For decades, Central America has been the most violent non-combat zone in the world. The *Mara Salvatrucha* and 18thStreet, the world’s largest transnational gangs (or *maras*), have become the spectacular face of this violence. Born out of histories of state terror, migration and US deportation, these gangs have evolved into brutal organizations engaged in extortion, contract killings and the drug trade.

Based on years of fieldwork inside Central American prisons, gang-dominated neighborhoods and migration routes to the United States, Dr. Fontes illuminates how the *maras* became public enemy #1. However, the *maras* are not the problem, and the problem does not begin or end with them. By providing cover for a host of others feeding and feeding-off extreme peacetime violence, the *maras* are in fact essential for creating a sense of order in the midst of chaos. In this talk, Dr. Fontes will explore how these gangs have become so crucial for making and mooring collective terror in Central American cities while tracing the ties that bind this violence to those residing in far safer environs.

Bio: Anthony W. Fontes is a human geographer and ethnographer. His scholarship focuses on theories of violence, illicit economies, prison worlds, human rights and Latin America. For the last seven years, his research has explored the evolution of transnational gangs, or *maras*, to understand how they became Central America’s public enemy #1.