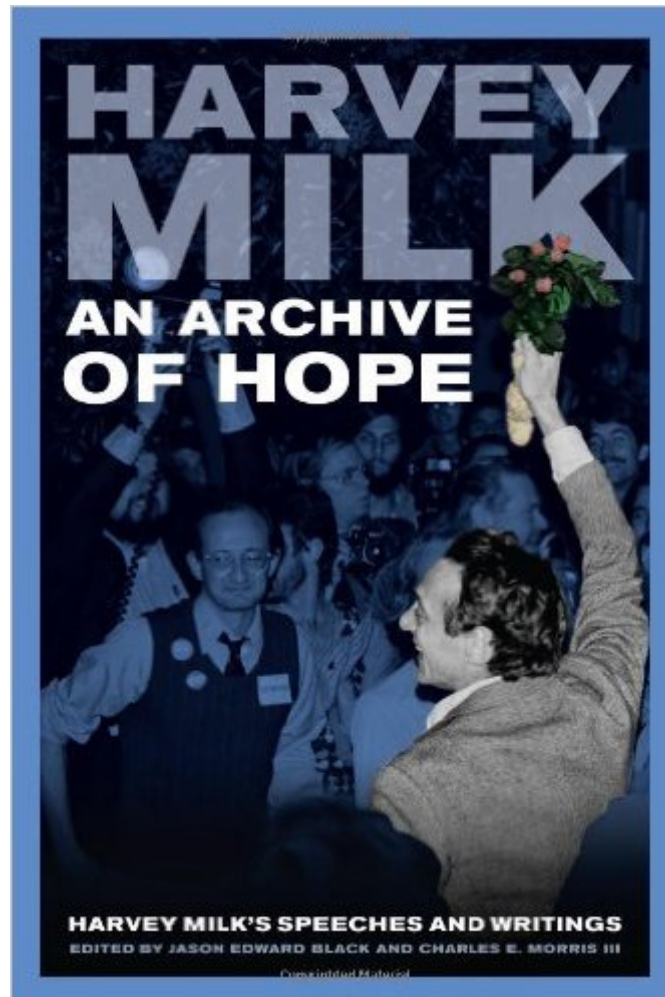


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# An Archive Of Hope: Harvey Milk's Speeches And Writings



## Synopsis

Harvey Milk was one of the first openly and politically gay public officials in the United States, and his remarkable activism put him at the very heart of a pivotal civil rights movement reshaping America in the 1970s. *An Archive of Hope* is Milk in his own words, bringing together in one volume a substantial collection of his speeches, columns, editorials, political campaign materials, open letters, and press releases, culled from public archives, newspapers, and personal collections. The volume opens with a foreword from Milk's friend, political advisor, and speech writer Frank Robinson, who remembers the man who "started as a Goldwater Republican and ended his life as the last of the store front politicians" who aimed to "give hope" in his speeches. An illuminating introduction traces GLBTQ politics in San Francisco, situates Milk within that context, and elaborates the significance of his discourse and memories both to 1970s-era gay rights efforts and contemporary GLBTQ worldmaking.

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## Customer Reviews

A few years ago, while I was digging in the Harvey Milk archives to research *The Harvey Milk Interviews: In His Own Words*, I first met Charles Morris III and Jason Edward Black. They were visiting San Francisco to research *An Archive of Hope*. We quickly compared our two books-in-process and found them quite complimentary: *The Harvey Milk Interviews* would focus on Milk's interviews and his famous debates against John Briggs, while Morris and Black planned to concentrate on Milk's speeches and writings. All three of us agreed that Harvey Milk is a worthy subject. When Milk was elected a supervisor of the City and County of San Francisco, he became

the first openly gay person elected to office in California. He supported a wide range of human rights, environmental, labor, and free speech issues across North America until his assassination in 1978. Since then, Milk's life and work have inspired millions of people around the world. Time Magazine named him "one of the 100 most important people of the twentieth century." Now Morris and Black's ambitious book is available, and it is a winner. An Archive of Hope provides by far the best collection of Milk's speeches and writings available anywhere, a "greatest hits" archive you can hold in your hand, plus illuminating explanations of his political strategies, his techniques for persuasion, and the reasons Milk matters to us now. The 48 speeches and documents gathered here have been selected with insight and skill, and are bolstered by a touching foreword by novelist Frank M. Robinson; a lengthy, well-footnoted introduction explaining Milk's politics and his importance today; and 45 headnotes telling the role each speech and document played in Milk's story, in American history, and in the battle for LGBT rights. Because editors Charles Morris III and Jason Edward Black have made an outstanding selection of Milk's materials and because their text provides a guided tour of Milk's political and communication strategies, An Archive of Hope is the definitive introduction to Milk's speeches and writings, and will remain so for decades. Who is this book for? If you are new to the topic of Harvey Milk, An Archive of Hope might be too detailed to be a starting place. You might instead begin with the deeply moving Academy Award-winning documentary *The Times of Harvey Milk* and Randy Shilts' stirring biography *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk*. But if you want to learn more about Milk's political career, his strategies for winning campaigns (which remain valid for winning campaigns today), and his techniques for communicating and persuading people, An Archive of Hope is an essential resource. It gives us a treasure chest of valuable speeches and documents, plus editorial explanations that help us understand each item in its time and what Milk means to us today. What is in this book? The 48 items collected in An Archive of Hope include 10 speeches, one interview, a partial transcription of one debate between Milk and John Briggs, a transcription of Milk's tape-recorded political will (in which he predicts his own assassination a year before it happened), two examples of Milk's campaign materials, two proposed anti-apartheid resolutions for the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, five press releases and press statements, nine letters, and sixteen newspaper articles written by Milk. They are arranged chronologically from the awkward beginning of Milk's political career through his failures and triumphs. When I describe An Archive of Hope to other people, they sometimes ask me, "Is this just a collection of stuff copied from other books?" It is not. Almost every gem in An Archive of Hope is collected for the first time. Only five are available in other books. To be specific, documents 3, 27, 37, and 45 are printed at the end of *The Mayor of*

Castro Street. (Both *An Archive of Hope* and *The Mayor of Castro Street* include Milk's famous hope speech, but each provides a different version.) And a lively debate between Milk and Briggs is also transcribed in *The Harvey Milk Interviews*. Everything else in *An Archive of Hope* is unique. The editors begin with a 44-page introduction, "Harvey Milk's Political Archive and Archival Politics." After a short prolog, their introduction is divided into 3 sections. The first section, "Remembering Harvey Milk" (7 pages), presents a passionate argument for the need to preserve GLBT history and memories in archives, discusses why these memories are vulnerable, gives a short history of Milk's archives, and answers the question "Why Harvey Milk?" The second section, "Harvey Milk: A Brief Political Genealogy" (29 pages), is the heart of the introduction. It rarely touches on Milk's personal life. Instead, Morris and Black focus on his political life, not so much telling his story as explaining how it happened and what Milk's political career means. Their explanations provide deep context for Milk's views, strategies, and activities. Their insights are essential for anyone wanting a thorough understanding of Milk and the struggle for LGBT rights in the United States and especially in San Francisco. Finally, the third section of the introduction, "Why Milk Memory Matters" (7 pages), discusses Milk's cultural and political afterlife, and why remembering Harvey Milk is important for us today. The introduction is followed by 15 pages of 153 footnotes that form an indispensable research tool in their own right. They cover Milk and more, for instance providing a very useful bibliography of LGBT history in San Francisco. In addition to presenting the 48 documents and the important introduction, the editors of *An Archive of Hope* also wrote 45 headnotes, each 1-3 pages long, for individual documents. These headnotes present some of the most rewarding information in this book, guiding us one step at a time through Milk's passionate political career and the whirlwind of historic events in his time. To cite three examples from Milk's newspaper writings, document 16, "Au Contraire . . . PCR Needed," without its headnote seems to be a general explanation of the need for both the police and the gay community to work together to improve relations, but it is only after reading Morris and Black's headnote that we understand the angry tumults that inspired Milk to write this piece and how Milk bucked political advice when he stressed the need to work together. The headnote to document 19, "Reactionary Beer," gives a marvelously well-researched yet concise introduction to the famous Coors beer boycott and Milk's role in its success. The headnote to document 22, "Uncertainty of Carter or Certainty of Ford," not only describes the candidates in the 1976 presidential election and Milk's involvement with Gerald Ford, but also points out how this piece shows Milk's farsighted vision of the political role LGBT people need to play. By themselves, these informative headnotes add depth to our understanding of Milk's life, his political career, and the evolution of the gay rights movement. With the documents, they tell Milk's story and make each

document relevant and, in some cases, much more dramatic. What are the weaknesses of this book? A project as ground-breaking and ambitious as this one will, of course, show a few blemishes in its first printing. The most serious startled me when I turned to the back of its book for its index. I was surprised to find it has none. To deprive such an important scholarly resource of an index is short-sighted on the part of its publisher, the University of California Press. *An Archive of Hope* is the essential research tool into the speeches and writings of one of the most influential people of the last century, so it will remain in use by scholars far beyond my lifetime; I certainly hope the publisher corrects this problem by adding an index to a future printing. Another surprise is that *An Archive of Hope* describes five documents as something other than what they are. Document 26, "Harvey Speaks Out," is described as an "Interview." However, it is a speech. The first paragraph of its text even says that it is a speech. Document 28, "The Word Is Out," is described as a "Public letter," when it is a speech that Milk wrote February 1, 1978, and delivered in Toronto, Canada on February 3, 1978. Document 31 is described as "Press releases" when it actually consists of the texts of two resolutions Milk proposed plus two letters Milk wrote to his supporters. The book calls document 42 a "Public letter" but it is a press statement. Document 44 is labeled as a "Public letter" in the table of contents and on page 239, but its introduction describes it as a "press release." It is actually a ballot argument, seemingly written for a voter information pamphlet. Are the transcriptions of the 48 documents accurate? It is vital to select Milk's most important speeches and writings, which this book does well, and it is also important to report them accurately. To check that accuracy, I spent a couple of afternoons in the Milk archive comparing 11 original source documents with the versions in *An Archive of Hope*. Most transcriptions were letter-perfect, or contained only tiny discrepancies. I found larger differences in three documents. In document 1 of the book, an "Interview with Harvey Milk" by Davidlee Rinker, I spotted 26 differences between the original version printed in the *Kalendar* newspaper and its transcription in *An Archive of Hope*. Most were inconsequential, but some could matter to certain readers. Document 26 in the book, "Harvey Speaks Out," presents excerpts from a speech. The original transcript is divided into 17 sections, but *An Archive of Hope* omits four. Finally, in document 43, Milk's speech "Overall Needs of the City," the second paragraph is missing. Perhaps only these three transcriptions contain discrepancies. I hope to return to the Milk archives for more comparisons and will update this review with whatever I find. Is the explanatory material accurate? I have already described the high value of the information Morris and Black present in their introduction to the book and in their fact-filled headnotes for each document. I inspected their information for factual errors, and was delighted by their consistent accuracy, especially on points where other writers have been wrong. I could find only a few errors of fact. On

page 179, in the second paragraph of introductory text, this sentence may not be correct: "But he never had a chance to see the citywide law come to fruition, as he would be assassinated some eight months later by fellow Board Supervisor Dan White." I believe that this ordinance came into effect on Tuesday, April 11, 1978, when Mayor George Moscone signed it into law, five months before Milk's death. (See *The Harvey Milk Interviews*, p. 325.) Page 181, near the bottom of the page, says: "In the end, the resolutions garnered support from the Board of Supervisors but did not move beyond the governmental channels from there." I do not agree with that evaluation. On June 5, 1978, the Board passed the resolution establishing a policy of the city and county not to invest "in corporations and banks doing business in or with South Africa." (See *The Harvey Milk Interviews*, p. 328.) San Francisco was one of the very first government entities in the U.S. to disinvest, eventually inspiring hundreds of other local governments to follow. Anti-apartheid activists credit the financial pressure from disinvestment as an important influence on South Africa's abolition of apartheid. On page 227, the debate occurred September 6, 1978. This date is confirmed by Harvey's appointment calendar for 1978, which is saved with his papers and schedules the debate on September 6. Also, the "unnamed moderator" was broadcast reporter Richard Hart. When I consider the wealth of information that editors Morris and Black have presented, to find so few factual errors is a testimony to their undeniably thorough research. In conclusion On page 1, the editors state that their goal for *An Archive of Hope*: "... we hope in this book to deepen and circulate the public memory of Harvey Milk." The authors magnificently accomplish their goal. While not perfect, their book plays a valuable role in disseminating Milk's speeches and documents and in illuminating Milk's political career and communications techniques. I highly recommend it to anyone wanting to learn more about what Harvey Milk accomplished, how he did it, and what that means to us today.

If you're a fan of Harvey Milk or want to understand the gay struggle for civil rights, you should read this book. There are a couple of mistakes in some of his speeches and writings. I wondered why the editors didn't correct them only to read at the end that they felt it was best not to do so because Harvey wrote them this way. I noticed that "LGBT" was written as "GLBT" and this sounded odd. For as long as I've known about this acronym, it's been "LGBT." I expected his speeches to be more inclusive of other groups, but they were not. Still, some speeches were very amazing. It was nice of him to request, in his letter to President Jimmy Carter, that the South African embassy be closed in America to protest apartheid. It's just that he started with the necessity of dismantling apartheid but most of the letter was mainly about gay rights in America. I feel like the editors should have, at least,

mentioned Jonestown. The people who look up to him deserve to know the whole truth about a gay icon as important as Harvey Milk. By reading this book, I learnt that he wasn't the saint that a lot of people believe him to be. One of the things he really shouldn't have done was to out a gay man who wasn't ready to come out in one of his speeches (his name was Sipple). I didn't think it was fair. Even though he did not write most of his speeches, as I also learned from this book, it's still a priceless book to read and possess. He was a highly intelligent man among other things. As someone who used to live in San Francisco, it was nice to see things pertaining to this city like the San Francisco Public Library, MUNI, popular streets, landmarks, etc. I also learnt a lot about San Francisco history and other important things. In some places, it made me uncomfortable when he kept using African-Americans as examples of many things from slavery to the inability to change the colour of their skin to how they responded as a group to certain things. In other words, "if they can do it, so can we," which doesn't always work like this. At the end of the day, it's still a good book for the most part. So I recommend it to different groups of people such as the elderly, women, the disabled, labour unions, people of colour, the working class, but mainly the LGBT community.

This publication has been a major source of inspiration for a graduate paper I wrote on Harvey Milk's speeches in a Rhetorical Criticism course. The book is superb as it highlights original and primary sources of Milk's visions of hope. Great collection of interviews, articles, and speeches that truly embody the messages and sociopolitical philosophies of Milk. Excellent book!

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