

Paper 1

“The Hope Speech” by Harvey Milk was written in 1978. The speech was meant to appeal to all audiences about equality for the LGBT community. His speech helped lead the way for gay rights. This speech didn’t come without consequences however, as Milk was gunned down a year later. To convince others to treat people of the LGBT community equally, he mainly used pathos to appeal to his audiences. He gave many examples to make listeners sympathize with the LGBT community. Through his examples people could see how society treated those that had a different sexual orientations than heterosexual.

Throughout the speech Milk describes how people of the LGBT community would be afraid of expressing themselves or letting their sexual preferences be known. He claimed this was due to the fear of backlash from the people that didn’t share their preferences. Things such as being kicked out by their parents or facing the judgement of their peers. He even states in the speech that “Gay people have been slandered nationwide.” (Milk, 1978). In stating this he draws the attention of people who will be slow to listen.

Milk’s main audience were the people who were judging those of a different sexual preference. He could’ve been more balanced in his approach by sharing a view from the opposing sides perspective, but I see why he didn’t as that would’ve been counterproductive to his argument. Not addressing the differing views of his audience could’ve been very dangerous because it might’ve swayed those who were neutral on the topic against it due to the lack of equality in the speech. It seems difficult to make a claim to equality, but not represent everyone equally in the speech. Milk did try to garner the support of the minority groups to his side. He

used lines like “ I can’t forget the looks on the faces of people who’ve lost hope. Be they gay, be they seniors, be they blacks looking for an almost impossible job, be they Latinos trying to explain their problems in and aspirations in a tongue that’s foreign to them. I personally will never forget that people are more important than buildings.” (Milk, 1978). By using lines like this Milk managed to weave the LGBT community into the group of minorities. His goal was to get people who were suffering from oppression to join his cause by explaining how his own community was being oppressed.

Harvey also liked to repeat how hope was the only thing anyone had left after being oppressed, and that without hope everyone would just give up. This emphasized that he was not only fighting for the rights of gay people, but anyone who was or still is being discriminated against. Making statements like “ The anger and the frustrations that some of us feel is because we are misunderstood, and friends can’t feel the anger and frustration.” (Milk, 1978) gives Milk a stronger hold on his target audience by hinting that he shares the same emotions they keep hidden deep down. Or more indirect statements like “The only thing they have to look forward to is hope. And you have to give them hope. Hope for a better world, hope for a better tomorrow, hope for a better place to come to if the pressures at home are too great.” (Milk, 1978). Powerful phrases like this put the responsibility to fix the problem of discrimination and oppression in the hands of those that were the discriminators or oppressors.

Although Milk didn’t try to look through the eyes of the majority, he did help them understand the plight of the minority. This piece as a whole gives a great demonstration of rhetoric. The author brilliantly used pathos and logos to his advantage when writing the speech. Milk’s speech was meant to target the audience’s emotions and draw them in. Once he had their

attention he used his voice to represent them all and turned his attention to those oppressing his group. He then challenged them to support and give hope to minorities, and reinvigorate a nation that has given up.