Anchorage, Alaska’s Delaney Park Strip: Knots of political memory and hierarchies of trauma

Delaney Memorial Park, or “Delaney Park Strip” in downtown Anchorage, Alaska is a historically important former airstrip and wildfire break and current central public park. While the city takes pride in its multiculturalism as site of the two most diverse public school districts in the United States, its various communities’ claims to Alaskan identity remain muffled. Vigorous assertions of Anchorage’s deep “American-ness” dominate, given the state’s mere 60 years of statehood and great distance from the political center of the country. The assorted memorials in the park, particularly for military veterans and Martin Luther King, Jr., and their arrangement demonstrate public contestations around identity and memory. Drawing on print media, ethnographic observation, and semi-structured interviews with Anchorage residents, I examine Native Alaskan and veteran performances related to these identities. Using Michael Rothberg’s concept of “knots of memory” and a case study from Anny Curtius’ work on post contact sites of memory in Martinique as theoretical sources, I begin to loosen the tangles of meaning around historic trauma experienced by Anchorage’s military veteran, indigenous, and African American communities that public, political memory-making practices at the park enact and enshrine in hierarchy.

2:30pm in 27 Macbride Hall
November 1st, 2019