



Middle Atlantic Archaeological Conference (MAAC)

Statement in Support of the Montpelier Descendants Committee

April 1, 2022

The below signed members of the Executive Board of the Middle Atlantic Archaeological Conference (MAAC) are disheartened and disappointed in the recent decision made by [The Montpelier Foundation](#) (TMF) to break its previous commitment of shared governance with the [Montpelier Descendants Committee](#) (MDC). This recent action calls into question TMF's long-term goals regarding sound historical research and interpretation and commitment to ethical collaborative work.

For the past two decades, James Madison's Montpelier has been a model in collaborative, descendant-oriented research with powerful exhibits such as "[The Mere Distinction of Colour](#)" and their leadership in the development of "[The Rubric](#)" ("Engaging Descendant Communities in the Interpretation of Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites"), a way for historic sites to evaluate their own engagement with descendant communities. Such endeavors, and countless other initiatives by Montpelier's staff, culminated in the decision by TMF in June 2021 to [restructure their bylaws](#) to "establish equality with the Montpelier Descendants Committee in the governance of James Madison's Montpelier." Through this structural change, TMF was agreeing to structural parity with descendants of those who were enslaved on Montpelier and other plantations in Central Virginia, giving a real voice in governance of an historic plantation museum. These changes to the bylaws served as a model for other historic sites, illustrating TMF's commitment to the right of descendant groups to equal partnership in the interpretations of their ancestor's lives, including the landscapes, built environment, and material culture they left behind.

In a striking reversal, on March 25, 2022, TMF Board voted to [end their policy of shared governance](#) with MDC over the objections of not only the committee, but also [The National Trust for Historic Preservation](#) (which owns the property), Montpelier staff, and other historians, preservationists, and archaeologists. The TMF framed their decision as "broadening the pool of candidates from the descendant community, not just limiting ourselves to those who are favored by the committee" to serve on the board. However, as outlined in a recent [Washington Post article](#), TMF will now only consider MDC's recommendation, with no guarantees that the majority of Montpelier's enslaved descendants will have a voice on the board.

This recent action by TMF is not only a step backwards, it also threatens to sully the reputation the organization has for meaningful descendant collaboration and public interpretation of the multivocal aspects of this nation's history. The below signed members of the Executive Board of the Middle Atlantic Archaeological Conference urge The Montpelier Foundation to recommit to their 2021 agreement to structural parity with the Montpelier Descendants Committee.

Sincerely,

Lauren K. McMillan, Ph.D.
President

Crystal O'Connor
President-Elect

Sean McHugh
Recording Secretary

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Board Member at Large

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