

# [***Harris is making unprecedented Black outreach efforts as Biden campaign looks to her to bolster support***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BYP-5661-JBSS-S011-00000-00&context=1516831)

CNN Wire

May 6, 2024 Monday 8:00 AM GMT

Copyright 2024 Cable News Network All Rights Reserved

**Length:** 1726 words

**Byline:** By Edward-Isaac Dovere, CNN

**Dateline:** (CNN)

**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; The big event on Kamala Harris' trip to New York two weeks ago was left off her public schedule.

A few hours after appearing on set with Drew Barrymore, the vice president was at a small dinner with Black finance leaders put together by software and investment executive Charles Phillips to ask for their ideas and help getting more Black voters connected to the reelection campaign.

The dinner had been delayed - it was supposed to have happened weeks earlier when high winds in New York made the Air Force ground Harris' plane - but the discussion had intensified since, with reelection campaign polls and focus groups showing Joe Biden continuing to leach Black support.

The campaign is counting on Harris to help change that - both because of who she is as the first Black vice president and by deploying her in ways that go beyond anything she did in 2020 in a Black outreach effort unlike any previous presidential campaign.

"There is misinformation that is astonishing to me. But we have to deal with it," Harris told CNN when asked about her outreach to Black voters in an exclusive interview during a campaign swing in Las Vegas in April.

But voters aren't the only ones who need a reality check, Harris argued: "Any suggestion and inference that we've got any voter in our back pocket and therefore should be able to count on their vote without earning it, I think is misinformed."

Big questions loom over all these conversations for Harris and her circle, who are thinking not just about her future as a running mate this year but as a woman interested in another eventual presidential run herself: Can she help shift the kind of national appeal being made to Black voters beyond just talking about criminal justice reform and legalizing marijuana? Can she really connect with Black voters, especially men, in ways that she didn't while running for president in 2019? Can she help reverse the trend of some younger Americans giving up on the Democratic Party that top operatives are particularly concerned about for younger Black Americans?

Voters in focus groups are showing "a strongly held belief about the value of having a woman of color in national office, and it is a positive insight about President Biden that he embraces that value as well," said Geoff Garin, who has been conducting some of the research for the campaign.

On Monday, Harris will give what's expected to be a hard-hitting speech in Detroit on the next stop of her economic opportunity tour. Then, on Wednesday, she'll be in the Philadelphia suburbs with "Abbott Elementary" star Sheryl Lee Ralph for an event on abortion rights.

These events are in addition to frequent appearances in Black media that have often gone under the radar, with many more planned as the campaign ramps up.

"That connection, that appeal, that sense that they see themselves in her is something that is really powerful," said Julie Chavez Rodriguez, a former Harris aide who is now the campaign manager for the Biden-Harris reelection, expressing hope that the vice president can "root their relationship with the Democratic Party in ways that we can continue to grow and build that base."

In the 2020 Democratic primaries, Biden always had consistent Black support, while Harris never drew much. And while [*CNN's*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/28/politics/cnn-poll-trump-biden-matchup/index.html) and other polls show Biden still has higher approval ratings among people of color and is the overwhelming choice against Trump, many of those same polls consistently show Trump's share of the Black vote is ticking into the double digits. Many Black activists, Black Republicans and even some administration aides bitterly bring up Biden's 2020 line - [*"I tell you what, if you have a problem figuring out whether you're for me or Trump, then you ain't Black"*](https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/22/politics/biden-charlamagne-tha-god-you-aint-black/index.html) - as evidence that they have been taken for granted.

They don't tend to remember Biden's apology. Rep. Wesley Hunt, a Black Republican from Texas, has even made a running theme of the quote on social media, invoking it against the president on a wide range of political hits.

And Trump's allies are trying to make Biden disaffection among minorities and young voters part of their messaging: [*a new ad from the Make America Great Again super PAC running in rural Georgia*](https://youtu.be/s_vQxqd6PNo) shows a White woman making calls from what's supposed to be a Biden-Harris campaign office.

"Yeah, yeah - I voted for Biden last time," a man's voice says.

"That's fantastic!" the woman says.

"Is it?" he says, complaining about "handouts" for immigrants while he is struggling to pay his bills. "Things were better before Biden. I'm voting for Trump." The ad ends with the text of a headline on screen that reads: "Black, Hispanic, Young Voters Abandon Biden."

Already, several top Democrats tell CNN they are concerned about the effect on Black turnout for their party if Trump picks South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott as his running mate.

Even Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson, a 37-year-old Black Democrat, told CNN that he has one friend who is a Scott fan.

But, the mayor insisted, the appeal would be limited.

"Tim Scott's got no juice," Johnson said.

Reaching out to Black men

How to better reach Black men has become something of an obsession for Harris, advisers say.

Her staff has put together countless dinners with Black male leaders in ***politics***, culture and business, both at her official residence at the Naval Observatory in Washington and when she is back home for weekends in Los Angeles. They've come to call these the "extraordinary gentlemen" dinners.

She asks them what she should say, how she should say it. She urges them to get in league with her, like when she appeared on comedian D.L. Hughley's radio show shortly after the "extraordinary gentlemen" conversation he was part of last year at the Naval Observatory. And some she calls or follows up with individually, like when she took an hour on her most recent trip back to Los Angeles in April to talk with Mav Carter, LeBron James' business partner.

Though Garin told CNN his focus groups have not measured a larger drop-off among Black men specifically for Harris, people who have spoken to her say the vice president herself and multiple people around her remain watchful about anecdotal evidence about Black men's response to a Black woman in power - and to her specifically.

"We cannot escape and we should not try to escape those conversations," said Nevada Attorney General Aaron Ford, who is Black, while acknowledging, "There is no voice that is going to be able to touch every part of the electorate, and Black men are not alone in that regard."

When CNN asked Harris about those concerns about connecting with Black men, her answer was firm.

"I don't agree with it. And it's not been my experience. It's literally not been my experience," Harris said. "If you think about the issues that are important, I'll just tell you based on my own experiences politically and personally, I don't agree with the premise."

Focus on Black wealth

Prepping for a meeting last year, Harris was grilling staff on the Small Business Administration website. What statistics did they have on who was visiting it? How easy was it to navigate? She'd already moved on by the time she was asking, pushing staff to get a direct number or email address she could give out to the 30 Black men, ages 18 to 35, whom she gathered in the Indian Treaty Room in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building.

But it wasn't long before someone mentioned her "Kamala the cop" reputation from her old days as a prosecutor.

Rashad Robinson, the president of the activist group Color of Change, who helped organize the session for her, had urged her to talk about how the world had changed - how, he said, "there were no progressive prosecutors when she was coming up, and if there were, she would have been one."

Harris did some of that. But mostly she redirected the conversation about justice to jobs and economics, citing numbers about environmental and economic opportunities opened up by the Inflation Reduction Act, or about how Black unemployment is higher than unemployment overall.

Biden has been talking about building Black wealth, funding for historically Black colleges and universities, and programs like the billions of dollars going into replacing lead pipes in underserved communities that he touted last week on a trip to North Carolina - a program that both creates jobs for those putting in new pipes and is better for the health of those who will now have cleaner drinking water.

Harris has taken a more granular approach, pushing for more talk on access to capital, raising credit scores, tackling housing costs.

In part, that is from watching Trump. As she tells staff, he doesn't have the right message - and she too rolls her eyes at his big policy proposal for Black men so far being a trip to Philadelphia to promote a $400 gold sneaker - but at least he is seeming to talk to them.

Her "economic opportunity tour" (government-speak for a campaign-minded focus on Black men that started in Atlanta before this stop in Detroit, and which will go next to Milwaukee, with an emphasis throughout on Black entrepreneurs) grew out of that. No victory tour. No grand pronouncements. Talking directly to and with Black men about what they needed, what the administration could help them access and what more needed to be done.

"The work we are doing to extend access to capital is tapping into the ambition to exist, the aspirations that exist, and then giving people the resources that are necessary - money and other resources - to actually achieve success," Harris said in a podcast geared for Black entrepreneurs she recorded live on stage in Atlanta on the first stop of the tour last week.

More than Black or White, red or blue, said John Hope Bryant - the CEO of Bryant Ventures and Operation HOPE, who met with Harris ahead of the first stop - "what I've told the vice president is: The color is green."

"The president has to be talking about having a global vision and all that stuff," Bryant said. "She can roll up her sleeves a little bit and get down to strategy and tactics."

Bryant said he ran through a series of charts like the effects of raising a community's average credit score, and he said he was impressed with Harris's response: "Send me that."

By Edward-Isaac Dovere, CNN

TM & © 2024 Cable News Network, Inc., a Time Warner Company. All rights reserved.

**Load-Date:** May 6, 2024

**End of Document**