

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## Versace accused of racism in ex-employee's suit

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*Versace fall/winter 2016 campaign*

By STAFF REPORTS

Italian fashion label Versace is being sued by a former employee who claims his store engaged in racial profiling.

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The civil case, filed in the Superior Court of the State of California by Christopher Sampino, alleges that a manager asked the salesperson to use the alphanumeric code for black clothing to alert coworkers when a black customer entered the store. Versace denied each of Mr. Sampino's claims in a response, asking for the case to be dismissed.

### Versus Versace

The 23-year-old Mr. Sampino is one-quarter African American. The plaintiff is filing the suit, which includes claims of wrongful termination and discrimination, on behalf of himself and others who are "similarly situated," opening up the case to become a class action suit.

Mr. Sampino worked at Versace's store in the Simon-owned San Francisco Premium Outlets in Pleasanton, C.A. for two weeks this fall. In the lawsuit, the former employee states that a manager instructed him during training to "casually" say the code for black clothing, D410, when he saw a black customer walk in the door, adding that he could hold a black garment to make the message clearer.



*Image courtesy of Versace*

According to the suit, Mr. Sampino told the manager, "You know I'm African American?" The plaintiff says the manager seemed surprised to hear this.

After this encounter, Mr. Sampino claims he was denied proper training or breaks. He also states that he did not receive access to his pay stubs or his final pay check.

When Mr. Sampino was fired, he says that the managers told him that his performance was up to expectations, but he did not understand luxury, having not "lived the luxury life."

In a statement given to [CNN](#), Versace said, "Versace believes strongly in equal opportunity, as an employer and a retailer. We do not tolerate discrimination on the basis of race, national origin or any other characteristic protected by our civil rights laws. We have denied the allegations in this suit, and we will not comment further concerning pending litigation."

British fashion house Alexander McQueen and its parent company Kering similarly had a lawsuit brought against them by two store employees.

The plaintiffs, Christopher Policard and Duane Davis, filed a suit in a New York court that claims the brand has "engaged in systematic racism" against its African-American employees. Consumers are increasingly looking at the practices of the brands they buy into, in which even an alleged wrongdoing may sway their sentiment ([see story](#)).

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