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Wesley Snipes Gets 3 Years for Not Filing Tax Returns

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OCALA, Fla. — A federal judge on Thursday sentenced the actor [Wesley Snipes](#) to three years in prison for willfully failing to file tax returns.

Mr. Snipes, who was convicted in February, received one year for each count, to be served consecutively, and an additional year of probation. The sentence was handed down by Judge William Terrell Hodges of Federal District Court.

Mr. Snipes, who apologized for his actions before the sentence was announced, showed no immediate reaction to the verdict.

Judge Hodges allowed Mr. Snipes and a co-defendant, Douglas Rosile, to remain free on bond until they were summoned by either the United States Marshals Service or the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

The sentencing came at the end of a daylong hearing in which lawyers for Mr. Snipes argued for leniency while federal prosecutors sought the maximum penalty possible.

The case was the most prominent tax prosecution since the billionaire hotelier [Leona Helmsley](#) was convicted of tax fraud in 1989. Mr. Snipes, who has built a worldwide following acting in films like the “Blade” vampire trilogy, must pay up to \$17 million in back taxes plus penalties and interest.

In a prepared statement, Mr. Snipes said: “I’m very sorry for my mistakes. I acknowledge that I have failed myself and others.” But in the statement, which ran to nearly 10 minutes, Mr. Snipes never mentioned the words “tax” or “taxes.”

“He never stated he didn’t pay his taxes or show any remorse for it,” said Robert O’Neill, the acting United States attorney for the Middle District of Florida, the lead prosecutor on the case.

Mr. Snipes even tried to make a down payment on his taxes before sentencing; his legal team offered Judge Hodges three checks totaling \$5 million.

Judge Hodges refused the checks, saying he did not have the authority to accept them. Prosecutors also declined to accept the checks. An [Internal Revenue Service](#) employee eventually accepted the checks on behalf of the Treasury Department.

Mr. Snipes’s legal team also questioned the validity of federal sentencing guidelines. At one point, one of his lawyers, Carmen Hernandez, described herself as “an expert on sentencing.”

Judge Hodges replied, “If I may be so bold, I’ve also had some experience with that.”

A jury found Mr. Snipes guilty on Feb. 1 of three misdemeanor counts of willfully failing to file tax returns, but acquitted him of felony conspiracy and tax fraud charges and three additional counts of failure to file.

The jury also convicted two co-defendants, Eddie Ray Kahn and Mr. Rosile, on felony charges.

Mr. Snipes was a member of American Rights Litigators, an organization founded by Mr. Kahn. Prosecutors have described that organization and its successor company, Guiding Light of God Ministries, as illegal tax-evasion schemes.

Mr. Rosile, a certified public accountant, prepared some tax returns, including Mr. Snipes's, for the organization.

Judge Hodges sentenced Mr. Kahn to 10 years and Mr. Rosile to four and a half years.

Mr. Kahn, who represented himself throughout the trial and has consistently refused to recognize Judge Hodges's authority, was defiant to the end.

"For the record, your honor, I don't accept that," Mr. Kahn said.

The judge responded, "You may not accept it, Mr. Kahn, but you will serve it."

Mr. Rosile declined to comment after the sentencing. His lawyer, David Wilson, however, said the sentence was fair.

A member of Mr. Snipes's legal team said they would appeal. "We were hoping for a complete acquittal," the lawyer, Linda Moreno, said. "I have faith in the process, and I have faith in the jury system. We will appeal."