

# Cynthia McKinney for President - 2008

August 2, 2024



*This is the eighth of a series of article about Black political candidates for the two highest offices of president and vice-president of the United States. The idea of writing this series originally begun when Cornel West announced his candidacy, the story of Black political candidates for the highest offices take on a new significance in light of Kamala Harris' current campaign. This is the list of candidates that we discuss in this series, though the four candiates of 1968 are discussed in one article.*

- **George Edwin Tayler**, candidate of the National Negro Liberty Party, sometimes known as the National Liberty Party in 1904;
- **Clifton Berry**, of the Socialist Workers Party in 1964;
- **Charlene Mitchell** of the Communist Party in 1968;
- **Eldridge Cleaver** with the Peace & Freedom Party in 1968;
- **Dick Gregory** as a write-in candidate in 1968;
- **Channing Emery Phillips** as a Democrat, all in 1968.
- **Shirley Chisholm**, Democrat, in 1972;
- **Angela Davis**, Communist Party for vice-president in 1984 and 1988;
- **Jesse Jackson**, Democrat, for president in 1984 and 1988;
- **Ron Daniles**, People's Party candidate in 1992;
- **Cynthia McKinney**, Green Party candidate 2008;
- **Cornel West**, independent, in 2024;
- **Barack Obama**, Democratic candidate in 2008 and 2012;
- and finally **Kamala Harris** for vice president in 2020 for president in 2024.

*We are currently (first week of August) editing these pieces. The essay on George Edwin Taylor has yet to be posted.*

**Cynthia McKinney**

In 2008 Cynthia McKinney, who had served six terms as a Democratic Congresswoman for the state of Georgia, ran for president as the candidate of the Green Party. She was in many ways the ideal candidate for such a left party. She had earned a reputation as a fighter for civil rights and a sharp critic of America's imperial foreign policy.

A Black candidate with her experience in office, a knowledge of international affairs, and a reputation as a radical, she should have been a great boon to the Greens. But as it happened, a young Black Senator from Illinois named Barack Obama ran for president that same year on the Democratic ticket, defeating the Republican John McCain. McKinney ultimately received only 161,797 votes or 0.12 percent of all votes cast. And disappointingly, McKinney subsequently devolved into a trafficker in conspiracy theories and antisemitism.

Cynthia McKinney was born in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1955 and raised in the well-off Black neighborhood of Collier Heights. Her mother Leola McKinney was a nurse and her father Billy McKinney a police officer and then a Georgia state representative. When her father returned from military service in Europe, still wearing his uniform, he used a "white's only" water fountain in Florence, South Carolina, and was arrested. In reaction to his arrest, he became a civil rights activist, worked successfully to integrate the Atlanta Police Force, joined the Afro-American Police League and protested against the City of Atlanta's discriminatory policies in law enforcement, picketing in front of the police station, taking the young Cynthia with him. Billy McKinney was subsequently elected a state representative serving from 1973 to 2003, and his daughter says he not only introduced her to the world of politics, but also taught her how to read legislative proposals.

Cynthia McKinney studied at the University of Southern California where in 1978 she earned a B.A. in international relations and then earned an M.A. from the Fletcher School for Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in 1979. Years later, in 2015, McKinney got her Ph.D. at Antioch University, writing a dissertation on Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez. The abstract of the dissertation says, "This study investigates the leadership of Hugo Chávez and his legacy on race as seen through the eyes and experiences of selected interviewees and his legacy on race." The dissertation is a paean to Chavez as a transformative leader leading a fight for socialism and for the advancement of women and people of color.



It was her father who launched her political career when in 1986 he urged a write-in campaign for her as a candidate for the Georgia House; she lost, but garnered 40 percent of the vote. She ran for the same seat again in 1988 and won, serving alongside her father.

She became an opponent of the Gulf War, speaking out against it in the legislature in 1991. Many of

the other legislators left the chamber to protest her remarks. In 1992, McKinney was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, retaining her seat there through several elections even though her district was repeatedly redrawn as a result of court cases. She served on several committees — Banking and Finance, Armed Services, and Foreign Affairs — and she criticized President Bill Clinton's intervention in Kosovo, U.S. sanctions on Iraq, and U.S. policies in the Middle East.

She gave voice to a theory, widely circulated on the political fringes, that President George W. Bush knew in advance of the Sept. 11 attacks but allowed them to happen because they would prove profitable to the global investment firm his father was associated with. In her final term, she introduced bills to impeach Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

In 2002 McKinney was defeated in the Democratic Party primary, attributing her defeat to Republicans who took advantage of the state's open primary. Her father claimed she was defeated because, "Jews have bought everybody. Jews. J-E-W-S." She was subsequently reelected to Congress in 2004. In 2006, when she was stopped by a capitol police officer who didn't recognize her, she slapped the officer, an incident that damaged her reputation. She left the Democratic Party in 2007 and made a statement, identifying with the first American feminists, summing up her conversion to a more radical politics:

And just like the women and men at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 who declared their independence from the Old Order, I celebrated my birthday last year by doing something I had done a dozen times in my head, but had never done publicly: I declared my independence from every bomb dropped, every threat leveled, every civil liberties rollback, every child killed, every veteran maimed, every man tortured, and the national leadership that let this happen.

She became a strident critic of the U.S. electoral system and what she saw as its failure to protect the rights of Black voters. In 2008, citing the film "American Blackout" (in which she also appears) she declared that the 2000 and 2004 elections had been stolen. She asserted that one million Black voters were never counted. She also claimed that the electronic voting machines and mail-in ballots also led to a lack of election integrity.

McKinney became the Green Party candidate for U.S. President in 2008, sharing the Green's environmental views, its opposition to militarism and war, and its criticism of the state of Israel and sympathy for the Palestinians. She ran with Rosa Clemente, a Puerto Rican Afro-Latina journalist and activist making them the first all-female slate for president and vice-president. As already noted, McKinney, despite her experience as a member of Congress, did poorly in the election, coming in sixth in the race with only 161,603 votes.

In the period after her campaign McKinney participated in two attempts to bring medical supplies to Palestinians in Gaza, the first in December 2008 on the ship *Dignity* and the second in June 2009 on the ship *Humanity*. She was deported from Israel. In 2011 McKinney appeared on state television in Libya opposing the U.S. intervention on the side of the forces opposing Muammar Gaddafi in the Libyan civil war. She said the U.S. intervention was "not what the people of the United States stand for and it's not what African-Americans stand for." (CNN May 21, 2011.) She praised Gaddafi and his *Green Book* as standing for "direct democracy."

In 2011 she appeared on Iranian state TV and said, "it is clear that the people of Iran have one thing in mind, and that is that they are a revolutionary state. And as a revolutionary state, they understand

colonialism, neo-colonialism, and imperialism. They understand being under the foot of oppression and occupation—even if it is mental occupation—from an outside force or outside power, and that is what centers the resistance.” (*The Atlantic*, May 23, 2011.) That is, McKinney had evolved into a campist, supporting even reactionary authoritarian regimes so long as they opposed the United States.

After the 2008 campaign and her adventures in Libya and Iran, McKinney gradually adopted an ever more antisemitic politics. She began to associate with antisemites and Holocaust deniers such as Mahathir Mohamad, the former prime minister of Malaysia, Michele Renouf, and David Pidcock whom she described as a “friend.” While McKinney argued that she was anti-Zionist and not anti-Jew, her arguments tended to become antisemitic. For example, she wrote an essay on the international economy in which she “...essentially accused financier George Soros and former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan (both of whom are Jewish) of participating in a plot to destabilize the world economy to pave the way for ‘one-world government.’”



Ex-Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney poses in London with “my London friend” David Pidcock, a prolific anti-Semitic writer, and another acquaintance, well-known Holocaust denier Lady Michele Renouf. – photo from Southern Poverty Law Center.

She herself actively promoted antisemitic materials. “On September 11, 2023, McKinney promoted a livestream called ‘Can Black People and White People Work Together to Defeat Our Common Enemy’ with the Star of David representing the ‘common enemy’ that is, the Jewish people.” The program she promoted would feature former KKK grand wizard David Duke and Black nationalist Ayo Kimathi.

Beyond her dalliances with antisemites and Holocaust-deniers, McKinney became the purveyor of a variety of conspiracy theories. For example, during COVID pandemic McKinney claimed preposterously that the COVID vaccines made up of spike proteins actually gave people “COVID-AIDS” and that that caused long COVID and made them sicker. So, she has taken hydroxychloroquine, an anti-malarial not recommended for the treatment of COVID.

She has also continued to be a campist, offering her service to Vladimir Putin’s fascist regime in Russia. In 2024 McKinney was “an election observer”—the European Platform for Democratic Elections calls her a “fake election observer” in the Russian national presidential election. As the group’s report “Fake Observers” says, there were “Kremlin-friendly” supposed “experts” brought in to legitimate the authoritarian police-state elections and to endorse Putin’s legitimate victory. Russian observers not linked to Putin’s government described the election as a fraud but said, “Even

without fraud, the elections aren't truly democratic."

For the last several years McKinney held the position of assistant professor at North South University, a private college in Bangladesh.

Cynthia McKinney's unfortunate degeneration from a leftist opponent of racism and imperialism to a conspiracy promoter, a campist, and an antisemite is a sad story. Even sadder is that marginal talk-show hosts continue to give her a platform from which to spew her dangerous views.