

### Call for Papers

## ***Natural Catastrophes in the United States – Making Sense of Risks and Vulnerability***

30. June - 02. July 2022

Heidelberg Center for American Studies, Heidelberg University

Unlike many other Western industrialized nations, the United States has long been highly vulnerable to large-scale natural catastrophes, which take place in many regions of the country on a regular basis. Hurricanes and tropical storms, followed by storm surges and flooding, tornadoes, winter storms, droughts, forest fires, or earthquakes are all common occurrences in the U.S. But despite being confronted with these devastating events on a regular basis, the U.S. has struggled to mitigate their effects. In fact, the U.S. displays a broad spectrum of reactions to these events ranging from the recognition of vulnerability, working towards more resilience, all the way to denial of the many risks that natural catastrophes pose. One aspect in this debate are the more visible effects from the changing climate. However, drawing from an interdisciplinary perspective, this conference aims to investigate an array of **specific U.S.-American factors** regarding **society, population shifts, the political system, or the economy** that distinguishes the American experience from that of other countries dealing with natural catastrophes. Additionally, we want to examine the **specific societal and cultural response** as well as the **specific discourses engaged with natural catastrophes** in the U.S. Therefore, this conference will address questions such as:

- What are the main reasons for high risks and vulnerability to natural catastrophes in the U.S.?
- Why have damages and losses from natural catastrophes in the U.S. risen over time and what role do factors like natural environment, population movement, public policy, political institutions and processes, and the overall economic development play?
- Are there specific examples for more, or less risk exposure and risk mitigation in the U.S.?
- How could risks and vulnerability be addressed by political and economic actors and institutions and why has risk mitigation been so weak in many cases in the U.S.? How could these challenges be addressed in the future?
- How is society reacting and responding to natural catastrophes? Which groups in society are most affected? What role does the racial or ethnic, as well as socio-economic background play?
- What role does social/regional/income/wealth inequality play?
- How are risks and vulnerability to natural catastrophes anticipated, perceived, and received in different communities?
- What cultural/media/societal discourses can be identified around this topic?
- How do risk, vulnerability and actual events translate into cultural production?

In the conference *Natural Catastrophes in the United States – Making Sense of Risks and Vulnerability*, organized by the Heidelberg Center for American Studies (HCA), we are aiming to explore the risks and vulnerability to natural catastrophes in the U.S. from a truly interdisciplinary perspective. Therefore, **we are welcoming contributions from various fields such as (but not limited to) political science, sociology, economics, risk management, geography, history, environmental studies, religious studies, cultural studies, media studies, or literary studies**. Researchers outside of these fields as well as doctoral students and early-career researchers are also welcome to apply!

Please send an abstract in PDF format of no longer than **400 words and a short biography** to [nrauscher@hca.uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:nrauscher@hca.uni-heidelberg.de). The conference will take place in Heidelberg on June 30 – July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022, or, if not possible, as an online conference.

At the conference, we will ask participants to present their findings in **short presentations**. Additionally, **we will ask presenters to submit short working papers before the conference**. The conference and working papers will be the basis for a possible publication on the topic.

For further information see the [HCA Website](#) or follow us on Twitter: [@hcaheidelberg](#)