

Kamala Harris: A Baptist with a Jewish husband and a faith that traces back to MLK and Gandhi

By Darren Sands
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Black clergy who know Vice President Kamala Harris, now the front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomination, marvel at the fusion of traditions and teachings that have molded her religious faith and social justice values.

A Baptist married to a Jewish man, she's inspired by the work of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., and influenced by the religious traditions of her mother's native India as well as the Black Church.

"She's had the best of two worlds," says her longtime pastor, the Rev. Amos Brown, who leads Third Baptist Church in San Francisco.

In interviews, religious leaders and theologians told The Associated Press that Harris' candidacy has special symbolic significance following President Joe Biden's departure from the election campaign. Not only because she would be the nation's first female president, but she's a Black American with South Asian roots and her two cultures are intrinsically linked.

The clergy and scholars noted that the concept of nonviolent resistance, a critical strategy in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, gained influence under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi in India, who was an inspiration for many decades to America's Black preachers and civil rights leaders. Gandhi was a Hindu who preached Hindu-Muslim unity.

"It may be through the Negroes that the unadulterated message of nonviolence will be delivered to the world," Gandhi said in 1935 to a visiting delegation led by



prominent Black U.S. theologian Howard Thurman.

Those shared cultural links can be found in Harris' family history, too. Her maternal grandmother was a community organizer, and her grandfather P.V. Gopalan, was a civil servant who joined the resistance to win India's independence from Britain.

Harris' mother, Shyamala Gopalan, even met King as a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, where she participated in civil rights demonstrations.

"She was conscious of history, conscious of struggle, conscious of inequities. She was born with a sense of justice imprinted on her soul," Harris wrote of her mother in her 2019 book *The Truths We Hold*.

The Black Church tradition also influ-

enced Harris.

"The vice president has a strong Christian faith that she's talked about a lot," said Jamal Simmons, a pastor's son and Harris' former communications director. As a Democratic strategist, he has helped candidates make inroads with faith communities.

"She was raised in a Christian church, and attended Christian churches throughout her life, and I think that still influences her, her worldview, and her ethical commitments," he said.

The Rev. Freddie D. Haynes III, a pastor in Dallas, first met Harris at Third Baptist in San Francisco, sparking their more than 30-year friendship.

Haynes — whose family has close ties to Third Baptist — was guest preaching at the time while visiting his mother. Harris,

RELIGION & SPIRITUALITY. A Baptist married to a Jewish man, Vice President Kamala Harris is inspired by the work of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., and influenced by the religious traditions of her mother's native India as well as the Black Church. Pictured is VP Harris visiting with families during a celebration of Juneteenth at the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., in this June 20, 2022 file photo. (AP Photo/Patrick Semansky, File)

then the Alameda County district attorney, had just joined the congregation.

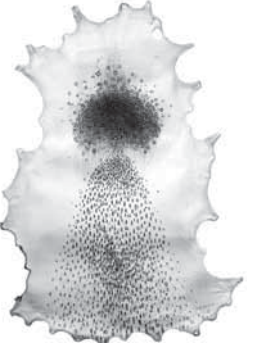
"She has always understood that Jesus and justice go together. So, it's not hard to see why she chose a church that has that kind of justice DNA," said Haynes, whose grandfather shaped Third Baptist's social justice identity as its pastor. Then his father carried it on during his short time in the pulpit.

Through the years, Haynes and Harris connected over their shared faith. Haynes said she admired his ability to blend Black Christian theology in the pulpit with the cadence and rhythm of hip-hop. It was Harris's commitment to serving the most vulnerable that impressed him.

"Her spirituality has been informed by a sense of justice for those who are othered, disadvantaged, and treated as second-class citizens," said Haynes, who leads Friendship-West Baptist Church in Dallas.

As a student at Howard University in Washington, D.C., Harris was immersed in a cultural environment influenced by deep faith. The fellowship and service she learned at her alma mater is key to understanding the spirituality driving her sense of purpose, said Matthew Watley,

Continued on page 15



FROELICK GALLERY
Representing Contemporary Japanese Artists
714 NW Davis, Portland
503-222-1142
FroelickGallery.com

Takahiko Hayashi



Tu Phan
Branch Manager, NMLS #7916

Call about
refinances & purchases
Offering
FHA/VA/Conventional Mortgages

(503) 780-6872
<tu.phan@fairwaymc.com>
<www.LoansNow.com>

12817 S.E. 93rd Ave.
Clackamas, OR 97015

Copyright©2023 Fairway Independent Mortgage Corporation, NMLS#2289. 4750 S. Baltimore Lane, Madison, WI 53718, 1-866-912-4800. All rights reserved. This is not an offer to enter into an agreement. Not all customers will qualify. Information, rates and programs are subject to change without notice. All products are subject to credit and property approval. Other restrictions and limitations may apply. Fairway is not affiliated with any government agencies. Equal Housing Opportunity. AZ License #BK-0904162. Licensed by the Department of Financial Protection and Innovation under the California Residential Mortgage Lending Act, License No. 41DBO-78367. Licensed by the Department of Financial Protection and Innovation under the California Financing Law, NMLS #2289. Loans made or arranged pursuant to a California Residential Mortgage Lending Act License.

11th Annual
montavilla Jazz FESTIVAL

AUG. 30-SEPT. 1



montavillajazz.org



LENTS INTERNATIONAL FARMERS MARKET

Sundays, 9 am - 2 pm
SE 92nd Ave & Reedway Rd

Farm-Fresh Produce

Local Food

Kids' Activities

Shopper Loyalty Program

Double your SNAP dollars up to \$20 each week!



STUNNING PHOTOGRAPHY
WEDDINGS
SENIORS
BABIES
PREGNANCY
PORTRAITS
FUNERALS
LANDIS.PHOTOS@GMAIL.COM
JANLANDISPHOTOGRAPHY.COM
503•317•3759

PLANNING TO VISIT MULTNOMAH FALLS?

The Historic Highway west of the falls will be closed October 2024 to Memorial Day 2025 for restoration work.

Use I-84 and Exit 31 to access Multnomah Falls or try something new and leave the driving to RideCATbus.org

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR GORGE PROJECTS AT
i84GorgeConstruction.org

