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## Kamala's Karma

She's smart, she's experienced, and she's running for DA. But she's Willie Brown's ex-girlfriend, and her opponents are trying to crucify her for that.

By Peter Byrne

Wednesday, Sep 24 2003

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Terence Hallinan sits in the auditorium of the State Building on Golden Gate Avenue, staring morosely at the stage. There, members of the low-profile but powerful San Francisco County Democratic Central Committee are wrangling over the temperamental district attorney's fate. Hallinan badly needs the Central Committee endorsement to bolster his bid for a third term in November. Behind him sits Bill Fazio, a defense attorney who has twice lost to the incumbent by thin margins. Both men studiously avoid looking across the room, where neophyte candidate Kamala Harris huddles with her campaign team. Harris has been lobbying Central Committee honchos -- who include U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein and House Majority leader Nancy Pelosi -- for months, asking them to deny their influential support to both male candidates.



BRANDON FERNANDEZ

Kamala Harris is under fire from both of her male opponents over her former fling with Mayor Willie Brown.



And in the end, that's exactly what the leaders of San Francisco's one-party system do. In a significant victory for Harris, they vote "no endorsement," withholding their blessing for the first time from the incumbent DA. A few days later, Harris adds a valuable endorsement from Local 790 of the Service Employees International Union to her growing trophy list, which includes a number of other union locals and Democratic clubs that traditionally have gone for Hallinan (she even bags the Irish American Democratic Club).

But political plugs only take a candidate so far. And outside of local political, legal, and society circles, few people even know the 38-year-old Harris' name. She is a well-regarded criminal and civil prosecutor with an enviable record on domestic violence and

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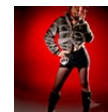
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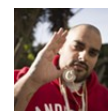
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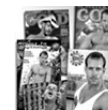
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sexual abuse issues. Hallinan and Fazio, however, are doing their best to make sure that when their younger opponent's name finally registers in voters' brainpans this fall, it's irrevocably linked with another name: Willie Brown, Harris' spurned ex-lover and unsolicited political backer.

Hallinan and Fazio aren't attacking Harris' platform (which they both profess to generally share) or professionalism (each admits that Harris is a competent prosecutor). Rather, they are knifing her with innuendo, saying her ties to the outgoing mayor would cause her, as district attorney, to look the other way should her former beau or his political minions ever be credibly accused of committing crimes in office.

The charge that she is Brown's puppet -- that she's guilty by association with a mayor who has not been found guilty of anything -- infuriates Harris. Though in third place in recent polls, she's a political comer. She's whip-smart, hard-working, and well-credentialed to be San Francisco's top criminal prosecutor. She's hauling in campaign cash like there's no tomorrow. And topping it all off, she's a beautiful blend of East Indian mother and African-American father who may draw votes particularly well among women and minorities. If she manages to come in ahead of Fazio in the Nov. 4 election, and if Hallinan fails to win more than 50 percent of that vote, she'll face the district attorney in a December runoff. In a high-profile sprint against an aging incumbent, Harris -- with her brains, connections, and buppie glamour -- might just emerge victorious.

If she can just get out from under this damn Willie Brown thing.

Harris routinely tries to distance herself from her ex-squeeze, whom she hates even *talking* about. The mere mention of their former liaison makes her shoulders tense, her hands clench, and her eyes narrow.

"I refuse," she says vehemently, "to design my campaign around criticizing Willie Brown for the sake of appearing to be independent when I have no doubt that I am independent of him -- and that he would probably *right now* express some *fright* about the *fact* that he cannot control me.

"His career is over; I will be alive and kicking for the next 40 years. I do not owe him a thing."

She acknowledges that Brown is an "albatross hanging around my neck" and fears that voters who dislike him will ignore her candidacy -- even as she dismisses such an act as irrational. "Would it make sense if you are a Martian coming to Earth that the litmus test for public office is where a candidate is in their relationship to Willie Brown?" Harris asks. "Willie Brown is not going to be around. He's gone -- hello people, move on. If there is corruption, it will be prosecuted. It's a no-brainer, but let's please move on."

Would that politics were so simple.

San Francisco voters tend to have long memories, and Brown himself is complicating Harris' attempts to shed him politically. He personally gave \$500 to her campaign, and a political consultant who worked on both of his mayoral runs is raising money for Harris - without her consent -- using a pitch letter signed by Brown. Harris denies asking the mayor for fund-raising help and knows it gives her antagonists even more ammunition.

She also knows there's not much she can do about it, except to keep saying that the affair is ancient history and that she is a good candidate with good ideas. But as Harris well

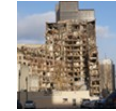
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understands, the more she tries to explain away the Willie factor, the bigger a factor he becomes.

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Kamala (pronounced "KAH-mah-lah") Harris is clearly striving to be her own person, to act independently of special interests, to negate the bimbo/sugar daddy imagery propagated by her opponents. And in person, she does this successfully -- she consistently comes across as forthright, intelligent, and competent.

In a series of lengthy interviews with *SF Weekly*, Harris acknowledges that she benefited from her relationship with Brown, but insists there was nothing improper about it. (Through a spokesman, Brown declined to be interviewed for this story.)

Harris met Brown in 1994 when he was speaker of the state Assembly. She was 29, he was 60. Their May/December affair was the talk of the town during the year before Brown's successful 1995 bid to become mayor. But shortly after he was inaugurated, Harris dumped Brown, a notorious womanizer.

Now, as a candidate in her own right, she's even more eager to distance herself from Da Mayor. She hired as her chief strategist a political consultant who's used Brown as a punching bag in a number of recent campaigns. While her candidacy is endorsed by many longtime Brown supporters, it is also backed by several politicians known for butting heads with the mayor. And Harris promises that, as district attorney, she will investigate corruption allegations that have been directed at an array of city agencies -- and will indict any past or present city official who is prosecutable, including Brown.

While she enjoys significant support in Pacific Heights (one of her best friends is Vanessa Getty), Harris also is trying to generate enthusiasm for her run in poorer neighborhoods such as Bayview-Hunters Point, the Mission, and the Tenderloin. But her candidacy is hardly of the grass-roots variety. Most of the \$400,000 she has raised so far has come from the city's social and legal elites, people with power and money, people who respond well to Harris' message that Hallinan is erratic, divisive, and soft on crime.

Some of them are people Brown introduced her to. But Harris' pollster says that voters, especially the minority voters she is targeting her campaign at, are not as turned off by the mayor as they were in 2000, when the electorate put a solid majority of anti-Brown candidates on the Board of Supervisors, then widely perceived as a rubber stamp for the mayor's pay-to-play administration.

"People told me that Hallinan and Fazio would throw the Willie thing at me," Harris says with a sigh. "The Willie factor is a personal attack, and we want to marginalize it."

She and her campaign manager, Jim Stearns, came up with that strategy last winter as they discussed how to respond to the inevitable assaults on her old relationship with Brown. There were, Harris says, two basic options: "Do we put it out there in our own words and defend, frame, and deconstruct it? Or do we push ahead with an affirmative campaign and respond when hit?" She decided on the latter approach: "When the Willie factor is raised, I respond by saying, 'Let's talk about the real issues.'

"Am I supposed to stand before a group of people and talk about my critique of Willie Brown? They would think that truly odd. He is not one of my opponents. That would be the tail wagging the dog."

She has no doubt that Hallinan and Fazio will unleash blizzards of hit mailers linking her to Brown in the final days of the campaign. Pollster David Binder, who has worked for the Harris campaign, isn't worried. "I believe that voters are less and less concerned

about Willie Brown," he says. "His era is over and he is not the lightning rod for public opinion that he was a few years ago.

"In this race, the swing voters are white women and people of color. ... People of color are now the majority in San Francisco. And most nonwhites are not going to be upset that Brown is raising money for Harris."

Supervisor Aaron Peskin, a frequent Brown nemesis, agrees that the mayor is no longer the political stink bomb he once was. "It's a great line in the press to say that Kamala was Brown's girlfriend, *therefore* she won't prosecute him if evidence of criminality turns up," he says. "But two-thirds of the people in politics here can be associated with Brown. The question is, 'Are you a Willie Brown hack or no?' And if the answer is no, then move on." Peskin points out that Supervisor Bevan Dufty was recently elected despite being labeled a Brown crony by his opponent, Eileen Hanson, whose campaign was run by Stearns, Harris' current manager.

Nonetheless, the mayor's embrace may be harder to shake than the Harris camp realizes.

On the night of the Central Committee vote, a reporter for the *Bay Guardian*, which has vociferously criticized Harris for her association with Brown, stands staring outside the State Building as Harris drives off in a stylish black car. "Willie Brown gave her that BMW!" the scribe remarks with unconcealed disgust.

The reporter is about half right. In fact, as Harris later tells *SF Weekly*, the mayor gave her a 1994 BMW, which she traded in for the 1997 model she now drives. The car remains a tangible link to a man whom many San Franciscans associate with political chicanery and self-dealing -- a connection that doesn't bode well for Kamala Harris.

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The person who truly wields influence over Harris isn't Willie Brown. It's her mother, the renowned breast cancer scientist Gopalan Shyamala.

Shyamala immigrated to America from her native India in the early 1960s. "I came to study at UC Berkeley," she remembers. "I never came to stay. It's the old story: I fell in love with a guy, we got married, pretty soon kids came." The guy she married was Donald Harris, who later became a Stanford economics professor.

Kamala was born in 1964; her sister Maya arrived two years later. The maternal side of the family has a tradition of public service. Shyamala's father was a high-ranking Indian civil servant; her mother was an upper-class feminist concerned that the women who did her laundry were the victims of domestic violence.

"In Indian society we go by birth," Shyamala explains. "We are Brahmins, that is the top caste. Please do not confuse this with class, which is only about money. For Brahmins, the bloodline is the most important. My family, named Gopalan, goes back more than 1,000 years."

By marrying an American, Shyamala was the first person to break the ancient Gopalan bloodline. The union collapsed when Kamala was 5. ("My father is a good guy, but we are not close," she says.) Shyamala earned a doctorate in endocrinology from Berkeley and went on to become an internationally recognized expert in breast cancer research.

A conversation with Shyamala ranges from genealogy to the sociology of cancer to comparative religion and the nature of karma. "We are not born to a higher purpose," she reflects. "Karma simply means ... we schlep. We do what we must, and the less we dwell on it the better.

"But karma is not passive: Every action is based upon intention. The only question is: Are you aware of your intentions? Of the consequences of your actions?" She makes no comment about the ironic karmic fallout of her elder daughter's relationship with the mayor of San Francisco.

Shyamala says that, like her own parents, she did not idly praise the accomplishments of her children as they grew. She expected them to excel in their studies, and they did.

Harris attended public schools in Oakland and Montreal (where she studied art). Then it was off to Howard University, a traditionally African-American college in Washington, D.C. She graduated in 1986 with a degree in political science and economics. During her student years, Harris organized mentor programs for minority youths, demonstrated against apartheid, and pledged a socially significant black sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha.

She reveled in the blackness of Howard. "Close your eyes and imagine: Every Friday night, 10,000 students get dressed up and go out in the yard of Howard University," Harris recently told a youthful audience at a Western Addition church. "It is like a promenade, like the mating season. There is a yard filled with thousands of young people who look like you -- and they are all college students!"

Back in the Bay Area, Harris earned a law degree from Hastings in 1989. She was quickly hired as an assistant district attorney for Alameda County, telling her mother that the world needs socially aware prosecutors. She specialized in child sexual abuse trials, a particularly difficult type of prosecution because juries are, Harris observes, more inclined to accept the word of an adult than a child. (Alameda District Attorney Tom Orloff recalls that Harris has "a good courtroom presence, a high success rate. She is a genuinely good person and her social values will work well in San Francisco.")

When Harris began dating Willie Brown, also an attorney, she had no idea that the affair would generate political consequences for her in the future.

"Black people who go to college have about two degrees of separation with other black professionals, and those who go to law school have even less," Harris explains. "The networks of black lawyers in California are small. Brown and I had lots of mutual friends."

Harris' networks, especially in high society, expanded rapidly while she was going out with one of California's most powerful politicians. The association also had major financial benefits, which Harris talks about reluctantly.

Aside from handing her an expensive BMW, Brown appointed her to two patronage positions in state government that paid handsomely -- more than \$400,000 over five years. In 1994, she took a six-month leave of absence from her Alameda County job to join the Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board. Brown then appointed her to the California Medical Assistance Commission, where she served until 1998, attending two meetings a month for a \$99,000 annual salary.

"These jobs were created before I was born," Harris says. "Whether you agree or disagree with the system, I did the work. I worked hard to keep St. Luke's Hospital [in the Mission] open. I brought a level of life knowledge and common sense to the jobs. I mean, if you were asked to be on a board that regulated medical care, would you say no?"

In 1998, she left the Alameda County DA's Office to work for Hallinan, managing the San Francisco DA's career-criminal unit and concentrating on Three Strikes cases. She

personally tried three cases, including a homicide, negotiated dozens of plea bargains, and supervised five other attorneys.

In 2000, upset by what she says was the politicization of the office, Harris and several colleagues tried to overthrow Darrell Salomon, Hallinan's chief deputy. When the coup failed, Harris abruptly quit and went to work for then City Attorney Louise Renne, heading up the division of Renne's office that handles child abuse, domestic violence, building code enforcement, and public health matters. (Renne describes Harris as an extremely capable lawyer and a compassionate person. "She will make the best DA this city has seen in years," says Renne.)

Harris was so angry at Hallinan that she decided to try to knock him out of office. She has been running for DA ever since -- attending political events, helping out on other people's campaigns, serving on the boards of nonprofits that work with domestic violence victims. She's attended society bashes from Nob Hill to Hollywood -- always striving to be seen, methodically gathering support, pushing herself as an alternative to yet another duel between two political has-beens.

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Stumping in the Castro, the Mission, and the Tenderloin, Harris shows real stuff as a candidate.

She listens carefully to the concerns of ordinary people. She does not patronize them or make idle promises. A cook slaving over a hot wok in a Chinese restaurant greets her with a grin. A janitor stops to chat. A clutch of black men playing dominoes in a Tenderloin park high-five her.

They want to know how she's different from Hallinan. (San Francisco's poorer neighborhoods have never gone for the conservative Fazio.) But differentiating herself politically and ideologically from Hallinan is a problem for Harris. She shares many of the famously liberal DA's views on legal and social issues, including the death penalty (against), medical marijuana (for), and the need to ramp up prosecutions of domestic violence and child sexual assault cases (strongly for).

She argues, however, that Hallinan is running his office into the ground.

"The DA's Office is a mess. It's falling apart. There's one computer for every two or three lawyers, there's no centralized database to track cases. Staff morale is low because he is failing to prosecute serious and violent crimes."

Harris attacks the incumbent for his handling of the Fajitagate case (in which Hallinan encouraged a grand jury to indict the top brass of the San Francisco Police Department for obstruction of justice without having enough evidence to prove his case) and for allowing Elbert Flowers to plea-bargain out of a stiff sentence for torturing his girlfriend in 1998. (Flowers was arrested for torturing another girlfriend last month.)

Hallinan, she adds, has an abysmal conviction rate for serious crimes. She says that before he assumed office in 1995, the District Attorney's Office won convictions in 75.5 percent of cases filed. After Hallinan took office, the conviction rate fell to 64.7 percent. "During Hallinan's first five years, 4,568 cases would have been convictions if Arlo Smith's track record had been maintained," she concludes.

Hallinan replies that the 10 percent drop in his conviction rate is due to his diversion program, which emphasizes rehabilitation over punishment. He says his attempts to prosecute top SFPD officers in Fajitagate may have failed, but they "lifted the lid off a long-simmering problem" and may lead to future reforms. He still believes command-

level officers conspired to obstruct justice after three young cops were accused of beating up two men who refused to give them their steak fajitas.

The DA admits he is "not 100 percent clear" why Flowers received only a two-year prison sentence after his first offense. The victim and her lawyer, Hallinan explains, apparently prevailed on an assistant DA to give Flowers a break. "Those are hard cases," he says. "Sometimes you bite the bullet and take a chance. As this one worked out, we should not have let him out, period. He should still be in prison."

Harris also charges that federal and state law enforcement agencies have stopped bringing white-collar crime and public corruption cases to Hallinan because he is not doing his job. She promises to more vigorously investigate and prosecute city officials who break the law.

Hallinan insists he has excellent working relationships with his counterparts in Washington, D.C., and Sacramento, especially California Attorney General Bill Lockyer. In the past two years, he says, his office disposed of 11 theft cases involving city agencies or the San Francisco school district, and nine other cases are under investigation. "I'm not remiss in the prosecution of governmental corruption since her boyfriend was elected mayor of San Francisco," he says. "The situation of public corruption under Brown is discouraging to me -- it is everywhere. Her relationship to Brown would make it hard for her to prosecute."

But at least a few prominent members of the San Francisco bar view Harris as more competent than the incumbent. Among them are well-known defense lawyers Jim Brosnahan, who represented "Marin Taliban" John Walker Lindh, and John Kecker, who has served on the San Francisco Police Commission.

"I like Terence Hallinan, but he has been a disaster as a DA," says Kecker. "The assistant district attorneys complain that the cops bring them bad cases, the police whine that the DA doesn't prosecute. Fazio does not have the organizational capability to bring about reform. Harris is one of those once- or twice-in-a-generation politicians that does have real legal and organizational talents."

Harris also has fans among those who try to help young sex-abuse victims. She co-founded the Coalition to End the Exploitation of Kids, which provides legal and health services to sexually exploited children, including teenage prostitutes. Her partner in that project is Norma Hotaling, an ex-hooker who considers youthful prostitutes to be the victims of serial rape. Hotaling is not endorsing anyone in the DA's race, but she finds "Harris to be absolutely dedicated to ending the sexual exploitation of children, who should not be arrested but saved from the johns."

Dr. Shannon Thyne, who coordinates the Department of Public Health's child sexual abuse program, works closely with the unit Harris heads at the City Attorney's Office. Together, they created a program to spot evidence of child sexual abuse in emergency rooms. While Thyne credits Hallinan with setting up effective programs to deal with those who prey on children -- making it easier, for example, to remove young victims from abusers and put them into foster care -- she says Harris has long been the mover and shaker on the issue.

As Harris campaigns in the Mission, a man on the street tells her that he likes Hallinan's "permissiveness." Harris responds that people ought not to confuse "compassionate justice" with Hallinan's failure to prosecute property-destroying war protesters.

"It is not progressive to be soft on crime," she says.

In fact, Harris' law-and-order rhetoric worries Public Defender Jeff Adachi, who does not want her to win. "Harris would be a hard-nosed prosecutor," says Adachi. "It's not the tradition in San Francisco to favor punishment over rehabilitation. We are not concerned with the conviction rate, we don't want to come down hard on people accused of crimes, we don't want to nail them to the cross."

Harris just laughs at this criticism, which would qualify as a wannabe DA's dream endorsement almost anywhere except San Francisco.

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Despite her credentials and zesty campaigning, Harris acknowledges that recent polls indicate she is lagging far behind Hallinan and Fazio.

With the incumbent at 28 percent and Fazio in the mid-20s, she has 14 percent of the prospective vote (having risen from 9 percent back in February). The silver lining, she says, is that unlike in most political races, the percentage of undecided voters in the DA contest is rising (from 27 percent in March to 35 percent this month). That growing pool, she believes, gives her an opening.

As her name recognition slowly increases, the possibility of her winning is driving her opponents bananas. In an interview about his own candidacy, Fazio couldn't leave the subject of Harris alone. "How can Harris root out corruption if she has Willie supporting her behind the scenes?" he interjected, apropos of nothing. "I do not care that they had a relationship, but there are legitimate questions whether or not there is payback there."

San Francisco Assemblyman Mark Leno sees the efforts of Hallinan and Fazio to smear Harris with her past association with Brown as misogynistic. He says the two male candidates are focusing on the Willie factor because Harris "presents a real threat and they have no other cards to play."

His sentiments are echoed by Harris' sister and fellow attorney, Maya Harris West, director of the Racial Justice Project for the ACLU's Northern California chapter. "This hype around Willie Brown is such a distraction and so opportunistic, sexist, and ridiculous," says West. "When a woman dates an accomplished man, why are people so willing to assume it's only because of him that the woman is successful?"

Harris' mother agrees. Shyamala says the "malevolence" of the personal attack on her daughter makes her angry. "What has Willie Brown done for her? Introduce her to society people when they dated? If they did not like Kamala on her own right, they would have dropped her after she dropped Willie. Kamala is comfortable in all kinds of social scenes. She can pull it off in high society, too. She has the manners, the eating habits.

"Why shouldn't she have gone out with Willie Brown? He was a player. And what could Willie Brown expect from her in the future? He has not much life left."

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Given the voter demographics she is targeting, and her own ethnicity, it's not surprising that Harris' campaign headquarters is smack in the middle of Bayview Hunters Point.

"I feel the black community is my base," she says. "I feel comfortable there, with people coming in off the street to check out the headquarters." Local African-Americans, she notes, turn out in relatively small numbers at the polls, even though they are disproportionately represented as the objects of the district attorney's prosecutorial attention.



But with her law degree and upper-middle-class background, Harris doesn't always seem completely in tune with her would-be constituents.

One day, she visits the decrepit Sunnydale housing project escorted by Ruth Jackson, a community activist who lives nearby. During Brown's administration, the Housing Authority spent more than \$25 million remodeling Sunnydale, but the most prominent improvement appears to be the huge letters decorating one building: MAYOR WILLIE L. BROWN COMMUNITY YOUTH CENTER.

Down the street, young men sell drugs, glancing sideways at strangers. Outside the center, Harris talks to three other men who are friends of Jackson. She tells them why it is important to vote against Prop. 54, a ballot initiative intended to prevent the state from gathering racial information from Californians. Harris explains that Prop. 54 will undo affirmative action, that it is a step backward toward *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the infamous 1896 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that legalized segregation. The men listen politely, genuinely interested in what she has to say.

Harris has a brainstorm: The men should sponsor a mayoral debate in the community center. They are lukewarm to the idea. They're planning to stage a protest demonstration the next day because, they say, Muni broke a promise to hire black youths from their ZIP code to help build the new light-rail system snaking down Third Street. Harris brightens.

"You should ask a police captain to conduct a protest training," she says. "That way you can protest safely. For example, people need to know not to run!"

Harold Kyer, who is organizing the Muni protest, seems a bit embarrassed to have to straighten her out. "Our community is not police-friendly, Ms. Harris," he explains gently. "They will not come to a meeting if the police show up."

The get-together ends. Harris zooms away in a black BMW (not hers) piloted by a volunteer campaign chauffeur. She's on a tight schedule, and does not have time to walk the community and talk to the low-income women and children who populate it. She insists, however, that she won't forget them.

"I have no intention," she says, "of turning a blind eye to the problems at Sunnydale."

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From his Marina District office, political consultant Philip Muller is raising money for Kamala Harris -- without her consent.

Muller, who worked on both of Willie Brown's mayoral campaigns, is doing this through an independent expenditure committee innocuously called the California Voter Project. (Such committees are often used by special interests to raise political cash far in excess of state limits on individual contributions.) Muller plans to buy radio time for Harris, and he says he might air commercials critical of Hallinan and Fazio. He's also printing up window signs and bumper stickers for Harris.

His main fund-raising tool is a letter signed by Brown that requests \$500 donations to "help Kamala win." He says the mayor's signature is legitimate, and Brown's spokesman confirms that.

Harris says she has had no contact with the mayor about his fund-raising on her behalf. She is "not sure" how she feels about his efforts, but she doesn't spend her time worrying about it.

Muller's unsolicited involvement in her campaign is galling in another way though. Unbeknown to Harris, Muller's committee was behind an anonymous mailer that attacked Harris' brother-in-law, Tony West, when he ran for a San Jose Assembly seat in 2000. The mailer suggested that West lived in Oakland (he didn't) by superimposing his head on the Oakland Raiders logo, with two swords sticking through his skull. Months after West lost the election, the *San Jose Mercury News* criticized Muller for unleashing "last-minute mailers riddled with distortions" and not revealing their true source.

When *SF Weekly* shows her a copy of the *Mercury News* article, Harris yelps, "You are kidding me. This is outrageous. Offensive. I will have no part of this. You watch what I do!" A few days later, after she calms down, Harris notes that there is nothing she can do to stop Muller, since the law forbids her campaign from even contacting his committee.

Muller's efforts notwithstanding, Harris is raising plenty of money on her own. According to her finance chairman, Mark Buell, a major Democratic Party fund-raiser, she has banked nearly \$400,000 to date. (Hallinan says he's raised \$157,000, while Fazio, who had raised \$105,000 by the end of June, declines to reveal how much he's taken in since then.)

Buell insists the Harris campaign has "not received a penny from Willie Brown." When informed by *SF Weekly* that public records show Brown personally gave Harris \$500, the maximum individual contribution allowed, Buell's memory suddenly improves. "Oh yes," he says. "My stepdaughter asked Brown for a contribution in a restaurant.

"I was not in communication with Willie, except for the chat I had with him about the race," Buell continues. "He said the best way for Kamala to win is to take Fazio out. So I had lunch with Fazio, but he would not get out." (Fazio confirms this account.)

Buell excuses himself from a telephone interview, saying, "I am going to a lunch for [mayoral front-runner] Gavin Newsom to get a list of people from him to do a fund-raiser for Kamala." Harris supports Newsom's November ballot initiative, Proposition M, which will further criminalize panhandling in San Francisco but provides no new funding for housing or health services for beggars. Her support of the initiative seems at odds with her more liberal stance on other social welfare issues.

Yet Harris doesn't hesitate to play up her sympathy for down-and-outers when raising cash for her campaign.

One evening at Clouds Restaurant, atop Yerba Buena Gardens, she addresses a group of black professionals, telling them, "The most victimized people do not vote, so you have to act on their behalf."

A few nights later, she hits up an all-white Pacific Heights crowd with the same speech. Among the wine-sipping guests is romance novelist Danielle Steel. The hostess, Frances Bowes, whose fortune derives partly from Hula-Hoops and Frisbees, says she met Harris at a benefit thrown by clothier-to-the-wealthy Wilkes Bashford, a longtime Willie Brown crony, in 1994. Bowes and Harris served together on the board of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, where Harris started a successful program to bring art into the public schools.

Bowes is particularly impressed by "Kamala's incredible theme, which is to protect young girls that become enslaved to prostitution. She is so vital and impassioned, anybody who heard her would vote for her for president.

"Why, Willie Brown just wrote us a letter on her behalf," she adds happily.

The crowd seems fascinated by Harris, an intelligent woman of color who speaks their language, who knows their first names, and who understands that as *liberals*, they want to maintain law and order -- but with a certain San Franciscostyle noblesse oblige.

One woman asks, "What about people who rent? What will make them go to the polls and hit that button for you?"

"Name recognition," Harris replies, as her staffers collect checks.

Kamala Harris is doing everything she can to make sure she has enough money to buy more name recognition before Nov. 4.

She needs at least another \$300,000 to do mailings and radio spots. Her goal is to raise \$40,000 a week (not counting Muller's money), which means she has to schmooze literally hundreds of people who can afford those \$500 max-out donations.

Asked what guarantee she can make that she will not sell out the interests of her rank-and-file supporters to those of her wealthy financial backers, Harris says with real emotion, "How could I turn my back on my people?"

"I believe that everything you put out in the world comes back to you. There are consequences for everything. Karma exists, absolutely."

Tags: Feature, Featured Stories, Bill Fazio, Donald Harris, Kamala Harris, Terence Hallinan

## About The Author



**Peter Byrne**

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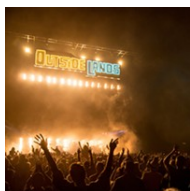
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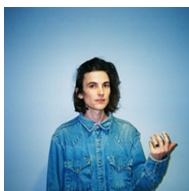
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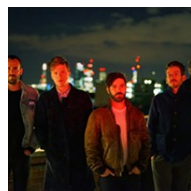
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