

# CULTURE

## One of Kamala Harris' biggest challenges is called

# 'misogynoir'

**A TV host, a singer and a director, among others, have laid the foundations for Americans to see Kamala Harris as a presidential candidate. But she still has to fight against stereotypes and an ancient double hatred all the way back to the White House.**

### US presidential election



EMILIE MAARBJERG DARK

himself as a presidential candidate, an invitation to a Zoom call began. When Joe Biden's campaign launched the call, it was to take place immediately evening with the purpose of gathering people, that would contribute to the name of the country's next president being Kamala Harris.

The organizers hoped for courage 1,000 participants, says the professor Rebecca Wanzo fra Washington University i St. Louis.

But during the three hours, the call lasted, more than 44,000 blacks participated women.

Together they collected over 10 million kroner.

"It gives a sense of where many African American women there is prepared to mobilize", says Wanzo, who has researched political narratives about black American women.

There is an expression called *linked fate*, she says. It refers to a idea that the success of black people is connected regardless of social class.

"The zoom call makes it clear that many black women now have a feeling of sharing a fate with Harris. If it looks like she has a chance, will

they redoubled their efforts and work to get her chosen", says Rebecca Wanzo.

The support of black women is just one of the ways in which Kamala Harris' skin color becomes important for the campaign, which, by all accounts, she must lead towards 5 November with the goal of becoming American president.

And many of the other meanings are negative.

That she as a black woman can stand as a credible bid for a candidate for the summit of all summits, witnesses about a development in the views of Americans on black women, the experts believe, that Politiken has spoken to. But the experts also see how Harris is already being attacked in ways that write her off based on her

identity as a black woman.

And they fear that her pursuit of the highest office will give birth to one wave of hatred and revenge from groups, whose ideal president is neither female or black.

Because that hatred will not only affect Harris himself.

### Conglomerate of black women

Never before has a black woman been top candidate for the post of American president. Yes, actually no one has of the 50 states a black woman who governor, and Harris is the first black woman in office as vice president. For that reason alone, she writes history.

Although a black woman is now standing the doorstep to the oval room, racism and sexism are still contemporary phenomena, points out Rebecca Wanzo from University of Washington. But the Americans have seen over the past decades black women in more and more contexts.

"They meet more black women at work or in their educational life and sometimes in their neighbourhood," says Rebecca Wanzo.

"Black women have worked hard to show the diversity of their life and abilities, and it has had meaning".

Stereotypical narratives about blacks women as either hot-tempered and celebrity-seeking or servile caregivers has characterized American society. But the stories have become more now-

anchored, says Aria S. Halliday, who is Associate Professor of Women's Studies and African-American Studies at the University of Kentucky.

She singles out a number of black women who have worked particularly hard for that case.

"You can't avoid that mention Oprah Winfrey," says Halliday.

"She was decisive in how white households experienced black women, especially in the 1980s and 90s, before people integrated elsewhere. She was a talk show host and people felt close to her because she guided them through difficult personal stories. I think she has paved the way for think of black women as help-sum".

After her talk show ended in 2011, Oprah Winfrey has engaged in films such as 'The Color Lilac' and 'The Princess and the Frog' that have in common that they puts black women's stories at the centre. Aria Halliday doesn't mean either,

### BLUE BOOK

## Kamala Harris

**Born 1964** in Oakland, California.

**Vice President of the United States** since January 2021.

**Former Senator** for California 2017-2021.

**Attorney General** of California 2011-2017.

San Francisco **Public Prosecutor** 2004-2011.

**Lawyer** from the University of California with minor in political science.

**The daughter** of a Jamaican father, who is a professor emeritus at Stanford University, and an Indian mother, who researched cancer.

**Married to** the lawyer Douglas Emhoff and stepmother of two children.

**Expected to be** nominated as presidential candidate by the Democrats convention 19.-22. august

that you can get around Beyoncé.

"Whether you have a terrible or an amazing experience, Beyoncé has a song for it, and in that way have she created a soundtrack for many people's experiences. That makes her one kind of cultural authority. And it shapes, how people think of black people in general," says Halliday.

Finally, she mentions director and producer Shonda Rhimes, who also has hit after hit behind him. Including the monster success 'Grey's Anatomy', which ran over 21 seasons, and the series 'Scandal', 'Bridgerton' and 'Queen Charlotte'.

"Shonda Rhimes has been involved to shape how we think about relationships and culture. Before 'Grey's Anatomy' had people not really seen black people as doctors. And 'Scandal' acts about a black woman who has a relationship to the president, and who pulls the strings on many political issues", says Aria S. Halliday.

She could name others, she says. "But the conglomerate of black women has shaped what we as a society are finds okay, and I think that it has contributed to the fact that a person like Kamala Harris can become president."

### Misogynoir

Regardless of the amount of television series and cultural icons that convey strong, positive narratives about black women, Harris' identity becomes a point of attack for her political opponents.

Rebecca Wanzo is already seeing how-when Harris is exposed to it, the American researcher Moya Bailey has called *misogynoir*, a mixture of misogyny and hatred of black people.

"It unfolds when Harris is accused of having dated successful men in his past and thus not having earned his position by virtue of his own effort. And when it is suggested that she is not intelligent enough, that she has not accomplished something", says Rebecca Wanzo. One of those who messed around in Kamala Harris' past, is the right-wing activist Matt Walsh.

He wrote on Sunday to his 2.9 million followers on X that Kamala Harris got his political start by sleeping with Former mayor of San Francisco Willie Brown.

"She has made a career out of

ask for alms from powerful men. A completely unimpressive person," as he put it.

That they have used sex to get a front pocket is an accusation like countless others women have met.

But Rebecca Wanzo also sees Harris be exposed to stereotyping that aiming more specifically at hers skin color.

"A term that *uppity* is used for especially black women who seem too self-assured. There are cultural regulations for, how grateful and caring black women have to behave in order to be likable, and as a highly educated black woman, Kamala Harris runs the risk of people seeing her as, for example, cold", says Rebecca Wanzo.

"On the contrary, they think she's laughing too high. These are the kinds of paradoxes that she will face".

None of that criticism is essentially about Kamala Harris's political views. But even if presidential elections involve real political issues, according to Wanzo, it may become difficult to separate Harris's politics from other factors, that shapes how voters perceive her.

"The task will be to distinguish between, when people criticize Harris for her views on real politics

questions and when the criticism is expression of racist, sexist and misogynist reactions to her as black woman", says Wanzo.

*Conversely, isn't there a risk that one comes to interpret criticism of hers policy such as racism or sexism against her?*

"I think you can have real ones conversations about who she is as a candidate when you focus specifically on political issues and merits. But attacks on her as a person and on her achievements will be intertwined with racist and sexist narratives, so it is difficult to separate", says

Rebecca Wanzo.

"We know that charisma and performance mean something to political candidates, but it is wishful thinking to think that if people were aware that avoid those narratives, they would perhaps focus on the substance. Because no kandidat in the USA can run a campaign on substance alone".

The reactions that are expressed

Kamala Harris is the daughter of an Indian mother and a Jamaican father and defines herself as a black woman.

She can expect massive support from other black women, experts say.

Photo: Evelyn Hockstein/Ritzau Scanpix

opposition to black women risks not only affecting Harris.

Since her candidacy it became most likely path forward for the Democrats' presidential campaign, has Black American women shared calls on social media to take care on himself.

According to Aria S. Halliday from the University of Kentucky, the calls are an expression of a fear that more black women will experience harassment in their everyday lives, because Harris, with his candidacy, is manifesting conservative men's fear of, that their power is waning.

"The shift is a physical representation of a white man being replaced by a black woman," says Aria S. Halliday.

Kamala Harris is the daughter of an Indian mother and a Jamaican father and willingly takes on the identity of a black woman. IN sin selvbiografi, 'The Truths We Hold', she writes:

"My mother understood very well that she raised two black girls'.

But even if thousands of black women support her, they must also be careful of seeing her as a black woman above all, assesses Aria Halliday.

Because her story may live on not up to their expectations.

"She is an elite person. It is not as with Joe Biden, who is from the working-class industrial area of Scranton.

She is a Californian. She attended a historically black college and university, but she was a prosecutor. A lot of people is in jail because of her. It is not life stories that settle down nicely on top of each other", says Aria S. Halliday.

"I think we should talk about Kamala Harris as representative, but not as a generalizable representative for all".

Photos: Evelyn Hockstein; zz/ndz/star Max/iph; Chris Pizzello; Andy Kropa; Lucas Jackson/Ritzau Scanpix emilie.mork@pol.dk