



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on May 25, 2011

Police: Murderer at Conn. Company Not Avenging Racism

The media ran with the story, from Thornton's family and girlfriend, that the beer distributor in Manchester, Connecticut was full of racists, and that racist employees taunted and otherwise expressed racist attitudes toward Thornton. Hartford Distributors was also racist, so Thornton's family and girlfriend alleged with the help of the media, and permitted the untoward behavior. Thornton is black. Hartford's owner is white. Thus, the script was written: The victims at Hartford [deserved to be murdered](#).



From the start, anyone with any sense knew the allegations of racism were untrue. Thornton opened fire because his employer forced him out after it video-recorded him stealing beer. But Thornton's family and girlfriend smeared the company. The media peddled the smears.

Now, almost a year later, a report from the police [has exonerated](#) the company — as if it needed exoneration — from the scurrilous lies that rocketed across the nation after Thornton murdered eight people in cold blood.

Indeed, according to the report, quoted in the *Hartford Courant*, the real racism at Hartford Distributors was Thornton's. That's why he murdered eight whites.

What Happened

The deadly day on August 3 began when company officials called Thornton in for a meeting to either resign or be fired. They showed him video surveillance of his beer theft. Thornton signed his resignation letter. Then he began shooting.

When the gunfire finally stopped, eight were dead. Thornton killed himself.

But then Thornton's bereaved family and white girlfriend sprang into action. They retailed wild stories of racist crackpots torturing poor Thornton at every turn. He just couldn't stand it, they said, and he finally snapped.

[The New York Times recounted](#) the girlfriend's preposterous tale as if it were gospel truth:

Mr. Thornton called her from the men's room at the plant to let her hear his boss and a colleague he identified as a union representative say they were going to get rid of him, using a racial slur. [Kristi] Hannah said she could hear the comments clearly because of how they echoed in the bathroom. She said that even though Mr. Thornton brought the case to his union representative several times, the union never followed up.

"I know they pushed them; they did this to him," Hannah told the *Times*. "I know what was said, and I know it was very hurtful, and I know it bothered him a lot."

As [The New American reported](#) at the time, "the *Times* then sought Hannah's 13-year-old brother's opinion." Said Hannah's little brother: "Omar was a great guy. This thing was brought on by people who



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don't treat each other as equals."

[Thornton's uncle told](#) the CBS News affiliate a similar tale: "[He said](#), 'I killed the five racists that was there bothering me,' He said, 'That's it. The cops are going to come in so I'm going to take care of it myself.'"

"This all could have been avoided," Holliday told the station. "He went to the union a couple of times with issues concerning what was going on, and it was not dealt with appropriately."

The headlines at the time said it all, as [The New American reported](#). Among them were these: "Is racism at heart of Connecticut shooting? Answer still unclear." [That was](#) the *Christian Science Monitor*. [CBS News.com offered](#) this idea: "I Killed The Five Racists." [The New York Daily News chose](#) this line: "Kristi Hannah, girlfriend of Omar Thornton, recalls gunman's goodbye, racism concerns."

[MSNBC.com reiterated](#) the point: "Family: Racism caused Conn. gunman to snap."

Theft Never in Doubt

Astonishingly, or perhaps not, the media gave the ridiculous charges credibility even though they had evidence that Thornton [was a thief](#) and that Hartford's owner never would have tolerated racist behavior. The media permitted Thornton's family and girlfriend to make the claims although they had to have known they were false. That Thornton was a thief was news available the day of the shooting.

A union leader told the *Hartford Courant* that their claims of Thornton the avenger of racist slights were nonsense. [According to](#) the *Courant*, the union "had no record of any complaints filed by Thornton based on racial harassment. He said there would have been an immediate investigation of the complaint if one had been made. 'There was no complaint of any kind like what was communicated [by Thornton's family].'"

Nonetheless, the media ran with the meme; the *Times* story [that quoted](#) Thornton's family and girlfriend appeared the same day as the *Courant's* containing the quote from the union official. For the *Times*, Thornton couldn't be a thief caught stealing, who killed in a rage after losing his job; rather, the owners, the Hollander family, had to be racists.

Problem is, they weren't. And aren't.

Shortly after Thornton committed the murders and the media smeared Hartford, the public learned that the company's owner, Ross Hollander, [sued the town](#) he lived in, Bloomfield, because the town attorney [quashed a referendum](#) to allocate \$94 million to improve the schools, the students in which are mostly black.

"The current student population in the Bloomfield public schools is 88 percent African American, six percent white and six percent other minority," Hollander's lawsuit observed. "Given that African American children in this country have historically been educated in substandard facilities, the May 23, 2006, referendum seeks to give children who traditionally have not had access to the same educational facilities as their suburban counterparts. Bloomfield has the opportunity to reverse this traditional disadvantage by enacting the referendum as passed, as it would provide for modern facilities now enjoyed by its suburban counterparts."

Because of Hollander's efforts, a federal judge overturned the town attorney's decision and reinstated the results of the referendum.

Police Reports



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According to a report compiled by the Manchester Police Department, racism was not the cause of Thornton's rampage.

In March, [the *Courant* reported](#) that police did not find racist images on Thornton's cellphone:

As police conclude their investigation into the Aug. 3 slayings, sources say a forensic examination of Thornton's cellphone found no evidence to back Thornton's claims of racism. There also was no evidence to support similar claims of racism voiced by Thornton's family or girlfriend, according to sources familiar with the investigation.

Now, the final report [has emerged](#), and it appears as if the only racist at Hartford was Thornton. The *Courant* [also reports](#) that Thornton told his uncle what was coming: "Thornton loaded his gun the night before, the report shows, and showed his uncle two 17-round clips for his Ruger 9 mm pistol."

No one, apparently, has asked why the uncle didn't call the police or Hartford Distributors when Thornton made the threat, but in any event a Hartford employee recounted a story about Thornton that explains the shooting:

Mark Bellavista, a co-worker, told police that "Omar would jokingly ask me if I knew any good white men," according to a summary of the investigation. "I would tell Omar to look around — there is a lot of good white men around here. Omar would then say you got to kill them before they go bad."

[According to](#) the *Courant*, the one sign of any racist activity "that Thornton might have seen" at Hartford Distributors "was graffiti in a bathroom stall of President Barack Obama with a noose around his neck, police said. When company managers learned of the graffiti, it was quickly removed."

Anyway, stealing beer wasn't Thornton's only problem. [According to](#) the Teamsters boss at Hartford, Thornton didn't cotton to the simple concept of seniority. "Omar saw that as racism," the official said. Another black employee flatly called Thornton, known as "Slow-mar" at Hartford Distributors, lazy and shiftless. Thornton used to fall asleep at work.

Despite all this, the *Courant* reported, Thornton's salary was scheduled to double to nearly \$100,000 annually.

[Thornton was not avenging racism](#). In addition to stealing beer, he was lazy, slept at work, and didn't think his place in the pecking order was just. That's why he murdered eight white men on August 3.

Photo of Omar Thornton on the day of the shooting: AP Images



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