

BARBRA MEEK

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

LINGUISTICS AND THE FIERCE URGENCY OF NOW

In Martin Luther King Jr.'s anti-war speech, "Beyond Vietnam," he called upon his audience to act; "We are now faced with the fact, my friends, that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late. Now let us begin. Now let us rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter, but beautiful, struggle for a new world" (given April 4, 1967). Fifty years later his words still resonate.

Within linguistics, language endangerment is one of the most striking situations in which "the fierce urgency of now" confronts us. Drawing from my own research in Native America, from documenting an endangered language (Kaska, a vital Athabaskan language) to analyses of public representations and performances of Native American languages, I sketch out some of the key ways in which a linguistic approach can be, and has been, impactful. I conclude by reflecting on the contributions, real and potential, that linguistics offers for addressing "the fierce urgenc[ies] of now" within and beyond its disciplinary borders.



31st JANUARY 2018
1:30 – 2:30 PM
235 GATTON