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USA

Kamala Harris selection causes racist and sexist backlash by Trump

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Politics in the United States has always revolved around the issue of race and racism. When a woman is tapped for a top elected office, the vile sexism of white men also spills out.

President Donald Trump once again raised the issue of "birthism" regarding Democratic vice-presidential nominee Kamala Devi Harris, due to her parents having been immigrants from India and Jamaica. As he normally does when talking about a strong woman, Trump called Harris "nasty", "mean" and "radical far left".

This is no accident. Black women have always been denigrated more than any other group in US history. Slavery made Black women chattel and baby makers for their rapist owners.

Most Black women and South Asian women take pride in the Harris selection, even if many disagree with her record as a prosecutor and a mainstream Democratic Party politician.

The left is more divided, because Joe Biden is a corporatist presidential candidate. The extreme right-wing presidency of Trump, however, has made Biden appear as a "centre left" bourgeois politician (a "lesser evil" or "palatable" option).

Why Harris' appointment matters

When Biden selected California Senator Harris as his vice president, she became the first Black and South Asian female candidate nominated as president or vice president by either major ruling-class party.

Trump has conducted a foreign and domestic policy of "America First" and white nationalism. In 2016, Trump attacked Mexican immigrants and other people of colour.

Within 48 hours of Harris's selection, Trump challenged her eligibility under the constitution to run for vice president. The constitution states only citizens born in US territory are eligible to do so.

Trump raised his ludicrous "birthism" charge against Harris, who was born in Oakland, California. Her Stanford University economist father, Donald J Harris was born in Jamaica. Her South Asian mother, cancer scientist Shyamala Gopalan, was born in Tamil Nadu, India.

Trump made the same allegation of "foreign born other" against former president Barack Obama.

Not surprisingly, Harris is seen as an "other" by Trump to promote his anti-immigrant and racist ideology. This tactic has been used for two centuries and usually works.

Until 1967, immigration laws favoured immigrants from northern Europe. When labour was needed, the door was opened slightly to others for example, when men from China were brought to California to build the railroad.

In 1967, a sweeping new immigration law was adopted, allowing immigration from Asia, Africa and other non-white countries. Until then, only a few qualified students from the Caribbean, Asia and Africa could attend schools of higher education (except for the all-white colleges in the segregated South).

Early years in Oakland

As a child of the '60s in Oakland, Harris went to protests for civil rights with her father and mother. Her mother encouraged both daughters to identify as "Black".

Harris decided to attend Howard University in Washington DC, a historically Black college, known as the "Harvard of the South". Harris, thus, became deeply rooted in Black politics and culture.

Following university and law school, Harris decided to become a prosecutor rather than a public defender.

The concept of "progressive district attorney" did not exist. It was an unusual choice by a daughter of civil rights supporters. She said she wanted to change the criminal justice system, which disproportionately harms Blacks, by working within the system.

Harris became the first Black and South Asian woman of colour to win the office of District Attorney in liberal San Francisco. She then ran for Attorney General of California. Again, she was first woman of colour to win.

In 2016, Harris became the first woman of colour to be elected to the Senate from California and only the second Black woman in US history.

She sought the 2020 presidential nomination, but could not gain traction, dropped out early and endorsed Biden.

Harris' most principled position as Attorney General in San Francisco was to oppose the death penalty, including after an undercover cop was killed.

At the same time, she did not advance a progressive agenda around prison reform and mass incarceration, and supported the expansion of the police force.

Harris has modified her positions with the rise of the Black Lives Movement. She says she supports BLM but not its most radical demands.

Trump as existential threat

One reason Harris did not win the presidential nomination was that a majority of Black women did not support her because they feared she could not defeat Trump.

Trump is seen as an existential threat to people of colour. History shows how white supremacy remains a dangerous ideology and underpins the capitalist system. The American-style caste system is based on the white caste at the top

and Blacks at the bottom, whatever one's class.

Black people had hoped Obama's election in 2008 could lead to a new recognition that race is an unscientific concept. The hope was that a "colour blind" society could result.

Trump's 2016 victory, however, escalated a white backlash that continues today.

The capitalist system is based on more than private ownership of property and the means of production. It is intertwined with race and racism and maintaining the colour line.

Trump tapped into that conscious and unconscious sentiment among a majority of working-class white men and whites in general. It's why he can still win re-election.

The white nationalist backlash in 2016 is a warning to Black and Brown people of what could happen in the 2020 election. That's why most Black women and men decided to vote for the "safe" white centrist bourgeois politician, Joe Biden.

The left

After Harris accepted Biden's nomination, longtime Marxist and activist Angela Davis spoke about its significance, with a caution, at an online fundraiser: "I don't think that simply finding new actors to participate in a system that is structurally racist and misogynistic is going to lead us in a progressive direction. But, at the same time, I don't think that means that we don't participate in the electoral system."

Davis told Reuters on August 14: "We can't forget some of the real problems that are associated with [Harris'] career as a prosecutor," referring to Harris' role as California's attorney general.

"But ... it's a feminist approach to be able to work with those contradictions. And so, in that context, I can say that, I'm very excited.

"I think it makes the ticket a lot more palatable, that's for sure."

Davis has been a radical activist since the 1960s and is a professor emeritus at the University of California-Santa Cruz. She was also the Communist Party's vice presidential candidate in 1980 and 1984.

Her observation about Harris is what many on the left and socialist movement are considering. Davis posed the contradiction of recognising the significance of Harris' nomination and the fact Harris supports a system based on racism.

There are those leading the street protests in the Black Lives Matter upsurge the Black vanguard who see protests as key to winning reforms and fundamental change to policing and government institutions. The presidential election is seen as important but secondary to the movement.

The Black elected officials in the Democratic Party who back the protests, on the other hand, view voting as primary

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over the next 90 days. They are for modest reforms to policing. They reject demands to defund and dismantle the police. They falsely state there are only a "few bad apples" in policing. Yet, the facts show that most cops are enablers (the "Blue Wall") of the worst cops.

The most radical group is the militants, including socialists, who align with the Black vanguard leadership but advance an anti-capitalist perspective. They see the democratic struggle as the first step toward a radical transformation of the capitalist system.

The Harris nomination is also seen as significant, because it is a way to highlight defence of immigrant rights, civil rights, LGBTI rights and women's rights, especially on the 100th anniversary of women winning the right to vote.

The suffragette movement was historic. But it was influenced by white nationalism. The leaders refused to support Black men getting the right to vote. They also refused to demand that Black women in the legally segregated South be included in the 19th Amendment, adopted in August 1920, which gave women the right to vote. State laws allowed racial discrimination denying Black women and men the vote.

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) the largest socialist group in the US has not yet decided whether to endorse the Biden-Harris ticket. Its general electoral policy is to support DSA members who run for office as Democrats or independents. Some DSA members will likely vote for the Green Party presidential candidate, Howie Hawkins.

The Harris candidacy is significant. But it is not a reason for working people of colour to actively campaign for Biden.

Harris, as his number two, will defend Biden's big business and pro-war policies. Her record as a pro-cop attorney general in San Francisco and California is what matters, not verbal support for Black lives.

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