

# Gay Americans

**Step 1** Read about gay men and lesbians' struggle for civil rights in Section 6 under the heading "Gay Americans Stand Up for Their Rights." Then complete the Reading Notes for this group.

**Step 2** Read the excerpt below.

**Step 3** Complete your Station Notes for this group by doing the following:

- Copy one sentence from "Learning from Harvey Milk" that more fully explains what actions Milk believed gay Americans should use to achieve change. Draw a line connecting this quotation to your "How Achieved" notes.
- Sketch and label one detail from the photograph of Harvey Milk and one detail from the photograph of the vigil after Milk's assassination that show more fully what actions gay Americans used to achieve change. Draw a line connecting these sketches to your "How Achieved" notes.

*Harvey Milk was elected to San Francisco's board of supervisors, which is similar to a city council, in 1977. On November 28, 1978, Milk, along with San Francisco mayor Dan Moscone, were assassinated by an antigay former supervisor. A vigil in honor of Milk assembled spontaneously the night of the assassination. The following spring, Dan White, the assassin, was given a lenient sentence. A large and angry group of demonstrators marched to protest the verdict. The excerpt below details Milk's strategies for achieving change.*

## **Excerpt from "Learning from Harvey Milk" by Jim Rivaldo**

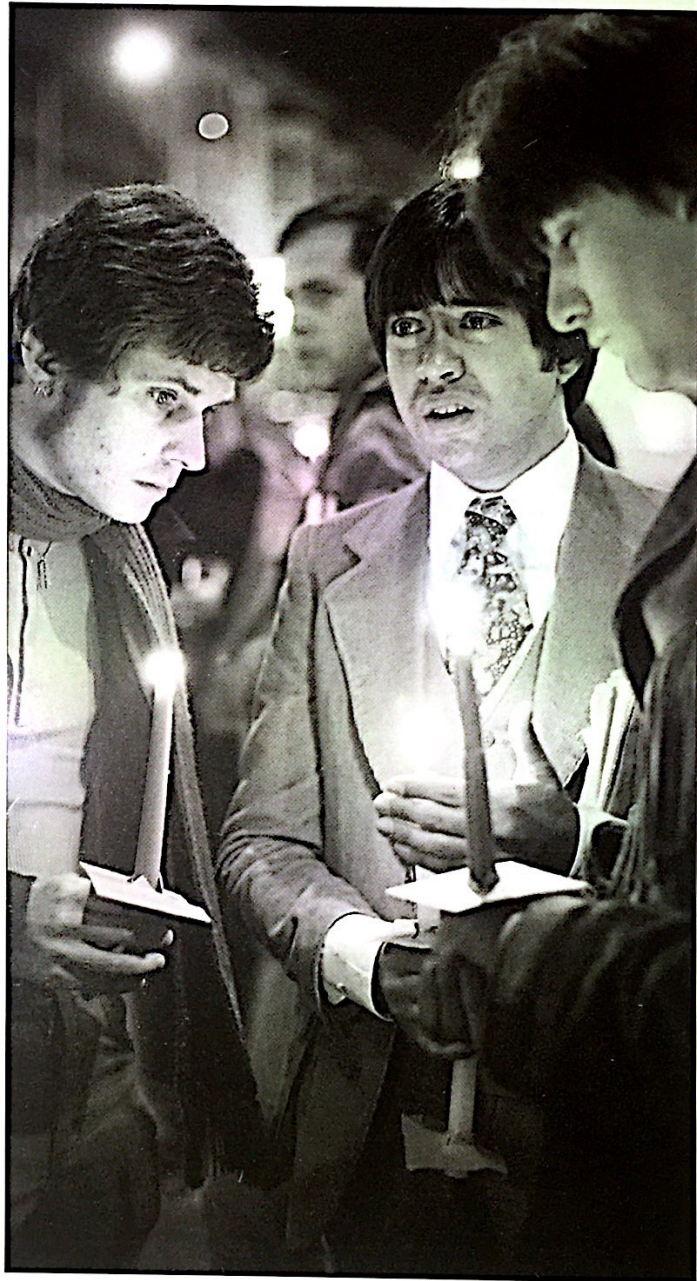
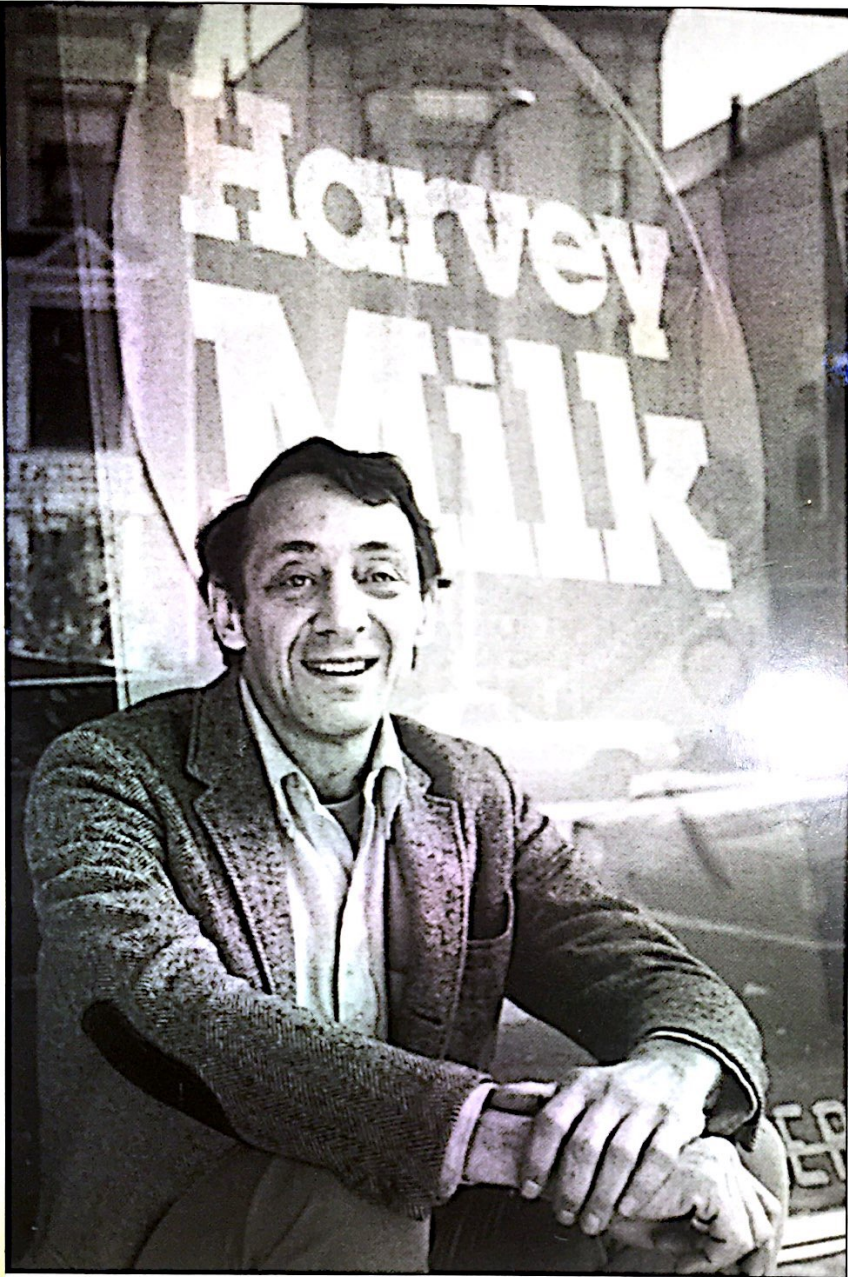
Harvey Milk spoke out forcefully on the need for lesbians and gay men to seize control of our lives, to hold public office and to participate in the decisions that may affect us. He learned well from the lessons of the civil rights and anti-war movements: When you're right, keep pushing; don't be afraid to offend those more interested in decorum than in justice . . .

Harvey also had a parallel message for lesbians and gay men: While we cannot depend on our friends to carry the struggle for us, we must never lose sight of the fact that the eventual success of our struggle depends on our ability to make non-gay people see that our interests are their interests.

The greatest potential for achieving this is in the formation of a coalition between gay people and the Blacks, Asians, Latinos and Filipinos who are engaged in their own struggles for an end to discrimination. Harvey also saw activists in the feminist, labor, senior and disabled movements as natural allies in the struggle for gay rights.

Harvey called for others to follow his example—to involve themselves as openly gay people in their neighborhoods and communities . . . to come out, openly and proudly.

Gay Americans



## Gay Americans Stand Up for Their Rights

Gay men and lesbians also began to demand equal rights in the 1960s. At the time, the police often harassed gay men and lesbians in public places. An employee could be fired for being gay or even for being perceived as gay. Many gays and lesbians felt they had to hide their sexual orientation to avoid discrimination.

A gay rights movement had begun to emerge in the late 1950s and early 1960s. By the late 1960s, gay rights activists in Philadelphia were holding an annual Fourth of July protest. Neatly dressed gays and lesbians gathered at Independence Hall, where the Constitution was signed. They pointed out to visitors that gay Americans did not enjoy many of the rights that most Americans took for granted.

It was not until the **Stonewall riots**, however, that the gay pride movement became highly visible. On June 27, 1969, New York City police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in the neighborhood of Greenwich Village. New York outlawed homosexuality at the time, and police raids were common. That night, however, the customers at the Stonewall fought back. Riots broke out and lasted for hours. The Stonewall riots marked the beginning of the gay rights movement. Since then, the anniversary of Stonewall has prompted annual gay pride events in cities around the world.

After Stonewall, more Americans began to join the gay rights movement. In March 1973, a group of parents with gay sons and daughters began meeting in New York. By 1980, the group—now known as Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, or PFLAG—had members around the country.

Another key event in the history of gay rights occurred in 1977, when Harvey Milk was elected to the board of supervisors in San Francisco. Milk was the first openly gay candidate to win office in a major American city. Eleven months later, however, Milk was assassinated by a former colleague.

