

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE SECOND CIRCUIT

Muhammadali v. City of New York

No. 18-1981, United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit (February 28, 2020)

SUMMARY

In this unpublished summary order, the Second Circuit affirmed the district court's sua sponte dismissal of the plaintiff's 42 U.S.C. § 1983 claims as time-barred. The court held that, although a district court ordinarily should not dismiss sua sponte on statute-of-limitations grounds without notice and an opportunity to be heard, remand would be futile because the plaintiff was bound by his attorney's negligence under New York tolling rules and failed to identify any legal basis for tolling. The decision underscores that a § 1983 plaintiff is responsible for his attorney's errors, including the choice of forum, and that such negligence does not warrant equitable tolling.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Rosemary S. Pooler; Gerard E. Lynch; Michael H. Park
JURISDICTION	Federal
DECIDED	February 28, 2020
DOCKET	18-1981
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Appeal from district court's sua sponte dismissal of complaint as time-barred
STANDARD OF REVIEW	de novo
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unpublished
PARTIES	Sayyid D. Muhammadali v. City of New York, P.O Solis, Sgt. Honstetter, Sgt. Cordiner, P.O Baruccheri

TOPICS

- civil procedure
- statute of limitations
- affirmative defenses
- civil rights
- appellate procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

- Civil Rights
- Civil Procedure
- Statute of Limitations

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the district court properly dismissed the plaintiff's complaint as time-barred.
2. Whether any legal basis for tolling the statute of limitations applies.

HOLDINGS

1. The district court properly dismissed the complaint because the claims are time-barred and no tolling applies.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Ordinarily, a district court should not sua sponte dismiss an action as time-barred without giving the plaintiff notice and opportunity to be heard as to potential affirmative defenses.”

“Because Muhammadali is bound by the negligent actions of his attorney, he cannot avoid the consequences of his attorney’s conduct, including the choice of a state rather than a federal forum.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The plaintiff brought a pro se § 1983 action against the City of New York and several police officers. The district court sua sponte dismissed the complaint as time-barred. The plaintiff had previously filed related claims in state court, and his attorney's negligence allegedly caused delays. The court assumed familiarity with the underlying facts.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The district court dismissed the plaintiff's 42 U.S.C. § 1983 complaint as time-barred without giving notice and an opportunity to be heard. The plaintiff appealed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Abbas v. Dixon, 480 F.3d 636 (2d Cir. 2007)
- J.S. v. T'Kach, 714 F.3d 99 (2d Cir. 2013)
- Poucher v. Blanchard, 86 N.Y. 256 (1881)
- Dep't of Soc. Servs. on Behalf of Beatrice V.P. v. Trustum C.D., 97 A.D.2d 831 (2d Dep't 1983), leave denied, 61 N.Y.2d 605 (1984)

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

18-1981 Muhammadali v. City of New York UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE SECOND CIRCUIT SUMMARY ORDER RULINGS BY SUMMARY ORDER DO NOT HAVE

PRECEDENTIAL EFFECT. CITATION TO A SUMMARY ORDER FILED ON OR AFTER JANUARY 1, 2007, IS PERMITTED AND IS GOVERNED BY FEDERAL RULE OF APPELLATE PROCEDURE 32.1 AND THIS COURT’S LOCAL RULE 32.1.1. WHEN CITING A SUMMARY ORDER IN A DOCUMENT FILED WITH THIS COURT, A PARTY MUST CITE EITHER THE FEDERAL APPENDIX OR AN ELECTRONIC DATABASE (WITH THE NOTATION “SUMMARY ORDER”).

A PARTY CITING A SUMMARY ORDER MUST SERVE A COPY OF IT ON ANY PARTY NOT REPRESENTED BY COUNSEL. At a stated Term of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, held at the Thurgood Marshall United States Courthouse, 40 Foley Square, in the City of New York on the 28th day of February, two thousand twenty. Present: ROSEMARY S. POOLER, GERARD E. LYNCH, MICHAEL H. PARK, Circuit Judges.
SAYYID D.

MUHAMMADALI, Plaintiff-Appellant, v. 18-1981 CITY OF NEW YORK, P.O SOLIS, TAX REG.

943832, SGT. HONSTETTER, TAX REG. 936777, SGT. CORDINER, TAX REG. 929940, P.O BARUCCHERI, TAX REG. 952448, Defendants-Appellees.
For Plaintiff-Appellant: Sayyid

D. Muhammadali, pro se, Far Rockaway, NY.

For Defendants-Appellees: No appearance. Appeal from the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York (Kuntz, J.). ON CONSIDERATION WHEREOF, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED, ADJUDGED, AND DECREED that the judgment of said District Court be and it hereby is AFFIRMED. Appellant Sayyid D. Muhammadali, proceeding pro se, appeals from the judgment entered on April 6, 2018, of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York (Kuntz, J.) sua sponte dismissing his complaint under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 as time-barred.

We assume the parties’ familiarity with the underlying facts, procedural history, and specification of issues for review. We review a sua sponte dismissal de novo. See *J.S. v. T’Kach*, 714 F.3d 99, 103 (2d Cir. 2013).

For substantially the same reasons set out by the district court in its opinion dated April 4, 2018, we conclude that the district court properly dismissed Muhammadali’s claims as time- barred. Ordinarily, a district court should not sua sponte dismiss an action as time-barred without giving the plaintiff notice and opportunity to be heard as to potential affirmative defenses.

Abbas v. Dixon, 480 F.3d 636, 640 (2d Cir. 2007). Here, however, as in *Abbas*, a remand to permit Muhammadali to replead or otherwise address the statute of limitations issue would be futile. Muhammadali was made aware of the limitations issue by the district court ruling, and was

specifically questioned at oral argument as to any fact or legal theory that might warrant tolling of the limitations period.

Neither in his brief on appeal nor at oral argument did Muhammadali identify any legal basis for tolling. Muhammadali argues on appeal that his counsel in the state court proceedings in which he first brought his claims was negligent, and that the time it took to discover counsel's negligence and bring his claims in federal court should toll the statute of limitations.

This Court applies a state's tolling rules in a § 1983 action unless those rules would defeat the goals of § 1983. *Id.* at 641. Under New York law, Muhammadali is responsible for the "negligent and wrongful acts" of his attorney within the scope of that attorney's representation of him. *Poucher v. Blanchard*, 86 N.Y. 256, 260 (1881); accord *Dep't of Soc. Servs. on Behalf of Beatrice V.P. v. Trustum C.D.*, 97 A.D.2d 831, 831 (2d Dep't 1983), leave denied, 61 N.Y.2d 605 (1984) ("[I]t is well settled in civil litigation that an attorney's errors or omissions are binding on the client absent extraordinary circumstances such as the attorney's mental illness." (internal citations omitted)).

Because Muhammadali is bound by the negligent actions of his attorney, he cannot avoid the consequences of his attorney's conduct, including the choice of a state rather than a federal forum. As a result, Muhammadali's federal claims are barred by the statute of limitations.

We have considered the remainder of Muhammadali's arguments and find them to be without merit. Accordingly, the judgment of the district court hereby is AFFIRMED. FOR THE COURT: Catherine O'Hagan Wolfe, Clerk 2