

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

CHARLOTTE NEWMAN,	:	X
	:	
Plaintiff,	:	Civil Action No.:
	:	
v.	:	COMPLAINT
AMAZON.COM, INC., AMAZON WEB	:	
SERVICES, INC., ANDRES MAZ, STEVEN	:	
BLOCK, and SHANNON KELLOGG, in their	:	DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL
individual and professional capacities,	:	
	:	
Defendants.	:	

Plaintiff Charlotte Newman (“Plaintiff” or “Ms. Newman”), by and through her undersigned counsel, Wigdor LLP, as and for the Complaint in this action against Defendants Amazon.com, Inc., Amazon Web Services, Inc. (“AWS”) (together, “Amazon” or the “Company”), Andres Maz, Steve Block, and Shannon Kellogg, in their individual and professional capacities, (collectively, “Defendants”) hereby states and alleges as follows:

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

1. Amazon and its Chief Executive Officer (“CEO”), Jeff Bezos, hold themselves out as among the foremost, most innovative companies and business leaders in the United States and the world. They have made “customer obsession” their top leadership principle. Driven by profits and greed, Amazon and Mr. Bezos are not, however, “employee-obsessed” in the same way. Their practices when it comes to hiring and promoting Black people and other underrepresented minorities to high-level positions (and paying them commensurately) perpetuate decades-old patterns of discrimination. Like so many other Black and female employees at Amazon, Charlotte Newman was confronted with a systemic pattern of insurmountable discrimination based upon the color of her skin and her gender. While Amazon

may be the largest on-line retailer and Mr. Bezos one of the richest men in the world, they are not above the law. Ms. Newman, therefore, files this Complaint in an effort to hold Amazon and its executives accountable for their unlawful and discriminatory practices.

2. Four years ago, Amazon hired Ms. Newman as a Public Policy Manager (a Level 6 position at Amazon), despite the fact that she had applied and was qualified for a higher-level position called Senior Manager (Level 7). Within months of starting at the Company, she in fact was assigned and doing the work of a Senior Manager-level employee while still being paid at and having the title of the Manager level. To make matters worse, and in defiance of the anti-discrimination laws, Ms. Newman was paid significantly less than her white coworkers, particularly in valuable Amazon stock. If that were not bad enough, unlike her colleagues, Ms. Newman had to wait more than two and a half years for a promotion to the level at which she should have been hired in the first place, and at which level she had already been performing work for more than two and a half years.

3. Many of Ms. Newman's colleagues observed a consistent practice of paying Black employees less than similarly situated white employees, and a near-total lack of Black representation in and very few women in the upper echelons of the group's leadership. A group of Public Policy employees in Ms. Newman's group grew so demoralized and troubled by the lack of attention to these openly unequal conditions that, in or around September 2019, they composed a lengthy memorandum that made a series of highly detailed policy proposals to address racial and gender-based imbalances.

4. Ms. Newman certainly is not alone among Amazon's corporate workforce in facing discriminatory treatment. Based upon numerous conversations with other Amazon employees who are persons of color and/or women, the "de-leveling" of Black employees when

they are hired (i.e., dropping them a level below the job they applied and were qualified for or will be performing) is common, as is a longer wait for promotions for Black employees and women (particularly to high-level positions at Director (L8) and above).

5. Ms. Newman reported her concerns about the impact of her race and gender on her employment to the Company on multiple occasions. She talked with her managers repeatedly about how perceptions of Black and female employees on the part of managers could prevent them from succeeding at the Company, including how stereotypical views based upon characteristics such as race and gender can affect employees' advancement (and that she believed it had affected her, too). She also participated in the creation of a document submitted to Amazon management on behalf of underrepresented minority employees pointing out significant systemic diversity-related issues at AWS. In June 2020 she filed a written complaint about the vile and aggressive sexual assault and harassment committed against her by a senior male employee (which had distinct racial aspects as well), as well as regarding discriminatory attitudes by her managers and their impact on her. Finally, in September 2020 Ms. Newman filed an administrative complaint with the Washington, DC Office Human Rights regarding racial and sexual harassment and discrimination at the Company.

6. Recent reporting strongly confirms Ms. Newman's experiences, and conclusively shows that Amazon and AWS harbor Company-wide trends and attitudes that adversely impact Black employees and applicants. <https://www.vox.com/recode/2021/2/26/22297554/bias-disrespect-and-demotions-black-employees-say-amazon-has-a-race-problem> (last visited February 26, 2021). This information comes not only from rank-and-file employees, but from diversity and inclusion managers at the Company.

7. These practices and trends include frequent slotting of Black employees into jobs and “levels” that do not reflect their skills and qualifications (and pay them much less), much longer paths to promotion, and disinterest by some in Amazon leadership (including some on Jeff Bezos’s elite “S-Team”) when it comes to changing set practices that appear to have negative racial impact or listening to employees about how to address Amazon’s issues on race, particularly regarding Black employees.

8. Black employees who Ms. Newman talked with, as well as many Black employees who talked with reporters, consistently found that they and Black coworkers were slotted into Amazon job levels and compensation lower than their experience and credentials supported (unlike the general experience of white colleagues). This longstanding practice affects Black employees’ job authority, compensation (including stock awards), and prospects for promotion. As with Ms. Newman, being put into a lower level has a strong negative, downward effect on an employee that echoes for years and can cost them millions of dollars in compensation.

9. It is astounding that even highly specific instances of harassment that Ms. Newman has experienced as a Black woman at Amazon, such as a senior employee yanking on her hair or being told by a manager she is “too direct” and “scary,” are echoed in incidents involving other Black female employees. Other Black women at Amazon, and AWS specifically, report having coworkers touch their hair without consent or asking and being criticized for not smiling or being friendly enough (or being singled out as a Black woman who is “safe”). Other Black women also reported, as has Ms. Newman, having applied for jobs that the Company said were at a higher level, and then being hired by the Company at a lower level, a practice known as “down-leveling” or “de-leveling.” See

<https://www.vox.com/recode/2021/2/26/22297554/bias-disrespect-and-demotions-black-employees-say-amazon-has-a-race-problem> (last visited February 26, 2021).

10. For the first three years of Ms. Newman's tenure at Amazon, 2017-2019, Amazon's Public Policy team did not hire a Black employee at the L8 level or promote any Black employees to L8. From the Public Policy team's inception in the mid-2010s until December 2018, Amazon Public Policy did not hire any Black employees at the L7 level. The first Black employees hired at the L8 level in Public Policy joined on or around September 21, 2020.

11. Amazon's discriminatory conduct was not limited to paying Ms. Newman less than her white peers and discriminatorily failing to promote her for years after she had already taken on a more senior role. Underlining Ms. Newman's vulnerable position at the Company, a senior male coworker also felt free to sexually harass Ms. Newman and at times in plain view of others.

12. Racial and sexual discrimination exists in Amazon's corporate corridors, not just its warehouses—it simply takes a different form. Amazon has failed to seriously grapple with these issues among its management.

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