

# USC Price

## *Urban Growth Seminar*

*Top Practitioners—Engaging Research—Innovative Responses*

### ***"Creating Space for Democratic Practice for Power and Agency in the Metropolis"***

**Speaker: Ernesto Cortes**

**National Co-Director (Industrial Areas Foundation)**

**Adjunct Professor (USC Price School)**



Ernesto Cortes, Jr. is the National Co-Director of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), a non-profit organization founded in Chicago by the late Saul Alinsky. Cortes' affiliation with the IAF began in 1972 with attendance at the organization's training institute in Chicago. After training, Cortes worked with IAF leaders in Wisconsin and Indiana for a year before moving to San Antonio, his native city, where he founded the Communities Organized for Public Service, COPS, the well-known and highly effective church-based grassroots organization. In the following years, Cortes helped found other community based organizations in cities throughout Texas and the southwest to what is now called

the West / Southwest IAF Network. Under Cortes' supervision, the organizations of the network have developed successful initiatives in the areas of job training, economic development, citizenship and education. In the mid-80s, Cortes and the network envisioned and launched an innovative public education initiative, called the Alliance School Initiative, to engage communities in school restructuring and reform. The Alliance School Initiative, as well as the other accomplishments of the network, has been written about in several books and articles. Cortes has received numerous awards and fellowships for his work, including most recently the H. J. Heinz Award for Public Policy and an appointment as a Martin Luther King Visiting Professor at MIT in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning.

Description of the lecture: The undeniable polarization and cynicism pervading our nation's political landscape is explained in the dominant culture by two competing narratives: Our democracy is in disarray either due to the moral failure and cynicism of the elite (and the acquiescence and materialistic culture of the rest of us) or because of the concentration of wealth and its corrosive effect on our political institutions. But neither explanation encompasses the decline of the intermediary institutions in which we are taught the habits and practices requisite for a vibrant democratic culture. Alexis de Tocqueville, an early observer of American political life, was the first to understand the important role of institutions in American politics and the first to link them to the kind of culture requisite for the functioning and survival of democracy. In studying American politics, Tocqueville developed a concern for what he called the Augustinian Soul in American life -- the tension between an inclination toward self-absorbed narcissism and, at the same time, a tendency to overreach in an attempt to dominate. The Industrial Areas Foundation builds "universities of public life" in which diverse groups of people can learn the habits and practices necessary to engage one another across lines of race and class to create a vibrant democracy.

**Discussant: Terry Cooper**

**The Maria B. Crutcher Professor in Citizenship and Democratic Values, USC Sol Price School of Public Policy**

Date:

Tuesday,

**Oct. 20**

**12:15-1:30pm**

Location

**Lewis Hall (RGL),**

**Room 101**

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