

[Opinion](#)

[Guest Voices](#)



Vice President Kamala Harris delivers remarks to the National Collegiate Athletic Association champion teams in her first public appearance after President Joe Biden dropped out of the 2024 race, on the South Lawn of the White House July 22 in Washington. (OSV News/Reuters/Nathan Howard)

Efran Menny

[View Author Profile](#)

Black Catholic Messenger

[View Author Profile](#)

## [Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

November 4, 2024

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

With immense pressure from intra-party disputes and general dissatisfaction from Democratic voters, President Joe Biden withdrew from the 2024 presidential election, paving the way for Vice President Kamala Harris to be the presumptive nominee alongside Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz. Democratic delegates and voters coalesced around Harris in an extraordinary way, breaking fundraising records and creating massive buzz for her campaign.

While it's no surprise that Harris isn't the preference of the Republican base, they have had a difficult time adjusting to a robust and professional Black woman of her caliber. She has been in politics for two decades, including as district attorney of San Francisco, attorney general of California, U.S. senator, and now vice president. What makes Harris a powerhouse political figure and a threat to current conservatives has always been her prowess as a skilled attorney, which contrasts with the gaffes and ramblings of former President Donald Trump.

As a result, many Republicans have resorted to personal attacks and racist dog whistles to undermine Harris' credibility as a challenger. Whether they are official party members or average American voters, many of these people are Catholics, and their assaults against Harris have rehashed deeply entrenched White stereotypes and caricatures of Black Americans.

The Republican vice presidential candidate, the Catholic convert [JD Vance](#), within his first weeks on the ticket, established himself as a notable anti-Black and anti-Harris ideologue. In [a solo campaign speech](#), he asserted that Harris has done nothing but "collect a government check for the last 20 years."

This was a strategic remark that conservatives have levied against Black Americans for decades. Vance attacking her extensive career in government shows that he thinks she is lazy, freeloading, and simply collecting government dole. Most importantly, it conjures up images of "[welfare queens](#)," harkening back to conservative idol and former President Ronald Reagan, amid his cutthroat agenda to

reduce social problems and public assistance—popularly viewed as connected mostly to Black women.

[Kellyanne Conway](#), a Catholic and former adviser to Trump, said Harris "does not speak well. She does not work hard. She doesn't inspire anyone." This belief that Black people are dumb, uneducated, and inarticulate is one of America's longstanding beliefs about Black Americans. Dating back to enslavement in America, many White people have seen us as incapable of being schooled, as completely docile, and utterly feeble-minded. These stereotypes carried into the Reconstruction period, Jim Crow era, and obviously still exist today.

Those tempted to highlight Harris' high turnover with staffers and say "she is difficult to work with" only further racist and sexist microaggressions against Black women professionals. It is already troubling that Black women feel [they have to work twice as hard](#) to excel in male-dominated, largely White spaces. This not only creates immense pressure, but also puts their [well-being at risk](#) as they navigate various stressors on the job.

Catholic critics of Harris should err on the side of empathy and understand what it must be like for a Black woman to navigate a code, standard, and overall system intrinsically designed without the consideration of Black people, let alone a Black woman. The role of vice president and president was not envisioned with those of African descent in mind, so it should be expected that they would encounter massive hurdles. [Forty-five percent of Black women](#) report that the workplace is where they most often experience racism. Apparently the White House (and the road to it) is no exception.

Many right-wing Catholic voters have attacked Harris' record as a legal expert, alleging that she is just too direct and forceful in her demeanor. For Black women, this will immediately ring a bell of the "angry Black woman" trope. It's one thing for White people to constantly push the flawed belief that opportunity is possible if you simply work hard for it. It's another thing altogether to, when a Black woman ascends to a leadership role, level [unfair racial and gender-based discrimination](#).

Advertisement

Trump, who has consistently lowered the bar with his degrading distortions of opponents, is [no stranger to this insult](#) with Harris. He has called her "angry" in the past, and I can see this attack on Harris becoming increasingly popular in Christian spaces against a "loud" prosecutor, failing to meet the peaceful homebody ideal of a traditional housewife in many Catholic contexts.

Even Harris's Blackness has been questioned by Trump, who is notorious for fanning the flames of racism, dating back to his conspiracy theories about former President Barack Obama's birth certificate. It was only a matter of time before he seized on Harris' biracial identity.

With every personal attack on Harris, I'm reminded of the words of Jesus Christ:

But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.

(Matthew 15:18-19)

The message is clear regarding the standard that Christians are supposed to model. Our words can carry immense weight. But with his prescription, it goes even deeper. Jesus asserts that what we say is a reflection of our heart. If we say hateful things, it's a reflection of the enmity between us and our neighbor. On the other hand, if we have edifying words that empower and elevate others, then that demonstrates a Christ-like concern for their well-being.

Given the preponderance of un-Christian views that many have shared about Harris, it can be said that many in the body of Christ see not just Harris, but Black Americans in general as inferior.

If a Christian feels comfortable claiming that a Black person is lazy, a "[DEI vice president](#)," or too assertive, what implications does that have? We've been fighting hard to break away from the tarnished image of Blackness in a country that continually (and negatively) redefines our understanding of what it means to be Black. These damaging stereotypes only knock our community further down the social hierarchy of access to resources, opportunity, and power.

This bias also inflames an already dangerous situation in our country. Regardless of party affiliation, everyone likes to say, "Tone down the violence." But any criticism

rooted in the intentional dehumanization of Black people is a threat to our basic dignity, adding to the centuries of violence waged against us that devalues our intrinsic holiness.

As we reflect on the words of Jesus, we may disagree on policy approaches but we should always seek to understand and strive for Christian distinction. In policy, there's room for healthy disagreement, but projecting racial bias and stereotypes that undermine the worth of another is slanderous and has no business coming from our mouths.

If Harris wins the election, it seems the uptick in racism from Christian conservatives will only increase. During the Obama years, the attacks were nonstop, a terrible strain on our nation and a continuation of our persistent racial divide. Yet with Harris, it will be that same energy infused with misogynoir.

As this saga unfolds on Election Day and potentially afterward, we can choose to do better by embracing the authentic call of holy thinking and conduct.

This story appears in the **Election 2024** feature series. [View the full series.](#)