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Jeff Vaughn, a former evening news anchor, sued CBS in July 2024. Photographer: Elisa Ferrari/Bloomberg

[Equality](#)

The Trump Administration Wants White Men to Claim Discrimination. This Is What Happens When They Do

By [Jeff Green](#)

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Jeff Vaughn says it was a 2022 billboard that convinced him being White and male was becoming a liability.

The then-evening anchor at CBS's flagship Los Angeles television station remembers seeing an ad for his news program — and realizing it didn't feature him. It did include all of his co-anchors, none of whom, he says, was a straight White man like him.

“That was a real gut punch,” Vaughn, 60, said in an interview. “If you take a look at every person that's on the billboard, it's somebody that CBS sees as checking the box, whether it's a woman or a minority or LGBTQ.”

In his recollection, the incident was one of a string of slights — coinciding with a diversity campaign at the broadcasting network — that culminated in his firing in 2023. His replacement, who was Black, got his own billboard.

Vaughn sued CBS in July 2024 and the case is scheduled to go to trial in September.

If the Trump administration has its way, more suits like Vaughn's will come before the courts as the government seeks to redress what it sees as discrimination against White men. In December, the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission urged White men to come forward with complaints about their treatment by employers looking to diversify their workforces.

However, many of the White men doing so are confronting the same blunt reality as countless employees of other genders, races or sexual orientations who have stood up to corporate HR over perceived wrongdoing: Bringing a lawsuit against your employer may well damage your career.

Vaughn says he hasn't been able to land a network job since filing his case. The near-30-year news veteran is creating content for outlets such as Fox News, iHeartRadio and conservative network Salem News Channel via his own company, at a fraction of his former pay.

“I knew that filing a lawsuit against CBS would mean that I would never work in mainstream media again,” Vaughn said. Even without a legal claim, finding a new job at 60 isn't always straightforward. A lawsuit likely doesn't help. But he doesn't regret suing. “When somebody hits you, you either take a beating, you run, or fight back. And I'm just not one to run.”

CBS, whose parent Paramount Global agreed to end many of its [diversity, equality and inclusion practices](#) ahead of its merger with Skydance Media, said in a legal filing that Vaughn was fired for poor performance and that the company has a constitutional right to decide who sits in the anchor chair. CBS had no additional comment.

“People who sue, broadly, tend to have trouble getting new jobs,” said [Elizabeth Tippett](#), a professor at the University of Oregon School of Law, whose book, *The Master-Servant Doctrine*, explores the power employers have over workers. “It’s part of the broader challenge of protecting whistleblowers.”

To vast swaths of underrepresented US workers, claims that White men are discriminated against are confounding. Men still make up 90% of chief executive officers at S&P 500 companies, as well as about three-quarters of all C-suite employees. And the proportion of Black men or women who have held the top job is extremely small, currently hovering at about 1%.

But power did shift in some respects as the decades-long call for more equitable business leadership strengthened in recent years. Many corporations promised to broaden their labor force, often with specific targets for specific groups. And in 2024, White men (who make up about 39% of the US workforce) for the [first time](#) did not hold a majority of board seats at S&P 500 companies.

The pace of change in the workplace, while modest, has sparked a conservative backlash. Groups such as the conservative not-for-profit America First Legal, the Heritage Foundation and the National Center for Public Policy Research claim diversity efforts have gone too far.

President Donald Trump has made tackling perceived injustices against White men a central tenet of his second term, ordering the [dismantling](#) of DEI efforts on day one. His deputy chief of staff, Stephen Miller, is a co-founder of AFL, which is representing Vaughn and other White men in cases against companies including Meta Platforms Inc., International Business Machines

Corp. and Shell Plc. On Feb. 4, the EEOC [disclosed](#) in a legal filing that it was investigating whether Nike Inc. violated workplace rules by setting goals to hire workers from under-represented groups.

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The momentum was shifting even before Trump's election, but with the current regulatory support, "it's raised at least the awareness so that people know you can't do this now, and you can't do it in the future," said Gene Hamilton, AFL president and co-founder.

Andrea Lucas, who was appointed by Trump as EEOC chair, posted a [video](#) to social media in December urging White men to contact her agency with their discrimination complaints. The video has attracted about 6 million views and 4,000 comments, many of which she has responded to directly.

"I want companies to go back to neutral," Lucas told Bloomberg in an interview. She aims to show them that "there are consequences for discrimination against anybody and to not automatically assume that they can just make the White guy the scapegoat."

The EEOC shares no specific data on White men's claims. Most of the 80,000 to 90,000 complaints the watchdog receives each year are handled out of the public eye and the agency is required by law to keep investigation details confidential. Still, Lucas says the activity around her social post is an indicator of the scale of the response.



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“It was important, for me, for White men to understand that that included them,” Lucas said. “There has been a strong misimpression that they were not covered by the laws.” No group has a lesser or greater right to sue, she added.

The US Supreme Court agrees. In June, it [unanimously ruled](#) that anti-discrimination laws apply equally to everyone, regardless of demographics.

Faced with calls for a “return to a meritocracy,” DEI proponents counter that about two-thirds of US workers are female or from a minority group or both, and the best candidate for a given job is often among them.

Regardless of how White men's discrimination claims are viewed, those plaintiffs don't have any particular immunity from the predicament that women and minorities typically face when filing a lawsuit against an employer, said Gloria Allred. She is best known for defending women who have made harassment or assault claims, including against Trump, Jeffrey Epstein and film producer Harvey Weinstein.

Airing discrimination and harassment claims publicly may help to protect other workers from similar wrongdoing. But since US lawsuits are on the public record, a potential employer can find out with a basic Google search whether a job candidate has ever made a claim. More than 90% of cases are settled before a lawsuit is even filed, Allred said, as both sides would rather "keep the peace and move on with their lives."

"I usually indicate to clients who are thinking of suing — whoever they are — that the best day in your lawsuit is generally the day you file the lawsuit," Allred said. "After that, it's war, not peace."

That has not been lost on James Harker, who worked as a freelance lighting technician on movies and commercials in the New York City area for almost three decades, up until 2023.

He says those jobs ended when he sued Meta, along with an advertising agency and another company, over an internship program that he considered discriminatory. The program offered ethnic-minority workers opportunities to shadow professionals and learn new skills. He says that while working on a contract job for Meta, one of those interns was given a title and role superior to him, even though in his view the person had less experience.

Meta and other defendants said in a legal filing he had never applied for the role in question, was not eligible for the DEI program and lacked legal standing to sue over it. Harker's case was dismissed in 2024 and is now pending appeal. Meta had no additional comment.

Harker, 61, says he's spent most of his retirement nest egg and other savings as he's tried to find a new job and waited for the case to get resolved. Even a

win is unlikely to make him whole, he concedes, as he's suing over a one-day contract.

“I’ve never worked again,” Harker said, his voice cracking. “Everyone from my professional life, almost to a man, woman, just disappeared.”



James Harker, Photographer: Krisanne Johnson/Bloomberg

As he recalls it, the EEOC’s Manhattan office did not take his claim seriously when he initially approached them in May 2023. Lucas says White men should expect a better reception now. Legal counsel at companies who are assessing risks take note of who sues and they aren’t seeing White men, she said. “It is really important for some people to stick their heads up” if they want corporate culture to change, she added. “I know that it comes at a cost.”

Ironically, one of the most successful cases in recent years involved a White executive who sat on his company’s diversity advisory committee and helped promote its mission, according to his lawyer.

David Duvall won more than \$4.8 million, his lawyer said, after a jury found in 2024 that the health care executive had been wrongfully terminated by Novant Health Inc. and that “his race and/or sex was a ‘motivating factor.’” Duvall’s case attracted national headlines when a jury initially granted him \$10 million in punitive damages, although that award was later overturned.

It was a “dog-catches-bus kind of case that caught a lot of people’s attention,” said Duvall’s attorney, Luke Largess, who explained that his client was not opposed to DEI efforts, but rather the way in which they were approached in this specific instance. “This was not a cause for him,” Largess said, adding that he usually works on more traditional civil rights claims. “This was just about unfairly losing his job.”

In a statement, a company spokesperson said that “ensuring equal employment opportunities is a foundational aspect of Novant Health’s culture and we continue to vehemently disagree with the finding of liability in the referenced case.”

Even with the cash award, Duvall’s case appears to have come at a cost. He had secured a new job by the time of the filing, but was fired in the midst of publicity over the case, Duvall said in the lawsuit. Several other potential employers lost interest in him once the lawsuit was disclosed, he told the court. His LinkedIn profile shows that he now has his own consulting business.

A company that decides not to hire an applicant after seeing press coverage of a lawsuit, or hearing about it from other sources, could be guilty of retaliation if there was evidence of the action, the University of Oregon’s Tippet said.

But the fact that there is a risk at all shows the flaw in the current system, she added.

“If you think about what makes our anti-discrimination laws healthy, you need anyone who has been wronged under the law to participate,” she said. If

“some people who bring these claims find themselves unemployable, that’s bad for a legal system that is meant to hold everybody accountable.”