May 24, 2018

Jeffrey Bezos
Chairman, President and CEO
Amazon.com, Inc.
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Seattle, Washington 98109

We are writing to express concern about recent news that Amazon is working with local law enforcement agencies across the country to market and implement Rekognition, a powerful new facial recognition technology. Ostensibly purchased and deployed by law enforcement for the purposes of expediently and accurately identifying criminals, we are troubled by the profound negative unintended consequences this form of artificial intelligence could have for African Americans, undocumented immigrants, and protestors.

It is quite clear that communities of color are more heavily and aggressively policed than white communities. This status quo results in an oversampling of data which, once used as inputs to an analytical framework leveraging artificial intelligence, could negatively impact outcomes in those oversampled communities. Even body cameras, which were originally intended to strengthen police accountability, could be used as a tool to surveil law-abiding Americans and potentially violate their fourth amendment rights. We are seriously concerned that wrong decisions will be made due to the skewed data set produced by what we view as unfair and, at times, unconstitutional policing practices.

In the past several months we have seen the Department of Justice, under the leadership of Attorney General Sessions, vow to be more lenient on police accountability and less lenient on undocumented families. Additionally, the Federal Bureau of Investigation published an irresponsibly worded intelligence assessment establishing a new category of targeted persons the Bureau refers to as "Black Identity Extremists." We also know that law enforcement officials across the nation have already integrated this terminology into their protocols and policing decisions. In light of these circumstances, we are worried deployment of technology like the one you have developed has a high propensity for misuse. Surveillance of perfectly legitimate and constitutionally protected activity will only further erode the public's trust in law enforcement.

Artificial intelligence is a cutting-edge technological prospect, with boundless economic potential. That is why we welcome you to engage with us in a substantive dialogue about some of the aforementioned concerns pertaining to the development of your technology. We also encourage you to hire more lawyers, engineers, and data scientists of color to assist in properly calibrating this technology to account for racial bias that can lead to inaccuracies with devastating outcomes. The race based "blind spots" in artificial intelligence, especially those that are manifested in facial recognition technology, have been well documented. Keeping this criminal justice context in mind, we urge you to be thoughtful, deliberate, and assiduous as development of this technology advances.

Sincerely,

Cedric L. Richmond
Chair, Congressional Black Caucus

CC:
Dean C. Garfield
President and CEO
Information Technology Industry Council

Michael Beckerman
President and CEO
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