

Mother's Day shooting in New Orleans injures 19 people

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The Mother's Day shooting during a neighborhood parade in New Orleans' 7th Ward has focused attention on the appalling social conditions in the city, nearly eight years after it was devastated by Hurricane Katrina and five years into the economic slump triggered by the financial collapse of 2008.

Nineteen people were wounded when gunfire broke out at the "second-line" parade at about 1:45 p.m. The injured included 10 men, 7 women and 2 children. Some were only grazed by bullets, but many were taken to area hospitals. Three were at first reported in critical condition and were taken straight into surgery, but apparently none of the injuries were life-threatening.

News reports said that three men were seen running away after the shootings, and the New Orleans police released video surveillance of possible suspects. Emergency medical responders took 11 of those injured to the Interim LSU Public Hospital. Others were taken to the University Hospital.

The FBI, in the climate of fear whipped up after the bombing of the Boston Marathon, issued a statement declaring the shootings "strictly an act of street violence" and not connected to terrorism. A police spokeswoman said, "This is an extremely unusual occurrence, and we're confident that we will make swift arrests." As of Monday afternoon, however, authorities were still searching for the gunmen.

Second-line parades are part of the tradition of brass band parades in New Orleans. The "first-line" consists of the members of the band that has actually obtained a parade permit, while the second-line includes many who come to enjoy the music and dancing, following the band and socializing with family and friends. Second-line parades usually take place almost every Sunday except during the hottest months of the summer. The Mother's Day parade was organized by a

social club called The Original Big 7, founded about 15 years ago in a nearby housing project. The second-line parade on this Mother's Day attracted up to 400, including many families.

Relatives of those injured gathered anxiously at local hospitals waiting for word on their loved ones. "We were about 50 feet away from the actual shooting," one eyewitness, 24-year-old Happy Acee, told the *Los Angeles Times*. "It sounded like there were six or seven shots that rang off, and we ended up hitting the deck...and literally people [were] just running over the top of us, just trying to get away."

Shermaine Tyler, 32, who lives nearby, was celebrating Mother's Day one block away from the shooting. "Me and mom were going to the second line," she told the NOLA.com web site. "I told her I didn't want to go because there are always shots at a second line. And the second I heard shots fired, we ran outside and one man fell in my lap who had been shot."

New Orleans mayor Mitch Landrieu called the incident part of "the relentless drum beat of violence" in the city. "It's a culture of violence that has enveloped the city for a long, long period of time," Landrieu told a news conference outside University Hospital.

"It's important for us, as I have said, to change the culture of death on the streets of New Orleans to a culture of life, and it's going to take an all-hands-on-deck approach," said the Democratic mayor. "These kinds of incidents are not going to go unanswered. We're going to be very, very aggressive. There were hundreds of people out there today, so somebody knows who did this."

Landrieu's platitudes and empty statements of concern have been repeated endlessly, not just in New Orleans but in nearly every large city in the United

States. The Mother's Day shootings are noteworthy, but far from unique. Last January in New Orleans, a drive-by shooting wounded five people just after a parade had passed by on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. In February, four people were shot in the French Quarter on the last weekend before Mardi Gras.

The mayor's handwringing is an effort to divert attention away from the social causes of the crime and misery in New Orleans. The city was devastated by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, losing half of its population who fled in addition to the more than 1,500 who died in the floods. The population of the city has fallen from a historic high of 627,000 in 1960, down to about 220,000 after Katrina and now, partially recovered, at about 350,000.

New Orleans is one of the most famous cities in the US, renowned as the birthplace of jazz as well as for its music, cuisine, Mardi Gras celebrations, architecture and French Creole heritage and traditions. While many tourist areas and attractions have been helped to recover in the years since Katrina, however, the poor and working class sections of the city have been left to make their own way, without job opportunities and with dwindling social spending.

The poverty rate in New Orleans stands about 27 percent, one of the highest levels in the country, and it would be even higher if thousands of the city's poorest people had not left after Katrina and not returned.

Large swaths of the city, especially the poorer and largely African-American areas like the 7th and 9th Wards, remain economically devastated. For New Orleans as a whole, the official unemployment rate stands at about 6 percent, but that figure reflects the fact that vast numbers of adults have stopped looking for jobs that are not there.

For youth in the city, the jobs crisis is even more acute. In the wake of Katrina, local authorities also seized on the devastation to turn over much of the public school system to private companies, making the New Orleans school system the biggest charter school operation of any major US city.

These are the conditions under which street crime and violence, much of it gang-related, remain entrenched. Crime statistics have fallen in New Orleans as they have elsewhere in the US, but the homicide rate, at 57.9 per 100,000 population for 2011, the latest year for which figures are available, is the highest in the country

among cities of greater than 250,000 population.



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