

## ***Louisiana Judge Who Used Racial Slur in Video Resigns***

*Michelle Odinet, of the City Court of Lafayette, La., resigned on Friday, saying in a letter that “my words did not foster the public’s confidence and integrity for the judiciary.”*



*Michelle Odinet as a candidate for Lafayette City Court judge in 2020.*

**By Vimal Patel**

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A Louisiana judge who could be heard on a video using a racial slur while watching security footage of a foiled burglary outside her home has resigned, according to her lawyer and a letter from the judge.

“I take full responsibility for the hurtful words I used to describe the individual who burglarized the vehicles at my home,” the judge, Michelle Odinet, of the City Court of Lafayette, La., wrote in a letter dated Friday to the chief justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court.

“I am sorry for the pain that I have caused my community and ask for your forgiveness, as my words did not foster the public’s confidence and integrity for the judiciary,” she wrote.

Ms. Odinet said she was stepping down “after much reflection and prayer, and in order to facilitate healing within the community.”

In the video, people off camera inside the judge's home can be heard using a racial slur repeatedly and laughing as they narrate security-camera footage of a person trying to break into a car on Dec. 11.

The word "mom" is used a few times in the clip, and at least two people in the room identify themselves as being in the security footage, helping stop the burglary. Ms. Odinet's lawyer, Dane S. Ciolino, later confirmed that she had used a racial slur in the video, which did not show the faces of those speaking.

After an unknown person released the video to the local news media, civic groups, including the Lafayette branch of the N.A.A.C.P., called on the judge to resign, and criminal defense lawyers asked the judge to recuse herself from their cases.

Mr. Ciolino acknowledged on Friday that the video footage had raised understandable concerns about Ms. Odinet's impartiality as a judge.

"There was never going to be a situation where African Americans would appear before her and not file motions to recuse," Mr. Ciolino said.

"She understands that she's done with being a judge, but she's just starting her efforts to try to earn forgiveness from her community," he added. "She knows that's going to be a long haul."

In an earlier statement, Ms. Odinet confirmed to *The Current*, a nonprofit news organization in Lafayette that reported on the video, that the footage had been recorded in her home, but she did not acknowledge that she had used a slur.

She said that her "mental state was fragile" because of the attempted burglary and that she had been "given a sedative at the time of the video."

"I have zero recollection of the video and the disturbing language used during it," Ms. Odinet told *The Current* in a statement. "Anyone who knows me and my husband, knows this is contrary to the way we live our lives."

The local N.A.A.C.P. chapter did not immediately respond to a message late on Friday. The chapter's president, Michael Toussaint, had previously said that Ms. Odinet was not fit for her job.

"We do not believe a person having her revealed disposition should fulfill any office bearing the powers over judiciary," he said.

Ms. Odinet, a Republican, was elected in November 2020 to be the judge for Division A of Lafayette City Court. City judges serve six-year terms. She was previously a prosecutor for the district attorney's offices in New Orleans and Lafayette.

Mr. Ciolino said there were efforts in New Orleans to scour Ms. Odinet's files for evidence of racism in how she had handled cases involving Black people.

"She welcomes that," he said, "because it would show that she hasn't, in practice, acted as a racist."