

You'd have to be well over 30 to have any chance of remembering where you were when ex-marine / cop / fireman / city Supervisor Dan White killed San Francisco Mayor George Moscone and pioneering out gay Supervisor Harvey Milk.

If you don't remember – or weren't born yet – you need to see the Lost Nation Theater production of Emily Mann's recreation of the trial of Dan White in its final week.

Playwright Mann used trial transcripts to recapture the way the system worked to let conservative Catholic neighborhood son Dan White off with a five-to-seven year sentence for the involuntary manslaughter of two progressive politicians, one a gay Jew, the other a liberal Catholic.

So here's the question: was the prosecutor that inept, the jury that bigoted, or the defense that sharp?

Don't look at me for an answer – or at Emily Mann for that matter. You decide how a jury listened to Dan White's taped confession – describing killing Harvey Milk: "He smirked at me ... so I shot him" – and determined that the crime was voluntary manslaughter and not first-degree murder.

According to Mann's choice of focus, the tragedy here seems to belong to Dan White, the golden boy who had and lost it all, the dangerous naïf, the hero with feet of clay. I cry no tears for Dan White. Every murderer claims his act was justified, whether it was one or thou-

"white ethnics" – descendants of Irish and Italian and Polish immigrants – and by the police and the firemen: solid, salt of the earth, 'regular,' people. When he was elected, he lost his job as a fireman because he couldn't legally hold two city jobs at once. And he couldn't support his growing family on his \$9800 supervisor's pay.

He was never a great politician, too absolute in his sense of right and wrong (especially when it was someone else's wrong), never quite able to finesse a deal and make it work. He reneged on a promised vote for a project of the Mayor's, and then felt betrayed when Harvey Milk reneged on a vote Dan White thought he'd earned.

When he began complaining about how unfair it was that he'd had to give up his fire department job when all the other supervisors supplemented their incomes, the big money boys came to the rescue, holding a "Friends of Dan White" fundraiser. This time he got the quid pro quo: his vote in favor of a waterfront development would net him a piece of the action, a lease on a commercial property in the soon-to-be-built "Pier 39." Dan and his family turned the lease into a spot called the "Hot Potato."

That may have been the turning point for Dan White. His wife was working in the shop and his son was in daycare, and he couldn't stand that. He wanted the sweet Mary Ann home with little Charlie where they belonged. The people in his district

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sands. It's the sense of entitlement – I deserve 'x' or 'y' just because of who I am – that leads to violence.

Dan White was the working class hero, son of a fireman, service in Vietnam, cop, fireman, hometown boy made good. He quit the police force when he was ostracized for trying to report another cop for beating up a purse snatcher. He became a fireman, top of his class. He hated feeling pushed out of his city by an influx of immigrants and homos. When he ran for office he called blacks and homosexuals and prostitutes "malignancies" to be eliminated from 'his' city. Dan White felt entitled to be a bigger man in San Francisco and to decide how it was going to be.

Ironies abound. Dan White's run for Supervisor was possible only because of a new districting plan that divided San Francisco into 11 sections rather than having all candidates run from the city at large. Moscone pushed that plan in order to get the city's politics out from under the big money interests downtown. The same plan made possible Harvey Milk's election from the district that included the Castro.

Dan White was backed by

saw his votes going to the pet projects of big business and began a recall initiative. Bills went unpaid, calls from constituents went unanswered, and he felt he could never win the war of words with those slick progressives Harvey Milk and George Moscone.

Frustrated and angry because he felt nothing was going his way, he sent a letter of resignation to the Mayor without consulting his backers. When the news broke, the backers demanded that he rescind his resignation, or at least ask the mayor to reappoint him.

But in the meantime, the Board clerk had stamped a copy of the letter with the official city seal and filed it as completed. And Harvey Milk went to Mayor Moscone and said, look, you can't reappoint him – he's obstructed all the great things you want to do in this city – and with him gone, we can turn the tide toward progressive projects. You can't reappoint him.

The rest, as they say, is history: how Dan White took his .38 service revolver and extra bullets with him when he went to city hall; how he climbed in a side window to avoid the metal detector; how he

asked one more time for his job back; how he shot Mayor George Moscone twice in the chest and twice more in the head; how he reloaded his gun, slipped out of the mayor's inner office by a side door, and roamed the hallways looking for Harvey Milk; how he asked Harvey to see him for a moment; how he fired three shots into Harvey's body and two more into the back of his head as he lay on the floor.

How Diane Feinstein – then the president of the Board of Supervisors – announced in a voice that shook, "Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk have been shot and killed. The suspect is Supervisor Dan White." How the police cheered when the news broke. How Dan White called his wife to meet him in St. Mary's Cathedral and then went to his old precinct to turn himself in to his best friend.

How thousands of queers and straights and drag queens and bulldykes and prostitutes and hippies, white and brown and black and Asian people poured into Castro Street with candles, making a river of light headed to City Center, quietly, peacefully grieving their broken hearts and their murdered dreams. How Joan Baez

was there and sang Amazing Grace. How Harvey himself had said, "If a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet destroy every closet door."

How Dan White was treated with kid gloves by friendly cops while held. How the defense attorney painted Dan White as an all-American hero, a fireman who had rescued a mother and daughter from a burning building. How the verdict came in as two counts of manslaughter and our rage was unleashed in a riot that trashed City Hall and store windows and set fire to a dozen baby blue police cars.

How the police, who had been held back until the crowd was dispersing, hid their badges and nametags and then rampaged through the Castro, through the bars, batons shattering glass and bones, seeking revenge for their humiliation at the hands of their usual prey.

How Dan White went to Soledad Prison, served five years and one month and was released on parole. How he still thought the world owed him something, and when he didn't get it in the 22 months he was free, he taped a hose to the exhaust pipe of his 1979 yellow Buick and ran it into the driver's side window, went to sleep and died with a picture of Ireland in his hand.

It's a history reduced and made more powerful in Lost Nation's production, the way a reduced sauce is boiled down to its essence to concentrate the flavors. Lisa Tromovich, no stranger to producing Mann's moving stories, is back to inspire this multimedia production. Twenty actors play 50 characters and a talented tech crew recreates the chaos of

Murderer of Martyrs Euan Bear looks back at the trial of San Francisco City Supervisor Dan White, the basis of Emily Mann's new production "Execution of Justice"

Dan White (Patrick Clow), Mary Ann White (Jennifer Cassady), and Defense Attorney Douglas Schmidt (David Stradley) bring Emily Mann's script to life in dress rehearsal.



the riot. Because of deadlines, as I write this I have not yet seen this production. But it doesn't matter. By the time you read this, I will have gone – because it's our history, because Emily Mann is an expert at telling the story with words that were really said, because it's important to remember that even nine years after Stonewall, in the gayest city in North America, one "all-American boy" gunned down the Mayor of Castro Street and the Mayor of San Francisco.

Was it homophobia? We tend to think so. But soon before he killed himself, Dan White confessed to his best friend the cop that he had really wanted to kill four people that day – the Mayor, Harvey, and two other liberals, Supervisor Carole Ruth Silver and Assemblyman Willie Brown.

Execution of Justice runs through July 7th. Go to the play, see for yourselves. ▼

In the interest of full disclosure, Mountain Pride Media, which publishes Out in the Mountains, is a co-sponsor of Lost Nation Theater's production of Execution of Justice. The proceeds of one evening's performance last month were donated to MPM.

Sources for this story include www.backdoor.com/castro/milk-page.html; www.notfrisco.com/col-matales/moscone; and the Showtime video, *Execution of Justice*, based on the play by Emily Mann.