

# Jury awards \$3.3 million in discrimination suit

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A black trucker who alleged he was fired twice after complaining to his Denver supervisors of racial discrimination in the workplace won a \$3.3 million verdict Friday.

The eight-member jury entered \$3 million in punitive damages against Yellow Freight Systems after concluding the Kan-

sas-based trucking company's actions were malicious or "taken with reckless indifference."

Matthew J. Antoine, the 42-year old plaintiff, received an additional \$300,000 for emotional distress.

After delivering the verdict in Denver's U.S. District Court, several jurors walked up to the father of four and shook his hand. "I don't understand how he has continued to work there," said juror Nancy Caddoo.

Yellow Freight's Denver attorney, William Schoeberlein, said the company is disappointed with the verdict. "We strongly disagree with it," said Schoeberlein, who maintained during the three-day trial that the company has a strict policy against racial harassment.

Antoine, who earns roughly \$45,000 a year at Yellow Freight, claimed he was subjected to years of racial slurs from his white co-workers and supervi-

sors at the company's northeast Denver distribution terminal at 15950 Smith Road.

He endured two firings, only to be reinstated with full back pay after his union intervened.

His 1999 lawsuit said managers routinely assigned the least desirable duties to three black drivers, and referred to the largely black Montbello neighborhood near the terminal as "Mount Ghetto."

Although Antoine, hired as a

driver in 1992, had seniority over many of the company's 200 union drivers, "he was consistently given the dirtiest, most difficult trailers to unload," his suit said.

Antoine testified that in 1998 a white manager told him he wasn't prejudiced against minority employees but that "a lot of you black guys look like monkeys."

William J. Martinez, Antoine's Denver attorney, said the manager wasn't disciplined and that

the company typically responded to such incidents with "warning letters" to the entire staff.

Juror Linda Gordon said it became apparent during the trial that "sensitivity training" at Yellow Freight was a foreign concept. "They had a video (on discrimination) but it was inadequate, and it was really just for supervisors."

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