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**James French Stepping Down from The Montpelier Foundation Board of Directors**

***Historic tenure of service included the establishment of equal co-stewardship between the Foundation and the Montpelier Descendants Committee***

Orange, VA – The Montpelier Foundation (TMF) announces that after a historic tenure of service on the Board of Directors, Mr. James French is stepping down.

While serving as Chairman of the board from 2022-2023, Mr. French pioneered the establishment of equal co-stewardship between the Board and the community of descendants of enslaved Africans, the first of its kind at a major museum and historic site in the United States. This unprecedented achievement has been lauded by museum professionals around the country, who have identified Montpelier's new leadership arrangement as a governance model to emulate.

Since assuming the role in May 2022, Mr. French transformed the organization by shepherding the first model of structural parity into existence and launching a new organizational strategy to realize its full potential. That strategy, The Four Pillars, is informed by research and work conducted by the descendant community, and has also been met with wide support and praise.

Mr. French's leadership resulted directly in Montpelier obtaining a \$5.8 million dollar grant from The Mellon Foundation to develop a memorial for those enslaved at Montpelier. While negotiating parity, French helped raise \$1 million from the Commonwealth of Virginia to support the first collaboration between Montpelier and the newly formed Montpelier Descendants Committee (MDC).

French's election as chairperson culminated a years-long effort to achieve the milestone of parity in the governance of Montpelier. Mr. French, a descendant, said, "I'm extremely proud of the monumental efforts by the board, staff, and descendants to ensure that Montpelier has become the first American institution and Founder site to have achieved equal co-stewardship with the descendants of the enslaved. After three years at the helm of the MDC and four years on the Montpelier board, including a one-year term as chair, I believe the time is right for me to focus on new challenges."

Hasan Kwame Jeffries, associate professor of history at The Ohio State University and formerly Vice Chair of Montpelier's board was appointed to succeed Mr. French as Chair at Montpelier's April board meeting. "We thank James for his dedication to Montpelier and for his leadership as Chair," said Jeffries.

In recognition of Mr. French's service and singular accomplishments, TMF has issued a formal proclamation highlighting his transformative impact:

**Proclamation of the Montpelier Foundation Board of Directors  
June 2023**

Whereas, James Albert French has been a persistent advocate of structural parity and a compelling spokesperson for the interests of American descendants of slavery in the presentation and programming of historic sites;

Whereas, Montpelier hosted the first National Summit on the Teaching of Slavery in 2018 and produced a set of nationally recognized best practices for historic sites, known widely as "the Rubric";

Whereas, James Albert French was instrumental in pioneering the first application of the Rubric and the founding of the Montpelier Descendant Committee, to which he was elected as founding chairman in 2019;

Whereas, James Albert French, as the founding chairman of the Montpelier Descendants Committee, raised \$1.3 million, manifesting his commitment to bridging the success of both parties towards parity;

Whereas, James Albert French, in the face of challenging negotiations and formidable obstacles, dedicated himself as a Montpelier Foundation Board member since 2019, conscientiously endeavored to secure the Board's acceptance and implementation of shared governance with the Descendants of the enslaved at Montpelier;

Whereas, due to James Albert French's dedication and leadership as both a member of the Montpelier Foundation Board and the Chair of the Montpelier Descendants Committee, the Board voted in favor of structural parity in June 2021, leading to the subsequent election of 11 distinguished representatives of the Montpelier Descendants Committee to join the Board in May 2022;

Whereas the newly constituted Montpelier Foundation Board elected James Albert French as its Chair;

Whereas, James Albert French, serving as Chair of the Board during the pivotal year of transition following the implementation of structural parity, successfully navigated Montpelier through financial difficulties and the absence of a permanent President;

Whereas, in close collaboration with Montpelier staff and the Montpelier Descendants Committee, James Albert French swiftly developed the Four Pillars, a transformative organizational and fundraising strategy designed to strengthen Montpelier's reputation as a leader in civic engagement, guide the plans for memorialization of the enslaved, facilitate a world-class visitor experience, and shape the national dialogue around the meaning of the United States Constitution and the context and experience of slavery;

Whereas, as Chair of the Montpelier Foundation Board, James Albert French demonstrated outstanding success in mobilizing financial resources for Montpelier, spearheading efforts to secure a \$5.8 million grant from the Mellon Foundation for the memorialization of the enslaved;

Whereas, thanks to James Albert French's leadership, Montpelier is an organization well positioned for future growth and national impact and influence;

Therefore, be it resolved that the Board of Directors of the Montpelier Foundation hereby expresses its sincere gratitude to James Albert French for his historic accomplishments on behalf of Montpelier, the Descendant Community and American democracy, and offers him its best wishes for future endeavors.