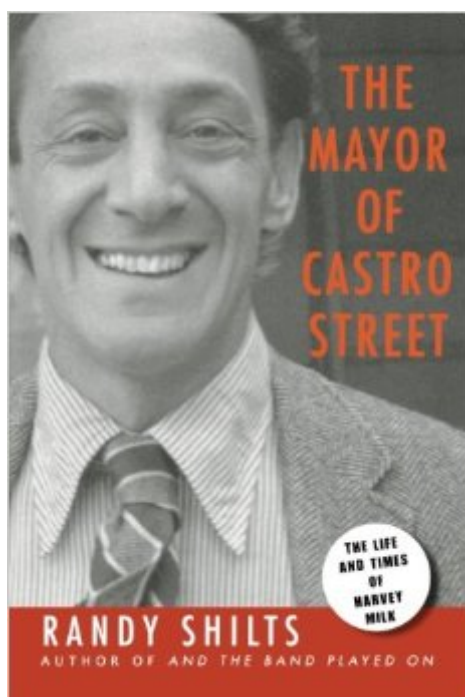


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The Mayor Of Castro Street: The Life And Times Of Harvey Milk



Synopsis

Known as "The Mayor of Castro Street" even before he was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, Harvey Milk's personal life, public career, and final assassination reflect the dramatic emergence of the gay community as a political power in America. It is a story full of personal tragedies and political intrigues, assassinations at City Hall, massive riots in the streets, the miscarriage of justice, and the consolidation of gay power and gay hope. Harvey Milk has been the subject of numerous books and movies, including the Academy Award-winning 1984 documentary, *The Times of Harvey Milk*. His life is also the basis of a 2008 major motion picture, *Milk*, starring Sean Penn.

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Customer Reviews

Harvey Milk has become, deservedly, something of a legend in the gay rights movement and in the broader history of San Francisco politics. In *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk*, Randy Shilts attempts to separate man from myth and then put it back together again. The result is a book which is accessible to both a casual and more academic audience. Shilts's writing style is fresh and casual. It is almost as though the man were sitting in a room having a conversation with you. Episodes are presented as a series of stories that flow throughout the book. So for example, we learn what Milk's lover Scott was doing when he heard the news of his assassination. The writing style lends itself well to a biography and works to make Milk more "human" than might otherwise be achieved. Shilts's writing style can be somewhat problematic,

however, in that the story does not necessarily flow in a linear fashion. For the reader who is interested in the story of Milk from a conceptual or casual interest, this should not be a problem. It could be more problematic, however, for the academic reader looking for a better picture of the linear timeline. A timeline in the appendices of this book would have served this purpose well. Perhaps one of the greatest joys of this book, however, is reading about Milk's fight in his own words. Shilts includes transcripts of some of Milk's more famous speeches in which we learn a great deal about Milk's political beliefs and his thought process in those short months immediately preceding and during his tenure as Supervisor. These speeches, included in the appendix, should not be skipped as they will help to ground the concepts discussed throughout the biography.

Author Randy Shilts was a journalist before he became a best selling author (*And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic, 20th-Anniversary Edition, Conduct Unbecoming: Gays and Lesbians in the U.S. Military*). His chronicling of the life of Harvey Milk from New York to San Francisco bears witness to the everyman struggles of gay men of that period. From the arrests and harassments in bars to the ultimate victory of being the first gay man elected to United States office, Shilts details every aspect of Milk's life. People famous then and now supplied detailed information on the kind of human being that Harvey Milk truly was. (Mind you, this book was written in the early eighties). Told in a quickly paced and unrelentingly thorough style, Shilts shows how an ordinary man like Milk can make a global change (all after age forty). Milk did this before he was assassinated, making his story all the more intriguing, tragic and poetic. The recent Gus Van Sant film does a great service to the novel, but Shilts is the one that truly gets under the skin of Harvey Milk and displays a man full of integrity, conviction and humility. In his reporter's style, Shilts also describes Milk's associates, friends and coworkers, pulling together the fabric of a life cut far too short.

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