

University of California  
**UC Hastings**  
College of the Law

**Toward**  
JUSTICE  
**for All**

AS CALIFORNIA ATTORNEY  
GENERAL, KAMALA HARRIS '89  
TAKES ON THE STATE'S  
TOUGHEST CHALLENGES



**Immigration Now**

- THE UC HASTINGS COMMUNITY LOOKS AT THIS  
TIMELY ISSUE FROM MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

SPRING 2013

# Toward Justice for All

[ In targeting perpetrators of human trafficking and protecting foreclosure victims, California Attorney General Kamala Harris '89 is shaking up the status quo. ]

Among the multitude of rising stars in California legal circles and national politics, Attorney General **Kamala D. Harris '89** is capturing lots of attention—and with good reason. Pragmatic and photogenic, she is the first woman, the first African American, and the first South Asian to hold the post as the state's top prosecutor.

At wide-ranging venues and in challenging circumstances, Harris has made her mark as both articulate and audacious—scoring stunning electoral victories, first as district attorney in San Francisco

before assuming her statewide post; standing up to big banks in securing safeguards for California foreclosure victims; addressing the Democratic National Convention and supporting the reelection of President Barack Obama, with whom she has personal and political ties.

Even while media pundits speculate that she may be a possible candidate for governor or a post in the Obama administration, Harris is decidedly keeping her attention focused on her current office. Always committed and conscientious, she doggedly defends the interests of the people



“We must counter the ruthlessness of human traffickers with resolve and collaboration. Law enforcement must continue to train, gather data, and shut down the trafficking operations in our state.”



“We need to be smart in the ways we are addressing immigration, and it needs to be based on what is in the best interests of our community, not driven by ideology and emotion.”

of California—protecting the rights of consumers, fighting to preserve the state’s natural resources, and supporting efforts to ensure marriage equality for all Californians (her office recently filed an amicus brief with the U.S. Supreme Court opposing Prop. 8).

### **BORN TO MAKE WAVES**

No matter the case, Harris is driven by the law’s power to right wrongs and balance the scales of justice. As she puts it, “Lawyers have a profound ability and responsibility to be a voice for the vulnerable and the voiceless.”

It’s a point of view that’s virtually in her DNA. An Oakland native, Harris grew up amid the

social unrest and political activism of the 1960s and ‘70s and describes her divorced parents as civil rights activists. Her father, a Jamaican immigrant, went on to teach economics at Stanford. Her mother, who raised her, was Indian and became a leading breast cancer researcher.

“My [maternal] grandfather was one of the original freedom fighters in India,” says Harris, recalling her earliest memories of her family’s periodic trips there. She had the honor of joining him and his friends, all retired public servants, on daily walks on the beach.

“They would debate the role of government and the need to fight corruption,” she says. “Those

conversations had a tremendous influence on me.”

### **FROM COLLEGE ACTIVIST TO CAREER PROSECUTOR**

Having grown up “surrounded by people who were always passionately fighting for this thing called ‘justice,’” Harris once told a reporter, “I was ultimately inspired to make my own contribution to this noble cause through public service.” That sense of purpose led her first to Howard University in Washington, D.C., America’s oldest historically black university, then to UC Hastings, which suited her aspirations and lifelong bent toward activism. She served as president of the Black Law

Students Association (BLSA), in a regional post for BLSA's national parent organization, and as an advocate for greater campus diversity as part of the Legal Education Opportunity Program.

After law school, Harris signed on with the Alameda County District Attorney's Office as deputy district attorney. In 1998, she joined the San Francisco District Attorney's Office, where, among other posts, she led the Career Criminal Unit. She was elected district attorney in 2003, defeating two-term incumbent Terence Hallinan; she held firm to her stance against the death penalty while in that post, winning an unopposed second term in 2007.

In 2010, voters chose Harris to be the state's 32nd attorney general. What has been called her "biggest test and success" came the next year, when she negotiated an additional \$12 billion in debt relief for Californians as part of the settlement of a 49-state suit against five major banks accused of mortgage abuses.

#### ON THE AG'S AGENDA

Prosecuting human trafficking is high on Harris's list of priorities, as it has been throughout her career. According to statistics released by her office, California is one of the nation's top four destination states for the multibillion-dollar, modern-day slave trade. "At its core, this is

a pure law enforcement issue, and we must address it," says Harris. "We've got to send victims the signal that we care."

Other immigration-related issues are also a focus of her office. Harris made statewide headlines reminding local law enforcement that federal orders to turn over noncriminal undocumented immigrants aren't mandatory. She also recently filed two high-profile amicus briefs: one with the California Supreme Court supporting the admission of undocumented immigrant Sergio Garcia to the state bar, and another with the U.S. Supreme Court in opposition to Arizona's illegal immigration legislation.

Taking a big-picture view of immigration reform, this immigrants' daughter says she's excited about what she sees as a convergence of political will, legal opinion, and public support for sweeping change. As with *Brown v. Board of Education's* school desegregation, spearheaded generations ago by her legal heroes Thurgood Marshall, Charles Hamilton Houston, and Constance Baker Motley, immigration reform may very well be the next civil rights issue to have its day in court.

"I think history will also show this moment as a turning point," she says. "It's incumbent on everyone to consider the moment and decide what side of history they want to be on."

