

STRANGE CELEBRITY LAWSUITS

We're back with one of our regular features: unusual legal battles involving famous people.

THE PLAINTIFF: Kristina Karo, 27, a Ukrainian-born pop singer living in Los Angeles

THE DEFENDANT: Mila Kunis, 33, a Ukrainian-born actress known for *That '70s Show* and *Bad Moms*

THE LAWSUIT: In 2015, Karo announced that she was suing Kunis for stealing her pet chicken. According to the up-and-coming singer, the two girls were “inseparable” in their village in Berezhnytsia, Soviet Ukraine. Mila would visit Kristina’s farm every day to play with their favorite chicken, named Doggie. But then one day Doggie disappeared. Karo said that Kunis confessed to the crime, saying, “Kristina, you can have any other chicken as a pet, you have a whole chicken farm.”

Losing her beloved Doggie left Karo an “emotional wreck,” and when she arrived in Los Angeles years later, the mere presence of Kunis, who also lived there, “brought back all the bad memories” and forced her back into therapy. In an amazing coincidence, Karo announced the \$5,000 lawsuit—for emotional distress and therapy bills—at the same time she was debuting the video to her new song “Give Me Green Card,” in which she dances provocatively in an American flag bikini at various L.A. locations (including, for some reason, a Home Depot parking lot).

Kunis said she doesn’t even know the singer, and the math doesn’t add up because Karo was just a baby when Kunis was seven. “I was like, ‘Which chicken did I steal?’ because I was obviously in the village when I stole these chickens. So I apologize to this woman who was maybe or maybe not a month old.”

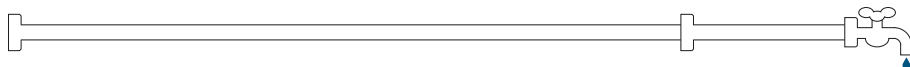
THE VERDICT: “There is only one judge and that is God,” said Karo, while announcing that she was dropping her lawsuit against Kunis. “I pray for her soul and the soul of Doggie, that he has found peace finally in chicken heaven.”

Kunis’s response: “I would like to launch a counter \$5,000 lawsuit for making me sit there and watch your music video. My body hurts. My eyes hurt, they’re burning. That requires money.” (The video topped 750,000 views.)

THE PLAINTIFF: Alfonso Ribeiro, who played Carlton Banks on the 1990s sitcom *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*

THE DEFENDANT: Epic Games, maker of the video game *Fortnite*

THE LAWSUIT: *Fortnite* was already the most popular multiplayer game in the world in January 2018, when Epic offered players a dance move “emote” (an action or symbol



...until you can swallow a steel blade at least 2 cm wide and 38 cm long (0.79 in. wide and 15 in. long).

that expresses an emotion, available via an in-game purchase) called “Fresh.” “Fresh” is almost identical to “the Carlton Dance,” the awkwardly funny 1980s dance move that was Ribeiro’s signature move on *Fresh Prince*. The Carlton Dance became a pop culture staple (especially at weddings), so it’s not surprising that Ribeiro is protective of it. He concluded his winning season of *Dancing with the Stars* by doing it as the crowd danced along.

Turns out Carlton, er, Ribeiro, wasn’t the only one whose likeness had been appropriated by Epic: *Fortnite* players could also buy the signature dance moves of rapper 2 Milly (Terrence Ferguson), rapper BlocBoy JB (James Lee Baker), and an Instagram star known as the “Backpack Kid” (Russell Horning). None of these people are mentioned in the game, nor were any of them asked for their permission.

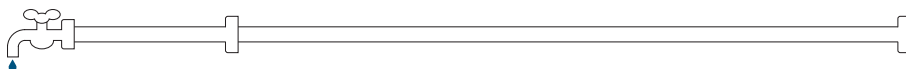
In December 2018, the *Fresh Prince* actor became the first public figure to sue the video game giant. “Epic cannot profit from its intentional misappropriation of Ribeiro’s original content and likeness,” read the complaint. The other three public figures filed similar suits, and then a viral video star known as “Orange Shirt Kid” sued Epic (technically, his mom did)—even though he originally submitted his stiff dance routine to *Fortnite* as part of a contest.

The lawsuits got even stranger in February 2019 when a hacker claiming to represent one of the rappers sent fraudulent e-mails to the U.S. Copyright Office demanding that “our copyright claims [are] to be terminated/dismissed because they were false/baseless.” It’s unclear who sent the e-mails but the FBI was alerted, and all the while, *Fortnite* was garnering a ton of free publicity.

THE VERDICT: In early 2019, the celebrity plaintiffs dropped their suits...temporarily. Why temporarily? Because none of them had actually copyrighted their signature dance moves, so their lawyers said they would refile when—and if—their clients were able to successfully trademark their signature moves. If so, a judge ruled that they would be allowed to sue Epic retroactively. But later that year, Ribeiro’s copyright was denied on the grounds that the Carlton Dance “consists of three dance movements,” so “it is not a work of choreography and is thus not protected under copyright law.” Not helping Ribeiro’s claim was a 2015 *Variety* interview in which he said the dance was inspired by “Courtney Cox in the Bruce Springsteen video ‘Dancing in the Dark’...or in Eddie Murphy’s ‘Delirious’ video, ‘The White Man Dance,’ as he called it.” The other litigants ran into similar copyright-claim issues. As of last report, the *Fortnite* dancing lawsuits were on “pause.”

THE PLAINTIFF: Minnie Driver, 44, a British-born actress known best for *Good Will Hunting*, who moved next door to the Perelmutter

THE DEFENDANT: Daniel Perelmutter, described in press reports as “a 74-year army vet and heart transplant survivor” who lives with his elderly wife Mary Lou in Los Angeles



A frog’s tongue is 10 times as soft as a human’s.

THE LAWSUIT: In 2014, Driver purchased a three-bedroom, \$2.5 million home at the top of a long driveway in a fancy neighborhood not far from the famous Hollywood sign. She shared the driveway with three other neighbors, including Perelmutter. Things began cordial enough. Driver asked if it would be okay to put a gate in the driveway to deter peeping paparazzi. Perelmutter agreed because he didn't use that driveway. (He had another one.) But things soured the following year when Perelmutter started construction of a new home in his backyard. To make room for a wall, he narrowed the shared driveway by six feet. Driver was so angry about it (and the noise and trucks) that she retaliated by changing the gate code so that his workers couldn't enter the yard.

Then it got really nasty. Driver told reporters that Perelmutter “blew smoke in her son's face and made misogynistic comments.” After police broke up a verbal altercation between the two neighbors, Driver filed a restraining order, and then a lawsuit against Perelmutter, claiming he told workers to leave mounds of dirt blocking her driveway.

THE VERDICT: Driver won. Perelmutter was ordered to remove the wall, perform community service, pay a \$1,000 fine, and pay Driver's attorney fees of \$200,000. The next time they saw each other, Perelmutter claims Driver said she was “glad he got [censored]” and that she hopes he “loses everything.” Would Perelmutter let this stand? See the next entry.

THE PLAINTIFF: Daniel Perelmutter

THE DEFENDANT: Minnie Driver

THE LAWSUIT: In 2016, not long after Driver won her lawsuit against Perelmutter (see the previous entry), he sued her right back, claiming that her changing of the gate code cost him \$100,000 in work delays. “She has made my life a living hell,” he told reporters. “I've had a heart transplant, 14 back surgeries and a knee replacement, and Minnie Driver isn't helping my health.”

Among Perelmutter's other accusations: Driver pelted his new house with baby food jars full of black paint, threatened to have his workers deported, and tried to run him over in her car. Driver denied everything, claiming it was *he* who leaped in front of *her*. Perelmutter, who walks with a cane, responded, “Look at me. I'm handicapped—I wish I could leap!” Driver's lawyer called the suit “frivolous,” saying, “Daniel Perelmutter has been the bane of his neighbors for years.”

THE VERDICT: At the pretrial hearing in superior court, both parties arrived with an armada of attorneys. Judge Rita Miller expressed her disappointment: “The heart of this case is who's richer than who, I guess.” Shortly before the trial began—surprise!—the warring neighbors settled out of court. It's unclear who came out on top, only that “money changed hands.”

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“Too much money ain't enough money.” —Lil Wayne



Cat owners are less likely to be churchgoers than people who don't own cats.