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Tent Cities: An Interim Solution to Homelessness and Affordable Housing Shortages in the United States

Zoe Loftis-Farrel

Tent cities have reemerged in the public view as a result of economic depression and the housing crisis in recent years. Despite the growing number of tent cities and their homeless residents, these encampments have received almost no academic attention or analysis. This Comment seeks to open the dialogue on tent cities in the context of informal housing law and policy in the United States. By doing so, it provides background on homelessness, informal housing, and tent cities; explores the benefits derived from tent cities both for encampment residents and for local government actors; and also considers the ethical and legal constraints associated with homeless encampments. The Comment then explores innovative government responses that have allowed tent cities to survive and the social and political context in which tent cities exist, and the substandard conditions that many tent city residents endure, underscores the incoherence of the issue, and the importance of addressing encampments in a coherent, cohesive, and comprehensive manner.