

## “You Gotta Have Hope”

By Anonymous

For centuries, there was a system that allowed legal and social discrimination and the refusal of basic civil rights against the gay people of the United States. This refusal to accept individuals who are now known as the LGBTQIA+ community led to unjust stereotypes, misrepresentation, harassment, and persecution by the church and state. The 1970’s marked a new period of transformative growth for the community. Among this progress, most notably the Stonewall Riots, Harvey Milk became the first openly gay elected official in office and he remains a prominent inspiration for gay rights today. In his speech “You Gotta Have Hope,” Harvey Milk uses rhetorical devices such as pathos, logos, and ethos, to dispel the perpetuated fallacies surrounding the gay community in order to advocate for hope, unity, and more political representation in his audience.

Milk begins his speech using satirical humor to joke about how if Americans were to vote between saving the Pope, the President, and Mayor Daley, it would be Daley because he was “the mayor of the backbone of the United States... and what took place in the archdiocese of Chicago affected Catholicism” (Milk). He uses pathos to lighten the mood and give a subtle nod to multiple things – Daley’s corruption accusations, his support for the Catholic church, the largest anti-gay community, and the American system of the popular vote (Wilgoren). He also uses logos to discredit Anita Bryant, a right-wing activist, and her blatant slandering of gay people. Bryant argues that the draught in California was started by the gay people, and while Milk logically refutes the argument by claiming that it has rained multiple times since he’s been

elected, “the people of San Francisco figure the only way to stop it is to do a recall petition. That’s the local joke” (Milk). The intended audience for his jokes narrows down, as he uses the first to address his whole audience about the state of the political landscape and the second to specifically reach members of the gay community. He uses pathos to comically relieve the hurtful, erroneous assumptions that the gay community faces from political figures while rationally using logos to point out the fallacy behind their words.

Milk continues his speech using logos and pathos to fight against forces that are trying to restrict progressive change for the gay community. By analyzing the media, who promote a movement to the right, the anti-gay, and the anti-progressive, he uses logical reasoning to deduct that “in 1977 we saw a dialogue start” (Milk), with the first election of a gay person, the decriminalization of marijuana, and the National Women’s Conference in Houston (Agresta). He urges his audience to rationalize the inconsistencies between what the media claims is happening and the slow, but perceptible, change that is actually taking place, which is the movement to the cultural left. Milk also brings up the continuous slander that gay people are slapped with, such as associations with pornography and accusations of child molestation. These misconceptions are not only false and damaging to the character of gay people, but they appeal to the audience’s emotions to expand the momentum that has already been created. The hurt and exasperation urges the community to see the need for action by having more gay people in positions of power to actively dismiss the stereotypes.

Speaking of political power and representation for gay people, Milk acknowledges the criticism of whether he has done enough as a representative of the community as the first openly gay elected official. He recounts the tragic death of a gay person three days before Gay Pride Day and how he “walked among the sad and the frustrated... These were strong people, whose

faces I knew... They were strong, but even they needed hope” (Milk). He openly admits that, even with the huge stride of having a position in office, he alone cannot change the discrimination the people face. These strong, resilient people will be left defeated and dejected after every unfair act of hatred. He uses ethos to build credibility as a politician, and as a gay person himself, to mourn over the losses that they face and the pain of not being accepted because of their sexuality. He is standing with them in this fight, marching with them after every setback, and he will never stop fighting for gay rights. However, it is imperative that “gay people run for office and that gay people get elected” (Milk).

In the final words of his speech, Milk changes his tone from discussing the discrimination and stereotypes that the gay community faces to the potential for hope that comes with representation in office. There is a clear, tangible difference between a friend in power and a gay person in power because “a friend has never gone through what is known as coming out” (Milk). He uses pathos to touch a chord with other gay people about the connection that they share – the difficult paths that each individual took to proudly accept their sexuality. It is now time to have “many legislators who are gay and proud of that fact and do not have to remain in the closet” (Milk). The people can no longer be invisible; they can no longer rely on friends who “can sense it in us, but they can’t feel it” (Milk), and thus, cannot fully advocate for their rights. The community needs direct representation, gay elected officials, to serve as “both examples and hope” (Milk) to look up to when they have no one. Milk also calls upon other marginalized groups for assistance and unity, using those communities as an example that “we must give people the chance to judge us by our leaders and legislators” (Milk). He again uses pathos to promote a sense of unity between the gay people and their allies to represent the “green light to

move forward” (Milk)—hope for the same rights, treatment, and representation for gay people as any other citizen in the United States.

Harvey Milk was able to convey many messages of hope, unity, and political representation in his speech using rhetorical devices, such as pathos, logos, and ethos, to construct a better world for the gay community to live in. There has been some progressive change since the 1970’s for the LGBTQIA+ community, such as the legalization of same sex marriage in the U.S. in 2016, or the global celebration of Pride Month. The results of the 2020 election year in the U.S. were met with huge milestones as more LGBTQIA+ candidates won seats in Congress. To name a few, Ritchie Torres and Mondaire Jones became the first two openly gay Black men elected to Congress in New York while Sarah McBride became the first openly transgender person to hold a Senate seat in Delaware. However, this progress is still fragile, and discrimination still remains, especially with the accessibility of healthcare. The future of civil rights for the LGBTQIA+ community is terribly shaken with the recent passing of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a passionate defender of the community. This goes to show how the message of Harvey Milk’s speech still rings true today: that even with progress, there are still factors that make it difficult for the LGBTQIA+ community to find political representation, compassion, civil rights, and hope in order to feel heard and empowered.

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