

Kamala Harris



Who Is Kamala Harris?

Kamala Devi Harris is a politician and an attorney who could make history in 2021 by becoming the first woman, the first Black person and the first South Asian-American person to be the vice-president of the United States of America.

Childhood

On 20th October 1964, Kamala was born in Oakland, California. Initially, Kamala was given the middle name 'Iyer' but her parents changed their minds two weeks after she was born; they decided to amend Kamala's birth certificate and change her middle name to 'Devi' – an Indian name meaning 'goddess'.

Kamala's mother, Shyamala Gopalan – a renowned biomedical scientist – had moved to the USA from India so that she could study nutrition and endocrinology (the study of hormones in the human body) at university. Her father, Donald Harris, moved to the USA from Jamaica and he works as a highly-respected university economics professor, meaning that he teaches others about how people choose to spend their money on goods and services.

Shyamala and Donald divorced when Kamala was seven years old; from this point, Kamala and her younger sister Maya would spend weekdays with their mother and weekends with their father. Kamala and Maya also travelled across the world as children to visit extended family members in India.

Education

In light of Shyamala's acceptance of a research and teaching position at the Jewish General Hospital in Quebec, Kamala and Maya relocated to Canada when Kamala was 12 years old. This meant that Kamala and Maya attended a French-speaking primary school (Notre-Dame-des-Neiges) and then the English-speaking Westmount High School.

After graduating from Westmount High School in 1981, Kamala returned to the USA, attending Howard University in Washington DC to study political science and economics. While studying at Howard University, Kamala had an internship sorting the mail at the office of a Californian senator. She also ran the meetings of the university's economics society and led the debate team.

After graduating in 1986, Kamala returned to California to attend law school at the University of California. While studying, she served as the president of the university's Black Law Students Association group. In 1989, Kamala was awarded her Juris Doctor – a professional degree that is needed if someone wants to practise law.

Career

After graduating, Kamala was hired as a deputy district attorney in Alameda County, California, meaning that she became responsible for ensuring that the law was applied justly. Kamala was passionate about making sure that young people who were accused of crimes were treated fairly and she began a programme that gave offenders opportunities to achieve qualifications and find employment.

In 2010, Kamala was elected as the first woman, the first Black person and the first South Asian person to serve as California's Attorney General. This meant that she was the main person in charge of making sure that the laws of California were upheld and oversaw more than 4,800 other attorneys and employees. As part of this role, Kamala endeavoured to make sure that all people in California were protected: she defended California's climate change law, she protected affordable healthcare for residents and she helped to secure marriage equality for all Californians. It was at this time that Kamala met Douglas Emhoff – a lawyer – whom she married in 2014. Kamala became stepmother to Cole and Ella Emhoff, who are said to lovingly refer to her as 'Momala' – a hybrid of 'mom' and 'Kamala'.

In 2016, Kamala was elected as a member of the US Senate to represent California – one of only 100 senators across the USA to hold the position at any one time. In this role, Kamala worked hard to promote equality for all people – she introduced laws to raise the minimum wage and she defended the legal rights of refugees and immigrants.



Becoming Vice-President

In 2019, Kamala announced her candidacy to become the president of the United States of America in 2020 and many people supported her, including former president Barack Obama. However, Kamala and her team did not have the funds to see the campaign through to the end. Instead, Kamala endorsed Joe Biden in his campaign and became his ‘running mate’ – a position which could secure her place as vice-president of the USA if Joe is victorious.

Joe Biden is currently the projected winner of the presidential election. Any vote count disputes should be resolved by 8th December 2020. The US Congress will count the electoral votes on 6th January 2021 and the president-elect and vice-president-elect will be sworn into office on 20th January 2021.



Questions

1. What did Kamala study while in Washington DC? Tick **two**.

- French
- political science
- a professional degree in law
- economics

2. Draw **four** lines and match each year to the event which happened in it.

1964	Kamala returned to the USA from Canada.
1981	Kamala and Douglas Emhoff married.
1986	Kamala's middle name was changed.
2014	Kamala returned to California from Washington DC.

3. What is endocrinology?

4. ... **who could make history in 2021 by...**

How else could the author have written this phrase?

5. Find and copy the name of the French-speaking primary school that Kamala attended.

6. Discuss Kamala Harris's impact on Californian citizens based on information from the text.

7. Summarise how Kamala could be elected as vice-president of the USA in 25 words or fewer.

8. Compare **two** jobs that Kamala has had and explain why they are similar.

9. 'Kamala promotes equality.'

Give **two** ways that the text supports this statement.

10. Compare how Kamala's university studies are similar to her father's university teaching career.
