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ENTERTAINMENT

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Picking pockets, picking films: How classic films like ‘Oliver Twist’ can legally be remade



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Fisticuffs. Pickpockets. Domestic violence. Bulldogs. Orphans. Kidnapping. If that’s not enough excitement for a classic movie, the [five-time Oscar awards](#) for the 1968 “Oliver Twist” flick certainly are. British author Charles Dickens made quite a name for himself with this [1838 classic](#), and Ice Cube apparently liked the tale so much that he wants to retell it. [Shadow and Act](#) reports that the former NWA member will be remaking this film, along with the 1843 classic book-turned-movie “A Christmas Carol.”



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“Are We There Yet?” the TV show and “Are We There Yet?” the movie have helped cement Ice Cube’s resume in making kid friendly TV shows. So it’s safe to say that he’ll more than likely stay true to both of Dickens’ books. For obvious reasons, it just wouldn’t be right for him to exclude his hip-hop influence in the musical scenes though. The same can be said for the director of “Hamilton,” Thomas Kail, who Ice Cube is [partnering with](#) for both films.



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Of course Dickens was long gone before hip-hop was born, and there's no way of telling how he'd feel about the musical spin. But this should be a great way to introduce both adults and children to movie classics, and more importantly, the authors of them.

Unfortunately, sometimes producers, screenwriters and book authors don't always see eye-to-eye when it comes to how TV show and movie spin-offs should be. The [authors' responses](#) to "Twilight," "The Walking Dead," "Fresh Off the Boat" and "Orange Is the New Black" are but a few examples of that.

Recommended Reading: "[Contract calls: The highs and lows of bringing books and comics to TV and movies](#)"

It is by no surprise that authors who at least get some say in how the film (or TV show) is produced or casted tend to be happier with how their products are released to a wider audience versus those who sell the rights off and have no power whatsoever. Even Stephen King referred to some film adaptations of his books with a disgusted "yuck," but he was pretty impressed with others, according to [The Guardian](#).

Considering Dickens' death in 1870, the "Oliver Twist" creator and Ice Cube clearly

Considering Dickens' death in 1870, the "Oliver Twist" creator and Ice Cube clearly cannot break bread and discuss Ice Cube's intended adaptation of Dickens' novels. In the United Kingdom, where Charles Dickens lived and died, a copyright lasts for the life of the author plus 70 years. Under U.K. copyright law, Dickens novel became a part of the public domain in 1940.

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A work that is in the public domain means it is unprotected by intellectual property rights such as copyrights, trademarks and patents. Works that are in the public domain can be used without getting the permission of the author/creator of the work. Ice Cube does not have to get permission from Charles Dickens' estate to make a film based on Dickens' novels "Oliver Twist" and "A Christmas Carol."

In the United States, all works published before 1923 are in the public domain. When the Copyright Act was first enacted in the United States, the duration for a copyright was only 14 years. Works that were published on and after January 1, 1923 but before 1978 are protected for 95 years.

Sonny Bono, of Sonny and Cher fame, pushed to extend the life of a copyright in the United States. In 1998, [The Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act](#) was enacted. As a general rule under the act, works created after January 1, 1978 will have copyright protection that lasts for the life of an author plus an additional 70 years. There are [exceptions](#): "For an anonymous work, a pseudonymous work, or a work made for hire, the copyright endures for a term of 95 years from the year of its first publication or a term of 120 years from the year of its creation, whichever expires first."

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As an interesting aside, “Steamboat Willy,” the first Mickey Mouse cartoon, was published by Walt Disney in 1928. Mickey Mouse should have entered the public domain. Under The Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act, the copyright has been extended to 2023. Unless Disney figures out a way to extend Mickey’s Mouse copyright, that cartoon character will fall into the public domain on January 1, 2024. This would mean the general public would be free to use Mickey Mouse without seeking Disney’s approval.

Have more questions about copyrights and literary or artistic works in the public domain? Contact [J. Paye & Associates](#) today.

Shamontiel L. Vaughn contributed to this blog. Find out more about her at [Shamontiel.com](#).

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