

Shopping While Black?

FOUR LIBERIAN WOMEN ACCUSED OF SHOPLIFTING AT GUESS? SAY THEY WERE TARGETED BECAUSE OF THEIR SKIN COLOR

BY JONATHAN KAMINSKY

Upon arriving at the sprawling Albertville outlet mall on a balmy morning in April, Albertha Thomas had two objectives, she says. Accompanied by her two sisters and her cousin, she was looking for presents to bring along on a visit to her native Liberia, which she'd fled during its brutal civil war. And flush from her latest paycheck as a nurse's assistant, Thomas says, she wasn't opposed to spoiling herself a little, too.

After scoring shoes at Nike and buying a stack of shirts at the Gap, Thomas and her fellow dark-skinned shopping companions, all in their late 20s and early 30s, were lured by a promising sale at Guess?. They picked out T-shirts, passing them around to see who they looked best on, and were waiting to try on some capri pants in the fitting rooms when the foursome was met by Sara Manion, the chic and slender blond-haired manager of the store.

Manion asked the women to follow her to the back room. Waiting for them there was Wright County Sheriff's Deputy Aaron Myren, a husky man in a beige uniform.

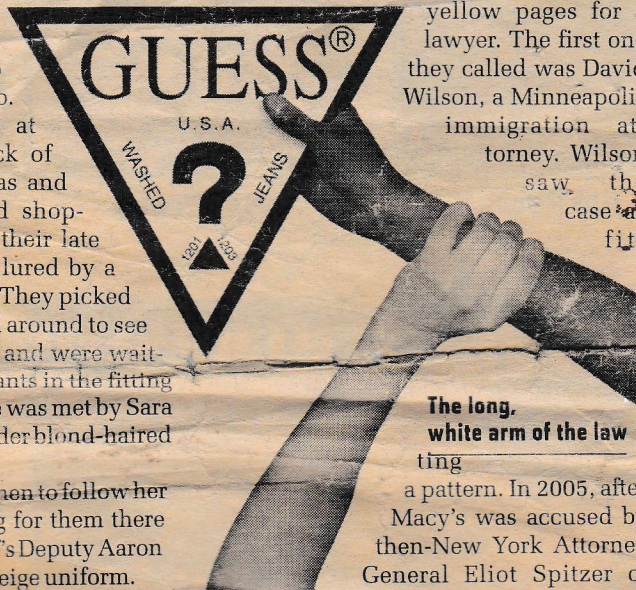
Manion and her employees, having endured a spate of recent shoplifting, were

for our money."

The deputy asked Thomas to put her money away and told the women they were free to go, according to his report. But they didn't leave without telling Manion that they felt certain they'd been racially profiled, and this wouldn't be the end of it.

After getting home, they consulted the

yellow pages for a lawyer. The first one they called was David Wilson, a Minneapolis immigration attorney. Wilson saw the case as



The long, white arm of the law

ting a pattern. In 2005, after Macy's was accused by then-New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer of racial profiling, it agreed to overhaul security at its stores and offered

Actor Forest Whitaker's morning deli run turned into an embarrassing, racially tinged incident on Friday. Because he's a celebrity but also just like us, Whitaker dropped by Morningside Heights' Milano Market for a pre-work cup of yogurt. Not finding what he needed, he was headed for the store's exit when an employee accused him of "taking something" and insisted on a pat-down. Unsurprisingly, they didn't find any pilfered Smart Water or mini-Toblerones. Upon realizing that he had just needlessly frisked an innocent person/Oscar winner, the Milano worker blamed his accusation on the "bad angle" of the store's security cameras and offered Whitaker free food to make up for the trouble. He also asked Whitaker not to call the cops, which he worried would result in the loss of his job. While Whitaker was nice enough to oblige the request, his publicist says that he was definitely "troubled" by the whole thing. "This was an upsetting incident given the fact that Forest did nothing more than walk into the deli," she told the New York Daily News. "Forest asked that, in the future, the store change their behavior and treat the public in a fair and just manner."

Actor Forest Whitaker gets stopped and frisked leaving Morningside Heights deli [NYDN]