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The New York Times

U.S.

How Tough Is It to Change a Culture of Harassment? Ask Women at Ford

Decades after the company tried to tackle sexual misconduct at two Chicago plants, continued abuse raises questions about the possibility of change.

By SUSAN CHIRA and CATRIN EINHORN Photographs by ALYSSA SCHUKAR DEC. 19, 2017

CHICAGO — The jobs were the best they would ever have: collecting union wages while working at Ford, one of America's most storied companies. But inside two Chicago plants, the women found menace.

Bosses and fellow laborers treated them as property or prey. Men crudely commented on their breasts and buttocks; graffiti of penises was carved into tables, spray-painted onto floors and scribbled onto walls. They groped women, pressed against them, simulated sex acts or masturbated in front of them. Supervisors traded better assignments for sex and punished those who refused.

That was a quarter-century ago. Today, women at those plants say they have been subjected to many of the same abuses. And like those who complained before them, they say they were mocked, dismissed, threatened and ostracized. One described being called "snitch bitch," while another was accused of "raping the company." Many of the men who they say hounded them kept their jobs.

In August, the federal agency that combats workplace discrimination, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, reached a $10 million settlement with Ford for sexual and racial harassment at the two Chicago plants. A lawsuit is still making its way through the courts. This, too, happened before: In the

1990s, a string of lawsuits and an E.E.O.C. investigation resulted in a $22 million settlement and a commitment by Ford to crack down.

For Sharon Dunn, who sued Ford back then, the new lawsuit was a fresh blow. “For all the good that was supposed to come out of what happened to us, it seems like Ford did nothing,” she said. “If I had that choice today, I wouldn’t say a damn word.”

In recent months, as women have spoken out about harassment — at media companies and technology start-ups, in the entertainment industry and on Capitol Hill — they have spurred quick action, with accused men toppling from lofty positions, corporations pledging change and lawmakers promising new protections.

But much less attention has been focused on the plight of blue-collar workers, like those on Ford’s factory floors. After the #MeToo movement opened a global floodgate of accounts of mistreatment, a former Chicago worker proposed a new campaign: “#WhatAboutUs.”

Their story reveals the stubborn persistence of harassment in an industry once the exclusive preserve of men, where abuses can be especially brazen. For the Ford women, the harassment has endured even though they work for a multinational corporation with a professional human resources operation, even though they are members of one of the country’s most powerful unions, even though a federal agency and then a federal judge sided with them, and even after independent monitors policed the factory floors for several years.

At a moment when so many people are demanding that sexual harassment no longer be tolerated, the story of the Ford plants shows the challenges of transforming a culture.

Workers describe a mix of sex, swagger, suspicion and racial resentment that makes the factories — the Chicago Assembly Plant and the Chicago Stamping Plant — particularly volatile.

The plants are self-enclosed worlds where employees pass on job referrals so relatives, classmates and longtime friends can work together. They share gossip and rumors, but also keep secrets that entrench bad behavior. Many feel deep loyalty to Ford and their union, and resent the female accusers, fearing they may damage the company and jeopardize good paychecks and generous

benefits. Some women are suspected of gaming a system where sex is a powerful lever.

Ford has worked to combat harassment at the plants, including recently stepping up disciplinary efforts and installing new leadership. But over the years the company did not act aggressively or consistently enough to root out the problem, according to interviews with more than 100 current and former employees and industry experts, and a review of legal documents.

Ford delayed firing those accused of harassment, leaving workers to conclude that offenders would go unpunished. It let sexual harassment training wane and, women charge, failed to stamp out retaliation.

The local union, obliged to protect both accusers and the accused, was divided, with a leadership that included alleged predators. And even the outsiders whom women turned to for help, including lawyers and the E.E.O.C., left some of them feeling betrayed.

Ford officials say they view the harassment as episodic, not systemic, with an outbreak in the ’90s and another beginning in 2010 as new workers flooded in. They say they take all claims seriously and investigate them thoroughly. Responding to the national outcry over sexual harassment, Ford’s chief executive, Jim Hackett, released a video to employees last week about appropriate behavior. “The test would be if you go to work, have experiences, and go home and tell your family about it and be proud of what went on,” he said. “We do not expect or accept any harassment in the workplaces here at Ford.”

Shirley Cain, who arrived at the stamping plant five years ago and had to fend off advances from supervisors and co-workers alike, was skeptical. “That’s not the reality,” she said. “They don’t even go on the floor, so they don’t know what goes on.”

‘Fresh Meat!’

From the beginning, the women were targets. The first warning often came during orientation as new hires were paraded through the Chicago Assembly Plant. Shirley Thomas-Moore, a teacher who came to Ford to make better money, recalled the scene in the mid-80s: A man would hit his hammer on a

railing, summoning the attention of the factory floor. “Fresh meat!” the male workers hollered.

“When they come in, everybody’s: ‘Oh man, look at her. Nah, this is going to be mine,’” recalled her husband, Terrance Moore, who also worked at the plant.

Men still stake their claims today, according to workers. Some women say they know how to shut down unwanted advances — “I don’t play,” they snap — while others say they have never encountered harassment. But James Jones, a union representative, said the problem should not be minimized, describing the attitude of many men at the factories: “You’re going to want to eat that porterhouse steak.”

The giant Chicago Assembly Plant sprawls like a low-slung fortress over an isolated stretch of Chicago’s South Side near the Indiana border. The oldest continuously operating plant at a company that once revolutionized manufacturing with the Model T, it now churns out Ford Explorers and Tauruses.

Women joined the work force during World War II, when the factory made M8 armored cars. But it was not until the 1970s that they routinely held permanent jobs on the line. By then, Ford had built a second factory, the Chicago Stamping Plant, to supply parts. Today, the two plants employ about 5,700; just under a third are women.

As women were finding their way into Ford, the nation’s manufacturing base was eroding, and overseas competition threatened the auto industry.

Darnise Hardy, one of the first women to arrive, was told by male workers that she belonged at home in the kitchen. Ms. Thomas-Moore, who arrived a few years later, said some men felt that the newcomers were taking their jobs. Two decades later, a foreman told Suzette Wright that women should never have been hired.

A job at Ford was considered a golden ticket. When Ms. Wright, a 23-year-old single mother, was offered a spot at Chicago Assembly in 1993, she was “crazy insane elated.” She had been working part-time jobs as a hair salon receptionist and a data entry clerk. In an instant, her hourly wage tripled, to about $15. With overtime, workers could earn $70,000 or more a year, good money for those without a college degree — and an incentive to put up with a lot.

Ms. Wright and others discovered a robust underground economy at the assembly plant: Everything from toys and televisions to drugs and guns were for sale inside, and sex outside. On the line, she would hear men regaling one another with stories about late-night parties with strippers in the parking lot. Ms. Thomas-Moore's father, who worked at the stamping factory, saw prostitutes and makeshift liquor trucks as he waited to pick her up from Chicago Assembly. "Baby girl," she remembers him saying, "I can't believe this is part of Ford."

As Ms. Wright settled in, she asked a co-worker to explain something: Why were men calling out "peanut butter legs" when she arrived in the morning? He demurred, but she insisted. "He said, 'Well, peanut butter,'" Ms. Wright recalled. "'Not only is it the color of your legs, but it's the kind of legs you like to spread.'"

Like many of the female employees who eventually sued Ford, Ms. Wright is African-American; those accused of harassment include black, white and Latino men. Some of the women felt doubly victimized — propositioned and denounced as sluts while also being called "black bitches" and other racial slurs. (The assembly plant's work force is predominantly African-American, while the stamping plant's is majority white.)

As the affronts continued — lewd comments, repeated come-ons, men grabbing their crotches and moaning every time she bent over — Ms. Wright tried to ignore them. Veteran female employees warned that reporting the behavior brought only more trouble. The smallest infraction, routinely overlooked, suddenly merited a write-up. The very nature of factory work — the pressure to keep the production line going — gave bosses power to inflict petty humiliations, such as denying bathroom breaks.

But after a man Ms. Wright had trusted as a mentor made a crack about paying her $5 for oral sex, she asked her union representative for help. He began what she calls a "don't-file-a-claim-against-Bill" campaign: Her co-worker would lose his job, his benefits, his pension, she was told. Rumors spread, questioning their relationship. Then a union official delivered the final insult: "Suzette, you're a pretty woman — take it as a compliment."

The same thing happened to Gwajuana Gray, who had followed her father into the assembly plant in 1991 and still works there. When she told her union

steward that a manager had pressed his groin against her, he said she should be flattered. “I was like, well, where do you go?” she said.

The accumulating misconduct took a toll. Some women quit. Others were emotionally spent.

“It just was way, way, way, way too much,” Ms. Wright said of the abuses. “Each time that I was taking it, again and again, it just felt like more of me diminishing,” she said, “just getting smaller until it was just like a shell of a person.”

She and Ms. Gray both said they were overcome by anxiety and depression and took extended medical leaves. “I was at rock bottom,” Ms. Gray recalled.

When their lawsuit was settled in 2000, Ms. Wright had to leave Ford. Ms. Gray was able to return. The harassment subsided for a while, she and others said, but soon came back. Louis Smith, a 23-year Ford veteran, could see some of the damage. “I would never want my daughter to work in that environment,” he said. “We as men have got to do better.”

In the last five years, one woman said a male co-worker bit her on the buttocks. A supervisor told a female subordinate, “I want to screw you so bad,” she recalled. A laborer described in pornographic detail what he wanted to do to another woman, then exposed himself to her, she said; later, he pushed her into an empty room and turned off the lights before she fled.

Those who complained said they faced retaliation from co-workers and bosses. Some women were frightened after harassers warned them to watch their backs. An Army veteran who accused a man of groping her was physically blocked by his friends from doing her work, she said. Later she found her car tires slashed in the parking lot.

Ford officials say that they have a strict policy against retaliation, and that supervisors who exact retribution will be disciplined. But “when you speak up,” Ms. Gray said, “you’re like mud in the plant.”

In explaining why harassment became so ingrained, she and others described sex as a preoccupation at the plants — variously a diversion, a currency and a weapon. There were plenty of consensual affairs and flirtations, employees agree. Some women used sex to win favors from the overwhelmingly male

hierarchy. Bosses rewarded those who acquiesced to their advances by doling out cushier jobs or punished those who spurned them, requiring them to do more taxing, even dangerous work.

Miyoshi Morris gave in to a supervisor's leverage, and was filled with shame. She had been struggling to find day care centers for her children that were open early enough for her to make her 6 a.m. shift. By her account, a manager in the paint department told her she was in trouble because of tardiness. He could help her, she recalled him saying, if she came to his house on a day off he arranged.

She agreed, and had sex with him.

"I was so lost, afraid, and realizing I had children to care for," she said. Afterward, she said, her attendance record was no longer a problem, and she received better assignments. She remembers thinking, "Where else are you going to go and make this kind of money?"

The manager, Myron Alexander, who was accused by multiple women of sexual harassment and fired in 2014, did not return calls and Facebook messages seeking comment.

Today, Ms. Morris works as an aesthetician for a fraction of what she earned at Ford. "No person should have to endure that," she said of the inappropriate behavior at the plant. "You have to force yourself into a place of not feeling anything, of not having any emotion, to exist."

A Divided Union

The first place workers in trouble are supposed to turn for help is their union — a family, some call it. But when one member formally accuses another of sexual harassment, solidarity splinters.

Mr. Jones, the United Automobile Workers representative, recalled a recent meeting when he was advocating for both sides — a woman and the man she accused. Ford issued its decision: termination. The man shot a despairing look at Mr. Jones.

“How do you know the woman is telling the truth and she didn’t get her buddies together to come up here and say this?” Mr. Jones remembers thinking.

Union representatives are caught between women’s pleas to stand with them and men’s pleas to save their jobs. And the Chicago union itself is now divided between those who champion women and those accused of preying on them.

“The union has got an impossible job,” said George Galland, who acted as an independent monitor at the two Chicago plants for three years. “They’re supposed to protect their members. Unions are ill at ease helping management

control sexual harassment. They tend to throw monkey wrenches where they can."

Some women at the plants say the union, whose leadership is mostly male, often met their calls for help with hostility, resistance or inaction. One woman said a representative downplayed a co-worker's vulgar commentary about her body, saying, "That's just him — the man has no filter." Another was told not to bother filing a report against a union representative who forcibly kissed her, saying it was her word against his.

Tonya Exum, the Army veteran who reported being groped, recalled a union representative saying: "It's not sexual harassment. He only did it one time." When she asked him how he would feel if that happened to his mother or sister, he just walked away.

The current lawsuit against Ford, which involves about 30 plaintiffs, accuses multiple local union representatives of harassing women or obstructing their complaints.

But women also single out some union representatives for praise, including one man who said he spent hours helping women fill out claims. "As a union, we're supposed to be all one," said the man, who insisted on anonymity because he feared losing his job. "It frustrates me to see that others do not conduct themselves like gentlemen."

In 1979, even as sexual harassment was not yet settled law or a familiar concept to many Americans, the autoworkers' union was one of the earliest to include a clause in its contracts with Ford and Chrysler allowing members to file a grievance if harassment occurred. Its constitution condemns sexual harassment. And the union cooperates with Ford in training; Chris Pena, president of Local 551 in Chicago, said he emphasized the anti-harassment policy with every new employee during orientation.

But as the Great Recession ravaged the auto industry, economic survival eclipsed everything. Chicago Assembly was "on life support," said Bill Dirksen, Ford's vice president of labor affairs. The plant laid off 700 employees in 2008 and slashed production. "You're not going to have sexual harassment if you don't have a company to work for," Mr. Pena said.

That near-death experience haunts workers to this day. Fear that their well-paying jobs could evaporate if the plants become a headache for Ford drives some of the hostility toward women who complain of harassment. Terri Lewis-Bledsoe remembers a union representative warning her to stop filing complaints: “You’re going to be called a troublemaker,” she recalled him saying. She shot back, “Then a troublemaker I shall be.”

The top union official at Chicago Assembly, Alan Millender, who is known as Coby, is a polarizing figure. Some women praise him for helping them, and he has won two terms. Others have accused him of harassment, including Ms. Morris. She lost her job in January 2014 and turned to him for assistance. But Mr. Millender told her that she would have to get on her knees if she wanted her job back, she said. She should act like another woman who, moments before their conversation, had been pressed close to him, standing between his legs, Ms. Morris recounted.

“I could not compromise myself anymore,” Ms. Morris said. “My job was lost.”

Mr. Millender declined to comment on the allegations. In a brief telephone conversation, he said: “My record at Ford Motor Company has always been impeccable. The truth is always going to be the truth.”

National U.A.W. leaders declined interview requests, and Ford officials do not comment on specific cases. But, Mr. Dirksen said, the company does not hesitate to punish anyone who violates its sexual harassment policy, whatever the union rank, and punishments of union members in the past have not provoked plant protests.

Ford suspended Mr. Millender for two weeks in April 2015 for “improper conduct,” making inappropriate comments and “inappropriate unwanted touching,” according to a company document obtained by The New York Times. The decision was later overturned by an outside arbitrator.

‘Easy To Backslide’

When Howard Stamps, a longtime Ford veteran, transferred to Chicago Assembly several years ago from a plant near Detroit, he was jolted by the anything-goes culture he encountered. “I’ve never seen anything like Chicago all the days of my life,” he said. “They don’t think the rules apply to them.”

By 2015, half of all sexual harassment and gender discrimination complaints lodged with the E.E.O.C. about Ford’s domestic operations originated in Chicago.

The company is unique among the Big Three automakers, controlled by one family since the days of Henry Ford. Blue-collar employees used to say they “work at Ford’s,” and family members still talk of their close ties to workers. But from the factory floor, many workers viewed the company as defensive and tentative about a long-simmering problem, enacting its strongest measures against sexual harassment only after pressure from female employees and outside forces like the E.E.O.C. and lawsuits.

In the mid-90s, some women at the Chicago plants had enough. Dozens filed formal complaints with the E.E.O.C. and joined several lawsuits. When Ford officials found out that a “Dateline NBC” segment was in the works in 1998, they took action, firing or disciplining eight managers and workers, according to local news media reports.

After long negotiations, the lawsuit was dismissed in exchange for a toughened settlement with the federal agency in 2000; Ford would pay $22 million, with $9 million in damages to women. Mr. Galland recalled that at least 100 women received payments. As is typical in such agreements, Ford denied liability. The company also pledged to make changes, which would be overseen by outside monitors.

“If we didn’t like the way H.R. was investigating these complaints, we told them and made them start over,” said Mr. Galland, the chairman of the three-member monitor panel. “We told them it’s not the paper procedures that count. A firing is worth a thousand words.”

Firing workers demonstrated that harassment came with steep penalties. But many men did not view their behavior as improper. Ms. Thomas-Moore, the former teacher, was among those asked to conduct the classes. “Once you crossed into what we call Ford World,” she said, “everybody was supposed to be

treated as co-workers." There should be no hugging. When employees found themselves in uncomfortable situations, she taught them to say, "You're in the yellow," or "You're in the red."

Some men scoffed or cracked jokes. Still, she felt the training was having an effect. One day, a man spoke up, saying he had wronged a co-worker by lying about having sex with her, Ms. Thomas-Moore recalled. He asked that the woman come upstairs, then apologized to her in front of his classmates.

For a time, many women said, the plants seemed "quieter." When the monitors ended their stint in 2003, they gave Ford high marks. But their final report warned of "significant risks that need attention," including staffers inexperienced in investigating complaints, the lack of a policy against fraternization and the practice of promoting people widely perceived to be harassers. The report was prescient: Ford would struggle in those areas in the coming years.

"It's easy to backslide," Mr. Galland said in an interview.

Back from the brink of economic catastrophe in 2010, Chicago Assembly doubled its work force in a couple of years. A mix of young, inexperienced hires and transfers who resented leaving their hometowns flooded in.

In the rush to ramp up production, the training lagged — several workers recalled receiving only a piece of paper outlining the harassment policy, and managers often refused to excuse workers for class, according to Ms. Thomas-Moore. Ford said the training never stopped, but acknowledged it peaked in the early 2000s.

Complaints of harassment at the plants started spiking in 2011. Ford officials in the Dearborn, Mich., headquarters said that they dispatched a team to Chicago to insist on prompt but thorough investigations, and that they added staffers to tackle the growing pile of complaints. Training took on new urgency.

Still, there appeared to be a gap of expectations. Like most companies, Ford was bound by privacy protections and unwilling to communicate specific findings. But some women felt grilled as if they were lying and frustrated that they were not told if the company was meting out discipline. "We were told it's been handled," said LaWanda Jordan, referring to her complaint about a supervisor who was fired two years later. "The case has been closed; we can't discuss it."

In assessing complaints, Ford struggled with verifying what often boiled down to he-said, she-said accusations. Mr. Galland, the monitor, acknowledged that false accusations were a real problem in factories. But because there often are no witnesses — or none willing to cooperate — and no evidence, he added that investigators must assess credibility on both sides.

An employee who investigated complaints said Ford was insistent on proof. “Our policy at Ford, told to us by our bosses — that I didn’t agree with — was if there are no witnesses, there is nothing you can do,” said Grant Crowley, a former labor relations representative at the stamping plant. (Mr. Crowley said he was asked to leave Ford this year after he posted on Snapchat an emoji expletive about a departed co-worker who left him with extra work.) Ford said investigators also took credibility into account.

Even if investigators could not verify some individual accusations, company officials often failed to consider patterns of behavior, workers and lawyers say. Keith Hunt, the lawyer who represented women in the 1990s and today, described cases of four men who were the subject of numerous complaints by women dating back years — in one instance three decades ago — but were fired only in the last few years. Julie Lavender, director of personnel relations and employee policies, said that Ford now gave more weight to multiple complaints.

And even when there were witnesses, assessing credibility was often hard.

Christie Van arrived at Chicago Assembly with the influx of transfers in 2012. She said a supervisor who had been giving her easy jobs like placing radiator caps began asking her to “play hooky” from work with him. She claimed that the man, Mike Riese, told her his preferred nickname: “He called himself White Chocolate. He said that he had a black man’s dick.”

After another supervisor, Willie Fonseca, showed her a picture of his penis on his cellphone, she said, Mr. Riese laughed and asked if she wanted to see his too. “That was it for me,” she said.

Both men denied that happened. Ms. Van filed a complaint in 2012. She showed investigators text messages from Mr. Riese, she said. According to company records obtained by The Times, several co-workers denied her account and described her as disgruntled to Ford investigators.

But two other employees, Mr. Stamps and a man who insisted on anonymity because he feared retaliation, said they witnessed Mr. Riese's advances toward Ms. Van and heard him boast of his nickname. Neither was questioned in Ford's inquiry, they said.

The documents indicate that the company did not substantiate Ms. Van's complaint. But later, without specifying any episodes, the E.E.O.C. determined she had been subjected to sexual harassment, retaliation and gender discrimination. Several other women accused Mr. Riese of harassment, which he denied. Mr. Riese said he was fired in 2015. "My life was shattered," he said.

Although they do not comment on individual cases, Ford officials said discipline could be invisible when pay or bonuses were docked. They also said they believed in giving employees a chance to remedy behavior, although the company has fired workers if a first offense is egregious. But many people drew the same conclusion as Ms. Gray: "They get a slap on the hand and come right back to work."

Starting about six years ago, multiple women once again turned to the E.E.O.C. and lawyers. The agency opened an investigation in 2014, and that same year Mr. Hunt filed a lawsuit. Ford accelerated changes as both were unfolding. Company executives said they acted independently of the inquiry and legal action.

One supervisor was fired in late 2014, and by the spring of 2015, the automaker was replacing senior leaders at Chicago Assembly, according to multiple interviews and news media reports. Company officials were also ramping up additional harassment training "with a vengeance," according to David Cook, Ford's human resources director of global operations. That summer, the company issued a new rule: Salaried employees must disclose any family or romantic relationships with subordinates.

Still, Grant Morton, a former top union official at the plant, filed a suit charging that Ford managers discouraged him from helping women submit complaints and retaliated against him when he did. His suit claimed that a senior executive told him, "Your people better stop complaining." The manager denied his account.

Mr. Morton reached a confidential settlement with Ford that bars him from commenting. But Mr. Crowley, who investigated complaints at the stamping plant, said his managers “didn’t want to admit any wrongdoing or punish the supervisors because they didn’t want to add on to the case.”

In August, Ford and the E.E.O.C. announced the $10 million settlement. Because the law imposes strict confidentiality on the agency when it reaches an agreement with an employer, it does not reveal details of what it found, who those accused of harassment were and which workers were involved — something some Ford women want to know.

The agreement requires more improvements at Ford, including holding managers more accountable. “How do we ensure sustainability?” Ford’s Mr. Dirksen said. “We have to keep asking ourselves that question.”

Once again, monitors will be watching closely, this time for five years. “It’s something we push for,” said Julianne Bowman, the agency’s Chicago district director, when “we’re really trying to come up with a culture change in the company.”

Absorbing Lessons

Ms. Gray does not regret taking on her employer by joining the lawsuit decades ago. “If one person doesn’t stand for everybody,” she said, “then it’s just a continual cycle.”

But this time, she said, things must be different.

Many of the women back then felt betrayed by both Ford and their lawyers, and said they were pressured into giving up their jobs. Their lawyers told them Ford insisted they resign as a condition of the E.E.O.C. settlement, for an additional payment. Ford lawyers later told a judge that was optional. Ms. Gray resisted but many of the others gave up the largest paychecks they would ever earn.

Ms. Dunn received $225,000 in the settlement, legal records show, but as a divorced mother raising two children, she said that was no substitute for a Ford job. In 2000, her last year there, she earned $23 an hour; at Bed Bath & Beyond, she got only one-third that pay. She worked as a home health aide at night and mowed lawns during the day, inching her way back to $17 an hour. “I’m 61 years old, and I cut grass for a living,” she said.

Ms. Dunn and the other plaintiffs were outraged to find that their lawyers had claimed one-third of their awards in addition to the $2.75 million in fees the judge had approved, so they protested. The judge accused the lawyers of deception and ordered them to return the money to the women. Several lawyers on the case, including Mr. Hunt, were disciplined. He said the fees were legal and there was no intent to mislead the judge.

Workers have their own ideas about how to make lasting change in the culture — having the equivalent of undercover cops walking the factory floors, plastering signs all over the plants warning about sexual harassment, punishing Ford with a far more painful settlement than $10 million, one on the scale of a recall.

Ford said it had absorbed some lessons. The company appears more willing to fire people; Ford has disciplined 27 Chicago employees for sexual harassment

and terminated five managers since January 2015, Ms. Lavender said. Others have received lengthy suspensions.

So far, there are some signs of progress: The proportion of complaints about harassment or gender discrimination from Chicago is now about a quarter of those reported in its domestic operations, down from half in 2015.

But the company is still struggling to win workers' trust. Some women still dread coming to the plants, and cite misbehavior that continues to this day. Recently, Ford officials said they noticed a small uptick in complaints and sent reinforcements to Chicago.

Women said that those accused of harassment who remain at the plants angered and worried them most; they reel off lists of men who seem untouchable.

Like Chicago Assembly itself, Ms. Gray has struggled and survived. Once again, a supervisor she says has a record of mistreating workers has been berating her, even showing up at her house. She logged repeated calls to a company anti-harassment hotline, to no avail. Her anxiety mounted; her friends worried about her.

But just the other week, she was stunned when the plant's new human resources director welcomed her to his office and vowed to help. For the first time in years, Ms. Gray felt that a manager was taking her complaints seriously.

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