

How One Person Can Impact Democracy

Fallon Tomlin – Honorable Mention

A true democratic society cannot exist unless all people have a political voice. Septima Poinsette Clark, a Charleston native, knew that the road to freedom and equality began with voting. Clark and other civil rights activists urged the black community to take an active role in politics. Describing her role in the Civil Rights Movement, Clark once stated, "I just tried to create a little chaos. Chaos is a good thing. Change is what comes of it." The 2020 election can definitely be described as chaotic; but the change that resulted will positively impact the future of our country for generations.

Joe Biden's historic choice for vice president highlights the diversity within the Democratic Party. In addition, the power of female and black votes were significant and indicates that future presidential tickets will be forever changed. According to Bacon Jr. the days of white males dominating the presidential election are gone ("Kamala Harris is Biden's VP Pick — Here's What it Means for the Election and Beyond," 2020). Vice President Harris has provided all young Americans with an example of what one person can accomplish if they completely ignore the demands to conform and selflessly do what is best for all people. She not only represents people of color, but she is also the perfect model of what a strong, confident female leader can be.

The election of a multiracial female has given this country a new standard. The Biden-Harris administration is providing fresh insight that will impact a variety of underrepresented groups for years to come. Denise Crosby of the Chicago Tribune stated perfectly what this election signifies to women: At some point women "lost that narrative their mothers wanted instilled in them. Therefore the hope for this youngest generation - yes, including my own granddaughters - is they will never let doubt cross their minds," (With an Eye on Vice President Harris, Women See Things Are Attainable," 2021). Moving forward, women and other minorities will know that their concerns are relevant. How often have we been told that things are getting "better?" Better is no longer enough. Equality is the only option, and the election of a diverse female gets us one step closer.

Though the United States has recognized some rights of the marginalized, it has often fallen short in the protection of women and minorities in several areas. One primary example is the Equal Rights Amendment. This powerful document sought to end sex discrimination; however, these goals never came to fruition because numerous states did not ratify the document. The election of Kamala Harris as vice president provides disparaged groups with a newfound sense of purpose and value as the Democratic Party seeks to rectify political inequalities.

A more recent example of how disparity still exists came to light just last week. The women's NCAA players were given a few hand weights for their "weight room," while the men's teams enjoyed a spacious facility with ample resources. In my opinion, the female players who brought this situation to light felt safe doing so because women's voices are now being heard, and they even have a vice president in the White House who will support them. The ability to relate to an individual in power and recognize that they can mandate real change, encourages people to step up and get involved. Dawn Staley, the head women's basketball coach at the University of South Carolina, also voiced her disappointment and frustration with the inequality that still exists. She started off by saying, "I cannot be quiet." Staley went on to state, "What we now know is the NCAA's season long message about "togetherness" and "equality" was about convenience," (@dawnstaley Twitter, 2021). Powerful female minority leaders such as Dawn Staley and Rutgers head coach C. Vivian Stringer are taking a hard stance on equality for all. They know that their voices will no longer fall on deaf ears. These small acts of defiance did not occur because one woman made it into the White House; they happened in part because the election of a multiracial female proved that the majority of people in this country recognize the disparities that exist. The country wants leaders in place that will ensure equitable treatment.

During the 2020 election many diverse groups realized that the only way to receive balanced political

representation was to vote. Changing a system that has been in place for generations required the undivided attention of all underrepresented groups. Brancaccio, Shin, and Soderstorm (Marketplace.org, 8/12/2020) argued that Harris would help unite a fragmented Democratic Party. Unprecedented voter participation among blacks and younger groups proved them right.

Madam Vice President is the best of all of us; she is the embodiment of what is right and just. My interpretation is not based on one group's perspective; rather, it examines how an individual and her political party were able to unravel a system that suppressed both women and minorities for generations. With the election of President Biden and Vice President Harris, our country now has leaders in place that understand the adversity faced by marginalized groups. It is with a renewed hope that we all begin to work towards acceptance and unity.

In my opinion, the election of Kamala Harris will also have international repercussions. A multiracial female will clearly have a different viewpoint and approach than any prior vice president. This new perspective may be exactly what our country needs to strengthen international relationships. In addition, the election of a female vice president will cultivate a new respect for women on a global scale. Females worldwide now have an example of what can be accomplished when they are given the chance. Seeing a multiracial female in this powerful position has created a new mindset in our country. My hope is that it will spread and form a new mentality about women and minorities.

At the U.N. Women's conference in March (2021), Vice President Harris stated, "The status of democracy depends fundamentally on the empowerment of women. Not only because the exclusion of women in decision-making is a marker of a flawed democracy, but because the participation of women strengthens democracy," (Besheer, 2021). The same can be said for other minority groups. In my opinion, past political leaders have given diverse groups the scraps of democracy; hoping to stave off substantial change. To their dismay, the election of a multiracial female has given all people a hunger for real democracy.

Sources

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