

Harvey milks
biography and the
major
accomplishments
history essay



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Harvey is known as a martyr in the United States for his role for championing the rights of gay community. Harvey was a city politician of San Francisco. Even though Milk was murdered in 1978, he remains a symbol of activism for gay rights in USA. Milk did not only deal with gay issues but also championed for other human rights in issues related to literacy, public transport, children care as well as low-income housing. This paper is going to discuss on Harvey Milk's biography and his major accomplishments.

Milk's boyhood

Milk was born in 1930 to a Jewish family in Woodmere, New York. His family had emigrated from Lithuania. His grandfather owned a department store in New York City. His father operated clothing business. Even though Milk was already aware of his homosexuality by the time he was a teenager, he chose

to keep it a secret to himself, (Marcus 100). Milk actively participated in sports and people considered him as a clown while in high school. He developed an interest for opera. Due to this, he frequented the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City.

In 1947, Milk enrolled for a degree course in New York State College for Teachers, situated in Albany, New York. He earned his degree in 1951 and then joined the navy. Milk served as a junior lieutenant while at the navy. He was in the group of the military officers that boarded the submarine rescue ship during the 1950-1953 Korean War. He was discharged honorably from the navy in 1955.

Tracing a career path

After being discharged from the forces, Milk became a high school teacher. During this time, Milk lived openly with Joe Campbell (his lover) although he kept this a secret from his relatives. After teaching for several years, Milk left teaching job and engaged in a number of occupations before he landed a job with Bache and Company (an investment firm) in 1963 at the Wall Street. Milk realized that he was talented in finance and investment while working at Bache. This made him rise very fast through the corporate world.

Up early 1960s, Milk's social and political values were conservative in spite of his lifestyle. During mid 1960s, Milk's social and political views begun to change. Milk became involved in theater under the influence of his new Jack Galen McKinley who worked in theater. Milk was mostly interested in Tom O'Horgan's experimental work. Gay life was most visible in theater and as a result Milk started coming to terms with his homosexual identity. As this was

taking place, Milk's overall world view started moving towards left-leaning away from the mainstream.

Milk's life in San Francisco

In 1968, Milk's lover known by the name McKinley got a job as stage director of musical Hair by O'Horgan in San Francisco production. Milk moved with McKinley to California. He secured a job in finance. The conflict between Milk's personal and professional lives went beyond control during this time. This made him to burn his BankAmericard in public during a protest held in 1970 following invasion of Cambodia by American. Due to this action, Milk was fired from his job on that day.

This cut off Milk's ties to mainstream life thus he decided to return to New York and theater work. During this time Milk sported long hair and a beard. This made him look like an aging hippie. Milk went back to San Francisco in 1972 with his new partner, Scott Smith. While in San Francisco they opened a camera shop on Castro Street. By this time Castro Street was becoming the heart of the city's gay neighborhood.

Political life

The Watergate scandal angered and compelled Milk to enter the political arena in 1973. Milk hoped to produce change through politics. Thus he vied for a slot in the Board of Supervisors in the city council of San Francisco. Milk used the gay community as his voting base. He also sought alliance with other minorities in the city. He emerged tenth among the thirty two contestants.

Even though Milk lost the election, he got himself to the city's political map. Owing to his popularity in his district, he was known as " the Mayor of Castro Street." During the rest of 1974, Milk spent much time preparing for his next election campaign. During this time he took on a more mainstream look. Milk revitalized the Castro Village Association which became a powerful civic organization. He also launched the Castro Street Fair. Furthermore, Milk conducted a voter registration drive which resulted in signing up of two thousand new voters. He also became columnist for the Bay Area Reporter.

Milk lost again when he ran for supervisor in 1975 coming in seventh even though he had the support of several important labor unions. The new Mayor George Moscone (1929-1978) recognized the growing political power of Milk and because of that he decided to appoint him to serve in the Board of Permit Appeals. This became the first public office to be held by Milk. After being in office for a few weeks, Milk announced that he will be running for the state assembly. This led to his sacking from his city post.

Milk lost to a democratic party by four thousand votes. During this campaign, Milk's campaign theme was " Harvey Milk versus the Machine." During this time had established the San Francisco Gay Democratic Club as his political machine. In 1977, Milk succeeded in the election for the Board of Supervisors. This made him to be the first gay to be openly elected official in the history of San Francisco city, (Miller 78).

Milk's agenda

During his short stint as a city official, Milk's successful campaigns were characterized by several themes. For instance he demanded the response of

the government to the needs of individuals. He also fought for gay rights. He also fought for the preservation of the unique character of the city's neighborhoods.

Milk was instrumental for the passage of the gay-rights law when he was a city supervisor. This law prohibited unequal treatment or discrimination with respect to employment opportunities and housing, basing on sexual orientation. The city complied with his urging and rolled out a drive to hire more police officers who were gay and lesbian, (Clendinen and Nagourney 30). Milk also began programs which benefited workers, minorities, and the elderly. Milk came into national limelight as a result of the role he played defeating a state senate proposal which had the objective of prohibiting people who were gay or lesbian from being employed as teachers in the public schools in California.

Death

Milk was shot by Dan White on November 27, 1978. Dan white had previously resigned from being a city supervisor following the passage of the city's gay rights law. White's attorneys employed the Twinkie Defense during trial. He was only convicted for voluntary manslaughter and he served five years in prison prior to being paroled. The outcome of the trial outraged homosexuals and their supporters across the country. Many people were injured during the riots and property \$250, 000 was damaged, (Carter 45).

Tributes and media

The City of San Francisco recognized the contribution of Milk to the gay community and named manifold locations after him. In the intersection of

Market and Castro streets there is an enormous Gay pride flag flying on the top of Harvey Milk Plaza. In 1978, in appreciating the role of Milk, The San Francisco Gay Democratic Club decided to change its name to Harvey Milk Memorial Gay Democratic Club. However, it has long changed its name to Harvey Milk Democratic club of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender and is regarded as one of the biggest Democratic organization in the city of San Francisco. In 1982, Randy Shilts, a freelance reporter wrote a book about the biography of Milk and gave the title, The Mayor of Castro Street. In 1985, a documentary film, entitled as The Times of Harvey Milk, which was based on Shilts' book won the Academy for Documentary Feature.

Conclusion

Milk has remained a symbol for the gay community since his death. He characteristically symbolizes things that have been achieved and things that need to be addressed. Milk championing of the gay rights has made him to be immortalized as seen in the names Harvey Milk High School located in New York and the Harvey Milk Democratic Club as well as the San Francisco's annual Harvey Milk Memorial Parade. The documentary film, distinctively known as The Times of Harvey Milk was able to win the Academy Award in 1985 for being the best documentary. Milk was posthumously awarded Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama in 2009 for his eminent contribution to the gay rights.

In a nutshell, Harvey Milk changed the outlook of the gay community and because of his relentless efforts; the United States has been able to recognize the rights of this minority community. Thus many policy issues undertaken by the United States government that might affect this <https://assignbuster.com/harvey-milks-biography-and-the-major-accomplishments-history-essay/>

community are taken into consideration before their implementation. Harvey made it possible for the gay people to employed and work in the US government as well as to participate in the political affairs of the nation. Milk also participated in many other human rights issues besides fighting for the gay rights and these include issues related to literacy, public transport, children care as well as low-income housing.

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