

# Macy's settles racism litigation

By Shelley Fortune  
Special to Sentinel-Voice  
NEW YORK (NNPA) — Macy's East, Inc., the owner of 29 Macy's department stores in New York State, has agreed to pay \$600,000 to the state to settle a lawsuit alleging that it discriminated against Black and Latino customers.

The lawsuit, commenced by Attorney General Eliot Spitzer, accused the company of following, questioning, stopping, searching and detaining shoppers based on their race or ethnicity—a violation of federal and state law—in an effort to prevent shoplifting. The suit was filed after an investigation by Spitzer's office that began in July 2003, following customers' complaints. As is customary in these kind of settlements, Macy admitted no guilt or wrongdoing.

Some, like City Councilmember Charles Barron, have said that Spitzer should've pushed for harsher

penalties against the company.

According to a complaint filed by Spitzer, Macy's automatically handcuffed detainees in its New York City stores, regardless of whether they appeared dangerous. The complaint alleges that Blacks and Latinos were detained on suspicion of shoplifting at a much higher rate than Whites (at over 75 percent at most of the stores examined). The complaint also charges that these detainees were handcuffed and arrested at a much higher rate than White detainees and that Macy's stopped Blacks when security alarms sounded upon their exiting the store, subjecting them to intrusive searches while allowing White customers who set off the alarms to exit.

But in the agreement, Macy's said that these acts were performed by its security personnel, unbeknownst to the company, adding that the company does not con-

done these acts.

"Macy's does not tolerate discrimination and expressly prohibits profiling," Macy's said in a statement released last week. "It trains its security team to stop suspected shoplifters based on their behavior, not on their appearance. If anyone is found to have engaged in profiling or any form of discrimination, that person will be disciplined or fired."

Macy's acknowledged that it had not sufficiently monitored its security personnel to ensure that employees were operating lawfully, but it said that it has long had an anti-discrimination policy in place.

"In our discussions, the New York State Attorney General's office has acknowledged that Macy's East has a number of clear anti-profiling policies in place. The agreement we have reached is focused on assuring that compliance with specific policies and practices is moni-

tored regularly," company officials said in their statement. "In the spirit of our longstanding commitment to diversity, we intend to work closely with the office of the Attorney General to assure that all customers are treated equally and that all of our employees abide by the letter and spirit of our policies."

To comply with the agreement, Macy's will make certain changes, including appointing an internal security monitor to train security personnel to ensure that their behavior is not discriminatory. The company must also investigate complaints about security personnel, and change their detention policies, providing ample justification for the use of handcuffs and arrests.

Ed Goldberg, vice president of government and consumer affairs for Macy's, said that the store has already taken corrective action.

"Macy's is America's de-  
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# Social Security—Big stakes for women

By Melinda Tuhus  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (WOMEN'S e-NEWS)—The Bush administration is now putting on a robust campaign to dismantle Social Security and replace it with a system in which workers invest part of their payroll taxes into private investment accounts.

Bush recently warned that the 70-year-old retirement program will soon be "flat bust, bankrupt" because of the looming retirement of Baby Boomers and the increasing longevity of the population as a whole.

The president won't present a detailed plan until February, but he and many of his top aides are already drumming up support and groups backing and opposing privatization are coming out with television and newspaper ads.

Both sides of the struggle over the program — which also provides disability income for workers and their families and survivors' insurance for the families of workers who have died — say women will be the greatest beneficiaries if their side wins and they are actively pursuing women's support.

Sixty percent of Social Security beneficiaries are women. A quarter of all women 65 and over depend on the program as their sole income and most of these women are poor.

Social Security what was put in place 70 years ago as a cornerstone of the New Deal, the system of governmental programs established during the 1930s by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to pull the country out of depression.

Backers say it has been tweaked over the years and needs to be tweaked some more. To ensure that the system does not run out, they say benefits could be cut slightly, the payroll tax could be raised slightly or the income level that is taxed for Social Security — now capped at \$90,000 — could be raised.

Social Security defenders — including AARP, the advocacy organization for seniors — say the alarms about the system are false.

Meanwhile, the Social Security Administration and the Congressional Budget Office predict that the program, with no additional changes, will be able to cover retirement for everyone until the mid-21st century, after which it could still cover 70 percent of all retirees' payouts.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research, based in Washington, D.C., is lobbying to preserve the current system. In an analysis of U.S. Census Data, that say fully half of women over 65 would be poor without Social Security income.

Meanwhile, plenty of women, such as Michelle LeMere, 33, worry about what will happen if Social Security is dismantled.

"I feel that I can't count on it being there for me when I retire," says LeMere. She's married with two children, and has been paying into Social Security since she was 16. She says she invests "aggressively" in her 403b, the non-profit equivalent of a 401k offered by her employer, a Connecticut environmental organization.

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# Wal-Mart campaigns to answer naysayers

By Andre Coe  
Special to Sentinel-Voice  
DALLAS (NNPA) — Wal-Mart, the nation's largest retailer and industry leader, is flexing its muscles against company critics.

In a letter published in more than 100 daily and weekly newspapers nationwide and locally, including *The Dallas Examiner*, *The Dallas Morning News*, *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and *The Dallas Post-Tribune*, Wal-Mart said "...it's time to set the record straight with the real facts about Wal-Mart as a place to work, presented by the people who know — not by people who presume to know."

The company also launched a website, [www.walmartfacts.com](http://www.walmartfacts.com), to help combat negative criticism of its company.

In the letter written by Lee Scott, president and CEO of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., the company stated that it creates more than 100,000 new jobs in the United States each year, promotes 76 percent of its managers from within the store where an employee initially began, maintains a diverse full-time workforce that is 20-40 percent above the retail industry standard and offers benefits such as healthcare, profit-sharing, merchandise discounts and vacation pay to its employ-

ees.

Accompanied with the letter, are smiling Wal-Mart male and female employees of various ethnicities and ages.

"There are a lot of people out there that are talking about Wal-Mart, and Wal-Mart hasn't been one of those people," said corporate Wal-Mart spokesman Gus Whitcomb, adding that the average Dallas Wal-Mart employee makes \$10.51 per hour. "...To some extent, we are guilty of not telling our own story."

Critics of Benton, Ark.-based Wal-Mart view the retailer as a neighborhood bully, one that takes up a lot of space, creates traffic problems wherever it goes and, as in California, attempts to change zoning laws when it appears the company will not get its way in development.

Other say that the jobs the store creates are low paying and that the chain drives out small "Mom and Pop" businesses. Critics have ranged from affluent neighborhood associations, to small business owners, to local zoning boards, to long running, well-established businesses.

(Mike Buffington, president of the National Newspaper Association, sent a letter to H. Lee Scott, CEO of Wal-Mart earlier this month after being contacted by a repre-

sentative of Hill & Knowlton public relations firm advising him that company executives are available for interviews to "set the record straight about the facts about Wal-Mart." In his letter, Buffington said, "...Community newspapers across the nation are all but invisible to Wal-Mart unless the company is looking for some free PR in our pages. Wal-Mart has a fairly standard policy of doing little or no local newspaper advertising... Why is it that community newspapers in America are good enough to help you fend off critics with free PR, but we're not good enough for your paid advertising?")

DeSoto City Councilmember Thelma Clardy does not buy into Wal-Mart's recent chest-pounding. Clardy was the lone DeSoto councilmember who opposed construction of a proposed 200,000 square-foot Wal-Mart "Supercenter" when it came before the DeSoto City Council last September. The vote passed 6-1 in favor of constructing the Supercenter, Wal-Mart's solution to "one-stop shopping," on Belt Line Road between Ellison and Westmoreland.

Clardy said she has not conducted her own investigation, but believes reports about the number of jobs Wal-Mart creates is a result of a

public relations campaign designed to bolster the company's image.

She is aware of a discrimination lawsuit filed against the company by Wal-Mart employees and that when she goes into the stores she sees all types of diverse people working for the company.

That does not mean that the company has that same level of diversity in its upper-ranks, she said.

"Anyone can do that," Clardy said, referring to a company's diversity hiring practices at the lowest levels.

Like Clardy, Ron Johnson, 49, president of DeSoto's Silver Creek Homeowner's Association, was also opposed to the construction of the Wal-Mart Supercenter.

He readily points out his belief that the store creates unnecessary traffic, mistreats its employees and generally ignores the concerns of residents who must live near the store. Johnson, owner of J&J Custom Installations, a home-based carpet installation business that he has operated for 25 years, said he views Wal-Mart as a threat to small business.

"It says to me that the City Council was not looking at what the people and the community wanted," Johnson said. "That left an ill feeling for me. As a matter of fact, I  
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