



### **James French, Chair Montpelier Descendants Committee**

James French was elected as the founding Chair of the Montpelier Descendants Committee (MDC) in 2019. The MDC is committed to empowering the descendants of the enslaved at, and in the region of, Montpelier, the historic residence of one of America's most iconic Founding Fathers, James Madison. Soon thereafter, he was invited to serve on the Board of The Montpelier Foundation, where he serves on the Executive Committee.

Inspired by two groundbreaking academic paradigms, the “The [Rubric](#) for Engaging Descendant Communities in the Interpretation of Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites” and the [Clientage Model](#), James is leading the MDC to center the narratives, perspectives and, especially, the authority of the descendants to act as equal co-stewards of Montpelier. To this end, he designed Structural Parity, a new national model for public engagement that is rewriting the rules for the museum industry, according to the National Trust for Historic Preservation. James is currently negotiating its implementation at Montpelier.

The Structural Parity Model is based on equal representation, authority and decision making power for the descendants community on the board of Montpelier. It offers valuable lessons to stewards of shared public and private spaces more broadly. By flipping orthodoxies and renegotiating legacy power structures, a commitment to more courageous, complete and truthful programming and research will emerge. Experience has shown that this new approach will only broaden audiences to include wider and younger demographics and generate philanthropic support from new quarters.

James brings governance, financial and entrepreneurial experience to these roles. After graduating from the Darden Graduate School of Business Administration at the University of Virginia, James worked in finance in several emerging markets, with a focus on financial inclusion in Africa. James is currently at work expanding financial services to underserved communities across Africa and other emerging economies using cutting edge financial technology (fintech).