

Unit 1: Video 1 Transcript

Q1: Introduction

A: My name is John Lutz, and I teach history here at the University of Victoria. And my principal area of research is the History of Racism, History of Aboriginal–Settler Relations.

Q2: What are the key themes in your field?

A: The key themes in my field, in my field if you like, is the history of race and is within that, Indigenous–settler relations. The key themes is the discovery, I guess, in the last few decades that race is an invention. That race doesn't exist, and this is a result of, I guess, new scientific research that people are able to do, genetic research after the Second World War. We went looking for the race gene, what makes whites different from blacks and Asians and Indigenous peoples. And when the scientists went looking, they could find nothing. There's nothing there. We all exist on a continuum of skin colour, of hair texture, of bone structure. And so scientists decided that if you want to divide the world up, there are some clear categories. Some of us have a blood type, and others have another blood type. And that's definitive. You're in one category or another. Some people have blue eyes, and some people have green eyes. You can divide people up that way. But race doesn't work as a division.

And so when we start to go looking for—well, then why do we organize our world along the lines of race? We find, as with so many things, the answer is historical. We go back into history and we find that race didn't actually exist as a word until the 18th century. And in the 18th century it comes out of animal breeding and—actually 17th century. It comes out of animal breeding and comes together with new discoveries, as Europeans are now spreading out around the world, voyages of exploration, and coming across strange peoples and strange phenomenon.

And so actually a guy called Blumenbach invented this idea of Caucasian as being the best race in the world. He noticed that he thought the most beautiful women in the world came from the Caucasus regions of Russia. And so he called the white race, Caucasians. And he created a hierarchy with other races below the whites. And this was very useful and seized upon at the time because it allowed Europeans, who were spreading over the world to say, well: "We're superior to those other people we're encountering. And they don't seem to be using all the land. And so because we're superior; we

have civilization, they don't; we can take that from them." And so race became a very convenient justification for, if you like, theft on a grand scale.

And so that applies to North America and South America. Europeans arrived here. They said, "Oh, there are people here, but we're going to legally call this an empty land, because these people aren't civilized. And they are on this racial category well below us." Well, now we realize what a story that was, what a myth that was. But still, race is almost hard-wired into our vocabulary and our social structure, and it's going to take a long time for this kind of, if you like, "scholarly appreciation of race" to kind of work its way out into the community. But you see it happening all around us all the time with people. It used to be that you would never marry across your racial boundaries. And fortunately today a lot of those taboos have broken