Exploring the 1701 Great Peace of Montreal and Its 2026 Celebration

Moderator: Randy Kritkausky MCLL Winter Term 2026-2027

NOTE ABOUT AI- I believe very strongly that MCLL is about human-created knowledge and wisdom, sharing such knowledge in community, and doing so for the benefit of humans. I make every possible effort to avoid AI generated "information" and never knowingly incorporate it into my study groups.

This Study Group will be partly an historical investigation, and partly a detective story. It includes a mystery surrounding one of the Indigenous protagonists, Kondiaronk, who died and was buried with state and ecclesiastical honors in Montreal's Notre Dame Basilica on the eve of signing The Great Peace. His corpse was exhumed and "disappeared" a century later. There is a fake "signature" on the Great Peace "Treaty" document, and a laundry list of scholarly and diplomatic distortions, misrepresentations and inventions reaching into the present. This not the dry history of your school days. It is more like a John le Carré novel with elements of an Agatha Christie mystery.

Topics list:

a) Deep background- Beaver Wars and internecine struggles among Indigenous Peoples; the fur trade, and why it mattered so much to the small settlement of Montreal
b) Montreal as the crossroads and as a flash point - how "land acknowledgements" tell only part of the story of a so called "meeting place" which was also contested territory in pre-contact times, after colonization and even today
c) The Map of the Players - beyond Montreal, the Nations of Pays d'en Haut
d) The leading players - Indigenous leaders and French authorities – Kondiaronk, Teganissorens, Callière
e) What was the role of French religious leaders?
f) Laying the ground work for negotiations - Chapter on "Delicate Negotiations" in Havard's *Planting The Tree of Peace"* pages 22-31
g) Conflicting aspirations of participants in 1701 negotiations
h) Captives and kinship complications as a stumbling block
i) Indigenous Peoples' voyages to Montreal - a dangerous journey
j) Negotiations and crises or near collapse of the negotiations
k) Finalizing the "Treaty" - was there a "final *document"* or something more like an understanding based on ceremony and Indigenous tradition?
l) The fiction of a "signed document" - Kondiaronk's posthumous totem "signature" and copies and changes made by French clerks
m) The many faces of Kondiaronk, his untimely (or fortuitous?) death, his hagiography and what these dimensions reveal about Indigenous history rewritten by settlers (Graeber and Wendow and romanticizing *les sauvages*)
n) Kondiaronk and the mystery of his missing body during the time of erasure
o) The continuing legacy of The Great Peace for Indigenous Peoples in the decades after 1701

p) How a Great Peace "celebration" was used to distract attention from the fact that 2026 is also the 150th anniversary of Canada's Indian Act, a nefarious piece of legislation that was the final settler attack on Indigenous culture and sovereignty
q) Canadian global leadership in convening international agreements – 350 years ago; in the twentieth century (e.g. Montreal Protocol on CFCs); and today - Carney on the world stage as a leader of Middle Powers in the 21st century – his Davos speech

Some recommended readings for critical economic and political background

While I strongly recommend a background text and a few brief online sources, I encourage you to investigate your own sources on the 1701 Great Peace of Montreal. At best you will do what MCLL study groups do so well - turn up little known and neglected facts. Even if you fall into one of many misconceptions about the 1701 Great Peace by travelling off the beaten path, you will be contributing to broadening our study group's understanding of the wide range of competing historical narratives concerning this event.

Beaver Wars article in Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beaver_Wars

Planting the Tree of Peace, by Gilles Havard, published by McCord Museum of Canadian History in 2001. 73 pages. This is highly recommended, as the Study Group material will be very difficult to navigate without the background in this book.

Available as an e-book through McGill's Library
Available in print at the Pointe-à-Callière Museum gift shop for $10
Available for free (ten copies) in the MCLL office lounge

The Great Peace of Montreal, by Gilles Havard, 297 pages – *the* scholarly text from which Havard drew information for the shorter McCord Museum publication. While lengthy, it is amazingly accessible. This book is for anyone wanting to dig deeper.

Do not hesitate to email me with questions before making a final decision about participating in this study group. Contact me at rkritkausky@ecologia.org

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