

NOT SO BRIGHT FUTURE FOR MISS CLEO?

While popular psychic Miss Cleo concentrates on the future of her clients, Florida's Attorney General is more focused on her past. Miss Cleo, who rose to fame on television infomercials, tells her millions of viewers that she's a Jamaican shaman. The state of Florida thinks otherwise.

Jennifer Vaughn, an investigator for Florida's Attorney General's office, has identified "Miss Cleo" as Youree Harris, a 39-year-old woman residing in an upscale area of South Florida. Apparently, Miss Cleo has better insight into her patrons' future than her own. When Vaughn tried to serve Harris with a subpoena in February, Harris (Miss Cleo) made a 911 call that brought a Broward County sheriff's deputy to the scene. The police officer warned Harris "about calling 911 and trying to dodge a subpoena." Harris then accepted the court summons from Vaughn.

Assistant Attorney General Dave Aronberg said people who are spending millions of dollars have a right to know the truth about Miss Cleo. "That's important because the whole concept of Miss Cleo is premised on her being a shaman from Jamaica. If she's from the Bronx instead, that would be fraud," Aronberg said in a *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* report. Officials have publicly stated that they do not expect that either Miss Cleo or the various corporations with which she is affiliated will be able to document that she is the "world-renowned or acclaimed master psychic" she claims to be.

The state of Florida is not the only fog that may eventually cloud Miss Cleo's crystal ball. Just hours after the Florida indictment, the Federal Trade Commission filed its own lawsuit charging Miss Cleo's psychic network is "permeated with fraud." The FTC made its move after it had received a "high volume of consumer complaints." Miss Cleo has been the recipient of previous investigations and/or lawsuits by the attorneys general in Missouri, Arkansas, and Pennsylvania.

On popular commercials, and more lengthy infomercials, Miss Cleo incites viewers to make a "free" call to learn more about their spiritual journey or future, including their love life. The first three minutes are free, but it is claimed that during that time, callers are put on hold or questioned for basic personal information. After that the call is forwarded to a 900-telephone number which charges \$4.99 a minute. Some callers have racked up charges as much as \$300. According to the FTC, the average bill is about \$60. The lawsuit also charges that Miss Cleo's "readers" are paid for the amount of time

they spend on the phone with callers. These "readers" (or operators who answer the phones) are paid on a per-minute basis and are fired if they are not able to keep patrons on the line for a minimum of 12 minutes, the FTC lawsuit said.

—MKG

THE HIGH PRICE OF EXORCISM

A Fort Worth jury has found pastor Lloyd McCutchen, former youth pastor Rod Linzay, and several other members of the Pleasant Glade Assembly of God Church of Colleyville, Texas, liable for an exorcism gone wrong. The jury awarded a \$300,000 judgment to Laura Schubert. Schubert brought suit against the church for two exorcism attempts made on her in June 1996. She was seeking more than \$500,000 in damages.

Schubert, who was 17 at the time of the incident, claimed that as many as eight youths pinned her to the church floor while trying to exorcise demons, as adults from the congregation watched. Schubert, now 23, and other witnesses testified that she kicked and tried to break free as the church's youths tried to expel the demons. "This was not a situation of prayer. They were trying to commit an exorcism on me," she told jurors.

David Pruessner, an attorney for the church, argued that Schubert had exhibited a pattern of overdramatization and had developed a mental disorder. "Laura Schubert breathes in attention the same way we breathe in air," Pruessner told the court. "Before she showed up at the church, she had a pre-existing personality disorder," he said. The attorney said the hardship of periodic uprooting and travel because of her missionary parents contributed to her condition.

Schubert's attorney, Bill Wuester, disputed Pruessner's claims, stating the teenager was a model student at her high school, worked at a job, and had paid for her own car. "The girl had no problems. ... She had a great life," Wuester said.

An earlier court ruling in the lawsuit prohibited jurors from hearing any religious aspects of the case, including explicit details of the two exorcisms. According to a *Star-Telegram* report, Schubert's original indictment described "a bizarre night in which church members anointed the sanctuary with holy oil, rapped on pews and propped a cross against the church doors to keep or drive demons out." However, the "jurors heard none of

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