

## Sean 'Diddy' Combs Acquitted on Racketeering and Sex Trafficking Charges, Convicted on Two Prostitution Counts

**After a 7-week trial, Sean Combs was acquitted of racketeering and sex trafficking but found guilty on two counts of transporting women for prostitution; the verdict follows testimony from Cassie Ventura and evidence from raids and recordings.**

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**Sean "Diddy" Combs, who was acquitted of racketeering and sex trafficking but convicted on two prostitution-related charges following a federal trial in Manhattan.**

After a nearly seven-week trial that gripped the nation with its salacious allegations and high-profile testimony, a federal jury in Manhattan delivered a mixed verdict on July 2, in the criminal

case against hip-hop mogul Sean “Diddy” Combs. The 55-year-old music icon was acquitted on the more severe charges of racketeering conspiracy and sex trafficking by force, fraud, or coercion, but was found guilty on two counts of transportation to engage in prostitution. The verdict came after 14 hours of jury deliberation.

The trial, held in the Southern District of New York, centered on allegations that Combs ran a criminal enterprise through his Bad Boy Entertainment empire, orchestrating what prosecutors described as “freak-offs” — drug-fueled, days-long sexual performances involving women and male sex workers. The indictment, first filed in September 2024 and later expanded with two superseding indictments, accused Combs of a decades-long pattern of abuse, including sex trafficking, forced labor, kidnapping, arson, bribery, and obstruction of justice. The racketeering charge, which carried a potential life sentence, alleged that Combs and his inner circle of employees facilitated and concealed these crimes.

The jury’s decision to acquit Combs on the racketeering and sex trafficking counts was a blow to prosecutors, who had presented a sprawling case involving 34 witnesses over six weeks. Among the key witnesses were Combs’s former girlfriend, R&B singer Casandra “Cassie” Ventura, and another ex-girlfriend identified only as “Jane.” Both women testified about alleged abuse and coercion, describing how Combs used his wealth, influence, and physical intimidation to control their lives and compel them to participate in the “freak-offs.” Ventura, who was eight-and-a-half months pregnant during her testimony, recounted brutal physical assaults, including a 2016 incident captured on hotel security footage where Combs appeared to kick and drag her in a Los Angeles hallway. “I felt trapped,” Ventura testified, describing how Combs directed every aspect of the sexual encounters, from participants to her attire.

Prosecutors, led by Assistant U.S. Attorney Maurene Comey, argued that Combs’ business empire was a vehicle for his criminal activities. “Over the last several weeks, you’ve learned a lot about Sean Combs,” Assistant U.S. Attorney Christy Slavik said in closing arguments. “He’s a leader of a criminal enterprise. He doesn’t take no for an answer.” They presented evidence including text messages, bank records, and audio recordings, as well as testimony from former employees and male sex workers who described arranging and participating in the “freak-offs.” A March 2024 raid on Combs’ Los Angeles mansion uncovered drugs, guns, and over 1,000 bottles of baby oil and lubricant, which prosecutors linked to the alleged orgies.

The defense, led by attorney Marc Agnifilo, countered that Combs’s relationships and the “freak-offs” were consensual, part of a “swinger” lifestyle common among wealthy celebrities. “This was their private sex life, defined by consent, not coercion,” Agnifilo told CBS News in April. The defense called no witnesses, relying instead on cross-examinations to highlight evidence of voluntary participation. A key moment came during testimony from an exotic dancer known as Punisher, who described Ventura as appearing comfortable and engaged during the “freak-offs.” Punisher also expressed ongoing affection for Combs, stating, “I still like him,” which underscored the defense’s argument that relationships with Combs were not universally coercive. Text messages presented by the defense further supported their case, including one from Ventura in 2009 saying, “I’m always ready to freak off,” suggesting her participation was willing.

Other witnesses offered mixed perspectives. Some male sex workers testified that they were paid to participate in the “freak-offs” and saw no signs of coercion, while others described pressure from Combs’ inner circle to comply. A former Bad Boy employee testified that arranging these events was part of their job but maintained that participants appeared to act freely “[T]he defense’s strategy was to humanize Combs and show that these were consensual adult interactions, not a criminal enterprise,” said Sarah Klein, a legal analyst who followed the trial.

“The jury clearly grappled with distinguishing between distasteful behavior and provable crimes.”

The jury, composed of eight men and four women, struggled with the racketeering charge, which required proof that Combs knowingly joined a conspiracy involving at least two criminal acts, such as kidnapping or bribery. On July 1, they sent a note to U.S. District Judge Arun Subramanian indicating they were deadlocked on this count, with “jurors with unpersuadable opinions on both sides.” Subramanian urged them to continue deliberating, rejecting a defense request to avoid pressuring the jury. By the next morning, the jury returned with not guilty verdicts on the racketeering and sex trafficking charges but convicted Combs on the two prostitution-related counts, each carrying a maximum sentence of 10 years.

The guilty verdicts pertain to Combs’s transportation of Ventura and “Jane,” along with commercial sex workers, across state lines for prostitution. Legal analysts noted that these charges, while serious, are significantly less severe than the life sentences tied to racketeering or sex trafficking. “The prosecution aimed high with the RICO charge, but it’s a complex statute requiring clear evidence of a coordinated enterprise,” said Robert Mintz, a former federal prosecutor, in an interview with the BBC. “The jury clearly wasn’t convinced that threshold was met.”

As the verdict was read, Combs appeared relieved, briefly raising his hands and making praying gestures toward the jury, according to courtroom observers. His family, including his mother and six adult children, filled the courtroom gallery, with Combs whispering to them, “I’ll be alright. Love you,” as he left the previous day’s session. Post-verdict, Agnifilo argued for Combs’s release on bail, citing his acquittal on the most serious charges. “Sean ‘Diddy’ Combs should be released on appropriate conditions,” Agnifilo said, noting that Combs’s family could support a bond and that he lacked access to his private plane. Combs, however, remains in custody at Brooklyn’s Metropolitan Detention Center, where he has been held since his September 2024 arrest after multiple failed bail attempts.

The trial’s outcome has sparked varied reactions. Supporters of Combs, whose career as a rapper, producer, and founder of Bad Boy Records made him a billionaire, view the acquittals as a vindication of his claims of consensual relationships. Critics, including advocates for victims of abuse, expressed disappointment, arguing that the case highlights the challenges of proving coercion in high-profile cases. “The courage of the women who testified cannot be overstated,” said William S. Walker, Acting Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations, in a statement last year. “We urge anyone who believes they are a victim of sex trafficking to come forward.”

Sentencing details remain pending, and Combs is expected to appeal the prostitution convictions.