

Airline Discrimination Lawsuit: Client Profile

CLIENT: Michael Dasrath
AGE: 32
NATIONALITY: Naturalized U.S. Citizen; born in Guyana, South America; currently resides in Brooklyn, NY
OCCUPATION: Analyst in the Internal Consulting Services Division of JP Morgan Chase in NY; he has an MBA
DEFENDANT: Continental Airlines, Inc.
ATTORNEY: Reginald Shuford, ACLU National Office

STATEMENT: I am here today because I can no longer stay silent about the blatant and painful racial discrimination I encountered as I boarded a routine flight home to my family in Florida last New Year's Eve. What happened to me didn't happen because the airline thought I was a security risk. It happened because someone didn't like the color of my skin.

When I arrived at the airport on December 31, I went through several security checks without incident, including a random x-ray of my suitcase. After I took my seat in first class, I noticed a woman with a small dog glaring at me and several other passengers seated nearby. Then I heard her say to the captain, "Those brown-skinned men are behaving suspiciously." Moments later, I and two other so-called brown-skinned men were ordered off the plane. No explanation was given. I was not searched or asked to meet with any security personnel. I would have answered any of the flight crew's questions or been willing to submit to even further security searches, but I never even got the chance.

The staff on the ground were apologetic and obviously embarrassed. We all knew that the incident had nothing to do with security, because we were offered flights on the next plane out, although we could get not direct flights to our destinations.

I was working in Manhattan on September 11 and I will never forget the horror of that day. But ejecting me from a flight to make a passenger feel better isn't going to make anyone any safer.

I used to think that I lived in a country where liberty and freedom stood for everyone. I have two young sons at home and I want them to grow up with the same sense of patriotism and pride that I felt growing up in this great country. My boys should never have to experience the humiliation and anguish that I went through last December.