



Climate & Health Seminar Series



Climate Change from the Streets: How Conflict and Collaboration Strengthen the Environmental Justice Movement

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Presented by the Southern California Environmental Health Sciences Center, the USC Institute on Inequalities in Global Health, the USC Spatial Sciences Institute and by The Equity Research Institute

Although the science of climate change is clear, policy decisions about how to respond to its effects remain contentious. Even when such decisions claim to be guided by objective knowledge, they are made and implemented through political institutions and relationships—and all the competing interests and power struggles that this implies. Michael Méndez tells a timely story of people, place, and power in the context of climate change and inequality. He explores the perspectives and influence low-income people of color bring to their advocacy work on climate change. In California, activist groups have galvanized behind issues such as air pollution, poverty alleviation, and green jobs to advance equitable climate solutions at the local, state, and global levels. Arguing that environmental protection and improving public health are inextricably linked, Mendez contends that we must incorporate local knowledge, culture, and history into policymaking to fully address the global complexities of climate change and the real threats facing our local communities.

Dr. Michael Mendez is an assistant professor of environmental policy and planning at the University of California, Irvine and Visiting Scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR). He previously was the inaugural James and Mary Pinchot Faculty Fellow in Sustainability Studies and Associate Research Scientists at the Yale School of the Environment. Michael has more than a decade of senior-level experience in the public and private sectors, where he consulted and actively engaged in the policymaking process. This included working for the California State Legislature as a senior consultant, lobbyist, a member of the California State Mining & Geology Board, and as vice chair of the Sacramento City Planning Commission. In 2021, California Governor Gavin Newsom appointed Dr. Mendez to the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board. The board regulates water quality in a region of 11 million people.

During his time as a scholar, he has contributed to state and national research policy initiatives, including serving as an advisor to a California Air Resources Board member, and as a coauthor of the U.S. Global Change Research Program's study on "Climate Vulnerability and Social Science Perspectives." Michael is a member of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's Board on Environmental Change and Society (BECS), a coauthor for the forthcoming National Academies of Sciences' consensus study, "Accelerating Decarbonization in the United States: Technology, Policy, and Societal Dimensions," and a coauthor of the upcoming National Climate Assessment (NCA5), the U.S. Government's premier report on climate change impacts, risks, and adaptation across the Nation (a Congressionally mandated, interagency effort).

His new book "Climate Change from the Streets," published through Yale University Press (2020), was the winner of the Harold and Margaret Sprout Award, sponsored by the International Studies Association (ISA) and the Betty and Alfred McClung Lee Award by the Association for Humanist Sociology; and a finalist for the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning's John Friedmann Book Award.

Friday, October 8th, 2021

1:00 pm - 2:00 pm PST

[Click here for Zoom Link](#)

For questions, please contact Domenica Romaniello (romaniel@usc.edu)