

The Hope Speech by Harvey Milk

The Speech

- Watch the speech, delivered by Ian McKellen.

<https://www.speech.almeida.co.uk/speech/hope-speech>

Duration: 9 minutes 30 seconds

- Discuss students' initial responses.

Context

Harvey Milk was an American politician, and the first openly gay elected official in California. He was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1977 and remained in office for over a year. He was assassinated by former Supervisor Dan White on 27 November 1978 along with San Francisco Mayor George Moscone.

During his time in office he spearheaded a civil rights bill banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation which the New York Times called "the most stringent and encompassing in the nation."

This speech was delivered by Milk on 25 June 1978 at the San Francisco Gay Pride Parade.

- Below is a list of key events in the history of The Gay Rights Movement in America and Harvey Milk's career. Ask students to place these events on a timeline and add any additional events they find. They can use the sources listed at the end of this document.

Illinois becomes the first state to decriminalise homosexuality

President Eisenhower signs an executive order banning homosexuals from working for the U.S. Government

Police raid the Stonewall Inn in New York City leading to widespread protests and riots

Harvey Milk successfully campaigns against the Briggs Initiative – a proposition put to a referendum by State Senator John Briggs banning gay and lesbian teachers from working in state schools

Daughters of Bilitis are formed in San Francisco. They are the first known lesbian rights organisation in America

Harvey Milk is murdered by Dan White

A march takes place in New York to mark the one year anniversary of the Stonewall riots – this is now considered to be the first gay pride parade

Harvey Milk and other local business owners found the Castro Village Association

The first recorded gay rights organisation – the Society for Human Rights is founded by Henry Gerber in Chicago

Maryland becomes the first state to ban same sex marriage

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Gilbert Baker designs the first rainbow flag

Elaine Noble is elected to the Massachusetts State Legislature. She is the first openly gay candidate to be elected to state office.

Harvey Milk becomes the first openly gay man to be elected to public office in California. He is inaugurated as San Francisco City Supervisor.

- Ask students to compare their timeline with the timeline listed [here](#) of events that took place in the UK.

Content

- Watch the speech again.
- Assign students one of the following cards to respond to.
- Lead a group discussion drawing on the students' responses.

<p>How does Harvey Milk present the recent history of LGBT rights in America?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Which dates and people are named as being significant?• What are the kinds of prejudices that LGBT people face?	<p>How does Harvey Milk compare the prejudice towards LGBT people with prejudice towards the Black and Hispanic communities?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What similarities and differences does he present?• Who are the 'us-es'?
<p>The term 'proud' reinforces Harvey Milk's attitude to being gay.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does he develop this concept?• How does he link pride to hope?	<p>What has inspired Harvey Milk to present 'hope' to this community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What particular details have suggested the need for hope?• What is the concrete source of hope that the speech ends on?

Language and Structure

- Ask students to read a copy of the speech and explore the rhetorical devices used. **A transcript of the speech is included at the end of this document.**
- This exercise encourages students to identify features of rhetorical language, and more importantly to comment on their effect.
- Provide students with the chart below. This exercise could be done individually with each student completing the full table or by splitting the class in to groups and allocating three lines of the table to each group and asking them to feedback on one.

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Language/ Structural Device	Example	Effect
Themes and Key Words		
Types of repetition - e.g. repetition of a single word or repetition of a phrase or repetition of an idea		
Ethos – a demonstration of the speaker’s credibility or strength of character		
Pathos – the emotional appeal of the speech		
Logos – appealing to the audience with reason and using facts and figures		
Counter argument		
Contrasts		
Anecdotes		
Pronouns and modes of addressing audience		
Register e.g. formal or informal		

Discussion

- Watch the discussion between Ian McKellen and members of the North London LGBT+ Community.

Duration: 4 minutes 30 seconds

<https://www.speech.almeida.co.uk/reaction/hope-speech>

- Ask students for their initial responses to the discussion.

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Extension Task

Ask students to complete a research project on one of the following points raised in the discussion:

- How do modern politicians scaremonger and use imagery to incite hatred? **00:05**
- Are there modern LGBT+ role models in politics that inspire others? **00:46**
- How can education policy be reformed to challenge LGBT+ discrimination? **01:15**
- Is Ian McKellen right to see hope in schools and young people? **01:38**
- Which communities are still unrepresented in politics and society today? How can this be challenged? **03:30**

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Useful Links

Websites

[Harvey Milk's Legacy](#) - International Gay Rights

[Harvey Milk](#) – Official Biography

[Gay Rights Movement](#) – a history

[Gay Rights](#) – five activists reflect on the history of the moment in the U.S.

[Stonewall Timeline](#) – key dates in the development of LGBTQ+ equality

[Daughters of Bilitis](#) – an overview

[The Briggs Initiative](#) – an overview

[Black Pride](#) – Why we need a Black Pride

[British Asian LGBTI](#)

[Tammy Baldwin](#) – the first openly Gay woman to be elected to the United States Congress

[LGBT Inclusion](#) in English Schools

Films

[Milk](#) – directed by Gus Van Sant and starring Sean Penn

[The Times of Harvey Milk](#) – a documentary

[The Outlist](#) – interviews with LGBTQ+ celebrities and community leaders

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THE HOPE SPEECH Harvey Milk | 25 June 1978

This is an edited version of the speech made at San Francisco's Gay Freedom Day Parade. Milk was assassinated in November of the same year.

About six months ago, Anita Bryant in her speaking to God said that the drought in California was because of the gay people. On November 9, the day after I got elected, it started to rain. On the day I got sworn in, we walked to City Hall and it was kind of nice, and as soon as I said the word "I do," it started to rain again. It's been raining since then and the people of San Francisco figure the only way to stop it is to do a recall petition.

So much for that. Why are we here? Why are gay people here? And what's happening?

Let's look at 1977. In 1977, gay people had their rights taken away from them in Miami. But you must remember that in the week before Miami and the week after that, the word homosexual or gay appeared in every single newspaper in this nation in articles both pro and con. In every radio station, in every TV station and every household. For the first time in the history of the world, everybody was talking about it, good or bad. Unless you have dialogue, unless you open the walls of dialogue, you can never reach to change people's opinion. Once you have dialogue starting, you know you can break down prejudice. In 1977 we saw a dialogue start. In 1977, we saw a gay person elected in San Francisco.

What that is, is a record of what happened last year. What we must do is make sure that 1978 continues the movement.

I know we are pressed for time so I'm going to cover just one more little point. That is to understand why it is important that gay people run for office and that gay people get elected. I know there are many people in this room who are running for central committee who are gay. I encourage you. There's a major reason why. If my non-gay friends and supporters in this room understand it, they'll probably understand why I've run so often before I finally made it.

You see there is a major difference – and it remains a vital difference – between a friend and a gay person, a friend in office and a gay person in office. Gay people have been slandered nationwide. We've been tarred and we've been brushed with the picture of pornography. In Dade County, we were accused of child molestation. It's not enough anymore just to have friends represent us. No matter how good that friend may be.

The black community made up its mind to that a long time ago. That the myths against blacks can only be dispelled by electing black leaders, so the black community could be judged by the leaders and not by the myths or black criminals. The Spanish community must not be judged by Latin criminals or myths. The Asian community must not be judged by Asian criminals or myths. The Italian community must not be judged by the mafia, myths. And the time has come when the gay community must not be judged by our criminals and myths.

Like every other group, we must be judged by our leaders and by those who are themselves gay, those who are visible. For invisible, we remain in limbo - a myth, a person with no parents, no brothers, no sisters, no friends who are straight, no important positions in employment. A tenth of the nation supposedly composed of stereotypes and would-be seducers of children – and no offense meant to the stereotypes. But today, the black community is not judged by its friends, but by its black legislators and leaders. And we must give people the chance to judge us by our leaders and legislators. A gay person in office can set a tone, can command respect not only from the larger community, but from the young people in our own community who need both examples and hope.

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The first gay people we elect must be strong. They must not be content to sit in the back of the bus. They must not be content to accept pabulum. They must be above wheeling and dealing. They must be – for the good of all of us – independent, unbought. The anger and the frustrations that some of us feel is because we are misunderstood, and friends can't feel the anger and frustration. They can sense it in us, but they can't feel it. Because a friend has never gone through what is known as coming out. I will never forget what it was like coming out and having nobody to look up toward. I remember the lack of hope - and our friends can't fulfil it.

I can't forget the looks on faces of people who've lost hope. Be they gay, be they seniors, be they blacks looking for an almost-impossible job, be they Latins trying to explain their problems and aspirations in a tongue that's foreign to them. I personally will never forget that people are more important than buildings. I use the word "I" because I'm proud. I stand here tonight in front of my gay sisters, brothers and friends because I'm proud of you. I think it's time that we have many legislators who are gay and proud of that fact and do not have to remain in the closet. I think that a gay person, up-front, will not walk away from a responsibility and be afraid of being tossed out of office. After Dade County, I walked among the angry and the frustrated night after night and I looked at their faces. And in San Francisco, three days before Gay Pride Day, a person was killed just because he was gay. And that night, I walked among the sad and the frustrated at City Hall in San Francisco and later that night as they lit candles on Castro Street and stood in silence, reaching out for some symbolic thing that would give them hope. These were strong people, whose faces I knew from the shop, the streets, meetings and people who I never saw before but I knew. They were strong, but even they needed hope.

And the young gay people who are coming out and hear Anita Bryant on 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.

So if there is a message I have to give, it is that I've found one overriding thing about my personal election, it's the fact that if a gay person can be elected, it's a green light. And you and you and you, you have to give people hope.