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Los Angeles County Court Rules $900 Million Jury Verdict “Shocked the Conscience” In Workplace Sexual Assault Case; Reduces It To $90 Million

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As we previously reported, a Los Angeles jury awarded one of the largest verdicts in history in a sexual assault case in June 2024, doling out a massive $900 million verdict in favor of a plaintiff in a suit against billionaire Alkiviades David. This week, however, a Los Angeles County Court found the damages award “shocked the conscience” and ordered the case to go to a new damages trial unless the plaintiff accepts a reduced award of $90 million dollars.

In its ruling, the Court acknowledged that the plaintiff "testified to a pattern of workplace harassment that culminated in an instance of rape, which is an obviously heinous act causing physical and emotional injuries." And, while the Court found the plaintiff's testimony credible, it nevertheless concluded that an award of $100 million in noneconomic damages was excessive. Indicating the jury was likely motivated by passion, the Court noted that "[b]ecause the issue of punitive damages was not bifurcated, the jury made its determination of noneconomic compensatory damages after it heard evidence of [d]efendant's net worth, that plaintiffs in other cases had obtained multimillion dollar verdicts against [d]efendant, and that [d]efendant had publicly ridiculed the plaintiffs in other cases." While such evidence was relevant to the issue of punitive damages, it was not relevant to the issue of compensatory damages and "likely aroused the passion of jurors and incurably affected their determination of compensatory damages, such that their determination of compensatory damages was not only based on" testimony about the plaintiff's "emotional and physical injuries, but also on evidence of [d]efendant's economic power, mistreatment of other women, and history of losing multimillion dollar verdicts." Therefore, the Court ruled the evidence supported a finding of $10 million in compensatory damages. The Court also found $80 million dollars as an appropriate amount of punitive damages, thus preserving the jury's 8-to-1 punitive damages ratio.

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