

Sentence Extended for Mickey and Friends

He was up for parole at the end of 2003, but the bad news came down on January 15 when nine Supreme Court judges announced a 20-year extension to be added on for the Mouse and his friends. The vote against parole was 7–2.

The downcast rodent was seen slowly shaking his head in disbelief as Ms. Ginsburg read, “This case concerns the authority the Constitution assigns to Congress to prescribe the duration of copyrights. . .”

“Twenty more years workin’ for the man,” he sighed. “I just can’t do it—I’ll be 95 when they let me out.”

“...by securing to authors for limited times the exclusive right to their writings...”

“Haven’t had a new pair of shoes in 75 years,” he protested quietly, looking down at the floor. The lady adjusted her glasses and continued reading.

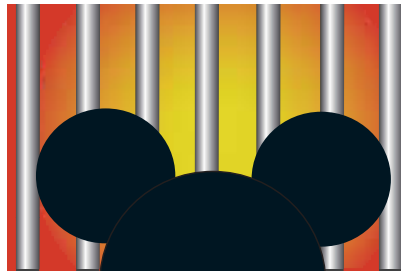
A duck wing came to rest on his shoulder. Small consolation—the friend at his side in the sailor suit was an equal victim of the CTEA (Copyright Term Extension Act).

Their champion, law professor Lawrence Lessig from Stanford, stood at their side listening. Justice Ginsburg elaborated on the new sentencing guidelines:

“Add 20 years for works copyrighted after January 1, 1923.

“Works copyrighted by individuals since 1978 get life plus 70 years.

“Works made for hire (by or for corporations) get 95 years.”



Lessig wondered how else he might have argued the term “limited” when he felt the Mouse tugging at his sleeve. “What about the day laborers?” he whispered to his attorney. He meant Snow White, Pinocchio, Peter Pan, Sleeping Beauty,

and the others who were recruited into service by the boss without payment or permission. The Mouse still didn’t understand how the company could make money on them in the same way they did with him and his contemporaries.

“They can still go home at the end of the day,” Lessig replied, not wanting to get into explaining again why some thefts aren’t seen as thefts.

The reading finished, the lawyer and his clients were packing up at the table when Goofy said, “It’s Sonny Bono’s fault, isn’t it?”

“He wrote the law passed by Congress,” Lessig conceded.

The big dog had noticed Congresswoman Mary Bono, Sonny’s widow, sitting in the back of the courtroom, and he put two and two together and got 20. After a muffled conference, he, the Mouse, and the Duck began loudly humming “I Got You Babe” as they proceeded up the aisle to the door.

Congresswoman Bono stood up, sputtering, and pointed at the trio.

From the bench, Mr. Scalia responded to her entreaty. “That song,” he announced, “still has 70 years. Cite ‘em before they leave the courtroom.”

[The complete court decision on CTEA can be read at <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/>.] ■