

Finding a Way to Win Gay in an Evolving Historical Movement: How Harvey Milk's Rhetoric Led Him to San Francisco City Supervisor

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Introduction

If San Francisco was the capital of Gay America, Harvey Milk was the president.

– Jason Edward Black and Charles E. Morris, Introduction to *An Archive of Hope*

The so-called “president” of Gay America, a man named Harvey Milk, certainly did leave his mark on the world and has become recognized as one of the most distinguished gay rights figures of his time. Entering the public arena with no political background, he campaigned three times for San Francisco City Supervisor and became victorious on his third attempt in 1977. Needing to prove to the world that a gay man was capable of holding a position in politics, Milk did so through rhetoric.

Throughout campaigning for Supervisor in 1973, 1975, and 1977, Milk's understanding and adaptation of his use of rhetoric proved he was a notable public speaker and politician. Milk understood what it took to be a part of the public sphere by undergoing rhetorical changes to appeal to his audience such as his delivery, use of ethos and pathos, identification strategies, and altering his own appearance to appeal to a wide audience.

In addition to adapting his own rhetorical strategies, the gay historical movement occurring around Milk entered him into a wider rhetorical conversation, especially with his political “enemies” Anita Bryant, an Oklahoma native, beauty queen, singer, and Christian, used her platform to make herself known as an anti-gay rights activist; and sponsor of anti-gay rights legislation California Senator John Briggs. During the time span of his three campaigns, Milk watched homosexuals no longer being disbarred from government positions; homosexuality no longer being tied to mental illness or pedophilia; states becoming free of criminalized sexuality; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) folk across the nation coming out of the closet; and the establishment of gay rights occurring nationwide, which inspired his rhetorical stance.

After learning about Milk through Sean Penn's 2008 biopic, I wanted to analyze how both his rhetoric, and the ever-changing world around him, contributed to his

triumph. So, I asked myself the following: Over the course of three elections, what are the ways in which Harvey Milk's rhetoric evolved in response to the changing cultural and historical movement around him?

In this paper, I begin with an overview of Milk's life and career so readers will have a basic understanding of who he was and what he accomplished. Next, I examine his three campaigns in order to map the ways his rhetoric shifted over time in response to the changing cultural and historical environment. In my concluding section, I examine Milk's political "will" to try to understand how he used rhetoric to shape his legacy after his passing.

Background and Overview: Who Was Harvey Milk?

Milk was born on May 22, 1930, in Woodmere, New York. As much as he advocated for LGBTQ folx to come out of the closet, Milk did not come out until he was forty years old. After falling in love in New York City, with a man named Scott Smith, Milk decided to move to San Francisco with Smith to be a part of the gay culture that was thriving there in the 1970s. In San Francisco, they opened a camera shop, which became a safe house for LGBTQ folx to gather, on Castro Street, the heart of San Francisco's gay community.

Milk was one of the few storefront politicians, someone who ran for public office without money. Having no political background, his motive for campaigning was his desire for homosexuals to feel accepted, which he believed could only be accomplished by having a gay representative in politics. Because of this, he turned his camera shop into "a place for voter registration and urged all gay people to 'come out'—saying that people would never change their viewpoint on homosexuality unless they had actually met some homosexuals" (Robinson xviii).

Frank Robinson, Milk's good friend and speechwriter, recalled that Milk "campaign[ed] as a businessman, but in reality he was a terrible one. He wore hand-me-down suits, ground the beans for his coffee, and was an ace at a good spaghetti sauce" (xxii). As for his own public discourse, "Milk's words are sometimes fragmentary, typically unpolished, and occasionally banal. At the same time, they always crackle with his energetic engagement" (Black and Morris 4). Milk often used humor in his statements. As an example, in "Keynote Speech at Gay Conference 5," Milk stated the following:

Anyhow, I'm Harvey Milk and I'm here to recruit you. [Laughter, applause] I was reading the *Playboy* interview of that person from Florida [laughter], who wants to put all gay people in jail. [Laughter] We would have our own communication center . . . hahaha, and, instead of running for Supervisor, I'm going to run for Sherriff . . . haha. [Laughter]. (199)

The person from Florida Milk referred to was anti-LGBTQ activist Anita Bryant, who was interviewed by *Playboy* in 1978. Humor can be a tricky addition to

speeches since the concept of humor is different for everyone; however, Milk's use of humor often resulted in a roar of laughter from his audience, which is evident in the speech transcript above. Milk's own energetic cackle made his speeches so memorable yet able to address his platform's serious issues.

On November 27, 1978, Milk's activism and eloquence came to an end when former City Supervisor Dan White shot and killed Milk and Mayor George Moscone inside City Hall. Reminiscing on his friendship with Milk, Robinson says, "We desperately wanted to find a gay hero. I never realized I had found mine until the day that Harvey died" (xxiii).

Setting America up for an Inclusive Future through Deliberative Oratory and Identification: 1973

Milk strived to become the first openly gay person elected to the Board of Supervisors, but it certainly did not come easily to him due to his ineffective use of political rhetoric in his first two campaigns. Not having a political background, he went up against skilled orators who had prior knowledge in the public sphere. Milk's first campaign came from his desire to help those did not have a voice represented in politics.

During his first campaign, Milk was influenced by the changing historical circumstances. On December 15, 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) voted to remove homosexuality from the list of mental illnesses. This new declaration was a step towards LGBTQ equality, and it drastically changed public opinion about being gay. The declaration states, "We will no longer insist on a label of sickness for individuals who insist that they are well and demonstrate no generalization impairment in social effectiveness" (qtd. in Kozuch). This gave Milk motivation and hope to campaign for City Supervisor.

Milk focused on the idea of changing the "mentality" of the privileged, or what he called the "Marie Antoinette Syndrome" (69). To him, this "mentality" stemmed from the white, upper-class men who ran politics. In "Address to the San Francisco Chapter of the National Women's Political Caucus," Milk stated:

The same people . . . the same mentality that is for spending money to tear down ugly freeways while there is a need for more childcare centers; the same mentality that is for building convention halls instead of developing the poverty areas – this mentality is setting priorities and tax rates for our City. (70)

By listing multiple things that the current City Supervisor cared about more than the people of San Francisco, Milk led his audience toward feeling a certain way — ultimately, angry. While attacking the "mentality" that had been running the city, Milk rhetorically presented himself as a victim affected by the same

problems the current leadership created. He said “our city” to let his audience know that he was also affected by the political power prioritizing economics over people. Milk strategically used this rhetorical stance “to control and direct the attitude of a defined audience in a particular situation” (Herrick 109). Ultimately, his aim was to lead the audience towards anger at the current political power running the city, which he attempted by rhetorically identifying with his audience’s feelings of vexation.

Another rhetorical strategy Milk used was creating consubstantiality with his audience. Introduced by Kenneth Burke, consubstantiality refers to a commonality of substance, which is created by building identification—using commonality as a form of persuasion—through rhetorical practices. Consubstantiality leads to a “healing from the wound of our separation” (Herrick 241). Milk implements this idea when he discusses the current City Supervisor spending the City’s budget on personal transportation and refusing to ride the public trolley. As a future Supervisor, Milk encouraged public transportation, and he thought it was wrong to spend the City’s budget on something so unnecessary. This proved his similarity to his audience by sharing their everyday experience of public transportation, something that many people in politics refuse to use. By expressing this, he created consubstantiality with his audience as Burke discussed. While Milk was identifying as a City Supervisor in his campaign, he made his audience aware that his ideas for San Francisco were unique and different from the current City Supervisor; ideas like the conversation Milk entered regarding public transportation. Unlike the current leadership, Milk did not see the importance of personal transportation when the budget could be spent on more important ways to better San Francisco, such as building child-care shelters and developing poverty areas (70). By voicing this, he was rhetorically removing separation from his audience and proving commonality.

In his first campaign, Milk looked toward deliberative oratory for guidance and focused only on the future. The current leaders were only concerned about the present, which Milk thought was a horrible tactic. He said, “A City can concern itself about the clogged sewers of today and worry about tomorrow when tomorrow and tomorrow’s problems come; or it can prepare itself for tomorrow” (70). Strongly believing that the past City Supervisors had handed their mistakes to future generations, Milk aimed to focus on the future so the next City Supervisor would not have to deal with the messy mistakes of the past. Milk’s future mindset was a hopeful one, and it turned into his campaign mantra.

Like an ideal orator, Milk did “attend to what real audiences believe and value” by referring to the Constitution (Herrick 217). Mentioning that the Founding Fathers set America up for the future by making the Constitution, Milk suggested that he hoped to accomplish something similar as City Supervisor. Instead of focusing on current America, he, like the Founding Fathers, was concerned with setting America up for eternity. Mentioning the Founding Fathers and the Constitution must have spiked interest in his audience. Milk was aware that his audience

already knew what the Constitution entailed, and instead of listing all the details of the document, he must have thought, “I don’t have to tell this particular audience.” Milk knew his audience’s prior knowledge, and he chose to adapt his speech accordingly.

Milk also appealed to his audience’s values by mentioning religion. In his “Address to the Joint International Longshoremen & Warehousemen’s Union of San Francisco and to the Lafayette Club,” he stated the following:

Let them teach the Commandment: Thou Shall Not Kill. I know of no Commandment that says: Thou Shall Not Read Dirty Books. I know of no Commandment that says: Thou Shall Not Walk Around Naked. Why are they such moralists when it comes to man-made Commandments and such anti-moralists when it comes to God’s Commandments? (74)

By bringing the Commandments into his speech, Milk brought the serious issues his platform was built upon to the surface, while also appealing to the religious interests of his audience. Without any knowledge of Milk’s aim to repeal all victimless crime laws, these topics might seem silly for a political candidate to address. In the 1970s, San Francisco was a city where victimless crimes such as prostitution and drug use were prohibited. Milk sought to decriminalize these laws he saw more harm in than good, and to focus on bigger things. He believed taxes should “go for my protection and not for my prosecution” (74). Instead of spending money on victimless crimes, Milk believed it should be spent on more important things that San Francisco would benefit from. Milk was concerned with these real issues that floated around San Francisco and thought every person, including sex workers, should be treated the same.

Throughout his 1973 campaign, Milk listed things he wanted to accomplish as City Supervisor. He fought for “making a city an exciting place for all to live: not just an exciting place for a few to live! A place for the individual and individual rights” (72). Like many other rhetors in politics, Milk spoke directly to his audience, using words like “you,” “we,” “our,” and “us,” thereby showing he listened to what San Franciscans personally wanted. Although he did showcase the use of rhetorical skills, it was not enough. Not only did his audience want to hear about the future, they wanted the problems of today to be addressed, such as the inclusion of all members of the gay community into a society where they were not being accepted.

Milk’s political rhetoric failed. He did not succeed in going beyond telling his audience what he wanted to accomplish as City Supervisor, and he failed to mention exactly how he would fulfill the promises he was making. Overall, his 1973 campaign was the roughest of his three attempts to be elected as City Supervisor, and it was due to Milk’s lack of having a specific action plan. Though he did attempt rhetorical strategies such as deliberative oratory, collective pronouns, consubstantiality, and appealing to his audience’s values, it was not

enough to convince the people of San Francisco that 1973 should be the first year a proudly gay man should become City Supervisor. While Milk did identify with his audience, attempting to prove that he was no different than his followers, he failed in going beyond their similarities as citizens of San Francisco, and he failed to show his audience why he deserved to hold political power above the other candidates. For his first campaign, with no political background, Milk was sad to lose, but he was impressed that he finished tenth out of thirty-two candidates. For him, this was enough to run for City Supervisor again in 1975 with new rhetorical strategies.

A New Appearance and Response to his Audience's Concerns with Ethos: 1975

Milk looked at his 1975 campaign as a "whole new ball game" (118). This time, he was positive he would be able to win San Francisco City Supervisor by making one major change: his appearance. Believing a new look would help his audience view him as a more serious candidate, he cut his hair, stopped smoking cigarettes, and started dressing in proper political suit attire. Milk's 1975 persona is described as the following: "The ponytail shorn, replaced by a second-hand, two-piece suit, Milk's hippie persona yielded to a clean-shaved one no less down to earth and outspoken but with broader visual and thus political appeal" (Black and Morris 20). Since Milk was running in a city-wide election, he had to appeal to a wider audience outside of his own neighborhood. In other words, Milk now needed to gain the straight vote. This required Milk to alter his ethos and use his new appearance as a tool in his political campaign. With cleaner attire, Milk's character would be taken more seriously, especially by his straight audience.

The responses to Milk's new appearance were mixed. Though he was more presentable in the eyes of his political audience, those who knew Milk prior to his physical change were shocked. In fact, "Milk's appearance and demeanor became so devastatingly average that he sometimes had to fend off allegations that he was actually heterosexual" (Black and Morris 20). Those who knew Milk would laugh at this statement; however, it is possible appearing as "actually heterosexual" was Milk's strategy. Milk noted that he could not expect the gay vote alone to carry him to victory. Although the gay vote was powerful, Milk knew he needed to appeal to a much wider audience, so he went to the straight community. In his 1975 campaign letter, "Harvey Milk for Supervisor," he wrote, "I've tried to build a bridge between 'us' and 'them' because I believe the contact with the straight community is a two-way street" (119). With the overall goal of equality, Milk sought to gain the respect of heterosexuals. Overall, his new "average" façade was influenced by the straight candidates he was running against. He hoped the straight community would now accept him as a serious political candidate.

The year of 1975 was inspiring for Milk because the US Civil Service announced that homosexuals would no longer be disbarred from government positions. This was a step closer to the equality that Milk had dreamed of. The same year, as he watched Elaine Noble get elected as the first openly lesbian legislator in

Massachusetts history, he became increasingly confident in his own campaign, and in his capability of being an openly gay man in politics.

On top of his physical changes, Milk underwent a change in his own rhetorical delivery. While his platform remained the same, “he was a better speaker and his statements were more refined” (Black and Morris 117). He also became bolder with his statements, and fearless of directly confronting anyone against LGBTQ equality. Though rhetorical experts believe “You should not be more confident, certain, or directive than you actually have the evidence and certitude for” (Bazerman 129), confidence was one of Milk’s rhetorical strategies. If he sounded confident with the control of his voice, and body language, he was sure he could gain the straight vote.

Consistent with his first campaign, Milk addressed his audience with everyday language that the entire population could understand. However, with his second campaign, he altered his spoken vernacular into a written version with the introduction of his column in the *Bay Area Reporter*, titled “Milk Forum.” When discussing rhetoric, “the very cardinal sin is to depart from the language of everyday life” (Herrick 115). Though Milk used everyday language in his previous campaign, this column allowed him to speak directly to his audience in a more personal and casual way, opposite that of a formal speech. These columns were the raw Milk; he was able to express his own words without his speechwriter, Frank Robinson, helping him. More than ever, he was speaking directly to each member of his audience by publishing a column that felt like a one-on-one conversation between Milk and his readers. In his own words, Milk could address specific issues his readers wanted their City Supervisor to tackle.

Anyone close to Milk knew he was against the way San Francisco police treated the LGBTQ community. Milk himself was a victim of police harassment, so it was surprising he was suddenly promoting “encouraging a positive attitude and public friendliness towards police and endorsing the Police Community Relations (PCR) Department and its seminars” (Black and Morris 113). With a history of advocating the end of homophobic police harassment and violence on Castro Street, why was Milk suddenly supporting the police?

The answer is simple: Milk may have disliked the police, but the straight population did not. Aiming to appeal to the heterosexual community, Milk sought to show his support for the police force. Engaging the police, who had a history of harming homosexuals, was a large part of Milk’s rhetorical strategy. On top of gaining the straight vote, he hoped writing his column “Au Contraire . . . PCR Needed” would show the police that all the LGBTQ community wanted was equality, thereby gaining the police vote as well. Charles Bazerman asked, “If you cannot enter into the audience’s world of objects and ways of knowing, how can you get them to turn attention to new evidence, attend to a different part of the world, and gather knowledge in a different way?” (116). If Milk remained biased against police, his audience would not see him as a serious candidate

who wanted San Francisco to evolve into an inclusive city. In his column, Milk writes: “While police are busting gays for obstructing the sidewalks, and while gays are yelling ‘pig,’ people are being mugged, robbed, and murdered. . . . Instead of looking for gays to beat up, the police should look for criminals” (116). While he was critical of police, calling them out for the harm they caused to the LGBTQ community, Milk showed he saw potential in the police force by including it in his political rhetoric. This also showed the straight community (including the police) that Milk was not against them and shared similar beliefs. This made Milk more appealing to a wider audience outside of just the LGBTQ vote he sought to capture in his first campaign. In the 1970s, San Francisco was a city where over 100 crimes were reported a day. If LGBTQ folx and the police continued their ongoing feud, Milk feared everyday crimes would never stop. In the end, Milk’s political platform revolved around how much he cared for San Francisco; it came to be his most heartfelt rhetorical move. Putting his own feelings aside, and seeing the importance of police from his audience’s perspective, shows Milk’s mature growth as a politician.

Unlike his 1973 campaign, Milk certainly responded to what his audience wanted. Bazerman states, “A more sober approach is to identify what needs, interests, or concerns might have brought the readers to the text and then somehow speak to those motivating concerns” (126). His audience must have cared about their city if they took the time to listen to his speeches and read his columns. In this campaign, Milk adapted to his audience’s needs and concerns. In his campaign letter, “Harvey Milk for Supervisor,” he wrote:

I intend to fight for a better sense of spending priorities in city government, calling upon my own financial background. As a small businessman, I intend to fight for the needs of small businesses rather than solely for the interest of “Downtown.” I will call upon my work with the police department, and my experience with top police officials, to recommend more successful ways of fighting serious crimes. (119)

Realizing his audience cared about finances, businesses, and crime, Milk adapted his rhetorical platform to fit these needs.

While he did appeal to his audience by responding directly to their concerns, Milk still struggled with explaining to his audience exactly how he would accomplish his goals as City Supervisor. It is likely Milk’s audience was used to false promises from past political candidates, so how could they tell that Milk was genuine and would stay true to his promises? Due to this uncertainty, Milk lost for the second time, finishing seventh behind six incumbents, with 53,000 votes. Although Milk faced his second defeat, his loss was not enough for him to give up on the LGBTQ community. He saw the rising number of votes as a sign that he was getting closer to victory.

Responding to New Political Enemies with the Theme of Hope: 1977

1977 was “among the most consequential years in LGBTQ history to date” (Black and Morris 23). With nineteen states freed from criminalized sexuality, the nation entered a wider rhetorical conversation, and Milk became a part of it. During 1977, much of Milk’s rhetoric was in response to Anita Bryant and California Senator John Briggs. Bryant and Briggs would do anything to prevent LGBTQ rights, so they became clear political enemies whom Milk aimed his rhetoric toward.

In 1977, Bryant founded Save our Children in opposition to gay rights. Focusing on the idea that homosexuals were threatening to children, Bryant backed up her argument with the idea that since gay people could not have biological children of their own, they were after her children. “By focusing on the idea that gays and lesbians were somehow threatening to children, Bryant had created an incredibly powerful rhetorical focus for social conservatives” (Miller). Milk became invested in this conversation with Bryant and altered his own rhetoric in response to hers.

Bryant got her wish to repeal gay rights in Florida. On June 7, 1977, in Dade County, Florida, constituents voted to repeal the County’s only recently passed gay rights law that prohibited discrimination against LGBTQ members. Bryant was not content. The repeal of the gay rights legislation made it onto the nightly news and into magazines and newspapers across the country, inviting a lot of backlash to the repeal, including from Milk. While he was watching all of this happen from San Francisco, Milk urged a crowd to march downtown. Calling the protest “Orange Tuesday,” Milk and other protesters chanted through a bullhorn at Union Square. Though Milk and his followers had attempted to end the debate by demanding that gay people be given the rights they deserved, the battle continued into the San Francisco pride march later that month.

The day after “Orange Tuesday”, Senator Briggs called for the removal of all homosexual teachers from schools. “The Briggs Initiative,” otherwise known as California Proposition 6, continued into 1978. Like Bryant, Senator Briggs saw all homosexuals as pedophiles who had the sole intent of abducting children. Having been a teacher himself, Milk took the proposition personally.

According to Herrick, “The audience ‘will determine to a great extent both the direction the arguments will take, and the character, the significance that will attribute to them.’ Thus, the audience’s role in testing ideas is as important as the rhetor’s” (217). Bryant and Briggs tested Milk’s own stance on gay rights, allowing Milk to enter a much larger rhetorical conversation. With Bryant’s platform, Milk was able to respond to the whole country. For this reason, “Anita made the gay rights movement a national story. She put the move in the gay rights movement. . . . She was the best thing that happened to the gay community” (Holeman). Without Bryant’s platform, Milk would not have reached as wide of an audience as he did. Staying true to his own motivations to gain

complete equality and freedom for homosexuals, Milk did not get distracted by the large rhetorical conversation he chose to enter, and instead he used their counterarguments to his advantage.

During his 1977 campaign, Milk “inspired kids from small towns everywhere where the closet needed to be opened to hold onto ‘hope’—this became Milk’s mantra” (Black and Morris 145). His theme of hope, which continued throughout his campaign, was introduced in his speech “You’ve Got to Have Hope”, which became Milk’s rhetorical signature. On June 24, Milk delivered the speech at the San Francisco Gay Community Center, which the current City Supervisor had wanted to tear down and turn into a parking garage. Milk carefully chose this location because of its context in the gay community. If the speech were not delivered on the steps of this center, it would not have been as effective. A well thought out location has the power to influence an audience. Seeing Milk fight for gay rights in front of the Gay Community Center showed how important his political stance was to him. The rhetoric behind his chosen location resonated with his audience, and “You’ve Got to Have Hope” is still seen today as his most famous speech.

In 1977, Milk’s coalitional message further evolved. In 1973, he strove for a union between all members of the LGBTQ community, hoping that their vote alone would bring him to victory. After realizing that this was not enough votes for him to win, he sought to make an alliance with the straight community and the police force. Once again, this proved to fail. However, in 1977, Milk brought together all the minority groups of San Francisco to form his threat of “US against THEM.” In “You’ve Got to Have Hope,” he says, “It’s no longer the Seniors, the unemployed, the Asian community, the Gay, the Blacks, the Latins and so forth. They’re all US. It’s US against THEM” (150). Realizing that each of these groups uniquely contributed to San Francisco, he suggested they all work together with the aim of turning San Francisco into a place of equality for all. Being a part of the minority his whole life, Milk finally found the groups that believed in him.

Milk identifies with the individual experiences of his audience and looks at his speech from their perspective. Herrick argues that rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke found “Identification to be pervasive in human experience. ‘Identification,’ he writes, ‘ranged from the politician who, addressing the audience of farmers, says, ‘I was a farm boy myself’” (241). Far from being a farmer, Milk used his own identification to connect with the audience. He said, “I’ll never forget what it was like coming out. I’ll never forget the looks on the faces of those who have lost hope” (154). Knowing exactly the experiences and hardships his homosexual audience had been through, Milk was able to revise his rhetoric to better fit his audience.

With the intent of moving his audience’s emotions, Milk tells his crowd, “I stand here before you tonight because I’m proud of you” (Milk 154). Saying “I’m proud of you” is most likely something his audience was not used to hearing. Being gay

in a time where gay people were not accepted was difficult, and often it led to being disowned by family members. Milk took on a parental status when he expressed how proud he was of his audience. Unlike other anti-gay activists, and citizens of the 1970s, Milk did not see his gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender audience as mentally ill or as pedophiles. He wanted to let his audience know that they were good enough, regardless of age, sex, gender, race, or sexual orientation. Milk assured his audience they were all worthy of life, love, and equality. Milk had the desire that this concept would one day be granted to all, which evoked emotion and hope from his audience.

The use of pathos was a strategy Milk kept in his back pocket throughout his 1977 campaign. He argued the following:

It's the THEMES who benefit when the Gays and the Blacks and the Latins fight amongst themselves. It's the THEMES who want to tear down the homes and community centers of the USes for their special pet projects. It's the THEMES who divide – and conquer. It's the THEMES who are the real outside agitators in our communities. And they've been here for years. (150)

The “thems” (the straight white men who ran politics) were something minorities could all understand. Mentioning exactly what the “thems” were for—which was what Milk, and his LGBTQ followers, were against—aroused anger in the audience, fueled by flaws in the system. Milk personally altered the emotions of his audience to his advantage. (150)

Milk also continued to use pronouns such as “we,” “us,” and “you” to have a deeper, more personal conversation with his audience. Saying phrases like “It is not my election, it is yours,” (Milk 155) and “We in the gay community” (Milk 140) further proves his intention to establish a personal relationship between himself and his audience. Also, by using “we,” he showed the audience he, too, was affected by the current system. Milk was invested in the politics of location, mentioning street names and their particular local problems. Since he understood and could name the neighborhoods, it was evident Milk was an active member of the community. This further showed how much Milk was personally affected by the same issues as his audience.

Since he knew San Francisco like the back of his hand, Milk was the only candidate who spoke out on the smaller, but still serious, personal issues that San Franciscans cared about the most. These “small” issues were what the audience dealt with every day, and Milk’s goal was to look his audience in the eyes and promise to solve the problems that the current City Supervisor had refused to.

Unlike his 1973 and 1975 campaign, Milk realized that “Actions speak louder than campaign literature” (150). Instead of only mentioning what he wanted to

accomplish as City Supervisor, he began to tell his audience *how* he would keep his promises to reach his goals. In “You’ve Got to Have Hope,” he puts himself in the audience’s shoes, saying, “Okay, Harvey, you say, enough of the rhetoric—what are you going to do?” (150). Milk realized that if he were a member of the audience, he would ask the same questions of the politician in front of him. San Francisco minority groups were used to false promises from City Supervisors, so Milk began to listen to his audience and respond to them accordingly. Thus, he began to tell his audience exactly how he would introduce gay rights, which was a tactic he lacked in his past two campaigns. He also asked the audience multiple rhetorical questions, then answered them as a method of showing his audience that he shared the same concerns.

Even with something so simple as helping to devise a law that ordered people to pick up their dog’s feces, Milk showed he was listening to what his audience wanted. In order to influence an audience, “you need to know what they look at, what is important to them, and what they are likely to accept into their universe of attention” (Bazerman 116). Seeing the people of San Francisco affected and annoyed by dog fecal matter left on public property, Milk took action and showed his audience that he had been listening to their needs all along. His new and improved rhetorical strategies were paying off. That year, Milk’s rhetoric helped his audience identify with him as a political candidate.

After three campaigns, Milk finally understood what a great rhetor was composed of, and it proved to be successful, because he finally reached his goal of San Francisco City Supervisor. In “You’ve Got to Have Hope,” Milk said that he believed his election would signal “A green light that says to all who feel lost and disenfranchised that you now can go forward—it means hope and we—you and you and you and, yes, you got to give them hope” (155). If the city of San Francisco all worked together, they would be able to make a change in the city, the state, the country, and, then, the world.

Milk’s Rhetorical Legacy: “This is to be played only in the event of my death by assassination”

On November 27, 1978, ten months and eighteen days after his inauguration, Milk and Mayor Moscone were shot and killed by former City Supervisor Dan White. Predicting he would die early, Milk recorded a “Political Will” on a cassette tape that was only to be played in the event of his assassination—carrying his rhetorical stance beyond his death.

In his “Political Will,” Milk acknowledged that people would be angry at the person who killed him. Speaking to his supporters, he said, “I hope they will take that frustration and that madness instead of demonstrating or anything of that type, I would hope that they would take that power and I would hope that five, ten, one hundred, one thousand would rise” (248), which is what his followers did

when they turned their anger into profound silence. Across the nation, supporters of Milk and the gay liberation movement, used silence to prove their point. Marching through the Castro District, letting their candle lights do the speaking, those who loved and looked up to Milk did exactly what he would have wanted, which was rhetorically using silence to continue the fight for LGBTQ equality. This example further proves that rhetorical silence can be more powerful than words.

A rhetor's power is being able to lead the audience toward new meanings during a journey. Although Milk's "Political Will" did help his audience towards new understandings of his character and the reasons behind his persistent campaigning, Milk never bought his journey to an end. He continued to influence his audience to fight for an inclusive future for both San Francisco and the world. This shows how strong of a rhetor Milk truly was. Although his first two campaigns were rough, based on ineffective uses of rhetoric, Milk's final campaign showed his growth as a rhetor. He was able to learn from his mistakes and reach his goal of City Supervisor by adapting his rhetoric to fit the growing needs of his audience in an everchanging world.

Milk asked the following from his listeners:

I ask for the movement to continue, for the movement to grow because last week, I got a phone call from Altoona, Pennsylvania, and my election gave somebody else, one more person, hope. And after all it's what this is all about. It's not about personal gain, not about ego, not about power – it's about giving those young people out there in the Altoona, Pennsylvania's hope. You gotta give them hope." (249)

Milk's death was just the beginning. He remains the staple figure of gay the rights movement, and he deserves recognition for changing the lives of young LGBTQ folx during the 1970s. Black and Morris write, "we aim to keep Harvey talking, and we hope generations will earnestly engage in the work of queer listening" (44). Milk will never be silenced. His rhetoric will continue to influence those struggling with acceptance as he remains the face of hope for the LGBTQ community.

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