

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COURT OF APPEALS

Jorida Davidson v. United States

137 A.3d 973 (D.C. 2016) · No. 14-CF-1065 · Decided May 5, 2016

SUMMARY

The District of Columbia Court of Appeals affirmed Jorida Davidson’s voluntary manslaughter conviction arising from a fatal vehicle-pedestrian collision. The court held that voluntary intoxication is not a defense to voluntary manslaughter and rejected Davidson’s argument that *Comber v. United States* changed that longstanding rule. The court also concluded that the evidence was sufficient and that the trial court did not improperly limit closing argument.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	District of Columbia Court of Appeals
WRITING FOR THE COURT	John R. Fisher, Associate Judge; Earl N. Glickman, Associate Judge; Easterly, Associate Judge
JURISDICTION	District of Columbia
DECIDED	May 5, 2016
DOCKET	14-CF-1065
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Direct appeal from a conviction for voluntary manslaughter in the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. Davidson challenged the denial of a requested voluntary-intoxication jury instruction and raised additional claims concerning the sufficiency of the evidence and limits on closing argument.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The sufficiency of the evidence was assessed in the light most favorable to the government. The limitation on closing argument was reviewed for abuse of discretion.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	published precedential opinion
PARTIES	Jorida Davidson v. United States

TOPICS

- mens rea
- criminal procedure
- appellate procedure
- evidence

PRACTICE AREAS

criminal law

criminal procedure

appellate litigation

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether voluntary intoxication is a defense to voluntary manslaughter under District of Columbia law and therefore required a jury instruction.
2. Whether the evidence was sufficient for a reasonable jury to find that Davidson acted with conscious disregard of an extreme risk of death or serious bodily injury.
3. Whether the trial court improperly limited Davidson's closing argument by preventing comparison of the evidence in the present trial with evidence from her first trial.

HOLDINGS

1. Voluntary intoxication is not a defense to voluntary manslaughter in the District of Columbia; accordingly, the trial court properly refused to give the requested instruction.
2. The evidence was sufficient for a reasonable jury to find that Davidson consciously disregarded an extreme risk of death or serious bodily injury to another person.
3. The trial court did not abuse its discretion by precluding Davidson from comparing the evidence presented at the current trial with evidence presented at the first trial.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Voluntary intoxication is not a defense to voluntary manslaughter.” (at 977)

“voluntary intoxication may preclude formation of the premeditation and deliberation necessary for a first-degree murder conviction.” (at 974)

“a drunken man is equally responsible as a sober one.” (at 975)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Davidson consumed at least three glasses of wine and champagne before driving her sport utility vehicle home. At approximately 1:30 a.m., she drove erratically, made unsafe lane changes, sped, and drove close to parked cars before striking Kiela Ryan as Ryan exited a parked vehicle, killing her. About an hour later, police found Davidson asleep in her vehicle in her condominium garage; she smelled of alcohol, showed signs of intoxication during field sobriety testing, and refused a breathalyzer test.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Davidson was convicted of voluntary manslaughter after striking and killing a pedestrian while driving. On appeal, she argued principally that the trial court should have instructed the jury that voluntary intoxication could negate the required mental state. The District of Columbia Court of Appeals rejected her claims and affirmed the conviction; the opinion also noted that a prior appeal had rejected a double-jeopardy challenge to a second trial.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Davidson v. United States, 48 A.3d 194 (D.C. 2012)
- Bishop v. United States, 107 F.2d 297, 299-303 (D.C. Cir. 1939)
- Harris v. United States, 8 App. D.C. 20, 26 (1896)
- M.A.P. v. Ryan, 285 A.2d 310 (D.C. 1971)
- Nestlerode v. United States, 122 F.2d 56, 60 (D.C. Cir. 1941)
- King v. United States, 372 F.2d 383, 388 (D.C. Cir. 1967)
- Bell v. United States, 950 A.2d 56, 65 (D.C. 2008)
- Comber v. United States, 584 A.2d 26, 52 (D.C. 1990) (en banc)
- Wheeler v. United States, 832 A.2d 1271, 1273-76 (D.C. 2003)
- Haley v. United States, 799 A.2d 1201, 1207 (D.C. 2002)