

Sneakers: Defining your identity

Kamala Harris's preference for non-traditional footwear was first seen last year when she was a Democratic presidential hopeful, and appeared in Converse Chuck Taylor All Stars. Ever since James Dean wore his, Converse has become the go-to shoe for the rebellious and the outcasts. "Chuck Taylors have a long history of being used to convey ideas of authenticity rather than hype," says Elizabeth Semmelhack, (the author of *Sneaker X Culture: Collab*). Fans have included Andy Warhol, the Ramones, Karl Lagerfeld and Kurt Cobain.

Nick Engvall, the founder of Sneaker History, thinks Harris's choice of sneakers rather than the traditional business attire worn by politicians on the campaign trail could mean she will appeal to others like myself who feel it makes her more authentic or normal". Jeff Carvalho, the co-founder of streetwear website Highsnobiety, thinks they will "help her connect not only to a younger audience but also to the important Gen X^① crowd".

Culturally, they are also "a quintessentially^② American sneaker," says Semmelhack. But Harris's US is in contrast to Donald Trump's blindingly white one, and she is making a statement about the country she represents. A biracial woman whose parents met while protesting for civil rights in Oakland in the 60s, Harris is stepping into a political landscape where, for example, 90% of the Senate is white. As Bobbito Garcia^③ wrote in *Out of The Box*: "The progenitors of sneaker culture were predominantly... kids of colour who grew up in a depressed economic era."

- ① People born between 1965 and 1980.
- ② typically
- ③ An American DJ, author, streetball player.

