

Descendants Committee Announces 20 Esteemed Candidates for Montpelier Board

Calls on Foundation to Drop Delay Ploy and Seat New Members on May 16

ORANGE, VIRGINIA, USA, April 28, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Today the Montpelier Descendants Committee (MDC) announced a [slate of twenty candidates](#) who are ready to immediately fill nine



This is an important moment and the eyes of our nation are watching us as we embark upon an opportunity for healing. [...] We are prepared to do the work, beginning on May 16.”

Dr. Daina Ramey Berry, The University of Texas at Austin

open seats on the board of the Foundation that manages President James Madison’s historic estate. The candidates include highly accomplished professionals drawn from multiple fields, including history, law, politics, public policy, leadership theory and practice, journalism, finance, philanthropy, fundraising, dispute resolution, emerging technology, cultural heritage preservation, and museum management – fields central to the Foundation’s mission. All candidates have made clear, however, that they will not serve if The Montpelier Foundation treats them as second-class members by delaying granting them voting power after appointment.

Candidates include Soledad O’Brien, a multi-E Emmy-winning broadcast journalist; Reverend Cornell William Brooks, the current Harvard Kennedy School Professor and a former president and CEO of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); and DeAnna Dodds Cummings, program director at the \$2.8 billion McKnight Foundation.

MDC Chairman and Montpelier Foundation Board member James French stated, “These professionals will restore Montpelier’s reputation and elevate its programming beyond even prior successes. They will help us honor both the brilliance of the Constitution and the harsh truths of the exploitation of those invisible enslaved founders whose labors and knowledge enabled Madison’s successes and those of our Nation.”

MDC’s release of the candidate list constitutes its latest effort to resolve the leadership crisis that has engulfed Montpelier since March when the Foundation’s board voted to rescind its widely-celebrated promise to share governance with the MDC, the democratically-formed organization created to represent descendants of the families whom Madison enslaved and those of nearby plantations. The broken commitment has drawn the ire of top organizations throughout the history, museum, anthropology, archaeology, and related fields. Nearly 11,000 visitors and

donors have signed a petition supporting the MDC and Montpelier's staff, the latter of whom issued a second public statement on Monday. It describes the actions of their employer, which include firing senior staff who had spent more than twenty years building close relationships with the descendant community.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation today issued a [statement praising MDC's candidates](#) and concluding, "The time is now to end this public crisis by seating and welcoming these new volunteers for service as Directors immediately upon election, and without condition."

MDC's announcement challenges the public promise made on April 20 by the Foundation's embattled CEO Roy Young and by the board that if, by May 1, MDC provided a list of fifteen candidates from which to choose, the board would vote to install nine new board members. The appointments would achieve parity on the board: the expanded board will consist of twelve current Foundation members, twelve members nominated by MDC, and one designee from the National Trust for Historic Preservation. But there is a catch: the Foundation promised to vote on MDC's nominees in May, but will deny more than half of them power to vote until October.

This ploy would preserve the current board's ability to retaliate against staff and to abandon any commitments they have made under the pressure of intense public attention. In the face of widespread criticism of its offer, the Foundation yesterday shut down the ability for the public to comment across all of its social media platforms and has cancelled all public events.

The Foundation's justifications for wanting to delay empowering new directors have engendered more charges of racial bias. Board Vice Chairman Peter McHugh told staff in a meeting last Monday that any MDC-nominated candidates would require time to come up to speed before earning the ability to vote. CEO Young told the New York Times that the commencement of "board members' terms would be staggered to avoid a mass vacancy in the future," but the Foundation's bylaws allow adjustments to the ending dates of a member's first term in office to avoid that problem.

The Foundation's continued maneuvering is causing significant harm and raising questions about the current leadership's commitment to their fiduciary duties to the organization. This week, CEO Young announced that the Foundation is cancelling its two biggest annual fundraisers and archaeological programming. Yesterday the Foundation's sole remaining full-time Black employee resigned [citing failures in leadership and hostile treatment](#) of staff by remaining senior management and board members.

MDC-nominated board candidate Dr. Daina Ramey Berry, Chair of the Department of History at The University of Texas at Austin, stated, "This is an important moment and the eyes of our nation are watching us as we embark upon an opportunity for healing. We are all fully aware of the current crisis facing Montpelier. We are prepared to do the work, beginning on May 16."

Greg Werkheiser of Cultural Heritage Partners, PLLC, legal counsel to MDC stated, "Here again

Black people have had to show up with ten times the credentials of white folks to sit at the same table. Now we'll see if the Foundation insists it must slow-walk the seating of a slate of superheroes."

#

About the Montpelier Descendants Committee

The Montpelier Descendants Committee (MDC) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit devoted to restoring the narratives of enslaved Americans at plantation sites in Central Virginia, including but not limited to James Madison's Montpelier, from the margins to the center of historical discourse. The MDC promotes a more accurate understanding of the lives of enslaved people based on broader, richer and more truthful interpretations of American history. Through a series of public programs, events, research, and communications the MDC seeks to demonstrate how the lives of enslaved persons made possible and informed the ideals of universal liberty enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, yet denied to them. Membership in the MDC is open to all descendants of enslaved ancestors in the central Virginia area, known as the Arc of Enslaved Communities.

#

Greg Werkheiser
Cultural Heritage Partners
+1 703-408-2002

[email us here](#)

Visit us on social media:

[Other](#)

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/570366231>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2022 IPD Group, Inc. All Right Reserved.