

A Report of Hate Crimes and Violence Against People who are Homeless in the United States in 2000

**Prepared by
National Homeless Civil Rights Organizing Project**

**A Project of
National Coalition for the Homeless**



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INTRODUCTION

Over the past several years, an alarming increase in the reports of violence and hate crimes against people experiencing homelessness has come to the attention of homeless advocates nationwide and to National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH.) Advocates and homeless shelter workers from around the country have received news reports of men and women being killed, beaten, harassed and even dragged to death. In response to this barrage of information, NCH, along with its Civil Rights Work Group, a nationwide network of civil rights and homeless advocates, began compiling these articles and news reports. NCH produced the first report of its kind, Hate Crimes: A Report Documenting the Violence Against Men and Women Homeless in the U. S., in 1999 in order to call attention to this problem and to educate lawmakers and the general public about this serious national trend. This publication, A Report of Hate Crimes and Violence Against Homeless People in the United States in 2000, presents the known incidence of violence and hate crimes against the homeless population in 2000. These reports aim:

1. To compile the incidence of violence and hate crimes against people who are homeless that NCH has received and reviewed in order to document this alarming trend.
2. To make lawmakers and the public aware of this phenomenon.
3. To recommend proactive measures to be taken.

The term, *hate crime*, generally conjures up images of cross burnings and lynchings by white supremacists, the painting of swastikas on Jewish synagogues and the horrific murders of gay men. The first federal law to combat hate crimes, 18 U.S.C. Section 245, passed in 1968, protects individuals who are attacked because of their race, color, religion or national origin. Subsequent federal bias-motivated crime laws have expanded the definition of groups that are covered under this law. The Hate Crimes Statistics Act of 1990 (HCSA) mandates the Justice Department to collect data from law enforcement agencies about crimes that “manifest evidence of prejudice based upon race, religion, sexual orientation or ethnicity.” Gender and disability are included in the Fair Housing Act’s criminal provisions. The Hate Crimes Sentencing Enhancement Act, enacted as a section of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, calls for enhanced penalties for crimes directed at individuals because of their “actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, gender, disability or sexual orientation...” Also part of the 1994 crime bill, the Violence Against Women Act expands the circumstances under which an abusive perpetrator can be prosecuted.¹

There is currently no federal criminal prohibition against violent crimes directed at individuals because of their *housing status*. The most recent piece of legislation, the Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which was introduced in the 105th, 106th and in the current 107th Congress, would amend the existing federal law (18 U.S.C. Section 245) to include gender, sexual orientation and disability.² National Coalition for the Homeless aims to include the issue of homelessness in the Hate Crimes Prevention Act and in future pieces of legislation. By including people who are experiencing homelessness as a protected status, hate crimes and violent acts such as those that follow in this report will be more appropriately handled

¹ Source: Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, www.civilrights.org

² Source: Library of Congress, www.congress.gov

and prosecuted. Additionally, if victims know that a system is in place to prosecute such crimes, they are more likely to come forward to report these crimes. Citizens who are forced to live and sleep on the streets for lack of an appropriate alternative are placed in an extremely vulnerable situation, and it is unacceptable that they are not protected by the hate crimes laws.

Hate crimes are commonly called bias-motivated crimes, referring to the prejudice or partiality of the perpetrator against the victim's real or perceived grouping or circumstance. Most hate crimes are committed not by organized hate groups but by individual citizens who harbor a strong resentment against a certain group of people, and they aim to harm them or rid them altogether. Some are "mission offenders," who believe themselves to be on a mission to cleanse the world of a particular evil group. Others are "scapegoat offenders," projecting their resentment toward the growing economic power of a particular racial or ethnic group. Still other perpetrators are "thrill seekers"-those who take advantage of a vulnerable and disadvantaged group in order to satisfy their own thrills.³

The last of these groups-the thrill seekers-are the most common perpetrators in violence against the homeless population. Being completely vulnerable and utterly helpless on the streets, homeless men and women become an easy target for hate crimes perpetrators. In Denver, Colorado in 1999, for example 7 homeless men were found dead, 2 of whom had been decapitated. Whether the murderer, who still remains at large, is a mission offender, a scapegoat offender or a thrill seeker, the nature of these murders undoubtedly is characterized as a hate crime.

National Coalition for the Homeless relies on news reports and homeless shelters around the country for the data and documentation that is included in the 2000 and the 1999 reports. Although NCH acts as the nationwide repository of hate crimes against the homeless, there is no systematic method of collecting and documenting reports and incidence of violent acts and hate crimes against people experiencing homelessness. Many of these violent crimes go unpublicized and/or unreported, thereby making it difficult to assess the true situation. The Hate Crimes Statistics Act of 1990 mandates the Justice Department to collect data about hate crimes, but limits this to "crimes that manifest evidence of prejudice based on race, religion, sexual orientation or ethnicity."⁴ National Coalition for the Homeless urges the U.S. Department of Justice to maintain a database that addresses the issues of violence against the homeless population so as to address this growing trend on a systematic, federal level.

A main objective of this report is to educate lawmakers, advocates and the general public about the problem of hate crimes and violence against people who are homeless in order to instigate change and ensure protection of civil rights for everyone, regardless of their economic circumstances or housing status. As part of its mission, National Coalition for the Homeless is committed to creating the systemic and attitudinal changes necessary to end homelessness. A major component of these changes must include the societal guarantee of safety and protection and a commitment by lawmakers to combat violent acts and hate crimes against people who experience homelessness.

³ Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, www.ojp.usdoj.gov

⁴ *ibid* number 3

SUMMARY OF HATE CRIMES DATA

Total Number of Dead in 2000: 43

Total Number of Victims Who Suffered Non-lethal Violence: 23

Number of Cities Where Crimes Occurred: 42

Cities Where Crimes Occurred:

Austin, TX	Hamilton, OH	Peoria, IL
Bay Point, CA	Hartford, CT	Portland, ME
Berkeley, CA	Honolulu, HI	Raleigh, NC
Chicago, IL	Houston, TX	San Diego, CA
Cincinnati, OH	Kansas City, MO	San Juan, Puerto Rico
Cleveland, OH	Kissimmee, FL	Santa Ana, CA
Colorado Springs, CO	Las Vegas, NV	San Jose, CA
Dallas, TX	Lawrence, KS	Santa Cruz, CA
Miami, FL	Milwaukee, WI	Seattle, WA
Denver, CO	Modesto, CA	Sioux Falls, SD
Fayetteville, NC	New York, NY	Sun Valley, CA
Filley, NE	Norristown, PA	Tacoma, WA
Fort Worth, TX	Omaha, NE	Tucson, AZ
Fredericksburg, VA	Passaic, NJ	Westminster, CA

**Known Ages of Accused/ Convicted: 18 (two), 19, (two), 20, 22 (two),
33 (three), 35, 38 (two), 39**

**Known Ages of Victims: 19 (two), 26, 29, 31, 34 (two), 35, 37, 38 (two), 39, 40 (two), 41, 42
(four), 43 (three), 44 (three), 45, 45, 47 (two), 48 (two), 51, 52, 64,
72**

**Gender of Victims: Male: 60
Female: 5
Unknown: 1**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTIONS

National Coalition for the Homeless recommends that the following actions be taken:

1. A public statement by the U.S. Department of Justice acknowledging that hate crimes and/or violence against people experiencing homelessness is a serious national trend.
2. A database to be maintained by the U.S. Department of Justice, in cooperation with the National Coalition for the Homeless, to track hate crimes and/or violence against people who become homeless.
3. Inclusion of the issue of homelessness in the pending federal hate crimes legislation, the Hate Crimes Prevention Act (S. 622, H.R. 1082.)
4. Sensitivity training at police academies and departments nationwide for trainees and police officers on how to deal effectively and humanely with people who become homeless in their communities.
5. A research study sponsored and/or funded by the U.S. Department of Justice in which those convicted of hate crimes and/or violence against people who are homeless are interviewed. The study will address the following: causes of hate crimes, circumstances that contribute to or were responsible for their behavior, beliefs held by perpetrators of these crimes and how their beliefs have changed since conviction, thoughts and advice to others who are considering hate crimes against the homeless population.

CASE DESCRIPTIONS BY MONTH AND CITY

Hate Crimes and Violence Against Homeless People in 2000

December

****Fredericksburg, Virginia Man Found Ablaze**

Jose Orosco, a homeless man, was discovered near a shopping center in Fredericksburg. Police responded to a report of a brush fire and instead discovered Orosco on the ground, in flames from the waist down. The flames were suppressed with a fire extinguisher; he was rushed to Mary Washington Hospital, and later to Washington Hospital Center.

****Hartford, Connecticut Suspicion Surrounds Burns Suffered by Homeless Woman**

A homeless woman who had been living under a road overpass entered a Citgo gasoline station covered with black singe marks and severe burns. An ambulance was called and she was flown to the burn center at Bridgeport Hospital, where she was in serious condition.

As yet, the circumstances of the fire are still unknown. Police found many of her personal items in the space where she had been living, as well as some other personal belongings, which were suggestive of another person living there with her. Police are not sure who was sharing the space with the woman, but hope to find him or her for questioning. The police are leaning towards the explanation that the woman was set on fire by someone, but are not ruling out the possibility that she may have set herself on fire.

****Las Vegas, Nevada Homeless Man in Beaten to Death**

Seventy-six year old Arthur Cramer was in critical condition in the University Medical Center two days after being beaten by a gang of youths. The assault took place on December 27 at the intersection of "A" Street and Owens. Witnesses said that there were approximately ten juveniles involved in the attack on the sleeping homeless man. Ron Travis, a homeless man who camped close by, told officials he saw a group of teenagers stomping and hitting Cramer at about 8:30 p.m. He said he picked up a large rock and started heading toward the group of teens, apparently scaring them off. "He didn't say anything to them. He had his blankets over his head. That's the way he sleeps," Travis stated. "I didn't hear them say anything before they started. I just heard Arthur (grunting) when he was being kicked."

***Update March 2001. Arthur Cramer died March 10, 2001 at the Las Vegas Health Care Center. The homicide remains under investigation.*

**** Las Vegas, Nevada
Homeless Man Shot to Death**

Thirty-nine-year-old Marshall Hughes was discovered in a parking lot on the afternoon of December 17. Police responded to an anonymous 911 call, which spoke of a young male running from the area. They arrived to discover that Hughes had been fatally shot. The investigation is continuing.

****Modesto, California
Killings of Two Homeless People Cause Alarm**

Two homeless people were killed at the end of the month, causing many to take extra precautions. Some are leaving for other cities, some are running to the missions, some are clinging to groups, and some have found other places to sleep. People such as Jason Van Clief, 25, are even scared that a killer might enter a mission with a weapon; Van Clief was threatened by a man believed to be connected with one of the killings for talking to police. Women are sleeping in groups, keeping their boyfriends near them at night, and are afraid to walk alone. Even some family members of people who are homeless are becoming afraid and are trying to get their loved ones off the streets. Although the two killings are not related, they are enough to cause a lot of fear out on the streets.

Jesse Alfredo-Federico Origel, 18, has been charged in the killing of 43-year-old John Michael Tracey as he pushed his bicycle across a Modesto scrap-metal yard.

****San Diego, California
Homeless Man Shot and Killed**

Antonio Castello, a homeless man, was killed at a homeless encampment under the San Diego Freeway. He had lived in this encampment intermittently for two years; otherwise, he lived with his wife and two teenage sons. He was shot and killed following an argument.

****San Juan, Puerto Rico
Homeless Man Stabbed; Homeless Man Beaten**

Two men stabbed 34-year-old Jose Jessy Agosot, a homeless man while he was walking to the ferry station. He was transferred to the City Hospital where he underwent surgery for perforated organs. The assault remains under investigation.

Another man with a lead pipe beat Ernesto Perez Reynoso, a 44-year-old homeless man. Both arms were broken. No charges were filed.

November

****Chicago, Illinois**

Homeless Man Beaten and Strangled

Hikers discovered the body of John E. Conrad, a 31-year-old homeless man, in Pratt's Wayne Woods Forest Preserve. He was known to frequent the shelters and wooded areas in DuPage and Cook counties. He had been beaten and strangled to death. The police are still searching for information.

****Fayetteville, North Carolina**

Homeless Man Kidnapped and Attacked

Two men kidnapped Tommy Council, a homeless man. They tied him up and poured battery acid on his genitals while they threatened to kill him with the drop cord they had tied around his neck. One of the men, Leroy Thaggard, Jr., is in jail with \$150,000 bail, but the other is still at large.

****Filley, Nebraska**

Body of Homeless Teen Found

Sheila Van Natter, a.k.a. Julia Olsen, was a 19-year-old homeless runaway. Her body was discovered under a bridge on a dirt road. She had run from a youth rehabilitation center in May, and she had been living at a series of places and on the streets ever since. She often stole cigarettes and alcohol from local stores to fuel her addiction and her parties. She lived at the Stewart home for a while, after 16-year-old Shaunna convinced her father to take Sheila in. However, Sheila's incessantly rude behavior soon saw her eviction from the house and her reentry onto the streets. No arrests had been made.

****New York, New York**

Homeless Man Beaten and Robbed

A 19-year-old homeless man was found beaten and robbed in the stairwell of an Elgin apartment. He said he had been outside the building when three masked men approached him and asked him for money. After his refusal to give them any, they proceeded to beat him and steal \$50 from him. He lost consciousness and was found an hour later inside the apartment building. No arrests were made.

October

****Bay Point, California**

Seemingly Random Killing Prompts Questions

47-year-old Nick Taylor, an unemployed man living in Bay Point, was shot as he crossed a busy intersection. A man armed with a .22 caliber rifle shot him several times as he helped a homeless friend push his shopping cart across the street. Authorities say Taylor was killed by either a shot to the head or torso.

Police detained a man they found running from the scene and are ascertaining whether he is a suspect or merely a witness. They were able to locate the rifle used in the shooting near where the man being questioned was taken into custody.

Friends and family were left stunned at the unexpected turn of events. No one could understand why such a respectable man known for keeping to himself would be the victim of such a tragedy. Police are investigating to see if he was killed because he might have been identified with the homeless population.

****Berkeley, California**

Homeless Man Beaten to Death

Merlin Terry Antone, 42, was taken off life support at Highland Hospital, days after he had been found beaten on the street. No motive has been established, and no arrest has been made.

****Fort Worth, Texas**

Homeless Woman Killed, Identity Unknown

A homeless woman, who regularly stayed at the Presbyterian Night Shelter, died from head injuries inflicted from an ax handle. They found her nude body and a pile of clothes in a field, along with a man's wallet. Police have arrested the owner of the wallet, 30-year-old David Ray Bodkin, in connection with the murder and jailed him on a capital murder charge. He told authorities he had been drinking with the woman and she had rejected his advances.

****Honolulu, Hawaii**

Handicapped Homeless Man Beaten

Firefighters responded to a small rubbish fire and discovered a 48-year-old homeless man lying unconscious five feet from the fire. The man's wheelchair was on fire and he was suffering from head and facial wounds and appeared to have been beaten. He was taken to Queen's Medical Center, where he died a short time later.

****Portland, Maine
Charred Remains Found**

Police found the charred remains of a homeless man with the help of a witness. His death was described as “suspicious” because he was discovered lying in a fetal position under his tarp, burned beyond recognition. In addition to this, the fire had burned both the man and his sleeping area, but none of the surrounding brush. He had been sleeping in a heavily wooded area often used by homeless people because of its discreet location; hidden from both the streets above and below, a rope had to be used to overcome the inclines and reach the flat sleeping area. The identity of the man had still not been confirmed, but he was believed to have been a long time resident.

****Santa Ana, California
Homeless Man Found Dead**

Alex Francisco Rangel celebrated his 40th birthday alone, underneath the Judge Judy billboard where he lived. His body was found badly beaten the next morning. Rangel was known in the area, a popular spot for homeless people.

He was remembered fondly as a respectable man. He had his pride, too; he would approach the delivery trucks for Charlie’s Foods and ask if they had any leftovers, but never for the food they were serving. Jesus Bailon, who operates L.P. Gas, a nearby business, allowed Rangel to use the restroom, and noted how clean he kept it and how appreciative and respectful he was.

Jose Negrete, a security guard for Charlie’s Foods, found Rangel’s body face down in a large pool of blood. Police are still searching for suspects.

****Sioux Falls, South Dakota
Police Chief Accused of Using Excessive Force in Arrest of Homeless Woman**

A complaint was filed against Wagner Police Chief Ed Zylstra, which accused him of employing excessive force in the arrest of Sharon K. Gullikson, a homeless woman, at a grocery store. She alleges that Zylstra told her she was under arrest for panhandling and trespassing and then threw her to the ground. Larry Weddell, the witness who filed the report, stated, “...I could just see her arms waving at her side. He just grabbed her and slammed her down to the street. Her face was on the street.” Zylstra and the city deny the charges.

****Tacoma, Washington
Man Robbed at Knifepoint**

A 48-year-old self-described transient was standing at a bus stop when a man approached him and pulled a knife on him, demanding his money. The man surrendered \$9 in cash to the stranger. The man called 911 from a nearby payphone. Police responded, and, with the help of the man, began to search for the robber. They were unsuccessful, and no arrests were made.

****Westminster, California
Man Dies from Beating**

Paramedics found a 43-year-old homeless man in a shopping center. He was transported to UCI Medical Center in Orange County with abrasions on his arms, legs, and head. The man was also bleeding internally, due to an apparent blunt-force trauma to his stomach. Doctors operated on him, but he died later that night.

Police were investigating.

September

****Colorado Springs, Colorado
Fear Follows Outbreak of Attacks on Homeless**

People who are homeless in Colorado Springs were taking extra precautions after a homeless man was killed and two others badly beaten in separate attacks.

Police believe a band of teens armed with rocks, knives and other weapons is behind the three attacks. The victims could not identify their assailants because they struck at night while the men slept.

John Michael Jones, 42, of Lexington, Kentucky used to spend nights at the city's only homeless shelter, but left in August to live with a friend, said Jeannine Holt, the shelter's director. His body was found in a sleeping bag on September 9.

Authorities say Jones died of a blow to the head.

He was found beneath a downtown bridge, a quarter-mile from a soup kitchen and a park that is a popular gathering place for homeless people. The two other men who suffered assaults a week prior to Jones' death were in the same area at the time of their attacks.

According to spokeswoman Rita Burns, Memorial Hospital is treating several homeless people each day on a regular basis.

San Edwards, manager of the Marian House soup kitchen, said he has noticed an increased number of attacks on Marian House patrons. Though he acknowledged that fights among homeless people are common, Edwards asserted that, "...this is something different. These are harder and more intense beatings."

Police are investigating the resemblance of these attacks to those that occurred in Denver in 1999 and resulted in the deaths of seven homeless men.

****Denver, Colorado**

Homeless Man Beaten to Death, 2 Others Injured

Eric Townsend, 33, turned himself over to authorities, admitting he had killed one homeless man and injured two others. The four of them had been socializing in a park near the Cherry Creek Mall when they began having an argument, possibly over money. He killed one of them with a rock, and the other two walked away with injuries.

****Hamilton, Ohio**

Homeless Man Shot and Killed

Alden Ray Little, a 37-year-old homeless man, was shot after watching Monday Night Football at a friend's house. He was outside arguing with several people, when one of them left, returned with a gun, and shot Mr. Little.

There are numerous witnesses to the shooting, and police have been working to collect interviews and evidence. However, they had been unable to identify a suspect because of the many conflicting stories they have been getting; the number of shots heard ranges anywhere from two to seven, etc. They have found the possible weapon used in the shooting, but declined to provide a description. Many mourned the death of Mr. Little, described as a polite and pleasant man with a nice personality.

August

****Austin, Texas**

Police Officer Shoots Homeless Suspect

An Austin police officer was placed on administrative duty after shooting a homeless man suspected in the stabbing of another homeless man. The suspect, John McKee, 51, was shot once in the chest while lying in his tent.

Police planned to charge McKee with aggravated assault in the stabbing of Jerry Long, 55, another homeless man, who suffered serious injuries as a result of the attack. Officers reported that when they found McKee in his tent, he had one hand under his bedroll by his head. Though officers repeatedly asked McKee to show his hand, instead he abruptly

sat up and threw an object at them, according to the officers. Officer James Thomsen then shot McKee once in the chest.

Homeless advocates argue that had McKee been housed, he may not have been shot. Had he been approached from behind a closed door, they argue, he would first have asked police for a search warrant, or refused to open the door and called an attorney. Homeless people, advocates feel, are more vulnerable and exposed to violence than are those who live in houses.

****Houston, Texas**

Body of Homeless Man Found

The body of a man, who police said appeared to be homeless, was found in a vacant building on August 9. The man was struck twice in the head, possibly with a large blunt object, according to homicide officer Jim Kay.

A man who owns a store next to the vacant building found the body. The victim appeared to have been dead for 24 hours, Kay said. A shopping cart with a sign asking for money was found near the victim's body. He appeared to have been living in the building.

Police were still searching for clues in the case.

****Las Vegas, Nevada**

Homeless Man Beaten to Death

Las Vegas police were looking for suspects who beat a homeless man to death on August 8. Police went to the area looking for a reported injured person and found the victim with severe trauma to his head. He later died at University Medical Center.

Police learned that the man lived in the area with several other homeless people. They were still trying to establish a motive for the attack.

****Santa Ana, California**

Homeless Man Shot to Death

52-year-old Wayne Randall Gilbert ("Randy") was found shot to death in the abandoned lot he had made his home near Fairview Avenue. He had lived in the area for at least three years, and was known by the area businesses. He once entered Mily Garcia's hair salon to get a haircut, and she asked for the money up front; not only did he give her the \$7 for the haircut, he even gave her a \$1 tip. Every morning, Gilbert waited for Dan Giang to open his grocery store. He bought one bottle of Miller High Life for \$1.34, which he would drink behind the store. Giang knew something was wrong one morning when he opened the store and Gilbert wasn't there waiting for him; then he noticed the police cars parked across the street.

Police were running a photo of Gilbert in the media to try and locate his next of kin.

July

****Cleveland, Ohio**

Homeless Men Harassed by Construction Crew

On July 11, two homeless men, Edwardo Lauriano and Dave Clark, were sleeping when members of a construction crew working nearby began throwing large metal washers at them. Clark went to the supervisor's trailer/office to complain and was assured by the foreman that it would not occur again.

The following day, more debris was thrown at Lauriano and Clark. The crew also reportedly shouted derogatory statements at the men while one crewmember pulled down his pants and exposed himself. Panzica Construction Co. stated that it would look into the situation.

****Denver, Colorado**

Homeless Man Found Dead Under Bridge

Denver police identified the homeless man they found dead under a bridge as Mark Warren Davis, 44. The cause of death was blunt trauma to the head.

A cleanup crew found Davis under the bridge hidden between some rocks. The body had been there for about 24 hours, police said.

****Milwaukee, Wisconsin**

Homeless Man Found Stabbed to Death

A 35-year-old homeless man was found stabbed to death on July 28. Police said there were multiple stab wounds to his upper body and neck. The man was found in a scrap yard in which homeless people often sleep.

****Passaic, New Jersey**

Homeless Man Beaten to Death

A homeless Polish immigrant was beaten to death after an argument over a round of drinks. Apparently, men were drinking near the railroad tracks, and wanted to buy more alcohol; they believed that the victim had money and was holding out. Four men attacked 48-year-old Kazimir Serafin, who then suffered from head injuries and died the following day. Andrezej Janiec, 58, Ryszard Swiatek, 46, William Sloma, 45, and Edward Iskra, 51, were charged with murder and were being held at Passaic County jail on \$500,000 bail.

****Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**
Homeless Man Killed by Amtrak Police

Amtrak police at Philadelphia's main railroad station shot a homeless man to death after he allegedly threatened them with a chair while they were escorting him out of the station. Witnesses reported that Robert Brown, 45, was threatening passersby and using profane language. As officers were escorting the man out of the station, he reportedly picked up a chair and threatened them, throwing the chair at one officer. The other officer fired one shot and struck the man in the chest. He was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital.

According to Glenda Langley, a sanitation worker at the station and witness to the shooting, Brown swung the chair when one of the officers reached for it. According to Langley, after the shooting, other witnesses screamed and some said, "You didn't have to do that." Langley said she saw the man nearly every day at the station, and added that "He often talks to himself, but he never seemed violent."

The officer involved in the shooting was placed on administrative leave while the Philadelphia Police Department investigated the incident.

****Sun Valley, California**
Homeless Man Beaten to Death

The body of Ruben Mejia, a 41-year-old homeless man, was found on San Fernando Road. He had been known to live in the industrial area where his body was found. Mejia had been left mentally incapacitated by an earlier automobile accident. Police had no leads and were still trying to piece together the killing. In November, the Los Angeles City Council began offering a \$25,000 reward for information regarding the incident.

June

****Miami, Florida**
Police Investigate Gun Planted on Homeless Man

Six police officers were assigned to desk duty while investigators determined whether they planted a gun on a homeless man who had just been shot in the leg by an officer.

Investigators said the officers planted a .45-caliber pistol on the scene to make it appear that the shooting victim, Daniel Hoban, had been armed. Hoban, who survived, was actually holding a radio.

Although the officers were subjects of an investigation, they were not criminally charged and continued to receive pay.

May

****Austin, Texas**

Two Men Charged in Immigrant's Death

Police filed capital murder charges against two men suspected of robbing and fatally beating an immigrant beneath a bridge in May.

Police say Mario Villarreal, 18, helped his stepbrother, Cesar Villarreal, 22, kill 26-year-old Honduran immigrant Jose Israel Lopez.

****Colorado Springs, Colorado**

Homeless Man Murdered

Two people are accused of beating a homeless man to death on May 20. Leonard Burzynski, 44, suffered a head injury and had been in critical condition in Memorial Hospital's intensive care unit. An autopsy showed he suffered blunt force trauma to the head and neck.

Michael Joseph Wolfmule, 38, and Trinidad Miles, 33, were arrested May 23 on suspicion of first-degree assault and conspiracy.

According to police, one person struck Burzynski in the face, knocking him to the ground, where he was kicked several times. The two people then left the area, taking Burzynski's bicycle.

****Kansas City, Missouri**

Fourth Kansas City Homeless Man Found Dead in Six Week Period

Police found the body of a homeless man on May 4 beneath a Kansas City viaduct, the fourth reported assault on a homeless man in a six-week period.

The Kansas City Police Department's murder squad was investigating the death. Neither the cause of death nor the man's identity had been determined.

Workers found the man's body on the ground about 40 yards away from a set of railroad tracks. He had some personal belongings, including a sleeping bag. Detectives could not tell if he had been robbed. Police said the death did not appear to be connected to the three other recent attacks on homeless individuals in Kansas City.

****Norristown, Pennsylvania**

Elderly Homeless Man Robbed and Fatally Beaten

Caesar Romero Thomas, 39, is on trial for having allegedly robbed and beaten Ferdinand C. "Reds" Branca, a 64-year-old homeless man. Former neighbors of Thomas stated that they had seen an elderly man at Thomas' house and later witnessed Thomas pushing him from the

yard. Police arrived to discover Branca covered in blood; he was admitted to Montgomery Hospital, treated for a broken sternum and rib, and released the following day. Subsequently, his body was discovered on May 9 behind a tavern. Branca died of injuries suffered three days before when Thomas allegedly robbed him of \$600 and assaulted him at his house.

****Omaha, Nebraska**

Homeless Man Shot Near Encampment

Andrew Gouker, 19, was the prime suspect in the attempted murder of a homeless man that occurred on May 6.

Gouker was arrested after John Bores, a 46-year-old homeless man, was found shot in the chest. Bores lived in an encampment just off the railroad tracks that snake into the trees and brush behind the house where Gouker lived.

Sgt. Jerry Mann said Bores was shot after he went to investigate noises near his campsite. The noises turned out to be gunshots from a .22-caliber rifle that Gouker and two other young men were shooting.

According to Mann, Gouker saw Bores and another homeless man approaching and intentionally fired a shot at them. "Our investigation revealed that it was intentional," Mann said. "I don't think he went out looking to shoot them. But when the opportunity presented itself, he took it."

According to Joseph Hall, a friend of Gouker who was present at the time of the shooting, Gouker didn't realize the men were approaching and shot Bores only accidentally. When one of the men began yelling, said Hall's mother, the boys didn't know if it was because he was injured or because he was angry, so they ran away.

****Seattle, Washington**

Homeless Woman Murdered

On May 26, a 40-year-old homeless woman, Debbie Jean Cashio, was found dead in an overgrown patch of land. Seattle Police Detectives regarded Cashio's death as suspicious and were investigating it as a homicide.

Detectives continued to search for information that could help solve the case.

****Tucson, Arizona**

Homeless Man Found Dead

Police are investigating the death of a homeless man found dead on May 18 as a homicide. The man was found leaning against the wall of an office at a housing complex by a city employee.

Detective Bryce Gardner said he couldn't be certain how the man died, but that he suffered from "blunt trauma."

According to Gardner, the man was often seen in the area where he was found picking up scrap metal and other items he might have been able to sell. "He was seen at various shelters and soup kitchens around town," Gardner said.

April

****Cincinnati, Ohio Mentally Ill Homeless Man Victim of Police Attack**

A mentally disabled man was walking down the street counting his money when two police officers on horseback confronted him. Reacting to the threat of arrest, the man reportedly became agitated. In response, the two cops on horseback allegedly pulled out billy clubs and began to beat him, punch him, spray him with mace, and kick him in the face. The man was also kicked in the ribs by one of the horses. According to a reporter for the *Street Vibes* newspaper, the 40 to 60 bystanders who witnessed the assault were alarmed by the actions of the police, whose numbers had grown to eight, and attempted to protest.

A neighborhood resident acquainted with the man said that he had never witnessed him being disruptive or violent.

****Dallas, Texas Shopkeeper Charged in Shooting Death of Homeless Man**

A man was charged with murder for shooting the homeless man that he believed to be stealing canned goods from his neighborhood grocery. On April 11, Manuel Lara Vides, 35, fatally shot Leroy Anthony Milan, 38, after confronting him for shoplifting. Although Vides claimed that he did not intend to kill Milan, police say Mr. Vides' actions were "not a clear-cut case of self-defense."

Vides reported a confrontation between Milan and himself in which he accused the man of shoplifting. The men then argued about the price of an ice-cream cone and eventually became engaged in a physical struggle in front of the checkout counter, whereupon Vides asked his wife to get his gun. Though Vides holds that the gun fired accidentally, Milan was shot in the back, and when found by the police, was lying near the front door of the store. According to police, Milan "didn't have a weapon, so we cannot clearly establish that the homicide was justifiable."

****Kansas City, Missouri Series of Assaults on Homeless Prompts Concern**

A homeless man was beaten along a set of railroad tracks on April 24 and later died in the hospital.

A witness told police that he saw two men dragging another man by his feet from a homeless camp. The victim's face was covered with blood.

Another homeless man was paralyzed and later died of injuries from a hit-and-run driver, and a homeless Navy veteran was found shot to death on March 28 in a parking garage.

None of the apparently unrelated crimes had been solved.

****Lawrence, Kansas**

Sleeping Homeless Man Hit by Car and Killed

John Lowe, 38, was sleeping in an alley behind Community Mercantile when a car hit and subsequently killed him. Police responded when Lowe's body was found lying in a gutter along Mississippi Street, and authorities stated that he apparently had been dragged about 200 feet before his body dislodged from the run-away vehicle. Police initially had no suspects in the homicide and eventually narrowed their search to 22-year-old Joshua Cree Mattocks in August 2000. Mattocks pleaded innocent to the crime in September 2000 but indicated his plea could change. He then pleaded no contest in March 2001. Mattocks' sentencing is scheduled for April 2001. Mattocks is charged with involuntary manslaughter "based on reckless action." When they interviewed Mattocks, police learned that he had been drinking alcohol before the accident. Mattocks told police he thought Lowe was a bag of trash but that he could tell it wasn't when he hit the victim. He didn't know what to do, and so he accelerated to dislodge Lowe from his vehicle.

****Raleigh, North Carolina**

Two Men Face Charges in Homeless Murder

Jamus Keith Potter, 20, and Michael Reddix, 19, will face charges of strong-arm robbery and first-degree murder in the beating death of Michael Charles Eadie, a homeless man who was staying at a downtown Raleigh motel. Police say that the two men entered Eadie's room on April 8, repeatedly punched and kicked him, and took a boom box and a jug of lemonade. Eadie later died from complications from injuries received during the assault.

****Santa Cruz, California**

Two Attacks on Homeless Reported, Accounts of More

According to the *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*, two homeless men were victims of an attack on Sunday, April 9, although the crime was not reported in the paper until Friday, April 14, potentially delaying the discovery of clues in the case.

Two eyewitnesses observed the victims, James "Boston" Leonard and Steve Dawson, being beaten with a metal pipe and pieces of wood. Leonard and Dawson were airlifted to Stanford Hospital for treatment.

According to Santa Cruz Police Department Sergeant Steve Clark, “We don’t know if they were targeted or had voluntarily gotten themselves into a confrontation.”

While Leonard continued to recover from the attack in Stanford Hospital, another homeless man was reportedly stabbed while he slept in a park. Eyewitnesses reported that the victim, Brad Mills, was handcuffed by police and taken into custody despite his injuries. He was also airlifted to Stanford Hospital for treatment.

At a meeting of the Homeless Issues Task Force, other incidents of police misconduct against homeless people were reported. According to one account, an officer beat a homeless man across the face with his flashlight. Another homeless man was reportedly beaten by a group of young people along a set of railroad tracks. Also, another wheelchair-bound homeless man reported having been kicked and punched from behind by an officer in early April.

March

****Chicago, Illinois**

FBI Opens Investigation in Police Shooting of Homeless Man

In June, the Federal Bureau of Investigation opened a preliminary inquiry into the police shooting of a homeless man, Arthur Earl Hutchinson. Chicago Police shot Hutchinson to death near the Chicago Transit Authority’s Addison “L” stop station on March 16.

Mr. Hutchinson’s mother, Pauline Underdown, is still seeking answers in his death. Mrs. Underdown was prevented from seeing her son’s body at the hospital and was only allowed to view it at the morgue. Though she made numerous requests for information, she received none--not even the name of the police officer involved in the shooting.

The officer had been called to remove Hutchinson from the station after CTA security twice asked him to leave for panhandling and being disruptive. Hutchinson was shot once in the chest after allegedly lunging at the officer with a shiny silver object. The object later turned out to be a fork.

Prior to Hutchinson’s death, the CTA and City Department of Human Services announced a policy to identify and remove homeless people from CTA property. In their media statements, CTA officials blamed homeless people for recent crimes on CTA property.

February

****Peoria, Illinois**

Death of Homeless Man in Police Custody Accidental

The Peoria County Coroner's jury ruled in March that the death of a homeless man in police custody was accidental, but said it was impossible to tell what caused the death.

Eugene K. Pitchford, 43, died of asphyxiation while being restrained by officers. An employee said Pitchford became upset when he tried to turn in a bag of aluminum cans and was told the center was closed. Police were called to the recycling center. When police arrived, Pitchford ran. Police said they chased and tackled him. During a struggle with three officers, Pitchford was sprayed with pepper spray and repeatedly struck with a baton, according to police reports. A fourth officer helped to handcuff Pitchford, who fell unconscious as officers tried to lift him to his feet.

A review by county prosecutors did not result in any charges.

"I'm not satisfied with this answer," said Pitchford's uncle, Charles Walls. "I didn't expect no different."

****San Diego, California**

DA Concludes Police Were Justified in Shooting Homeless Man

Three police officers fatally shot a homeless man who reportedly threatened them with a sharp tree branch during a confrontation outside a restaurant in February. The homeless man, William Anthony Miller, 42, had a history of mental illness. According to District Attorney Paul Pfingst, the officers were justified because state law allows police to use deadly force to protect themselves from the threat of death or serious injury.

Miller was reportedly shot seven times by the officers outside a McDonald's restaurant after he refused to drop the three-foot branch he used as a walking stick and lunged at one of the officers.

Pfingst added, however, that a barking police dog might have contributed to the deadly turn taken when it startled Miller into running directly at officers. The dog's handler positioned the dog behind Miller rather than behind the officers as suggested by Police Department policy.

The three officers, who had been on administrative duties since the shooting, returned to street patrols after the June ruling.

****San Jose, California
Man Held in Slaying of Homeless Man**

A man was arrested for the beating death of a homeless man whose body was discovered in the Pajaro River in February.

Jose Mendoza Flores, 33, was questioned after the body of an acquaintance, Julio Ayala Mendez, was found in shallow water under the Pajaro Bridge on February 3. An autopsy revealed that Mendez died after being struck over the head several times with a blunt object.

Mendez was homeless and known to frequent a spot under the bridge where homeless people often gather.

January

****Kissimmee, Florida
Homeless Man Set on Fire**

A homeless man reported to police that he was set on fire after trying to sell a gold necklace to four men on the street on January 9.

Earl Lawrence, 34, reported that the men poured gasoline on the necklace after throwing it on the ground. When he attempted to put the fire out, one of the suspects poured gasoline on him and set him on fire.

Lawrence remained at the hospital in stable condition with third-degree burns to his legs, back, and buttocks.

****Raleigh, North Carolina
Homeless Man Beaten to Death**

On January 13, a homeless man was found beaten to death and lying in a pool of his own blood on a cement platform near an abandoned industrial building. According to police, the man had been clubbed over the head several times with a blunt object.

The man was apparently one of a number of homeless people who frequented the area where he was murdered. Police were not sure what triggered the attack.