

Name _____ Date _____

Harvey Milk

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b'

Notes

Before Harvey Milk made history, he lived many lives. He was an officer in the Navy, a teacher, a financial analyst, and a small-time actor. In 1972, Milk moved to San Francisco and opened a camera store on Castro Street, the heart of San Francisco's gay community. Milk's warmth, sense of humor, and unabashed personality quickly made him a popular figure in the neighborhood. He was a keen observer of his community and believed that clean, safe, and close-knit neighborhoods would help the city flourish. He thought the city failed to support disenfranchised people. Milk had a vision of local government that not only provided basic services to everyone, but also took a more personal approach to developing community and collaboration.

2. b'

Notes

In the early 1970s, LGBTQ people faced homophobia, discrimination, and police violence. As Milk was drawn toward politics, he refused to downplay or hide his sexual orientation. He believed that pride in his identity was the only way to properly advocate for the LGBTQ community and other marginalized groups. In 1973, Milk ran for San Francisco Board of Supervisors and lost. But he didn't give up. He continued to ingrain himself in his community, meeting with and advocating for construction workers, union leaders, immigrants, the elderly anyone who would meet with him. He ran and lost again in 1975, this time only by a small margin. By now, he had earned the unofficial title Mayor of Castro Street, and his welcoming brand of politics earned him a diverse coalition of supporters. When he ran for Board of Supervisors a third time in 1977, he won easily, making him one of the first out gay public officials in the United States. His victory made national and international headlines and greatly increased his profile.

3. b'

Notes

Milk entered public office in 1978. He launched a campaign to clean up the city and introduced a bill outlawing discrimination based on sexual orientation. At the same, anti-gay movements were gaining momentum across the country. One piece of legislation in California called Proposition 6 aimed to make it illegal for gay people to work in California schools. Milk fought hard against Prop 6, urging gay people to come out of the closet and take pride in their identity to help dispel the lies and myths that led to this legislation. Milk stressed the importance of representation and how it could impact the lives of young gay people. Attendance swelled at gay pride demonstrations in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Milk's powerful speeches and organizing helped mobilize activism against Prop 6. On November 7, 1978, the initiative was defeated in a landslide. Milk's message was being heard. He seemed to be on track to have a larger voice in California politics and possibly beyond.

\n'

4. b'

Notes

Less than 20 days after Prop 6 was defeated, Dan White, a former city supervisor who often clashed with Milk over his political views, snuck past City Hall's metal detectors. He shot and killed mayor George Moscone in his office, then walked down the hall and shot and killed Harvey Milk. The night of Milk's murder, thousands gathered to hold a candlelight vigil at City Hall. Milk had been no stranger to death threats. There were so many that he left audio recordings with friends that were to be played in the event of his assassination. Milk was prepared to die for his beliefs and he did. In one of his recordings, Milk said:
If a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet destroy every closet door.

\n

Today, Milk remains a pioneering figure in the fight for equality for not only gay people but for all people. In 2008, a statue of Milk was unveiled in San Francisco City Hall. The following year, Milk was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Milk's life was cut short by hate, but his vision of inclusivity lives on in an ongoing fight for equality.

\n'