



What Kamala Harris' Campaign Meant To Women Of Color

NATALIE GONTCHAROVA
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By running for president, Sen. Kamala Harris made history, as well as challenged stereotypes and preconceptions about women of color in this country head-on. For many women, particularly women of color, Harris — who would have been the first Black woman and the first South Asian woman to win a presidential nomination — was an important example of representation in politics.

The challenges she faced show that all women, but especially those from minority backgrounds, who run for office don't just face double standards, but research shows they often have to convince voters of their qualifications *and* credibility. The field is much less diverse now that Harris has dropped out, with the lineup on the December debate stage shaping up to be all-white.

We asked eight women of color what Harris' campaign meant to them, and the lessons we can learn from it for the future. Read their reactions, ahead.

L. Joy Williams, Political Strategist, President Of Brooklyn NAACP, Chair Of Higher Heights PAC

"I often had to ask myself if I was holding her to a higher standard because she is a Black woman. Was I expecting her to be the perfect Black candidate and the perfect Black woman candidate? It is normal in my circles, which include people of color, to ask the question of whether a candidate of color is 'electable,' and what we really mean is, will white folks vote for them? The candidates of color in this primary race have a higher bar and we also have different expectations of them. We put all of our hopes and desires onto their shoulders, and while we the voters are expecting them to clear certain hurdles, so is the political establishment, donors, and mainstream media. That is a lot to carry and live up to while also trying to do the basic mechanics of running a presidential campaign, while your opponents are allowed to make mistakes and enjoy more grace and support based on their potential."

10 years from now folks gonna be using Kamala Harris image like they do Shirley Chisholm and I'm gonna be there to cuss folks out

— L. Joy Williams (@ljoywilliams) December 3, 2019

Abby L., Activist

"I never fully understood the power that representation had until I experienced it myself. After Hillary Clinton lost in 2016, I knew that I couldn't just stand on the sidelines. I went to Washington, D.C., in the summer of 2017 to intern for a youth-rights group. While I was there, I had the opportunity to watch Sen. Kamala Harris in a Senate hearing with Jeff Sessions. After the hearing, I had the rare opportunity to run into her as she headed back to her office. I always joked with people that if I met her, I'd cry. But when she took the time to stop and talk to me, I did cry. I was almost speechless. When I found out that Sen. Harris was suspending her campaign for president, I cried again. This photo is worth 1,000 words. It shows the raw emotion and connection that people feel when they are seen and can see themselves in someone else. The influence that representation has is powerful. And even though many of us in the #KHive are mourning, we will continue to do the work."

Ally Maldonado, Student

"This campaign has singlehandedly changed my life. And I say that with so much gratitude in my heart. I had the honor of being in Oakland for her opening rally, where her words touched my soul. It was a moment of clarity and courage for me. I came out to my mom because of how safe I felt after Kamala spoke. Because I knew, this was a woman who spoke truth and valued EVERYONE.

"Aside from that, I have created friendships, heard stories, told stories, and learned so much about teamwork and the power we have in creating and pushing for progressive change. The sense of community and passion that has surrounded me these last 10 months has enriched my life.

"Because of Kamala, more barriers have been broken. Women of color and little girls see themselves; they see all they can achieve and more. Representation matters! This has been an experience of a lifetime, and I will continue to support and admire Kamala for the exceptional politician and human being she is."

Ally is an inspiration. Her story can teach us all about the importance of speaking our truths.
pic.twitter.com/UoqosXSLCm

— Kamala Harris (@KamalaHarris) May 29, 2019

Na'ilah Amaru, Policy Strategist, Iraq Veteran

"The end of Kamala Harris' candidacy reinforces a brutal truth that women of color understand from our own lived experience: We must be twice as good for half the opportunity — and even then, that may not be enough. The journey toward political representation for women of color in America is paved with gendered and racial roadblocks, demanding that women of color prove their credibility, likability, and electability — all concepts deeply rooted in racism and misogyny. As such, women of color offering their political leadership must fight media narratives and political systems that replicate the systems of power and privilege this country was founded on.

"Still, it was inspiring to see the third Black woman run for the highest office in the land, and it is painful when Black and brown women are torn down in the pursuit of claiming our space in American democracy. At the intersection of history and hope, there is space and opportunity for us to reflect as a nation regarding the impact of race, gender, and political representation. In time, we will elect our first president who is a woman of color. Until then, we must challenge ourselves to do and be better in supporting Black and brown women who run for public office. Thank you Shirley Chisholm, Carol Moseley Braun, and Kamala Harris for lighting the way."

Miriam Cash, EMILY's List Press Secretary

"I think that we're all inherently excited by someone who 'looks like us.' We want our representatives to share the diversity of our country. But for Kamala, it wasn't just that she looked like a Black woman, but at her core she also understood the complex struggles of Black women in America. We watched her deal with them every day on the trail. The critiques she faced, the different set of standards she was held to, the way she and her campaign were discussed by pundits and the media, were so relatable to so many of us who know what it's like to not be heard, to be discounted, to be the only one in the room, and to have that room be surprised when you open your mouth because you're different from what they expected. We were able to watch in real time, on a national stage, what it's like to be a woman of color in America — and many still don't get that. More than that, so many of us received a new example of what it means to be a successful woman of color. We're too often put into a singular box, but Kamala — a woman so incredibly intelligent, beautiful, tough, cool, funny, and kind — reflected the multidimensional experience we live each day."

Tonya Williams, EMILY's List Director Of Strategic Communications

"I am saddened by the news of Sen. Harris suspending her campaign. Before the first debate, I knew she would be participating, but what I was not prepared for was the pride I'd feel seeing a Black woman standing there commanding the stage and solidifying her place. And the fact that I shared the moment with my 6-year-old daughter made me emotional. Even as things seemingly became more difficult on the trail, and she endured unusually harsh media coverage, Sen. Harris remained poised and in control with an unfaltering energy and spirit. We all knew she would have to maintain that composure no matter what, because that's what is required of women and especially women of color. I wish that she could have stayed in the race longer, but I'm still proud and my daughter is proud. And I'm hopeful, because I know that her work isn't done. If anything, I believe she is ready to continue the fight for our democracy."

Erika Lee, Web Producer At CBS L.A.

"It was definitely shocking to hear that Kamala Harris dropped out before many other men who were polling way below her. Although I am undecided about who I want to be president, there is no doubt that her campaign made an impact on women of color. She came so far, inspired us, and made us see that it was possible for a WOC to become president. I would have expected the white men polling at 0% to drop out before her."

Aimee Allison, She The People Founder

"It was evident when Sen. Kamala Harris launched her campaign that she would be a formidable contender for the White House — one who was able to attract a multiracial and enthusiastic base that would fuel her historic bid. I had hoped that she would be able to recapture some of that early excitement. As a Black woman, I know from personal experience that Kamala has to work three times as hard as some of the other candidates in this race to get half as far."

"Kamala's presence in the race helped blaze a trail for the next generation of women of color. She ran a competitive campaign that has forced us to rethink what it means to be electable. But her journey is not over. We believe her political career will continue to grow and she will become stronger and rise up higher from this experience."