

Former Tesla Employee Claims Race Bias Diminished His Sense of Self-Worth



On Wednesday, a former elevator operator at Tesla's California assembly plant testified about the emotional toll of experiencing racial slurs, threats, and other workplace incidents. Owen Diaz, who is Black, shared that he recorded Spanish-speaking coworkers calling him racial slurs and struggled with feeling "less than a man" due to the harassment. During a five-day trial on damages, Diaz testified after a jury in 2021 found Tesla liable for discrimination and ordered the company to pay him \$137 million. U.S. District Judge William Orrick later agreed that the EV maker fostered a hostile work environment but reduced the award to \$15 million. Diaz rejected the payout and opted for a new trial on damages before a different jury.

During Wednesday's testimony, Diaz spoke about the psychological toll of the racial incidents, which strained his relationship with his son, who also worked at the factory, and made it difficult for him to trust people. Diaz struggled to speak at times and became emotional during his testimony. Judge Orrick even called a 15-minute recess to allow Diaz to compose himself. Lawyers for Tesla will complete their cross-examination of Diaz on Thursday.

Alex Spiro, who represents Tesla, questioned Diaz about why there was no record of him making written complaints about the racist conduct to supervisors. Diaz said he could not recall whether he complained in writing or only verbally and accused Spiro of mischaracterizing his responses to other questions.

Tesla has maintained that it does not tolerate workplace harassment and takes discrimination complaints seriously. Spiro told jurors that Diaz was exaggerating his emotional distress claims and that there was no evidence warranting a multimillion-dollar award.

Find the legal job that meets your unique needs and interests with BCG Attorney Search.

During opening statements on Monday, Diaz's lawyer, Bernard Alexander, compared the Fremont plant to a "plantation," where Black workers were targeted for harassment, and their complaints were ignored by managers. Jurors have also heard testimony from five workers and supervisors at the Fremont plant, a Tesla human resources manager, and a lawyer who conducts investigations into workplace disputes and served as an expert witness for Diaz. The lawyer testified that while Tesla had adopted adequate anti-bias policies, the company failed to properly investigate and respond to complaints from Diaz and other Black workers.

The trial highlights the issue of discrimination in the workplace and raises questions about the effectiveness of anti-bias policies. It also emphasizes the importance of proper investigation and response to employee discrimination complaints.

The trial outcome could have significant implications for Tesla and other companies, as it could set a precedent for the number of damages awarded in discrimination cases. Diaz's experience sheds light on the impact of racial harassment on individuals and their families. It emphasizes the need for companies to take proactive steps to prevent discrimination in the workplace.

In conclusion, the trial involving former Tesla employee Owen Diaz highlights the issue of discrimination in the workplace. It emphasizes the need for companies to take proactive steps to prevent such incidents. The emotional toll experienced by Diaz and his family underscores the importance of proper investigation and response to discrimination complaints from employees. The trial outcome could have significant implications for Tesla and other companies, setting a precedent for the damages awarded in discrimination cases.