

More lawsuits aimed at Fox News — this time alleging racial discrimination

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The alleged exploits of some of Fox News' most prominent men have cast the channel as a hostile work environment for women in the last year and, just this month, caused an advertising and public relations nightmare for executives.

Now, a fresh crop of Fox News employees are making accusations — this time about race.

On Tuesday, a combined total of 13 current and former employees of Fox News — all people of color — took three separate legal actions against the organization, alleging years of “hostile racial discrimination.”

Eleven people, including Emmy-winning reporter Kelly Wright, filed a class-action lawsuit against the network in New York State Supreme Court; a 12th former employee filed a separate discrimination lawsuit in federal court in the Southern District of New York; and a 13th person turned to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission with a discrimination charge.

Each complaint, at least in part, addresses the behavior of Judith Slater, the company's longtime comptroller whom Fox News fired in late February. Slater, the complainants allege, subjected black and other nonwhite employees in the payroll department to “top-down racial harassment.”

According to the complaints, Slater mocked the way these employees pronounced words like “month” and “ask,” insinuated that black men were “women beaters” and expressed insulting racial stereotypes about Mexicans, Chinese men and people of Indian descent.

The employees claim that top executives had known for years of Slater's alleged behavior, but told black employees that “nothing could be done because Slater knew too much about senior executives,” including former Fox chairman Roger Ailes, former chief financial officer Mark Kranz and former “O'Reilly Factor” host Bill O'Reilly.

All three men have left Fox News in the last year.

Ailes was ousted last July after multiple sexual harassment allegations were brought against him, including from former anchor Gretchen Carlson, and Kranz, who has deep knowledge of the company's finances, was reportedly pushed out the following month.

Then in early April of this year, a New York Times investigation revealed that the network had paid five women a total of \$13 million to settle sexual harassment and misconduct claims lodged against O'Reilly, marking the beginning of the end of the host's Fox News career. More women stepped up with additional allegations, advertisers fled “The O'Reilly Factor” and, after mounting pressure, Fox News eventually severed ties with O'Reilly.

An earlier version of the class-action lawsuit was first filed in late March, just before O'Reilly's downfall began.

Two black women who worked in the Fox News payroll department — Tichaona Brown and Tabrese Wright — sued Slater, Fox News and its parent company, 21st Century Fox, alleging that Slater's

bosses did nothing about her behavior for years.

Fox countered in a statement to the New York Times, claiming that the company “took prompt and effective remedial action” before Brown and Wright ever filed their lawsuit.

“There is no place for inappropriate verbal remarks like this at Fox News,” the statement read. “We are disappointed that this needless litigation has been filed.”

But in the amended class-action lawsuit filed Tuesday, Brown and Wright, joined by nine others, described a coverup culture at Fox News that not only enabled an uncomfortable work environment for women but also for people of color.

“Indeed, the only consistency at Fox is the abhorrent, intolerable, unlawful and hostile racial discrimination that was inflicted on minority employees that appears more akin to Plantation-style management than a modern-day work environment,” the class-action lawsuit says.

It added Dianne Brandi, Fox News’ general counsel, to the list of defendants from Brown and Wright’s original suit.

Monica Douglass, a credit and collections manager who is black and Panamanian, was the third person to join. She claimed that Slater called Brooklyn the “murder capital of the world” because of its large black population, ridiculed Douglass’s accent and called black people “your people.”

Slater also called Douglass, a breast cancer survivor, “boobs girl” and “cancer girl,” the complaint claims, and warned Douglass against going to the human resources department. “I am HR,” Slater allegedly said.

Douglass complained anyway, the lawsuit claimed, but was ignored.

Another former employee claimed he was paid less than his white colleagues and, after complaining, received quiet, retroactive pay raises, only to face retaliation from Slater that made him leave the company.

The racial discrimination allegations were not limited to Slater, though. A Bangladeshi former employee named Musfiq Rahman accused Ailes of building a wall in his office to keep out dark-skinned employees, the lawsuit alleges.

And the most widely recognized employee on the lawsuit, “America’s News Headquarters” co-host Kelly Wright, claims that “despite his performance, and because he is black,” the veteran reporter has “been effectively sidelined and asked to perform the role of a ‘Jim Crow’ — the racist caricature of a Black entertainer.”

In the class-action suit, Kelly alleged that O’Reilly refused to let him discuss the racial divide in Ferguson, Mo., on “The O’Reilly Factor and would not play his “Beyond the Dream” project, stories about the African American community, because it showed blacks in “too positive” a light.

Kelly also claimed that his career was stunted because Fox News promoted his white colleagues over him.

The federal discrimination lawsuit filed by Adasa Blanco, another employee in Fox News’ payroll department, listed 21st Century Fox, Fox News, Slater, Brandi and Susan Lovallo, another Fox

employee, as plaintiffs, and alleged similar grievances as those outlined in the class-action lawsuit.

Blanco claims she reported “the racially hostile work environment” at Fox to Brandi as early as 2008, eight years before Slater was fired. Blanco is Puerto Rican and was “constantly mocked” by Slater for her accent, according to the federal lawsuit.

A Fox News spokesman told CNN in a statement that the company and Brandi “vehemently deny” the allegations in both lawsuits.

“They are copycat complaints of the original one filed last month,” the spokesman told CNN. “We will vigorously defend these cases.”

USA Today reported that Wasim Rafik, a former Fox News employee, filed a discrimination charge with the EEOC. Rafik was one of several employees who complained to human resources about Slater.

Catherine Foti, Slater’s attorney, said in a statement that the lawsuits are “meritless and frivolous” and that the claims of racial discrimination are “completely false.” She called the language used by the plaintiffs’ attorneys in the lawsuit incendiary and said that “raising the shameful period of Jim Crow and plantations is outrageous and draws a comparison that demeans the atrocities committed during those times.”

She continued: “These frivolous charges are solely aimed at generating headlines, inflaming racial tensions and poisoning potential jury pools and judges.”

Attorneys Douglas Wigdor and Jeanne Christensen are representing all 13 people alleging racial discrimination.

“When it comes to racial discrimination,” the attorneys said in a statement Tuesday, “21st Century Fox has been operating as if it should be called 18th Century Fox.”

This post has been updated with comment from Slater’s attorney.