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Biden picks former law-and-order prosecutor Kamala Harris to be his Democratic running mate

Former Vice President Joe Biden announced Tuesday afternoon that he had selected Senator Kamala Harris as his running mate in the 2020 presidential election. The decision, entirely predictable and widely expected, confirms the right-wing political orientation of the Democratic presidential ticket.

Biden has a 48-year political career in which he has been identified primarily with intensified police repression at home and the ferocious defense of the interests of American imperialism abroad. The 77-year-old candidate will now have a 55-year-old running mate with her own right-wing credentials: as a law-and-order prosecutor and attorney general in California, and, since coming to Washington in 2016, an advocate and defender of the military-intelligence apparatus.

Biden's statement came on social media less than a week before the opening of the Democratic National Convention, which will nominate the Biden-Harris ticket to face Trump and the Republicans in the November election. He tweeted that Harris was "a fearless fighter for the little guy."

The truth is that during her 26 years as a prosecutor—first in Alameda County (Oakland), then San Francisco, then for California as a whole—Harris was putting "the little guy" in jail, while she cultivated relationships with the wealthy San Francisco elite (including the Getty oil billionaires), who became her principal political backers.



Kamala Harris, then California Attorney General, poses for a photo with U.S. border patrol agents at the U.S.-Mexico border fence in 2011 (Photo: Office of the Attorney General of California)

Neither Harris nor Biden is associated with any popular social movement or linked to the advocacy of any significant social or political reform. They have carried out their entire political careers under conditions where the Democratic Party has been moving steadily, and ever more rapidly, to the right.

For 36 years Biden was a senator from Delaware, the state where American corporations go to escape regulations, taxes and government oversight. The tiny state has fewer than one million people, but more than one million corporations are headquartered there, thanks to a political environment that guarantees low taxes and look-the-other-way enforcement.

Biden entered the Senate in 1972 and was always associated with right-wing, pro-corporate politics, rising to become chairman of the Judiciary Committee, then chairman or ranking Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee. He was chosen by Barack Obama to be his running mate in 2008 for precisely that reason: to reassure Wall Street and the Democratic establishment, in the midst of a global financial crisis, that there would be nothing radical about an Obama presidency.

Harris, a generation younger, made her career in the Bay Area, dominated by the Democratic Party politically, during the time when vast fortunes were being made in Silicon Valley. She proved her political worth to big business in her 2003 campaign for San Francisco district attorney. Harris ran as a law-and-order candidate, backed by the police unions and big business, and defeated the “left” incumbent, Terence Hallinan, who had close ties to the Stalinist-led trade unions and the sizeable radical milieu.

Establishing close ties to the older, established wealth of San Francisco, anchored in banking, oil and real estate, Harris followed in the footsteps of two other prominent and wealthy San Francisco Democrats—Dianne Feinstein, first mayor, then US senator, and Nancy Pelosi, congresswoman and now speaker of the House. After six years as San Francisco DA, Harris was the consensus choice of the Democratic Party establishment to succeed Jerry Brown as state attorney general in 2010, and then to take the open US Senate seat in 2016.

Democratic Party officials and their media acolytes have hailed the “historic” character of the selection of Harris, the first African-American woman on a major party ticket. This chorus of praise includes Bernie Sanders, who declared that Harris “will make history.” But despite the hosannas from the advocates of identity politics, her ethnicity and gender provide no assurance about the “progressive” character of her politics.

If anything, the opposite has been the case. Harris has frequently traded on her status as the first black woman to be district attorney, the first black woman to be state attorney general, the second black woman to hold a US Senate seat, etc., as a political screen to cover the right-wing policies she advocates and the social class that she defends: the corporate elite of multi-millionaires and billionaires.

She has now joined this class herself, thanks in part to her marriage to millionaire entertainment industry lawyer Douglas Emhoff. The couple had an adjusted gross income of \$1.88 million in 2018, putting them in the top 0.1 percent of American society.

Objectively speaking, there is little to distinguish Harris, with only four years in the US Senate, from other potential alternatives for the vice presidency. She is not notably more qualified than dozens of other senators, governors or representatives. But in the eyes of the advocates of identity politics, in and out of the corporate media, Harris’s mediocrity and right-wing politics count for nothing compared to her skin color and gender.

In her unbounded opportunism and ruthless pursuit of her own career and economic interests, Harris personifies both the social psychology and class basis of identity politics. It is the politics of privileged layers of the upper-middle class, including but not limited to minorities, that use race, gender and sexual orientation to conceal the fundamental class divisions in capitalist society, channel social opposition behind the Democratic Party, and carve out a greater share of the wealth of the top one percent for themselves. It is organically hostile to the interests of the working class and socialism.

Identity politics was the key to Biden's own campaign for the presidential nomination, which he based on the mobilization of support from the Congressional Black Caucus and African-American businessmen and Democratic Party operatives, trading on his role as Obama's vice president. Prior to the Obama administration, he had no significant connection to civil rights struggles and won no significant black support in either of his own presidential campaigns, in 1988 and 2008.

With the emergence of Bernie Sanders as the leading candidate for the nomination, with victories in New Hampshire and Nevada and a tie in Iowa, the Democratic Party establishment launched an all-out drive to block the self-proclaimed "democratic socialist" and deliver the nomination to its choice, the former vice president.

The critical turning point in February 2020 came with the fulsome support of Representative James Clyburn, the political boss of the Democratic Party in South Carolina and the third-ranking Democrat in the House of Representatives, as majority whip. Biden had been badly beaten in the first three primaries, but won by a landslide in South Carolina, thanks to a large African-American turnout.

Besides Clyburn's support, Biden was assisted by the withdrawal of Kamala Harris, who folded up her own presidential campaign in December 2019, and Cory Booker, who dropped out a month later, insuring that there would be no African-American candidate to draw away votes from Biden in South Carolina.

Within days, two more Democratic rivals, Amy Klobuchar and Pete Buttigieg, threw their support to Biden, allowing him to sweep the Super Tuesday primaries and become the virtually unchallenged frontrunner. Soon afterwards, Harris endorsed Biden and began campaigning aggressively for him in states like Michigan.

Those celebrating the elevation of a black woman to the presidential ticket seem to forget that only 12 years ago an African-American man, Barack Obama, was elected to the presidency. Despite the claims that the first black president would be a transformational figure, Obama proved to be a thoroughly reactionary defender of Wall Street and the CIA. He bailed out the banks and the stock exchange, forced auto workers to take wage cuts, continued the wars of George W. Bush and added new ones, including Libya, Syria and Yemen.

The disappointment and disillusionment in Obama's empty promises of "hope" and "change" found expression in the shift of significant sections of the working class, white and black, away from the Democratic Party, leading first to the Republican takeover of

Congress—the House in 2010, the Senate in 2014—and then the election of Trump in 2016.

One element in Biden's decision to choose Harris as his running mate is the need to provide some stimulus, even as poor as this, to black voter turnout in cities like Milwaukee, Detroit, Cleveland and Philadelphia, where the 2020 election could well be won or lost.

Biden is also seeking to demonstrate to his real constituency, the American ruling elite, that he will represent a steadier hand than the erratic and impulsive Trump. If the selection of Kamala Harris is the conventional, safe and predictable choice, that only underscores his pledge to be a conventional, safe and predictable defender of the interests of corporate America, in contrast to Trump, who is increasingly regarded in the ruling class as a destabilizing factor who provokes mass opposition through his incendiary, authoritarian and racist tirades.

It is significant that on the eve of the selection of Harris, and the week before the Democratic National Convention, the *New York Times* ran a major report on the growing support for Biden on the stock exchange, while *Politico* followed with an account of how Biden has won the lion's share of campaign contributions from Wall Street bankers.

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