

ONWARD

The Next **50** Years

Inspired by a legacy of *social justice*, leading the *movements* of today.

LANDON RICHIE



Age, occupation:
17, Student

Why did you select Harvey Milk as your social justice icon?

I am an out transgender and gay youth with political experience and aspirations and an innate drive for social justice. For me, Milk is an early embodiment of the notion that our identities do not negate or undermine our ability to enact meaningful change and to step up to and out against institutions and ideologies that disenfranchise, discriminate against and harm marginalized communities. Despite the reality that America and parts of California where he was elected as Supervisor in 1977 still promoted anti-LGBTQ+ mindsets and legislation, he and others

surmounted those obstacles, and their legacy continues to inspire me to this day.

Favorite Harvey Milk quote:

“If a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet destroy every closet door.”

Are there any books, documentaries, films, or articles you would recommend for others to learn more about the work of Harvey Milk?

Milk is a movie on Netflix that’s an engaging and clearly articulated exhibition of Milk’s work prior to and during his time as Supervisor, as well as the progress made by the LGBTQ+ community during that time. I highly recommend it to everyone, regardless of how familiar they are with Milk and his work.

What social, racial, economic, or political justice issue does your social justice work address?

My work primarily addresses LGBTQ+ issues and an even heavier focus on issues specific to the transgender community.

When did you first become aware of/interested in working on your social justice issue?

My personal interest in social justice and advocacy stems from my involvement in the HERO campaign in Houston four years ago, as well as engagement (since 2015) with the Texas Legislature over transgender equality, a battle which directly impacts my life. At the time I was 12 and had come out only a year prior. I was immediately captivated by the work others did and the true power of the people and knew that I wanted to devote my life to this work.



If you could have everyone in the world do one tangible thing to help advance the cause of the issue you work on, what would it be?

I would want people to meet a trans person. To have a conversation and to leave all baggage at the door -- to enter with an open mind. The power of experience is transformative. Until you meet someone who is trans, all you have to base your mindset on is the strongest and most compelling voice, which is most oftentimes a voice that instills fear.

Can you describe the biggest accomplishment/most gratifying moment you’ve had working on your issue to date?

For the past four years, I have been working to change my school district’s non-discrimination policy to include protections for LGBTQIA students and employees, an effort which has included testifying in front of the school board during my 8th-grade year, as well as founding a student-led group of FBISD students to propel the mission forward. Through our group, FortGenderBenders, we started a petition drive throughout the district, exceeding 600 signatures within a year primarily through word of mouth, and campaigned in a local neighborhood to gather additional visible support. These have to be the most gratifying moments. Although we have been unable to change the policy as of now, the dedication and galvanization of the peers I’ve worked alongside has been truly inspiring and energizing.

Who or what gives you the hope and motivation to keep going when you feel fear or doubt about achieving justice?

I’d say that my hope and motivation to persevering is derived from the justice that is being achieved right before our very eyes. Working to achieve social justice is a marathon, not a sprint, and we are running alongside many people through the course of it all. Additionally, the emerging leaders of today and tomorrow instill in me a sense of hope. From the organizers of the US Climate Strike, to March for Our Lives, a drive for social justice is apparent and it’s a beacon of hope that I hold on to.

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What advice do you have for those who care about social justice but don't know how or where to begin?

In advocacy and activism, it is far too often observed that young people's skills, ideas, and ability to affect change is questioned, ignored, and undermined. This ageism can be discouraging, but it should not serve as a deterrent. Instead, use this barrier as an opportunity to show your resilience and ability to overcome challenges. Even though many experienced advocates practice ageism, there are many who are eager to both mentor and elevate younger advocates. Seek them out. The experience and mentorship of adults can help you immensely. We often learn by observing and shadowing others, and although the

experiences held by many adults differ greatly from what we as youth face, there are overlapping similarities, as well as universal truths that can be passed down and enhanced by our generation as they pertain to speaking out against injustices, fighting for necessary change, educating others and ourselves, dispelling myths and stigmas, and most importantly, boldly being our authentic selves. Your age does not equal your ability and power to change the world. Additionally, welcome and seek out opportunities that help increase your personal knowledge surrounding the issues most salient to you. Embrace opportunities to refine the delivery of your own truth. Work steadily toward becoming the most impactful advocate you can be by knowing what you are passionate about, knowing what you are good at, surrounding and aligning yourself with others of like mind, and taking care of yourself.

FUN FACTS

What are some of your hobbies? What do you do for fun?

My hobbies are all over the place. I love photography, reading, exploring nature, creating art, playing music and working out with my dad. Can you count spending too much time at coffee shops as a hobby?

What would people be surprised to know about you?

I think most people are surprised when I disclose that I've been playing the trumpet for 6, going on 7, years!



Landon Richie inspired by Harvey Milk