

Front Page Monday, October 12, 1998 Published at 11:57 GMT 12:57 UK

World
UK

UK Politics

Business

Sci/Tech

Health

Education

Sport

Entertainment

Talking Point

On Air

Feedback

Low Graphics

Help

World: Americas

Clinton urges crackdown on hate crimes



Police examine the scene where the beaten student was left tied to a fence

The US President, Bill Clinton, has called for tougher laws in the United States against what he described as hate crimes following an attack on an openly gay university student in Wyoming.

The 22-year-old student, Matthew Shepard, died of



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injuries he received when he was beaten, burned and tied to a fence for 18 hours on Wednesday night.

"In the face of this terrible act of violence, they are joining together to demonstrate that an act of evil like this is not what our country is all about," Mr Clinton said in a statement released by the White House.

Matthew Shepard: Died of his injuries

sexual orientation, gender and disability.

Gay-rights activists said the attack shows the need for tougher hate-crime legislation, and reveals a growing national level of intolerance.

"There is a climate right now of intolerance that we believe is being fostered by religious political organisations," said Kim I Mills of the Human Rights Campaign, the largest US gay and lesbian political group.

Charges of attempted murder

Two young men have been charged with attempted first-degree murder, kidnapping and aggravated robbery. Two women have been charged with being accessories after the fact.



Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney: Charged with attempted murder

Police said the two men lured Mr Shepard from a University of Wyoming campus bar by telling him they were gay. The three allegedly drove off in a truck, where Mr Shepard was beaten. Later, the assailants tied him to the fence and beat him some more.

Authorities said the two men made anti-gay remarks to the two women.

Police said there were indications the attack was both a robbery and a hate crime, and the investigation was continuing.

Condition deteriorating

The hospital officials said Mr Shepard had suffered

In this section

[Chilean president applauds Pinochet ruling](#)

[Paraguay president to face Senate](#)

[Jackson rules out White House run](#)

[Annan gives strikes qualified support](#)

[Gay student murder trial begins](#)

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[Straw considers Pinochet case](#)

From Business
[Microsoft's settlement offer](#)

[Chinese scientist was 'FBI suspect'](#)

From Sci/Tech
[Sea Launch primed to make history](#)

[Guatemala judge resigns in bishop murder case](#)

[Argentina marks coup anniversary](#)

[Canada warns against UDI by Palestinians](#)

[Freed Peru prisoners demand compensation](#)

[Chilean reactions to Pinochet ruling](#)

[Castro biography banned in China](#)

severe head injuries in the attack, including damage to his brain stem.

"When he arrived on Wednesday night ... his head trauma consisted of a massive blow to the right side of his head," said Rulon Stacey, representative of the hospital.

"It fractured his skull from behind his head to in front of his right ear and compressed his skull into his brain," he said.

Mr Shepard's parents flew in to be with their son, from Saudi Arabia where his father works in the oil industry.

The parents said in a statement that their son's one intolerance was with people who "don't accept others as they are".

"He has always strongly felt that all people are the same regardless of their sexual preference, race or religion," they said.

[Advanced options](#) | [Search tips](#)

[Back to top](#) | [BBC News Home](#) | [BBC Homepage](#)



[Front Page](#)

Saturday, October 17, 1998 Published at 00:10 GMT 01:10 UK

[World](#)

[UK](#)

[UK Politics](#)

[Business](#)

[Sci/Tech](#)

[Health](#)

[Education](#)

[Sport](#)

[Entertainment](#)

[Talking Point](#)

[On Air](#)

[Feedback](#)

[Low Graphics](#)

[Help](#)

World: Americas

Americans mourn gay hate-crime victim



Anti-gay protesters picketed the funeral

The funeral has taken place in the United States of Matthew Shepard, a 21 year-old student who was apparently beaten to death because he was gay.



[Bridget Kendall](#)
reports from
Washington

Friends and family gathered in pouring rain at the church in the town of Casper, Wyoming, where he was baptised.



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The brutal way in which he died has shocked the country. President Clinton, who said he was "deeply grieved" and "horrified" by the killing, sent two representatives to the funeral.



The Shepard family joined the pleas for tolerance

Tied to a fence, Matthew Shepard was repeatedly beaten by his attackers and then left for dead in near freezing temperatures.

The bicyclist who found him on Wednesday, some 18 hours after the attack, first mistook him for a scarecrow.

Authorities said he had been pistol-whipped after being lured from a campus bar by two men who told him they

were gay.

He died in hospital on Monday - his skull was so badly fractured by the beating that doctors said surgery was not an option.

Two charged

Two 21-year-old men have been charged with first degree murder.



University of Wyoming students protest at the killing

Police say although the main motive may have been robbery, the attackers also singled out their victim simply because he was gay.

The charge carries a possible death sentence, but prosecutors have not said whether they will seek the death penalty.

The savage attack has prompted numerous candle-lit vigils across

America calling for tougher laws to combat hate crimes, which monitoring groups say are on the increase.

Members of Congress have joined prominent gay activists in expressing outrage and pleading for tolerance.

President Clinton has urged members of Congress to pass legislation making it easier for federal prosecution of hate crimes.

'Wake-up call'

In this section

[Chilean president applauds Pinochet ruling](#)

[Paraguay president to face Senate](#)

[Jackson rules out White House run](#)

[Annan gives strikes qualified support](#)

[Gay student murder trial begins](#)

From Business
[America Online cuts 1,000 jobs](#)

[Straw considers Pinochet case](#)

From Business
[Microsoft's settlement offer](#)

[Chinese scientist was 'FBI suspect'](#)

From Sci/Tech
[Sea Launch primed to make history](#)

[Guatemala judge resigns in bishop murder case](#)

[Argentina marks coup anniversary](#)

[Canada warns against UDI by Palestinians](#)

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[Chilean reactions to Pinochet ruling](#)

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At a rally in Washington DC, TV star Ellen Degeneres said heterosexuals should see the savage killing as "a wake-up call to help us end the hate."



The brutal killing has caused shock across America

"Right now, homosexuals are the target of, at the very least, discrimination; at the very worst, hate and violence," she said.

At the funeral Matthew Shepard's father, Dennis, described him as a caring, loving person who would have been overwhelmed by what his death has done to the hearts of people around the world.

Reverend Royce Brown of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, where the funeral took place knew Matthew Shepard and his family well.

"He was a really nice kid. He was always willing to help," Reverend Boyce said. "You never needed to tell Matt what to do."

Anti-hate law

In response to the killing, Wyoming state legislators have called for the state to pass an anti-hate crime law.



Matthew Shepard: "A really nice kid"

But homosexuality is an issue that deeply divides America and anti-gay demonstrators held a rally at the funeral.

Members of the Westboro Baptist Church from Topeka, Kansas, a group that regularly holds anti-gay pickets, said they would protest at the funeral, ignoring pleas for privacy from the Shepard family.

"We should try to remember that because Matt's last few minutes of consciousness on earth may have been hell, his family and friends want more than ever to say their farewells to him in a peaceful, dignified and loving manner," Matthew Shepard's father said.

Wyoming State Governor Jim Geringer said officials could not stop the group from coming to Casper, but said their presence was not wanted.

"The people of Wyoming do not tolerate their hatred,"

said spokesman Jim Orr.

Search

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[Back to top](#) | [BBC News Home](#) | [BBC Homepage](#)



Front Page Tuesday, December 29, 1998 Published at 17:05 GMT

- [World](#)
- [UK](#)
- [UK Politics](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Sci/Tech](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Sport](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [Talking Point](#)

- [On Air](#)
- [Feedback](#)
- [Low Graphics](#)
- [Help](#)

World: Americas

Gay student's killers could face death penalty



Matthew Shepard was left for dead, tied to a fence

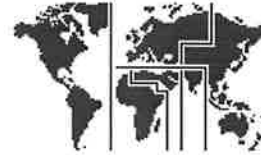
Two men accused of the alleged homophobic murder of a gay university student in the United States could face the death penalty if convicted.

Wyoming prosecutor Cal Rerucha has announced he is seeking the death penalty for Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson, on trial for the murder of Matthew Shepard, 21.



The two are charged with first-degree murder, kidnapping and aggravated robbery.

For the death penalty to be imposed under Wyoming law, the prosecution will have to prove aggravating



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- 17 Oct 98 | Americas
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- 12 Oct 98 | Americas
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Henderson and McKinney:
Charged with first-degree
murder

circumstances in the killing.

The brutality of the killing in October shocked the US.

Matthew Shepard was tied to a fence, beaten and

pistol-whipped, after being lured from a campus bar by two men who told him they were gay.

Mr Shepard was left for dead in freezing temperatures and died in hospital later. His skull was so badly fractured by the beating that doctors said surgery was not an option.



Matthew Shepard: Targetted
because he was gay

Police said that although the main motive may have been robbery, the attackers also singled out their victim simply because he was gay.

The savage attack has prompted calls for tougher laws to combat violent crimes based on prejudice, which monitoring groups say are on the increase.

Members of Congress have joined prominent gay

activists in expressing outrage and pleading for tolerance.

President Bill Clinton, who sent representatives to Mr Shepard's funeral, urged members of Congress to pass legislation making it easier for the federal prosecution of prejudice crimes.

Several US states have laws targeting crimes of prejudice on their statute books. Wyoming is not among them, though state legislators have called for it to pass an anti-prejudice crime law.

But the strength of anti-gay feeling that also exists among some in the US was shown by demonstrators, many of them fundamental Christians, who picketed Mr Shepard's funeral.

In this section

[Chilean president applauds Pinochet ruling](#)

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[Jackson rules out White House run](#)

[Annan gives strikes qualified support](#)

[Gay student murder trial begins](#)

From Business
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