



# Young AKA Sisters Feel About Her Victory.

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When the Biden-Harris campaign secured enough electoral votes for the presidency on November 7, Kamala Harris made history in many different ways. As Vice President, Harris will be the first woman, first Black person, and first South Asian American in that position — after being the first Black woman to serve as attorney general of California, and the only Black woman in the U.S. Senate during her tenure.

Before embarking on her political career, Harris was a politically active student, having participated in South African-apartheid protests and sparred with campus Republicans at Howard University, the alma mater of Thurgood Marshall, the first Black justice on the Supreme Court. While at Howard, Harris, the daughter of Indian and Jamaican immigrants, pledged Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated (AKA), the nation's first Black sorority. At 300,000 members strong, AKA is a powerful network of influential women, and has often been described as Harris' "secret weapon." While AKA was not allowed to endorse specific candidates because of its non-profit status, the organization did encourage voting, particularly within Black communities. In the lead-up to the presidential election, Harris' "sorors" mobilized with fellow members of Black Greek-letter organizations on initiatives like the "Stroll to the Polls" campaign, which helped further mobilize what is already an essential voting bloc for Democrats: Black women.

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U.S. politicians and world leaders, such as Reps. Alma Adams, Bonnie Coleman, Sheila Jackson Lee, Eddie Bernice Johnson, Terri Sewell, Lauren Underwood, and Frederica Wilson; as well as Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first woman president of Liberia and first woman head of state in Africa.



PHOTO: ELIJAH NOUVELAGE/BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES.

*Vice President Elect Kamala Harris, center, stands with attendees and participates in the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. hymn at their Annual Pink Ice Gala in Columbia, South Carolina, U.S., on Friday, Jan. 25, 2019.*

but to see a Black woman, one that looks like me, one that's part of my sorority, it really meant a lot to me," she told Refinery29. "To see a Black woman on that scale, articulating her ideas, was something that I had never seen before." But Burnett's enthusiasm for Harris is tempered by concern about Harris' past "over-policing and over-prosecuting." And she's not alone in feeling this way.

Although President-Elect Joe Biden and Harris have spoken about the ongoing [police violence in Black communities across the nation](#), young people — who were far less enthusiastic about Biden's campaign than they were about that of Sen. Bernie Sanders, for example — are knowledgeable about both of their involvement in the criminal justice system. Biden was co-author of the [1994 crime bill](#), the largest crime bill in history that contributed to more aggressive policing and that critics say led to more mass incarceration; and, former-prosecutor Harris was known for supporting policies such as a truancy program. Still, though, the vast majority of young voters of color voted for Biden, even if one-third said they view him negatively, according to an [NBC News/Quibi survey](#).

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"[I'm] an abolitionist, [and Kamala Harris] aided in a lot of the practices that I do not believe in, specifically policing and enforcing the school-to-prison pipeline standard," Tori Brown told Refinery29. The University of South Florida student is an undergraduate member of AKA and organizes with the Black Collective Movement, a youth-led community organization dedicated to fighting the injustices against Black people in Tampa and across the nation. "[She] uses her political capital in a way that particularly impacts Black and Brown youth and individuals," Brown said. "AKA is a melting pot of individuals. We may all be members of the same organization, but we all have varying views and political identities. Our political alignment is not what defines our organization."

November 7. “Her affiliation with Alpha Kappa Alpha has nothing to do with our political viewpoints,” Tyler Lawson, an undergraduate member of AKA at the University of Pennsylvania, who has worked at the ACLU and public defender’s office in Philadelphia, told Refinery29. “We can make that clear that it is really, really separate. When we speak on these really political things and get into the nitty-gritty of it, we do a good job of separating our affiliation with the sorority from our political beliefs.”

While Brown, Burnett, and Lawson’s views are their own — just like Harris’ are her own — they all reflect Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority’s centuries-old tradition as a hub for Black women who are passionate about serving their community. And, when it comes to Harris, Burnett said, the community “can’t put everything on her,” but can recognize how the Vice President-Elect is an important beacon of representation. “I feel like with her, it’s important to focus on the good,” Burnett said. “It’s important to know that she can’t fix every problem that’s been going on in our community, but we do need to give her the chance. We have to take this opportunity as our seat at the table.”

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