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RESPONSE TO ADVERSITY

1973 – 1980

BACKLASH
NATIONAL LEVEL ACTIVISM
Protesters against Anita Bryant and the discriminatory California Proposition 6, the Briggs Initiative.

**HARVEY MILK**

1930 – 1978

As openly LGBTQ institutions multiplied in the early 1970s, their emerging voice and visibility made them targets of a series of arson attacks. Arsonists targeted Metropolitan Community Church buildings in Nashville and San Francisco and burnt down the mother church in Los Angeles. Arson fires and bomb attacks destroyed gay bars in San Francisco and Springfield, Massachusetts. Fires claimed LGBTQ services and activists buildings in Phoenix, Buffalo, and New York. In the

**HARVEY MILK HAD BEEN A SCHOOLTEACHER,** insurance company actuary, financial clerk, and Wall Street analyst before moving to San Francisco and becoming a leading figure in the gay rights movement. He ran for a seat on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1973 and again in 1975, before winning in the 1977 election. He became the first openly LGBTQ person to be elected for public office in California.

Milk spearheaded the passing of a city-wide anti-discrimination bill for LGBTQ people. He fought against Proposition 6 to ban LGBTQ teachers from schools, and debated State Senator John Briggs, the proposition’s sponsor, across the state. For many, Milk and his call for all gay and lesbian people to come out of the closet, was the face of the campaign and a main factor in the proposition’s defeat.

On November 27, 1978, former supervisor Dan White assassinated Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone in their offices. Memorial services culminated in more than 25,000 people carrying candles in a silent march from the Castro district to city hall. The 1979 March on Washington was organized in part as a way to honor Milk’s legacy.

**BACKLASH**

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worst catastrophe, thirty-two men died in the arson fire of the UpStairs Lounge bar in New Orleans that doubled as the home for the local Metropolitan Community Church.

In 1977, a conservative uprising headed by singer Anita Bryant fought to roll back LGBTQ equal rights legislation. Their “Save Our Children” campaign helped to reverse equal rights legislation in Dade County, Florida; St. Paul, Minnesota; Wichita, Kansas; and Eugene, Oregon. In California, State Senator John Briggs sponsored Proposition 6, a measure to purge LGBTQ teachers from public schools and prohibit the positive discussion of homosexuality. Municipal Elections Committee of Los Angeles (MECLA), San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk, and activists like Troy Perry, Ivy Bottini, Morris Kight, and Jeanne Córdova led a campaign to defeat the measure at the polls, and won by a 2 to 1 margin.

But the success was marred by tragedy when later that year, San Francisco Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk were assassinated in their offices. The first openly LGBTQ elected official in California, Harvey Milk had become a hero in the community for his outspoken leadership for LGBTQ rights. When assassin Dan White received a lenient 7-year sentence for the murders, the largest LGBTQ riot ever recorded broke out on the streets of San Francisco. Police retaliated against the LGBTQ community by raiding the streets and bars of the heavily LGBTQ-populated Castro District, clubbing citizens and destroying property. An agreement between LGBTQ activists and city leaders ceased the violence and led to a peaceful gathering of 10,000 people on Castro Street to commemorate the fallen leader on what would have been his 49th birthday.

The assassination of Harvey Milk led to a massive candlelight march in San Francisco to honor the LGBTQ leader.
IN THE 1970S, LGBTQ ACTIVISTS sought to build a national movement for LGBTQ rights. In 1973, the National Gay Task Force formed as an advocate for LGBTQ rights, modeled after the American Civil Liberties Union. The Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund was established the same year, becoming the nation’s first LGBTQ legal organization. To bring more political pressure to LGBTQ rights issues, the Gay Rights National Lobby was founded in 1976 and the Human Rights Campaign Fund in 1980. The two organizations would eventually merge to become the largest civil rights organization advocating for LGBTQ Americans. Horizons Foundation, Gay Rights Advocates, Lesbian Rights Project, and Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, emerged at the end of the decade to join the national effort.

In 1979, a massive march on Washington demonstrated the great diversity of people and organizations that had arisen in the decade following the Stonewall riots. The march celebrated the LGBTQ movement’s significant achievements in local communities, its success against sodomy laws at the state level, and the promise of a great coalition at the national level. The march also addressed how much left there was to achieve. There was still no federal or state anti-discrimination legislation for LGBTQ citizens. There were no same-sex partner benefits, even on the municipal level. Challenges against bans on same-sex marriage and gay and lesbian participation in military service had yet to achieve any success.

STEVE ENDEAN 1948 – 1993

INSPIRED BY THE GAY RIGHTS ADVOCACY of Jack Baker and Mike McConnell, Steve Endean joined the gay rights cause while a student at the University of Minnesota. He formed the one-man Gay Rights Lobby and used it to usher through a broad anti-discrimination bill in Minneapolis in 1973. He moved to Washington, D.C., and took over the ailing Gay Rights National Lobby in 1978. Endean focused his efforts on lobbying the United States Congress for a gay and lesbian anti-discrimination bill. Understanding that money means political power, he helped found, then lead, the Human Rights Campaign Fund in 1980.
The Immigration and Naturalization Service still excluded LGBTQ people from entering the country. For all that was built and achieved in a decade, the LGBTQ movement would have to continue the struggle into the following decades for broader civil rights victories.