

Wigdor LLP Represents Charlotte Newman In Race Discrimination And Unequal Pay Lawsuit Against Amazon

March 2, 2021 • News & Press

On March 1, 2021, Wigdor LLP filed a federal race discrimination and unequal pay lawsuit in the District of Columbia against Amazon, Amazon Web Services (“AWS”) and other individually named Defendants. Plaintiff Charlotte Newman alleges that Amazon’s corporate offices have a practice of hiring people of color at lower levels and promoting them less often than their white coworkers with similar qualifications. These practices have an especially severe impact on Black women at the company, the lawsuit alleges.

Ms. Newman is a Harvard Business School graduate and former economic policy advisor to Sen. Cory Booker. She currently works as the Head of Underrepresented Founder Startup Business Development at AWS.

Ms. Newman alleges that Amazon routinely discriminates against Black employees in corporate roles through a process called “de-leveling.” In other words, Amazon will often give Black hires a lower title than the one they applied for or will be performing, resulting in lower compensation and a longer path to advancement compared to white employees, the lawsuit alleges.

For example, Ms. Newman claims that she interviewed and was well-qualified for a Level 7 role as a Senior Manager on AWS’s Public Policy team, but was offered only a Level 6 role as a Public Policy Manager. Within months, Ms. Newman was performing work at the L7 level she applied for, but she would not be paid or elevated to that level for more than two years, the Complaint alleges. Ms. Newman alleges that this de-leveling cost her hundreds of thousands or more in total compensation, including valuable Amazon stock which has increased in value over time.

For years, Charlotte served with integrity & professionalism as a policy advisor on my team. I have deep respect for her & I am proud of her extraordinary strength & courage. Her story is alarming. Racism, misogyny & harassment have no place anywhere. <https://t.co/9qhJzoskAd>
— Cory Booker (@CoryBooker) [March 2, 2021](#)

Ms. Newman further alleges that Amazon’s dismissive attitude toward Black women left her vulnerable to racial and sexual harassment by her coworkers and supervisors, including being told by a coworker that she looked “like a gorilla.” The complaint further alleges that Ms. Newman’s supervisor, Defendant Steven Block, used racial tropes when criticizing her work, including calling her “aggressive,” “too direct”

and “just scary,” and on one occasion dismissed the idea that AWS employees could be affected by unconscious bias on the basis of race.

In addition, Ms. Newman alleges she was sexually harassed and preyed upon for years by a more senior coworker, Defendant Andres Maz. This alleged harassment included Mr. Maz reaching under a restaurant table and, without Ms. Newman’s consent, pressing his hand down on her lap, close to her genitalia, and groping her thigh, later propositioning her for sex that same evening. In another highly disturbing incident in front of multiple colleagues, Ms. Newman claims that Mr. Maz forcefully pulled down on her braids while telling her to either stay out with them or leave her hair behind – a particular insult for a Black woman. Mr. Maz also later locked his arm in hers, pulled her close, and said to Ms. Newman, “Let’s pretend to be boyfriend and girlfriend,” the Complaint states.

When Ms. Newman complained to HR about various forms of mistreatment and serious misconduct she faced as a Black woman, Amazon failed to keep her updated on the status of any investigations or offer any further support, the lawsuit alleges.

In 2019, Ms. Newman and several other coworkers participated in the preparation of a 15-page document to Amazon management outlining dozens of detailed policy and process changes that would help ensure the equitable treatment of underrepresented minorities at Amazon. To Ms. Newman’s knowledge, Amazon has not implemented any of these proposed policy changes, the lawsuit alleges.

The lawsuit was filed just days after *Recode* published a report detailing allegations of [systemic workplace race discrimination](#) based on interviews with over a dozen Amazon employees.

A new report reveals disturbing allegations of institutional race discrimination at [#Amazon](#).

Over a dozen corporate employees told [@Recode](#) that the company has failed to create a culture where all Black employees feel welcomed and respected. <https://t.co/yxaTLcpcmh>

– Wigdor LLP (@WigdorLaw) [February 26, 2021](#)

Ms. Newman is represented by Wigdor LLP Partners [Douglas H. Wigdor](#) and [Lawrence M. Pearson](#).

Statement from Douglas H. Wigdor, Founding Partner Wigdor LLP:

“As one of the largest and most powerful companies in the world, Amazon has an obligation to lead by example and promote a level playing field for all workers regardless of their race. Sadly, despite its emphasis on innovation, Amazon still treats Black employees like second-class citizens by shutting

them out of high-level corporate roles, paying them less than similarly situated white employees, and dismissing their concerns about equity and safety. Because of Ms. Newman's bravery, we expect other current and former Black employees at Amazon will now have a voice to stand up to this discrimination and no longer suffer in silence."

Statement from Charlotte Newman:

"Amazon should harness the power of diverse leadership, instead of dimming the light of Black employees."

[Read the Full Complaint Here](#)

CBS This Morning

March 9, 2021 **WUSA9 News Washington D.C.**

April 6, 2021 **NPR**

March 9, 2021 **KING5 News Seattle**

April 6, 2021 **Atlanta Black Star**

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Barron's

"Amazon Accused Of Race-gender Bias In Workplace"

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Black Enterprise

"Black Manager Sues Amazon over Alleged Discrimination, Sexual Assault and Harassment"

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Bloomberg

"Amazon Sued for Alleged Race, Gender Bias in Corporate Hires"

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Business Insider

"A Black manager at Amazon Web Services is suing her own employer, alleging management fostered 'shocking racial insensitivity' and left her vulnerable to sexual assault"

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CBS News

"Race discrimination lawsuit says Amazon "de-levels" employees of color"

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CNBC

"Amazon will examine its employee review system after claims of racial bias"

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CNET

"Amazon sued by Black senior manager alleging sexual assault, discrimination"

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CNET

"Amazon must change corporate diversity policies, Harvard Business School alumni letter says"

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CNN

"Amazon employee sues the company, alleging racial discrimination and unequal pay"

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The Daily Beast

"'Second-Class Citizens': Black Amazon Manager Sues Company Over Alleged Racial Discrimination, Harassment"

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Daily Mail

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"Black senior manager at Amazon sues the tech giant and two executives for race and gender discrimination and claims she was sexually harassed by her manager"

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Deadline Hollywood

"Amazon Manager Sues Company For Racial Discrimination In Hiring; Cites Abuse, Sexual Harassment"

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Economic Times

"Lawsuit in US accuses Amazon of 'systemic' racism in corporate offices"

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Fast Company

"Amazon slapped with federal lawsuit for alleged discrimination and sexual harassment"

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Fast Company

"Why I'm suing Amazon for racial discrimination and sexual harassment"

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Fox Business

"Amazon slapped with federal lawsuit alleging racial, gender discrimination in hiring practices"

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The Hill

"Amazon manager sues company over racial discrimination, harassment allegations"

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The Hill

"Harvard Business community backs alumna's discrimination lawsuit against Amazon"

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Law360

"Amazon Manager Says Black Workers Face Bias In Hiring, Pay"

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Law & Crime

"Amazon Sued for 'Systemic Pattern' of Anti-Black Racism and Equal Pay Act Violations"

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Los Angeles Times

"Amazon worker sues company, claiming race and gender bias in corporate hires"

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KING 5 News

"Senior manager at Amazon sues company alleging racial discrimination, sexual harassment"

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New York Daily News

"Amazon hit with pay equity, racial discrimination lawsuit"

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New York Post

"Black Amazon manager alleges discrimination, says she was compared to 'gorilla'"

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Recode

"A Black Amazon manager is suing company executives in a discrimination and sexual harassment and

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Reuters

“Lawsuit accuses Amazon of ‘systemic’ racism in corporate offices”

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The Seattle Times

“Amazon sued by Black cloud-computing manager over alleged racial discrimination and sexual harassment”

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“In Bezos’ last shareholder letter, Amazon founder commits to improving employee safety”

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The Seattle Times

“Amazon must address racial and gender pay inequities in its workforce, Harvard Business School petition says”

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theGrio

“Black Amazon manager files lawsuit against company over racial discrimination”

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USA Today

“‘Second-Class Citizens’: Black Amazon Manager Sues Company Over Alleged Racial Discrimination, Harassment”

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The Washington Post

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Washington Examiner

"Amazon sued by black employee over accusations of discrimination"

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