

= Harvey Milk =

Harvey Bernard Milk (May 22 , 1930 ? November 27 , 1978) was an American politician who became the first openly gay person to be elected to public office in California , when he won a seat on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors . Politics and gay activism were not his early interests ; he was not open about his homosexuality and did not participate in civic matters until around the age of 40 , after his experiences in the counterculture of the 1960s .

Milk moved from New York City to settle in San Francisco in 1972 amid a migration of gay men to the Castro District . He took advantage of the growing political and economic power of the neighborhood to promote his interests , and ran unsuccessfully for political office three times . His theatrical campaigns earned him increasing popularity , and Milk won a seat as a city supervisor in 1977 .

Milk served almost 11 months in office and was responsible for passing a stringent gay rights ordinance for the city . On November 27 , 1978 , Milk and Mayor George Moscone were assassinated by Dan White , another city supervisor who had recently resigned but wanted his job back . Milk 's election was made possible by and was a key component of a shift in San Francisco politics .

Despite his short career in politics , Milk became an icon in San Francisco and a martyr in the gay community . In 2002 , Milk was called " the most famous and most significantly open LGBT official ever elected in the United States " . Anne Kronenberg , his final campaign manager , wrote of him : " What set Harvey apart from you or me was that he was a visionary . He imagined a righteous world inside his head and then he set about to create it for real , for all of us . " Milk was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2009 .

= = Early life = =

Milk was born in Woodmere , New York , to William Milk and Minerva Karns . He was the younger son of Lithuanian Jewish parents and the grandson of Morris Milk , a department store owner who helped to organize the first synagogue in the area . As a child , Harvey was teased for his protruding ears , big nose , and oversized feet , and tended to grab attention as a class clown . He played football in school , and developed a passion for opera ; in his teens , he acknowledged his homosexuality to himself , but kept it a closely guarded secret . Under his name in the high school yearbook , it read , " Glimpy Milk ? and they say WOMEN are never at a loss for words " .

Milk graduated from Bay Shore High School in Bay Shore , New York , in 1947 and attended New York State College for Teachers in Albany (now the State University of New York at Albany) from 1947 to 1951 , majoring in mathematics . He also wrote for the college newspaper . One classmate remembered , " He was never thought of as a possible queer ? that 's what you called them then ? he was a man 's man " .

= = = Early career = = =

After graduation , Milk joined the United States Navy during the Korean War . He served aboard the submarine rescue ship USS Kittiwake (ASR @-@ 13) as a diving officer . He later transferred to Naval Station , San Diego to serve as a diving instructor . In 1955 , he was discharged from the Navy at the rank of lieutenant , junior grade .

Milk 's early career was marked by frequent changes ; in later years he would take delight in talking about his metamorphosis from a middle @-@ class Jewish boy . He began teaching at George W. Hewlett High School on Long Island . In 1956 , he met Joe Campbell , at the Jacob Riis Park beach , a popular location for gay men in Queens . Campbell was seven years younger than Milk , and Milk pursued him passionately . Even after they moved in together , Milk wrote Campbell romantic notes and poems . Growing bored with their New York lives , they decided to move to Dallas , Texas , but they were unhappy there and moved back to New York , where Milk got a job as an actuarial statistician at an insurance firm . Campbell and Milk separated after almost six years ; it would be his

longest relationship .

Milk tried to keep his early romantic life separate from his family and work . Once again bored and single in New York , he thought of moving to Miami to marry a lesbian friend to " have a front and each would not be in the way of the other " . However , he decided to remain in New York , where he secretly pursued gay relationships . In 1962 Milk became involved with Craig Rodwell , who was 10 years younger . Though Milk courted Rodwell ardently , waking him every morning with a call and sending him notes , Milk was uncomfortable with Rodwell 's involvement with the New York Mattachine Society , a gay @-@ rights organization . When Rodwell was arrested for walking in Riis Park , and charged with inciting a riot and with indecent exposure (the law required men 's swimsuits to extend from above the navel to below the thigh) , he spent three days in jail . The relationship soon ended as Milk became alarmed at Rodwell 's tendency to agitate the police .

Milk abruptly stopped working as an insurance actuary and became a researcher at the Wall Street firm Bache & Company . He was frequently promoted despite his tendency to offend the older members of the firm by ignoring their advice and flaunting his success . Although he was skilled at his job , co @-@ workers sensed that Milk 's heart was not in his work . He started a romantic relationship with Jack Galen McKinley , and recruited him to work on conservative Republican Barry Goldwater 's 1964 presidential campaign . Their relationship was troubled . When McKinley first began his relationship with Milk in late 1964 , he was 16 years old . He was prone to depression and sometimes threatened to commit suicide if Milk did not show him enough attention . To make a point to McKinley , Milk took him to the hospital where Milk 's ex @-@ lover , Joe Campbell , was himself recuperating from a suicide attempt , after his lover Billy Sipple left him . Milk had remained friendly with Campbell , who had entered the avant @-@ garde art scene in Greenwich Village , but Milk did not understand why Campbell 's despondency was sufficient cause to consider suicide as an option .

= = = Rise of Castro Street = = =

The Eureka Valley of San Francisco , where Market and Castro Streets intersect , had for decades been a blue @-@ collar Irish Catholic neighborhood synonymous with the Most Holy Redeemer Parish (a few Lutherans of Scandinavian ancestry also lived in the neighborhood) . Beginning in the late 1960s , however , young families left the neighborhood and moved to Bay Area suburbs , and the city 's economic base eroded as factories moved to cheaper locations nearby and blue @-@ collar port jobs relocated to Oakland . Mayor Joseph Alioto , proud of his working @-@ class background and supporters , based his political career on welcoming developers to provide construction jobs and attracting a Roman Catholic Cardinal to the city . Many blue @-@ collar workers ? often Alioto supporters ? lost their jobs as large corporations with service industry positions replaced factory and dry dock jobs . San Francisco , which had been " a city of villages " , a decentralized city with ethnic enclaves that each surrounded its own main street , began a demographic change .

As the downtown area developed , neighborhoods suffered , including Castro Street . The Most Holy Redeemer Parish shops shut down , and houses were abandoned and shuttered . In 1963 , real estate prices plummeted when most of the working @-@ class families tried to sell their houses quickly after a gay bar opened in the neighborhood . Hippies , attracted to the free love ideals of the Haight @-@ Ashbury area but repulsed by its crime rate , bought some of the cheap Victorian houses . Beginning in the late 1960s , many San Francisco gays who were affluent began to move from the small apartments of the Polk Gulch area , San Francisco 's primary gayborhood since the end of World War II , to the large cheap Victorians in the Castro neighborhood .

Since the end of World War II , the major port city of San Francisco had been home to a sizable number of gay men expelled from the military who had decided to stay rather than return to their hometowns and face ostracism . By 1969 the Kinsey Institute believed San Francisco had more gay people per capita than any other American city ; when the National Institute of Mental Health asked the Institute to survey homosexuals , the Institute chose San Francisco as its focus . Milk and McKinley were among the thousands of gay men attracted to San Francisco . McKinley was a stage

manager for Tom O'Horgan, a director who started his career in experimental theater, but soon graduated to much larger Broadway productions. They arrived in 1969 with the Broadway touring company of Hair. McKinley was offered a job in the New York City production of Jesus Christ Superstar, and their tempestuous relationship came to an end. The city appealed to Milk so much that he decided to stay, working at an investment firm. In 1970, increasingly frustrated with the political climate after the U.S. invasion of Cambodia, Milk let his hair grow long. When told to cut it, he refused and was fired.

Milk drifted from California to Texas to New York, without a steady job or plan. In New York City he became involved with O'Horgan's theater company as a "general aide", signing on as associate producer for Lenny and for Eve Merriam's Inner City. The time he had spent with the cast of flower children wore away much of Milk's conservatism. A contemporary New York Times story about O'Horgan described Milk as "a sad eyed man? another aging hippie with long, long hair, wearing faded jeans and pretty beads". Craig Rodwell read the description of the formerly uptight man and wondered if it could be the same person. One of Milk's Wall Street friends worried that he seemed to have no plan or future, but remembered Milk's attitude: "I think he was happier than at any time I had ever seen him in his entire life."

Milk met Scott Smith, 18 years his junior, and began another relationship. Milk and Smith returned to San Francisco, where they lived on money they had saved. In March 1973, after a roll of film Milk left at a local shop was ruined, he and Smith opened a camera store on Castro Street with their last \$10,000.

== Changing politics ==

In the late 1960s, the Society for Individual Rights (SIR) and the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) began to work against police persecution of gay bars and entrapment in San Francisco. Oral sex was still a felony, and in 1970, nearly 90 people in the city were arrested for having sex in public parks at night. Mayor Alioto asked the police to target the parks, hoping the decision would appeal to the Archdiocese and his Catholic supporters. In 1971, 2,800 gay men were arrested for public sex in San Francisco. By comparison, New York City recorded only 63 arrests for the same offense that year. Any arrest for a morals charge required registration as a sex offender.

Congressman Phillip Burton, Assemblyman Willie Brown, and other California politicians recognized the growing clout and organization of homosexuals in the city, and courted their votes by attending meetings of gay and lesbian organizations. Brown pushed for legalization of sex between consenting adults in 1969 but failed. SIR was also pursued by popular moderate Supervisor Dianne Feinstein in her bid to become mayor, opposing Alioto. Ex-police officer Richard Hongisto worked for 10 years to change the conservative views of the San Francisco Police Department, and also actively appealed to the gay community, which responded by raising significant funds for his campaign for sheriff. Though Feinstein was unsuccessful, Hongisto's win in 1971 showed the political clout of the gay community.

SIR had become powerful enough for political maneuvering. In 1971 SIR members Jim Foster, Rick Stokes, and Advocate publisher David Goodstein formed the Alice B. Toklas Memorial Democratic Club, known as simply "Alice". Alice befriended liberal politicians to persuade them to sponsor bills, proving successful in 1972 when Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon obtained Feinstein's support for an ordinance outlawing employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Alice chose Stokes to run for a relatively unimportant seat on the community college board. Though Stokes received 45,000 votes, he was quiet, unassuming, and did not win. Foster, however, shot to national prominence by being the first openly gay man to address a political convention. His speech at the 1972 Democratic National Convention ensured that his voice, according to San Francisco politicians, was the one to be heard when they wanted the opinions, and especially the votes, of the gay community.

Milk became more interested in political and civic matters when he was faced with civic problems and policies he disliked. One day in 1973, a state bureaucrat entered Milk's shop Castro Camera and informed him that he owed \$100 as a deposit against state sales tax. Milk was incredulous and

traded shouts with the man about the rights of business owners ; after he complained for weeks at state offices , the deposit was reduced to \$ 30 . Milk fumed about government priorities when a teacher came into his store to borrow a projector because the equipment in the schools did not function . Friends also remember around the same time having to restrain him from kicking the television while Attorney General John N. Mitchell gave consistent " I don 't recall " replies during the Watergate hearings . Milk decided that the time had come to run for city supervisor . He said later , " I finally reached the point where I knew I had to become involved or shut up " .

= = Campaigns = =

Milk 's reception by the gay political establishment in San Francisco was icy . Jim Foster , who had by then been active in gay politics for 10 years , resented the newcomer 's asking for his endorsement for a position as prestigious as city supervisor . Foster told Milk , " There 's an old saying in the Democratic Party . You don 't get to dance unless you put up the chairs . I 've never seen you put up the chairs . " Milk was furious at the patronizing snub , and the conversation marked the beginning of an antagonistic relationship between the " Alice " Club and Harvey Milk . Some gay bar owners , still battling police harassment and unhappy with what they saw as a timid approach by Alice to established authority in the city , decided to endorse him .

Though he had drifted through his life thus far , Milk found his vocation , according to journalist Frances FitzGerald , who called him a " born politician " . At first , his inexperience showed . He tried to do without money , support , or staff , and instead relied on his message of sound financial management , promoting individuals over large corporations and government . He supported the reorganization of supervisor elections from a city @-@ wide ballot to district ballots , which was intended to reduce the influence of money and give neighborhoods more control over their representatives in city government . He also ran on a culturally liberal platform , opposing government interference in private sexual matters and favoring the legalization of marijuana . Milk 's fiery , flamboyant speeches and savvy media skills earned him a significant amount of press during the 1973 election . He earned 16 @,@ 900 votes ? sweeping the Castro District and other liberal neighborhoods and coming in 10th place out of 32 candidates . Had the elections been reorganized to allow districts to elect their own supervisors , he would have won .

= = = Mayor of Castro Street = = =

Milk displayed an affinity for building coalitions from early in his political career . The Teamsters wanted to strike against beer distributors ? Coors in particular ? who refused to sign the union contract . An organizer asked Milk for assistance with gay bars ; in return , Milk asked the union to hire more gay drivers . A few days later , Milk canvassed the gay bars in and surrounding the Castro District , urging them to refuse to sell the beer . With the help of a coalition of Arab and Chinese grocers the Teamsters had also recruited , the boycott was successful . Milk found a strong political ally in organized labor , and it was around this time that he began to style himself " The Mayor of Castro Street " . As Castro Street 's presence grew , so did Milk 's reputation . Tom O 'Horgan remarked , " Harvey spent most of his life looking for a stage . On Castro Street he finally found it . "

Tensions between the older citizens of the Most Holy Redeemer Parish and the gays entering the Castro District were growing , however , and in 1973 , when two gay men tried to open an antique shop , the Eureka Valley Merchants Association (EVMA) attempted to prevent them from receiving a business license . Milk and a few other gay business owners founded the Castro Village Association , with Milk as the president . He often repeated his philosophy that gays should buy from gay businesses . Milk organized the Castro Street Fair in 1974 to attract more customers to the area . More than 5 @,@ 000 attended , and some of the EVMA members were stunned ; they did more business at the Castro Street Fair than on any previous day .

= = = Serious candidate = = =

Although he was a newcomer to the Castro District , Milk had shown leadership in the small community . He was starting to be taken seriously as a candidate and decided to run again for supervisor in 1975 . He reconsidered his approach and cut his long hair , swore off marijuana , and vowed never to visit another gay bathhouse again . Milk 's campaigning earned the support of the teamsters , firefighters , and construction unions . Castro Camera became the center of activity in the neighborhood . Milk would often pull people off the street to work his campaigns for him ? many discovered later that they just happened to be the type of men Milk found attractive .

Milk favored support for small businesses and the growth of neighborhoods . Since 1968 , Mayor Alioto had been luring large corporations to the city despite what critics labeled " the Manhattanization of San Francisco " . As blue @-@ collar jobs were replaced by the service industry , Alioto 's weakened political base allowed for new leadership to be voted into office in the city . George Moscone was elected mayor . Moscone had been instrumental in repealing the sodomy law earlier that year in the California State Legislature . He acknowledged Milk 's influence in his election by visiting Milk 's election night headquarters , thanking Milk personally , and offering him a position as a city commissioner . Milk came in seventh place in the election , only one position away from earning a supervisor seat . Liberal politicians held the offices of the mayor , district attorney , and sheriff .

Despite the new leadership in the city , there were still conservative strongholds . One of Moscone 's first acts as mayor was appointing a police chief to the embattled San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) . He chose Charles Gain , against the wishes of the SFPD . Most of the force disliked Gain for criticizing the police in the press for racial insensitivity and alcohol abuse on the job , instead of working within the command structure to change attitudes . By request of the mayor , Gain made it clear that gay police officers would be welcomed in the department ; this became national news . Police under Gain expressed their hatred of him , and of the mayor for betraying them .

= = = Race for State Assembly = = =

Keeping his promise to Milk , newly elected Mayor George Moscone appointed him to the Board of Permit Appeals in 1976 , making him the first openly gay city commissioner in the United States . Milk , however , considered seeking a position in the California State Assembly . The district was weighted heavily in his favor , as much of it was based in neighborhoods surrounding Castro Street , where Milk 's sympathizers voted . In the previous race for supervisor , Milk received more votes than the currently seated assemblyman . However , Moscone had made a deal with the assembly speaker that another candidate should run ? Art Agnos . Furthermore , by order of the mayor , neither appointed nor elected officials were allowed to run a campaign while performing their duties .

Milk spent five weeks on the Board of Permit Appeals before Moscone was forced to fire him when he announced he would run for the California State Assembly . Rick Stokes replaced him . Milk 's firing , and the backroom deal made between Moscone , the assembly speaker , and Agnos , fueled his campaign as he took on the identity of a political underdog . He railed that high officers in the city and state governments were against him . He complained that the prevailing gay political establishment , particularly the Alice B. Toklas Memorial Democratic Club , were shutting him out ; he referred to Jim Foster and Stokes as gay " Uncle Toms " . He enthusiastically embraced a local independent weekly magazine 's headline : " Harvey Milk vs. The Machine " .

Milk 's role as a representative of San Francisco 's gay community expanded during this period . On September 22 , 1975 , President Gerald Ford , while visiting San Francisco , walked from his hotel to his car . In the crowd , Sara Jane Moore raised a gun to shoot him . A former Marine who had been walking by grabbed her arm as the gun discharged toward the pavement . The bystander was Oliver " Bill " Sipple , who had left Milk 's ex @-@ lover Joe Campbell years before , prompting Campbell 's suicide attempt . The national spotlight was on him immediately . On psychiatric disability leave from the military , Sipple refused to call himself a hero and did not want his sexuality disclosed . Milk , however , took advantage of the opportunity to illustrate his cause that public

perception of gay people would be improved if they came out of the closet . He told a friend : " It 's too good an opportunity . For once we can show that gays do heroic things , not just all that ca @-@ ca about molesting children and hanging out in bathrooms . " Milk contacted a newspaper .

Several days later Herb Caen , a columnist at The San Francisco Chronicle , exposed Sipple as gay and a friend of Milk 's . The announcement was picked up by national newspapers , and Milk 's name was included in many of the stories . Time magazine named Milk as a leader in San Francisco 's gay community . Sipple , however , was besieged by reporters , as was his family . His mother , a staunch Baptist in Detroit , now refused to speak to him . Although he had been involved with the gay community for years , even participating in Gay Pride events , Sipple sued the Chronicle for invasion of privacy . President Ford sent Sipple a note of thanks for saving his life . Milk said that Sipple 's sexual orientation was the reason he received only a note , rather than an invitation to the White House .

Milk 's continuing campaign , run from the storefront of Castro Camera , was a study in disorganization . Although the older Irish grandmothers and gay men who volunteered were plentiful and happy to send out mass mailings , Milk 's notes and volunteer lists were kept on scrap papers . Any time the campaign required funds , the money came from the cash register without any consideration for accounting . The campaign manager 's assistant was an 11 @-@ year @-@ old neighborhood girl . Milk himself was hyperactive and prone to fantastic outbursts of temper , only to recover quickly and shout excitedly about something else . Many of his rants were directed at his lover , Scott Smith , who was becoming disillusioned with the man who was no longer the laid @-@ back hippie he had fallen in love with .

If the candidate was manic , he was also dedicated and filled with good humor , and he had a particular genius for getting media attention . He spent long hours registering voters and shaking hands at bus stops and movie theater lines . He took whatever opportunity came along to promote himself . He thoroughly enjoyed campaigning , and his success was evident . With the large numbers of volunteers , he had dozens at a time stand along the busy thoroughfare of Market Street as human billboards , holding " Milk for Assembly " signs while commuters drove into the heart of the city to work . He distributed his campaign literature anywhere he could , including among one of the most influential political groups in the city , the Peoples Temple . Milk 's volunteers took thousands of brochures there , but came back with feelings of apprehension . Because the Peoples Temple leader , Jim Jones , was politically powerful in San Francisco (and supported both candidates) , Milk allowed Temple members to work his phones , spoke at the Temple and later wrote a letter to President Jimmy Carter defending Jones character , despite private misgivings about the group . But to his volunteers , he said : " Make sure you 're always nice to the Peoples Temple . If they ask you to do something , do it , and then send them a note thanking them for asking you to do it . They 're weird and they 're dangerous , and you never want to be on their bad side . "

The race was close , and Milk lost by fewer than 4 @,@ 000 votes . Agnos , however , taught Milk a valuable lesson when he criticized Milk 's campaign speeches as " a downer ... You talk about how you 're gonna throw the bums out , but how are you gonna fix things ? other than beat me ? You shouldn 't leave your audience on a down . " In the wake of his loss , Milk , realizing that the Toklas Club would never support him politically , co @-@ founded the San Francisco Gay Democratic Club .

= = Broader historical forces = =

The fledgling gay rights movement had yet to meet organized opposition in the U.S. In 1977 a few well @-@ connected gay activists in Miami , Florida were able to pass a civil rights ordinance that made discrimination based on sexual orientation illegal in Dade County . A well @-@ organized group of conservative fundamentalist Christians responded , headed by singer Anita Bryant . Their campaign was titled Save Our Children , and Bryant claimed the ordinance infringed her right to teach her children Biblical morality . Bryant and the campaign gathered 64 @,@ 000 signatures to put the issue to a county @-@ wide vote . With funds raised in part by the Florida Citrus

Commission , for which Bryant was the spokeswoman , they ran television advertisements that contrasted the Orange Bowl Parade with San Francisco 's Gay Freedom Day Parade , stating that Dade County would be turned into a " hotbed of homosexuality " where " men ... cavort with little boys " .

Jim Foster , then the most powerful political organizer in San Francisco , went to Miami to assist gay activists there as election day neared , and a nationwide boycott of orange juice was organized . The message of the Save Our Children campaign was influential , and the result was an overwhelming defeat for gay activists ; in the largest turnout in any special election in the history of Dade County , 70 % voted to repeal the law .

= = = Just politics = = =

Christian conservatives were inspired by their victory , and saw an opportunity for a new , effective political cause . Gay activists were shocked to see how little support they received . An impromptu demonstration of over 3 @, @ 000 Castro residents formed the night of the Dade County ordinance vote . Gay men and lesbians were simultaneously angry , chanting " Out of the bars and into the streets ! " , and elated at their passionate and powerful response . The San Francisco Examiner reported that members of the crowd pulled others out of bars along Castro and Polk Streets to " deafening " cheers . Milk led marchers that night on a five @- @ mile (8 km) course through the city , constantly moving , aware that if they stopped for too long there would be a riot . He declared , " This is the power of the gay community . Anita 's going to create a national gay force . " Activists had little time to recover , however , as the scenario replayed itself when civil rights ordinances were overturned by voters in Saint Paul , Minnesota ; Wichita , Kansas ; and Eugene , Oregon , throughout 1977 and into 1978 .

California State Senator John Briggs saw an opportunity in the Christian fundamentalists ' campaign . He was hoping to be elected governor of California in 1978 , and was impressed with the voter turnout he saw in Miami . When Briggs returned to Sacramento , he wrote a bill that would ban gays and lesbians from teaching in public schools throughout California . Briggs claimed in private that he had nothing against gays , telling gay journalist Randy Shilts , " It 's politics . Just politics . " Random attacks on gays rose in the Castro . When the police response was considered inadequate , groups of gays patrolled the neighborhood themselves , on alert for attackers . On June 21 , 1977 , a gay man named Robert Hillsborough died from 15 stab wounds while his attackers gathered around him and chanted " Faggot ! " Both Mayor Moscone and Hillsborough 's mother blamed Anita Bryant and John Briggs . One week prior to the incident , Briggs had held a press conference at San Francisco City Hall where he called the city a " sexual garbage heap " because of homosexuals . Weeks later , 250 @, @ 000 people attended the 1977 San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade , the largest attendance at any Gay Pride event to that point .

In November 1976 , voters in San Francisco decided to reorganize supervisor elections to choose supervisors from neighborhoods instead of voting for them in city @- @ wide ballots . Harvey Milk quickly qualified as the leading candidate in District 5 , surrounding Castro Street .

= = = Last campaign = = =

Anita Bryant 's public campaign opposing homosexuality and the multiple challenges to gay rights ordinances across the United States fueled gay politics in San Francisco . Seventeen candidates from the Castro District entered the next race for supervisor ; more than half of them were gay . The New York Times ran an exposé on the veritable invasion of gay people into San Francisco , estimating that the city 's gay population was between 100 @, @ 000 and 200 @, @ 000 out of a total 750 @, @ 000 . The Castro Village Association had grown to 90 businesses ; the local bank , formerly the smallest branch in the city , had become the largest and was forced to build a wing to accommodate its new customers . Milk biographer Randy Shilts noted that " broader historical forces " were fueling his campaign .

Milk 's most successful opponent was the quiet and thoughtful lawyer Rick Stokes , who was

backed by the Alice B. Toklas Memorial Democratic Club . Stokes had been open about his homosexuality long before Milk had , and had experienced more severe treatment , once hospitalized and forced to endure electroshock therapy to ' cure ' him . Milk , however , was more expressive about the role of gay people and their issues in San Francisco politics . Stokes was quoted saying , " I 'm just a businessman who happens to be gay , " and expressed the view that any normal person could also be homosexual . Milk 's contrasting populist philosophy was relayed to The New York Times : " We don 't want sympathetic liberals , we want gays to represent gays ... I represent the gay street people ? the 14 @-@ year @-@ old runaway from San Antonio . We have to make up for hundreds of years of persecution . We have to give hope to that poor runaway kid from San Antonio . They go to the bars because churches are hostile . They need hope ! They need a piece of the pie ! "

Other causes were also important to Milk : he promoted larger and less expensive child care facilities , free public transportation , and the development of a board of civilians to oversee the police . He advanced important neighborhood issues at every opportunity . Milk used the same manic campaign tactics as in previous races : human billboards , hours of handshaking , and dozens of speeches calling on gay people to have hope . This time , even The San Francisco Chronicle endorsed him for supervisor . On election day , November 8 , 1977 , he won by 30 % against sixteen other candidates , and after his victory became apparent , he arrived on Castro Street on the back of his campaign manager 's motorcycle ? escorted by Sheriff Richard Hongisto ? to what a newspaper story described as a " tumultuous and moving welcome " .

Milk had recently taken a new lover , a young man named Jack Lira , who was frequently drunk in public , and just as often escorted out of political events by Milk 's aides . Since the race for the California State Assembly , Milk had been receiving increasingly violent death threats . Concerned that his raised profile marked him as a target for assassination , he recorded on tape his thoughts , and whom he wanted to succeed him if he were killed , adding : " If a bullet should enter my brain , let that bullet destroy every closet door " .

= = Supervisor = =

Milk 's swearing @-@ in made national headlines , as he became the first non @-@ incumbent openly gay man in the United States to win an election for public office . He likened himself to pioneering African American baseball player Jackie Robinson and walked to City Hall arm in arm with Jack Lira , stating " You can stand around and throw bricks at Silly Hall or you can take it over . Well , here we are . " The Castro District was not the only neighborhood to promote someone new to city politics . Sworn in with Milk were also a single mother (Carol Ruth Silver) , a Chinese American (Gordon Lau) , and an African American woman (Ella Hill Hutch) ? all firsts for the city . Daniel White , a former police officer and firefighter , was also a first @-@ time supervisor , and he spoke of how proud he was that his grandmother was able to see him sworn in .

Milk 's energy , affinity for pranking , and unpredictability at times exasperated Board of Supervisors President Dianne Feinstein . In his first meeting with Mayor Moscone , Milk called himself the " number one queen " and dictated to Moscone that he would have to go through Milk instead of the Alice B. Toklas Memorial Democratic Club if he wanted the city 's gay votes ? a quarter of San Francisco 's voting population . However , Milk also became Moscone 's closest ally on the Board of Supervisors . The biggest targets of Milk 's ire were large corporations and real estate developers . He fumed when a parking garage was slated to take the place of homes near the downtown area , and tried to pass a commuter tax so office workers who lived outside the city and drove into work would have to pay for city services they used . Milk was often willing to vote against Feinstein and other more tenured members of the board . In one controversy early in his term , Milk agreed with fellow Supervisor Dan White , whose district was located two miles south of the Castro , that a mental health facility for troubled adolescents should not be placed there . After Milk learned more about the facility , he decided to switch his vote , ensuring White 's loss on the issue ? a particularly poignant cause that White championed while campaigning . White did not forget it . He opposed every initiative and issue Milk supported .

Milk began his tenure by sponsoring a civil rights bill that outlawed discrimination based on sexual orientation . The ordinance was called the " most stringent and encompassing in the nation " , and its passing demonstrated " the growing political power of homosexuals " , according to The New York Times . Only Supervisor White voted against it ; Mayor Moscone enthusiastically signed it into law with a light blue pen that Milk had given him for the occasion .

Another bill Milk concentrated on was designed to solve the number one problem according to a recent citywide poll : dog excrement . Within a month of being sworn in , he began to work on a city ordinance to require dog owners to scoop their pets ' feces . Dubbed the " pooper scooper law " , its authorization by the Board of Supervisors was covered extensively by television and newspapers in San Francisco . Anne Kronenberg , Milk 's campaign manager , called him " a master at figuring out what would get him covered in the newspaper " . He invited the press to Duboce Park to explain why it was necessary , and while cameras were rolling , stepped in the offending substance , seemingly by mistake . His staffers , however , knew he had been at the park for an hour before the press conference looking for the right place to walk in front of the cameras . It earned him the most fan mail of his tenure in politics and went out on national news releases .

Milk had grown tired of Lira 's drinking and considered breaking up with him when Lira called a few weeks later and demanded Milk come home . When Milk arrived , he found Lira had hanged himself . Already prone to severe depression , Lira had attempted suicide previously . One of the longest notes he left for Milk indicated he was upset about the Anita Bryant and John Briggs campaigns .

= = = Briggs Initiative = = =

John Briggs was forced to drop out of the 1978 race for California governor , but received enthusiastic support for Proposition 6 , dubbed the Briggs Initiative . The proposed law would have made firing gay teachers ? and any public school employees who supported gay rights ? mandatory . Briggs ' messages supporting Proposition 6 were pervasive throughout California , and Harvey Milk attended every event Briggs hosted . Milk campaigned against the bill throughout the state as well , and swore that even if Briggs won California , he would not win San Francisco . In their numerous debates , which toward the end had been honed to quick back @-@ and @-@ forth banter , Briggs maintained that homosexual teachers wanted to abuse and recruit children . Milk responded with statistics compiled by law enforcement that provided evidence that pedophiles identified primarily as heterosexual , and dismissed Briggs ' assertions with one @-@ liner jokes : " If it were true that children mimicked their teachers , you 'd sure have a helluva lot more nuns running around " .

Attendance at Gay Pride marches during the summer of 1978 in Los Angeles and San Francisco swelled . An estimated 250 @,@ 000 to 375 @,@ 000 attended San Francisco 's Gay Freedom Day Parade ; newspapers claimed the higher numbers were due to John Briggs . Organizers asked participants to carry signs indicating their hometowns for the cameras , to show how far people came to live in the Castro District . Milk rode in an open car carrying a sign saying " I 'm from Woodmere , N.Y. " He gave a version of what became his most famous speech , the " Hope Speech " , that The San Francisco Examiner said " ignited the crowd " :

On this anniversary of Stonewall , I ask my gay sisters and brothers to make the commitment to fight . For themselves , for their freedom , for their country ... We will not win our rights by staying quietly in our closets ... We are coming out to fight the lies , the myths , the distortions . We are coming out to tell the truths about gays , for I am tired of the conspiracy of silence , so I 'm going to talk about it . And I want you to talk about it . You must come out . Come out to your parents , your relatives .

Despite the losses in battles for gay rights across the country that year , he remained optimistic , saying " Even if gays lose in these initiatives , people are still being educated . Because of Anita Bryant and Dade County , the entire country was educated about homosexuality to a greater extent than ever before . The first step is always hostility , and after that you can sit down and talk about it . "

Citing the potential infringements on individual rights , former governor of California Ronald Reagan voiced his opposition to the proposition , as did Governor Jerry Brown and President Jimmy Carter ,

the latter in an afterthought following a speech he gave in Sacramento . On November 7 , 1978 , the proposition lost by more than a million votes , astounding gay activists on election night . In San Francisco , 75 percent voted against it .

= = Assassination = =

On November 10 , 1978 , 10 months after being sworn in , White resigned his position on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors , claiming that his annual salary of \$ 9 @, @ 600 was not enough to support his family . Milk was also feeling the pinch of the decrease in income when he and Scott Smith were forced to close Castro Camera a month before . Within days , White requested that his resignation be withdrawn and he be reinstated , and Mayor Moscone initially agreed . However , further consideration ? and intervention by other supervisors ? convinced the mayor to appoint someone more in line with the growing ethnic diversity of White 's district and the liberal leanings of the Board of Supervisors . On November 18 , news broke of the murder of California Representative Leo Ryan , who was in Jonestown , Guyana to check on the remote community built by members of the Peoples Temple who had relocated from San Francisco . The next day came news of the mass suicide of members of the Peoples Temple . Horror came in degrees as San Franciscans learned more than 400 Jonestown residents were dead . Dan White remarked to two aides who were working for his reinstatement , " You see that ? One day I 'm on the front page and the next I 'm swept right off . " Soon the number of dead in Guyana topped 900 .

Moscone planned to announce White 's replacement days later , on November 27 , 1978 . A half hour before the press conference , White entered City Hall through a basement window to avoid metal detectors , and made his way to Moscone 's office . Witnesses heard shouting between White and Moscone , then gunshots . White shot the mayor in the shoulder and chest , then twice in the head after Moscone had fallen on the floor . White then quickly walked to his former office , reloading his police @-@ issue revolver with hollow @-@ point bullets along the way , and intercepted Milk , asking him to step inside for a moment . Dianne Feinstein heard gunshots and called the police . She found Milk face down on the floor , shot five times , including twice in the head at close range . After identifying both bodies , Feinstein was shaking so badly she required support from the police chief . It was she who announced to the press , " Today San Francisco has experienced a double tragedy of immense proportions . As President of the Board of Supervisors , it is my duty to inform you that both Mayor Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk have been shot and killed , " then adding after being drowned out by shouts of disbelief , " and the suspect is Supervisor Dan White . " Milk was 48 years old . Moscone was 49 .

Within an hour , White called his wife from a nearby diner ; she met him at a church and escorted him to the police , where White turned himself in . Many residents left flowers on the steps of City Hall . That evening , a spontaneous gathering began to form on Castro Street , moving toward City Hall in a candlelight vigil . Their numbers were estimated between 25 @, @ 000 and 40 @, @ 000 , spanning the width of Market Street , extending the mile and a half (2 @. @ 4 km) from Castro Street . The next day , the bodies of Moscone and Milk were brought to the City Hall rotunda where mourners paid their respects . Six thousand mourners attended a service for Mayor Moscone at St. Mary 's Cathedral . Two memorials were held for Milk ; a small one at Temple Emanu @-@ El and a more boisterous one at the Opera House .

= = = " City in agony " = = =

Moscone had recently increased security at City Hall in the wake of the Jonestown suicides . Survivors from Guyana recounted drills for suicide preparations that Jones called " White Nights " . Rumors about Moscone 's and Milk 's murders were fueled by the coincidence of Dan White 's name and Jones ' suicide preparations . A stunned District Attorney called the assassinations so close to the news about Jonestown " incomprehensible " , but denied any connection . Governor Jerry Brown ordered all flags in California to be flown at half staff , and called Milk a " hard @-@ working and dedicated supervisor , a leader of San Francisco 's gay community , who kept his promise to

represent all his constituents " . President Jimmy Carter expressed his shock at both murders and sent his condolences . Speaker of the California Assembly Leo McCarthy called it " an insane tragedy " . " A City in Agony " topped the headlines in The San Francisco Examiner the day after the murders ; inside the paper stories of the assassinations under the headline " Black Monday " were printed back to back with updates of bodies being shipped home from Guyana . An editorial describing " A city with more sadness and despair in its heart than any city should have to bear " went on to ask how such tragedies could occur , particularly to " men of such warmth and vision and great energies " . Dan White was charged with two counts of murder and held without bail , eligible for the death penalty owing to the recent passage of a statewide proposition that allowed death or life in prison for the murder of a public official . One analysis of the months surrounding the murders called 1978 and 1979 " the most emotionally devastating years in San Francisco 's fabulously spotted history " .

The 32 @-@ year @-@ old White , who had been in the Army during the Vietnam War , had run on a tough anti @-@ crime platform in his district . Colleagues declared him a high @-@ achieving " all @-@ American boy " . He was to have received an award the next week for rescuing a woman and child from a 17 @-@ story burning building when he was a firefighter in 1977 . Though he was the only supervisor to vote against Milk 's gay rights ordinance earlier that year , he had been quoted as saying , " I respect the rights of all people , including gays " . Milk and White at first got along well . One of White 's political aides (who was gay) remembered , " Dan had more in common with Harvey than he did with anyone else on the board " . White had voted to support a center for gay seniors , and to honor Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin 's 25th anniversary and pioneering work .

After Milk 's vote for the mental health facility in White 's district , however , White refused to speak with Milk and only communicated with one of Milk 's aides . Other acquaintances remembered White as very intense . " He was impulsive ... He was an extremely competitive man , obsessively so ... I think he could not take defeat , " San Francisco 's assistant fire chief told reporters . White 's first campaign manager quit in the middle of the campaign , and told a reporter that White was an egotist and it was clear that he was antigay , though he denied it in the press . White 's associates and supporters described him " as a man with a pugilistic temper and an impressive capacity for nurturing a grudge " . The aide who had handled communications between White and Milk remembered , " Talking to him , I realized that he saw Harvey Milk and George Moscone as representing all that was wrong with the world " .

When Milk 's friends looked in his closet for a suit for his casket , they learned how much he had been affected by the recent decrease in his income as a supervisor . All of his clothes were coming apart ; all of his socks had holes . He was cremated and his ashes were split , most of them scattered in San Francisco Bay by his closest friends . Some of them were encapsulated and buried beneath the sidewalk in front of 575 Castro Street , where Castro Camera had been located . Harry Britt , one of four people Milk listed on his tape as an acceptable replacement should he be assassinated , was chosen to fill that position by the city 's acting mayor , Dianne Feinstein .

= = = Trial = = =

Dan White 's arrest and trial caused a sensation , and illustrated severe tensions between the liberal population and the city police . The San Francisco Police were mostly working @-@ class Irish descendants who intensely disliked the growing gay immigration , as well as the liberal direction of the city government . After White turned himself in and confessed , he sat in his cell while his former colleagues on the police force told Harvey Milk jokes ; police openly wore " Free Dan White " T @-@ shirts in the days after the murder . An undersheriff for San Francisco later stated : " The more I observed what went on at the jail , the more I began to stop seeing what Dan White did as the act of an individual and began to see it as a political act in a political movement . " White showed no remorse for his actions , and only exhibited vulnerability during an eight @-@ minute call to his mother from jail .

The seated jury for White 's trial consisted of white middle @-@ class San Franciscans who were mostly Catholic ; gays and ethnic minorities were excused from the jury pool . The jury was clearly

sympathetic to the defendant : some of the members cried when they heard White 's tearful recorded confession , at the end of which the interrogator thanked White for his honesty . White 's defense attorney , Doug Schmidt , argued that he was not responsible for his actions , using the legal defense known as diminished capacity : " Good people , fine people , with fine backgrounds , simply don 't kill people in cold blood . " Schmidt tried to prove that White 's anguished mental state was a result of manipulation by the politicians in City Hall who had consistently disappointed and confounded him , finally promising to give his job back only to refuse him again . Schmidt said that White 's mental deterioration was demonstrated and exacerbated by his junk food binge the night before the murders , since he was usually known to have been health @-@ food conscious . Area newspapers quickly dubbed it the Twinkie defense . White was acquitted of the first degree murder charge on May 21 , 1979 , but found guilty of voluntary manslaughter of both victims , and he was sentenced to serve seven and two @-@ thirds years . With the sentence reduced for time served and good behavior , he would be released in five . He cried when he heard the verdict .

= = = White Night riots = = =

Acting Mayor Feinstein , Supervisor Carol Ruth Silver , and Milk 's successor Harry Britt condemned the jury 's decision . When it was announced over the police radio in the city , someone sang " Danny Boy " on the police band . A surge of people from the Castro District walked again to City Hall , chanting " Avenge Harvey Milk " and " He got away with murder " . Pandemonium rapidly escalated as rocks were hurled at the front doors of the building . Milk 's friends and aides tried to stop the destruction , but the mob of more than 3 @,@ 000 ignored them and lit police cars on fire . They shoved a burning newspaper dispenser through the broken doors of City Hall , then cheered as the flames grew . One of the rioters responded to a reporter 's question about why they were destroying parts of the city : " Just tell people that we ate too many Twinkies . That 's why this is happening . " The chief of police ordered the police not to retaliate , but to hold their ground . The White Night riots , as they became known , lasted several hours .

Later that evening , May 21 , 1979 , several police cruisers filled with officers wearing riot gear arrived at the Elephant Walk Bar on Castro Street . Harvey Milk 's protégé Cleve Jones and a reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle , Warren Hinckle , watched as officers stormed into the bar and began to beat patrons at random . After a 15 @-@ minute melee , they left the bar and struck out at people walking along the street . The chief of police finally ordered the officers out of the neighborhood . By morning , 61 police officers and 100 rioters and gay residents of the Castro had been hospitalized . City Hall , police cruisers , and the Elephant Walk Bar suffered damages in excess of \$ 1 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 .

After the verdict , the District Attorney Joseph Freitas faced a furious gay community to explain what had gone wrong . The prosecutor admitted to feeling sorry for White before the trial , and neglected to ask the interrogator who had recorded White 's confession (and who was a childhood friend of White 's and his police softball team coach) about his biases and the support White received from the police because , he said , he did not want to embarrass the detective in front of his family in court . Nor did Freitas question White 's frame of mind , lack of a history of mental illness , or bring into evidence city politics , suggesting that revenge may have been a motive . Supervisor Carol Ruth Silver testified on the last day of the trial that White and Milk were not friendly , yet she had contacted the prosecutor and insisted on testifying . It was the only testimony the jury heard about their strained relationship . Freitas blamed the jury whom he claimed had been " taken in by the whole emotional aspect of [the] trial " .

= = = Aftermath = = =

Milk 's and Moscone 's murders and White 's trial changed city politics and the California legal system . In 1980 San Francisco ended district supervisor elections , fearing that a Board of Supervisors so divisive would be harmful to the city , and that they had been a factor in the assassinations . A grassroots neighborhood effort to restore district elections in the mid @-@ 1990s

proved successful , and the city returned to neighborhood representatives in 2000 . As a result of Dan White 's trial , California voters changed the law to reduce the likelihood of acquittals of accused who knew what they were doing but claimed their capacity was impaired . Diminished capacity was abolished as a defense to a charge , but courts allowed evidence of it when deciding whether to incarcerate , commit , or otherwise punish a convicted defendant . The " Twinkie defense " has entered American mythology , popularly described as a case where a murderer escapes justice because he binged on junk food , simplifying White 's lack of political savvy , his relationships with George Moscone and Harvey Milk , and what San Francisco Chronicle columnist Herb Caen described as pandemic police " dislike of homosexuals " .

Dan White served a little more than five years for the double murder of Moscone and Milk . On October 21 , 1985 , a year and a half after his release from prison , White was found dead in a running car in his ex @-@ wife 's garage . He was 39 years old . His defense attorney told reporters that he had been despondent over the loss of his family , and the situation he had caused , adding " This was a sick man . "

= = Legacy = =

= = = Politics = = =

Harvey Milk 's political career centered on making government responsive to individuals , gay liberation , and the importance of neighborhoods to the city . At the onset of each campaign , an issue was added to Milk 's public political philosophy . His 1973 campaign focused on the first point , that as a small business owner in San Francisco ? a city dominated by large corporations that had been courted by municipal government ? his interests were being overlooked because he was not represented by a large financial institution . Although he did not hide the fact that he was gay , it did not become an issue until his race for the California State Assembly in 1976 . It was brought to the fore in the supervisor race against Rick Stokes , as it was an extension of his ideas of individual freedom .

Milk strongly believed that neighborhoods promoted unity and a small @-@ town experience , and that the Castro should provide services to all its residents . He opposed the closing of an elementary school ; even though most gay people in the Castro did not have children , Milk saw his neighborhood having the potential to welcome everyone . He told his aides to concentrate on fixing potholes and boasted that 50 new stop signs had been installed in District 5 . Responding to city residents ' largest complaint about living in San Francisco ? dog feces ? Milk made it a priority to enact the ordinance requiring dog owners to take care of their pets ' droppings . Randy Shilts noted , " some would claim Harvey was a socialist or various other sorts of ideologues , but , in reality , Harvey 's political philosophy was never more complicated than the issue of dogshit ; government should solve people 's basic problems . "

Karen Foss , a communications professor at the University of New Mexico , attributes Milk 's impact on San Francisco politics to the fact that he was unlike anyone else who had held public office in the city . She writes , " Milk happened to be a highly energetic , charismatic figure with a love of theatrics and nothing to lose ... Using laughter , reversal , transcendence , and his insider / outsider status , Milk helped create a climate in which dialogue on issues became possible . He also provided a means to integrate the disparate voices of his various constituencies . " Milk had been a rousing speaker since he began campaigning in 1973 , and his oratory skills only improved after he became City Supervisor . His most famous talking points became known as the " Hope Speech " , which became a staple throughout his political career . It opened with a play on the accusation that gay people recruit impressionable youth into their numbers : " My name is Harvey Milk ? and I want to recruit you . " A version of the Hope Speech that he gave near the end of his life was considered by his friends and aides to be the best , and the closing the most effective :

And the young gay people in the Altoona , Pennsylvanias and the Richmond , Minnesotas who are coming out and hear Anita Bryant in television and her story . 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 . Hope that all will be all right . Without hope , not only gays , but the blacks , the seniors , the handicapped , the us 'es , the us 'es will give up . And if you help elect to the central committee and other offices , more gay people , that gives a green light to all who feel disenfranchised , a green light to move forward . It means hope to a nation that has given up , because if a gay person makes it , the doors are open to everyone .

In the last year of his life , Milk emphasized that gay people should be more visible to help to end the discrimination and violence against them . Although Milk had not come out to his mother before her death many years before , in his final statement during his taped prediction of his assassination , he urged others to do so :

I cannot prevent anyone from getting angry , or mad , or frustrated . I can only hope that they 'll turn that anger and frustration and madness into something positive , so that two , three , four , five hundred will step forward , so the gay doctors will come out , the gay lawyers , the gay judges , gay bankers , gay architects ... I hope that every professional gay will say ' enough ' , come forward and tell everybody , wear a sign , let the world know . Maybe that will help .

However , Milk 's assassination has become entwined with his political efficacy , partly because he was killed at the zenith of his popularity . Historian Neil Miller writes , " No contemporary American gay leader has yet to achieve in life the stature Milk found in death . " His legacy has become ambiguous ; Randy Shilts concludes his biography writing that Milk 's success , murder , and the inevitable injustice of White 's verdict represented the experience of all gays . Milk 's life was " a metaphor for the homosexual experience in America " . According to Frances FitzGerald , Milk 's legend has been unable to be sustained as no one appeared able to take his place in the years after his death : " The Castro saw him as a martyr but understood his martyrdom as an end rather than a beginning . He had died , and with him a great deal of the Castro 's optimism , idealism , and ambition seemed to die as well . The Castro could find no one to take his place in its affections , and possibly wanted no one . " On the 20th anniversary of Milk 's death , historian John D 'Emilio said , " The legacy that I think he would want to be remembered for is the imperative to live one 's life at all times with integrity . " For a political career so short , Cleve Jones attributes more to his assassination than his life : " His murder and the response to it made permanent and unquestionable the full participation of gay and lesbian people in the political process . "

= = = Tributes and media = = =

The City of San Francisco has paid tribute to Milk by naming several locations after him . Where Market and Castro streets intersect in San Francisco flies an enormous Gay Pride flag , situated in Harvey Milk Plaza . The San Francisco Gay Democratic Club changed its name to the Harvey Milk Memorial Gay Democratic Club in 1978 (it is currently named the Harvey Milk Lesbian , Gay , Bisexual , Transgender Democratic Club) and boasts that it is the largest Democratic organization in San Francisco . In New York City , Harvey Milk High School is a school program for at @-@ risk youth that concentrates on the needs of gay , lesbian , bisexual , and transgender students and operates out of the Hetrick Martin Institute .

In 1982 , freelance reporter Randy Shilts completed his first book : a biography of Milk , titled The Mayor of Castro Street . Shilts wrote the book while unable to find a steady job as an openly gay reporter . The Times of Harvey Milk , a documentary film based on the book 's material , won the 1984 Academy Award for Documentary Feature . Director Rob Epstein spoke later about why he chose the subject of Milk 's life : " At the time , for those of us who lived in San Francisco , it felt like it was life changing , that all the eyes of the world were upon us , but in fact most of the world outside of San Francisco had no idea . It was just a really brief , provincial , localized current events story that the mayor and a city council member in San Francisco were killed . It didn 't have much reverberation . "

Milk 's life has been the subject of a musical theater production ; an eponymous opera ; a children 's picture book ; a French @-@ language historical novel for young @-@ adult readers ; and the

biopic Milk , released in 2008 after 15 years in the making . The film was directed by Gus Van Sant and starred Sean Penn as Milk and Josh Brolin as Dan White , and won two Academy Awards for Best Original Screenplay and Best Actor . It took eight weeks to film , and often used extras who had been present at the actual events for large crowd scenes , including a scene depicting Milk 's " Hope Speech " at the 1978 Gay Freedom Day Parade .

Milk was included in the " Time 100 Heroes and Icons of the 20th Century " as " a symbol of what gays can accomplish and the dangers they face in doing so " . Despite his antics and publicity stunts , according to writer John Cloud , " none understood how his public role could affect private lives better than Milk ... [he] knew that the root cause of the gay predicament was invisibility " . The Advocate listed Milk third in their " 40 Heroes " of the 20th century issue , quoting Dianne Feinstein : " His homosexuality gave him an insight into the scars which all oppressed people wear . He believed that no sacrifice was too great a price to pay for the cause of human rights . "

In August 2009 , President Barack Obama posthumously awarded Milk the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his contribution to the gay rights movement stating " he fought discrimination with visionary courage and conviction " . Milk 's nephew Stuart accepted for his uncle . Shortly after , Stuart co @-@ founded the Harvey Milk Foundation with Anne Kronenberg with the support of Desmond Tutu , co @-@ recipient of 2009 Presidential Medal of Freedom and now a member of the Foundation 's Advisory Board . Later in the year , California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger designated May 22 as " Harvey Milk Day " , and inducted Milk in the California Hall of Fame .

Since 2003 , the story of Harvey Milk has been featured in three exhibitions created by the GLBT Historical Society , a San Francisco ? based museum , archives , and research center , to which the estate of Scott Smith donated Milk 's personal belongings that were preserved after his death . On May 22 , 2014 , the United States Postal Service issued a postage stamp honoring Harvey Milk , the first openly LGBT political official to receive this honor . The stamp features a photo taken in front of Milk 's Castro Camera store and was unveiled on what would have been his 84th birthday .

Harry Britt summarized Milk 's impact the evening Milk was shot in 1978 : " No matter what the world has taught us about ourselves , we can be beautiful and we can get our thing together ... Harvey was a prophet ... he lived by a vision ... Something very special is going to happen in this city and it will have Harvey Milk 's name on it . "

In 2012 , Milk was inducted into the Legacy Walk , an outdoor public display which celebrates LGBT history and people .

= = Archival Resources = =

The Gay , Lesbian , Bisexual , Transgender Historical Society Holds artifacts of Milk , including the suit he was wearing when shot by Dan White

Harvey Milk Archives--Scott Smith Collection , 1930 @-@ 1995 , held at the San Francisco Public Library , James C. Hormel LGBTQIA Center .