

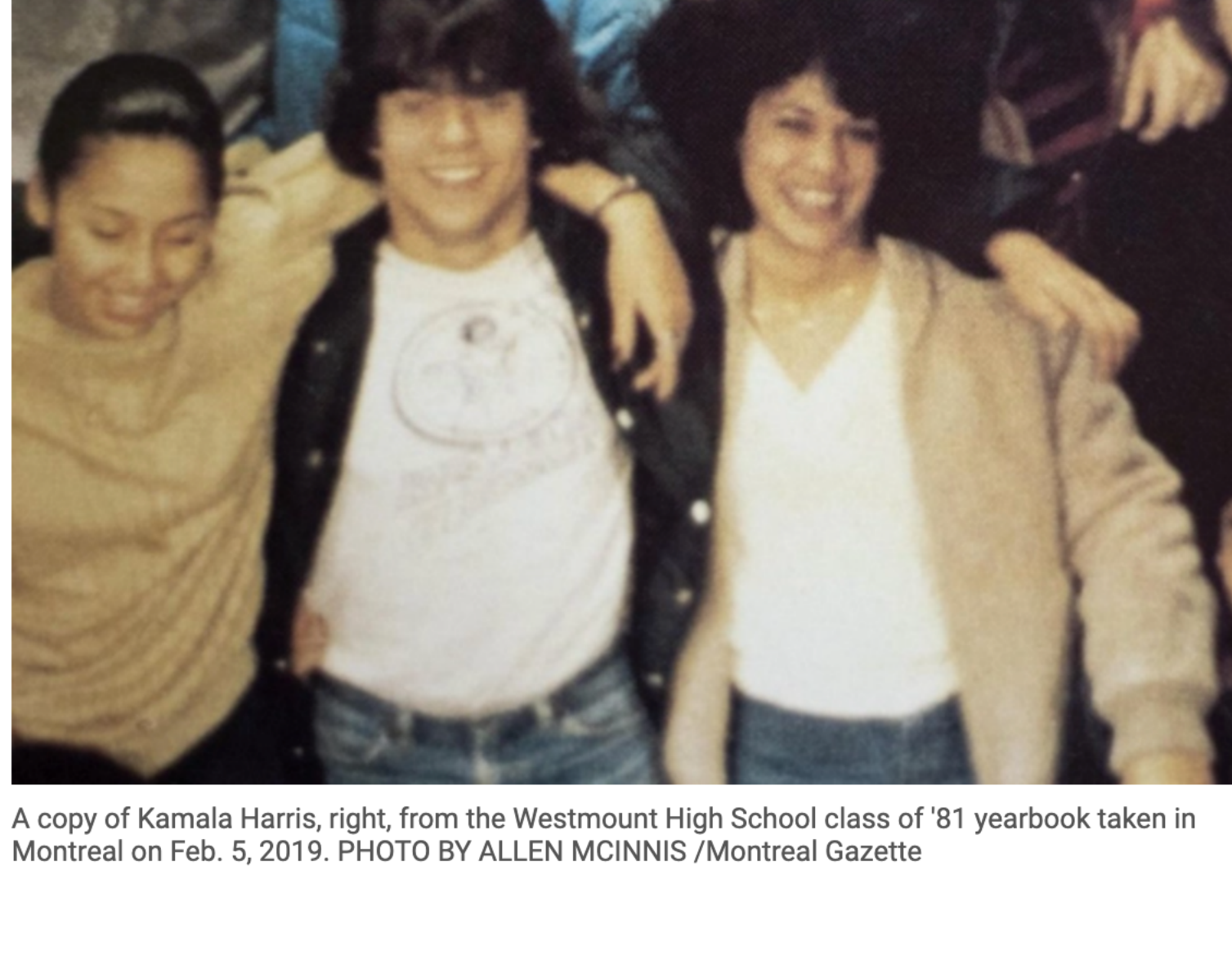
Local News

Westmount High celebrates alumna Harris becoming U.S. vice-president elect

'There's a woman in the White House who came to Montreal, who was educated at a public high school in Montreal, who experienced what my students experience'.

René Bruemmer

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A copy of Kamala Harris, right, from the Westmount High School class of '81 yearbook taken in Montreal on Feb. 5, 2019. PHOTO BY ALLEN MCINNIS /Montreal Gazette

For staff and students of Westmount High School, there was elation on Saturday over former student Kamala Harris becoming the first woman elected vice-president of the United States.

Elation and gratitude, that the message of infinite possibilities instilled by teachers, counsellors and principals at the multicultural Montreal public school since its inception has been affirmed with Harris's ascension to the White House.



SEBASTIAN HIGH
Grade 11 Student

“There’s a woman in the White House who came to Montreal, who was educated at a public high school in Montreal, who experienced what my students experience, in a school that has students from all over,” said Karen Allen, a guidance counsellor at Westmount High for 27 years. “To imagine that Kamala spent her formative years in our auditorium, in our art room, walking down the same halls, maybe went to a guidance counsellor to plan a career.

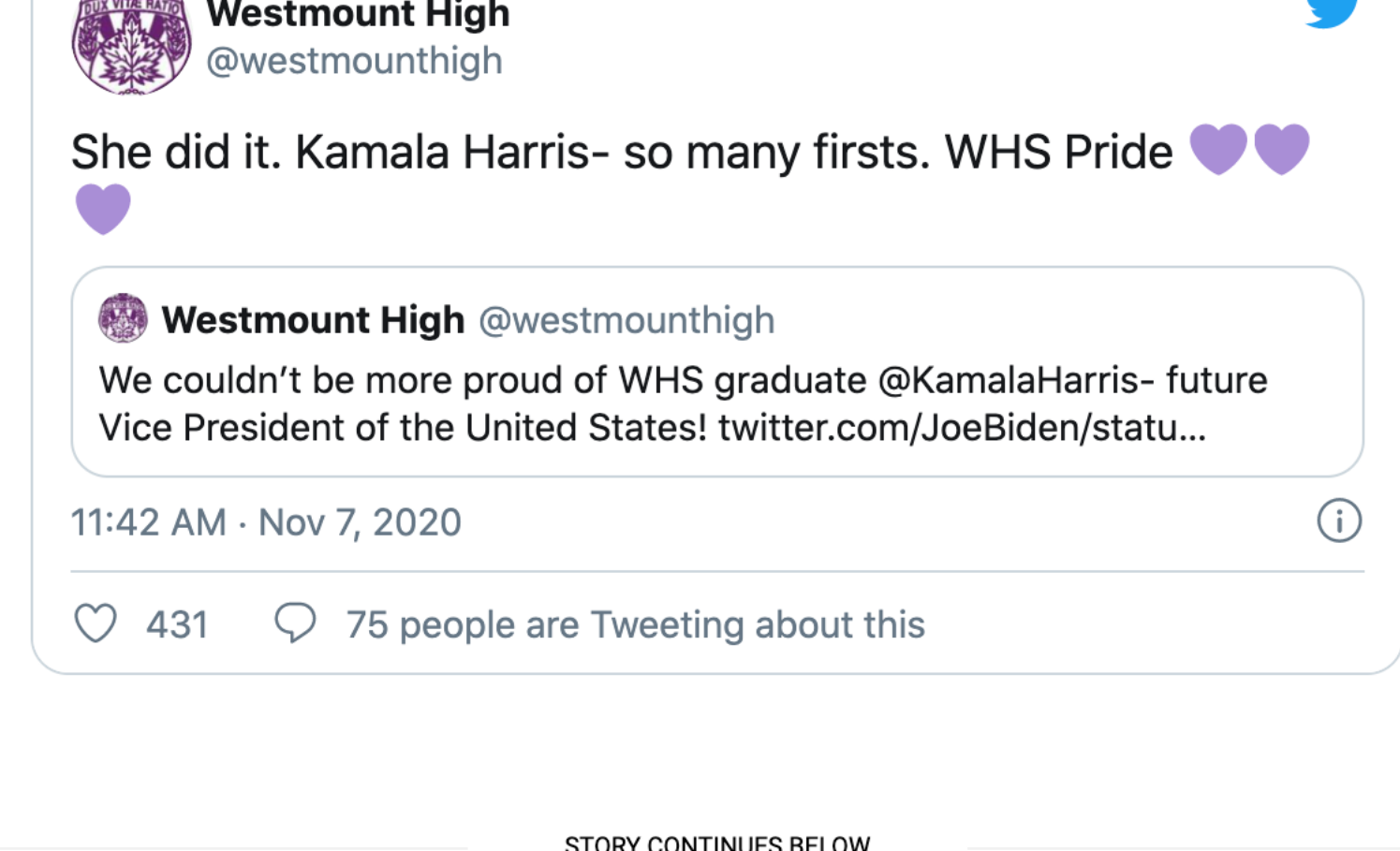
“I feel it makes it so much more connected, when you start imagining students when they leave here, they could be anything. It’s something you always say, but when it actually happens it’s pretty incredible.”

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

“WHS Knight in the White House!!” the high school tweeted from its official account on Saturday, accompanied by a picture of Harris and Joe Biden. “She did it. Kamala Harris — so many firsts. WHS Pride.”



STORY CONTINUES BELOW



Westmount High @westmounthigh
We couldn't be more proud of WHS graduate @KamalaHarris- future Vice President of the United States! twitter.com/JoeBiden/statu...

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Harris, whose father was from Jamaica and mother from India, came to Montreal as a 12-year-old from California with her sister and mother and spent her formative teen years at Westmount High School, graduating in 1981. Fellow students said she mixed in well in the diverse environment, and was an outgoing and intellectually vibrant peer.

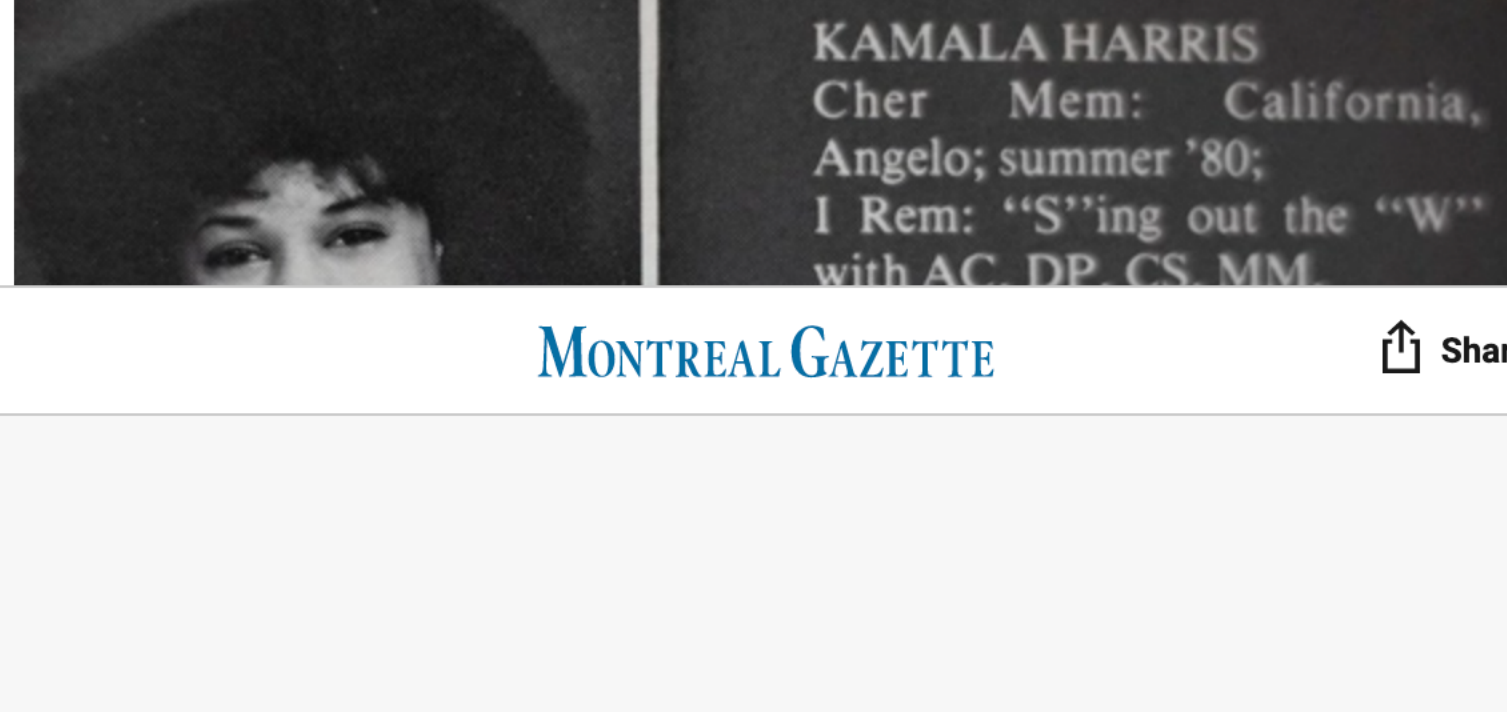
At the time, the school was 60 per cent white and 40 per cent Black from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, and students got along well, said former principal Garvin Jeffers.

“Never in my wildest dreams did I think one of my students would end up in the White House,” Jeffers said. “I think this is quite a step for a woman, and for a Black woman, to become vice-president.

“Maybe after one or two terms with Mr. Biden, she could follow in his footsteps and become president.”

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For Allen, Harris’s move to one of the most powerful positions in the world, and the defeat of Donald Trump, resonated on a personal level as well. In recent conversations with Black relatives in places like Florida, Maryland and New York City, there has been a “strong feeling of hopelessness, of not having any hope that there would be or could be change. Knowing how it’s been affecting them, I’m really pleased that there is a possibility of change, and of hope.”



If it wasn't for the pandemic, the school would probably have had a rally in the auditorium to celebrate Harris's (and the school's) achievements, Allen said. Instead, there will likely be socially distanced events, like “Kamala cookies on Tuesday.” Harris's nomination for the post had already sparked an interest in U.S. politics and history at the school.

On Friday, sensing a win for Biden and Harris, Allen and her colleagues composed a tribute that was read over the intercom to all the students.

“We want to take a moment to recognize one of our own. Kamala Harris was a graduate of Westmount High School and was inspired to fight for social justice because of the connections and friendships that she built within these very halls.

“It is no surprise to us that one of the most important positions in the world will likely be held by a graduate of Westmount High School. Her achievement is a representation of all the potential we see in you. When we look at Ms. Harris, we also recognize all the teachers that guided her, just like the amazing WHS teachers that are standing in front of you at this very moment.

“And we can't help but wonder how this moment in history will shape you.”

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