

# 'Friday After Next

Ice Cube's newest 'Friday' movie opens today

Courtesy of KRT - Me. Cube. Just chillin' in a Jewish delicatessen in West Hollywood.

Ice Cube has built up a serious appetite during a hectic morning that began early with an appearance with an overstimulated happy news crew at a local television station - one of the anchors rightfully said Cube was too cool for the room - and ended with a stop at a popular radio station.

The rapper-actor-writer-producer-director, whose new holiday-themed movie, *Friday After Next*, opens this Friday (not next Friday or the Friday after next), orders two lunches. His burly bodyguard, sitting across the aisle at his own table, orders the same.

Cube (that's what friends and reporters are asked to call him) is promoting his movie in every way imaginable. He's doing newspaper interviews, magazine interviews, television interviews, radio interviews, personal appearances on hip TV shows and even personal appearances on not-so-hip TV shows.

The *Friday* franchise is a lucrative one - the first two, *Friday* and *Next Friday*, have generated about \$200 million in revenue - but there are even higher expectations for the third installment, and the reason is *Barbershop*.

That film, which Cube starred in and produced, came out of nowhere a few months ago to make about \$80 million at the box office, or nearly seven times what it cost to make.

It also sparked a flurry of negative publicity when civil rights leaders attacked a scene in the movie in which a barber (played by Cedric the Entertainer) makes fun of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks and other icons of the civil rights movement.

"It was a non-issue," an unsmiling Cube said between bites of a chicken finger dipped in barbecue sauce. "It was much ado about nothing. It was a fictional character in a fictional movie. I think some people are taking themselves too seriously. I learned that if you take yourself too seriously, nobody else will."

Although Cube began his acting career on a serious note and has continued with dramatic work (*Three Kings*, *Anaconda*, *Trespass*), he is better known for his comedies, which include the two *Friday* movies and *The Players Club*, his directorial debut.

He also produces many of his films through

his production company, Cube Vision.

The rapper-mogul said he has no pretensions as to what kinds of movies he will produce, direct, write or star in after *Friday After Next*.

"I like to watch comedies, dramas and action movies, so I want to do those kinds of movies. Nobody wants to hear me talking about wanting to be a serious dramatic actor. They want to like my movies when they come out."

After the tremendous success of the *Friday* movies, a third was inevitable.

Since it was supposed to come out around the holidays, Cube figured a Christmas theme might be appropriate.

"There has never been a Christmas movie about the 'hood," he said. "All I've ever seen are East Coast Christmas movies with little white kids playing in the snow. That has nothing to do with what I remember about Christmas."

"I thought we could kill two birds with one stone by giving people a different view of Christmas and, at the same time, give the *Friday* franchise a paint job."

In *Friday After Next*, which Cube wrote and produced, he and his cousin (played by Mike Epps) get jobs as security guards in a big downtown mall after a thief dressed as Santa Claus breaks into their apartment and robs them.

Along the way, they meet up with the *Friday* assortment of strange characters who inhabit the 'hood.

In fact, Cube's comedies often poke fun at members of his own ethnic group.

"Nobody really escapes the humor," he said. "That's what makes it OK; it's not one-sided. We make fun of everyone. All I worry about is whether it's funny. I'm not trying to do social commentary."

"As for why I do so many jokes about people in the 'hood, I think it's easier for some to make jokes about his own community without it being considered offensive."

"Jewish comedians can make jokes about Jewish people without someone thinking it's anti-Semitic. Italian comedians can do the same with Italian people. And people who make jokes about their own do it the best because they know their own people the best. Stereotypes become stereotypes because there is an element of truth in them."

"What we laugh about in these movies is the same stuff that usually makes us cry."

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Mike Epps, left, and Ice Cube star in the newest *Friday* movie, *Friday After Next*, which hits theaters today.

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