

Crimes

Legislation

Continued

what he had actually stumbled upon was a badly beaten and nearly dead young man, he notified authorities.

Shepard was soon taken to Poudre Valley Hospital in nearby Fort Collins, Colorado where he lay in a coma until the early morning hours of October 12. It was then that he died as a direct result from the injuries received from the cold-blooded ruthless beating which took place only five days before. Two men, Russell Henderson, 21, and Aaron McKinney, 22, were found October 8 and charged with first degree murder, kidnapping, and aggravated robbery. Their girlfriends, 18 and 20, were apprehended as well because of the false alibis they supplied the assailants as well as assisting them hide clothing which had been stained with Shepard's blood.

Matthew, as I'm sure you remember, was gay. He was ultimately killed in an apparent display of hatred for his sexual orientation. His death has prompted a heated debate around the propriety of hate-crime legislation, particularly new federal legislation supported this year by the Clinton Administration. The President's initiatives to combat hate crimes include: having all 93 US attorneys establish hate crimes working groups to develop enforcement strategies, obtaining 50 more FBI agents and prosecutors which would be assigned to work on hate crimes enforcement, having the Departments of Justice and Housing and Urban Development assist victims of housing-related hate crimes to bring action against their attackers and win monetary damages, and

Page 5, November 1998

having the Departments of Justice and Education distribute manuals to the nation's school districts encouraging schools to confront hate-motivated behavior among students.

Most states which have hate crime statutes, including North Carolina, only cover incidents of violence directed against individuals because of their race, religion, or ethnicity. Most states do not cover all areas of bias, however, including gender, disability, and sexual orientation. And as these exclusions are the following states failed to establish hate crimes statutes:



Arizona, Wyoming, Nebraska, Kansas, Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Indiana, Kentucky, South Carolina, Georgia, New York, and Hawaii - that's not to mention other US possessions such as Guam, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands.

The question you should be asking yourself now is "WHY?" Why doesn't our government press for harsher penalties for those who commit crimes against others for reasons of bias? It's because not enough people have shown support for them. I strongly urge you to contact your senators and congressmen to convey your feelings concerning the subject. How many more senseless crimes must occur before we see the light? The truth is, it's up to make that determination.

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." --Martin Luther King, Jr.