

## 2 Men Plead Guilty in Attack on Transgender Woman Who Was Later Found Dead

Alexa Negrón Luciano was assaulted with paintballs in a street attack shared on social media before she was found dead in Toa Baja, P.R., in 2020. No one has been charged in her death.



By Amanda Holpuch

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Two men linked to an attack with a paintball gun on a transgender woman in Puerto Rico pleaded guilty on Monday to conspiracy to commit a hate crime. The case prompted an outcry on the island after the victim was found dead just hours after video of the assault was recorded.

The killing of the woman, Alexa Negrón Luciano, in February 2020 remains unsolved and no one has been charged in her death, though it brought renewed attention to violence against gay and transgender people in Puerto Rico. The F.B.I. is seeking information from the public to help with the investigation.

On Monday, Jordany Rafael Laboy-Garcia and Christian Yamaurie Rivera-Otero pleaded guilty in the U.S. District Court in San Juan, P.R., to conspiracy to commit a hate crime and obstruction of justice in connection with the assault, Justice Department officials said.

On Feb. 23, 2020, someone posted photographs on social media that showed Ms. Negrón, who was 29 and homeless, being questioned by the police after she had used the women's bathroom at a McDonald's in Toa Baja, P.R., according to the indictment.

The next day at about 12:29 a.m., Mr. Laboy-Garcia and Mr. Rivera-Otero were in a vehicle when they saw Ms. Negrón standing under a tent on the side of the road in Toa Baja, a town about 20 miles west of San Juan, the Justice Department said in a news release. A third man, Anthony Steven Lobos-Ruiz, was also in the car.

Mr. Lobos-Ruiz used an iPhone to record himself making "disparaging and threatening comments" to Ms. Negrón from inside the car, which included yelling "la loca, la loca," or "the crazy woman, the crazy woman," prosecutors said.

The men left and returned within 30 minutes with a paintball gun, and recorded video of Mr. Laboy-Garcia firing paintballs at Ms. Negrón, prosecutors said.

Mr. Lobos-Ruiz shared the videos with others, according to the Justice Department. Several hours later, he and Mr. Laboy-Garcia sent text messages to each other, agreeing to delete the videos to hide their involvement in the assault.

Ms. Negrón was found murdered on the side of the road in Toa Baja that same day.

The killing of Ms. Negrón received significant attention in Puerto Rico and beyond. Days after her death, the Puerto Rican pop superstar Bad Bunny appeared on "The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon" wearing a white T-shirt that said in Spanish: "They killed Alexa, not a man in a skirt."

W. Stephen Muldrow, the U.S. attorney for the District of Puerto Rico, said in a statement that the Justice Department would "continue to vigorously defend the rights of all people, regardless of their gender identity, to be free from hate-fueled violence."

"To assault an innocent victim who posed no threat to the defendants for no other reason than her gender identity is reprehensible behavior that will not be tolerated," Mr. Muldrow said.

In November, Mr. Lobos-Ruiz was sentenced to 33 months in prison after he pleaded guilty to aiding and abetting others in the attempted assault of Ms. Negrón because she was transgender. He had admitted to obtaining the paintball gun to injure Ms. Negrón and to recording the assault on his iPhone and sharing the video with other people.

Mr. Lobos-Ruiz was represented by the federal public defender's office, which does not comment on cases. At Mr. Lobos-Ruiz's sentencing hearing, he said he was sorry for mocking Ms. Negrón, *El Nuevo Día* reported. "I am ashamed of myself and of what I was in my past," Mr. Lobos-Ruiz said in Spanish.

A sentencing hearing for Mr. Laboy-Garcia and Mr. Rivera-Otero has not been scheduled.

Lawyers for the two men did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

There were 44 transgender or gender nonconforming people killed across the United States in 2020, and six of them, including Ms. Negrón, were killed in Puerto Rico, according to the Human Rights Campaign, an advocacy group for L.G.B.T.Q. rights. Last year, at least 34 transgender or gender nonconforming people were killed across the United States, a vast majority of them Black, the Human Rights Campaign said in a report released in November.

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