

Ray Lumpp - Seattle's Tent Cities Are A Local Reflection Of Global Slum Housing Crisis

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Urban slums may seem like a distant problem only facing poor countries. But Seattle has a history of informal settlements all its own.

Tent cities have existed as emergency shelter for thousands of years, often amassing in the wake of natural disasters, political purges, wars and other human catastrophes. For example, the Great Depression caused unprecedented unemployment rates worldwide and forced many American families to live in shanty towns—known as “Hooverilles”—some of which still exist today as tent cities.

Around the world close to one billion people live in informal settlements or “slums.” By some estimates that population is expected to [double by 2030](#). Residents of slums live in extreme poverty despite being located in industrialized urban centers such as Rio de Janeiro, Istanbul, and Cape Town. Characterized by squalor, overcrowding, high crime rates, and a lack of basic human needs, slums are a more visible and permanent relative of the tent cities we have right here in the Northwest.

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