

# Celebrity chef being sued for cheating servers out of tips.

By Julia Marsh

June 11, 2014 | 6:44pm



Chef Daniel Boulud at his eponymous eatery on the Upper East Side. The chef faces a multimillion-dollar lawsuit that claims he stiffed his servers on wages and tips.

Photo: Getty Images

Michelin-starred chef Daniel Boulud — whose eponymous eatery has hosted President Barack Obama and serves \$220 meals — has been stiffing his servers on wages and tips, according to a new, multimillion-dollar class action lawsuit.

The Manhattan civil suit accuses the celebrity chef of pocketing gratuities from private events at his six-restaurant empire, forcing waiters to do non-tipped side work such as cleaning bathrooms, taking out garbage and vacuuming floors, and making them pool tips with kitchen staff.

“Daniel is one of the best restaurants, not only in New York or the US, but in the world,” said the servers’ attorney Brian Schaffer.

“Workers deserve to be treated fairly,” he said, estimating that the pool of plaintiffs could eventually reach 500.

The servers, Edison Lopez, Carlos Cruz Cacildo and Justin Wands, claim they are owed the \$8-an-hour minimum wage for the menial tasks, instead of the \$5 an hour they receive for tipped work like waiting tables.

“The law is very clear about this,” Schaffer said.

On Monday Schaffer won a settlement for 88 other Boulud employees with similar grievances in a separate federal lawsuit. The terms of the deal, struck just on Monday, are confidential.

In this case, the stiffed servers say the French cook has earned heaps of accolades, including winning the “Chef of the Year” title by the Culinary Institute of America, but he doesn’t share the proceeds of his success with underlings.

The servers are seeking unspecified damages for tips and wages going back to 2008.

Boulud’s Dinex Group includes db Bistro Moderne on W. 44th Street near Sixth Avenue where the \$32 sirloin burger comes stuffed with braised short ribs, foie gras and black truffle on a Parmesan bun.

Obama hosted a fundraiser at Boulud’s signature Upper East Side restaurant Daniel in 2012 that was attended by film producer Harvey Weinstein and Showtime’s Matt Blank.

Earlier this spring, Boulud personally greeted Police Commissioner Bill Bratton and his wife Rikki Klieman as they dined at the E. 65th Street destination.

Daniel’s menu does not list prices for items like the Marcona almond crusted duck terrine or the crispy Santa Barbara spot prawns, as most customers choose from prix-fixe multi-course dinners ranging from \$108 to \$220 per person.

A rep for Boulud did not immediately comment.