



**KAMALA HARRIS, HIGH HOPES AND HARD CHOICES:
WORDS TO THE WISE, WOKE AND WONDERING**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

THERE IS A HUGE AND UNDERSTANDABLE sigh and feeling of relief that President Joe Biden has decided not to run for president again and most likely lose to Donald Trump whose mind is amazingly mean-spirited and small and whose flaws are uncontestedly numerous and negative to the health and welfare of the country. There is also praise for Biden for an uncommon act of those in power, putting his country's and party's interests above his own, and equally for endorsing Vice President Kamala Harris as his successor. And there is a mighty surge of energy, interest and high hopes for VP Harris' campaign, victory and presidency. For it is constantly said that it is vital to defeat Donald Trump who poses "an existential threat to our democracy".

Party leaders, politicians in general and a wide range of organizations and persons have also endorsed Harris and raised for her more money in one single first day, \$81 million, than any other presidential candidate in history. Moreover, 44,000 women, especially Black women, crowded on a zoom call on that day to discuss strategies and make commitments. And on Monday, the organization WinwithBlackmen.org held a similar meeting to mobilize and organize for Harris and the Democratic ticket. Also, on the first day of announcement, 28,000 volunteers stepped up to commit to serve in the campaign. Certainly, this marks a radical change in the fate and fortunes of the Democratic Party, strengthening its aspiration and will to win.

And yet, although there is great celebration and interest in working to win with and for Harris, there are also understandable concerns, as was with President Barack Obama, about her safety, the low-life tendencies and talk of her opponent, Trump,

racist and sexist attacks in general, and the toll it will take on her. Furthermore, there are apprehensions that the donor class not only didn't want Biden, but also didn't want Harris and would try to negate the will of the people expressed in the primaries and endorsed by Biden by calling for an open convention and engaging in a self-destructive struggle. However, the surge of support has muted such calls, if not fully ended them. Indeed, it is common knowledge, spoken loudly and clearly, that if Harris is denied what she has rightfully earned in the primaries, in service as VP and through endorsements by Biden and others, the Democratic ticket cannot count on Black people's vote and the vote of others with similar commitments, and would surely lose this coming election.

Also, it is important that we realize this will be no easy victory and will take all the support Harris can muster. Thus, one can give credit to Democrat donors and politicians for getting Biden to step down, but we cannot in all honesty deny or diminish the role young people and other activists on campus and in community played, condemning and resisting Biden's unconditional support for Israel's genocidal war in Gaza Palestine. For it is these struggles and the resultant uncommitted vote that offered unavoidable evidence Biden could not win the coming election and thus, opened the way for Harris to step up and offer a new way forward in both national and international policy whether in Palestine, Haiti, Africa or elsewhere.

Clearly, again Black people, Black women and Black men, will play a decisive role in this election as always. And as they are committed to support Harris for president and the Democratic ticket, they must

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also work to ensure that she and the party reciprocate and support domestic and international policies they hold as vital and important. This is especially true for Vice President Harris, herself, who has from the beginning been uniquely embraced by Black women as well as Black people as a whole and must return the appreciation in an equal and similar manner. This calling for reciprocity in relationship is called *cherishing and challenging* those we care about and who are committed to, particularly in the collective struggle for substantive and secure freedom, racial and social justice, and a shared and inclusive good in this country and the world.

It is said that the election is about saving democracy which is a kind of rephrasing of saving the soul of America and related salvational national projects. But there has been overfocus on ideas and declarations of aspirations rather than putting in place policies and practices that concretely serve and satisfy the interests of the people. We all are interested in saving democracy, but not in its old form as simply a procedural democracy rather than a substantive one, by claiming justice can be achieved in an unjust system simply by going through procedures and letting the process play itself out. Nor do we want a democracy which literally means “rule of the people”, but translates in life as “rule of the rich” who buy elections, deny decent wages and workers’ and other rights, and horde the wealth of the world leaving the majority of the world to suffer and eke out a living as well as they can. Thus, saving democracy must mean saving the people, all the people, especially the most vulnerable, creating conditions and capacities for them to live dignity-affirming, good and meaningful lives and flourish.

Yes, it is good to talk about saving democracy and even the rule of law, but not the law of the right-wing zealots who use the law to deny human and civil rights, i.e., the

right to life, the security of life, food, water, income, healthcare, housing, quality education, voting and reproductive rights and other life essentials. Indeed, already a platform has been created and most likely one not fully in the image and interests of the people and certainly not in recognition of the new realities shaping this election and the history of this country.

The need, then, is to engage in a serious and sustained effort to craft and share an agenda that justifies the people’s happiness and high hopes at the turn of events and the possibilities now open for a new way forward. It is not enough to appeal to fear of Trump and Project 2025 or even to simply be against evil, injustice and oppression or planned and promised fascism. We must also have policies, practices and proposals for alternative ways of governing, living, relating, working, respecting the environment and sharing and enjoying an inclusive good.

We have no illusions about the compromises and deals made to win, to build coalitions, to secure donations and to avoid vulnerabilities of all kinds that can be exploited by the opposition or misunderstood by the masses. We know too about the conversations of facing selective facts, counsels to wait until, to consider timing and be realistic. But as we said in the 60s, “as for reality, we have come to change it”. Thus, even if the platform cannot take all the hard lines needed, it must lay moral, political and policy ground that envisions and points toward an ultimate inclusive good indispensable for a just society and the well-being of the world. It cannot be overstressed that these issues must be voiced and these commitments gained in honest and frank negotiations *before the victory is won and voters and satisfying their needs become a less urgent concern*. Indeed, we must know at the beginning where we are headed, what are the central commitments and concerns and benchmarks to measure progress. For as our

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honored ancestors taught, “if you know the beginning well, the end will not trouble you”.

| FINALLY, NO ONE SHOULD MINIMIZE THE awesome responsibility placed on Vice President Harris in this difficult and demanding situation and the shared responsibility which must be embraced by all who support her and the possibility of reimagining and reconstructing this country in more dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and world-preserving ways. The hour is late, the tasks are many and the burden is great. And our

people, above all, who have served as a critical moral and social vanguard for this country since our arrival, must understand this election, not as a total solution, but as another ground of struggle to expand the realm of freedom, justice and good in the world. For if we fail to understand the election as a means rather than an end, even if we win the election, we could lose the struggle for a truly just society, one irreversibly committed to inclusive human good and the well-being of the world and all in it. ▲

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