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Media ignores gay murder

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American communities.

The case is similar to the 1998 beating death in Wyoming of Matthew Shepard, a white gay college student who was beaten and tied to a fence post. Two white men, both 21, were sentenced to life in prison for his murder.

Owen's saga began Feb. 17, when he told family members he was going to work in Raleigh and then to meet a friend from the Internet. That would be the last time Owen's parents would see their son alive.

It was February 21 when teenagers playing at Old Farm Park in Durham discovered his battered body.

According to an article written by Benjamin Niolet in the *Raleigh News and Observer*, twenty-one year-old Shelton Deangelo Epps, one of the suspects in Owen's murder, told police how he, Matthew Lawrence Taylor, 16, and Derrick Arness Maiden, 19, wanted to steal a car, found their intended victim on a gay chat line and lured him to his death along the banks of the Eno River.

An eight-page statement from Epps dictated to the head of the Durham police homicide unit, offers an account of the events that led up to Owen's slaughter.

The three accused gathered at the house where cousins Epps and Taylor lived and Taylor spoke of an acquaintance who had used the chat line to steal a car — indicating he wanted to try the scheme himself. He used his cell phone to call, talked to Owen and arranged to meet him.

When Owen pulled up in his car, the three men asked for a ride. Owen drove them to a store at Roxboro and Infinity roads where Epps bought a cigar, which they planned to use to smoke marijuana.

"We were going to get the gay guy high to steal his car," Epps told police. "[Taylor] said if the guy was not smooth, he would shoot him."

In front of the car, Taylor pulled the revolver, cocked the hammer and put the gun to Owen's head.

Epps remembers that Owen said, "Please don't do this to me," and turned to run, but Taylor fired anyway. Owen was hit in the head but did not fall. The three ran after him, and each hit Owen in the face. Owen was trying to get back inside his car while Epps, now holding the gun, tried to get a clean shot. By this time, Owen was fighting for his life, but it would be a battle he would soon lose.

"The old boy is still moving. I'm thinking, 'This boy is a soldier,'" Epps said in the statement.

Despite the gun wounds and beatings, Owen was still alive, and the attack continued. Epps kicked him in the head once and stomped on his head twice. Maiden kicked him in the side.

Epps surmised that by this time, Owen was dead or extremely close to it. The three dragged the body to the edge of the



Shelton Deangelo Epps (left) and Derrick Arness Maiden are also on trial for Owen's murder.

river and rolled it in the water.

"We all said we just did murder," Epps said. "We needed to get out of here."

Epps burned his clothes. Taylor, a Northern Durham High School student, drove the stolen car to his school, where it was immobilized for a parking violation. They got the car back before Owen's mother reported him missing.

After the teenagers discovered Owen's body, Maiden, Epps and Taylor wiped the car down with bleach and doused the interior with lighter fluid, abandoning it on Franklin Street in Durham County.

According to Niolet's story, the statement was the first time Owens had heard details of how his son died.

"To shoot a man and then beat the hell out of him and choke him and kick him and shoot him again and then just throw him in the river like he was a bag of garbage," Owens said. "They had no idea how many lives were going to be shattered when they did that."

Epps, Taylor and Maiden were indicted in mid April, although no trial date has yet been set.

Durham County Prosecutor Freda Black says they will be prosecuted for first-degree murder, which could lead to penalties of death or life in prison without parole.



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