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Posted: 2:31 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 25, 2012

'Sovereign Citizens' cleared of taking foreclosed homes



WSB-TV

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DEKALB COUNTY, Ga. — A DeKalb County jury acquitted three men accused of racketeering after they were arrested for signing fake deeds to themselves and then moving into foreclosed homes.

The charges came after a lengthy Channel 2 Action News investigation in 2010.

Eliyshuwa Yisrael acted as his own defense attorney in the case, which also included Jermaine Gibson and Richard Jenkins. Each man was charged with two RICO counts. They faced a prison sentence of up to 20 years.

During the trial, Yisrael told the jury that banks, which were the documented owners of the properties, should not have been allowed to own them in the first place.

The defendants did not deny their actions, but rather argued that they took nothing and hurt no one so no crime was committed.

Prosecutors argued the group targeted bank-owned homes because they were vacant and the men could move right in.

Gibson's attorney, Adeline Alexander, told Channel 2's Jodie Fleischer, "The facts just didn't meet a RICO case and I'm happy that the jury heard that and they believed that as well."

Alexander said his clients may have been guilty of criminal trespassing, but jurors did not have that choice.

The case initially included 11 other defendants, including several others who already pleaded guilty and were called as witnesses at the trial.

A Channel 2 Action News investigation in 2010 tied the men to 18 different properties across eight Georgia counties.

Several law enforcement sources told Channel 2 Action News that they cannot ever criticize a jury's decision -- but the decision should not send a message to the general public that it is OK to break into a foreclosed home and live there.

DeKalb County District Attorney Robert James sent a statement to Fleischer that said, "Cases that involve elaborate and complicated details are often tough to prosecute. The jury has spoken on this matter, and we have no further comments at this time."

Channel 2's Jodie Fleischer contributed to this report.

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