

Shooting Death of Gay Man Rocks New York's Cradle of Gay Rights

Greenwich Village, the birthplace of the U.S. gay rights movement, remained in shock on Sunday over the shooting death of a gay man by a gunman who police said uttered anti-gay slurs before targeting the victim.

Mark Carson, 32, was shot dead in Greenwich Village around midnight on Friday in what police are calling a hate crime. Others say it could be a backlash against the recent advance of gay marriage laws across the United States.

The Manhattan neighborhood has long been a haven for bohemians and artists, and its Stonewall Inn has been a landmark for gay rights since a 1969 clash when patrons of the gay bar resisted a police raid.

Sympathizers built a shrine to Carson on Sunday, leaving cards, candles and flowers at the spot where he was killed, on Sixth Avenue at Eighth Street.

"This is supposed to be like the world's capital where it's OK to be gay," said Josh Steinman, 42, who paused for a moment in front of the memorial.

The attack marked the 22nd anti-gay hate crime in New York City this year, compared to 13 incidents at this time last year, New York City Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly said.

"It's clear that victim here was killed only because, and just because, he was thought to be gay," Kelly told reporters on Sunday. "There's no question about that. There were derogatory remarks. This victim did nothing to antagonize or instigate the shooter. It was only because the shooter believed him to

be gay.”

A suspect identified as Elliot Morales, 33, was arrested on a charge of second degree murder as a hate crime shortly after the shooting. He is being held without bail and two of his companions are cooperating with police, Kelly said.

“I can’t believe that something like that happened in the Village,” said Carmine Tzavis, 40, a bartender at Stonewall Inn.

The police commissioner stopped short of confirming an increase in anti-gay attacks because, he said, hate crimes are typically underreported, so the data are skewed.

People in the Village said they were alarmed and feared the violence may have been sparked by the rapid passage of gay marriage laws.

On Tuesday, Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton signed a bill making his state the 12th to allow same-sex couples to marry.

“I seem to think it’s an overreaction to the marriage equality stuff,” said Brian Kennedy, 56, who came to the crime scene on Sunday to pay his respects.

Kennedy, who is gay, said he moved to New York from Atlanta in 1991 because he believed the city would be more accepting. Now he has his doubts.

“Getting beat up is one thing. Getting shot point-blank in the face is another,” Kennedy said.

The Anti-Violence Project has organized a march and vigil at the crime scene on Monday.

A spokesman for the anti-defamation group GLAAD called the killing “a stark and sobering reminder of the rife homophobia that still exists in our culture.”

“Until we rid our society of the discrimination that allows us to be seen as inferior and less than human, we will never truly be safe, even in one of the most accepting cities in the world,” spokesman Wilson Cruz said in a statement.

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