

Ousted 'New York Post' Editor Says She Was Propositioned For Sex, Fired for Reporting It

 [rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/new-york-post-editor-michelle-gotthelf-sexual-harrassment-lawsuit-1286538](https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/new-york-post-editor-michelle-gotthelf-sexual-harrassment-lawsuit-1286538)

By Andrea Marks

January 18, 2022

Former digital editor-in-chief of the *New York Post* Michelle Gotthelf has filed a lawsuit against her former employer and two former editors-in-chief of the publication, saying she was sexually harassed and that her authority was steadily undermined, culminating in her firing last week after more than 20 years with the publication.

“For more than two decades, I took great pride in my work shaping coverage at one of the most widely read news organizations in the country,” Gotthelf said in a statement. “While I never intended to become the news, the truth of what happened to me deserves to be heard. I will miss my colleagues dearly and hope that by speaking out there can be positive change for other women at the Post.”

Reached for comment, a spokesperson for News Corp and the *New York Post* said, “Any suggestion of wrongdoing related to the management changes announced today is meritless.”

In a complaint filed in the Southern District of New York, Gotthelf alleged that her former boss, Col Allan, who served as editor in chief from 2001 until 2016 when he retired, “delighted in” degrading women, often referring to women in news stories as “skanks” or “stupid women,” and allegedly calling one Post editor a “sneaky lesbian.” Gotthelf claimed that in 2007, when she was deputy metro editor, Allan promoted a less qualified man to metro editor over her, saying he “wanted a strong man in the job.”

Around 2013, Allan’s alleged sexual harassment and what Gotthelf describes as “abusive behavior” toward her began creating a hostile work environment. She claimed that during newsroom debates, he’d say to her, “Who do you think you are, my wife?” and claims in the suit that he eventually admitted that he mistreated her because she was “fiery” and reminded him of his wife. When she complained to her direct boss, Gotthelf said he brushed off her concerns. She says the harassment peaked in 2015 when, she alleges, Allan propositioned her for sex at a company dinner, saying “We should sleep together.”

Gotthelf said the abuse worsened after she refused Allan’s advances, with Allan on one occasion ripping up a list of story ideas she’d prepared and yelled at her to “get the fuck out” of a meeting, in front of her mostly male colleagues. She reported his behavior to HR and claimed this is when, in 2016, he was forced to retire, although the publication’s owner, Rupert Murdoch, did not acknowledge the reason at the time, instead lauding him for “many years of exemplary service.”

After Allan's departure, according to the lawsuit, others at the company began diminishing Gotthelf's power, "in retaliation for her complaints about Mr. Allan's sexual harassment." She said she was sidelined as managing editor from making newsroom decisions and that younger men with less news experience had more say in news coverage than she did.

In 2019, the publication re-hired Allan, who Gotthelf claimed resumed his abusive behavior towards her and forced her to take down a story about E. Jean's Carroll's rape allegations against Donald Trump, calling the claims "baseless shit." She said she complained to HR and was told that if Allan "tells you to do something, you do it."

"The *Post's* decision to rehire Col Allan after he sexually propositioned Ms. Gotthelf speaks volumes about exactly the type of newsroom News Corp is running," Gotthelf's lawyer Douglas Wigdor said in a statement. "We intend to aggressively move forward with holding the *Post* accountable and protecting Ms. Gotthelf's rights."

In early 2021, the *Post* hired Keith Poole as editor in chief. Poole, who Gotthelf claimed had spent weeks being "briefed" by Allan, allegedly questioned her in November 2021 about what had happened between her and Allan. She claimed she told him she'd been sexually harassed and propositioned for sex, and that two months later, on Jan. 12, 2022, she was fired without cause.

The spokesperson for News Corp and the *Post* also forwarded an email Poole sent Tuesday to his staff, announcing Gotthelf's departure. "I want to take this opportunity to thank her for all she has done during her 20-plus-year tenure here, and I hope you will join me in wishing her the best for the future," the email said in part, before announcing two promotions. "We anticipate additional appointments in the coming days, as we continue our efforts to build on *The Post's* success throughout 2022 and beyond."

In the complaint, Gotthelf alleged she suffered "monetary harm" due to the unlawful discrimination and retaliation she endured, as well as "humiliation, embarrassment, stress and anxiety, loss of self-esteem and self-confidence, and emotional pain and suffering." She is requesting monetary damages.