



Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

GUNS AND GUN LAWS , MURDER AND MAYHEM

Craigslist case - Take better aim on blame

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Who can blame Carmen Guzman for trying to place blame at the doorstep of a New Hampshire gun shop for its role in "causing" her daughter's death? Ever since Craigslist killer Philip Markoff chose a fast exit by suicide, Julissa Brisman's family has had to find alternative targets for their anger. The true villain was no longer around to take the heat.

Based on evidence released last week by the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office, it would indeed appear that State Line Gun Shop may not have been especially careful in selling the murder weapon to a man whose identity appeared questionable. Of course, errors and omissions like this can have dire consequences, even though, as local prosecutors contend, it was not intentional. However careless, the gun dealer did not encourage Markoff to troll the Internet for victims nor did it cause his to aim and shoot at Brisman.

Were we to hold the gun dealer accountable, why stop there? How about New Hampshire lawmakers for the state's relatively lax firearms regulations? Or what about the U.S. Congress for its moves designed to protect the domestic gun trade from lawsuits and administration oversight?

I draw the line on third-party culpability depending on whether there is a pattern of indifference. I might feel differently about State Line's responsibility if this dealer were to be a frequent supplier of guns used to commit violent crimes. Unfortunately, this kind of analysis is impeded by the gun-friendly forces in Washington.

So if Brisman's family wants to look for some remedial action as well as to lay blame for Julissa's murder, perhaps they should reset their sights to the south on Capitol Hill where National gun policy is fashioned rather than to the north in the Granite State where Markoff purchased his murder weapon.