



## Jury awards \$2.4 million to butcher who claimed racial, sexual harassment

WRITTEN BY ANDY GIBLIN | PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

A jury Tuesday awarded \$2.4 million to an African-American man who said he was tormented for years by racial slurs and homoerotic groping from Latino co-workers at a South Side grocery.

The verdict came after seven days of testimony and more than seven years after former Rosebud Farmstand butcher Robert Smith first filed a discrimination complaint.

Smith claimed he endured years of derogatory racial comments, as well as having his crotch and buttocks grabbed by his co-workers at the Riverdale grocery. He decided to sue after filing a civil rights complaint that prompted his colleagues in the butcher shop to begin brandishing knives at him, said Smith's lawyer, Robert Longo.

When jurors announced their award — \$800,000 in compensatory damages and \$1.6 million in punitive damages — Smith was stunned, Longo said.

"He almost fell out of his chair," Longo said.

The payout amount still is subject to various caps on damages and appeals by Rosebud, and U.S. District Judge Robert Dow still must rule on fees. Lawyers for Rosebud Farmstand did not immediately return calls for comment Wednesday.

Smith claimed his harassment began not long after he started working as a butcher at Rosebud in 2003, but his mistreatment escalated in 2007. Smith filed a discrimination complaint in 2008. He quit soon after filing the complaint, claiming his co-workers slashed his tires, scratched his car and waved long butcher knives at him "threateningly."

Lawyers for Rosebud denied Smith's claims.