

JMU HONORS COLLEGE FRESHMAN RETREAT AT MONTPELIER

2019

A GUIDE TO MONTPELIER AND RICHARD BROOKHISER'S BOOK *JAMES MADISON*

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"Ideals come to life in dozens of political transactions every day. Some of those transactions aren't pretty. You can try to understand this ... or you can look away. But ignoring politics will not make it stop. It will simply go on without you."

– Richard Brookhiser

Welcome to Montpelier

James Madison's Montpelier is located in the Piedmont countryside, four miles south of Orange, Virginia. The property was settled by James' grandfather, Ambrose, in the 1720s. James Madison, Sr. built the brick Georgian structure that is now known as Montpelier in the 1760s. Before and after his presidency, James Jr. made two major additions to the house. After Madison's death in 1836, Dolley divided her time between Montpelier and Washington, D.C. Deeply in debt, she sold Montpelier in 1844 and settled permanently in Washington, where she died in 1849. Nearly 300 Africans and African-Americans – at least six generations of families – were enslaved at Montpelier by the Madisons from 1723-1844. Although the number fluctuated, about 100 slaves lived at Montpelier at any one time.

Today, the Foundation's efforts are not limited to bringing to life the home and contributions of James and Dolley Madison. It is also committed to recognizing that the community of people who lived at Montpelier included the enslaved, whose stories are told in the award-winning exhibition *The Mere Distinction of Colour*, a culmination of two decades of archaeological and historical research. Visitors come to Montpelier to be inspired, to learn, and to take their inspiration and knowledge home. Montpelier is a place where visitors connect the dots between the past and the present and realize history's relevance in today's society. Montpelier is a monument to James Madison and the enslaved community, a museum of American history and the continuing struggle for freedom, and a center for constitutional education that engages the public with the enduring legacy of Madison's most powerful idea: government by the people.

Montpelier is a National Trust for Historic Preservation site.

Seven Key Achievements of Madison

1. Close ally of Thomas Jefferson; supporter of the Virginia Declaration of Rights & Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom
2. “Father of the Constitution” & “Father of the Bill of Rights”
3. Collaborator on the *Federalist Papers* with Alexander Hamilton and John Jay
4. Leader of the Democratic-Republican Party
5. Secretary of State supervising acquisition of the Louisiana Purchase
6. Fourth President of the United States
7. Commander in Chief in War of 1812

“I believe there are more instances of the abridgement of the freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachment of those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations.”

– James Madison



Madison Chronology

(with Brookhiser chapter references)

- **March 16, 1751** – James Madison born at Belle Grove plantation, Port Conway, Virginia (ch. 1)
- **1769** – enrolls at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) (ch. 1)
- **1776** – serves in the Virginia state legislature (ch. 1)
- **1780** – becomes the youngest delegate to the Continental Congress (ch. 1)
- **1784** – wins election to the Virginia House of Delegates (ch. 1)
- **1787-1788** – architect of the U.S. Constitution (Virginia Plan) (ch. 2)
- **1789** – elected to the U.S. House of Representatives; introduces the Bill of Rights (ch. 3)
- **1794** – becomes de facto leader of the Democratic-Republican Party (chs. 4 & 5)
- **September 15, 1794** – marries Dolley Payne Todd (ch. 5)
- **1801** – inherits Montpelier (including 108 slaves) upon his father's death (ch. 6)
- **1801** – appointed Secretary of State under Thomas Jefferson (ch. 7)
- **1803** – helps negotiate Louisiana Purchase (ch. 7)
- **1807** – campaigns for the Embargo Act, prohibits U.S. ships from visiting foreign ports (ch. 8)
- **1808** – elected President of the United States (ch. 9)
- **1811** – Battle of Tippecanoe against Native American confederacy led by Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa (ch. 9)
- **1812** – War of 1812 begins (ch. 10)
- **1814** – only president to lead troops in battle while in office - Battle of Bladensburg (ch. 10)
- **1815** – War of 1812 ends with Treaty of Ghent (ch. 10)
- **1816** – charts the Second National Bank (ch. 10)
- **1817** – leaves office and retires to Montpelier (ch. 11)
- **1826** – begins ten year term as rector and chancellor of the University of Virginia (ch. 11)
- **1833** – becomes president of the American Colonization Society (ch. 11)
- **June 28, 1836** – Madison dies at Montpelier (ch. 11 & Epilogue)
- **1908** – JMU founded as the State Normal and Industrial School for Women at Harrisonburg
- **1938** – JMU renamed Madison College in honor of President James Madison
- **1977** – JMU renamed James Madison University



JMU's "Little Jimmy" wearing the Honors College Medallion.

**I am Madison's legacy
I learn from and with others.
I foster collaboration.
I embrace complexity.
I advance the public good.
I learn from and with others
... So that we can draw on
our different strengths and
overcome our weaknesses.**

At JMU, we define civic engagement as advancing the legacy of James Madison, the Father of the Constitution, by preparing individuals to be active and responsible participants in a representative democracy dedicated to the common good.

The legacy of James Madison is complex. In his biography of James Madison, Richard Brookhiser notes, "Politics can be low, sometimes sordid. Much of that has to be endured, because that is the way men are. 'If men were angels,' as Madison wrote, 'no government would be

necessary.' But some of the shortcomings of politics may be capable of improvement. So say why and do better." (p. 250)

Consider Madison's shortcomings. How many are character flaws, and how many appear to be the product of the times in which he lived? Is it unfair to evaluate Madison according to present-day values? Think about how you and your society might be characterized (if not judged) by future generations.

Book Discussion Questions

"The courage James Madison showed on the morning of the Battle of Bladensburg is what first prompted me to write about him. It was moral courage even more than physical. He did not put on a hat and a cockade, he put himself at the point of contact. On a bad day that was likely to get worse, he chose to see what was happening and to face the consequences of his actions." (p. 6)

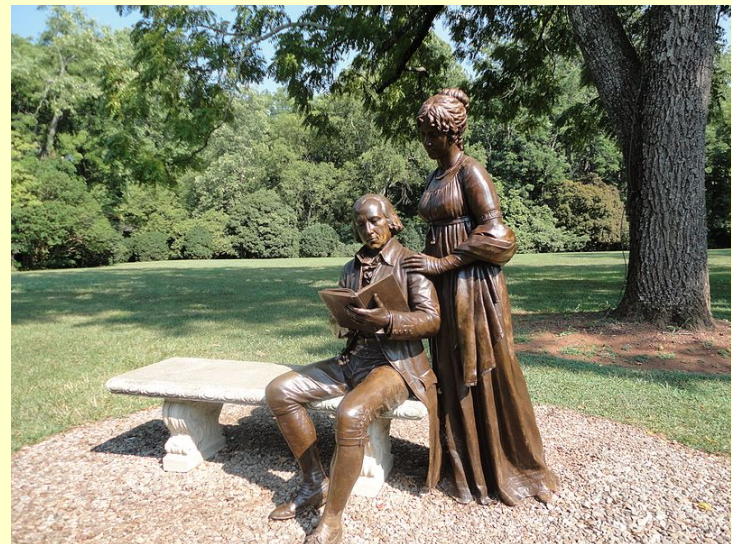
- **Though Madison is much celebrated as the leading framer of the Constitution, he occupies a less prominent place in American historical memory than several of his contemporaries. Why might this be the case? What do you make of James Madison as a leader and compromiser?**

"[A]nother iron law of politics is that you can't win them all. Heroes can aspire to perfection, especially if they die young, through the purity of an action, or a stance. But the long haul of politics takes at least some of the shine off almost everyone." (p. 11-12)

- **From where does Madison believe real political power comes from in our American republic? What is republicanism exactly, and how has it shaped the limits of your own thought and the way you live your life?**

"[I]deals come to life in dozens of political transactions every day. Some of those transactions aren't pretty. You can try to understand this and try to work with this knowledge, or you can look away. But ignoring politics will not make it stop. It will simply go on without you – and sooner or later will happen to you." (p. 12)

- **All of us have ideals. And then we confront hard reality. How should a person communicate their attitudes and values in a way that is useful and convincing to others? What was Madison's personal mission statement? What is *your* personal mission statement?**



Book Discussion Questions, cont.

“Toleration implies those who tolerate; superiors who grant freedoms to others. But who can be trusted to pass such judgments, even if the judgment is to live and let live? Judges may change their minds. ... So Madison prepared an amendment [to the Virginia Declaration of Rights]. ‘All men are equally entitled to the full and free exercise’ of religion. No one could be said to allow men to worship as they wished; they worshipped as they wished because it was their right as men.” (p. 23)

- James Madison is central to the religious liberty that we enjoy. What is the difference between religious tolerance and religious liberty? How does each affect the followers of the established church and dissenters? Do his personal beliefs matter one way or the other? Why would Madison have tried to keep his religious beliefs private as opposed to a man like Thomas Paine who was open about his deism?

“Madison and Jefferson were as bound by their differences as by their similarities. Jefferson had a gift of seeing views and making leaps. He was a prophet; he was also a blue jay, snatching at every shiny idea that caught his eye. ... Madison was often more practical, sometimes more temperate, and Jefferson knew he needed access to these qualities.” (p. 29-30)

- How can we better understand Madison through his relationship with Thomas Jefferson? Describe Madison’s and Jefferson’s ideal vision of an American economy. How did their dream for a nation fueled by economically independent citizens affect their belief in “American exceptionalism” and their foreign policy decisions? How does their vision compare with our 21st century vision of the American economy in the world today?

“We look back at certain past moments of idylls of unity. They may feel that way even to the people involved in them: we have won, or we are about to begin; we are all pulling together. But politics never rests, even among friends and allies. Even when they agree, there are still slight shades of difference that may deepen over time. New or ignored questions arise on which they differ greatly. And there is always ambition.” (p. 87)

- What was Madison’s vision of the American presidency, and how does that compare to images of our modern presidency? What are the similarities and differences?

“What Madison gained from his marriage was an expansion of his personality. He stayed the same – learned and thoughtful; at ease with friends, and devoted to them; silent, shy, and stiff in the outside world. Dolley completed him as a public figure. ... [S]he was expansive, gregarious, and outgoing. She would rather like people than dislike them.” (p. 122-123)

- How did Dolley Madison make her presence felt in Washington and at Montpelier? What have you learned about the role of elite women in political activity – and economic and social life – in the Early National period of American history? What burdens did she shoulder? What do you make of her decisions during the life of James Madison and after his death?

“Madison and Jefferson shared two goals, and two prejudices, which would guide their foreign policy for the next eight years and beyond. The goals were peace and expansion.” (p. 154)

- Are the goals of peace and expansionism complementary? How have Madison’s views in these areas played out over the centuries? What is your ‘theory’ of our place in the world?

Book Discussion Questions, cont.

“After more than forty years in public life, Madison had shown steady allegiance to certain things: religious liberty; freedom of the press; Anglophobia and Francophobia; trade war as an instrument of policy; expansion, especially to the west and south. On some things he had changed his positions: he supported a stronger national government when he expected to be influential in it and stronger state governments when his power base shifted to that level. His intelligence and his knowledge of history showed him how this tension between different political spheres could be built into the Constitution as a bulwark of liberty, though he came to believe that appealing to popular opinion through the arts of argument and politics was a bulwark at least as strong.” (p. 222)

- If Madison were to really have a change of mind in the years before his death, to what subjects should he have been giving his deepest consideration? Ask the same question of yourself: What social and political issues are you neglecting now that should become more important as you acquire wisdom and positions of influence?

“His notes [written during the Constitutional Convention of 1787] ... showed ... the importance of collaboration in his life – and how he used it for his own fulfillment.” (p. 228)

- How did Madison inspire and foster collaboration with both friends and rivals? How can you prepare yourself for productive collaboration and connection with other students at JMU, and with the greater Harrisonburg community?

“Madison the Virginian had particular reasons to keep slavery off the table: it put slave owners like himself in a paradoxical position. How could they be the vanguard of liberty when they held men and women in bondage? ... The option that is always open to men and society in the face of any problem is to do nothing. This is where Madison and Virginia ended up. The last constitution-making experience of Madison’s life stands as a model of inactivity, as far as slavery was concerned.” (p. 231, p. 234)

- If Madison truly believed in freedom of conscience, why did he accept as true that bringing an end to slavery was less important than preserving the integrity of the Union? The permanent exhibit on “The Mere Distinction of Color” makes the point that we must treat the people who were enslaved as worthy of historical examination – as worthy as that of the man and woman who owned them. What have you learned from your visit to Montpelier about the humanity and inhumanity of our ancestors? How is the legacy of slavery still with us today?

“Madison’s circumambient monument is American constitutionalism – the laws of doing and not doing, and all the debate and revisions they have generated (debating and revising are among the laws; some of the most important ongoing debates – over the power of the federal government, and of the courts; over free speech and freedom of religion[.] ... His other monument, coequal if not greater, is American politics, the behavior that makes constitutionalism work: the ways and means of acquiring, conferring, and rebuking power, the party organizations and partisan media that are the vehicles of interest, ambition, and thought. He was at the birth of the American political system, and he understood it better than almost all his great peers.” (pp. 249-250)

- It can be hard to grasp the extent to which Madison helped invent both the American political system and our core principles of constitutional interpretation. What might Madison observe about the causes, effects, and legacy of political factions in contemporary American life?

“I Am Madison’s Legacy”

from the JMU Center for Civic Engagement

At JMU, our civic engagement goals are to advance the legacy of James Madison, Father of the Constitution, and to prepare students to be active and responsible participants in a representative democracy dedicated to the common good.

Guiding us is a new civic competencies framework, “I am Madison’s Legacy,” a set of six affirmative statements inspired by knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with the historic James Madison. In presenting him as a political role model, we recognize that he exhibited many traits desperately needed today. At the same time, we refuse to idealize him; he had numerous flaws and foibles, and his legacy, like our nation’s, is mixed. We admit to a candid world that we, the people of the United States, are still evolving, still striving toward that perfect union. Looking ahead, we ask, what can each person do to secure the great nation he imagined?

I am Madison’s legacy
I learn from and with others.
I foster collaboration.
I embrace complexity.
I value pragmatism.
I advance the public good.
I lead.
I learn from and with others...
So that we can draw on our different strengths
and overcome our weaknesses.

“The best service that can be rendered to a Country, next to that of giving it liberty, is in diffusing the mental improvement equally essential to the preservation, and the enjoyment of the blessing.” – James Madison to Littleton Dennis Teackle, March 29, 1826.

So that narrow ideas and biases can be enlightened by the insights of different perspectives.

Many years after the Constitution was framed, Madison recalled that most of the delegates had changed their minds on important questions over the course of the deliberations, and most would be “ready to admit this change as the enlightening effect of the discussions.” – From “General Remarks on the Convention,” not dated.

By seeking to advance my own understanding of the subject, as well as the understanding of others.

“A tree of useful knowledge planted in every neighborhood, would help to make a paradise, as that of forbidden use occasioned the loss of one.” – James Madison to Jesse Torrey Jr., January 30, 1822.



I foster collaboration...

By listening actively and respectfully to all perspectives.

“It is worthy of our consideration, that those who prepared the [Constitution], found difficulties not to be described, in its formation—mutual deference and concession were absolutely necessary. Had they been inflexibly tenacious of their individual opinions, they would never have concurred.” – James Madison in the Virginia Ratifying Convention, June 24, 1788.

By building trust to achieve consensus.

During the ratification debates, Madison appealed to the near unanimity of the Framers of the Constitution as proof that all of the delegates were either “satisfactorily accommodated” by the compromises in the Constitution, “or were induced to accede to it by a deep conviction of the necessity of sacrificing private opinions and partial interests to the public good.” – Federalist No. 37.

By valuing our ideas more than my ideas.

When one of Madison’s correspondents referred to him as the “The writer of the Constitution,” he objected that he could “have no claim” to the title. The Constitution “was not, like the fabled Goddess of Wisdom, the offspring of a single brain. It ought to be regarded as the work of many heads and many hands.” – James Madison to William Cogswell, March 10, 1834.

By compromising to meet common goals if necessary.

When the Constitutional Convention was nearly finished with its work, Madison was deeply disappointed with the result. He confessed to Jefferson that he believed the Constitution would “neither effectually answer its national object nor prevent the local mischiefs which every where excite disgusts against the state governments.” Nonetheless, he believed it was of paramount importance that the Constitution be adopted—“If the present moment be lost it is hard to say what may be our fate”—and he worked tirelessly for ratification in spite of his personal disappointment. – Madison to Jefferson, September, 6, 1787.



I embrace complexity...

By acknowledging that social and political problems are interconnected and interdependent.

When it was suggested that the Constitutional Convention should propose amendments to the old Articles of Confederation as a sort of smorgasbord, and the states could pick and choose which changes they wanted to adopt, Madison answered that this method would not work, because the changes they needed to make would be too substantial and interconnected: "In truth my ideas of a reform strike so deeply at the old Confederation, and lead to such a systematic change, that they scarcely admit of the expedient." – James Madison to Edmund Randolph, April 8, 1787.

By seeking out evidence from diverse sources, both past and present.

Shortly after graduating from college, Madison wrote to a friend: "The principles & Modes of Government are too important to be disregarded by an Inquisitive mind and I think are well worthy [of] a critical examination by all students that have health & Leisure." James Madison to William Bradford, December 1, 1773. In March of 1784, Madison asked Thomas Jefferson to purchase numerous books for him from Paris. In particular, he sought books that would shed light on "the several confederacies which have existed.... The operations of our own [Confederacy] must render all such lights of consequence." The literary cargo that Jefferson sent formed the basis of one of the most important research projects in American history: Madison's "Notes on Ancient and Modern Confederacies." Madison's notes were used to evaluate America's existing political problems, find solutions, and defend those solutions after the Constitution was drafted.

By acknowledging that our decisions are contingent on and influenced by current trends and political coalitions (factions).

This awareness can be seen in Madison's inability to come to terms with slavery, both as an individual and as a political leader. Although he deplored slavery, he never freed any of his own slaves. Madison believed that pervasive white prejudice in his era prevented whites and blacks from living together, so he favored gradual emancipation and colonization back to Africa. As the abolitionist movement grew, he worried that if disunion undid the republic, it would be enmeshed in the institution of slavery. Though a man of inexhaustible faith in the ability of a self-governing people to choose the just course, by 1835 Madison "owned himself almost to be in despair" over slavery, according to Harriet Martineau. A British abolitionist who visited Montpelier, Martineau recalled that Madison "without limitation or hesitation" confirmed to her all the evils of slavery. He told her that "the whole Bible is against Negro slavery; but that the clergy do not preach this, and the people do not see it."

By evaluating the consequences, both the advantages and the disadvantages, of multiple courses of action.

In Federalist No. 10, Madison examined the nature of factions, which he believed were the "disease" of popular government, and reviewed several possible ways to control them. Nonetheless, he recognized that some potential remedies were "worse than the disease."

By recognizing that some questions are fraught with ambiguity.

"Questions daily occur in the course of practice, which prove the obscurity which reigns in these subjects, and which puzzle the greatest adepts in political science." – Federalist No. 37.

I advance the public good...

By preferring the common good over my own private interests.

Madison believed that when “the great variety of interests, parties, and sects” within the United States was united within a single deliberative body, then a “majority of the whole society could seldom take place on any other principles than those of justice and the general good.” – Federalist No. 51.

By recognizing my obligation to participate in civic life [public meetings, voting, petitioning, dialogues, etc.].

“To suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the people, is a chimerical idea.” – James Madison, speech in the Virginia Ratifying Convention, June 20, 1788.

By persevering to advance a just society.

“Justice is the end of government. It is the end of civil society. It ever has been and ever will be pursued until it be obtained, or until liberty be lost in the pursuit.” – Federalist No. 51.

“Despotism can only exist in darkness; and there are too many lights now in the political firmament to permit it to reign anywhere as it has heretofore done almost everywhere.” – James Madison to Marquis de Lafayette, November 25, 1820.

I lead...

By acting when I see a public problem or opportunity.

Madison’s efforts on behalf of religious freedom began with small intercessions against the prosecution of local Baptists. He went on to pen Virginia’s “Memorial and Remonstrance,” his landmark defense of religious liberty, and he ultimately ensured that the religious freedom clauses would be inserted into the First Amendment.

By working in pursuit of common goals rather than seeking credit for my own contributions.

Madison’s most important compositions—his “Memorial and Remonstrance,” the Virginia Plan, his Federalist essays and the “Virginia Resolutions”—were all written anonymously.

By reminding people about—and urging them to uphold—the governing principles on which a free society is based.



Experiential Learning and Potential Capstone Project Opportunities at Montpelier

Compiled by Raquel Suarez (rsuarez@montpelier.org)

The following is a short list of inter- and multidisciplinary experiential learning opportunities and potential research projects that reflect the richness of Montpelier's legacy.

Accounting – Understanding accounting for nonprofit organizations that are mainly grant funded and supported by private donations (public accounting).

Anthropology – Archaeology programs, expedition digs, field school.

Architecture – Architectural changes to Madison's home during DuPont era and during restoration; Catalog of all buildings and structures on Montpelier estate; House and Grounds; Restoration.

Art History – Curatorial team at Montpelier has a collections library of paintings, artifacts, and other historical art pieces.

Biology – Montpelier's nature trails, old growth forest, natural landscape, horticulture and gardening on the property.

Communication Studies – Montpelier's Communications and Marketing team manages all the communications for Montpelier, and there can be possible upcoming projects where a student can partner with us on an applied project.

Earth Science – Montpelier's nature trails, old growth forest, natural landscape, horticulture and gardening on the property

Economics – Gift shop and economic models used in museum retail shops.

Education – Teacher seminars offered at Montpelier, Program for Teaching Difficult History through using the MDC exhibit. Museum Studies.

Geographic Science – Old growth forest, natural landscape, GIS Mapping of Montpelier's grounds. (This is already happening and we can use some interns!)

Graphic Design - Design work for promotional materials, course packets, covers, updates to online courses.

History – Age of Madison, Plantation Slavery, History of Montpelier estate from when it was first established through today.

Hospitality Management – Analysis of Montpelier's donor events, seminars, and other programs. Annual events such as Constitution Day Festival, Wine Festival, Hunt Races, and Donor events.

International Affairs – International programs that come to Montpelier through the state department through IVLP (International Visitors Leadership Program) and YALI (Young African Leaders Initiative).

Justice Studies – Law Enforcement and the Constitution seminars offered at Montpelier.

Management (Business and Nonprofit) – Foundation Work, National Trust, Grants, Organizational Structure, and Organizational Culture.

Marketing – Montpelier's Communications and Marketing team manages all the communications for Montpelier, and there can be possible upcoming projects where a student can partner with us for an applied project.

Media Arts and Design – Podcasting, Design work for promotional materials. Updates to online courses.

Modern Foreign Languages – James Madison was able to read in 7 languages, perhaps we can provide a scripted tour that can then be translated into a different language.

Philosophy and Religion – James Madison's thought on religious freedom and freedom of conscience and looking at the philosophical principles that inspired his thinking.

Political Science – Life and Legacy of Madison; Civic Engagement; Stewardship.

Psychology – The psychology behind American Exceptionalism, the Founding, and it's connection to Contemporary American Political/social climate.

Sociology – Cultural and Social norms during Madison's time, Dolley's influence in creating the role of the First Lady.