7/25/24 / Kamala’s meme-mentum

[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]

[BILLBOARD]

SEAN RAMESWARAM (host): Noel King, have you been on the internet lately?

NOEL KING (host): Yes. Mm-hm.

SEAN: Have you heard, like, you know, Kamala mashed up with Britney?

NOEL: Mm-hm!

KAMALA X BRITNEY PLAYS

NOEL: <laughs>   
  
SEAN: Have you heard Kamala mashed up with Beyonce?

NOEL: Yes.

KAMALA X BEYONCE PLAYS

SEAN and NOEL: <laugh>   
  
SEAN: And I guess my last question is have you heard Kamala mashed up with my personal fav, Charli XCX?

KAMALA X CHARLI PLAYS

SEAN and NOEL: <laughs>   
  
SEAN: Okay, on the show today we’re gonna, uh, ask what the heck’s going on, and also figure out if any of this means anything for this campaign. But you’re gonna do something, too! What are you gonna do?   
  
NOEL: Alright. Vice-president Harris has got a lot of attention. (Coconut, coconut, coconut.)   
  
SEAN: <laughs>   
  
NOEL: But what should she do with it to help her campaign? We’re gonna ask.   
  
SEAN: There you go!

NOEL: Yeah.   
  
 SCORING BUMP

*<CLIP> KAMALA HARRIS: You think you just fell out of a …*

SEAN: Today, Explained!

[THEME]

SEAN: *Today, Explained* here with Charlie Warzel, staff writer at the Atlantic Magazine. Charlie, I don't usually open interviews this way, but can I ask how online you are?

CHARLIE WARZEL (staff writer, *The Atlantic*): <laughs> Wow, what a loaded question. Uh …

SEAN: <evil laugh> It's gonna be important, I promise.

CHARLIE: There are ebbs and flows to my online -ness, for sure, but as we get into the last stretch of a presidential election cycle, my online -ness ramps up to weapons-grade levels of online -ness right? Uhh, I'm jacked into the matrix right now.

SEAN: So, with that all established, as someone who is weapons-grade online, how would you describe Vice President Kamala Harris's presence on the internet right now?

CHARLIE: Yeah, July has been a renaissance for the vice president's internet presence is how I would put it. Out there right now on the internet, it's kind of been blanketed with Harris memes.

*SFX SWIPE <*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bSTqokjNEE)*> HARRIS: Everything is in context REVERB*

SEAN: The coconut tree speech the normal version of that is everywhere on the internet.

*PANNED L: SFX SWIPE*

*PANNED L: <*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bSTqokjNEE)*> HARRIS: You think you just fell out of a –*

*PANNED R: SFX SWIPE*

*PANNED R: <*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bSTqokjNEE)*> HARRIS: You think you just fell out of a –*

*SFX SWIPE*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bSTqokjNEE)*> HARRIS: You think you just fell out of a coconut tree? \*LAUGHS\* You exist in the context of all in which you live and what came before you.*

CHARLIE: Then it's also been supercut and remixed.

*SFX SWIPE*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.tiktok.com/@kesha/video/7393483015089016110?lang=en)*> HARRIS: \*LAUGHS\**

*KE$HA: Dance.*

*SFX SWIPE*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.tiktok.com/@adeadredhead/video/7393379181473844526?lang=en)*> TIKTOK REMIX*

*SWIFT: While you’ve been getting down and out about the*

*HARRIS: context*

*SWIFT: and the dirty dirty*

*HARRIS: coconut*

*SWIFT: in the world, you could have been getting down to this*

*HARRIS: coconut tree. Ha ha ha.*

REVERB, keep running under

CHARLIE: It's been remixed with dancing from the 2020 campaign to:

*SFX SWIPE*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://x.com/JoePostingg/status/1815387732841275827)*> CHARLI XCX: 360 …*

keep running under next act then dip up

CHARLIE: Charlie XCX's Brat album.

DIP CLIP UP

*.. HARRIS: You think you just fell out of a coconut tree?*

*SFX SWIPE*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://x.com/ryanlong03/status/1808510079382982870)*> HARRIS: You exist in the context*

*SFX SWIPE*

<CLIP> HARRIS: coconut coconut coconut

KEEP RUNNING UNDER

CHARLIE: There is a mashup of her again laughing and singing ‘Wheels on the Bus’...

*SFX SWIPE*

<CLIP> HARRIS: Wheels on the bus go round and round!  
 + THE DARK KNIGHT SCORE

CHARLIE: … while the Joker music from the Dark Knight plays?! There's a bunch of, you know, like Venn diagrams out there

*SFX SWIPE*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://x.com/ryanlong03/status/1808510079382982870)*> HARRIS: I love venn diagrams. it’s just something about those three circles and the analysis of where there’s an intersection right?* KEEP RUNNING

CHARLIE: Now people are saying that they are coconut -pilled, it's a little bit unhinged out there, but the the general feeling of her online presence is real enthusiasm

*SFX SWIPE*

<[CLIP](https://x.com/umichvoter/status/1815968451707445729?s=46&t=twOsEq-cg_qLcQlLNsRF2Q)> *You think you just fell out of a coconut tree, CLAP CLAP CLAP \*unhinged laughter\**

*SFX SWIPE*

*<CLIP> c-o-c-o-n-u-t you think you fell out a tree….*

*SFX SWIPE*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://x.com/ryanlong03/status/1813202486821343556)*>hey I just met you and this is crazy …*

*You think you just fell out of a coconut tree*

*SFX SWIPE*

<CLIP> HARRIS: coconut coconut coconut

CHARLIE: The reason why that coconut tree speech went so viral was because there was this like sort of awkwardness to that that people on like TikTok loved so they were doing like lip syncs to it and stuff and it took on a life of its own I think as this like you know she's awkward but that's relatable and and there's something kind of joyful about it

SEAN: Do we know who's making these memes? Because as you've established, this is on TikTok, but also Twitter and Instagram. It feels like, in this moment at least, and who knows how long it'll last, it's everywhere.

CHARLIE: It's really organic.   
  
SEAN: Mm.   
  
CHARLIE: Like people are actually having fun with this. People are actually enjoying, you know getting involved in this presidential race.

And I think what's important about that is I watched the four days of the RNC last week. And, one thing that was very clear to me was that Republicans in their own way were having a lot of fun.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdoZS1OmzCo&list=RDNSMdoZS1OmzCo&start_radio=1)*> KID ROCK: WHAT UP AMERICA IF YOU’RE READY FOR PRESIDENT TRUMP TO TAKE THE STAGE I NEED EVERYBODY TO STAND UP …*

*KEEP RUNNING*

CHARLIE: Like they felt this real enthusiasm coming off of Trump literally dodging a bullet, getting this iconic image:

*KID ROCK: Say Fight fight fight!*

CHARLIE: And Hulk Hogan comes on stage and he rips his shirt off.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/shorts/7sn-C3W959s)*> Let Trumpamania run wild brother. Let Trumpamania rule again…*

CHARLIE: And I thought to myself man when you contrast that with what's happening with the Democrats this idea that this election is only a battle for the soul of democracy this trudge to the polls to make sure to defend. I think that kind of negative motivation is motivating, it is really true that this election has incredible stakes, but at the same time you have to give people something to latch onto that isn't just, you know, fomenting a sense of dread. And I think this is what is going on and why the energy behind these Harris memes is so real.

SEAN: Okay, so the vibes are definitely good for Vice President Harris and the Democratic Party, but do we know if this, you know, just flood of memes that are definitely positive and favorable does anything for donations or, you know, God forbid, votes?

CHARLIE: I think it's a real fool's errand to take a look at a random Zoomer meme and go, there we go, we got Iowa, right? Or whatever, like, Michigan, it's gonna fall. I do think though what we've seen over the past few days is that the Harris campaign has raised record setting amounts of small donations. The enthusiasm behind her internet presence can help lead to that. What we have seen since Biden stepped down is the fact that style really does matter, right? And that campaigning really does matter and that vibes really do matter …   
  
SEAN: Mm.   
  
CHARLIE: … and that excitement and enthusiasm in whatever way really, really, really matters. And, you know, that will probably fade over time, but I do think that the bumps are meaningful and also show that there's something they can work with here.

SEAN: She doesn't seem to be overly leaning into it. She didn't come out on Monday and say like, it's so great to be a brat this summer or anything like that. you know, Harris HQ or whatever, the Twitter account that seems to be the central gathering place for the campaign online, is, you know, their banner is now Brat Green.

When politicians or corporations try to co -opt a meme, that's usually, you know, the first step towards its death. How does the Harris campaign not blow the meme-mentum?

CHARLIE: It's like walking a very fine line right now is how I feel, you know, and with every day that we go further, the line gets, you know, thinner and you're tiptoeing.

<[CLIP](https://www.instagram.com/p/C9zzkGOuNcH/?igsh=dzA2cHVwYWJzMnFj&img_index=2)> JIMMY FALLON SHOW

*Charli XCX posted ‘Kamala is brat.’ Kamala’s campaign was pretty excited about it, but there appeared to be some confusion over what that exactly means.*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1sidc7J5Wk)*> CNN:*

*JAMIE GANGEL: brat. ‘You’re just that girl who is a little messy and likes to party and maybe says some dumb things sometimes,’ end quote.*

*TAPPER: So is the idea that we’re all kinda brat and vice president Harris is brat? I don’t…*

CHARLIE: I saw some people, some younger people online express this sentiment, which is basically that there's a group of people who are coming into being able to vote or able to vote now who didn't get to vote for Obama   
  
SEAN: Mm.   
  
CHARLIE: Right? They're coming in new and their choices in recent presidential elections have been two old dudes, right? And this feeling of sort of that the, you know, the system doesn't reflect their excitement, their preferences. And I think a lot of those people are just excited about change, right? And this idea that, that, you know, this, that the system is in a way listening, right?

People express their frustration with Biden and the choice of this election and lo and behold, the system gave them a different option.

SEAN: Mm.

CHARLIE: There's this feeling of positive momentum and I think that is the type of thing that they need to lean into and to do authentically. Show that Harris, through the way she speaks, way that she tries to relate to people, that it's this rigid party system maybe coming out of this rut and not this idea of, you know, we're trying to make fetch happen …  
  
SEAN: <laughs>   
  
CHARLIE: … by forcing this meme down your throat. Like I think that is just... that's kind of a dangerous play and could alienate some of the people that are really excited right now.

SEAN: We're just in early days here, but it's interesting to think about Kamala Harris contra Donald Trump because right now, despite the former president getting shot in the head she owns the entire conversation and he's kind of quiet. He's kind of trying to make fun of her laugh when her laugh is endearing her to a fair chunk of this country.

<[CLIP](https://www.youtube.com/shorts/-vcBZXmIbnI)> *TRUMP: I call her laughing Kamala. You ever watch her laugh? She’s crazy.*

SEAN: Do you think it's killing him?

CHARLIE: Probably, yes. I mean, like there's some more like structural elements. Like the entire Trump campaign was constructed around this idea of running against Joe Biden and painting him as the old, frail, unfit for office candidate, right? that's not the opponent anymore and the opponent is someone who is much younger who makes Donald Trump look like the old guy now, that's like a formidable issue for them and a huge strength of her campaign.

SCORING IN – BEYONCE AMERICA HAS A PROBLEM (COCONUT TREE REMIX)

CHARLIE: In relation to Kamala Harris, he looks like a guy who doesn't have a lot of mobility, you know, kind of struggling to get out of the golf cart, kind of huffing and puffing. And so there's this, you know, real change in the race, not just in terms of, you know, the comparison there, but also in terms of attention. She is able, at least right now, to take that away. And I think what we've seen historically is that Donald Trump doesn't handle that well and reacts usually by lashing out.

` SCORING BUMP

SEAN: That was Charlie Warzel. He's a staff writer at *The Atlantic*. His piece over there about this business is called ‘Trump Versus the Coconut-Pilled.’

Noel, what did you make of Mamala’s memelas?  
  
NOEL: I would love it if you never said ‘memalas’ ever again.   
  
SEAN and NOEL: <laugh>   
  
NOEL: Um, I loved them. How about this? Would you like to hear a Democratic strategist and friend of the vice-president argue that she needs to get away from the memes? As far away from them as possible?

SEAN: Oh my … friend of the vice-president?! Count me in!

KAMALA HARRIS: The wheels on the bus go round and round!

NOEL: Coming up!   
  
SEAN and NOEL: Today, Explained.

[BREAK]

*<CLIP> JONAH: I came here to tell you you’re a meme ma’am.*

*VEEP: I’m a meme ma’am? What are you talking about? Speak English boy.*

*JONAH: No uh, an internet phenomenon.*

*VEEP: Oooh, kay.*

NOEL: It’s *Today, Explained*.   
  
Sean’s back on his phone looking for more memes.

Angela Rye, co-host of Native Land pod, attorney, political strategist, who knows the vice-president well, joined us at South by Southwest this year you may recall for a look at Black voters’ and Donald Trump.

Alright, Angela you understand influencer culture. Which meme should Vice President Harris lean into? The brat meme, the coconut meme, the cop meme? Among people who are not young and online?

ANGELA: You know, from my vantage point, I think the best thing that ummm Vice President Harris could do as she runs is to do a complete 180 from meme culture.

NOEL: Huh!

ANGELA: We are living in a day and age where people, I think, are having a hard time deciphering fact from fiction. They're having a hard time, figuring out what is real and what's not. And when the reality show credits roll for America, I don't want to be there, you know? Right. I don't I don't want to be a part of that. I think that what has to happen is this show needs to just end here. So instead of trying to make to meme her or to make her a t-shirt, or to make her a motto or to make her a slogan, I think we just let Kamala be Kamala. And I don't think that’s to her detriment. I actually think it's greatly to her benefit.

NOEL: Okay, so one of the things that, you know, we hear about Kamala, especially since she became vice president, is that she's kind of unknowable. You don't seem to agree with that. Give me a few lines on who you think the vice president is and who she should be presenting to the American people.

ANGELA: Yeah, I think, relatively unknown and unknowable or a little different. You know, I would just phrase that a little differently. I think that she has tried to be deferential to the president of the United States, so as to not outshine so as to not, you know, divert when they disagree on policy positions. And I think what we can expect from Kamala Harris at the top of the ticket is a more relaxed, approachable, the person that we all know and love, um she is a friend to me. She's like a big sister to me, and she's someone who, you know, gives the best advice solicited or unsolicited. She's someone who sees you going through something and is going to pick up the phone and ask you how you're doing and what she can do to help She she's discerning, she's intuitive. She kind of always knows the right thing to do. And I think when she now has that spaciousness to lean into her own intuition and her discernment about what's right to do, you get things like her saying, actually, I'm not going to preside over that joint session for Netanyahu.

*<CLIP> FOX 32 CHICAGO: Vice President Harris skipped the prime minister's address today, speaking instead at a sorority conference in Indiana.*

ANGELA: And I think that that is what our folks need to hear, our folks meaning all of the American people, people of different policy like ideas, different opinions, knowing that she's going to lean into her convictions is one of the most important things that we need right now. When you're on the opposite side, as someone who has demonstrated a very treacherous relationship with the truth.

NOEL: It sounds like you are not at all surprised to see the way she has turned it on over the last 72 hours. I think there's been some shock in the media like, oh my God, she was great in Milwaukee.

*<CLIP> KAMALA HARRIS: We are not going back. [crowd cheers]*

NOEL: People just started chanting along with her.

*<CLIP> MILWAUKEE RALLY: CROWD: We are not going back!*

NOEL: What I hear you saying is. No, I knew that was there.

ANGELA: It's always been there. And the thing that I think that as a black woman, I too know what it's like to be underestimated. You know, when people are like, oh, my God, you sounded so brilliant. Well, what did you think I was going to sound like? You know, she is someone who has won multiple elections statewide, elected twice. Like, she knows what it is like to win and she don't like to lose.

NOEL: All right, I want to ask you about some specific issues. So we know that the Trump campaign is going to attack Kamala Harris about the border. President Biden tasked her with addressing the root causes of migration from Central America. And the attack line is going to be….

*<CLIP> DONALD TRUMP: Kamala threw open our borders. That allowed 20 million illegal aliens to stampede into our country from all over the world.*

NOEL: Americans are very unhappy about what they see as too much immigration. What is the message she should be presenting to voters about the border and her role there right now?

ANGELA: I think she has to be honest. I think here is one of those moments where she has to speak from her conscience. I know she doesn't want, kids in concentration camps at the border like they were under Donald Trump. So what we know is what's happened hasn't worked. Some of what, President Biden offered up, I thought was too conservative. And I also thought was inhumane. Hopefully she does back from that. I believe she will. And bringing a lot of different partners to the table, CBP, ICE, and also some of the groups that represent migrants crossing the border seeking asylum, seeking a better life. What are the ways to ensure that people can have their day in America get here? You know, not necessarily cut folks who have been waiting in line, but also make sure that they can escape whatever it is they're trying to escape.

NOEL: Let me ask you about her time as a prosecutor. So the attack line, one attack line from Republicans we know will be she's soft on crime.

*<CLIP> FOX NEWS: Keep in mind, she supported the Minnesota Freedom Fund. That was a fund that raised $41 million and literally put criminals back out on the streets.*

NOEL: How did she combat a campaign that is going to be very interested in presenting her as soft on crime, based on some things that she said during the 2020 campaign?

ANGELA: Yeah, I think that this is one of those places where it could be an easy one liner. She is running against, um, an indicted criminal, and she's not going to be soft on Donald Trump. So what I would I think she should say in that moment is like, oh, you think I'm soft on crime? Let me show you how I'm a treat this criminal. Watch me work.

*<CLIP> HARRIS: “I took on perpetrators of all types. Predators who abused women. Fraudsters who ripped off consumers. Cheaters who broke the rules of their own game. So hear me when I say ‘I know Donald Trump's type!’ [CHEERS]*

NOEL: You know that from the left there will also be an attack line, which is that Kamala Harris, as a prosecutor over incarcerated Black and brown men in California. Do you think this is a problem for the vice president, particularly among Black men who the polls have shown us this year have have an increased interest? Some have an increased interest in Donald Trump.

ANGELA: I think that, again, the interest in Donald Trump is overstated. I don't know who these pollsters are talking to. I would actually like for them to start to poll some of the actual human beings. I think that a lot of that was hyperbolic, I think. Noel. Well, we talked about it during South By, you know, I just I don't think that's a real thing. What I do think is real is there have has been a lot of misinformation about Kamala Harris's record as, a prosecutor in, in the Bay Area and some of the things that have been said about her locking folks up for marijuana are simply not true. So what I would encourage the listeners to do is to go for it and look at what her actual record was. She was not soft on crime. She also was not tough on crime. She was fair on crime.

NOEL: You've seen the same stories I've seen over the past 72 hours, where you will have a reporter ask Black voters, how do you feel about this? This is historic, right? And you will have a response that says…

*<CLIP> KAMALA SUPPORTER: But I just feel like is America ready for a woman and also a Black woman? So that’s what scares me.*

NOEL: What do you think about these kinds of statements? Is this a real problem for for Kamala Harris?

ANGELA: I think that we have to stop placing Black people in one black box. Like, this is what Black voters think. There are Black voters who got on a call on Sunday when with Black women, and raised over $1 million for Kamala in 45 minutes, 44,000 Black women on the zoom call and another 50,000 in clubhouse. Almost 100,000 Black women. The next day, Black men raised over $1 million for Kamala Harris in three hours. And there were thousands of them, I think over 50,000 Black men on that call today. There is a gay and queer Kamala Harris call. There's a white woman for Kamala call. So when we talk about Black voters and the apathy and the fear, I think what's legit, Noel, honestly, is there's a little thing inside there that that asks the question, is the country ready for this? And that same question came up when Barack Obama was running. Right. And that same question came up when Joe Biden selected Kamala Harris as his VP. And that same question came up when he decided he was going to nominate Ketanji Brown Jackson as the first Black woman Supreme Court justice. There's not a time where that question doesn't come up. And for many of us who've experienced that ourselves when we were a first somewhere, or whether we were the first young person or the first person on a board or whatever it is, that question comes up. And the only way to beat back that “no,” or “I'm not ready” or “I'm not unsure” is to press forward. It's just to press forward.

SCORING IN—LAZY FOUNTAINS

ANGELA: I will tell you, Noel, from a super spiritual standpoint, I just want to point out that I have been on a five day cleanse and fast, and this just so … I ended it today. It just so happened to all go down during the cleanse and the fast. I just want to shout out the power of the prayers of Black women, and stand in the line with my sisters from that call on Sunday, which was just remarkably moving.   
  
NOE: <laughs>   
  
ANGELA: So shout out to all the people who fast … <laughs>   
  
NOEL: <laughs>   
  
ANGELA: … all the people who pray, and all the people who know that if we can push through that fear and the worry about what this country might not be ready for, we might just be able to make it a little more ready.

SCORING BUMP

NOEL: Angela Rye, co-host of Native Land Pod. Sean’s back, sean, you want to shout out to all the people who fast and pray?

SEAN: Peter Balonon-Rosen. Miles Bryan. Amina Al-Sadi. Laura Bullard. Matthew Collette. Rob Byers. Andrea Kristinsdottir. Noel King.

NOEL: Can we say ‘Today, Explained’ together?  
  
SEAN: <chortles> Yes.   
  
NOEL AND SEAN: *Today, Explained*.

[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]