

Los Angeles area homeless targeted in series of killings last week

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Three homeless men were murdered last week in Los Angeles. Their killings were the outcome of sustained ruling class efforts to demonize the homeless population in the nation's second largest city.

The three men were each alone on the mornings of Sunday, November 26, Monday, November 27, and Wednesday, November 29, and were shot while attempting to sleep.

The killings, which took place south of the city's downtown area, in the downtown area itself, and east of downtown Los Angeles, respectively, followed the same pattern. The killer quickly exited his car once he spotted a solitary homeless individual, shot at his target, and then drove away. He did not know the victims beforehand: Joseph Bolanos, 37, Marc Diggs, 62, and an unidentified 52-year-old man.

The suspected killer, Jerrid Powell, was arrested by Beverly Hills police on Wednesday. A gun in his possession had been used in all three murders. Powell is also a suspect in the murder of a homeowner in San Dimas, northwest of Los Angeles. The victim, Nicholas Simbolon, was found Tuesday night by his wife, suffering from a gunshot wound inside his Tesla in the garage of his home.

In response to the homeless murders, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass issued an alert to people living on the streets, urging them go to city shelters or to gather in groups to stay safe.

In a city that over the year has repeatedly campaigned to persecute the homeless, isolate them and disband encampments, Bass's words ring hollow. Since January 2023, Mayor Bass has broken up six encampments with much fanfare, providing temporary housing in motels for fewer than 300 individuals.

Members of the city's Democratic Party establishment and local media also recently blamed the

city's homeless for a devastating fire under the I-10 freeway that had closed down a major section of city highway for nearly a week, causing significant gridlock and increased travel times. The event garnered significant national media attention.

The fire was, in fact, primarily the result of excessive wooden pallets, vehicles and sundry flammable items stored under a freeway overpass by tenants who were subleasing the lots for storage.

Invisible People, an NGO that advocates for the homeless, commented on the killings and called for comprehensive measures to address the crisis:

"The ongoing and escalating violence against homeless individuals in Los Angeles is sounding an urgent alarm, highlighting a nationwide increase in attacks on those living on the streets. These vulnerable individuals, already burdened by the challenges of homelessness, are now facing a surge in brutal violence and hate crimes. This situation not only exposes the inherent dangers of life without shelter but also mirrors deep societal issues like mental health crises, substance abuse, and systemic neglect.

"Advocates urgently call for immediate protective measures and long-term support strategies, emphasizing the need to address the root causes of homelessness with comprehensive solutions involving housing, healthcare, job training and social services. The dire circumstances in Los Angeles are a stark reminder of the vulnerabilities faced by the homeless population, demanding immediate action to safeguard their rights and well-being and to prevent further tragedies in our communities."

A December 4 exposé on Invisible People's website "Death by Sweep: How Anti-Homeless Legislation Kills" describes how laws that allow for splitting homeless communities up ("sweeps") contribute to the

deaths of homeless individuals, not only from acts of violence and gunfire but from life-threatening infections, emergency hospitalizations and drug overdoses.

The January 2023 homeless population in Los Angeles County was estimated at more than 75,000, an increase of 9 percent over the 2022 estimate. Forty-four thousand live in the city proper, a 10 percent increase relative to 2022. The estimate for California is that more than 161,000 people are homeless. These numbers are based on a national “point in time” counting method, in which volunteers count individuals who appear homeless in the streets and estimate how many may be inside tents.

The survey takes place in the first 10 days of January, cold days, which guarantee an undercount. The 2015 survey reported 564,708 homeless in the US, a vast undercount relative to the number of homeless children in public schools for that year, which, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), added up to 1.3 million during the same year.

This gap is sometimes “explained” by the fact that the NCES includes children of parents who are “couch-surfing” (relying on shelter from relatives and friends), living in motels, trailer parks and camping grounds “due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations.”

Some 20 people experiencing homelessness die every single day in the United States. They die in cars, tents, shelters and on the streets. The number of deaths has gone up 77 percent in the last five years, according to the *Guardian*, in consultation with a University of Washington researcher Matt Fowle, co-creator of the Homeless Deaths Count website. Since 2020, many homeless deaths have been attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. But only New York City and Los Angeles have kept statistics on homeless deaths from COVID.

According to the above study, 18,000 people died homeless over five years in encampments in 20 US cities, including Seattle, Los Angeles, New York City, Philadelphia and Miami, on sidewalks or in shelters—5,000 deaths in 2020 alone. While some of these deaths are reported by county coroners, the federal government keeps very few records of homeless deaths, including those resulting from violence.

Another nonprofit organization, the federally funded National Care for the Homeless Council, estimates up

to 40,000 homeless deaths each year across the US.

Violence against homeless people is directly linked to the capitalist crisis. After jumping up during the Great Recession of 2008-2009, another wave of attacks on the homeless began developing at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and has yet to subside.

In addition to violent attacks, the homeless on the streets are affected by lack of medical care, and succumb to drug overdoses. Once homeless, most individuals confront a dramatic decrease in life expectancy. Last October, with the cessation of COVID pandemic emergency measures, 8.8 million people, homeless and others, were dis-enrolled from Medicaid federal health insurance benefits.

The homeless crisis is one side of the explosion of social and economic inequality across the world and a consequence of the failure of the capitalist system. The solution lies in the socialist transformation of society to meet human need and abolish the profit system, guaranteeing the right to housing, healthcare and education to all.



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