

# Bay Area African American Worker, Taunted with Noose, Sues for Racial Harassment

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Supervisor from the nation's largest construction materials company accused of taunting and intimidating African American workers with a hangman's noose and engaging in repeated [racial harassment](#) and derogatory behavior.

[The Armstrong Law Firm](#) and the [California Civil Rights Law Group](#) have filed a racial harassment lawsuit (Alameda County Superior Court, Case #HG14710460) on behalf of an African American employee in the Bay Area whose supervisor subjected him to repeated racial harassment, including hate violence. According to the lawsuit, these incidents were ignored for over three years by company management before any corrective action was taken.

Gordon Tillman alleges that a Bay Area subsidiary of Birmingham, Alabama-based Vulcan Materials, CalMat, ignored allegations against his supervisor, Shawn Geaney, for years before finally firing Geaney for his racially abusive behavior.

Tillman states in the lawsuit that his supervisor, Shawn Geaney, engaged in racial harassment against African American employees and hate violence in violation of California's Ralph Civil Rights Act, which prohibits violence or threats of violence based on an individual's race. Geaney's threatening and intimidating behavior against Tillman is said to have started in 2010. For example, Tillman alleges that Geaney taunted, threatened and intimidated him and other African American employees with a hangman's noose by holding it up and asking Tillman and his African American co-workers if it reminded them of anything. Geaney further bragged that he knew how to make the perfect noose with six or seven knots. Tillman further alleges that Geaney used racist nicknames in Spanish for African American employees. Geaney referred to Tillman as a Fat Black Grape and referred to another African American co-worker as Uncle Tom. Geaney also sprayed Tillman with water in a vicious and demeaning manner in contrast to his non-African American coworkers.

Geaney is also alleged to have engaged in other Jim Crow-era type behavior including invoking



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references to the "paper bag test", which was used during the 1960's to determine whether an African American was permitted to access "whites only" areas and privileges. Geaney is alleged to have said that Tillman's skin was too dark to pass the "paper bag test."

The straw that broke the camel's back was when Geaney told Tillman to take off his shoes and use his feet to climb up the ladder because "that's what...you guys do." Tillman and other employees are said to have understood Geaney's comments to be a racial slur comparing African Americans to monkeys climbing up ladders and chains barefoot. The lawsuit states that Tillman was also frequently called "twenty-five percent" due to his 25% Caucasian racial background and was repeatedly told by Geaney to use the "twenty-five percent" part of his brain. Tillman alleges that he would also frequently hear Geaney call other African Americans, including his son, the N-word by using the term "ninja", which employees understood to be the N-word. For example, Geaney allegedly referred to Tillman's son "a black nig ... a black ninja" when he learned he planned to be a ninja for Halloween. It is also alleged that Geaney stated, "We got that stupid ninja in the office," in reference to President Barack Obama, or in reference to the Trayvon Martin incident, Geaney allegedly stated, "If it was his own ninja that killed him you guys wouldn't all be mad." Geaney further stated in the workplace, "I'm here to spread hate."

Despite Tillman's numerous complaints to management, who also observed and heard Geaney's racist comments and behavior, the lawsuit states that Vulcan did nothing to stop or discipline Geaney as the behavior continued over the course of more than three years. When Tillman went to his shop steward, he was told that they were aware of Geaney's behavior and the company's lack of response to the complaints. When Tillman complained to the plant manager, Geaney essentially received a slap on the wrist as he was only suspended for one day and Tillman believes Geaney's suspension was for the use of "bad language." The suspension also gave Geaney a four-day weekend as it was enforced following a three-day weekend. In September 2013, three years after Tillman began enduring the racist behavior, Geaney was finally fired. However, no other Vulcan supervisors or managers were punished despite their apparent role in encouraging Geaney by ignoring his racist abuse of African-American employees when they witnessed it.

Birmingham, Alabama-based Vulcan Materials Co. is reportedly the nation's largest company specializing in sand, gravel and crushed stone and is the nation's largest producer of construction materials used for highways and housing. CalMat was purchased by and then merged with Vulcan Materials.

Statistics from the EEOC show that in 2012, there were 33,512 race based complaints file with the EEOC. The number of complaints filed with the EEOC remained constant from 1997-2012 and there were more race complaints filed with the EEOC in 2012 than any other type of complaint based on being in a protected group.

Please contact San Francisco attorney Kelly Armstrong at (415) 928-1293 with any additional inquiries.

About The Armstrong Law Firm ([www.thearmstronglawfirm.com](http://www.thearmstronglawfirm.com))

The Armstrong Law Firm uses the law to obtain justice and compensation for people who have been subjected to discrimination, harassment, intimidation or unfair employment practices in the workplace. Kelly Armstrong has represented clients in employment cases against the nation's largest companies for the past decade and her cases have been featured in the national and international media.

About The California Civil Right Law Group (<http://civilrightsca.com/>)

The California Civil Rights Law Group focuses on bringing important civil rights cases to trial throughout California. Accomplished trial lawyer Larry Organ has led the firm to significant jury verdicts in sexual harassment, race discrimination, retaliation and whistleblower cases.

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