

Jeff Bezos flaunts obscene wealth with \$80 million Manhattan penthouse purchase

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When Amazon's owner and the world's richest person, Jeff Bezos, recently bought an \$80 million triplex penthouse in New York City it didn't set a record. In a city that boasts some of the most extravagantly expensive real estate and is home to the highest concentration of billionaires in the world, Bezos has competition.

The record for priciest penthouse is still held by Ken Griffith, founder and CEO of the hedge fund Citadel, whose \$238 million property is the most expensive in the US.

Still, Bezos' acquisition exposes the obscene sums spent by the ultra-wealthy on luxury real estate in contrast to the abysmal housing conditions for masses of working people.

In a city where there are close to 62,000 homeless people—including 14,826 homeless families with 21,709 homeless children, and where 44 percent of the population pays more than a third of their income in rent—these residences sit empty much of the time. According to insurance giant AIG, their ultra-high net worth (UHNW) owners split their time among an average of nine properties abroad *in addition* to their US residences.

The wealth generated by the super-exploited Amazon workforce, concentrated in the hands of the richest individual in the world, is not available for their housing and other basic needs. "Affordable housing" is considered to be one third of income, which for an Amazon fulfillment worker earning \$15 an hour would be about \$800 a month.

This is nowhere near the median monthly rent in more expensive cities in the US—\$2,360 in New York, \$2,890 in Los Angeles, \$2,170 in Washington, DC. In Amazon's hometown of Seattle, the current median rent in the metro area is \$1,959 a month. Many

Amazon workers across the US live doubled and tripled up, and in some cases have been forced to live in their cars.

By contrast, what did Bezos get for \$80 million? A penthouse combined with the two apartments below resulted in a 12-bedroom, 17,000-square-foot triplex that reportedly boasts a seven-room "master suite" with views of the Empire State Building from the bathtub. The home also features a \$23,000 glass "foosball" table and a \$5,000 dog bed, among other amenities.

Bezos' purchase may have been prompted by his impending divorce from his wife of 25 years, who is likely to get the apartment that the couple has owned in a historic Manhattan building overlooking Central Park since 1999. That apartment—actually three adjoining condos with a fourth condo added in 2012 for a combined price of \$13 million—will be part of the settlement divvying up the couple's property according to Washington state divorce law.

The Bezos couple's joint property includes five homes, though to call these extensive residential compounds "homes" is like calling Versailles—the palace of French absolute monarch Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette—a cottage.

In addition to the mega-apartments in New York City, the couple owns a nearly 29,000-square-foot estate on 5.3 acres in the exclusive Seattle suburb of Medina, Washington, where Bill Gates and other tech giants are neighbors.

The Medina property cost \$10 million in 1998, with \$53 million spent on two houses that underwent an additional \$28 million renovation in 2012. The couple also purchased a \$24.5 million property in Beverly Hills, California in 2007, and then a year ago bought the house next door for another \$13 million.

Then there is the former textile museum that Bezos

bought in 2016 for \$23 million in Washington DC, to be his base in the nation's capital after he purchased the *Washington Post*, for \$250 million *in cash*.

According to blueprints for the \$12 million renovations obtained by *Washingtonian* magazine through a public-records request, Bezos' 27,000-square-foot mansion includes 25 bathrooms, 11 bedrooms, five living rooms, two kitchens, two libraries, two workout areas, two elevators, and a ballroom.

Located in the tony Kalorama neighborhood of the political elite, Bezos is neighbor to Barack and Michelle Obama, whose comparatively modest \$8 million mansion is nearby, as well as to Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner, who rent their mansion for \$15,000 a month, that is, *\$180,000 a year in rent alone*.

During their marriage, the Bezoses have spent \$216 million on residential property plus \$40 million in renovations. This does not include the 30,000-acre ranch in Texas where Bezos has based his aerospace company Blue Oracle, as the purchase price is unspecified. However, the combined acreage of these properties was enough to rank Bezos as Number 25 on the Land Report 100 list, a ranking of America's 100 largest landowners.

The scale of Bezos' wealth is nearly incomprehensible in the abstract. However, by way of comparison, the \$80 million spent on the purchase of his most recent NYC pied-à-terre could have covered:

- Annual median rent (\$18,000/year) for almost 4,500 workers
- Two years of the New York City parks budget that maintains 28,000 acres of public parkland, with 1,700 parks, playgrounds and recreation facilities
- The \$98 million required by the World Health Organization to respond to the latest Ebola outbreak in the Congo that has left more than 2,100 infected and 1,400 dead (only \$44 million so far) *Bezos' entire \$137 billion combined wealth could pay the annual median rent for all 250,000 Amazon workers in the US for 100 years*.

While Bezos may top the list of the ultra-wealthy for the present, he is only the most visible representative of a global oligarchy which likewise squanders billions a year on real estate and other luxury goods, including private jets, automobiles, yachts, jewelry, artwork, etc.

As reported in the "World Ultra Wealth Report" of June 27, 2017, the number of the world's UHNW

population, or those with \$30 million or more in net worth, globally grew 3.5 percent to reach 226,450 individuals in 2016. Their combined total wealth increased by 1.5 percent to \$27 trillion. If not concentrated in the hands of this tiny parasitical elite, the wealth produced by the global working class would be more than adequate to meet humanity's needs.



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