

Widow of Man Slain in Love Triangle Gets \$1.78 Million

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Three years ago an emotionally unstable Los Angeles police officer killed his 27-year-old Filipino ex-wife, her 39-year-old black lover and then committed suicide.

Last week the lover's wife and her two children won \$1.78 million in damages from the city.

A Glendale Superior Court jury awarded the money to Orleatha Thomas, 39, who claimed in her lawsuit that the Los Angeles Police Depart-

ment shouldn't have let officer Victor Ramos, 29, carry the gun he used to kill her estranged husband.

Gregory Yates, Thomas's attorney, said initially they offered to settle the lawsuit for \$350,000, but city officials did not respond.

On Aug. 12, 1992, Ramos went to the Glendale townhouse on East Garfield Avenue where his ex-wife, Melba Ramos, lived, and fatally shot her and Gregory Thomas, the plaintiff's husband, then turned the gun on himself, said Yates.

Ramos, a Puerto Rican, used his

LAPD-issued 9mm automatic to commit the double murder/suicide and pumped more than 20 bullets into the couple before shooting himself in the chest.

The Ramos's three boys were home at the time but were unharmed. Police said the children apparently remained there overnight and were found when officers showed up to investigate a possible break-in.

Ramos reportedly beat his ex-wife and threatened her with a gun in the months before the shooting.

"The LAPD knew this had hap-

pened but failed to report it accurately or deal with it in accordance with their own policies and procedures," Yates said after the jury announced its award.

"As a result, they took Officer Ramos' gun, but returned it shortly thereafter, and returned him to active duty without providing a psychological evaluation to determine if he was fit to carry that firearm."

Ramos lived with his wife at the townhouse until they separated a month before the shootings.

Thomas argued during the six-

day trial before Judge Charles Stoll that her husband would not have been in any danger had the LAPD followed up on allegations of Ramos' abusive behavior toward his wife.

She said, "This case is about two basic issues: first, the police failing to deal effectively with spousal abuse, and, second, the police code of silence."

Gregory Thomas began a relationship with Melba Ramos after meeting her at a health club where he worked as a personal trainer.

At one point he moved into her

townhouse, but was living with the plaintiff and was visiting Melba Ramos the night he was slain.

Victor Schulte, the deputy city attorney who represented the city during the trial, was unavailable for comment.

The jury made its award last week on Wednesday, which was Mrs. Thomas' birthday, Yates said. The Thomas' have two boys, ages 10 and 7, and the oldest boy, Rico, made an emotional speech to the jury, Yates said, telling them how much he missed his father.

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