

Unit 12: Video 1 Transcript

Introduction:

A: Hello, my name is Cecilia Morgan. I'm a professor in the Department of Curriculum Teaching and Learning at the University of Toronto, and I also teach in the Department of History here. I teach graduate courses in the history of gender and education Canada, the history of commemoration and memory in Canada, and also the history of colonialism, nationalism and gender in the British Empire. And at the undergraduate level I teach a course in Upper Canadian history, creating a settler society, and I also teach a course in the history of commemoration and memory in Canada. And my research-- right now, I've got two books in progress that deal with the history of commemoration and memory, public history, in Canada from the 1860's to the 1980's. I'm finishing off a manuscript on the travels of indigenous people from British North America to Britain and beyond from the 1770's to 1914. And I'm currently researching a project on English-Canada actresses and transnationalism from 1860 to 1940.

Q: Why was commemoration important in the 19th century?

A: Why do I think commemoration is important as a study of subject-- for historians and perhaps even more broad, you know, more broadly at a time right now when we're being bombarded with messages about commemoration from the federal government after-- in the aftermath of 1812 or now leading into World War I. One of the reasons I became very interested and intrigued in this area was the growth of all the-- different historical societies, for example, in Ontario in the late 19th century. And it seemed to me that the more I looked at these societies' activities or the activities of individuals, the role that history played as a form of social knowledge for these people, the importance it placed upon knowing about their past, however we might characterize what they knew about their past. But the importance of the past to them is a way of anchoring themselves, obviously in time. But also in space as well, space and place. And their desire for history. So I have seen, you know, I've argued that in many ways the desire to commemorate was a desire to exercise power. So that elites, for

example, were-- had been extremely interested in determining the shape of knowledge about the past and society, whether that's through large-scale pageants or writing of textbooks. But I think it goes beyond that, because I've seen it reflected in groups who were not elite, who were not part of a dominant group. And who sometimes shared in the desire to, say, commemorate the War of 1812 or to commemorate the coming of the loyalists but did so for their own kinds of reasons. So they would sometimes come together with more powerful groups, but at the same time I've seen that they had their own reasons, their own kind of desires for the past. So for me it is very much, I mean, Raphael Samuel talked about this in *Theatres of Memory*, it's very much a form of knowledge that helps you determine who you are and who you are in relationship to other people. And it's sometimes in relationship to elements such as the landscape or the environment.

Q2: What are some examples of commemoration in the 19th and 20th century?

A: Yeah, in terms of the 19th and well into the 20th century, you can see across Canada various attempts to commemorate the past. I mean, there are larger scale pageants like the 1908 tercentenary of Champlain's landing in Quebec. Various examples in the Maritimes of the landing of the Loyalists held in St. John, for example, or the Planter pageants in the 1920's in Nova Scotia, all kinds of contestations in Newfoundland over where it was that John Cabot actually landed. And with the end result being that we don't really seem to know very clearly where that took place. In Southern Ontario I would say the formation of historical societies from the 1880's well into the 1930's, across a wide swath of the province, not just in larger cities and towns but in smaller places, rural Ontario. The erection of monuments is another place where you see very conscious efforts to commemorate a particular person or a particular event. Whether it's General Isaac Brock at Queenston, whether it's World War I monuments and I'm thinking here, too, about the Prairies. Francis Sarippa's work on the landscape of the Prairies points to the use of churches, shrines on people's property, commemoration that straddles both public and private lines that demonstrates how people sought to recreate or to remember a past from another country whether it's Ukraine or whether it's Poland or other places from Eastern Europe. So I see it running across the country. The writing of history at a very popular level, too, and a more recent example

would be someone like Pierre Burton and his works. But I see that in historical fiction in Canada and that stretches back to the early 19th century. So there's various attempts to create a past for one's self and then there's family histories and genealogies. We think of genealogy as being something that's very popular today but, in fact, if you look at the 19th century, whether it's creating the United Empire Loyalist genealogy, whether it's creating Acadian genealogies in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, it's again, sort of a very longstanding part of Canada's past.