

# Notes on the social crisis in America

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## 38 applicants per every job opening at Washington DC Walmarts

Ahead of the opening of two new Walmart stores in the US capital, local NBC channel 4 News reports more than 23,000 people have applied for 600 low-wage positions.

*Business Insider* magazine commented that applicants “face worse odds than people trying to get into Harvard.”

Most of the jobs will pay the new local minimum wage of \$8.50 an hour. The rate was raised by a quarter recently after DC Mayor Vincent Gray vetoed a “living wage” bill that would have increased minimum wage to \$12.50 an hour.

The flood of Walmart applications is indicative of the job shortage that continues across the country more than five years after the onset of the economic crisis.

\* A Camden, New Jersey ceremonial ribbon-cutting ceremony October 14 drew a line-up of hundreds of people hoping to apply on the spot for a proposed Act Industries manufacturing housing factory. The city’s unemployment rate is 20 percent.

\* More than 1,200 people lined up in Wetumpka, Alaska last month hoping to land a job at the Poarch Creek Indian casino. Many began arriving at 4:30 in the morning. Jobs included serving and hotel cleaning, most with menial wages.

\* In Raleigh, North Carolina, 600 job seekers flooded a career fair within two hours November 14. The state’s real unemployment rate, including the federally defined “discouraged” and “marginally attached” workers, stands at 15.6 percent.

\* Hundreds of job seekers in Salisbury, North

Carolina waited for hours through cold and windy weather November 13 to apply for 170 jobs promised by Gildan Yarns. The *Salisbury Post* featured photos of people sitting on the concrete, filling out forms. Some expressed frustration at having applied for dozens of jobs in the past year without securing a face-to-face interview.

## Youth “disconnection” soars in urban centers

A new report on young Americans neither in school nor working found that 5.8 million youth—one in seven—in the 25 largest metropolitan areas are socially and economically “disconnected.” Over 800,000 more people between the ages of 16 and 24 joined this category between 2007 and 2010.

The Measure for America report identified Phoenix, Arizona as the worst off, with a youth disconnection rate of 18.8 percent. Many neighborhoods within metro areas were even worse. In Southeast Washington DC, the youth disconnection rate stood at more than one in three. Areas in the South Bronx had 35.6 percent of youth in neither desk nor job.

## Infant mortality rate rises in Alabama

Alabama’s infant mortality rate rose to 8.9 per 1,000 in the past year, a sign of worsening health and economic conditions for newborns and their mothers. The state ranks last in the country, tying with neighboring Mississippi, and on par with developing countries in terms of neonatal health.

Nationally, 6 in every 1,000 babies born this year will die within the first year of birth.

Alabama Department of Public Health statistics indicate that babies born to uninsured mothers had mortality rates of 22.7 per 1,000. Medicaid recipients saw an infant mortality rate of 9.7 per 1,000.

By comparison, the infant mortality rate of Sri Lanka—a country decimated by colonialism and decades of civil war—is estimated at 9.24 per 1,000.

Alabama's health department found that low-birth-weight babies in the state fared drastically worse, with a mortality rate of 62.1 per 1,000. This means that roughly one in every 16 babies born weighing under 5.5 pounds do not live to see their first birthday.

In 2012, some 6,000 babies born in the state were low-birth-weight. Nationally, the rate of low birth weight is half that of Alabama.

Low birth weight is associated with poor maternal health, such as smoking and diabetes, lack of health care, poor environment, and teenage pregnancy. Fundamentally, poverty is the prime source of poor maternal health. Alabama health experts pointed specifically to drug addiction, malnutrition, "lack of weight gain" and "exposure to air pollution."

## **Fatigued trucker sentenced to 20 years in prison for fatal crash**

An Illinois semitruck driver whose tractor-trailer struck a line of backed-up traffic on Interstate 80 in Nebraska last year was sentenced to 20 years in prison. The crash killed an entire family, including two children, their father and pregnant mother.

The trucker, 37-year-old Josef Slezak, was determined to have fallen asleep at the wheel after 15 hours of driving. The traffic standstill was caused by another fatal accident, also involving two other tractor-trailers.

Driver fatigue is a leading cause of trucking accidents, which are responsible for some 3,000 fatal highway accidents in the US each year, according to the federal Department of Transportation. Federal law sets average workweeks at 70 hours, and 14-hour-day limits for truckers. Slezak had worked for an hour over the

limit.

A McClatchy News analysis of a broader category of accidents comprising those involving trucks and buses found 320,000 crashes in 2011. A study sponsored by the Department of Transportation found 13 percent of commercial truckers involved in serious crashes were suffering from fatigue at the time.



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