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# No Hollywood ending for Wesley Snipes in this legal drama

By [Anthony Violanti](#)

Star-Banner

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LORNA EFFLER/SPECIAL TO THE STAR-BANNER

This artist's sketch shows Wesley Snipes, second from right, and his attorneys. Eddie Ray Kahn can be seen on the far left and Douglas Rosile is also in the background.

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OCALA - Wesley Snipes never before played a role so filled with drama, pathos, humor and personal tragedy.

On a day when he gave up \$5 million and was sentenced to three years in prison, Snipes was left wondering where celluloid madness ends and real life begins.

"I never imagined in my life I would be imitating roles I played on screen," the famed actor said in federal court Thursday before Senior U.S. District Judge William Terrell Hodges.

"I acknowledge I failed myself my family and the community," Snipes added. "I ask this court to show me mercy."

There was no happy ending and no mercy. That only happens in the movies.

Maybe that's why the bold swagger and menacing physical presence Snipes displayed in such films as "Blade," "New Jack City" and "U.S. Marshals" was nowhere to be found in the Golden-Collum Memorial Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse courtroom.

Instead, Snipes offered a stoic and somber facade. He was dressed in a dark black suit and tie. His mood was more funereal than tough. Snipes sat at a long table with five attorneys, and his Sphinx-like, chiseled profile showcased a tense face filled with tight angular lines. He would lean back in a blue-cushioned chair and stare at the proceedings, through his black-rimmed glasses with their small rectangular frames.

He watched quite a show, and the script included long-rambling arguments and pleas by Snipes' attorneys. Also, there was testimony from character witnesses, including TV Judge Joe Brown. Unintentional laughs seemed to come every 15 minutes. The ringmaster of this legal circus was cantankerous Judge Hodges, who had little patience with Snipes' attorney Carmen Hernandez.

The following dialogue was an example of their sometimes contentious, sometimes outrageous repartee.

"Judge, I pay taxes, you pay taxes, everyone in this courtroom pays taxes," Hernandez said.

"Not everyone," Hodges shot back, with a glance at the defendant's table.

It was Hernandez who first told the court about a \$5 million check, right after the lunch break, as a payment for some of Snipes' back taxes over the past eight years. Soon that event nearly turned into an episode of "Deal or No Deal."

Hodges said he had no authority to take it. He then offered it to the prosecutors, who also claimed no authority to bag the dough. "I'll take it," said Daniel Meachum, Snipes' lead attorney. "Now, it's in my pocket." Eventually the money was turned over to a representative of the U.S. Treasury Department.

Sideshows were everywhere, including the sentencing of two co-defendants: Eddie Ray Kahn and Douglas Rosile.

Snipes seemed gloomy at the mere sight of Kahn, who entered the courtroom looking like Marley's ghost. He was wearing shackles on his ankles and dressed in an orange striped prison outfit, over white long johns, with white socks and orange plastic prison sandals. Hodges sentenced him to 10 years.

Rosile, a former accountant, seemed typecast as a balding, book-wormish numbers cruncher, wearing a blue shirt, open at the collar, under an unbuttoned blue sport coat. Hodges gave him 54 months.

Those sentences were ominous signs to Snipes that jail time was coming.

Four character references, who described Snipes as a kind of Zen-master karate king. "I am an idealistic, naive, passionate, truth-seeking, spiritually motivated artist," is the way Snipes, a martial arts expert, described himself to the judge.

"Wesley is a role model," said TV Judge Joe Brown. "He's like John Wayne used to be." But when a prosecutor quizzed Brown about Snipes not paying his taxes, the TV judge got a little riled.

Brown said, in a resonant voice, that big corporations also don't pay taxes. That brought a roar and applause from the courtroom and raised the ire of Judge Hodges.

"We're here today for a very serious matter and if there's another outburst like that, I will clear this courtroom."

Hernandez then accused the government of going after Snipes, because "he's Wesley Snipes. ... A celebrity."

Meachum agreed.

"The government is not interested in collecting taxes," the defense attorney said. "They're big game hunters."

Meachum then played a game of Shakespeare with Hodges.

"I'm going to quote from 'The Merchant of Venice,'" Meachum said.

Hodges eyes brightened as he sat up in his chair, on an elevated platform. Hodges then quoted one passage from the play. "That's not it," Meachum said. Then the judge came back with another. "Sorry, your honor, that's not the one."

Hodges looked surprised, and Meachum then finally delivered these lines: "The quality of mercy is not strained/It drops as the gentle rain from heaven

Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest; It blesses him that gives and him that takes..."

Meachum added one more quote, this time from Denzel Washington instead of Shakespeare. Washington compared Snipes to a tree, "a mighty oak." Hodges was not impressed.

When it came time for the sentence, there was no literary relief. Hodges said Snipes must serve 36 months. Nikki Park, Snipes' wife, wearing a black jacket and dress, slumped in her first row seat and sobbed as a beefy security guard on the Snipes team put his arm around her shoulder.

Then, as Snipes was walking across the courtroom, he came within a few feet of his wife, stretched out his right arm toward her and seemed to whisper, "I love you," as he walked by to meet with court officers.

Park left the courtroom, held up by two men, crying and barely able to walk. Moments later she collapsed in a stairwell, in tears.

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1. ocalagirl says...  
Apr 24, 2008 6:54:12 pm

RE: <http://www.ocala.com/article/20080424/NEWS/339407982>

What a waste of taxpayers money to send him to prison for 3 years when he could pay millions more by working. The judge is an old crusty dood who should give up the bench and be more practical in these financial hard times and let the guy work and pay big money for restitution. I hope he appeals and gets out earlier. Partial fault is with the IRS for letting this go on for more than a year with as much taxes owed in this case, as a red flag should have gone up sooner that something was wrong.

2. pilot-in-fla says...  
Apr 24, 2008 7:05:39 pm

Snipes was not only unwilling to pay his taxes like everyone is required to do but his outrageous public conduct is likely to result in copycat crimes which will take a significant effort to undo. The jail sentence was quite appropriate. Letting a rich man write a check when caught in criminal conduct does not send the right message -- a stint in prison will do the trick.

- 
3. emvee79 says...  
Apr 25, 2008 5:29:32 am

Where does all our tax money go? Oh yea, to the people who live off the government. I'm sorry, but I don't agree with taxes and never will. Snipes is a great actor that probably should've been fined a large sum and left alone. After all, the welfare system isn't getting any smaller, and he could have contributed by upgrading their houses to the value of their expensive cars while they're, "wheelin and Dealin" on the block and paying with food stamps. Oops, Did I say that out loud?

- 
4. simba says...  
Apr 25, 2008 5:38:32 am

I dunno, a Hollywood ending to this story would be snipes taking out a "hit" on the judge who sentenced hmi like one of his characters would. I mean hey, if you gonna do time, might as well do the crime! LOL.

Seriously, I think its sad the judge chose to make an example because of his fame. I personally figured Snipes attorneys had this judge in their pockets but I guess not. I alwys thought the legal system was about "who you know" and of course how much money you have but clearly this isnt the case.

JJ  
<http://www.Ultimate-Anonymity.com>

- 
5. Sbn91407 says...  
Apr 25, 2008 7:14:25 am

I fully agree and support the judge's decision. He did not allow the names of "Big Hollywood" names as references sway his decision or take him away from the "Facts". After all, were those character witnesses with Snipes at the joining of the "American Rights Litigators?" Did they even know Snipes was a memmber of a group that didn't believe in paying taxes,while they,I am sure, payed dearly?? We all have wonderful character witnesses,but,do they know everything we do personally? And ask yourselves this,why did Snipes even join a group like that,if NOT to have to pay taxes!! He knew darn well what he joined and the reason he joined!

- 
6. Cdiaz38369 says...  
Apr 25, 2008 10:40:34 am

I do and don't agree with the Judge. First of all this is a misdamear crime. 3 years does not fit the crime. Yes, he should be all the hefty penalties and back taxes, because unfortunaltely we all have to pay taxes and he is no diferent. However, criminals get less crime than this. Rapist, armed robbery, drugs, domestic violence, shall I go on? The system is not balanced correctly. Also what about first time offenses. He has not been introuble before. Plus if you all followed the trial (and yes Snipes should have known better), but the fact is he got with a group of people that are feeding this information out to people that you don't have to pay taxes. They should go after the people that are giving out this information and misleading. However Snipe should have known better.

- 
7. Cdiaz38369 says...  
Apr 25, 2008 11:03:35 am

I see what you mean about worse crimes getting less time. Just google it. Here are only a few cases were murder, rape, robbery and attempted murder get probation. Bottom line, depends on the judge, the attorney defending you, or the attorney prosecuting you, on what kind of sentence you get, not always what the crime is. [Rapist & robber get probation](#)

[Women releases pit bull on IRS](#)

[Man gets probation for stabbing](#)

- 
8. GoofyGirl says...  
Apr 25, 2008 11:48:21 am

He broke the law. We all know that if we break the law, we could go to jail. It doesn't matter what the crime is. I feel no pity for him and hope he learned a lesson.

9. SlowcalaPro says...  
Apr 25, 2008 11:55:00 am

What is REALLY FUNNY to me is that MOST of you dont realize how EASY he got off. If any of you did EXACTLY what he did, without his money and resources, you'd be BEGGING to only get 3 years.

SlowcalaPro-  
The "Abuser" Abuser.

10. bawble says...  
Apr 25, 2008 1:28:35 pm

This post has no common sense in it. The MAXIMUM sentence is the most that anybody would be able to be sentenced to.

11. pilot-in-fla says...  
Apr 25, 2008 3:49:51 pm

Slow's post makes perfect sense. Snipes got great benefits from good lawyering at the trial stage and a healthy dose of celebrity justice. The folks he hired to pull off the tax scam got much greater sentences.

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