

Pornography Distributor Sentenced : Justice: Reuben Sturman, convicted of tax evasion, ran 200 businesses. He once reported \$1,237 in taxable income.

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FROM TIMES AND WIRE SERVICE REPORTS

CLEVELAND — Reuben Sturman, described in a 1986 presidential report as the world's largest distributor of pornography, was sentenced Monday to 10 years in prison and fined \$2.46 million for tax evasion.

Sturman, 65, who has a 5,610-square-foot Tudor-style house in Van Nuys and owns another residence in the Cleveland area, was convicted Nov. 17 in U.S. District Court of failing to report \$2.7 million in income from 1978 to 1982.

U.S. District Judge George White continued Sturman's \$1-million cash bond, pending appeals.

Sturman also is awaiting trial in federal court in Las Vegas on charges of racketeering and interstate transportation of obscene material. If convicted on those charges, he could be sentenced to 75 years in prison and fined \$22.5 million.

The maximum penalty in Cleveland could have been 70 years in prison, \$2.5 million in fines and \$20 million in civil penalties. Prosecutors had asked that Sturman be sentenced to 30 years in prison.

“Before this court stands a man who has driven a Rolls-Royce, spent \$350,000 to remodel his home . . . and who finally reports an income of over \$2 million a year,” said Stephen H. Jigger, head of the Cleveland office of the Organized Crime Strike Force. “He has proven crime pays.”

Sturman’s house on a quiet street in Van Nuys, an example of his wealth, sits on a football-field-sized lot surrounded by a five-foot-high fence and iron gates.

Sturman’s conviction last November set off a scramble among competitors eager to move in on the X-rated territory he dominated for two decades, according to industry and law enforcement sources. The 1986 report by the Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography stated that by 1986, Sturman had control of 200 businesses in 19 states and six foreign countries.

He started out distributing magazines and putting peep machines into adult bookstores around the country, but moved into the video business when it boomed in the early 1980s, authorities said.

The report also concluded that Sturman had close ties to organized crime figures, especially Robert DiBernardo, identified in the report as a member of one, and possibly two, major crime families in New York and New Jersey.

White sentenced Sturman to prison terms totaling 34 years, but several of the terms are to be served concurrently.

Sturman, who started his business 30 years ago in Cleveland, had been tried several times on pornography-related charges but never convicted.

“He stands before you essentially as a first offender,” Sturman’s lawyer, Michael Murray, told the judge. “As a society, we do not impose life sentences or 30 years in prison for such offenses.”

The government's case said Sturman hid millions of dollars in foreign bank accounts. In June, prosecutors, defense lawyers and officials from federal court in Cleveland went to Switzerland to interview Swiss bankers.

Testimony and evidence showed Sturman hid \$2.7 million in income from 1978 to 1982, failing to pay \$1.4 million in taxes. In 1979, for example, Sturman reported only \$1,237 in taxable income.

Jigger said Sturman used "the most state-of-art tax evasion" methods and the government probably only learned of a portion of his income.

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