work of Bertolt Brecht.

Our first production was *Women in Beckett*, a collection of all of Samuel Beckett's short plays for women (*Not I, Footfalls, Rockaby, Come and Go*). The venue was the lobby of Theater for the New City, in November of 1991. The space was only separated from the other theaters by a curtain, so when other performances finished we could hear people talking as they walked out. (Not a perfect atmosphere for Beckett.) We hired older female actors (ages ranged from 60–75) and set the play in an institution for the elderly. Marsha Ginsburg designed the set, a hyper-realistic nursing home with handrails, electrical outlets, and foot rails, juxtaposed against a floor made of live grass (which we had to water every night after the show). The possibility of creating a liminal space that existed in these women's minds was exciting. That juxtaposition of the hyper-realistic walls and the live grass presented a very intimate look at the surreal landscape of the characters' minds.

During this formative period, Moisés started using a number of exercises to create work and to explore the formal questions that interested him. Some of these exercises were popular in the deconstructivist/postmodern movement; others were created to solve specific problems in production and arrived at by necessity. ***Shortly, a process of investigation and questioning began to emerge – a process that would eventually become Moment Work™.***

Using this newfound process we continued to deepen our exploration of both subject matter and stage vocabularies. For *The Nest*, again at Theater for the New





City (although this time around we were in a legitimate theater with walls), we built a huge painted sky that encircled the stage, and then built a small A-frame home inside it. In the play a working-class newlywed couple dreams of the life they want to have. Set designer Marsha Ginsburg and Moisés decided that they would treat the entire space like a diorama, like the ones in the Museum of Natural History. The look of the setting was hyper-realistic, and there was also a clear sense that it was all artificial or “constructed.”

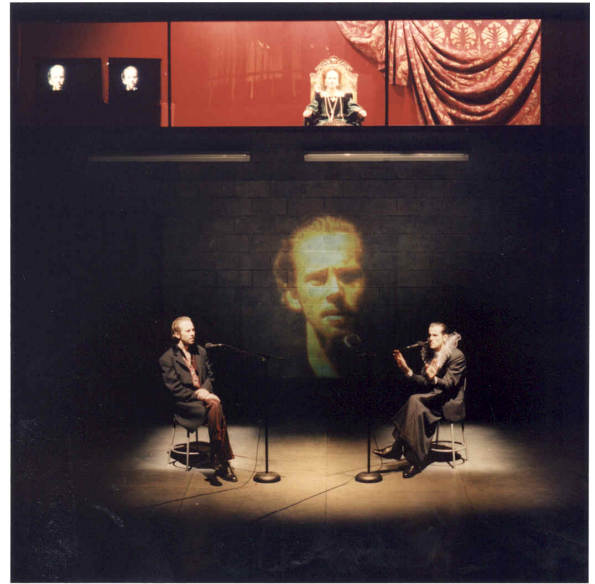
Most of the play occurs in and around the A-frame house, but there’s one scene that takes place by a lake. Because we were playing with the idea that this entire space was a construct of the characters’ dreams and desires, staging another location seemed to work against that. We decided to solve the problem by emphasizing the sense of the construct, rather than backing away from it. Instead of creating an entire set change, we made a small diorama of the lake, built to roll in for that one scene. We collaborated with puppeteer Basil Twist to build small puppets that looked like our actors. The actors crossed downstage and acted out the lake scene with their puppets in the miniature set, and when it was over, the diorama rolled off and the play continued.



Later, in the most catastrophic moment in the play, the entire sky dropped and revealed the walls of the theater. All the machinery that was “behind the scenes”

was made visible, and it was clear that the whole thing was a set. This action echoed the central event of the play: a couple believes in the perfect “diorama” of the life they have created, but when tragedy strikes, they are forced to confront their system of beliefs.

We were achieving a certain degree of dexterity in creating productions that fully explored the theatrical possibilities of a story. Spending time with the plays of Beckett, Brecht, and Kroetz was serving us well, but it was not entirely satisfying. We wanted to create new work. Moisés then encountered Naomi Iizuka, a playwright who shared our interest in experimentation, and decided to stage her play *Marlowe’s Eye*. This production was important to the company because it allowed us to work with a playwright in the room and take part in the editing and rewriting of the play.



Marlowe’s Eye tells the story of Christopher Marlowe’s murder, but it also uses contemporary narratives about current events to comment on the story. The play was formally daring, and because of its historical scope and depth, perfectly aligned with our interests and strengths. During this time, other artists began to join Tectonic; Leigh Fondakowski became Moisés’s assistant director and Maude Mitchell was cast as Queen Elizabeth.

We had always known that if we were going to be effective in exploring theatrical languages and theatrical forms, it wouldn’t be enough to only stage existing plays; we had to tackle the issue of text creation. *Marlowe’s Eye* was a big step in that direction. We used Moment Work™ to dig into the ideas of the play, and Naomi used the moments we were creating to re-write parts of her script. But it hadn’t yet become evident to Moisés that the Moment Work™ method we had been using to break down plays could be used to devise entirely new work. That realization came about with our next project, *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*. That process, which is discussed in full in Part 2 of this book, was the beginning of using Moment Work™ to create our own new plays.

From: https://www.tectonictheaterproject.org/?page_id=13675

Moment Work and *The Laramie Project*

In their 2018 book, *Moment Work: Tectonic Theater Project's Process of Devising Theater*, Kaufman (et. al) dig deep into their processes of who they are and how they approach the work they do. There is an entire chapter dedicated to their approach, intentions, and develop of what would become *The Laramie Project*.

While the entire chapter is fascinating and useful, we have excerpted parts of the chapter below to highlight the main points for easier accessibility.

NOTE: all citations in this section refer to the *Moment Work* text.

The Guiding Questions:

Kaufman wanted to focus on the town of Laramie and residents and not necessarily focus on Mathew Shepard directly. As a result, the group spent time in New York, prior to their trip to Wyoming, brainstorming questions to ask Laramie residents to build their source material. Specificity in their interview approach was important and designed, so they “made a list of about twenty questions for each [to use] as a rough guide” (180). The original questionnaire no longer exists, but the questions included:

1. Questions about what Laramie was like before the attack: What do you love about Laramie? What was it like to grow up here? What are jokes people tell about Laramie or about the residents of the town?
2. Questions about local lore or folk history-old stories that defined the place or spoke to its cultural identity: What are some stories about this part of the country that you grew up with? What are some sayings you most commonly use in the town?
3. Questions addressing the kidnapping and beating: When did you first find out about Matthew Shepard? How did you hear about it? What did you think when you heard?

4. Questions about the events that followed: What happened in the days after the attack? Did you attend the arraignment? How was it? What other events related to the case caught your attention? Why?
5. Questions about the media and their portrayal of the town: What did the media get wrong about Laramie? What did it get right?

Making Moments:

After the interviews had been transcribed, Tectonic began to develop and establish a performance text using Moment Work™. They started with this exercise:

Create a moment that introduces your character to the group. Choose texts from the interview that you find striking, relevant to our questionnaire, moving, or idiosyncratic. Make a moment with those texts, using other elements for the stage to communicate something about your character, the situation of the interview, or your experience in it. [...] **The company members had not only become interviewers but now were becoming editors as they made decisions about what to present and how.** (186)

The result of this exercise laid the foundation of the play. Actors adopted the use of small items (scarfs, boots, gestures, sound of a train going by, etc.) to create their moments. The company noted commonalities or things that repeated from person-to-person or interview-to-interview.

What emerged was the voice – or rather the voices – of the town of Laramie, telling us, in New York, what had happened to them. Our rehearsal room became a sort of “city hall”

away from Wyoming, where the people of Laramie were coming together to speak about their experience. (187)

By listening to individual moments, Tectonic was able to establish a framework, a structure, to the overall narrative – one moment next to another. As narratives came together, a collective narrative began to form that created a pseudo character of “the town,” which was telling them what had happened (189). Moment Work™ also allowed Tectonic to listen to and for discrepancies:

In the rehearsal room, while creating moments, members of our company would argue: “My character said this,” and somebody else would say, “Well, that’s not what my character said happened; my character said this!” So the discussions that were occurring in the rehearsal room were similar to the ones occurring in Laramie. (189-90)

Form: The Non-Documentary – Excerpted directly from *Moment Work*

“We have always maintained that what we do is not a ‘documentary play.’ One of the pitfalls of the word documentary is that it gives the illusion that ‘these are the facts.’ It implies that we are present facts unadulterated by opinion or interpretation. But in this day and age, we are all aware that the moment we edit two pieces of text together or splice two pieces of film, they are no longer simply ‘the facts.’ They are a narrative created by the people who are telling a particular story.

Furthermore, we are not reporters. We are not objective narrators. Some of the company members are gay, some are straight, some are Latino, some are white, and we are all theater people, so we all had different points of entry into the material.

It was therefore very important to us to make sure we came up with a model or theatrical form that conveyed to the audience

not ‘These are the facts’ but rather ‘this is what we say; this is what we heard.’ We needed structures that would place us – the interviewers and the performers – in plain sight of the audience at all times. Dozens of moments were created with that goal in mind.” (192-93)

Transformations

*“A moment can be defined as a unit of theatrical time, a building block of theatrical narrative, or a structural unit of performance. We think of each moment as a container that can hold the content we are exploring (the ‘what,’ or the subject matter) and the theatrical ideas that interest us (the ‘how,’ or the theatrical conventions, staging, movement, etc.) [...] Moment Work is defined as a process of creating and analyzing theatre one moment at a time.” (Kaufman, et. al, *Moment Work* 43)*

Moment Work™ is, in general, a framework of sense-making when conceptualizing, developing, formulating, and performing a theatrical text. For Tectonic, much of this work is rooted in being flexible and allowing you, as a performer, to transform from one character, or one moment, to the next.

The concept of transformation has its own history and is utilized by practitioners in a variety of ways. Transformation, much like Moment Work™, is about fluidity and commitment to the conventions being established.

For example, children use their imagination to transform objects all the time – a stick can be a telephone one moment, a sword the next, and a spoon the next. We allow them to commit to their choices and we, as the audience, accept the reality of the object because of their adherence and commitment to what they have transformed it to become.

Performance use of transformation is similar. The adoption of one character to another, to another, to another, and expecting the audience to accept those transformations relies on commitment, but also visual cues. The addition of a hat, or a scarf, or a specific mannerism, posture, facial 'masking' is crucial in the transformation process.

In this work, with a text like *The Laramie Project*, we do not get to rely on elaborate costuming or make-up effects to transmit who our characters are – we have to use our bodies and sparingly few items to transmit the transformation successfully.

History

Production History

The creation of this show began November 14, 1998; a month and two days after Matthew Shepard was declared dead. Moisés Kaufman and his team of actor-writers* from Tectonic Theater Project spent the next year traveling to Laramie, Wyoming several times. In the time he and his team spent in Laramie they collected over 200 personal interviews.

*Several of the actors are also credited as associate writers or dramaturgs.

Debut:

Opening: February 26, 2000 (Denver Center Theatre Company)

Closed: April 1st, 2000

Broadway:

Opening: May 18, 2000 (New York City, Union Square Garden)

Closing: September 2, 2000

Notable Performances: The production with the original cast was performed at the University of Wyoming in Laramie in November 2000. There were five performances.

Awards (2001-2002)

American Library Association: GLBT Book Award in Literature
Humanities Prize

Outfest: Special Programming Award

City Weekly: Best Playwright

GLAAD Media Award

Legacy

The Tectonic Theater Project collaborated with HBO to make a movie of *The Laramie Project*. This movie starred several of the original actors from the play. The movie was nominated for four Emmys in 2002:

- ❖ Outstanding Made for TV Movie

- ❖ Outstanding Directing of a TV Movie
- ❖ Outstanding Writing
- ❖ Outstanding Casting

From: https://www.tectonictheaterproject.org/?avada_portfolio=laramie and <https://www.playbill.com/article/laramie-project-packs-up-in-denver-april-1-readies-for-nyc-com-88203>

Reviews

Mar 5, 2000 11:00pm PT

The Laramie Project

The unfailing eloquence of plain-spoken words illuminates a tragedy in "The Laramie Project," the new play by Moises Kaufman and his Tectonic Theater Project that explores the violent murder of Matthew Shepard and its impact on the people of Laramie, Wy., where the murder occurred.

By Allen Young - <https://variety.com/2000/legit/reviews/the-laramie-project-1200461329/>

A world premiere presented by the Denver Center Theater Co., this poignant telling of the brutal facts is a riveting theatrical experience. It finds its own trenchant voice in the assembled word of the several hundred citizens of Laramie who were interviewed by members of the Gotham-based Tectonic troupe (of "Gross Indecency" fame). The play is dedicated to Shepard and to the people of Laramie.

Shepard, the diminutive, bright and gay student at the University of Wyoming at Laramie, is at the center of the play, but his voice is not heard. Instead, he is brought to life through the words of friends and neighbors who lend affectionate comments. Brief, incisive comments alternate with aria-like declarations.

The cast of eight portrays about 30 individuals representing voices from the law, the churches and the university as well as the bartender and clients of the Fireside Lounge. In one way or another they all express revulsion at Shepard's murder.

Despite the presentation nature of the play, it is never flat, thanks to the truth and vitality of the writing. There are compelling, dramatic moments, for instance a scene in which an elderly woman attacks two men she overhears denigrating homosexuals. The funeral scene, in which angel wings are devised to cover a hate sign, is magical.

Martha Swetzoﬀ's good use of video monitors depicting the media frenzy that followed the murder lends a thrilling immediacy, but the exceptional talents of the cast are most important in bringing the story to life. All the actors excel at evoking a variety of personalities.

Director Kaufman uses succinct staging techniques, placing performers in cogent relationships onstage. Robert Brill's minimal set is ideal, and Betsy Adams's lighting is shrewd.

The play represents a kind of democracy in action onstage, and it brings dramatic immediacy to a painful, complicated story.

The Laramie Project

Denver Center Theater Co. Ricketson Theater, Denver, Colo.; 200 seats; \$36

Production: A Denver Center Theater Co. presentation of a play in three acts by Moises Kaufman and members of the Tectonic Theater Project (head writer, Leigh Fondakowski; associate writers, Stephen Belber, Greg Pierotti, Stephen Wangh). Directed by Kaufman.

Crew: Set, Robert Brill; costumes, Moe Schell; lighting, Betsy Adams; sound, Craig Breitenbach; music, Peter Golub; video/projections, Martha Swetzoﬀ. Artistic director, Donoval Marley. Opened, reviewed Feb. 26, 2000. Running time: 2 HOURS, 30 MIN.

Cast: With: Stephen Belber, Amanda Gronich, Mercedes Herrero, John McAdams, Andy Paris, Greg Pierotti, Barbara Pitts, Kelli Simplins.

Play's world premier inspiring, stirring

By [Sandra C. Dillard](#)

Denver Post Theater Critic - <https://extras.denverpost.com/scene/shep0227a.htm>

Feb. 27 - Looking not only into their hearts and minds, but into their very souls, "The Laramie Project" shines a strong but sympathetic spotlight on the people of a small Wyoming town whose lives were turned upside down by a killing that made them the focus of the entire world.

The victim was gay college student Matthew Shepard, who was brutally beaten and left tied to a fence by two men he approached in a bar.

The murder and its aftermath touched everyone in the college town - residents who are brilliantly brought to life by an ensemble cast who slip in and out of dozens of personas with fluid ease.

The powerful drama, written by Moisés Kaufman and the members of the New York-based Tectonic Theatre Project, and drawn from more than 200 interviews, bowed in a

world premiere presented by the Denver Center Theatre Company on Saturday night at the Ricketson Theatre.

Still in transition, the piece is presented in the voices of the people who lived it, from the doctor who is shocked and offended that such a heinous thing could happen, to the talkative bartender who enjoys the attention, and the female sheriff's deputy who is the first to come to Shepard's aid - and then spends days in terror because he was HIV-positive and she was in contact with his blood.

A theater student wonders aloud at the feelings of his own family toward homosexuals, noting that his parents came to his every soccer game, but refused to attend his scholarship-winning performance of a scene from the gay-themed "Angels in America."

A spirited lesbian tells how she and her friend literally formed a band of angels to block a minister carrying a sign and spewing hate against "fags." And Matthew's father is heartbreaking as he wishes one of the killers a "long life" in which to contemplate what he has done.

The press, including The Denver Post, comes in for several swipes.

"Laramie" is played out on a bare stage dressed only with a few wooden tables and chairs, and enhanced by videos of the Wyoming scenery. Peopled with its memorable characters and thought-provoking message, it needs nothing else.

THE LARAMIE PROJECT

Written by: Moisés Kaufman

Starring: Ensemble

Directed by: Moisés Kaufman

Presented by: The Denver Center Theatre Company and the Tectonic Theater Project

Where: Ricketson Theatre, Denver Performing Arts Complex, 14th and Curtis streets

When: Through April 1. 6:30 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, 8 p.m. Thursday, Friday, Saturday, 1:30 p.m. Saturday matinee

Tickets: \$31-\$36. 303-893-4100; outside Denver, 800-641-1222; groups of 10 or more, 303-446-4849

THEATER REVIEW

THEATER REVIEW; A Brutal Act Alters a Town

By **Ben Brantley** – May 19, 2000

The vision that changes lives in Laramie, Wyo., on an October morning in 1998 is anything but celestial.

The first person to experience it, a young man on a bicycle, finds it impossible to believe that what he is looking at is human, initially thinking he has come upon a Halloween effigy, a grotesquely rigged-up scarecrow.

The second to arrive, a sheriff's deputy, cannot make out the face on the still-breathing body: only two tracks of skin are revealed through the crusted blood. They must have been formed, she speculates with an anguished wonder, by the paths of tears.

Thus is a 21-year-old man named Matthew Shepard described in the extraordinary final moments of the first act of "The Laramie Project," the enormously good-willed, very earnest and often deeply moving work of theatrical journalism that opened last night at the Union Square Theater.

These two accounts, taken from transcripts of interviews with citizens of Laramie by the members of the Tectonic Theater Project, are delivered in counterpoint with a third, that of an emergency room doctor who says his mind at first refused to grasp the idea that what was done to Mr. Shepard was wrought by the hands of other men. The note again resonates, a knell that trembles with troubling persistence: what has happened is beyond humanity, at least as any of these three figures has known it.

"The Laramie Project," which has been overseen by the director and writer Moisés Kaufman, the inspired talent behind "Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde," is virtuously determined to reclaim that missing human factor, to find the light in an event of harrowing darkness. Mr. Shepard, as much of the world now knows, was an openly gay university student who was beaten, tied to a fence on the outskirts of town and left to die by two men roughly his age. In death, he has become a poster boy for the casualties of anti-gay violence.

Throughout "The Laramie Project" -- which has largely been shaped from interviews conducted during six visits to Laramie by Mr. Kaufman and his ensemble of actors and writers following the crime -- the images of the bloodied Mr. Shepard, beaten beyond recognition, keep echoing. They become the touchstone by which everything else is measured, an unconditional physical reality that cannot be ignored but can, the play suggests, be transcended.

Reams have already been written on the murder of Matthew Shepard and on the trials of his killers, Russell A. Henderson and Aaron J. McKinney. Those three men remain mostly abstractions here. Whereas "Gross Indecency," the Tectonic group's best-known earlier project, was built around the vivid onstage presence of Wilde, the central players in the tragedy of "Laramie" are essentially presented as what they have come to stand for.

What Mr. Kaufman and his team are after is less a portrait of any person than one of the ethos of a place. In the deliberate, simple formality of its staging, in which eight radiantly clean-scrubbed performers embody 60 different people against Robert Brill's bare-bones set, "Laramie" often brings to mind "Our Town," the beloved Thornton Wilder study of life, love and death in parochial New

Hampshire.

To some degree, Laramie is indeed presented as a latter-day Grover's Corners, a cozy place where everyone appears to know everyone else's business and actually finds comfort in this. But if "The Laramie Project" nods conspicuously to Wilder, this play is "Our Town" with a question mark, as in "Could this be our town?" There are repeated variations by the citizens of Laramie on the statement "It can't happen here," followed immediately by "And yet it has."

A young "Muslim feminist" student who grew up in Laramie describes this dizzying contrast of idealized perception and deflating reality as something like the confusions induced by the mazes in an Escher print. The observation and the observer are unusually exotic for this play.

The production's characters, winnowed down from roughly 200 people interviewed, generally fit a more familiar mold of the small-town American Westerner: friendly, plain-spoken, guarded and understandably suspicious of the troupe from New York that has arrived to probe, a self-consciousness that has been incorporated into "The Laramie Project."

They needn't have worried. Even the evening's less sympathetic characters, including the Kansas preacher who showed up at Mr. Shepard's funeral as an anti-gay protester, are served up with respectful caution. Most of the others are wrapped in a warm cloak of affection.

The production's translation of transcribed interviews and documents may directly recall the methods of the performance artist Anna Deavere Smith, especially in her study of racial conflict in Brooklyn, "Fires in the Mirror." But "Laramie" -- which gives credit to a team of a dozen writers and dramaturgs led by Mr. Kaufman and Leigh Fondakowski -- feels less clinical than Ms. Smith's works in presenting its subjects, and the lack of distance is not always an asset.

A Roman Catholic priest who arranged the first of the candlelight vigils held for Mr. Shepard more than once speaks of the importance of a "correct" representation of Laramie. That injunction has been thoroughly honored. Though the cast is more than capable in its creation of an affecting emotional climate, only a few of its members have anything like Ms. Smith's ear for revelatory speech patterns and are able to summon portraits that feel correspondingly authentic.

There is an overriding sense that the characters -- who range from ranchers to university professors, from a lesbian waitress to a Baptist minister -- are cut from the same cloth of perplexed decency, embellished with the occasional signpost of an eccentricity, like the woman who remembers when her Laramie home was isolated enough for her to do her housework in "my altogethers."

There are a few recurring figures who acquire the specificity of fingerprints: one thinks especially of the bicyclist who found Mr. Shepard, embodied with eloquent inarticulateness by Kelli Simpkins, and the deputy sheriff, vibrantly played by

Mercedes Herrero, who is exposed to H.I.V. while assisting the wounded Mr. Shepard. By and large, however, these people are defined principally by their responses to an unspeakable event. You aren't allowed to know them, as you are, say, the characters in "Boys Don't Cry," a movie that covers similar material.

Yet, while running two and a half hours with two intermissions, "The Laramie Project" sustains its emotional hold. As Mr. Kaufman demonstrated with "Gross Indecency," he has a remarkable gift for giving a compelling theatrical flow to journalistic and historical material. And here he again finds the implicit music in repeated phrases and themes.

More than anything, those echoes conjure the feelings of horrified astonishment that certain acts of brutality can still elicit. Actually, the evening itself has the feeling of those candlelight vigils. There is that same sense of a stately procession through which swims a stirring medley of emotions: anger, sorrow, bewilderment and, most poignantly, a defiant glimmer of hope.

THE LARAMIE PROJECT

By Moisés Kaufman and the members of Tectonic Theater Project. Directed by Mr. Kaufman; head writer and assistant director, Leigh Fondakowski; associate writers, Stephen Belber, Greg Pierotti and Stephen Wangh; dramaturgs, Amanda Gronich, Sarah Lambert, John McAdams, Maude Mitchell, Andy Paris, Barbara Pitts and Kelli Simpkins. Sets by Robert Brill; costumes by Moe Schell; lighting by Betsy Adams; composer, Peter Golub; video and slide design, Martha Swetsoff; production manager, Kai Brothers; production stage manager, Charles Means; project adviser, Mr. Wangh. Associate producers, Mara Isaacs and Hart Sharp Entertainment. Presented by Roy Gabay, Tectonic Theater Project, in association with Gayle Francis and the Araca Group. At the Union Square Theater, 100 East 17th Street, Manhattan. WITH: Stephen Belber (Himself, Doc O'Connor, Matt Galloway and Andrew Gomez), Amanda Gronich (Herself, Trish Steger, Marge Murray and Baptist Minister), Mercedes Herrero (Reggie Fluty and Rebecca Hilliker), John McAdams (Moises Kaufman, Stephen Mead Johnson, Jon Peacock and Harry Woods), Andy Paris (Himself, Jedediah Schultz, Matt Mickelson and Doug Laws), Greg Pierotti (Himself, Sergeant Hing, Rob DeBree, Father Roger and Rulon Stacey), Barbara Pitts (Herself, Catherine Connolly, Zubaida Ula and Lucy Thompson) and Kelli Simpkins (Leigh Fondakowski, Romaine Patterson, Aaron Kreifels and Zackie Salmon).

History of Laramie, Wyoming

Created as a town when James Evans was laying out railroad plans for the Union Pacific Railroad. Ensured settlement in the area was established with the construction of Fort Sanders in 1866. Despite this the city was not given its actual location until 1867 and was named after the nearby river. Laramie became the home of the University of Wyoming when the school opened in 1887.

<https://www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/brief-history-laramie-wyoming>

Context

Background Information

In 1990 the Hate Crime Statistic Act was implemented, requiring law enforcement to report all hate crimes that occur. Hate crimes at this time were labeled as any act of prejudice based on race, religion, sexual orientation or ethnicity. Hate speech was not included in this reporting as it is protected under the First Amendment. Despite this recognition that there can be hate crimes towards LGBTQ+ members there was no legislation protecting members at this time. The 1992 election had a specific focus on homosexual and LGBTQ+ member rights, having the most members support the election. After taking office, Clinton announced he would lift the ban on LGBTQ+ members that kept them from being a part of the military. He even lifted travel bans on people with AIDS.

Despite these federal efforts many state governments were putting effort into preventing gay-rights laws claiming homosexuality is a problem and unhealthy to their communities. The 1996 United States Federal Hate Crime Law did not include any measures of protection for those who have experienced hate crimes due to their gender, gender identity, sexuality or disability. When analyzing data with hate crimes in 1997 it was found that sexual orientation was a motivator for 14% of reported hate crimes. Further on, 40 states had some form of hate crime legislation and 19 of which have sexual orientation as a listing of what is protected. The other 10 states, primarily in the south and southwest had no legislation against hate crime.

After the death of Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. in 1998, there was no change in federal regulation to include sexuality falls under hate crime protection. This was until the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crime Prevention Act was passed in 2009 to expand legal protection to those who have experienced hate crime. Many at this time were hesitant and still against it,

saying it would limit speech and criminalize people for their thoughts; jailing people for past speeches and opinions. Another worry was criminalizing churches. Even then, it was still passed, legally protecting members of the LGBTQ+ community when it comes to hate crime.

From: <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/02/05/us/rocky-mountain-states-resisting-move-to-broaden-hate-crime-laws.html>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthew_Shepard_and_James_Byrd_Jr._Hate_Crimes_Prevention_Act

<https://www.csmonitor.com/1993/0211/11011.html>

<https://theconversation.com/out-of-matthew-shepards-tragic-murder-a-commitment-to-punishing-hate-crimes-emerged-104102>


<https://www.nytimes.com/1991/04/28/business/managing-gay-rights-issue-of-the-90-s.html>


Where are They Now?

<https://www.wyofile.com/can-wyoming-be-shamed-into-passing-a-hate-crime-law/>





<https://www.bam.org/laramieproject>

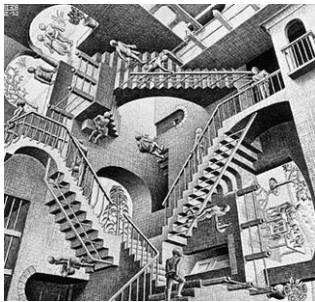
Glossary


<u>Page</u>	<u>Term/Phase</u>	<u>Definition</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Source</u>
22	Stewardship	Supervising or managing something. Also defined as the job of protecting and being responsible for.	On page 22, it's in the context of land.	https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stewardship#note-1
	Dubois	Pronounced: <i>DOO-BWAH</i> Philip Dubois, the president of the University of Wyoming from 1997-2005. He is responsible for implementing comprehensive academic, support services and assisting with capital construction plans.		http://www.uwyo.edu/pr esident/past-presidents/philip-dubois.html
23	Bosler, WY	Located in Albany county and north of Laramie, it was founded in the early 1900s by Frank Bosler. It slowly became a ghost town in 1970s with the interstate passing it. By 1990 there were around 50 people living there. The main thing that brings people in is Doc's Store.		http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~gtusa/history/usa/wy/bosler.htm
	Cody, WY	Located close to the east entrance of Yellow Stone, it was founded in 1896 by Colonel William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody. It is best known for its various museums.		https://travelwyoming.com/cities/cody
24	Waco	Pronounced: <i>WAY-KOh</i> Referring to a town in Texas, known for its various crimes and tragedies. On a list of most dangerous cities in Texas, it was number 13 out of 34. The town is primarily known for its siege of the Branch Davidian compound in 1993.		https://www.kxxv.com/story/31935851/new-report-ranks-two-central-texas-cities-among-most-dangerous#id25 https://www.voanews.com/archive/waco-texas-history-events
	Jasper	A town in Texas known and made infamous for the death of James Byrd Jr. when he was killed by three white men who		https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jasper,_Texas https://www.npr.org/201

		dragged him for three miles behind a pickup truck.		9/04/24/716647585/texas-to-execute-man-convicted-in-dragging-death-of-james-byrd-jr
25	Puritanism	The practices of the Puritans. Puritans believe that it is important to live according to God’s teachings strictly to receive redemption.		https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/puritanism https://www.britannica.com/topic/Puritanism
26	Angels in America	A two-part play written by Tony Kushner that focuses on the 1980s views on AIDS and homosexuality in America. The main story in the play focuses on a gay couple in Manhattan with several other story lines that occasionally cross paths.		https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angels_in_America
27	Chicken Fried Steak	A breaded, often cubed steak meal with seasoned flour that is then pan-fried.		https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicken_fried_steak
28	“all togethers”	Slang: referring to being naked or, sometimes, wearing only underwear		
	“ranching town”	Heavily tied with “cattle towns” are known for where cattle can be bought and shipped off. Ranching towns are towns dedicated to having lots of lawn dedicated to cattle.		https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cattle_towns#:~:text=Cattle%20towns%20were%20midwestern%20frontier%20settlements%20that%20catered%20to%20the%20cattle%20industry.&text=These%20towns%20were%20the%20destination,the%20central%20or%20northern%20plains.
29	“Run for the roundhouse. Minnie. They can’t corner you there.”	Based on the song “Run for the Roundhouse Nellie (He can’t corner you there)” by Jack Palmer and Willard Robison. It is also a play from 1973 that was written by Fendrich Shubert.		http://www.communitytheater.org/forum/forum_posts.asp?TID=5363 https://www.amazon.com/Roundhouse-Nellie-Cant-Corner-

				There/dp/B0007367LQ
30	Third and Grand	Third street on grand avenue. It is a location in town. Modern day Laramie has a 3 rd street bar located on Grand Ave where these two streets meet. These are the where the two main thoroughfares intersect in downtown Laramie		https://www.restaurantji.com/wy/laramie/3rd-street-bar-and-grill/
	Fort Collins, CO	Home of Colorado State University with a population of over 165k residents, it is the most populous city in Northern Colorado. It is one hour south of Laramie on Highway 287 and many locals travel to Ft. Collins on the weekends to “escape” the small-town life. Best known for its production of beer in the United States. In the context of the play, there is one gay bar in Fort Collins named R Bar and Lounge.		https://www.visittcollins.com/maps-info/about-fort-collins/#:~:text=Fort%20Collins%3A%20Colorado's%20Craft%20Beer%20Capital&text=Fort%20Collins%20produces%2070%20percent,brewing%20companies%20in%20the%20country. https://www.yelp.com/search?find_desc=Gay+Bars&find_loc=Fort+Collins%2C+CO
35	Humanists	A person who has strong interested for human welfare, values and dignity. Someone who is devoted in the humanities.		https://www.dictionary.com/browse/humanist
	Atheists	Atheism is in the broadest sense an absence of belief in the existence of deities. Less broadly, atheism is a rejection of the belief that any deities exist. In an even narrower sense, atheism is specifically the position that there are no deities.		
	Equivocate	To avoid committing yourself to something you say.		https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/equivocate

<p>38</p>	<p>Fireside Bar</p>	<p>A bar located in Laramie that Matthew Shepard frequented. It has changed names and ownership several times but the infamy has not gone away. It's a cozy, small town bar.</p>		<p>http://www.findingbrokeback.com/Entering_Wyoming/Fireside_Bar.html</p>
	<p>“The Equality State”</p>	<p>The motto and state nickname of Wyoming. It is the first state women were granted the right to vote in in 1869 so that there would be enough votes to make it a state.</p>	<p>Wyoming takes a lot of pride being the “Equality” state, but the reality is women voting was a necessity to gain to statehood. It was not because the people in the state valued women as equals; granting women the right to vote was a means to end.</p>	<p>https://statesymbolsusa.org/symbol/wyoming/state-nickname-state-quarter/equality-or-cowboy-state</p>
<p>43</p>	<p>Buck type fence</p>	<p>A fence made from various slabs of wood nailed together in a “x” formation</p>		<p>https://www.pinterest.com/pin/353954851965154142/</p>
<p>44</p>	<p>*breath (Reggie Fluty)</p>	<p>Typo - Should be ‘breathe’</p>		
<p>45</p>	<p>Ivinson Hospital</p>	<p>The local hospital is Laramie that was founded in 1917. The hospital Matthew Shepard was originally brought to for care.</p>		<p>https://images.app.goo.gl/HFBZp8vhQRGxNC7SA</p>
	<p>Poudre Valley</p>	<p>Pronounced: POO-Der Located in Fort Collins, CO that is about an hour away from Laramie. They specialize in orthopedic surgery, neuroscience, cancer, bariatric weight loss surgery and women and family services.</p>		<p>https://www.uhealth.org/locations/uhealth-poudre-valley-hospital/ https://images.app.goo.gl/fLzRyhCGY17uysNk7</p>
<p>49</p>	<p>*and (Judge)</p>	<p>Typo – remove ‘and’ from “...Aaron James and McKinney”</p>		

52	Gutenberg Press	An Iowa newspaper company that started in 1897 and is ongoing.		https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88059764/
	Hardcopy	A tabloid news show that ran from 1989-1999.	Highly sensationalized; not known for its integrity or high level of journalistic objectivity.	
56	HIV	Stands for human immunodeficiency virus. It weakens the immune system by destroying cells that fight infections and disease.		https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/index.html
	ATZ	It should be A-Z-T, but Flutty mispronounces the acronym. The use of “[sic]” next to the word is a note from Tectonic to let us know that this is not a textual mistake, rather, this is how Flutty stated it. Azidothymidine. It is a medication used to prevent HIV/AIDS. It can be used to prevent exposure to either viruses. It can be taken by mouth or injected.		https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zidovudine
60	Escher painting	M.C. Escher is known for his work that includes impossible constructions that bend reality.		https://mcescher.com/ https://images.app.goo.gl/Nmq9YjYULFN2tJvF8
71	Liturgy	A form of public worship.	Performed in the season of Easter that is performed every Sunday to celebrate Jesus ascending into heaven.	https://www.dictionary.com/browse/liturgy https://www.reformedworship.org/article/december-1987/easter-liturgy
74	Ordination	The act of being ordained. Ordain means to give someone holy order or to making something official.		https://www.dictionary.com/browse/ordination

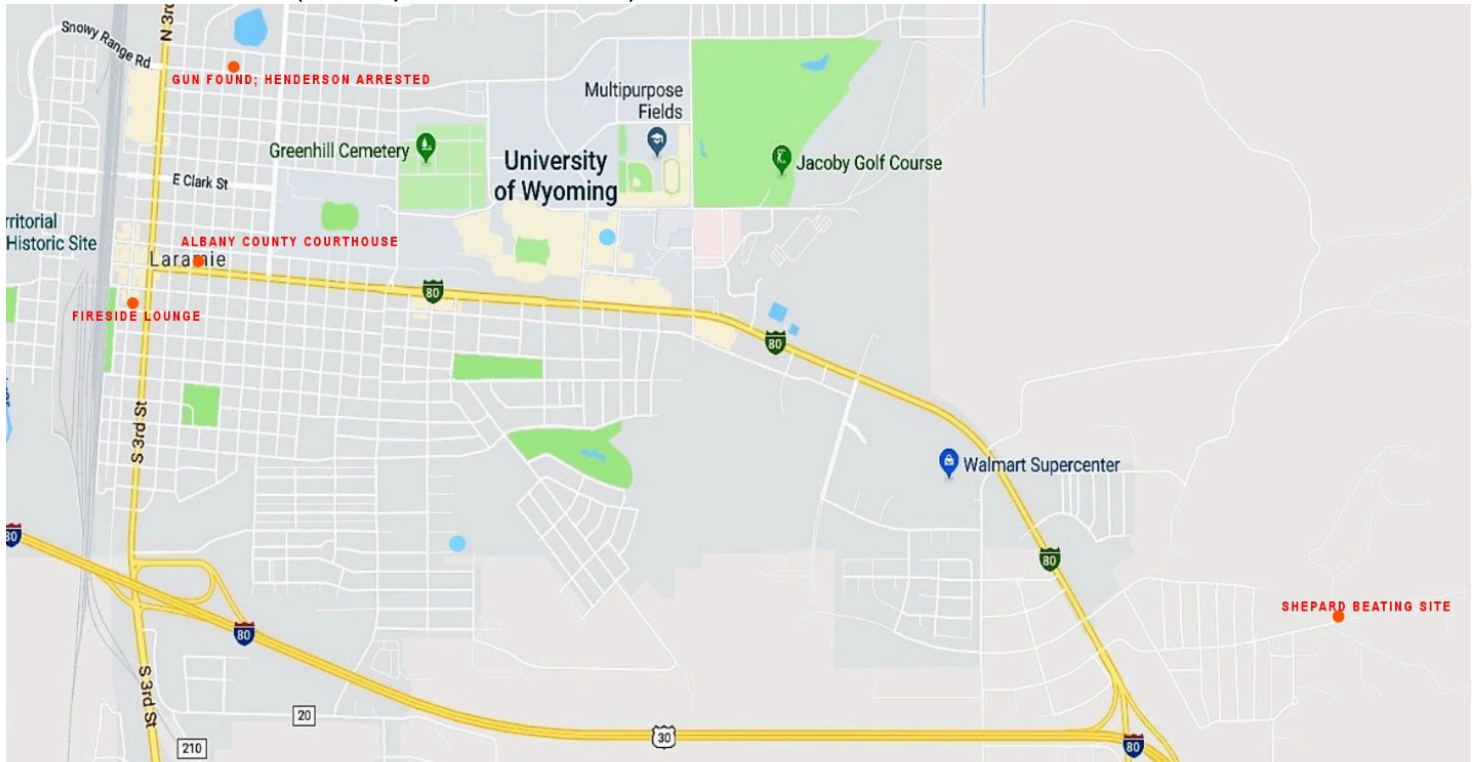
77	Excommunicate	Cut off from communion in a church, or more generally, to expel from participation in a group.		https://www.dictionary.com/browse/excommunicate
79	Rawlins Penitentiary	Located in Rawlins, the old prison that operated from 1901 to 1981 before becoming a museum. This specific instance is in reference to the new Penitentiary which is very close to the original.		http://corrections.wyo.gov/home/institutions/wsp https://travelwyoming.com/article/wyoming-frontier-prison-rawlins-wyoming
81	“jacking him up”	To inflict damage upon, physically or otherwise.		https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/jacking+him+up
	Twinkie Defense/ Harvey Milk/Moscone	Comes from an impossible legal defense. Specifically, in the case of Dan White for the murders of the San Francisco supervisor Harvey Milk and the mayor George Moscone. The main defense was that because of twinkies he wasn't able to think correctly.		https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twinkie_defense
86	Conversationalist	One who converses a great deal or who excels in conversation		https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conversationalist
87	OK Corral	Located in the historic town of Tombstone, AZ – this is where Wyatt Earp, his brothers, and Doc Holiday faced off in a famous gunfight with area ranchers in 1881.		http://www.ok-coral.com/
<u>Below: Derogatory Terms Used at Various Times Throughout</u>				
	Faggot	<i>Slang</i> Commonly used as a derogatory term mostly directed towards homosexual males. It can also be used to describe someone (often male) of being weak and cowardly		https://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/67623
	Queer	“Differing in some way from		https://www.merriam-

		what is usual and normal” Also defined as someone who likes someone of the same sex or don’t care for someone’s identification.		webster.com/dictionary/queer
	Dyke	Originally used as a slur for a masculine woman. It is more commonly used as another word for a lesbian.		https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dyke_(slang)
81	Gay Panic	It was created by a psychiatrist and recognized as an actual illness starting in the 1920s. This continued into 1959 where mood related symptoms contributed to a diagnosis. It is no longer recognized as a mental disorder. The first state to ban the diagnosis of HPD was California in 2014.		https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexual_panic https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/3197016/

Maps

[\(Source\)](#)

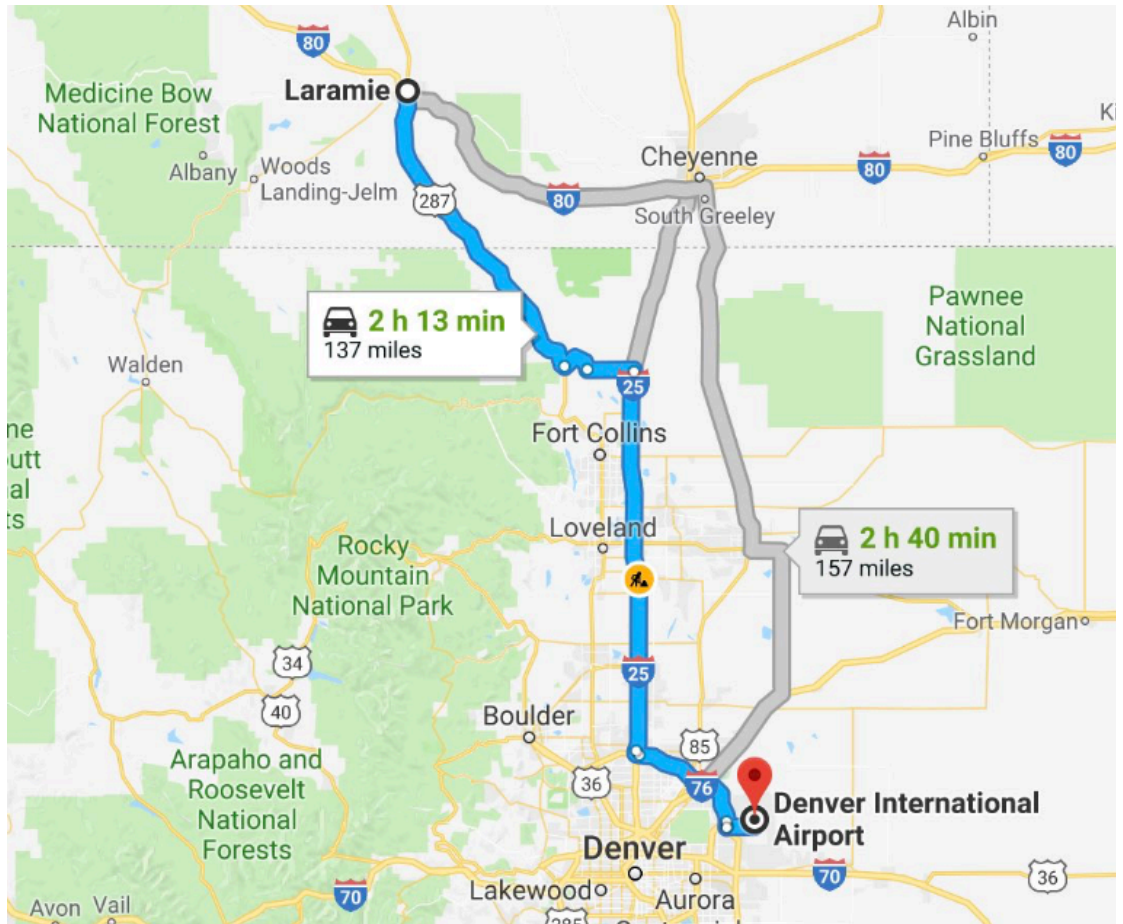
Laramie, WY (noted points of interest)



State of Wyoming (with noted points of interest)



**Route from
Denver
International
Airport to
Laramie via
287 through
Ft. Collins,
CO**



For Further Information

Links

- ❖ [How 'The Laramie Project' Changed theatre - and the world](#)
- ❖ [The Enduring Legacy of 'Laramie' - two decades later](#)
- ❖ <https://www.matthewshepard.org>
- ❖ <http://www.tectonictheaterproject.org>
- ❖ [Photos of many of the 'real-life' characters](#)

Videos

- ❖ [Nearly 30mins of footage from news clips to trial to press coverage](#)
- ❖ [Matthew Shepard's Lasting Legacy](#)

LGBTQ+ and Trauma

- More to come in this section

Images

The Land – Wyoming (Albany County)



(The Snowy Range Mountains – the northern part of the Medicine Bow Mountains that extend from Northern Colorado into Southwestern Wyoming)



Laramie, WY (a small sampling)



The University of Wyoming



The Fireside



The Fence

