

# ■ Biden-Harris Campaign Victory Speech

**Date:** November 7, 2020

**Author:** Kamala Harris

**Genre:** speech

## Summary Overview

While it may seem counterintuitive, in some instances crafting a victory speech after an election may be just as difficult as persuading people to vote for a candidate during a campaign. A victory speech does not necessarily need to persuade. Rather, it serves to set a tone for the upcoming term of office for the winner. In Vice President-elect Kamala Harris's victory speech following the 2020 Presidential election, reflects this need to establish goals for the upcoming administration. Beyond policy statements, however, Harris spoke to the essential nature of American democracy itself at a time when the nation was beset by upheaval and pandemic. Without denigrating the defeated opponent, Harris set out a vision that was strongly at odds with the actions and perspective of outgoing President Donald Trump.

## Defining Moment

The Presidential election of 2020 was unique in several ways. The first Donald Trump administration (2017–2021) was fraught with controversy, impeachments, and investigations. The election year of 2020 was no less chaotic, with the added catastrophe of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting the normal processes of campaigning. Restrictions on crowd size and efforts by many states to implement procedures for voting by mail contributed to the sense that 2020 was different than other election years. Furthermore, protests against police violence against minorities in several cities illustrated a growing dissatisfaction with the policies and rhetoric of the time. During their campaign, Democratic candidates Joe Biden and Kamala Harris stressed a commitment to mature, responsive government that would serve all Americans. With the Biden victory in November, Vice President-elect Kamala Harris took the opportunity to make this victory speech in which she continued to highlight the issues facing the United States with which the Democratic candidates had been concerned during the election.

## Author Biography

Kamala Devi Harris was born on October 20, 1964, in Oakland, California. Her parents had both immi-

grated to the United States in search of educational opportunities, her mother from India to study endocrinology and her father coming from Jamaica to pur-



*Kamala Harris. Photo via Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain.]*

sue economics. The family initially lived in Berkeley, California, but moved frequently as Harris's took positions at various universities throughout the United States and Canada.

Harris graduated from Howard University in 1986 and the Hastings College of Law at the University of California (now called UC Law San Francisco) in 1989. Harris began her legal career as a deputy district attorney in Alameda County, California. Throughout the 1990s, Harris held seats on various state boards and commissions. By 2000, Harris headed up the Family and Children's Services Division in the San Francisco city attorney's office. She entered politics in 2003, running for San Francisco district attorney. She won the election—the first person of color to hold the position. Harris served as district attorney from 2004 to 2011, leaving the post after winning election as

California attorney general. She served as attorney general until 2017, during which time she prosecuted a number of cases focused on consumer rights and protections against financial and medical corporations as well as privacy issues related to technological advancements.

In 2017, Harris took office as the junior senator from California, resigning in 2021 to take office as the first woman to serve as vice president. As vice president, she cast a record number of tie breaking votes in her role as president of the U.S. Senate. Harris was also detailed to work with Central American nations to address root causes of illegal immigration to the United States.

Following President Joe Biden's withdrawal from the 2024 Presidential election, Harris became the Democratic Party candidate. She lost the 2024 election to former President Donald Trump.



## Historical Document

### Presidential Campaign Victory Speech

November 7th, 2020

Good evening. Congressman John Lewis, before his passing, wrote: “Democracy is not a state. It is an act.”

And what he meant was that America’s democracy is not guaranteed.

It is only as strong as our willingness to fight for it, to guard it and never take it for granted.

And protecting our democracy takes struggle.

It takes sacrifice. There is joy in it and there is progress.

Because “We The People” have the power to build a better future.

And when our very democracy was on the ballot in this election, with the very soul of America at stake, and the world watching, you ushered in a new day for America.

To our campaign staff and volunteers, this extraordinary team—thank you for bringing more people than ever before into the democratic process and for making this victory possible.

To the poll workers and election officials across our country who have worked tirelessly to make sure every vote is counted—our nation owes you a debt of gratitude as you have protected the integrity of our democracy.

And to the American people who make up our beautiful country—thank you for turning out in record numbers to make your voices heard.

I know times have been challenging, especially the last several months.

The grief, sorrow, and pain. The worries and the struggles.

But we’ve also witnessed your courage, your resilience, and the generosity of your spirit.

For four years, you marched and organized for equality and justice, for our lives, and for our planet.

And then, you voted. You delivered a clear message.

You chose hope, unity, decency, science, and, yes, truth.

You chose Joe Biden as the next president of the United States of America.

Joe is a healer. A uniter. A tested and steady hand.

A person whose own experience of loss gives him a sense of purpose that will help us, as a nation, reclaim our own sense of purpose.

And a man with a big heart who loves with abandon.

It's his love for Jill, who will be an incredible first lady.

It's his love for Hunter, Ashley, his grandchildren, and the entire Biden family.

And while I first knew Joe as Vice President, I really got to know him as the father who loved Beau, my dear friend, who we remember here today.

To my husband Doug, our children Cole and Ella, my sister Maya, and our whole family—I love you all more than I can express.

We are so grateful to Joe and Jill for welcoming our family into theirs on this incredible journey.

And to the woman most responsible for my presence here today—my mother, Shyamala Gopalan Harris, who is always in our hearts.

When she came here from India at the age of 19, maybe she didn't quite imagine this moment.

But she believed so deeply in an America where a moment like this is possible.

So, I'm thinking about her and about the generations of women—Black women.

Asian, White, Latina, and Native American women throughout our nation's history who have paved the way for this moment tonight.

Women who fought and sacrificed so much for equality, liberty, and justice for all, including the Black women, who are too often overlooked, but so often prove that they are the backbone of our democracy.

All the women who worked to secure and protect the right to vote for over a century: 100 years ago with the 19th Amendment, 55 years ago with the Voting Rights Act, and now, in 2020, with a new generation of women in our country who cast their ballots and continued the fight for their fundamental right to vote and be heard.

Tonight, I reflect on their struggle, their determination and the strength of their vision—to see what can be unburdened by what has been—I stand on their shoulders.

And what a testament it is to Joe's character that he had the audacity to break one of the most substantial barriers that exists in our country and select a woman as his vice president.

But while I may be the first woman in this office, I won't be the last.

Because every little girl watching tonight sees that this is a country of possibilities.

And to the children of our country, regardless of your gender, our country has sent you a clear message:

Dream with ambition, lead with conviction, and see yourself in a way that others might not see you, simply because they've never seen it before.

And we will applaud you every step of the way.

To the American people:

No matter who you voted for, I will strive to be the vice president that Joe was to President Obama—loyal, honest, and prepared, waking up every day thinking of you and your families. Because now is when the real work begins.

The hard work. The necessary work. The good work.

The essential work to save lives and beat this pandemic.

To rebuild our economy so it works for working people.

To root out systemic racism in our justice system and society.

To combat the climate crisis.

To unite our country and heal the soul of our nation.

The road ahead will not be easy.

But America is ready. And so are Joe and I.

We have elected a president who represents the best in us.

A leader the world will respect and our children can look up to.

A commander-in-chief who will respect our troops and keep our country safe.

And a president for all Americans.

It is now my great honor to introduce the President-elect of the United States of America, Joe Biden.

[Source: [www.astrid-online.it/static/upload/harr/harris\\_07\\_11\\_20.pdf](http://www.astrid-online.it/static/upload/harr/harris_07_11_20.pdf).]



## Glossary

**Nineteenth Amendment:** ratified in 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment guarantees the right to vote regardless of sex

**Voting Rights Act:** 1965 federal legislation that provides enforcement of voting rights, particularly those of minorities who had been targeted by voter suppression techniques

## Document Analysis

Harris begins her victory speech by quoting the late John Lewis. Lewis was an African American civil rights pioneer who played an active role in sit-ins, the Freedom Rides of the 1960s and served as the chair of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) along with other significant roles in the civil rights movement. From 1987 until his death, he served as the member of the U.S. House of Representatives for the Fifth Congressional District of Georgia. Harris's chosen quotation from Lewis emphasizes the necessary role of active citizen participation in order to preserve democracy in the United States. Harris expands on Lewis's thoughts, highlighting the "struggle" involved in preserving representative government. There is reward in the struggle, however, because the American people "have the power to build a better future" and "progress" results when Americans work together. Harris goes on to assert that democracy itself, and "the very soul of America" was at stake in the 2020 election and with Joe Biden's victory, that voters "ushered in a new day for America."

Harris then moves into the portion of the speech in which she expresses appreciation for those who played a role in the campaign. One notable thing about this section is that Harris does not limit her gratitude to those who worked specifically on the Biden campaign or even those who worked more broadly on behalf of Democratic Party candidates. Rather, she includes praise for those who served in positions as poll workers and other election officials who had a significant administrative rather than partisan role in ensuring that the election process demonstrated "the integrity of our democracy." Harris goes on to thank the American people for voting in record numbers. As with her praise of election officials, Harris is careful not to restrict her gratitude to those who voted for the Democratic Party candidates. Here, Harris is again focusing on the exercise of democracy as the most vital part of the 2020 election.

Next, Harris transitions from tanking supporters and workers to acknowledging the struggles that Americans had faced, particularly during 2020. References to grief and sorrow evoke ongoing concerns

about the COVID-19 pandemic. She also acknowledges the marches, protests, and other demonstrations that had taken place during 2020 and throughout the four years of the Trump administration. Harris ends this brief portion of the speech by asserting that the outcome of the election indicates a choice by the American people for a number of positive attributes including hope, decency, and truth. These attributes are personified by President Elect Joe Biden.

Here, Harris segues into praise of the winning presidential candidate, choosing to concentrate on Biden's track record as a unifying and healing force who has a track records of being a "steady hand." She also focuses heavily on Biden's love for his family as well as the loss he has suffered during his life. From here, Harris addresses her own family, expressing thanks to her husband, children, and others. She next emphasizes the role that her mother played in her development, highlighting her mother's journey as an immigrant to the United States as well as her role as a woman of color from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Harris provides a brief summary of the milestones achieved by American women on the road to full political, civil, and legal rights.

Harris concludes her victory speech by proclaiming that she will serve all Americans "no matter who [they] voted for." She also sets out a list of goals for the administration, ranging from the continued fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, economic recovery, the elimination of systemic racism in the justice system, and dedication to environmental concerns. Harris closes by assuring Americans that Joe Biden will be a president who will be able to accomplish those things.

## Essential Themes

Kamala Harris's 2020 victory speech not only reiterates the policy goals of the incoming Biden administration but also tries to reinforce fundamental democratic principles, particularly free and fair elections. From her opening quotation of John Lewis to her nonpartisan recognition of poll workers and election officials and all Americans who took part in the election, Harris connects her concerns for "the very

soul of America” to the act of participatory government. While Harris also took time to recognize the contributions and sacrifices made by women—especially women of color—her comments on the integrity of the elections proved prescient throughout the subsequent months as the Trump administration and its allies filed numerous unsuccessful lawsuits disputing the election outcome, spawning conspiracy theories, and ultimately resulting in the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, which aimed to prevent the peaceful transfer of power. In the aftermath of the election of 2020, Harris’s concerns for “our very democracy” continue to resonate.

—Aaron John Gulyas, MA

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