

HARVEY MILK

1st Openly Gay Male Elected to Public Office in the U.S. (1930-1978)



Harvey Milk, a U.S. Navy Veteran who served during the Korean War, was the first known openly gay man elected to public office in the United States. In 1977 Milk won a seat on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors thanks to a canny political combination of immigrant, elderly, minority, union and gay voter support. His vast grass-roots based campaign and subsequent victory signaled a coming-of-age for San Francisco's GLBT population. Affable and shrewd, politically adept and a skilled negotiator, Milk was destined to enjoy a bright future both within San Francisco's political realm as well as on the national stage. But it was not to be. On November 27, 1978, a mere 11 months after taking office, Harvey Milk was assassinated along with San Francisco Mayor George Moscone. Disgruntled former City Supervisor Dan White was ultimately convicted, not of first-degree murder, but of the lesser charge of voluntary manslaughter – a verdict that triggered riots in the gay community. White served five years, only to commit suicide a year after his release from prison. Despite Milk's short career in politics, he became an icon in San Francisco and "a martyr for gay rights" world-wide. Activist Cleve Jones observed "Though we tend to see our heroes as these mythic people, Harvey was an ordinary man, who faced challenges, defeats and humiliations like the rest of us ...but he took the heart of San Francisco." Anne Kronenberg, who managed Milk's final campaign, wrote: "What set Harvey apart... 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. He remains the most famous openly gay person ever elected to office – an inspiration to the hundreds of men and women who can trace their own courageous forays into public service back to the historic election of Harvey Milk.

Lesson Plan

Level 1: Contributions Approach

1. Activate prior experience: What do you know about Harvey Milk, a political negotiator from San Francisco?
2. Read the biographical information.
3. Group Discussion: How did Harvey Milk impact the immigrant, elderly, minority communities, and unions in San Francisco?
4. Extend knowledge: Explore the Harvey Milk Foundation at Website at <http://milkfoundation.org/> and document key findings.

Level 2: Additive Approach

1. Investigate ways that Harvey Milk's story can be integrated into your curriculum and programming. Review this link at <http://milkfoundation.org/harvey-in-schools/using-the-harvey-milk-story-in-schools/> for suggestions.
2. Incorporate another political inductee from the Legacy Project from the link below: <http://www.legacyprojectchicago.org/Politics.html>
3. Create a lesson plan on civil rights and LGBT equality that would include a political inductee from the Legacy Project.
4. Assess learning through a visual or writing assignment for student.

Level 3: Transformational Approach

1. How did Harvey Milk give hope to others?
2. View the movie clip below: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufhZ2yUHj9Y>
3. View the Last Words of Harvey Milk at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-U_owSvbn00
4. Describe how Harvey Milk progressed from a state to national level of recognition of the rights of the gay community.

Level 4: Social Action Approach

1. Who is a political figure today that follows Milk's actions as described in the following: "What set Harvey apart... 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."
2. Show how your political figure provides that vision and hope for others.
3. In what ways would this political figure be recognized by our society today?