

BAM Education

BAM PETER JAY SHARP BUILDING  
30 LAFAYETTE AVE.  
BROOKLYN, NY 11217

# The Laramie Project

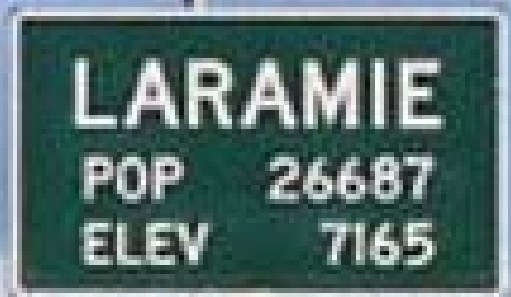
THU, FEB 14 2013 AT 10:30AM  
BAM HARVEY THEATER

Tectonic Theater Project

Written by **Moisés Kaufman** and  
**members of Tectonic Theater Project**

Directed by **Moisés Kaufman** and **Leigh  
Fondakowski**

Study Guide Written by Matt Freeman, Nicole  
Kempskie and Scott Barrow



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **3 Matthew Shepard : A History**

## **6 Gay America**

- 6 Forward
- 6 Way Back When
- 7 Wilde Thing
- 8 We're Here, We're Here
- 8 The Great White Way...To Jail
- 8 Prohibition II
- 8 Homosexual Threat
- 8 Hearing the Beats
- 8 Stonewall
- 10 Gay Groups
- 10 Progress
- 10 The Sickness that Dares not Speak its Name (The AIDS Crisis)
- 10 Uncle Sam Doesn't Care
- 10 The Art of the Possible
- 11 In Bill We Trust
- 11 Crimes of Hate
- 12 Goin to the Chapel and We're...
- 13 Just Married
- 13 Exercise: What in the World?
- 13 Exercise: And then What?

## **14 Storied Lives (An Interview with Moisés Kaufman)**

## **20 Moisés Kaufman Biography**

## **21 How Does Tectonic Create Its Productions**

## **22 Tectonic Theater Project Moment Workshop Exercises**

## **24 Understanding Documentary Theater**

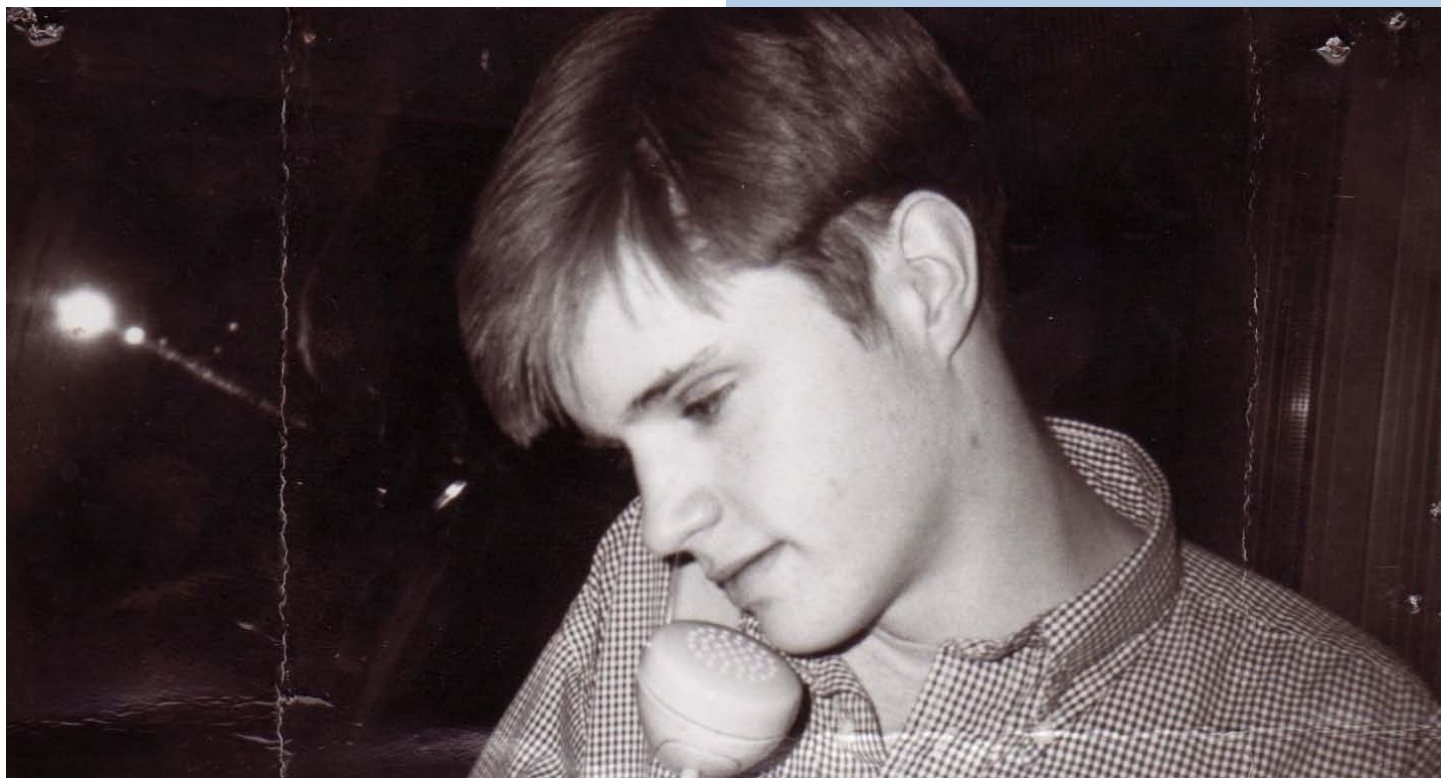
## **25 Exercise: New York, New York!**

## **27 Curriculum Connections**

- 27 Confronting Hate Crimes
- 27 Compare and Contrast
- 27 Theater Action Project
- 28 Living Newspaper
- 28 Further Reading

# MATTHEW SHEPARD: A HISTORY

By Matt Freeman



*I would like to begin my statement by addressing the jury. Ladies and gentlemen, a terrible crime was committed in Laramie thirteen months ago. Because of that crime, the reputation of the City of Laramie, the University of Wyoming, and the state of Wyoming became synonymous with gay bashing, hate crimes, and brutality. While some of this reputation may be deserved, it was blown out of proportion by our friends in the media. Yesterday you, the jury, showed the world that Wyoming and the city of Laramie will not tolerate hate crimes. Yes, this was a hate crime, pure and simple, with the added ingredient of a robbery. My son Matthew paid a terrible price to open the eyes of all of us who live in Wyoming, the United States, and the world to the unjust and unnecessary fears, discrimination, and intolerance that members of the gay community face every day. Yesterday's decision by you showed true courage and made a statement. That statement is that Wyoming is the Equality State; that Wyoming will not tolerate discrimination based on sexual orientation; that violence is not the solution. Ladies and gentlemen, you have the respect and admiration of Matthew's family and friends and of count-*

*less strangers around the world. Be proud of what you have accomplished. You may have prevented another family from losing a son or daughter.*

Dennis Shepard's statement to the court, as re-printed in Judy Shepard's *The Meaning of Matthew: My Son's Murder in Laramie, and a World Transformed*.

Judy Shepard says she knew her son Matt was gay when he dressed up as Dolly Parton for Halloween for two consecutive years. And while she understands how some might interpret this as a stereotypical assumption, she mentions many times in her book, *The Meaning of Matthew*, that she believes all mothers have a sixth sense when it comes to their children, a mother's intuition. Mrs. Shepard goes on to say she didn't have a problem with the idea of her eldest son being gay; her primary concern was for Matt's physical and emotional safety in a world that had proven throughout her lifetime and beyond to be largely homophobic. She says, "Like so many parents who first discover their child is gay—or even contemplate the prospect of having a kid who grows up to be gay—I assumed that Matt would never have a family of his own. I conjured up a grim forecast for my son: a

lonely and loveless existence.” Unfortunately, some of Judy’s fears for her son’s well being and future would prove tragically accurate.

Born on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1976, to Judy and Dennis Shepard, Matt spent most of his young life in Casper, Wyoming. From a young age, Judy recalls her son was hyper-sensitive to the emotional needs of his schoolmates, an emotional and social intelligence which was also expressed through an early inclination to local politics (helping with a political campaign at 7-years-of-age!) and doing community and college theater. Then in 1993, as Matt finished his sophomore year of high school, Judy and Dennis decided to move the family to Saudi Arabia so Dennis could start a new job with Saudi Aramco, an oil company. While a big move for the Shepard family, one of the benefits was that the company paid the tuition at many international boarding schools for their employees’ high-school aged children. For Matt, who started to express interest in a career in international relations, this was a huge perk—a chance to experience life outside of the small-town Wyoming existence he knew.

The Shepards eventually settled on the American School in Switzerland, where Matt would spend the last two years of high school studying, traveling Europe, and making close friends. During his time in Switzerland, Matt’s trips back to Saudi Arabia were infrequent, but he and his parents maintained contact primarily via fax (as e-mail wasn’t accessible where Dennis and Judy lived and calls between Switzerland and Saudi Arabia were about \$5 a minute.). Although the separation was difficult for Judy and Dennis, Matt seemed to be thriving.

Sadly, during his senior year, while on a trip to Morocco with friends, Matt was attacked and raped by three men. Judy writes, “Matt was truly never the same after that rape, and neither were Dennis and I. We constantly worried about his physical safety and his mental state.”

As Matt pushed through to finish his senior year, it finally came time for him to choose a college, ultimately selecting Catawba College in North Carolina, primarily based on the reputation of its theater program. Although Judy and Dennis were again

confronted with a great distance between them and their son, Matt seemed to be coming into his own at Catawba. Early on during his first semester, Matt phoned Judy at 3AM in Saudi Arabia (which is 8 hours ahead of North Carolina) to tell her he was gay—the moment Judy had expected from all those Halloweens before. After Matt’s announcement, Judy recalls in her book:

I think it probably took me a couple of seconds to say anything back, and I’m sure that for him those were longest seconds in the world. He’d just opened his heart to me and told me what I imagine was probably his deepest secret at the time. Aside from complete rejection, the last thing I wanted was silence. But as long as I had anticipated this moment, I hadn’t rehearsed anything to say when it finally came. And I didn’t want to say just anything—I had to say the right thing.

“What took you so long to tell me?” I finally asked, before explaining that I’d always known and had just been waiting for him to figure it out for himself.

If it were possible to hear the stress release from a person’s body, I could hear it fall off Matt’s back and shoulders that night. “How did you know before I did?” he asked, surprised and at the same time playful.

“It’s just a mom thing. I don’t think you can keep something like that from the person who knows you best.”

Unfortunately, Matt’s discussing his sexuality with Judy did not signal his full recovery. After struggling through his first semester at Catawba as the result of dealing with post-traumatic stress symptoms related to his rape, eventually Matt dropped out of school and began the first in a series of moves around the country. Over the next few years Matt lived in Raleigh, North Carolina, back in Casper, Wyoming, and in Denver, Colorado. Matt made his final move back to Wyoming, this time to enroll at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, approximately 150 miles south of where he grew up.

Very soon after starting his first semester, Matt,

always interested in political and social causes, became active with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Alliance on campus. On October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1998, after a group meeting to plan Gay Awareness Week, Matt went by himself to the Fireside Lounge, a bar he had been to a few times before. It is here where he first encountered Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson—a meet-

ing that would ultimately lead to the full realization of Judy's fears. Early in the morning of Wednesday, October 7<sup>th</sup> 1998, Matt was severely beaten, tied to a fence, and left for dead by the two men. He died 5 days later on October 12<sup>th</sup>, becoming forever known as Matthew Shepard, a symbol of hate crimes in this country and a reminder that the struggle for equality was long from over.

*Greg Pierotti, Jeremy Bobb, Amy Resnick, Christina Rouner, Mercedes Herrero*  
Photo Credit: Michael Lutch



# GAY AMERICA

Except where designated (\*), the following is largely reprinted directly from *Gay America: Struggle for Equality* by Linas Alsenas, available wherever books are sold. Used with the permission of Amulet Books, an imprint of ABRAMS.

## FOREWORD

Gays and lesbians play a very prominent role in American life today, whether grabbing headlines over political gains, starring in and being the subject of movies and television shows, or filling the streets of nearly every major city to celebrate Gay Pride every year.

Studying the history of gay and lesbian people can be a very slippery business. Just as with Heterosexuals, lesbians and gays are hard to define in any age and grouping them together across time adds further complications include figures and events that have been claimed by queer men and women in reconstructing the history of their community beginning with the Victorian era- because it was during that time the word “homosexual” appeared in America to describe a kind of person and identity.

The history of homosexuality in America is *huge*-and it grows more complex every day. This [timeline] could not possibly claim to be a complete history. My narrative tries to focus on the most dramatic, trail breaking moments and personalities, and it omits the everyday struggles and joys of the millions of gays and lesbians who lived unrecorded lives with silent courage throughout the period. It is important to note that there often are exceptions to every rule -- what is happening in New York may not be true in Oakland, California, for example, or the experience of one racial or ethnic group may differ vastly from the experience of others.

## WAY BACK WHEN

It may be hard to appreciate that just over a hundred years ago, people didn't use the words “gay” and “lesbian” to describe a kind of sexuality. Of course, guys have been attracted to guys and gals have been attracted to gals since at *least* ancient times (the ancient Greeks left us explicit sex scenes on their pottery as proof, to take but one example). But the concept of “homosexuality” as a sexual orientation appeared in America during the late 1800s. We know that earlier, colonial Americans had homosex, but they didn't think about sexual identity the way we do today. Instead, “sodomy” was the term colonists used to describe various sexual acts that didn't lead to “procreation,” or pregnancy. (In fact, sometimes the word “sodomy” was used for certain sexual acts, such as oral sex, that a man and a woman were physically able to do together.) The colonists' Puritan religion maintained that these acts were an offense against God. While religion was certainly a dominant reason for outlawing sodomy, historians have argued that colonists had a practical reason for doing so as well: it was particularly crucial for them to have children because their lives depended on it. Conditions in the North American wilderness were harsh, and the more workers they added to the community, the better their chances of survival.

In the early colonies, sodomy was no joke: it was a crime sometimes punishable by death. (Then again, so was witchcraft.) The colonists didn't believe that only certain people could be attracted to people of the same sex-they thought sodomy was an evil act by which *everyone* could be tempted.

## WILDE THING

Unfortunately, it seems that most public discussion of homosexuality during the Victorian era centered on scandals. The best-known such scandal was the trial of Oscar Wilde.

Wilde was a playwright living in London, England, who was world famous for his colorful personality and witty plays, including *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *An Ideal Husband*. Wilde was enamored with a younger man named Lord Alfred Douglas. The two had an intimate (though troubled) relationship for several years. Though Wilde was married and a father, he and Douglas would arrange to have sex with lower-class young men in exchange for gifts or money. Meanwhile, Douglas's father, the marquess of Queensberry,

was enraged that his son was spending so much time with the controversial and flamboyant Wilde. The marquess began intimidating and harassing the playwright. Wilde responded with a libel suit, which he lost, thereby leaving himself open to charges of "gross indecency." Though given plenty of opportunities to escape England, Wilde stayed, and during his trial in 1895, he stated an eloquent defense of love between men. Nevertheless, he was convicted and sentenced to two years of hard labor. Wilde served his prison time and died a few years later, in 1900, a penniless and broken man. His trial was well covered in American newspapers, although some newspapers, like *The New York Times*, considered his crime too heinous to describe. In the newspaper's extensive coverage of Wilde's case, from the trial until his death, neither the crime nor the charge was ever named. (The *Times* would not print the word "homosexuality"



Moisés Kaufman turned the trials of Oscar Wilde into a riveting human and intellectual drama called *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*. Expertly interweaving courtroom testimony with excerpts from Wilde's writings and the words of his contemporaries, *Gross Indecency* unveils its subject in all his genius and human frailty.

The play was one of the most performed plays in the country the year it opened, and has since been performed around the world.

until as late as 1926.)

## WE'RE HERE, WE'RE HERE

As America entered the new century, most people still thought all homosexual men were by definition highly feminine, like the “fairies” who could be found in New York’s less-reputable neighborhoods. But by the 1910s and 1920s, middle-class men had developed the beginnings of what historian George Chauncey calls the “gay world” in New York.

## THE GREAT WHITE WAY... TO JAIL

Meanwhile, in midtown New York, Broadway was at its most popular during the 1920s, with one season putting on two hundred and fifty different shows at seventy theaters. (In contrast, there were only fifty-four shows during the 2005-2006 season.) In the twenties, several plays opened that notoriously dealt with homosexuality. As early as 1923, Sholom Asch’s Broadway play *God of Vengeance*, had a lesbian theme that caused the producer, director, and cast to be arrested for obscenity.

## PROHIBITION II

This was just the beginning of a dark decade for homosexuals. When Prohibition was repealed with the 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1933, a new mechanism was introduced by states for monitoring the “moral order” of the public: liquor licensing. Part of the argument for Prohibition had been the number of social problems associated with saloons, such as prostitution and disorderly public behavior. The mere *presence* of homosexuals in a bar was considered “disorderly” by the police, who could force the bar to close. For the next thirty years, homosexuals in states such as New York would be legally prohibited from openly socializing or working where liquor was being sold.

## THE HOMOSEXUAL THREAT

Illogically, homosexuals were also roped into hysteria about Communists—gays and lesbians were considered dangerous not only because of their supposed predatory “perversion” or “deviant” behavior, but also because they were thought to be vulnerable to blackmail. Beginning in 1947, President Harry S. Truman’s National Security Loyalty Program instructed the State Department to fire suspected homosexuals as security risks.

## HEARING THE BEATS

On October 7, 1955, writer Allen Ginsberg read his landmark poem *Howl* in a San Francisco gallery. The poem began, “I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness....” and went on to list a vivid variety of experiences, including several explicitly gay encounters. The poem became an anthem for a generation of rebels, people who didn’t fit in to the rigid orthodoxy of 1950s America.

## STONEWALL

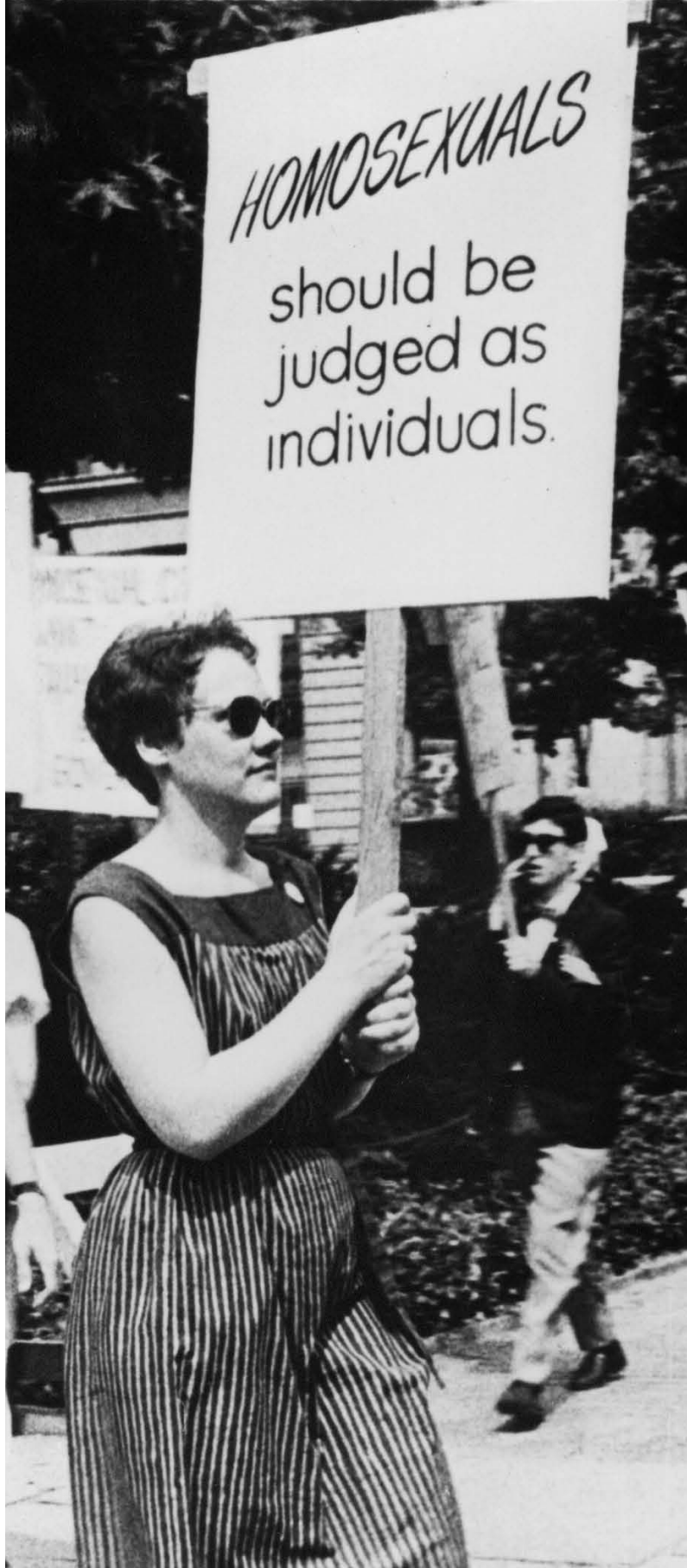
The Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street was a dingy bar with its front window painted black that served watered-down drinks in unwashed glasses. The Mafia owners paid about \$2,000 a week in bribes to the police to stay open, but even so, the bar was raided about once a month. The bar had warning lights that flashed when the police were on their way in so that customers could stop dancing and touching, and so that the bartenders had time to jump the bar and pretend to be customers (to better their chances of not getting arrested). The weekly bribes usually bought the bar a heads-up tip from the police that they were on their way—but on June 27, the tip didn’t come.

That night, the warning lights flashed, and eight detectives barged in. The raid started off with the usual insults and rough handling. The police arrested some customers, but let most of them go. There was a crowd outside the bar that night, and when departing drag queens left, they struck poses for the cheering onlookers. When police paddy wagons pulled up to take away the arrested customers, the crowd's mood suddenly shifted. Enough was enough. As the police came out of the bar, the bystanders began yelling. Then they started throwing bottles and coins.

The police were stunned-this had never happened at a gay bar raid. Homosexuals didn't fight back. Someone threw a garbage can through the bar's front window, and the police got scared. They retreated back into the bar. Someone squirted lighter fluid into the bar through the broken window and began throwing in lit matches. The police tried to come outside, but the crowd wouldn't let up- one police officer grabbed a hostage and pulled him in. They beat the man and arrested him for assault.

The street was in chaos: police beating people, people throwing concrete blocks and garbage at police cars. But a total of only thirteen people were arrested that night, seven of whom were Stonewall employees.

All throughout the next day, people came by to check out the scene of the trashed bar. Someone had scrawled "Support Gay Power" and "Legalize Gay Bars" on the entrance, and a crowd began to build. That night, the riot control unit returned to confront the thousands of people milling about - soon the street erupted into chaos again, with police randomly beating civilians, and people striking back by throwing bottles and garbage. Passing cars were swallowed by the crowd and rocked, terrorizing the passengers. The chaos lasted until four o'clock in the morning, when the last of the police left.



Pioneering gay rights activist Barbara Gittings at the first homosexual rights demonstration, Philadelphia, July 4, 1965

## GAY GROUPS\*

The Stonewall Riots prompted a few gay radical networks to form, such as the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) which started a newsletter called *Come Out!* After a fairly disorganized year, the GLF disbanded and a new organization emerged called the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA). The GAA became known for its media “zaps.” These “zaps” would have GAA members confront politicians at public events about their stance on gay rights. As a result, John V. Lindsay, the New York Mayor of the time, passed legislation that prohibited the discrimination of homosexuals in the work place and led City Councilwoman Carol Greitzer to cosponsor the gay rights bill that eventually passed in 1986.

## PROGRESS

Gay rights activists were finding more and more supporters among straight politicians, most notably New York City Congresswoman Bella Abzug and San Francisco’s State Assemblyman Willie Brown. In 1973, the National Gay Task Force (NGTF, later called the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, NGLTF) was formed as a truly national gay rights organization. Despite its shoestring budget, the NGTF was instrumental in getting the U.S. Civil Service Commission to stop excluding homosexuals from federal employment in 1975, and it helped make gay rights an official priority of the Democratic Party during the 1976 and 1980 national conventions. Activists even nominated a gay vice presidential candidate, Melvin Boozer, for the Democratic Party at the 1980 convention.

## THE SICKNESS THAT DARES NOT SPEAK ITS NAME [The AIDS Crisis]

At first, there was so much confusion surrounding the disease: what was causing it, how to test for it, and what could be done about it. Described as a “rare cancer” in the very first Centers for Disease Control (CDC) report in 1981, the mysterious illness was named GRID (Gay-Related Immune

Deficiency). After reports surfaced that some heterosexual hemophiliacs, drug addicts, and Haitians had been diagnosed with the disease, the name was changed in 1982 to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

## UNCLE SAM DOESN'T CARE

Meanwhile, the federal government was doing very little in response to the rapid spread of AIDS. Although the CDC had described the disease as an “epidemic” as early as 1981, President Ronald Reagan refused to provide adequate funding for dealing with the disease. In fact, *he didn't even say the word “AIDS”* in public until 1986, and his first major speech to mention AIDS was in 1987—when almost 21,000 people had already died from it.

Of course, there were some people in the government who were doing whatever they could to help, like the struggling, underfinanced researchers at the CDC. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop took a politically brave stand in 1986 by recommending an aggressive education program for youth: “Education about AIDS should start at an early age so that children can grow up knowing the behaviors to avoid to protect themselves from exposure to the AIDS virus.” Then, in 1988, the Presidential Commission on HIV, headed by Admiral James Watkins, recommended laws that prohibited discrimination against people with AIDS and encouraged AIDS education as early as kindergarten. The recommendations were largely ignored.

## THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE

The 1980s contained many setbacks for gays and lesbians, and certainly AIDS was the primary battle to be fought, both at a societal level, and—for too many—a personal one. But there were still enough political gains during the decade to give homosexuals in America hope. One important development was the founding of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) in 1980 as a gay/lesbian political lobbying organization. By 1988, HRC could brag that it had become the ninth largest

political action committee in the country with a budget of \$2.1 million. Also, the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) was founded in 1985 to counter inaccurate and sensationalized coverage of the AIDS crisis, and the organization has since developed into a powerful media watchdog group focused on representations of gender identity and sexual orientation.

## IN BILL WE TRUST

When Clinton became president in 1993, he seemed to be a godsend to the gay and lesbian community. Queer activists were desperate for a presidential ally after eight years of Reagan and four years of Bush (the first President Bush). In stark contrast, Democratic Party candidate Bill Clinton promised to get rid of the military's prohibition of homosexuals and increase AIDS funding.

### Silent Soldiers

But despite all these advances, gay and lesbian activists were disappointed by big setbacks during the Clinton years. The first was Clinton's failure to deliver on his promise regarding the military's exclusionary policy toward homosexuals.

## CRIMES OF HATE

As the new millennium approached, gays and lesbians all over the country were feeling pretty good about the direction things were heading. Then several high-profile murders reminded them that there was a lot more work to be done.

On October 7, 1998, a twenty-one-year-old University of Wyoming student named Matthew Shepard met two guys at the Fireside Lounge, a gay hangout in Laramie, Wyoming, and asked them for a ride back to campus. The two drove Shepard out to a field, robbed him, severely beat him, tied him to a fence with his own shoelaces, and left him to die. Shepard was discovered eighteen hours later by a passing bicyclist, and he was pronounced dead on October 12. At the trial, the defendants argued a "gay panic" de-

fense: they had gone insane temporarily because they claimed Shepard made sexual advances on them. They also said they had only wanted to rob Shepard, not kill him. The jury was unmoved, and both men received two consecutive life sentences in-one could have received the death penalty, but Shepard's family intervened. At Shepard's funeral, a notorious antigay protester named the Rev. Fred Phelps and his family (as members of his Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas) carried signs reading "Matthew Shepard Rots in Hell" and "God Hates Fags." Afterward, there was an attempt by President Clinton to add sexual orientation as a protected characteristic to federal hate crime legislation (which would strengthen and expand the Justice Department's ability to prosecute such crimes), as well as a similar move in the Wyoming state legislature. Both attempts failed.

On July 5, 1999, Barry Winchell was brutally beaten to death with a baseball bat by a fellow

**Five weeks after Matthew Shepard's murder, Moisés Kaufman and fellow members of the Tectonic Theater Project went to Laramie, Wyoming and over the course of the next year, conducted more than 200 interviews with people of the town. From these interviews they wrote the play *The Laramie Project*, a chronicle of the life of the town of Laramie in the year after the murder. *The Laramie Project* is one of the most performed plays in America today.**

Army Airborne Division soldier at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, because he was believed to be gay (Winchell was dating a transgender woman at the time). A great deal of publicity followed, with heavy criticism of the ineffectiveness of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. It is sad to note that afterward, Fort Campbell significantly increased the amount of gay discharges given out, and reports of harassment in all of the armed services shot up. If anything good can be said about these sad events, it is that they did not go unnoticed. Shepard's murder inspired a number of songs by celebrity performers, a play titled *The Laramie Project*, and three movies (*The Laramie Project*, *The Matthew Shepard Story*, and *Anatomy of a Hate Crime*), while Winchell's story was told in a Showtime movie in 2003 (*Soldier's Girl*). Trans-

gender youth Brandon Teena had been raped and then murdered a week later on New Year's Eve, 1993, and his death inspired a 1998 documentary and a 1999 feature film, *Boys Don't Cry* (for which Hilary Swank won an Oscar for Best Actress). The portrayals of these horrible deaths reminded Americans that although the antics of Will and Jack might be on TV every week, many American queers lived in terrible danger.

## GOIN TO THE CHAPEL... AND WE'RE...

As Americans celebrated the turn of the century in 2000, the idea of same sex couples marrying legally was considered far-fetched by many, even though Hawaii and Alaska had come close to allowing it in the 1990s. The issue was revived when Vermont introduced civil partnership laws in 2000, which basically permitted same-sex couples to marry but called it a "civil union" instead. Then, three years later, the Massachusetts Supreme Court shocked the nation when it ruled that disallowing same-sex marriage was unconstitutional in the state, and the legislature would have 180 days to act, until May 17, before the ruling would go into effect.

But even before that date, San Franciscans stole the spotlight. On February 12, 2004, Mayor Gavin Newsom announced that the city would begin issuing marriage licenses to homosexual couples. This soon led to a whole rash of gleeful marriage celebrations across the country, including Sandoval County, New Mexico; New Paltz, New York; Multnomah County, Oregon; and Asbury Park, New Jersey.

Then came the backlash. The California Attorney General took the city of San Francisco to court and in March, the California Supreme Court ordered the city to halt giving out marriage licenses to same-sex couples (by then, about 4,000 such marriages had taken place). The San Francisco marriages were soon invalidated, and eventually the rest of the spontaneous weddings would face the same fate. A couple weeks after the San Francisco weddings began, President George W. Bush announced his support for an actual proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution- called the

Federal Marriage Amendment – banning same-sex marriages in all states. Its supporters in Congress tried to force a direct vote on the proposal within months (but failed), and the measure was eventually put to a vote in 2006, when it failed again.

But nothing could stop the May 17, 2004, marriages in Massachusetts, where thousands of people cheered the couples lining up at Cambridge City Hall. The marriage issue was much discussed in elections a few months later, as eleven states voted on so-called Defense of Marriage Acts. The issue kept coming up in the presidential election that year, although even the Democratic candidate, John Kerry, did not endorse same-sex marriage (though he did support civil unions). For the Republicans, the issue was complicated by the fact that Vice President Dick Cheney's daughter (and campaign manager) Mary was an open lesbian. Candidate Cheney avoided talking about the issue as much as he could, and Mary Cheney later stated that she "actually came very close to quitting" as campaign manager because of the marriage issue ... but didn't. An organization of gay Republicans called Log Cabin Republicans refused to endorse Bush because of his views on marriage, but it didn't make much of difference: not only was he reelected, but all eleven DOMAs passed in their respective states (Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Utah).

As of the writing of this book, the campaign for legal recognition of same-sex couples continues across the country, with each state a different battleground. Forty-four states have passed "Defense of Marriage" laws, and twenty states have written same-sex marriage bans into their constitutions.

The supreme courts in New York and Washington disappointed gay and lesbian activists by refusing to extend marriage as Massachusetts had done. Meanwhile, Connecticut, California, Hawaii, Maine, and New Jersey joined Vermont to offer civil partnerships. California was the first state in which the legislature passed a law instituting same-sex marriage, but Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger terminated—vetoed—it. A case questioning the constitutionality of the federal Defense of Marriage Act is making its way through appeals

courts. There are still no final verdicts on marriage cases in the Maryland, Connecticut, and California supreme courts, while in certain states, state legislators have introduced bills making same-sex marriage legal.

## JUST MARRIED

In 1892, Alice Mitchell was regarded as insane in part because she suggested that she could marry Freda Ward. Just over a century later, “Boston marriages” no longer refer to the living arrangements of coupled Victorian-era women. They are legal marriages available to same-sex couples throughout Massachusetts today. Marriage is also available to same-sex couples in Canada, South America, and several European countries and even more nations have civil partnership laws. The militaries in countries such as Canada, Great Britain, Sweden, Germany, and Israel accept, indeed actively recruit, gays and lesbians. These countries remind Americans that the fight for equality is far from over, and a brighter, fairer future is within reach.

A quick look back at history inevitably leads us to hope, despite unrelenting discrimination, harrowing hardships, grave losses, and continuing threats to equality. Within one century, homosexuals have gone from being considered depraved sinners, criminals, and sick degenerates to being a political force to be reckoned with, visible leaders in a number of spheres, and proud members of the American public living openly and honestly. No doubt, there’s a lot to be proud

## EXERCISE: WHAT IN THE WORLD?

Now, with a general understanding of the history of Gay America, it’s time to paint on a larger canvas. In groups, take the different years noted above and make your own timelines of other events that also happened during similar dates. One group should focus on foreign events, another on events in your state, and still another could focus on much more local news. It might also be interesting for a group to select another community’s history to map in the same way.

What connections can you make between this timeline and that of the world, the nation, and the neighborhood? What is universal about these timelines? What separates them?

To finish, have a timeline presentation that clumps together the different events of a period so you hear the many different perspectives from that particular time. What was happening in the “Gay America” timeline is bound to be different from what was happening in international news. Hearing all the major events and happenings from that particular time will help us to see the bigger picture and hopefully remind us that no one story is complete and can ever speak for everyone and everything.

## EXERCISE: AND THEN WHAT?

It’s been nearly 15 years since Matthew Shepard’s tragic murder and in that time many things have happened in the ongoing fight for gay equality. Basically, our timeline of Gay America needs to be updated! I encourage you to break into small groups and look at some of the events and issues discussed below, as well as adding to the list with other topics you discover and think are relevant.

Based on what you learn, what connections can you make to things that appear in Linas’ timeline?

Some Suggested Topics:

Defense of Marriage Act  
Proposition 8

The Legality of Gay Marriage

Homophobia, Bullying, and Gay Suicides

It Gets Better Campaign

Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate

Crimes Prevention Act

“Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”

## Storied Lives <sup>1</sup>

Moisés Kaufman enjoys telling stories. He especially enjoys telling stories about how we tell stories. The Venezuelan-born, gay playwright and director says narrative serves a “very primal purpose in our life.”

Whether they are historical, collective or individual, Kaufman has spent the past 15 years exploring stories, writing about them, interpreting them. He is at ease in the distant past, where sexuality was hidden by all but the most extreme of individuals. And he has made a place in the present, exploring a town and its understanding of its own dark side. And yet, he holds out hope for the future, believing that a story a child hears today could give him hope for a life that may be 10 years from being achieved.

Kaufman has told the story of how Victorian England told its story of sexuality during the trial of Oscar Wilde. He called it *Gross Indecency*:

*The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* and won critical acclaim for the show in 1997.

Six years later, he directed the story, written by Doug Wright, of how Charlotte von Mahlsdorf — born Lothar Berfelde—told her story of oppression and repression from Nazis and Communists. The play, *I Am My Own Wife*, went on to win the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the Tony Award for Best Play, and merited the first of two Tony Award nominations for Kaufman, this one for directing.

But it was, in its way, a simple story—an *Our Town* for the new millennium—that became his most well-known work, due in large part to the currency of the subject matter but also likely because of the HBO movie that resulted from it. *The Laramie Project*, Kaufman’s play about the response of the town where Matthew Shepard was murdered, is meticulous in its detail, because Kaufman and his company—the Tectonic Theater Project—went to Laramie, Wyo., to interview and record the aftermath of Shepard’s killing in October 1998 as it was happening.



So, Moisés Kaufman will go on telling stories. And we will go on reading and watching—and maybe even listening.

<sup>1</sup> *Storied Lives* originally appeared in the November 18, 2010 edition of *Metro Weekly* magazine. The interview, as originally conducted by Chris Geidner, is reproduced here by permission of the editor.

---

**METRO WEEKLY (MW):** Why write *The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later*? Why did you want to revisit the site of Matthew Shepard's 1998 murder?

**Moisés Kaufman (KAUFMAN):** When the 10th anniversary was coming up, I realized that there was a curiosity on my part—I got very curious about what Laramie looked like 10 years on after the crime. When we were there the first time, we encountered a town that was very, very, very hurt—and in shock, and in turmoil because of this murder that had happened in their midst. I often say, I live on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. If there is a murder that happens a block away from my house, I think, “Well, this is New York, that’s it.” In Laramie, because it was such a small town of 26,000 people, people there were forced to ask themselves, “Why are we making a community here where this kind of thing happens?” And they asked themselves, “Why are we raising children like that here?”

So, there was a real soul-searching that went on during our time there, and I think that the reason why I wanted to go back was because I wanted to see how Laramie looked 10 years after that event. I wanted to know: What does an American town look like 10 years after a murder of that magnitude occurs in its heart?

**MW:** Now that you’ve gone back, you have that additional part, how do you feel that changes the performance?

**KAUFMAN:** The first thing we realized when we went back to Laramie was that perhaps the question that we were posing was not terribly helpful. “How has Laramie changed?” is not a great question. Perhaps the question is, “How do we measure change?” Do we measure it by the fact that now there is an AIDSWalk that goes right down the main street of Laramie and that raises thou-

sands of dollars every year for AIDS? That it ends with a drag show at the cowboy bar? To me, in a town like that, that definitely is progress.

There is a social symposium—a university symposium for social justice now called the Shepard Symposium for Social Justice. Every year, thousands of students from all over Wyoming come to Laramie to attend this symposium to hear civil rights speakers and social justice speakers. So, that is obviously some change. The nature of the dialogue, we felt, had changed. Those were some markers that were clear and quantifiable.

Perhaps something that wasn’t so quantifiable was the fact that we started hearing quite a number of people that were saying that Matthew Shepard’s murder wasn’t a hate crime. And they started saying that Matthew Shepard’s murder was a drug deal gone bad, or a robbery gone bad. We found that there was a real attempt on the part of many people in the town to rewrite history, and to rewrite the narrative of the murder. And, unfortunately, there weren’t only a few people who were saying that. It was a pretty—in our opinion—prevalent view.

Now, of course, there are many people in Laramie who say, “No, absolutely, it was a hate crime. And it was because Matthew was gay, and we have to own this.” So, that dialogue within the community—of “How are we going to tell this story? How are we going to recount this narrative? How are we going to create our identity? How are we going to tell of our identity?” Those are really the questions that the second part of *Laramie* deals with.

The play is not only about the event of Matthew Shepard and how the town of Laramie responded to the event any more. Now, it’s about how a town constructs its own identity and how a town constructs its own narratives—and how we, as individuals, and as communities, deal with the narratives that define us.

**MW:** *The Laramie Project* obviously took you to a place where far less time had passed since the incident that you were writing about and your interviews and writing process began. How do you

see this process of gauging history as it happens different from looking back 100 years earlier at the trial of Oscar Wilde, as you did in your earlier play, *Gross Indecency*?

**KAUFMAN:** I think that *Gross Indecency* really inspired me to write *The Laramie Project* because, when I read the transcripts of the trial, I found in them a document that was a sort of X-ray of Victorian society. It was a document that spoke of how Victorians felt about sexuality, about sexual orientation—but not just about those things, but also about class, about religion, about education, about meaning and about identity.

Even though they were trying Oscar Wilde, in the transcripts of the trial you hear Victorian men and women speak of what they held dear to their heart. In those texts, you understand what were the ideological pillars of that culture at that time.

My desire to go to Laramie was in a large part nurtured by this curiosity: Can we talk to the people of the town and gather a document that would operate like the transcripts of Oscar Wilde's trial—a document that would, in fact, record not only how the people of Laramie felt about sexuality, sexual orientation, and hate—but how they felt about class, how they felt about their identity, how they felt about education, how they felt about violence, how they felt about what we're teaching our children?

**MW:** The efforts you saw in Laramie—whether conscious or subconscious—to rewrite that narrative: What was your response as somebody who had come to Laramie back when the narrative was more raw, as opposed to the way that people were talking about things 10 years later? How did you view that as a playwright?

That idea, that desire to construct an identity, is a very profound desire for all of us as human beings. When somebody asks you where you are from? “Well, I'm from Arkansas, and I came to New York when I was 12, and I started....”

Narratives serve a very, very primal purpose in our life. Laramie's desire to re-write the narrative had as much to do with the fact that, fortunately or

unfortunately, this town had given the town such a bad reputation. Many people in Laramie said to us, “Well, we've sort of become the hate crime capital of America.” You say “Laramie,” and it is equivalent—for many people—with hate crime.

I think when something like that happens, that not only affects an entire community because of the event and the brutality and the fear the event generates, but because of the aftermath that redefines your identity. And many people in Laramie feel, “No, we're not the hate crime capital of America. No, this is not what we're like. There is a profound desire to reconstruct your identity and reconstruct your sense of self.

**MW:** Matthew Shepard's murder, outside of Laramie, also served to reconstruct the identity of a lot of gay people. It was a stark reminder of the dangers that we still out there –

**KAUFMAN:** That we all face.

**MW:** Yes, and, for the people who were constructing their own identity at that time, that murder became a part of their identity because it was a shared experience that people faced. When you create theater around this, that's also based in fact, how do. You think that helps outside of Laramie at creating the narrative that we all live with?

**KAUFMAN:** Well, there is a way in which people felt and feel that Matthew Shepard's murder was a defining moment in our history—in our history as Americans, in our history as gay people, in our history as people who are in the middle of a social justice fight. and some would say, in the middle of a social justice war. And Matthew Shepard was one of the great casualties of that war.

One of the things that theater can do is provide narratives that bring us together. Theater can provide narratives that show us what the kind of iconic events of our history are. When we go to the theater, we see the re-creation of how a historical event felt—as you say, we all feel that this could happen to all of us. And, also, *The Laramie Project* tells the story of an American town dealing with issues that we as gay people have to deal with every day. So, there's something very cathartic about

feeling that you're part of a national dialogue, feeling that you're part of a discussion that is happening on a national level.

I always say that there are many reasons why the Matthew Shepard murder became that kind of watershed historical moment. There are over 1,000 anti-gay crimes in America every year that are reported. That means there are probably another 500 that are not reported because people are in the closet and just don't report it. But for some reason, this one resonated. This crime was the one that we as a nation came together and said, "Look at what's happening." It operated as a lightning rod in our culture. When something like that happens, you have to ask, "Why? Why this one?" Why Matthew Shepard?"

And you know, there are many answers. Partially, it's the symbolic nature of the crime. It was a crucifixion, and you cannot do that in this culture without creating an incredible amount of attention.

The other reason was because he was white and he was photogenic. A Latino drag queen who is killed—goes home with someone, is tied to the bed and murdered—is not a worthy victim in our culture the way Matthew Shepard was. So, I think that there's those reasons. But there's another reason that is a very positive reason: We, as a culture, were finally able to hear it. I profoundly believe that had Matthew Shepard been killed the way he was killed 10 years before—in 1988 as opposed to 1998—we would have never heard of it. So, I think the fact that we as a culture are somewhere where we can actually have this conversation is something that the theater can reflect—because that's what we do in the theater, we have conversations.

I think that, unbeknownst to him, Matthew Shepard went on to become a narrative that resonated with many of us.

**MW:** It resonated to the point that, a little more than a year ago, the president signed into law the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which obviously is a level of narrative that most stories don't reach.

**KAUFMAN:** I think that you're absolutely right. It is in no small part—there's a reason why the act is called the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Act. These were two particular moments in our history.

The Tectonic Theater Project was able to go to the White House when it was signed. In a way, it was partially because we had been following this narrative so long that we needed to be at the White House when it was being signed. It took 10 years to get that legislation passed [after Shepard's murder] and it was in no small part due to the efforts of Judy Shepard.

**MW:** What has your experience been with Judy Shepard? Obviously, she's been a strong source of that narrative that resulted from her son's murder.

**KAUFMAN:** My experience with Judy has been that of witnessing an activist being born. As she herself says, she was a mom. And because she was thrown into this position, she had two options: She could demand her privacy and go home and keep this a personal catastrophe for herself, or she could take arms and own the spotlight that was shone unwilling on her.

And she owned it. She became a spokesperson. She trained herself to be able to speak publicly and to speak from her heart. And it has been really inspiring and magnificent witnessing the transformation from a very private person into a very public figure that speaks so eloquently and beautifully about social justice and issues of equality and identity.

For many years, she didn't see the play, she wasn't able to see the play—and I completely understood. And, then, she finally saw the play. And, then, we made the movie, and she came to see the movie. And, since then, she's become an ally to Tectonic Theater Project. And, many places where they do *The Laramie Project*, they invite her to come speak. So it's really proved, for the Matthew Shepard Foundation and for her, a very helpful tool which is very encouraging.

**MW:** When you talk about the importance and creation of narrative, *The Laramie Project* and, as you said, "the birth of an activist" of Judy

Shepard almost seems intertwined as narratives at this point.

**KAUFMAN:** I think so. Look, I want to be very clear, I'm not saying that because of *The Laramie Project* she became an activist because this was a woman who underwent to take on the transformation, and she made decisions at each step of the way that, as difficult as they were, were noble. She would fight me on that—she would not allow me to call her noble, but I think there's nobility in Judy Shepard.

But I do think that definitely *The Laramie Project* provided an extra forum where she could continue to have the conversation.

**MW:** Obviously, the political narrative of change is one that is front and center as LGBT advocates look at the possibilities for change after the mid-term elections, and you're bringing a show to Arena Stage that really puts one of the key parts of that narrative front and center. How do you bring a show like yours to a city like this?

**KAUFMAN:** Bringing the play to Washington is very moving to me. I think that there is something important to think about, which is that, yes, political change and legislative change occur. But, before political and legislative change occur, the hearts and minds of people have to change. Matthew Shepard being murdered, and then that creating - I'm not going to say creating a movement because the movement already existed, but it articulated something for the movement that was happening at the time, was something that definitely contributed to legislative change.

There are events in our culture that galvanize us, that bring us together as a culture, that bring us together and that allow us to create a societal narrative. And I think that Matthew Shepard was definitely an event that allowed us to create a societal narrative, where we all came together and said, "Yes, this is what it's like, this is what it's like to be gay in America. This thing can happen to you." And, to Laramie's credit, something like that happened in New York State, where a man was taken to an apartment and brutalized and raped—because he was gay. It was in New York. There have

been hate crimes all over the nation. Matthew Shepard's resonated, and I think there's a way in which Laramie, Wyo., is right in feeling, "Why do we have this reputation, as this happens in many other places?" That is a very valid discourse. What I find problematic is: What do you do as a response to that discourse? And I think that trying to change the narrative may not perhaps be the most ethical thing to do with that.

**MW:** That's a subtle way to put it. Looking at your other work, you have dealt with Oscar Wilde in *Gross Indecency* and Charlotte von Mahlsdorf in *I Am My Own Wife*—people who were outsiders, but they reveled in that. Matthew Shepard—the narrative of Matthew Shepard—was almost the opposite of that, though—wanting to be a part of, as opposed to an outsider in his community. When you're looking at those works—all Tectonic Theater Project works that you directed—how do you see them?

**KAUFMAN:** The reason why the play is called *The Laramie Project* and not *The Matthew Shepard Project* is because I was really, really interested in how the people of Laramie were responding, about the historical event that happened as a result of the murder.

But, I think there is a way in which - I didn't set out to write a trilogy, and, as you know, Doug Wright wrote *I Am My Own Wife*—but I think that the recurring theme with all of them is that I am profoundly fascinated by how we construct narrative, and I am profoundly interested in how theater can participate in a sort of national construction of narrative. And, I think that in that sense—that perhaps is the link or the glue between all of those works.

It's a profound curiosity and interest in theater and in what theater is capable of doing, what theater is capable of generating, and what role theater can play on a national level.

**MW:** Recently, a lot of public attention has been focused on LGBT suicides. Having looked at the way that hate played into Matthew Shepard's murder, you must have thought about the way hate plays into these suicides.

**KAUFMAN:** I have been incredibly dismayed by the suicides. Not surprised, but dismayed. We live in a culture in which a lot of the discourse is incredibly homophobic. Every time that you go to a church or a synagogue and the rabbi or the priest or the minister says, “Homosexuality is a sin,” you are contributing to creating a society in which children feel like they need to kill themselves. Every time people talk about the “sanctity of marriage,” they are creating a society in which gay and lesbian children feel the need to kill themselves. I think that that discourse is murderous. I feel that that discourse needs to be called out for what it is.

The thing that people have to remember is that other minorities are born into homes of minorities, so that if you’re Jewish you’re born into a Jewish home, if you’re African-American you’re born into an African-American home. The GLBT kids are born into homes that are usually not GLBT, and that creates an incredible sense of isolation and loneliness—and that makes them much more vulnerable to virulent discourses.

Children hear what we say. When children are bullying their gay and lesbian brothers and sisters, they’ve learned it somewhere—we’ve taught them. So, on the one hand, we have to rejoice and we have to be happy that the hate crimes legislation passed, and, on the other hand, we have to not lose track that there’s still an incredible backlash going on in our culture against our community. That backlash takes the form of acceptable discourse, and that that acceptable discourse finds very virulent and vicious ways of penetrating the zeitgeist.

**MW:** You’ve talked so much about the importance of narrative, and one of the things that I’ve found most interesting about the “It Gets Better” project started by Dan Savage is the fact that it’s actually—initially—LGBT people directly attempting to influence what that narrative is. It seems like incredible power to influence the narrative that wasn’t available in the past.

**KAUFMAN:** Absolutely, I think that it is a fantastic, fantastic experiment in changing the narrative. It’s going to take years before we realize whether the “It Gets Better” campaign really helped,

but it is a fantastic experiment in some kind of intergenerational dialogue that has never really occurred that way.

I always say that, as gay people, we have three histories—the history of the community that includes Oscar Wilde and Walt Whitman and Proust and all of the gay and lesbian people who came before us. There’s also a personal story, which is that you can go to anybody in the world, and say, “What was it like coming out for you?”

This idea—that there is a coming-out story—occurs in a personal realm, but it is a personal realm that we all share. So, there is a community history [and an individual history], but there’s also a personal history that we all share. And I think that the “It Gets Better” campaign operates exactly in that space. What it does is allow children to see themselves 10, 20 years from now.

That’s what has been really inspiring to me. The workers at Google did their video, the workers at Gap did their video, the people from the Broadway community did their video - so that, hopefully, we’re reaching many children with many varied interests. So that children who are interested in computers or the Internet, they can find in the workers of Google some nourishment and some support. And people who are interested in theater can look at the Broadway community and see some support there, and we hopefully will be serving as an antidote to the kind of bullying that’s going on.

When I was growing up in Venezuela, I didn’t know that there were any other gay people. I didn’t know that anybody else went through what I was going through - that thought never crossed my mind. I thought I was the only person in the world going through this. So, the more that we go into the different professions, communities - the more that we try to reach children everywhere we can, the more we’ll be saving lives.

## Moisés Kaufman

Kaufman received a Tony nomination for his play *33 Variations* and he also directed Rajiv Joseph's Pulitzer Prize finalist *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* (with Robin Williams) on Broadway in Spring 2011.

Other Broadway credits: Mr. Kaufman directed the Pulitzer and Tony Award-winning play *I Am My Own Wife*, earning him an Obie award for his direction, as well as Tony, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle and Lucille Lortel nominations. His plays *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde*, *The Laramie Project* have been among the most performed plays in America over the last decade.

Mr. Kaufman recently directed his first opera, *El Gato con Botas (Puss in Boots)*, which received rave reviews during its limited run.

Other credits include: *The Nightingale* (La Jolla Playhouse), *A Common Pursuit* (Roundabout), *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* (Mark Taper Forum); *Macbeth* with Liev Schreiber (Public Theater); *This Is How It Goes* (Donmar Warehouse); *One Arm* by Tennessee Williams (New Group and Steppenwolf Theater Company); *Master Class* with Rita Moreno (Berkeley Repertory Theater); and *Lady Windermere's Fan* (Williamstown Theater Festival).

Mr. Kaufman also co-wrote and directed the film adaptation of *The Laramie Project* for HBO, which was the opening night selection at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival and won the National Board of Review Award, the Humanities Prize and a Special Mention for Best First Film at the Berlin Film Festival. The film also earned Mr. Kaufman two Emmy Award nominations for Best Director and Best Writer. He is the Artistic Director of Tectonic Theater Project and a Guggenheim Fellow in Playwriting.

Photo: Moisés Kaufman by Lara Alcantara



## How Does Tectonic Create its Productions?

### **An Introduction to Moment Work**

Over the past fifteen years, Moisés Kaufman and Tectonic Theater Project have developed a wholly unique methodology, creating some of the most theatrically thrilling and important American theater of the past decade. Following the world-wide success of *The Laramie Project*, and with growing interest in Tectonic and its unique approach to making theater, the Tectonic Education Arm was officially launched in 2005. At the core of the Tectonic Education Arm is Moment Work, a technique for creating and analyzing theater developed by Moisés Kaufman.

Using the laboratory setting, the technique encourages participants to create work that is uniquely theatrical. It enfranchises writers, actors, designers, and directors to collaborate in the making of work focusing on the use of all theatrical elements to become true theater-makers, investigating all the possibilities of the medium.

### **How do you do Moment Work?**

Participants in Moment Work Trainings actively engage with the elements of the stage—exploring lights, sound, costumes, movement, text, architecture and others elements—to discover their full theatrical potential and the poetry inherent in each element. This experiment in theatrical language and form encourages participants to think theatrically, to unlock their theatrical imagination, and to discover the multitude of ways that the elements of the stage can communicate. Participants are taught to analyze and critique the work from a structuralist perspective.

After developing a familiarity with each theatrical element, Moment Work participants engage in active dialogue between about their theatrical ideas and the elements of the stage. Starting with a piece of text, a simple phrase of music, an image, or a body of research, the focus is to continue the exploration of the elements of the stage, applying them to the specific challenges of making original work that articulates new theatrical ideas.

The final phase of Moment Work is implementation: the same process Tectonic Company members have engaged in thousands of times to create the world of the play. The focus is on the dialectical relationship between the studio work, the subject matter, and the writing process. Participants create a body of work and then discover how the theatrical forms learned at the onset and the subject matter talk to one another.

## Tectonic Theater Project Moment Work Exercise

Submitted by Scott Barrow

This exercise is a combination of many exercises that we do during a full three day moment workshop and is designed to give the participants an idea of our methodology for creating and exploring a piece as well as draw the attention of students and teachers to all of the tools that are available to us as storytellers in the theater outside of just script and text.

### Exploring Props:

Students sit on one side of the space as an audience would.

The teacher places an object or objects in front of the group on the floor. (ex: a cane, a ball, newspaper, a paper towel tube, etc.)

Students with an idea of how they want to use the object in an unconventional way approach the object. They say, “**I begin.**” and share a short improvised interaction with the object. When they are done they say, “**I end.**” And return to their seats

while the next volunteer hops up. (ex: the student extends the cane’s hook upwards from her shirt and makes it look around; it’s a bird! Or another student peers through the paper towel tube scanning the horizon; A Spyglass!)

After a round of this, the ideas will begin to build on each other as a vocabulary of these props is developed. The teacher will then ask, “**What can we do to further theatricalize this Moment?**” The students will then add elements to the moments after seeing them. (ex: In the paper towel moment, what happens if the actor rocks as if the waves are moving him? What if the audience makes wind sounds? How does it change the story if we turn the light down or off?)

### Analysis:

As storytellers, what elements of the stage did we utilize to communicate more fully?

How was the experience different as the actor versus as audience making suggestions?

Once a prop is used in a certain way, how does that change the audience’s understanding of that prop? How does it change the way in which the actor can use it to communicate?

The Laramie Project—Christina Rouner, Jeremy Bobb Photo Credit: Michael Lutch



# Tectonic Theater Project

## Moment Work Exercise

Submitted by Scott Barrow

### The Museum

**An exercise in spatial analysis and relationship. What tells a story? What can we communicate non-verbally and how?**

- The class lines up on one side of the room, resembling the relationship of an audience to a proscenium stage.
- Three “actors” walk through the open space experimenting with level: (*ex: sitting, stretching, laying down, striding etc.*)
- The director calls “**FREEZE!**” when she sees an interesting picture. She then is allowed to make one small change to the body position of each actor. (*ex: turn the head of one actor to look at the actor on the ground, or turn an actor’s body away from us, etc*). The actors hold this composition for a minute or so, while the audience observes the sculpture.
- Each audience member then writes down their idea of:
  - The relationship of the characters
  - What has just happened
  - How the characters feel about the event

If it is an abstract or absurdist “*museum piece*,” questions like “*what is the general mood?*” or “*What might the artist call the piece?*” may serve better.

**Structural Analysis:** Audience and director share their ideas, which almost always have similar threads of content. The discussion helps to define what tools: positioning, expression, stance, were successful in communicating ideas.

- What made us think that actor was sad? Victorious? Scared? Etc
- Did anyone else think they were lovers? Fishing? Etc
- How could we make it clearer that they were not fighting? etc

#### **Further Reflection:**

What time of day was it?

What was the weather?

Where are they?

Where are they coming from or going to?

Sometimes it is useful to snap a quick picture of the piece so the actors can relax during the discussion and yet we can still check in with the image.

# Understanding Documentary Theater

By Nicole Kempfskie

## **DOCUMENTARY: of, relating to, or employing documentation in literature or art**

*Synonyms:* factual, hard, historical, literal, matter-of-fact, nonfictional, objective, true

*Antonyms:* fictional, fictionalized, fictitious, non-documentary, non-factual, non-historical, unhistorical (Merriam Webster Dictionary)

Just as there are multiple genres of film and literature, so too are there many different types of theater. On any given day somewhere around the world you may find a theater company performing theatrical pieces that are Realist, Absurdist, Musical, Shakespearean, Expressionist, and Farcical, to name a few. Each genre contains different acting styles, theatrical conventions, and techniques that are unique to them. One of the newer theatrical genres that has become very popular in the past few decades is documentary theater, also referred to as: *docudrama*, *ethno-theater*, *ethno-drama*, and *investigative theater*. This form of theater takes real events and uses the medium of theater to depict the unfolding of these events. Johnny Saldaña, one of the major scholars writing about this genre, explains:

*An ethno-drama, the script, consists of analyzed and dramatized significant selections from interview transcripts, field notes, journal entries, or other written artifacts. Characters in an ethno-drama are generally the research participants portrayed by actors, but the actual researches and participants themselves may be cast members. (Saldaña, Qualitative Inquiry, Volume 9, 2003)*

Unlike reality TV, the most common form of “reality-based” entertainment we consume in this country, documentary theater’s goal is to try and represent the truth of an event and in doing so, raise awareness, open up dialogue, and educate and inform an audience about the subject matter at hand. The writer of a documentary theater piece has the same ethical obligations that a good journalist does—to honor and truthfully represent those they are depicting, and to tell their story with respect, integrity, and honesty.

### **Tips for watching documentary theater:**

- Track the facts of the event and the moments that comprise the overall story. Documentary theater pieces are based on real events and so will contain factual information that can be further researched in the media (internet, newspapers, magazines, biographies, etc.).
- Notice *how* the writers use the medium of theater and its unique conventions to inform us of the facts and tell the story. How have they constructed reality?
- Try to discern what the message being delivered is, and what the point of view of the writers might be. Identify what the writers do to persuade us of their point of view.

# EXERCISE: NEW YORK, NEW YORK!

<b>CATEGORIES (DATA AS 2010)</b>	<b>LARAMIE</b>	<b>NEW YORK*</b>
<b>POPULATION</b>		
Population, 2010	30,816	8,175,133
Persons under 5 years, percent, 2010	5.8%	6.3%
Persons under 18 years, percent, 2010	15.9%	21.6%
Persons 65 years and over, percent, 2010	7.5%	12.1%
<b>RACE, ETHNICITY, AND CULTURE</b>		
White persons, percent, 2010 (a)	89.5%	44.0%
Black persons, percent, 2010 (a)	1.3%	25.5%
American Indian and Alaska Native persons, percent, 2010 (a)	0.7%	0.7%
Asian persons, percent, 2010 (a)	3.2%	12.7%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, percent, 2010 (a)	0.1%	0.1%
Persons reporting two or more races, percent, 2010	2.8%	4.0%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, percent, 2010 (b)	9.2%	28.6%
White persons not Hispanic, percent, 2010	83.8%	33.3%
Foreign born persons, percent, 2007-2011	6.4%	36.8%
Language other than English spoken at home, percentage 5+, 2007-2011	11.2%	48.5%
<b>EDUCATION</b>		
High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2007-2011	96.0%	79.3%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2007-2011	50.0%	33.7%
<b>HOME AND INCOME</b>		
Persons per household, 2007-2011	2.23	2.61
Median household income, 2007-2011	\$41,304	\$51,270
Persons below poverty level, percent, 2007-2011	25.7%	19.4%
<b>GEOGRAPHY</b>		
Persons per square mile, 2010	1,737.5	27,012.5

Notes:

(a) Includes persons reporting only one race

(b) hispanics may be of any race, so also are included in applicable race categories

\* Includes data for all 5 NYC Boroughs

Source: US Census Bureau State & County QuickFacts



New York City and Laramie, Wyoming are approximately 1,782 miles apart! Although separated by a great distance, by looking at the above chart we start to see how things compare in New York. What are some of the big differences you notice? How about any similarities? As a class, have a conversation about what these numbers mean and what else you want to know. Ask yourself, how might your life be different if you lived in Laramie? After the class conversation, split into 5 groups, each one focusing on one of the above categories and discuss the data on these two U.S. Cities. What picture is forming for you about life in Laramie versus life in New York? How can you best take this insight back to the other members of your class?

As a group, decide on an artistic way to highlight a connection between Laramie and New York. What relationship between the two cities will you highlight? Also, think about the best way to present that information. Will your group create your own chart to illuminate an idea? Will you create a short scene between two family members, one living in Laramie and the other in Brooklyn?

Just think, every time *The Laramie Project* is presented in a place outside of Laramie, Wyoming, it helps to inform the audiences' understanding of that community. While you're watching the play, think about how the play shapes Laramie and what information it gives you about the place and its people.

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

By Nicole Kempskie

### Confronting Hate Crimes

In 2009, President Obama signed the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which does the following:

Provides funding and technical assistance to state, local, and tribal jurisdictions to help them to more effectively investigate and prosecute hate crimes.

Creates a new federal criminal law which criminalizes willfully causing bodily injury (or attempting to do so with fire, firearm, or other dangerous weapon) when:

(1) the crime was committed because of the actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin of any person or (2) the crime was committed because of the actual or perceived religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability of any person and the crime affected interstate or foreign commerce or occurred within federal special maritime and territorial jurisdiction. ([www.justice.gov](http://www.justice.gov))

Use the information above as a starting point for a class investigation into hate crimes, researching and discussing the following:

- What is a hate crime and how is it different from other types of crime?
- What might be the motivation for committing a hate crime?
- What measures were necessary in order to get this law passed?
- Who advocated for this law?
- What opposition did the President and Congress face in passing this law?
- What effects has this law had on incidents of hate crime in our country?

Standards: CCR6-12 Reading 1-9; Speaking & Listening 1-6; Language 1-6; Blueprint: Making Connections

### Compare and Contrast

In addition to the play there is a film version of *The Laramie Project* produced by HBO, as well as a documentary and multiple narrative films. Choose another version for the class to view and have students compare and contrast the techniques used in each form to tell Matthew's story. As a class try to determine what benefits and challenges there are in each form (theater and film) and which has the potential for having the most impact on an audience.

Standards: CCR6-12 Speaking & Listening 1-6; Language 1-6; *Blueprint*: Theater Literacy, Making Connections

### Theater Action Project

Over the course of a week, ask students to identify an issue in their community that troubles them—something that they would like to change, see change, or raise awareness about. As a class, list all the individual issues that the students have identified. By voting or a process of elimination, refine the list to 4-5 topics that are most important to the class on the whole. Divide the class into small groups and assign each one an issue from the final list to research. Have each group then do the following:

- Identify 3—4 people in their community to interview about that issue.
- Brainstorm a list of interview questions that pertain to the issue such as: how this issue is affecting their community; the history and the background of the issue; individual and group actions that can be taken to influence change; and political issues that can be taken to influence change.
- Arrange and conduct interviews with community members and then transcribe them.
- Develop a 1-2 page documentary theater scene in the style of *The Laramie Project* that dramatizes excerpts from the interviews.
- Share and perform their scenes for the class and if possible, the community.

Standards: CCR6-12 Writing 3-9; Speaking & Listening 1-3; Language 1-6; *Blueprint*: Making Connections, Theater Making, Community and Cultural Resource

## Living Newspapers

As part of President Roosevelt's New Deal during the Depression, the Federal Theater Project (FTP) was instated to provide work opportunities for unemployed theater professionals across the country. One major program created for the FTP was the Living Newspaper Unit in which playwrights, reporters, and actors would work together to create theater pieces taken directly from the newspaper headlines of the day. Many of these plays had a strong social agenda, and thus, stirred up a lot of controversy. Divide students into small groups and have each group research one of the following aspects of the Living Newspaper's work:

- The plays: *Ethiopia*, *Triple-A Plowed Under*, *Injunction Granted*, *One-Third of a Nation*, *Power*, and *Spirochete*.
- The leaders: Hallie Flanagan and Elmer Rice.
- The content: events and issues covered and the ideologies of the writers.
- The challenges: censorship, HUAC, and the government's response.

After students present their research to the class, share the following quote with them and discuss the questions below:

**“The [Living Newspaper] seeks to dramatize a new struggle—the search of the average American today for knowledge about his country and his world; to dramatize his struggle to turn the great natural and economic forces of our time toward a better life for more people.”**

(Hallie Flanagan, National Director of the Federal Theater Project)

- Compare the goals of the Living Newspaper to what Tectonic Theater Project's *The Laramie Project* accomplishes. In what ways are they similar? Different?
- Do you think that theater is an appropriate and effective vehicle for addressing serious political and social issues?
- How do you think *The Laramie Project* has been received in different communities across the country?
- Could *The Laramie Project* have been presented 20 years ago? 50 years ago? Why? Why not?

For an additional hands-on theatrical activity, have students choose a headline from a local newspaper to dramatize.

*CCR6-12 Reading 1-9; Writing 1-9; Speaking & Listening 1-3; Language 1-6; Blueprint: Theater Making, Making Connections, Theater Literacy.*

## Further Reading

Choose one of the following plays to read after the performance that are linked to *The Laramie Project* and writer Moisés Kaufman, and that deal with gay rights and issues in a profound and significant way:

*Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* by Tony Kushner

*I am my Own Wife* by Doug Wright, directed by Moisés Kaufman on Broadway

*Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* by Moisés Kaufman

Standards: CCR6-12 Reading 1-9; *Blueprint*: Making Connection

Major support for BAM Education programs provided by:

**Goldman Sachs**  
*Gives*

 STAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION

Support for the Professional Development: Addressing Bullying in the Schools in conjunction with NYS DASA and The Laramie Project provided by Donald Capocchia in memory of Felicia Garcia, Michael Palm Foundation, Tony Randall Theatrical Fund, and Ted Snowdon

Expansion of BAM's Community and Education Programs made possible by the support of the SHS Foundation.

Leadership support for BAM Education programs is provided by Cheryl & Joe Della Rosa, The Irene Diamond Fund, The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, and The Rita and Alex Hillman Foundation.

Leadership support for school-time performances, pre-show preparation workshops and educational film screenings is provided by The Simon and Eva Colin

Foundation and Lemberg Foundation.  
Development of new education and community initiatives in the BAM Fisher supported by The Achelis Foundation; Altman Foundation; Booth Ferris Foundation; Brooklyn Community Foundation; The Simon & Eve Colin Foundation; Ford Foundation; Lemberg Foundation; The New York Community Trust; Rockefeller Brothers Fund; The Rockefeller Foundation New York City Cultural Innovation Fund; The Skirball Foundation; and Seth Sprague Educational and Charitable Foundation

Education programs at BAM are supported by: Barclay's Nets Community Alliance; Barker Welfare Foundation; Tiger Baron Foundation; BNY Mellon; The Bay and Paul Foundations; Constans Culver Foundation; Charles Hayden Foundation; Jaharis Family Foundation; Emily Davie and Joseph S. Kornfeld Foundation; David and Susan Marcinek; Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation; National Grid; PennPAT: a program of the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation; Tony Randall Theatrical Fund; The Jerome Robbins Foundation, Inc.; May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation; Rush Philanthropic Arts Foundation; Sills Family Foundation; Surdna Foundation; Michael Tuch Foundation; Turrell Fund; Joseph LeRoy and Ann C. Warner Fund.

Education programs at BAM are endowed by: Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Endowment Fund for

Community, Educational, & Public Affairs Programs; Martha A. and Robert S. Rubin; William Randolph Hearst Endowment for Education and Humanities Programs; Irene Diamond Fund; and The Robert and Joan Catell Fund for Education Programs.

Your tax dollars make BAM programs possible through funding from:



BAM would like to thank the Brooklyn Delegations of the New York State Assembly, Joseph R. Lentol, Delegation Leader; and New York Senate, Senator Velmanette Montgomery, Delegation Leader. The BAM facilities are owned by the City of New York and benefit from public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs with support from Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg; Cultural Affairs Commissioner Kate D. Levin; the New York City Council including Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn, Finance Committee Chair Domenic M. Recchia, Jr., Cultural Affairs Committee Chair Jimmy Van Bramer, the Brooklyn Delegation of the Council, and Councilwoman Letitia James; and Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz.

### About BAM Education & Humanities

BAM Education is dedicated to bringing the most vibrant, exciting artists and their creations to student audiences. The department presents performances and screenings of theater, dance, music, opera, and film in a variety of programs. In addition to the work on stage, programs take place both in school and at BAM that give context for the performances, and include workshops with artists and BAM staff members, study guides, and classes in art forms that young people may never have had access to before. These programs include **Shakespeare Teaches**, **AfricanDanceBeat**, **AfricanMusicBeat**, **Dancing into the Future**, **Young Critics**, **Young Film Critics**, **Brooklyn Reads**, **Arts & Justice**, and our **Screening** programs, as well as topically diverse professional development workshops for teachers and administrators.

BAM Education also serves family audiences with **BAMfamily** concerts, the **BAMfamily Book Brunch**, and the annual **BAMkids Film Festival**. In addition, BAM Education collaborates with

the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation to provide an arts and humanities curriculum to students who perform on stage in BAM's **DanceAfrica** program.

### Humanities at BAM

BAM presents a variety of programs to promote creative thinking and ongoing learning. The **Artist Talk** series, in conjunction with mainstage programming, enriches audiences' experience during the Next Wave Festival and the Winter/Spring Season. The **Iconic Artist Talk** series, launched as part of BAM's 150th anniversary celebrations, features iconic artists and companies examining the evolution of their work at BAM over the years through on-screen projections of original footage and images from the BAM Hamm Archives.

In September 2012, BAM launched **On Truth (and Lies)**, a series hosted by philosopher Simon Critchley that explores the ambiguity of reality with prominent artists and thinkers, as a co-presentation with the Onassis Cultural Center NY.

Humanities at BAM also include year-round literary programs: **Unbound**, a new fall series presented in partnership with Greenlight Bookstore that celebrates contemporary books and authors from across the literary spectrum, and the ongoing **Eat, Drink & Be Literary** series in partnership with the National Book Awards, in the spring.

The department also hosts master classes, including the **Backstage Seminar**, a series of workshops on the process of theater-making with BAM's production staff and guest artists.

### Department of Education and Humanities Staff:

**Stephanie Hughley**, Vice President, Education and Humanities  
**Suzanne Youngerman**, Ph.D.: Director  
**John P. Tighe**, DMA: Assistant Director  
**Violaine Huisman**: Humanities Director  
**John S. Foster**, Ph.D.: Education Manager  
**Gwendolyn Kelso**, Program Manager  
**Eveline Chang**, Program Manager  
**Shana Parker**, Event Manager  
**Jennifer Leeson**: Administrative Coordinator  
**Nathan Gelgud**: Box Office Manager/Program Associate  
**Tamar MacKay**, Administrative Assistant  
**Molly Silberberg**, Humanities Assistant  
**Rebekah Gordon**, Administrative Assistant  
**Hannah Max**, Humanities Intern  
**Lulu Earle**, Education Intern

### Study Guide Writers/Consultants

**Scott Barrow** is a Moment Work teaching artist and an actor and with Tectonic Theatre Project, having performed in 33 *Variations*, the tours of *The Laramie Project* and *the Laramie Project Epilogue as well as Dead Man's Curve*. He also is a fight choreographer and adapts books into plays for education outreach programs.

**Matt Freeman** (Education Director, Tectonic Theater Project) has worked with organizations such as The New Victory Theatre, The New York City Arts-in-Education Roundtable, and The CUNY School of Professional Studies (CUNY SPS) M.A. in Applied Theatre where he currently serves as the Assistant Director. Matt holds a B.A. in Theater and Arts Administration from Muhlenberg College, an M.A. in Arts Administration from Teachers College, Columbia University, and an M.A. in Applied Theatre from CUNY SPS.

**Nicole Kempkie** is a playwright, educational writer and consultant, and teaching artist.

Copyright © 2012 by Brooklyn Academy of Music. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photography, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Brooklyn Academy of Music.