



April 4, 2022

NCPH Statement of support for the Montpelier Descendants Committee

The National Council on Public History (NCPH) urges The Montpelier Foundation (TMF) to rescind its March 25 decision to remove the Montpelier Descendants Committee (MDC) as the sole representative of the descendant community. This action reverses years of dialogue, collaboration, and trust-building between Montpelier and the members of the descendant community to develop an equitable approach to the interpretation of slavery that prized reconciliation and repair.

In the landmark June 2021 bylaws revision, TMF committed to achieving structural parity through descendant representation on the board. In making that commitment to shared governance, TMF recognized the essential right of members of the descendant community to participate in the decision-making about how their history is represented at the historic site. This recent decision undermines all previous efforts at reparative justice by preventing the members of the descendant community from selecting their own representation on the board. We acknowledge that critical engagement is difficult work, but one of the key points of such work is those who hold power and privilege sitting with their uncomfortable feelings created by truly listening to the voices of the descendants of the enslaved. The MDC represents those who were subjected to chattel enslavement, and their experiences, and the harmful generational legacy of enslavement, should be acknowledged and respected.

As public historians, the members of NCPH are committed to robust, respectful collaboration and co-creation with community members. For several years, NCPH held Montpelier up as an exemplar for the ways that the staff undertook the painstaking work of dialogue and relationship building with the descendant community to develop an approach to telling the history of enslavement at the site that more fully represented the lives of the enslaved individuals who lived and worked at the site. In 2018 we honored the exhibition *The Mere Distinction of Colour* with our Outstanding Public History Project Award, and [explored the process behind creating the exhibition with Montpelier's staff and MDC collaborators](#), sharing the work as a model for the field on *History@Work*. The continuing success of that work simply will not be possible without equitable, shared representation of the MDC within Montpelier's decision-making structures.