

California suit accuses Tesla of racial segregation at factory

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Black workers at the factory were regularly subjected to deeply offensive racial slurs and racist jokes by co-workers and managers, the agency said.

California has sued Tesla alleging discrimination and harassment against Black workers at the electric carmaker's San Francisco area factory,

which the complaint called a "racially segregated workplace."

This is the latest accusation of prejudice at Tesla's Fremont production site, where a series of female workers filed lawsuits last year alleging sexual harassment and a Black worker was awarded \$137 million in a racism case.

The California Department of Fair Employment and Housing, which enforces the state's civil rights laws and filed its suit Wednesday, said it had received hundreds of complaints from workers.

The agency "found evidence that Tesla's Fremont factory is a racially segregated workplace where Black workers are subjected to racial slurs and discriminated against in job assignments, discipline, pay and promotion," DFEH Director Kevin Kish said in a statement.

Black workers at the plant were regularly subjected to deeply offensive racial slurs and jokes by co-workers and managers, the complaint said.

Ahead of the filing, Tesla released a statement Wednesday saying it "opposes all forms of discrimination and harassment" and that it is committed to providing "a workplace that is safe, respectful, fair and inclusive."

But excerpts of the complaint, released by the agency and filed in a California court late Wednesday, paint a very different picture.



Non-Black workers were frequently given preferential treatment at Tesla's Fremont plant, according to the filing.

The agency said non-Black workers would regularly refer to areas where many Black workers were stationed with racist names, including "the plantation," a reference to the enslavement of African Americans.

Workers at the Tesla factory would commonly be "taunted by racial slurs and then baited into verbal and physical confrontations" by non-Black workers and would subsequently face disciplinary action, the complaint said.

Non-Black workers were frequently given preferential treatment at the plant, according to the filing, including being handed easier jobs and

given greater leniency in disciplinary proceedings compared to their Black colleagues.

Troubled Fremont factory

The United States has a deeply troubled history with racism, slavery and racial injustice and protests in recent years have seen millions confront that legacy after several high-profile police killings of African-Americans.

The details in the DFEH complaint are particularly serious because they alleged a widespread culture of racial abuse at the Fremont factory.

One employee "heard these racial slurs as often as 50-100 times a day" and workers with racially incendiary tattoos of the Confederate flag would make them visible to intimidate Black employees, the DFEH said.



The company, owned by billionaire Elon Musk, has been hit with several lawsuits alleging discrimination at the California factory in recent months.

Other racist graffiti included Nazi swastikas, the N word, "KKK" in reference to the white supremacist group the Ku Klux Klan, and "go back to Africa."

Racist language directed at Black workers included "porch monkey" and jokes saying they were "out of the hood" and "from the ghetto."

The company said Wednesday that "Tesla has always taken disciplinary action and terminated employees for professional misconduct, including those who utter racial slurs or harass others in various ways."

The company, owned by billionaire Elon Musk, has been hit with several lawsuits alleging discrimination at the California factory in recent months.

In December, six women sued the company, alleging a culture of sexual harassment at the plant and other facilities.

The suit came after a California jury ruled in October that Tesla should pay a Black ex-employee \$137 million in damages for turning a blind eye to racism the man encountered at the Fremont plant.

Last year, Musk feuded with authorities over the re-opening of the factory amid coronavirus restrictions and threatened to move his headquarters out of the state.

Subsequently, Musk told investors in October that the leading electric vehicle maker is relocating its headquarters to Texas, where it is building a plant.

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