

# ***Michael Avenatti Is Convicted in Nike Extortion Trial***

The lawyer, who represented Stormy Daniels in lawsuits against President Trump, was found guilty of charges including attempted extortion and honest services fraud.



Michael Avenatti after his initial appearance in federal court in New York last year. Credit...Kevin Hagen/Associated Press

Published Feb. 14, 2020 Updated Feb. 16, 2020

Michael Avenatti, the brash lawyer best known for representing the pornographic film actress Stormy Daniels in her lawsuits against President Trump, was convicted on Friday of trying to extort more than \$20 million from the apparel giant Nike.

After three days of deliberations in the case, brought by the U.S. Attorney's Office in Manhattan, a jury found him guilty on all three counts, including attempted extortion and honest services fraud. Mr. Avenatti, who is scheduled to be sentenced on June 17, could face more than 40 years in prison in the case. He is set to stand trial in a separate federal criminal case on May 19.

Mr. Avenatti was charged last spring with an array of federal crimes in both New York and California, where he lived. Though he spent much of last year free on bail, a judge [revoked](#) that deal in January — after prosecutors argued that he was continuing to engage in criminal activity — and Mr. Avenatti was in federal custody as he stood trial in New York this year.

In making their case, federal prosecutors in Manhattan specifically accused Mr. Avenatti of trying to extort money from Nike in exchange for evidence he said he had of misconduct by company employees in the recruitment of college basketball players. He

demanded that Nike hire him to conduct an internal investigation into its criminal exposure, prosecutors said, contending that he had alternatively requested \$22.5 million to buy his silence and resolve potential claims by [a youth basketball coach](#) whom he said he represented.

“Today a unanimous jury found Michael Avenatti guilty of misusing his client’s information in an effort to extort tens of millions of dollars,” Geoffrey S. Berman, the United States attorney for the Southern District of New York, said in a statement on Friday. “While the defendant may have tried to hide behind legal terms and a suit and tie, the jury clearly saw the defendant’s scheme for what it was — an old fashioned shakedown.”

A lawyer for Mr. Avenatti, Scott Srebnick, said by email Friday that Mr. Avenatti planned to appeal the conviction. “Michael Avenatti has been a fighter his entire life,” Mr. Srebnick wrote, saying he believed there was “substantial” basis for the appeal. “The inhumane conditions of solitary confinement he has endured over the past month weeks would break anyone but he remains strong,” he said.

Many who had been former targets of Mr. Avenatti’s public attacks celebrated Friday’s verdict.

“Aged like a fine wine,” Donald Trump Jr., the president’s son, [wrote](#) on Twitter, posting an October 2018 message from Mr. Avenatti that had predicted the younger Mr. Trump would be indicted by the end of that year. “#Basta” Mr. Trump added in his message, referencing the hashtag, meaning “enough,” that Mr. Avenatti had made his catchphrase.

As he rocketed to fame in 2018 and toyed with declaring a presidential run, Mr. Avenatti maintained a cocksure public image that masked disarray that became evident in a trail of civil disputes, bankruptcy filings and alleged financial crimes going back several years.

In a [separate case](#) still pending in California, Mr. Avenatti has been accused of tax crimes and financial fraud, including stealing millions of dollars from clients and of lying repeatedly about his business and income to an I.R.S. collection agent, creditors, a bankruptcy court and a bankruptcy trustee. He has pleaded not guilty.

Though Mr. Avenatti has suggested that he believes the charges against him are politically motivated, prosecutors have noted that the I.R.S.’s investigation of him dated to September 2016 — before President Trump was elected and well before Mr. Avenatti began representing Ms. Daniels. He is scheduled to stand trial in the Central District of California this spring.

Mr. Avenatti has also been [charged](#) with stealing nearly \$300,000 from Ms. Daniels, the client who propelled him to prominence in 2018. Prosecutors accused him last spring of

taking part of Ms. Daniels's book advance and putting it toward his personal expenses, including dry cleaning, food deliveries and a monthly payment on a Ferrari.

On Friday, Ms. Daniels issued a statement on Instagram saying she was “not surprised his dishonesty has been revealed on a grand scale.” Calling Mr. Avenatti “arrogant, fraudulent and overly aggressive,” she added, “Although clearly a just result, I do feel sad for his children and foolish for believing his lies for so long.”

Both cases that Mr. Avenatti brought on Ms. Daniels's behalf against the president were dismissed in federal court; in one, a defamation suit, she was [ordered to pay Mr. Trump](#) nearly \$300,000 in legal fees.

Even as he faced multiple federal charges, Mr. Avenatti had [sought out](#) the spotlight and the news media, which had helped boost his profile across more than 300 television appearances and countless interviews, some with The New York Times.

Last month, he continued to release a range of messages on Twitter, commenting on the impeachment of Mr. Trump, emphasizing his support of former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. in the Democratic presidential primary and posting documents relating to his criminal defense. His messages, to an audience of roughly 760,000 followers — fewer than the number he had in late 2018 — stopped when he was jailed in mid-January.

***Correction:*** Feb. 16, 2020

*Because of an editing error, an earlier version of this article misstated the length of prison time that Mr. Avenatti could face in the Nike extortion case. It is 42 years, not up to 40 years.*