

**Kwame and Cadillac: *Le plus ça change le plus c'est la même chose***  
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How eerie history can be in foreshadowing events that would take place hundreds of years later!

Mayor of Detroit Kwame Kilpatrick, already in jeopardy because of allegations that he lied in connection with a whistle-blower case, reportedly spewed violent and racist remarks and shoved a representative of the legal system on 24 July 2008, ironically the 307<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Detroit in 1701. (There were no formal celebrations to mark the day.) Then he violated the terms of his bond by illegally traveling across the Detroit River to Windsor, Ontario; and he was jailed on 7 August, his bond was increased, and he was issued a tether so that his whereabouts could be monitored.

Although not a mayor of Detroit, Antoine Laumet, who used the name de Lamothe, *sieur* de Cadillac, served as commandant of Fort Pontchartrain *du Détroit du Lac Érié*, the first French settlement there, from 1701 to 1710. His appointment to lead the first convoy to establish what became the City of Detroit was clouded by a judicial case in which he had been accused of illegal and immoral activity during his tenure as commandant of Michilimackinac from 1694 to 1697. He even insulted and physically assaulted a Jesuit priest there. He made a fortune through supplying the Native Americans with (illegal) *eau de vie* (brandy). And a court case alleged that he robbed two of the hired men at Michilimackinac of their trade goods and personal possessions. As a “favorite” of the Minister of the Marine in France, Pontchartrain, Lamothe Cadillac escaped relatively unscathed from those accusations, because he threatened to appeal to the court in France (his right at the time), although one “whistle-blower” was technically granted relief in the case by being reimbursed for Cadillac’s illegal seizure of his property.

In 2008, Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox said, “In my almost 20 years as a prosecutor and now as attorney general, I cannot recall one case where someone ever assaulted a police officer as he or she tried to serve a witness.” (NY Times, 9 August 2008, p. A10.) Twenty years is a relatively short time. Others have commented that no mayor of Detroit, prior to Kilpatrick, had ever spent time in jail during his tenure.

Go back to 1704, three years into Fort Pontchartrain’s existence, and read about Lamothe Cadillac’s “assault” on and imprisonment of the representative of the Company for which Cadillac was under contract. This representative of the Company of the Colony of New France had been sent to investigate Cadillac’s alleged *malversations* (illegal activities) at the fort. After trying to appease the Indians, who allegedly refused to allow that season’s pelleteries to be sent down to the mother colony, Cadillac, leaving wife and family behind, boarded his canoe to return to Montréal and Québec City to present his defense. There he was promptly placed under house arrest for almost a year while the judicial system investigated the allegations against him. His wife and family joined him, returning in the official convoy sent to investigate the situation and to collect the pelleteries in September of 1704. Unfortunately, most of the documents recording the case have disappeared, but the commentary about it has not.

Once again, Cadillac threatened to appeal to France, saying his “judges” in New France were incompetent to rule in the case. Meanwhile, as the case was being deliberated, Cadillac’s appointment to be “Absolute Master” of the fort was made in 1704 but did not arrive from France until 1705 because the ship carrying it in 1704 had been pirated by the English. By 1705, since France and England were still at war and Fort Pontchartrain was a particularly important location at the time, the officials of New France bowed to the political pressures, essentially dropped the case against Cadillac, and prepared to support his appointment to return to the fort (what else could they do?). However, he did not return to the fort for a full year, not until the summer of 1706.

In 1708, a representative appointed by the king of France, traveled to Fort Pontchartrain to investigate the true state of affairs there. (Communication between New France and France took time. No telegraph,

telephone, or internet existed.) D'Aigremont's devastatingly negative report resulted in Cadillac being removed as commandant and appointed in 1710 to command at Mobile (*Louisiane*, now Alabama). He was to go there immediately overland. As he did not receive this command until late in 1710, he could not leave *Le Détroit* in wintertime; then, in the spring of 1711, he decided instead to travel back to the mother colony to bargain for the possessions and property he would be required to leave at the fort in the hands of its new commandant. Once again, his wife and children remained behind, not joining him until the fall, when Cadillac decided to go to France to appeal his removal from the fort.

He did not arrive in *Louisiane* until 1713. In 1715, he left his post, without telling his second-in-command, to travel to Illinois territory to investigate an alleged silver mine (that ended up being a lead mine). His arrogance and his failures at maintaining the local Indians in peace led to his removal from *Louisiane* in 1717. Once arrived in Paris, he was incarcerated in the Bastille with one of his sons, allegedly for having bad-mouthed the French settlement in *Louisiane*. Then he and his family lived out the rest of their lives appealing for the property he had once had at Fort Pontchartrain. He even bought the office of Mayor of Castelsarrasin with some of the proceeds of that appeal, serving only a few years as an undistinguished mayor and then dying there in 1730. His son Joseph, however, born at Fort Pontchartrain in 1702, continued his father's appeal to the land his father claimed at Le Détroit into the 1740s.

Étienne Véron, *fils*, the son, *sieur* de Grandmesnil, labored for his "old master," Cadillac, in connection with this appeal until his own death. In 1709, just days before Cadillac had appointed him as his *procurator* (gave him power of attorney) to take care of Cadillac's business back in the mother colony, Grandmesnil had been named as the father of the first illegitimate child recorded to have been born and baptized at the fort, on 24 July 1709 (yes, that founding date of 24 July, again!). The child was the daughter of widowed Marie Lepage, the only woman granted property at the fort. Grandmesnil fulfilled his responsibilities toward the child because she came to be known as Thérèse Véron and Thérèse Grandmesnil; but, when she married, it was to a first cousin, son of Grandmesnil's sister, and no dispensation was sought or recorded to allow these supposedly "blood" relatives to marry. (See my articles "Rush to Judgment?" in *MHH*, 2001 and the FCHSM website {Early Detroit page}.)

I cannot help but speculate that Grandmesnil "took the wrap" for Cadillac and that Cadillac was the true father of Thérèse. He may also have fathered another child, at Michilimackinac, Marie Anne Germaneau / Montour, who is said, at her Québec City marriage in 1730 (to a soldier from Castelsarrasin!), to be the daughter of Isabelle Couc *dite* Lafleur de Cognac, who was known by the 1720s as Madame Montour, of New York and Pennsylvania, and, allegedly, a man named *La Motte*, the phonetic spelling of the pronunciation of Lamothe. Scoundrels did not come into being in the 21<sup>st</sup> century!

I dread the possible parallels that may come to pass in Kwame's case. Will he, too, find loopholes and willing accomplices to prevent him from being accountable for his arrogance, greed, collusions, *malversations*, and sexual escapades?

The Ancient Greeks had it right when they wrote of *hubris*, overweening pride, a tragic flaw that can lead even exemplary individuals into disastrous consequences. Ah, both Kwame and Cadillac showed so much promise, at least for a little while.... *Le plus ça change le plus c'est la même chose...* The more things change the more it's the same thing...

P. S. I wrote the above in August of 2008. I have documentation for each statement about Cadillac. While I have not added any precise updates to Kwame Kilpatrick's saga since then, he was eventually convicted for his *malversations* and sentenced to prison, where he now resides. The announcement that he would be paroled, on 24 July 2011, the 310<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Detroit, added yet another bit of irony to the story. It was interesting to see how the legal problems he faced played out, because the more things change...