

White Florida woman sentenced to 25 years for fatally shooting Ajike Owens, her Black neighbor

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/susan-lorincz-ajike-aj-owens-white-woman-shot-black-neighbor-manslaughter-sentencing-watch/>

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A white woman in Florida was sentenced Monday to 25 years in prison for fatally shooting her neighbor, a Black mother of four, in a case that sparked outrage and yet another national reckoning over gun violence and racism.

A jury convicted Susan Lorincz, 60, of manslaughter in August for killing Ajike Owens outside of her home in Ocala on June 2, 2023. Owens, who went by the name A.J., was 35. Ocala is a small city located about 80 miles northwest of Orlando.

Lorincz faced a maximum sentence of 30 years imprisonment on the charges originally brought against her after the shooting — one count of manslaughter with a firearm and one count of assault — Bill Gladson, the state attorney for Florida's fifth judicial district, announced later in June that year. In Florida, the lead prosecutor in each district is called a state attorney.

On Monday, Judge Robert Hodges said Lorincz had ample time to call law enforcement and that there was no real risk that Owens was trying to break into her home. "The shooting was based, I find, more in anger than in fear," Hodges said before the sentencing.

The authorities and prosecutors involved came under scrutiny in the wake of Owens' death, in part because of the choice to charge Lorincz with manslaughter instead of second-degree murder, as well as the fact that Lorincz was not immediately taken into custody after the shooting occurred.

Florida's "stand your ground" law, a controversial doctrine adopted in multiple U.S. states that allows individuals to use force in self-defense scenarios, played a role in those decisions. The law has come up in similar cases in Missouri and elsewhere in recent years, after first entering mainstream public consciousness in connection with the deadly shooting of Trayvon Martin, a Black teenager, near Orlando in 2012.

"In making the filing decision on this case, my office carefully examined the viability of both second degree murder and manslaughter with a firearm, both first degree felonies," Gladson's office said in a statement once Lorincz's charges were revealed. A second-degree murder charge required "evidence of hatred, spite, ill will or evil intent toward the

victim at the time of the killing," which the Marion County sheriff's criminal investigation did not sufficiently find, according to the state attorney.

"As deplorable as the defendant's actions were in this case, there is insufficient evidence to prove this specific and required element of second degree murder," that statement continued. It noted charges for second-degree murder and manslaughter with a firearm are both first-degree felonies.

Lorincz shot Owens during an ongoing dispute between them over children in the neighborhood, including Owens' children, apparently playing in the area around Lorincz's residence, according to trial testimony and the arrest affidavit for Lorincz.

Authorities said Owens approached the door of Lorincz's home the day of the shooting to confront her, after learning the older woman had engaged in an argument with the children outside, shouted, and threw a roller skate at one of them.

Owens' 10-year-old son accompanied her to Lorincz's residence, where she knocked on Lorincz's door and demanded she come outside. Lorincz proceeded to fire a .380-caliber handgun through the door, striking Owens in the upper chest. Owens was unresponsive by the time authorities arrived at the scene and later pronounced dead at a hospital.

The door to Lorincz's home was locked when she fired the shot and Owens was unarmed.

Owens' mother, Pamela Dias, told "CBS Mornings" the week after her death that her grandson witnessed the shooting and felt guilty he could not save his mother. He was the 10-year-old child hit by the roller skate.

"I still can't believe this happened," Dias said. "When does a person get shot for knocking on a door?"

Attorneys for Lorincz claimed throughout her trial that the woman fired her gun in self-defense, the same stance she took in interviews with law enforcement after Owens' death. Lorincz told authorities she feared for her life when Owens approached her home, and just "fired the gun" because she felt she was in "mortal danger," according to the arrest affidavit.

She also said a prior altercation with Owens was the reason she purchased the handgun, which Lorincz said she had used only a handful of times at a shooting range, the previous year. Witnesses told law enforcement investigating the shooting that Lorincz was known to harass children in the neighborhood and call them, including Owens' children, horrendous racist slurs. Lorincz admitted to some of those allegations in conversations with detectives but denied she intentionally threw a roller skate at a child before the shooting.

Following a weeklong trial, a jury, which consisted solely of white jurors, according to the Associated Press, found Lorincz guilty of manslaughter with a firearm on Aug. 16.

"This case is undoubtedly a tragic reminder of the devastating consequences of gun violence. The defendant's choices have left four young children without their mother, a loss that will be felt for the rest of their lives," said Gladson, whose assistant attorneys prosecuted the case, in a statement. "While today's verdict can't bring AJ back, we hope it brings some measure of justice and peace to her family and friends."

Civil rights attorney Ben Crump, who famously represented the families of Trayvon Martin, George Floyd, and others in high-profile litigation over racial violence, also represented Owens' family in this case. Crump called Lorincz's conviction "a critical step in securing justice" for Owens and her family in a separate statement after the verdict came down.

"We are profoundly grateful that the jury has delivered a guilty verdict in this heartbreaking case. AJ Owens was a devoted mother whose life was tragically cut short, leaving her children, including a young son who witnessed this horrific act, to carry the burden of her loss," his statement said. "While nothing can erase the pain they've endured, today's decision sends a clear message that senseless violence will be met with accountability. We will continue to stand by AJ's family as they heal and fight for a future where no family has to experience such devastating loss."