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**TRADE-BASED MISUNDERSTANDINGS LED TO DESTRUCTION OF
FIRST NATIONS ECONOMY:**

Award-winning historian John Lutz upends conventional interpretations of Aboriginal-Settler relations to show how poverty in first nations communities ultimately arose from a crucial difference in language and world-view

In *Makúk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations*, University of Victoria historian John Lutz casts a fresh eye on our nation's colonial trade beginnings to explain how Canada's aboriginal people fell from prosperity to poverty in a relatively short period. Focusing on newcomer-aboriginal relations on Canada's northwest coast, Lutz argues that trade, for Europeans, meant nothing more than a simple exchange of one good or service for another. However, in Chinook jargon, the imprecise language of interaction among Europeans, Chinook, Nootka, and other aboriginal peoples, "trade" was translated as *makúk* – a word that meant, more loosely, "exchange," and encompassed not only trading, but also buying, selling, and other non-economic forms of reciprocity. Thus, what Europeans took as a straightforward concept was anything but for their aboriginal counterparts.

Nowhere was this difference in understanding more stark than in the idea of trading labour for pay. For Europeans, labour involved the subordination of nature and the accumulation of wealth, while aboriginal peoples lived in co-existence with nature and believed in sharing wealth through rites such as the potlatch. Using oral histories, manuscripts, newspaper accounts, and biography, *Makúk* demonstrates how this crucial difference, rooted in language itself, became the seed that led to the original pejorative myth of the "lazy Indian" -- one of the most persistent and damaging stereotypes ever applied to aboriginal peoples. With this mistaken characterization as justification, first nations people were disenfranchised from both their own traditional subsistence economy, as well as the Canadian capitalist and wage economies. Their compensation? Welfare payments that served to perpetuate the myth and further remove aboriginal people from their own self-sufficiency.

With *Makúk*, John Lutz offers us a new way to understand the fraught relationship between aboriginals and non-aboriginals. He proposes that for true communication to occur, we must recognize the fundamental misunderstanding that lay at the heart of native-settler interactions, where "what was given may not be what was received," and where something as fundamental as language contributed immeasurably to the impoverishment of native peoples. In exposing how this misunderstanding has been compounded into a century of discrimination, *Makúk* gives us the knowledge we need to start a new conversation that makes space for the differences in meaning, values, and culture that takes place in cross-cultural exchange.

John Sutton Lutz is a professor of history at the University of Victoria. He is a co-director of the extremely popular *Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History* initiative at canadianmysteries.ca, an innovative project that gets university and high school students involved in a unique way in the study and construction of history. He has won several awards for his work in making academic research accessible to the general public, and has published widely on Canadian Aboriginal history and anti-racism.

