

MGM Accused With Copyright Theft

Written by Robert ID1044

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Entertainment and business attorney Paul N. Philips, counsel to screenwriter Thomas Jay Winston Johnson, announced today the filing of a lawsuit against Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures and others related to what he describes as the outrageous theft of his client's intellectual property. That property, Philips says, was converted into MGM's "Barbershop" and movies that have followed it – "Barbershop 2" and soon-to-be-released "Beauty Shop." The movies star many rap and hip-hop personalities.

The lawsuit was filed today in the US District Court, Central District of California (#CV 052031) and seeks unspecified damages from MGM, hip-hop rap artist and actor Ice Cube's Cube Vision Productions, and others associated with the "Barbershop" film.

Plaintiff Johnson, a Colorado resident, submitted his script, entitled "The Barber Shop," for consideration in late 1999, and was advised simply that his work was not what producers wanted to pursue at the time. Unbeknownst to Johnson, however, "Barbershop" was well into pre-production the following year, and Johnson was not attached to it. The film was released in late 2002.

According to Philips, "Mr. Johnson found out about the making of MGM's project by chance while at the movie theater to see another film." According to Philips, Johnson was stunned when he saw the trailer for "Barbershop" in the summer of 2002 and realized that his original project had been made without him.

Since its 2002 release, Barbershop has grossed nearly \$100M, and Johnson and his counsel estimate that the Barbershop franchise, including its sequel and "Beauty Shop," will gross MGM nearly \$300M by the end of this year.

"We discussed the matter informally with MGM for months," Philips reports. "The end result, however, was that MGM was not willing to satisfy my client, and we were forced to file the lawsuit." Now, the dispute appears to have reached the point of no return, and the litigation should be in full swing in the immediate future.

According to Philips, who represents a number of entertainers and professional athletes, the

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goals of the litigation are to get Johnson compensated for what he believes are profits belonging to him, to get him recognition for the artistic endeavor that he says became MGM's "Barbershop," and to win a victory for other members of the artistic community, who Philips comments are subjected to consistent idea piracy by Hollywood studios.

The trial date for Johnson's case may not be set for many months.