

7 railroad engineers allege racial harassment

By Jessica Mach
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In two lawsuits, a total of seven engineers alleged they faced racial epithets, saw Ku Klux Klan imagery and were pelted with urine-filled bottles while working at a short-line railroad company that services the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. Six of the engineers are Black.

The company has denied the allegations completely, saying all the claims were investigated and found to be without merit.

The lawsuits were filed this week in state and federal court in Los Angeles by attorneys at Hadsell Stormer Renick & Dai LLP and Mirer Mazzocchi & Julien PLLC. The complaints represent the second time railroad workers have sued a subsidiary of Anacostia Rail Holdings Co. with allegations of widespread racial discrimination and harassment, the attorneys said, adding that New York & Atlantic Railway, in New York, faced the first lawsuit in 2018.

A spokesman for the California company, Pacific Harbor Line, denied the allegations Wednesday in a statement issued anonymously.

"Our No. 1 priority at PHL is to provide a safe workplace — whether that is physical safety or

emotional safety — for all of our near-200 employees," the statement said. "Anytime an allegation is made by or against one of our employees, we investigate the claims and take appropriate action. In this case, we scrutinized the claims made previously by these plaintiffs, and found them to be lacking in merit. Accordingly, we will vigorously defend ourselves against this suit and fully expect to be vindicated."

The statement added, "We encourage our employees to always make their voices heard when they feel any kind of discrimination or inappropriate conduct directed at them."

The lawsuits alleged: "Threatening KKK imagery and slogans such as 'the only good n***er is a dead n***er'; demeaning statements regarding their race such as being told that 'Blacks are not intelligent' or are 'lazy'; harassing slave 'jokes'; insulting and negative racial stereotypes regarding Black workers' supposed love of watermelons and fried chicken; and mocking the color of Black workers' skin, including with 'joking' comments that it was hard to see their Black faces at night." *Monte Chandler, et al. v. Pacific Harbor Line Inc. et al.*, 21STCV28427 (L.A. Super. Ct., filed Aug. 2, 2021). *Lonnie Pate v. Pacific Harbor Line, Inc. et al.*,

5:21-cv-01300-JWH-SHK (C.D. Cal., filed Aug. 2, 2021).

The lawsuits said the plaintiffs were also subjected to chalk drawings in the railyard or on Black workers' lockers, which depicted nooses, Black men hanging, and hooded KKK figures. Non-Black workers additionally pelted some of the plaintiffs with oranges, apples, beer bottles, rocks, flares, and bottles filled with urine, the lawsuits alleged.

The single non-Black plaintiff alleged he faced a hostile work environment because he witnessed the harassment of his Black colleagues.

"Over the past more than 10 years, numerous black employees have lodged complaints of racism with the corporate defendants' management, including but not limited to allegations of verbal harassment, racial epithets and slurs, and disparate treatment and discipline by its managers and employees," the lawsuits said. "The corporate defendants took no or completely ineffective remedial or disciplinary action in response to these complaints."

Attorneys with Mirer Mazzocchi filed the 2018 lawsuit in New York. *Antonio Adame, et al. v. Anacostia Rail Holdings et al.*, 157154-2021 (Supreme Court of the State of N.Y., filed Feb. 14, 2018).

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