

HARVEY MILK



**AN ARCHIVE
OF HOPE**

HARVEY MILK'S SPEECHES AND WRITINGS

EDITED BY JASON EDWARD BLACK AND CHARLES E. MORRIS III

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An Archive of Hope

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Preface

An Archive of Hope is about Harvey Milk and gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (GLBTQ) memory and history. We believe that GLBTQ pasts, such as the multifaceted configurations of Milk, are invaluable and underutilized as the inventional resources for GLBTQ well-being, relationships, communities, culture, politics, and movement in the present and future.

This is easier espoused than enacted. Historically and presently, numerous constraints and disincentives have made inhabiting and mobilizing GLBTQ pasts very difficult, and in some instances, impossible. One ongoing challenge concerns the *where* of GLBTQ history and memory, where it can be found and how it is marked or unmarked; the term *archive* in this context should signify anything but ample, obvious, accessible, sanctioned. And we say this as people in awe of the gains made by GLBTQ collectors, archivists, librarians, historical societies, and museums in the United States. In an important sense, the more vexing challenge is what we might call the *please* of GLBTQ history and memory, that is, the will and desire for the past. The challenges come from a systemic problem (rarely if ever are GLBTQ history and memory encountered in schools), a communal problem (indifference to GLBTQ history and memory is acculturated), and a rhetorical problem (inducements to GLBTQ history and memory require much more attention to appeal and audience).

We don't remember when we first encountered Harvey Milk. Paradoxically, he seems to have been long a presence and also in short supply. Chuck had been screening Rob Epstein's powerful, Academy Award-winning documentary, *The Times of Harvey Milk* (1984), in his social protest seminars since the late 1990s; Jason for years had been teaching the "Hope Speech" and had worked with the Harvey Milk City Hall Memorial Committee to select quotations to appear on the Milk bust unveiled in San Francisco in 2008. Yet when we began talking about this project in 2006, we both had a strong sense that despite our belief in Milk's significant place in GLBTQ history and memory, he did not seem substantially recollected anymore, except perhaps in San Francisco itself (and that was a hunch). Only a handful of Milk's speeches and writings circulated publicly at the time, as now: four in an appendix in Shilts's *Mayor of Castro Street* and a token representative, "You Gotta Give 'Em Hope," in a small number of anthologies. How could this be? Harvey Milk matters—our mantra—so we decided to figure out what else there might be.

Having successfully persuaded The University of Alabama and Boston College to provide us grant monies for a project on Harvey Milk (rhetorical challenges to GLBTQ memory and history are multiple and varied), we first flew to San Francisco in 2007 to explore the Milk collection at the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL), which we knew had recently opened to the public in 2003. We were not sure what we would find, even though the Harvey Milk Archives—Scott Smith Collection index (GLC 35), available online, had us wide-eyed with imagined possibilities. To our amazement, we discovered at the SFPL a remarkable trove of Milk's words in various forms: speeches, editorials, columns, press releases, event fliers, campaign materials, correspondences, and interviews. Astonishingly, it became apparent from our conversations with the SFPL archivists and librarians that few others were availing themselves of the Milk archive, despite the rare opportunity here of a well-organized and available, institutionally supported and authorized collection of a GLBTQ historical figure better known and appreciated than most. (Interest seems to have increased significantly as our project has come to its completion, owing perhaps to the visibility generated by the film *Milk*; see "Condensed Milk: A [Somewhat] Shortlist of Harvey Milk Resources," <http://sfhcbasc.blogspot.com/2012/05/condensed-milk-somewhat-short-list-of.html>.)

Walking past Harvey Milk Plaza into the historic neighborhood of many GLBTQ dreams on that day in 2007, we toasted with a celebratory

beer at Harvey's, the gay bar at Castro and 18th named in his memory and adorned with his images, all smiles over Milk's legacy being alive and well and available to be mobilized. A block away, at 575 Castro Street, marveling like pilgrims in front of what had been Milk's camera shop and political headquarters, beneath the second-story mural of Harvey wearing a t-shirt with his mantra, "You Gotta Give 'Em Hope," we committed ourselves as archival queers to doing what we could to help circulate and promulgate this invaluable archive. We went back to the SFPL in 2009, and the five years of this project have been consumed with the challenges of disposition, which is to say the culling, organizing, contextualizing, and rhetorically configuring this selected volume of Milk's speeches and writings. *An Archive of Hope* represents our best effort to do so (any shortcomings are squarely our own), an assemblage of artifacts from Milk's rhetorical and political corpus, most not seen publicly since they were originally published or delivered in the 1970s. Our hope is that Milk's voice, and ours, will in this book help to constitute one archival queer exhibition that contributes to the *where* and *please* of GLBTQ pasts.

Our fortune in this project has been an embarrassment of riches, and these brief lines of gratitude won't suffice but will have to do, at least in print. We simply can't believe that the fabulous Danny Nicoletta—so well-known and admired, so busy with his many significant projects—gave so much to our project, generously, copiously, whenever we asked. Danny is a GLBTQ treasure in his own right, and his proximity to Harvey Milk and Milk's memory, to GLBTQ San Francisco's past and present, for us made him our muse, our mentor, our Sherpa—electric and talismanic. We knew that *An Archive of Hope* had promise during our first meeting with Danny over dinner at Catch on Market Street, the very site where the Names Project transformed the world stitch by stitch into the AIDS Quilt. His encouragement has made all the difference.

The other guiding light of this project is Frank Robinson. Frank, too, is a great gift to GLBTQ history, and someone, we hope, will write his biography. Brilliant, gruff, witty, big-hearted, and a real "character," Frank both challenged and fostered our work. He made plain in no uncertain terms that he would not talk about Harvey Milk in a restaurant over lunch. So instead he welcomed us into his home, opened to us his files in the upstairs den, let us spread out materials in his kitchen, and sat for a long interview in his living room. Memory, of course, is both pleasure and pain, and we know Frank's conjuring of Harvey Milk was not always easy, more evidence of Frank's generosity

of spirit. And what a storyteller Frank is: how lucky we were to be the beneficiaries. Then, when the day's research was done, Frank looked at us, smiled, and said, "*Now* you may take me to dinner." And dine we did, once at the historic Hotel Whitcomb's Market Street Café, one of his favorite spots.

Numerous others, in plentiful ways, materially and affectively, made our research and writing of this book possible, easier, pleasurable, better. The University of Alabama and Boston College offered financial support of our San Francisco trips through multiple grants.

At the James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center in the San Francisco Public Library, Tim Wilson and Susan Goldstein warmly and enthusiastically endorsed and supported us and this project, and provided all the resources and expertise we needed and could have hoped for. Our many wonderful encounters with Tim in the reading room of the San Francisco History Center of the SFPL made us feel at home among friends, and when we returned in 2009, two years after our initial trip, the three of us fell right back into step.

For research and copyright assistance, we offer our thanks to Heather Cassell and Karen Sundheim at Hormel, Rebekah Kim and Daniel Bao at the GLBT Historical Society, Cynthia Laird at the *Bay Area Reporter*, Walter Caplan, David Lamble, Tom Spitz at KPIX/KBCW, Alex Cherian at the San Francisco Bay Area TV Archive, Ken Liss at O'Neill Library at Boston College, and Patrick Shannon at the Bancroft Library of UC Berkeley. Our research assistants, Benjamin Kimmerle and Gyromas Newman, handled many of our transcription assignments with good humor and good work.

San Francisco visits came with the warmest of welcomes and hospitality from friends and colleagues Gust Yep, John Elia, Ralph Smith and Russel Windes, Dan Saffer, Rink Foto, Jeff Sens, Jack Keatings and Tom Booth at Hotel Frank/Maxwell, and the staff at Harvey's.

At University of California Press, Kim Robinson's patience, counsel, and encouragement guided us through project vision and revision en route to a remarkably better book than the manuscript we submitted, for which we are so thankful. And we thank, too, Stacy Eisenstark for all her help during the production process.

Jason: This project, one borne from a mutual admiration of Harvey's story, has resulted in much more than the glorious fruits of an archival journey. For me, *An Archive of Hope* has also fostered a lifelong friendship—a story unto itself. Throughout the past seven years—from

San Francisco visits and Castro meanderings to writing sessions on a Boston rooftop and planning sessions on a Tuscaloosa riverboat—I have found a brother in Chuck Morris. I want to wholeheartedly thank Chuck for enlivening our work, for teaching me the nuances of queer worldmaking, and for supporting me when I needed it the most. *An Archive of Hope* would never have been realized and completed without his care and determination. I am genuinely honored and fortunate to consider Chuck a part of my family.

I would also like to express appreciation to my friends at The University of Alabama for all of their encouragement on this project. I am particularly indebted to Adam Sharples and Meredith Bagley for sharing their knowledge about LGBTQ memory and their mutual love for Harvey; to Beth S. Bennett, my good friend and mentor, for supporting *An Archive of Hope* every step of the way; to students in my undergraduate and graduate seminars for the many productive conversations about Harvey and the “hope trope”; and to my colleagues in the College of Communication & Information Sciences for their willingness to entertain my musings about and ardor for Harvey’s story.

Finally, I am grateful to have a moment to thank my partner Jennifer Black and daughters Anabelle and Amelia for all of their love. I am blessed (and awed) by their understanding and patience—both related to this project and always. This anthology has been a part of our lives for the better part of a decade. My wish is that Harvey’s name and *words* will remain constantly with us as a reminder of the possibilities of love and the resonance of hope.

Chuck: I beamed late one evening in 2006 when I read an email from Jason Black inviting me to consider collaborating with him on a Harvey Milk project. The idea excited me at that moment, but it would be our unfolding friendship that most enriched and sustained me as that idea transformed into this book. I now feel as if I’ve known Jason my whole life, and he’s become indigenous to my world, for which I am enormously grateful and deeply happy.

During this project I lost two of my sweetest inspirations, Alex and Augustine, whose love and curiosity meant so much to me, and whose spirits still fill me.

Among the living, my friends make daily work and life richly rewarding, and for their laughter and comfort and wisdom I thank Dale, Dan, Rob, Tom, Andrew, David, Mary Kate, Chuck and Ginny, Jackie, Shea, Katie, Andrew, Austin, Vanessa, Karma and Sara, Jeff and

Isaac, Kendall, Erin, Lance, Bob, Pam, Bonnie, John, Keith and Bob, the Boston Rhetoric Reading Group, and all my field and Facebook pals.

Finally, I dedicate my effort here to my partner Scott Rose, my Gatto, for giving the deepest meaning and feeling to living and loving and intervening in the GLBTQ world, and to our boys, Jackson and Cooper, with all my heart.

Harvey

FRANK M. ROBINSON

Harvey Milk was one of the most significant of the American political figures of the twentieth century. He started as a Goldwater Republican and ended his life as the last of the store-front politicians—those who ran for public office with no money, their stores their campaign headquarters, and their following largely those who stopped in to buy something and stayed to talk politics with the owner.

An “openly gay man,” as the newspapers of the time referred to Harvey, his constituency was the largely closeted gay population of San Francisco. Harvey was anything but—he was openly gay not only in the gay enclave of the Castro, but to the world at large.

He was to become the first gay man to win a major political office in the United States—despite the fact that gays were the last important group in the country who were subject to nationally approved prejudice. Tolerance was the most that a gay man could expect—acceptance was seldom granted.

In the city of San Francisco, the gay community was represented by politicians who were the “friends of gays” but never gay themselves.

It was Harvey’s unique idea that gays should be represented by one of their own. The black community was represented by black politicians—they could hardly change the color of their skin. But gays had the option of hiding, and that was the course that most of them took. You could vote anonymously at the ballot box, but to acknowledge your homosexuality to the world at large could be extremely risky when it came

to family, friends, or employment. It might be okay for Harvey to be openly gay, but it wasn't okay for most gays, and sometimes it could be physically dangerous.

Harvey was out to change all that. He turned his shop into a place for voter registration and urged all gays to "come out"—saying that people would never change their viewpoint on homosexuality unless they had actually met some homosexuals. Families might view their "single" aunts and uncles with suspicion, but as long as gay people "hid," they were tolerated.

By the time Harvey was elected to office as a San Francisco supervisor, those who suffered from the "love that dare not speak its name" had learned to shout.

Harvey was martyred after less than a year in office. His funeral procession led from 17th and Castro to City Hall and numbered 40,000. He was honored with a play produced locally; a biography, *The Mayor of Castro Street* by Randy Shilts, who wrote it for an advance of ten grand, peanuts in the publishing business; a successful television documentary, *The Times of Harvey Milk* (currently available on DVD); an opera that played in Houston, New York, and San Francisco; and a movie starring Sean Penn (he won an Oscar for it) with a screenplay by Dustin Lance Black (who also won an Oscar and gave an acceptance speech that earned him a standing ovation). After that, the small plaza at the corner of Castro and 17th, the staging area for so many of the rallies and marches Harvey led, was named after him.

And oh yes, you could buy a coffee mug with Harvey's picture on it from one of the souvenir shops on Castro.

But ask most young gay men about Harvey Milk and you'll get a blank stare and "Harvey who?"

A simple answer would be, "He's the man who changed your world." But memories are usually passed from one generation to another—from the third (grandfathers) to the second to the current one. For the gay community, except for a few, there is no second generation. It was largely wiped out by the AIDS epidemic.

This collection of speeches and writings is aimed not only at professors and researchers but also at a younger generation who might be assigned by their teachers to read it or who pick it up on their own.

Harvey.

In print.

A collection of his speeches and writings that resonated through the gay community and made it into a major political force in the country today.

Harvey was a tall, thin man in his early forties, with the improbable name of “Harvey Milk,” who ran a camera shop on Castro Street. I lived in “Pneumonia Heights,” a hill above the Castro, and used to walk down every morning for breakfast. One day he was out in front of his shop playing with Kid, the store’s dog, and we started to talk. I told him I wrote books for a living, and he said he ran the store and once he’d run for supervisor.

He said he got 15,000 votes his first time out, and I was properly impressed. In Chicago the biggest political event we’d ever held was a “kiss-in” in front of City Hall—all one hundred of us.

He told me he was going to run for Supervisor again and asked whether I wanted to write speeches for him. “It’ll be a hoot,” he said. “We’ll stir some shit.”

Despite Harvey’s 15,000 votes, I never for a moment thought he would win anything.

As a speechwriter, I soon discovered that I was just another cog in Harvey’s embryo political machine. Scott Smith, his lover, ran the day-to-day management of the store as well as Harvey’s campaigns (he and Harvey split after the first two. John Ryckman ran the third, and Anne Kronenberg, the fourth, as well as moved to City Hall with him when he won).

Jim Rivaldo and Dick Pabich wrote most of his campaign flyers. Some of the speeches Harvey gave nobody wrote for him. There were no teleprompters back then, and one of his speeches (Keynote Address, Gay Conference 5, Dallas, Texas) ran to seventeen typewritten pages. I’m pretty sure he spoke from a handful of notes, filling in as he went along. Mayor Feinstein—who had no love for Harvey because he frequently disagreed with her and wouldn’t follow the party line—complained that Harvey talked too long and too often.

I wrote a number of Harvey’s shorter speeches, as well as an occasional article for the *Bay Area Reporter’s* “Forum.” Harvey was far from illiterate—he could have written most of his speeches himself. But he couldn’t do both and campaign as well. To a large extent, I was the pencil in Harvey’s hand. We were both populists and agreed on practically all of his political positions. He was for the neighborhoods against downtown, and he championed the elderly, the unions, and the ethnic groups that made up the patchwork quilt of the city’s population. He was insistent that those who drew a salary from the city should also live in the city. He never forgot the policeman who lived out of town and told him, “You couldn’t pay me to live there”—meaning San Francisco.

He was tight with the unions, who were among his first supporters, and said a kind word about them whenever he could.

He was insistent about three things: The gay community should be represented by a gay man. The “friends of gays” who usually represented the community until Harvey came to town could change their positions depending on which way the political winds were blowing. An African American couldn’t change the color of his skin and voted for one of his own. And an “openly gay man” would never be able to disavow his sexual orientation.

The latter was put to the test when gays had been granted civil rights in a few states, which upset Anita Bryant, a spokeswoman for the Florida orange juice growers. She started a campaign against gays that rolled across the country, gathering support as it went. In California, State Senator John Briggs picked up on it and introduced a bill to ban all homosexual teachers in the public school system. The bill was winning in the polls, and suddenly the “friends of gays” faded into the background.

It was Harvey who debated Briggs up and down the state (including the conservative stronghold of Orange County). Nobody wrote for him when he was on the road—he shot from the hip. (“How do you teach homosexuality? Like you’d teach French.”)

The proposition lost.

High on Harvey’s list of things to talk about was voting. He was well aware that power came from the ballot box, but many gays didn’t bother to vote. He urged everybody in his audiences to “come out” and publicly acknowledge that they were gay. “How can people change their minds about us if they don’t know who we are?”

Voting was easy. “Coming out” was another story. You could lose your family, your friends, and your job. Harvey was admired for being openly gay, but it wasn’t a decision that many others were willing to make. It was easy to be “out” in the Castro—you could live there for weeks without meeting a straight man.

But being “out” in the world at large was a vastly different cup of tea.

Most of Harvey’s positions were easy to write about—I’d been active in gay politics in Chicago and Harvey and I were two peas from the same pod.

The speech he gave most often was a barnburner, but I couldn’t tell you who wrote it. It was Harvey’s “hope” speech, and like Topsy it just grew. Harvey was fond of talking about “hope” in many guises and how it was important that younger gays, confused about their orientation, should be given “hope.”

“You gotta give ’em hope.”

The punch ending was that this kid in Altoona, Pennsylvania, had heard one of his speeches and called him. His parents would never understand him. Harvey was flattered by the call and told the boy that when he was of age, he should grab a bus and come out to California. There was silence for a moment and then the boy said quietly, “I can’t. I’m crippled.” (This was a highly emotional scene in the movie.)

Harvey polished the speech and used it often, though the rest of us kidded him because some days the boy lived in Altoona, other times in San Antonio or Buffalo. The boy really got around, we thought.

Harvey didn’t have a battery of professional speechwriters who could make him sound like a latter-day John F. Kennedy. The strength of his speeches lay in his visceral connection with his audience.

It would take time for “gay power” to emerge, and it would bring hardships, but it would also bring freedom. Anybody who belonged to a minority group in the audience would nod and agree with that.

We expect our leaders to be exactly like us, and then we’re disappointed when they turn out to be mere mortals—exactly like us. The attempt to impeach President Clinton failed because his audience instinctively understood that.

The police in Nazi Germany were brutal when it came to the Jews, because the Jews were undesirable anyway. Police brutality against homosexuals in the United States was tolerated because homosexuals were also undesirable. Right? That attitude spread like a cancer, and soon most of the country accepted it.

When it comes to taxes, you pay your fair share—but the insurance companies, the banks, the big corporations “pay little or nothing.” You pay yours, but you’re also paying theirs. Harvey wrote that thirty-five years ago, but it sounds very familiar today.

When it comes to our leaders, most of us instinctively recognize that “no person is born to greatness, but many people rise to it.” Who knows what that scruffy kid down the block playing touch football will become? Harvey’s audience recognized that and gave the kid the benefit of the doubt. Someday they might be voting for him.

“Nixon’s appointments to the Supreme Court will affect our lives to a greater degree than anything he can do as president.”

That’s true of any president, and Harvey’s audience knew it. The struggle for one political group or another to control the court is still going on today—the country swings left or right depending on the decisions of that court.

Harvey was prescient. His audience realized that the problems he pointed out in his lifetime would also be the problems of the future. Two steps forward, one step back: the history of our country.

Harvey was more than just a politician, more than a man running for political office.

He was an oracle and his audience identified with it. He spoke not only for today but also for tomorrow.

Speeches are important not only for the information they convey but for the insight they give into the people who delivered them. Hitler was brutal and sadistic, and it showed in his speeches. John F. Kennedy was altruistic; it came out in the man like sweat. Theodore Roosevelt—the first Roosevelt—was probably responsible for the expression “the bully pulpit.” America had a manifest destiny—let’s go get it!

The second Roosevelt, Franklin, was a healer. The country was bleeding when he took it, bound up its wounds, and bit by bit taught it to believe in itself again.

And Harvey?

Read his speeches and writings. He taught the gay community to respect itself; he taught it to believe in the power that it had and how to use it. A few of Harvey’s campaigns and the local politicians knew that no anti-gay ordinance would ever be accepted by the city. The gays held veto power and they voted as a bloc.

Harvey wore a coat of many colors. He laughed a lot; he could be very funny; he could deliver a speech like an African American preacher, using the repetition of words and phrases until the crowd was roaring.

He started the first Castro Street Fair and showed the rest of the town how to throw a party. When the Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey circus came to town, he dressed as a clown and rode the cable cars to the delight of the tourists.

He never forgot those who had been less fortunate in life, and most of all, he showed his constituents how much he loved them. Some of us thought he loved campaigning more than he liked legislating.

He campaigned 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. He was a man of the people—especially poor people (being a supervisor paid \$9,000 a year; he had a very vivid idea of what being poor was like).

Why did he do it? Is there a lesson to be learned from reading what Harvey had to say? Can you see the man behind the curtain? You should; he never made any attempt to hide himself.