

# Notes on the social crisis in America

Naomi Spencer  
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## One dead, 20 hurt in Mississippi prison riot

A riot at a for-profit prison in Natchez, Mississippi left a guard dead and at least 20 other people injured Sunday. The unrest began early Sunday afternoon at the Adams County Correctional Facility, a private prison holding undocumented immigrants, after a fight allegedly broke out among members of rival gangs. The violence expanded through the night to a melee involving as many as 300 of the 2,500 inmates. More than two dozen guards were reportedly held hostage.

The prison is run by Corrections Corp. of America, one of the largest private prison companies in the US. The corporation is notorious for its cost-cutting, poor conditions, and brutality against prisoners. On May 16, the American Civil Liberties Union issued a damning report on conditions in CCA-run immigrant detention centers in Georgia, where prisoners suffer a “systemic violation of... civil and human rights while detained in substandard prison-like conditions ill suited for civil detainees.” (See, “Report details abuse at Georgia immigrant detention centers”)

Most of the inmates have been convicted only for their undocumented status and are held in low-security cells. “The big problem is CCA tries to cut corners in every possible way,” Frank Smith of the Private Corrections Working Group said in response to the riot. “They short-staff, they don’t fix equipment, and things just get more and more out of control, and that’s what leads to these riots. It’s just about maximizing short-term profits.”

## Homeless tent cities leveled in St. Louis and Philadelphia, banned in Denver

A string of riverfront tent cities north of St. Louis, Missouri have been leveled by bulldozers in the past week, displacing scores of homeless residents with nowhere to go. Homeless advocates and churches have said their facilities are already overwhelmed with need. One church, the New Life Evangelistic Center, has leased a parcel of land to allow homeless people to temporarily rebuild dwellings.

City officials responded to the move, “almost shocked,” according to local Fox News channel KTVI, by attempting to ban homeless camps. “Why in the world would you even think about replicating a tent city?” human services director Bill Siedhoff said. “That is absolutely unnecessary. It’s unlawful, and it’s never gonna happen in the city of St. Louis.”

The largest tent city, called Hopeville, was formed in 2010 after homeless people were forced out of an old tunnel system that the city filled in.

“As a great community we would help these people,” Mark Schulte, an attorney who owns property near the razed camp commented to the *Post-Dispatch*. “The banks in our nation and community have been bailed out and are sitting on tens of thousands of vacant housing units.”

Earlier this month, a large tent city north of Philadelphia was ordered dismantled by police to make way for the construction of a warehouse. “I have nowhere else to go,” 46-year-old John Haacke told a *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter. “I get \$200 a month from welfare, I’m looking for a job, and I’m living within my means. I can’t find any place to rent for that kind of money. Nobody wants you—you become a misfit.” Haacke was laid off from IBM, where he had worked as a computer network specialist.

“I don’t need medication, I’m not on disability, I get \$200 in food stamps a month, that’s it,” 51-year-old Scott Brookshire explained. “You’re told you can look for work, but I have no transportation to get there. Give me a bus pass so I can get around.” The local homeless shelter has 80 beds, but there is a waiting list to get in.

Tent city resident Jim Sandonato told the *Inquirer* his wife found themselves homeless in January after being evicted from their apartment. They lived in their car until it broke down. Sandonato lost his welding job of 13 years in 2009. The couple's three children were put in foster care a year ago.

In Denver on Thursday, Mayor Michael Hancock signed an ordinance banning camping within the city. The City Council approved the ban May 14 "in the face of an angry crowd that taped dollar bills to their mouths, chanted 'shame' after the 9-4 vote and staged a sit-in outside the chambers," the *Denver Post* reported.

Denver's homeless population has spiked in the past few years, to more than 12,000, 28 percent of whom sleep unsheltered on the streets.

### Job fairs draw hundreds

Some 550 people turned out for a few dozen openings offered at a Salem, Oregon job fair Friday. The positions are at a new assisted living community for the elderly, most of them low-wage housekeeping, food service or other support staff jobs beginning at \$8.80 per hour.

"Either I am old and unemployable, or there's a lot of people looking for work," Gregory Ellison, a 55-year-old applicant for a maintenance job told the *Statesman Journal* newspaper. Ellison said he had submitted 250 résumés in the past year, and gotten five interviews but no job.

Two days earlier, a similar scene played out in Everett, Washington, when 300 people arrived within the first hour of a job fair hoping to apply for an aerospace industry job. The Everett *Herald* noted that job seekers began lining up at 7 a.m., three hours before the doors opened.

"By 10:30 a.m., parking was scarce and the line of people waiting to get into the job fair wrapped around the side of the building. ... The line to talk to Boeing's representative was 100 people deep by 11 a.m." The paper noted that rather than conducting interviews on the spot, the company was "steering job applicants to its online system for future consideration."

Some applicants said they had been scouring the area for a job since January, when the Everett Kimberly-Clark paper and pulp mill closed down. The closure put 750 residents out of

work, many of the older workers. and

### Tennessee facing dental health epidemic

A new survey by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveals that the number of Tennesseans who visited a dental clinic or dentist fell 10 percent between 2005 and 2010, and at least 55 percent of the state's adult population have lost at least one permanent tooth.

A staggering 20 percent of Tennesseans under age 65 have lost *six or more* teeth to dental problems, a study by the Commonwealth Fund found.

Such figures express the consequences of cuts to Medicaid programs across the country in the past two decades. Tennessee is one of six states that do not cover dental care for Medicaid recipients. Because of the lack of access to preventive care, tens of thousands of Tennesseans have no choice but to seek help for dental problems at hospital emergency rooms. In 2009, over 53,000 people visited an ER for a dental emergency in the state.

Nearly every county in southeastern Tennessee is classified by the federal government as an underserved dental area, meaning they have less than one dentist per 50,000 residents.

Nationwide, one in four people enrolled in public programs went without needed dental care in 2010, according to a recent study by the Urban Institute, published in the journal *Health Affairs*. Overall, 20 percent of adults under the age of 65 had an "unmet medical need" because of health care costs, according to the study. (See, "One in five Americans had 'unmet medical needs' in 2010")



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