

Two Americas

In an address dated October 12th 2005, the seventh anniversary of Matthew Shepard's death, Matthew's mother, Judy Shepard, poignantly calls our attention to the paradoxical climate for queer people in America:

We continue to fight for hate crime legislation that will include sexual orientation, gender, and disability, and for federal job protection based on sexual orientation. Yes, you can be fired for being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender in 36 states of this nation. It is as if we are living in two Americas—one that tunes in to 'Queer Eye for a Straight Guy' but turns a blind eye to the injustices gay and lesbian people still face. (www.matthewshepard.org)

This week you've watched *The Laramie Project* as part of our unit on gender and sexuality studies. While this film may seem to be about the Matthew Shepard murder and trial, Moises explains in the film, "this is not about the case. This is about the town: why did this happen here, what are people saying, how do they feel and think about what happened." You've also read "A Boy's Life: For Matthew Shepard's killers, what does it take to pass as a man?" which offered yet another critical view of anti-gay culture.

After watching the film and "getting a feel" for Laramie, and reading the article and better understanding how something like this could happen, I'd like you to reflect on Judy Shepard's assertion that there are two Americas. Please compose a 3-page response to this idea, arguing with her *hypothesis*. Do not take her observation as fact—you may agree or disagree with her, but I'd like to see a developed line of argument taking a stance on one side or the other. As your case study, I'd like you to consider Syracuse University. In addition to your own observations of queer culture (or lack thereof) on campus, you might also want to consult university policies and the LGBT resource center to get a better understanding of the institutional side of queer culture. This outside research is entirely optional, but for many of you, it could offer additional resources to discuss the climate for queer people on campus. Please be prepared to share excerpts of your response in class.