

Suspect apprehended in multiple killings of the homeless in Washington, D.C. and New York City

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Gerald Brevard III was arrested Tuesday morning by agents of the federal Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives bureau in southeast Washington, D.C. Brevard, 30, is wanted in connection with a string of shootings and stabbings of homeless persons in the District and in Manhattan, New York.

Brevard was turned in to authorities after a multiple-city manhunt which involved federal authorities as well as the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and the New York City Police Department (NYPD).

He is suspected of the killing of two people and the serious injury of three others in the two cities. On March 3, Brevard allegedly shot three homeless District residents as they lay asleep. One man, 54-year old Morgan Holmes, was killed and left inside his tent, which was set on fire. Police found his body a day later.

On March 9 in lower Manhattan, Brevard allegedly shot two men, one fatally. “The victim had lain in the street for hours before authorities were summoned,” wrote the Associated Press. Two more men were attacked last Saturday, again in New York.

Brevard was connected to the shootings in both cities through surveillance video and the .22 caliber bullets used on his victims. According to the AP, the two cities’ Democratic mayors credited their “swift coordination” in response to the killings for bringing Brevard into custody. However, a tip from Brevard’s family was ultimately the key to his apprehension.

Gerald Brevard, Jr., the suspect’s father, texted a reporter for the *New York Times*, stating that his son “suffers from mental illness” and that the “failure of the judicial system” to find treatment for him was ultimately to blame. The elder Brevard extended his

“deepest condolences” to his son’s victims and their families.

The younger Brevard had a history of mental health issues as well as violent behavior. According to relatives, he had also been homeless for a time. In 2018, he was arrested for assault charges and later pled guilty to assault with a deadly weapon. A 2019 court ruling determined him to be mentally incompetent and he spent time at Saint Elizabeth’s Hospital in Washington, DC.

According to the elder Brevard, “[the city] said he was healthy so they let him out... I knew he wasn’t healthy. I know my son.” News reports have compared the string of killings to a recent New York City incident where a woman was pushed in front of an oncoming subway train by a homeless man suffering from schizophrenia.

Despite Brevard’s clear history of mental disorder, Eric Adams, New York City’s Democratic Mayor, sought to paint the crimes in purely moral terms. “Gun violence against anyone, let alone our most vulnerable populations, is sick,” he stated. Adams hypocritically declared “those experiencing homelessness can breathe a sigh of relief today.”

Adams, who came into office preaching a tough-on-crime message, recently enacted a homeless-removal program which the *Times* was compelled to admit “would push many people to the street who refuse to stay in the city’s barracks-like group shelters.”

Nearly 47,000 people stay in New York City’s homeless shelters, which the *Times* states are “rife with crime and interpersonal conflict.” Of this number, nearly 14,000 are children. Many thousands more remain un-housed in the city.

The District of Columbia has enacted a similar homeless removal program called “Coordinated Assistance and Resources for Encampments” (CARE). The program is designed to provide rapid re-housing for homeless individuals found in the city’s massive encampments.

In a letter published by the *Washington Post* last October, local ward administrators stated that while Democratic Mayor Muriel Bowser’s “concept may seem appealing in the abstract, in practice, this carrot-and-stick approach is harming the very residents it hopes to help.”

According to the local government advisers, CARE “is not principally meant to assist unhoused residents with their transition into housing. Instead, it prioritizes the removal of encamped residents and places a prohibition on their return, even if they have not moved into housing.”

The *Post* noted in a separate article published in January, “One of the points made repeatedly by those opposed to the swift dismantling of... encampments was that those forced evictions were tearing apart established communities and pushing the unhoused into more isolated places” where vulnerable individuals can be singled out and victimized. “The way the city is doing this is a war. It’s a war on the most vulnerable among us,” stated lawyer Tara Vassefi.

“You have to be out there to understand that on any given night, things change so fast, and you can end up with a world of hurt... you never know when someone is going to come at you, maybe to rob you or bonk you on the head,” stated Gregory Hammett, a 62-year old homeless veteran, in comments to the AP. “Listen, the streets are dangerous,” said Marty Mercer, who lives at an encampment outside of the District’s Union Station. “Just because someone is doing this on a serial basis is no different.”

The District of Columbia has wound down its pandemic aid programs. A March 2021 *Post* article quoted Amber Harding of the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless, who warns that absent the various stimulus programs, “a much, much deeper recession, or depression... is just lying in wait to explode family homelessness.”

In August, the city ended its moratorium on evictions, while claiming that a federally-funded rent assistance program would fill the gaps. In September, members of

the city’s Democratic Party-controlled legislature denounced the mayor’s STAY DC program, stating it was “not nimble enough to issue payments before these evictions occur.”



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