

Sandra Guzman sues NY Post for discrimination

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According to Sandra Guzman, the *New York Post* cartoon depicting Barack Obama as a chimpanzee wasn't the first time the paper has engaged in racist, discriminatory practices. Guzman, with assistance from her lawyer, Kenneth Thompson, filed a lawsuit Monday against the *Post*, citing "discriminatory treatment, harassment and unlawful retaliation" based on Guzman's ethnicity and gender. She's seeking monetary damages.

In the documented complaint, Guzman said she was let go after she vehemently protested the infamous Obama cartoon, which was the end of a long line of issues the Emmy Award-winning journalist had with the *Post*. "What we hope to get out of this lawsuit is that no person of color, whether they be Black, Latino or Asian, should ever have to work in a hostile work environment based on their race or gender," said Thompson of Thompson, Wigdor & Gilly LLP. "We want to tell people that if someone complains about discrimination, they should not be retaliated against or have their career destroyed."

The complaint states that the *Post*, along with its parent company, News Corp., continues to "maintain, condone, tolerate, directly participate in and contribute to a hostile work environment against its female employees and employees of color." The picture that Guzman depicts of the *Post's* work environment is one of the good ol' boys network run amok, with the paper's editor in chief, Col Allan, as the ringleader.

One story depicts Allan walking up to Guzman and a group of female employees after a night of sharing drinks and showing them a picture of a naked man on his Blackberry while asking them, "What do you think of this?" No investigation was undertaken to confront the issue, despite Guzman's complaints. The complaint also accuses Allan of rubbing up against a female employee at a party and making sexually suggestive comments, "causing that female employee to feel extremely uncomfortable and fearing to be alone with him."

Les Goodstein, vice president of News Corp., is also named in the suit and accused of making inappropriate comments to Guzman, calling her "sexy" and "beautiful" and

referring to her as "Cha Cha No. 1" in a dig at her ethnicity. According to the suit, one of the male senior editors sexually propositioned a young female copy assistant, promising a permanent reporter job in exchange for sexual favors.

It's all a little too much for Guzman's representation.

"As an African-American man, I feel strongly about discrimination in the workplace, and when I learned about what happened to Sandra Guzman, I had to take her case," said Thompson. "Because I realized that she brought this forth not only on behalf of herself, but on behalf of women and people of color at the *Post*." Thompson is known by most for his successful investigation and prosecution of the New York police officers who viciously attacked Abner Louima.

The suit also alleges that after Guzman conducted an interview with Dominican pitcher Pedro Martinez, who recently pitched the World Series for the Philadelphia Phillies, Allan asked Guzman if Martinez had been carrying a gun or a machete during the interview. Thompson said that Guzman found the joke "deeply offensive and insulting" and displayed Allan's blatant disre-

gard for Hispanic people. Guzman also alleges that a white male columnist would repeatedly walk into her office singing songs from the musical "West Side Story," particularly emphasizing the line "I want to live in America" while using a faux Spanish accent.

Similar stories are alleged throughout the suit from a white female employee openly displaying pleasure at professor Henry Louis Gates' arrest, calling him "an angry Black man," to Guzman being accused of engaging in "Santeria" when she decided to keep scented candles in her office. The term "Santeria" was used to demean certain Hispanic and African religions by suggesting that the candles represented witchcraft and voodoo.

"I have so much evidence, it's not even funny," said Thompson. The amount of allegations are startling, but not to Thompson. The picture of Obama may have been the first real blatant display of hatred of the president on the *Post's* part, but the suit claims that it's all part of the paper's plan. According to the suit, Washington bureau chief Charles Hurt said the goal of the paper was the "destroy Barack Obama."

"For any newspaper to have

that as a goal not only for the first sitting Black president, but for any president is completely un-American," said Thompson. Sonia Sotomayor's name was also brought up in the complaint. According to Thompson, Guzman, who's good friends with Sotomayor, was invited to a private reception at the White House in honor of the new Supreme Court justice and asked if she could cover it for the paper. Allan's one-word reply via email? "No." The next day, the paper bought an Associated Press report of the reception.

"This is a big case, and I am determined to make sure Guzman succeeds," said Thompson. "Because if she wins, many people at the *Post* and around the city win as well. Many people suffer silently [when discriminated against] until we go find another job. Standing up for your rights is a very hard thing to do.

"It's a difficult time for Ms. Guzman, and she's a courageous woman with enormous integrity," said Thompson. "She didn't have to bring this lawsuit. She's an award-winning journalist. She could've just picked up the pieces of her career and started rebuilding, but she's determined."