HOLLYWOODGLEE, LLC
1226 N Salsipuedes Unit C 1(805)704-5994 |https://hollywoodglee.com Larry@HollywoodGlee.com

Todayâ??s AFI Movie Club Film: MILK

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

A riveting portrayal from Sean Penn celebrating the life and legacy of Harvey Milk, the first openly gay man elected to public office in California. The film was honored with an AFI AWARD in 2008, recognizing it as one of the 10 outstanding films deemed culturally and artistically representative of the yearâ??s most significant achievements in the art of the moving image.

Interesting Facts

MILK was shot on location in San Francisco, utilizing city hall and various locations in the Castro District, including recreating Milkâ??s Castro Camera shop.

Thousands of unpaid extras participated in the candlelight march scene to honor Harvey Milk.

The â??Twinkie defenseâ?• was coined by Dan Whiteâ??s lawyers who argued that his consumption of massive amounts of junk food prior to the shootings contributed to his mental instability. White was subsequently convicted of voluntary manslaughter, rather than first-degree murder, which led to the â??White Night riotsâ?• across San Francisco as well as the state of California abolishing the diminished capacity criminal defense.

Some of Sean Pennâ??s wardrobe in the film was borrowed from Gilbert Baker, a friend of the real Harvey Milkâ??s. Baker is also famous for being the creator of the Rainbow Flag, the symbol of the LGBTQ+ community.

MILK won two Academy AwardsÂ®. Sean Penn won Best Actor and Dustin Lance Black won Best Original Screenplay.

MILK was intentionally released two weeks before the state of California voted on Proposition 8, a referendum to overturn the legality of gay marriage. California passed the proposition, although it has since been overturned.

The real Harvey Milkâ??s last public appearance was attending the San Francisco Opera performance of Puccîniâ??s opera â??Toscaâ?• on November 25, 1978 â?? two days before he was shot and killed. Not only is this event depicted in MILK, but it inspired the filmmakers to use â??Toscaâ?• for all the operatic music heard throughout the film.

Sean Pennâ??s cosmetic transformation in MILK included a prosthetic nose and teeth, contact lenses, and a redesigned hairline. His makeup was done by OscarÂ®-winner Stephan Dupuis.

Warner Brothers was developing another project about Harvey Milk called â??The Mayor of Castro Street,â?• which was ultimately never made? Milk associate Cleve Jones noted that Van Sant was originally considered for the Castro project 18 years earlier.

Matt Damon was originally cast for the role of Dan White but had to back out due to scheduling conflicts. The part was played by Josh Brolin in the final film.

When Gus Van Sant was planning a biopic of Harvey Milk in the early â??90s, he offered the part of Cleve Jones to River Phoenix, who he had just worked with on MY OWN PRIVATE IDAHO. Van Sant had wanted Tom Cruise to play Dan White.

Several associates of the real Harvey Milk appear in small roles in the film, including speechwriter and adviser Frank Robinson, politician Tom Ammiano, fellow board supervisor Carol Ruth Silver and LGBTQ activist Cleve Jones.

In the credits of MILK, Gus Van Sant acknowledges director Rob Epstein and his Academy AwardÂ®-winning 1984 documentary, THE TIMES OF HARVEY MILK, from which he used the footage.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The movie doesnâ??t end at the credits. Engage with your family, friends, and others like you who love movies. Check out the AFI Movie Club Discussion Questions for this movie and post your responses in the comment section!

-Did you know the story of Harvey Milk prior to seeing the film? If so, what did you think of Sean Pennâ??s performance and his transformation into the gay rights icon?

-What was the Briggs initiative and how did Harvey Milk organize and fight against it?

-What cinematic devices did director Gus Van Sant use in the film? Specifically, what did you think of him utilizing tape recordings made by Harvey Milk?

-Harvey Milk is depicted as looking for allies outside the gay male community. How does he represent the qualities of an intersectional activist? What makes a good community organizer and coalition builder?

-What is the significance of the Castro district for the LGBTQ community? Why is it important that the film was actually shot there?

-Harvey is confronted with threats to his life throughout the film. Why do you think he persisted?

-How were LGBTQ youth inspired by the appointment of Harvey Milk to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors? Why is it so important to have members of the LGBTQ community be visible and take part in politics?

-Harvey Milk believed in the transformative power of â??coming out of the closetâ?• in terms of transparency furthering LGBTQ rights. Do you think â??coming outâ?• is important or do you think labels are not essential in modern culture?

-Why do you think Dan White feared Harvey Milk and Mayor Moscone? What was your reaction to the verdict and the â??Twinkie Defenseâ?•?

-How has the LGBTQ community made strides in terms of gaining rights and protections in the U.S.?

-Anita Bryant and John Briggs harnessed religion in their anti-gay campaigns. How are religions diverse and how can we reconcile spirituality with supporting civil rights for the LGBTQ community?

-How would you rate MILK?

About AFI Movie Club

I hope the AFI Movie Club brings some inspiration and entertainment during this uncertain time. AFI has created a global, virtual gathering of those who love the movies where each dayâ??s film â?? announced by a special guest â?? is accompanied by fun facts, family-friendly discussion points and material from the AFI Archive to bring the viewing experience to life. As a non-profit, AFI Movie Club is a member-powered organization, dependent upon the support of its movie fans. To support AFI Movie Club please consider becoming a member or donating.

AFI Movie Club is a newly launched free program to raise the nationâ??s spirits by bringing artists and audiences together â?? even while we are apart. AFI shines a spotlight on an iconic movie each day, with special guests announcing the Movie of the Day. Audiences can â??gatherâ?• at AFI.com/MovieClub to find out how to watch the featured movie of the day with the use of their preexisting streaming service credentials. The daily film selections will be supported by fun facts, family discussion points and exclusive material from the AFI Archive to enrich the viewing experience.

(Source: AFI News Release)

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Author
hollywoodglee