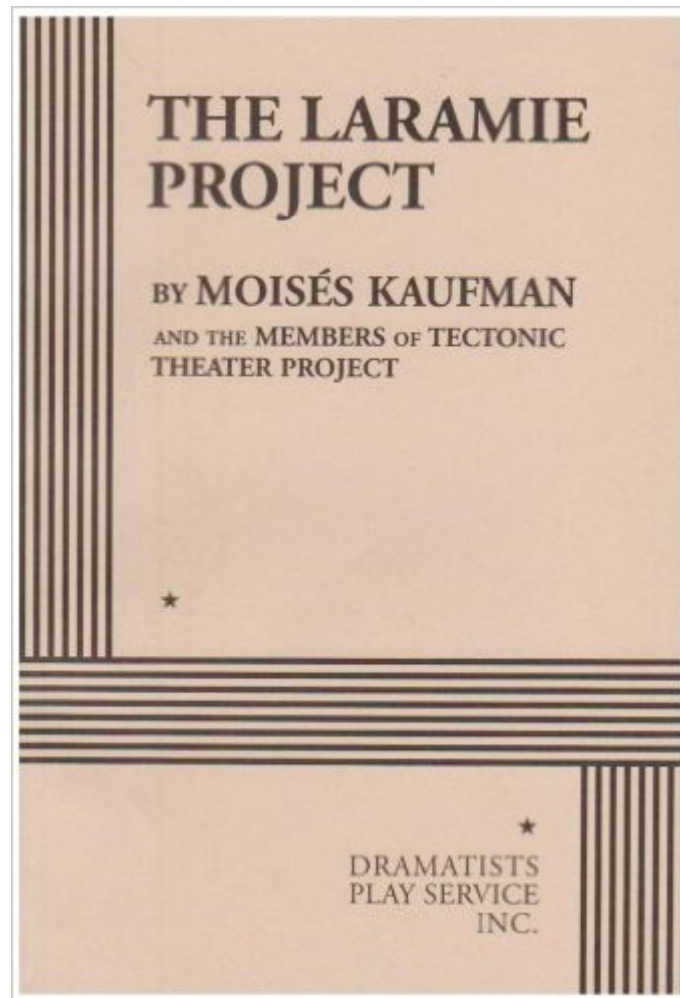


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# The Laramie Project



## Synopsis

On October 7, 1998, a young gay man was discovered bound to a fence in the hills outside Laramie, Wyoming, savagely beaten and left to die in an act of hate that shocked the nation. Matthew Shepard's death became a national symbol of intolerance, but for the people of Laramie the event was deeply personal, and it's there we hear in this stunningly effective theater piece, a deeply complex portrait of a community. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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## Customer Reviews

I am the 61-year-old father of a 24-year-old son who appeared in The Laramie Project two years ago, when he was a college senior. I sat in the front row of the theater in the round in which the play was produced. The play did not "get to me"--it dragged me into the worst What If a parent can have: what if my son were gay (he's not), what if he were murdered--how would I react, what would I feel? The question was answered via the actor who played Dennis Sheperd. When he delivered his monologue to the Aaron McKinney character, and referred to Matt Sheperd as his firstborn son and his hero, I absolutely lost it. Hatred, a desire for vengeance, but a recognition that this was the start of a time to heal. A message like this can go out of style...never. For any parent, The Laramie Project is terribly difficult to witness. But witness it you must.

The 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard, a gay college student, was a watershed event. This tragedy stimulated debates on anti-gay prejudice and violence. "The Laramie Project," by Moises Kaufman

and the members of the Tectonic Theater Project, attempts to find meaning in the murder and its aftermath. Kaufman and the other members of the theater group travelled to Laramie, Wyoming, which was the focal point of the Matthew Shepard tragedy, in order to interview the people of the town. As the play's opening states, the dialogue of the play is drawn from these interviews as well as from other sources. Thus the play's language has a raw authenticity. Many different voices are heard: a policewoman, Matthew's father, a Catholic priest, a lesbian college professor, Matthew's killers, a Unitarian minister, a viciously anti-gay protestor, etc. An interesting aspect of the play is the presence of Tony Kushner's play "Angels in America" as a sort of "background" text. "Angels" is mentioned more than once in this play, and indeed, there are significant parallels between the two texts. I recommend that people read both of these remarkable works. Many issues are addressed in "Project." One character notes that "we need to own this crime." This play is a not only a morally challenging attempt to deal with a high profile tragedy, but also a compelling work of art.

This play defies words. You probably already know this, but this play is structured as a "docudrama," somewhere between a documentary and a plot/character driven play. Laramie weaves together threads of national strife, the eternal fight against hatred and a plethora of deep, powerful characters. One of my favorite moments in this play comes when a middle aged gay man sits in his apartment and describes the rapidly growing group of people marching in a parade honoring Matthew in his last days, how eventually more people are marching for Matthew than for the parade itself. This play is a triumph of the human spirit that has arisen from a truly dark moment in recent American history. The recent HBO movie is a well-done rendition, although, having seen three different productions and been involved in one, I must say that the play is a bit more moving. Read it, and for the sake of the late Matthew Shepard, if you get the chance, SEE IT.

Moises Kaufman, who created the magnificent stage drama *Gross Indecency*, based on the trial of Oscar Wilde, here takes another true-life incident, the murder of Matthew Shephard, the young gay man who was beaten and left to die in Laramie, Wyoming, and applies the same documentary techniques, culling the monologues and characters from interviews with actual residents of the town and people variously involved with the tragedy and its aftermath. I saw the play in its Off-Broadway incarnation and was overwhelmed by the drama, brought out by a magnificent cast (members of which helped write the text), many playing multiple characters. The skill and passion of the actors, I think, was responsible for much of the power of the evening, combined with a simple but effective production. Inevitably, reading the text alone will not bring out the full impact of this work. Still, it is a

powerful testament and one that should be disseminated in whatever form. If it's produced anywhere in your neighborhood, I would say, run, don't walk to see it.

'The Laramie Project' is more than a play, it is a beautiful and astonishing work of art! If you are given the chance to see this play, THEN SEE IT! The HBO Films version is good, but the story loses some of its grace and charm in the whirlwind of big name actors. I have been privileged enough to perform in a production of 'The Laramie Project', and as a gay man, it gave me a lot to think about and a whole lot more to feel thankful for. If you are an actor, many of the monologues in this play are perfect for any audition. If this play could bring my stepfather to tears, who knows what it could do for you?

This drama goes past the newscasts and explains more in depth how the Laramie community was affected by this tragedy. Rather than portraying a bunch of "hicks" who were perceived as not caring by the media when the murder occurred, this book explains how most of the citizens of Laramie were affected. This is great in that it goes beyond the murder and looks into the aftermath and how the town was changed by the life and death of one special young man.

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