



## Indigenous Land and Enslaved Peoples Acknowledgement

We invite you to recognize the written histories of the Shenandoah Valley, the city of Harrisonburg, and our university's namesake, James Madison, as fractured.<sup>1</sup>

Let us acknowledge then that we are currently on the land of the Indigenous<sup>2</sup> Siouan, Algonquian, and Haudenosaunee<sup>3</sup> communities who lived here for many generations and who continue to be systematically erased by policies and practices<sup>4</sup> that remove their histories from this place.

Let us honor the enslaved peoples<sup>5</sup> who built the wealth and foundation of James Madison.<sup>6</sup>

Let us recognize the histories of Virginia and the United States as complicit<sup>7</sup> with the racism of White supremacy.<sup>8</sup>

We recognize that these difficult histories persist in present-day racial realities and privileges<sup>9</sup> at this university. We commit to dismantling racism in spaces of our work. **We invite you to work beside us to create change.**<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Fractured" connotes broken and incomplete, not representative of diverse voices, through the telling of a dominant narrative of history.

<sup>2</sup> Much dialogue ensued about using language groups in the acknowledgement instead of specific Indigenous tribes of Virginia. Unlike some other places in Virginia, where there are specific archaeologically documented and living tribal peoples, the archaeological evidence, written histories, and oral histories of the Shenandoah Valley are complex. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Shenandoah Valley was a crossroads of various groups of Indigenous people prior to European conquest in the land now called the United States. Language groups (i.e., Siouan, Algonquian, and Iroquoian) were identified based on archaeological evidence. This evidence suggests linkages to people who spoke these languages and also lived elsewhere on what is now called the continental United States. See the following presentation by Dr. Carole Nash for more information: [Native American Communities of the Shenandoah Valley: Constructing a Complex History](#).

<sup>3</sup> When this acknowledgement was originally written, the term "Iroquoian" was used. We changed it to "Haudenosaunee" based on faculty member recommendations. Modern-day descendants of the Haudenosaunee state that "Iroquoian" was a name given by White settlers, while "Haudenosaunee" is the Indigenous term. This video explains it well: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSXL33JiKLY>.

<sup>4</sup> Discussion among JMU faculty co-writers who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color included the perspective that the original language used in earlier drafts was not direct enough and was written in the past tense. There was a shift to the present tense in the words "continue to be systematically erased by policies and practices." Conversations about this specific point with faculty highlighted historical racialized policies and practices created and enacted by White people in Virginia history against people of color, such as forced relocation, [the eugenics projects and systematic sterilization of Indigenous and multi-racial people](#), and the [one drop rule](#).

<sup>5</sup> The term "enslaved peoples" was chosen to recognize the enslavement of people from Africa as well as Indigenous people in Virginia.

<sup>6</sup> Evidence for this direct statement is readily apparent when visiting Montpelier, the estate and plantation of James and Dolly Madison. In particular, [the Mere Distinctions of Color](#) exhibit at Montpelier provides a humanizing context for the enslaved peoples who built the wealth and foundation of James Madison.

<sup>7</sup> The term "complicit" was word smithed quite a bit during the process of co-creation of the statement and ultimately chosen to represent how racialized histories are tied to modern-day realities of [white supremacy](#) in the United States.

<sup>8</sup> A faculty member suggested that the use of "White supremacy" would be met with resistance and blowback; a decision was made to use it anyway in order to embrace conflicting viewpoints on the use of the term and to generate dialogue about definitions and understandings of White supremacy as an interlocking system. The term "White supremacy" conveys a multi-faceted system (economic, political, social) that advantages Whites and disadvantages people of color. The system works to ensure the power elite remain in power. A healing response to White racism has four stages, according to Howard (2006): honesty, empathy, advocacy, and action. From *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools*. New York: Teacher College Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

<sup>9</sup> "Privileges" is used consciously to convey the historical legacies of racial privilege, inequities, and inequalities of the present.

<sup>10</sup> This is not merely an acknowledgement; it is an "honest reckoning" with history and invitation to action. Co-creators agreed it needed to be a call for local action. This is a call for solidarity for people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds to collectively work for change. For example CFI programs have intentionally included BIPOC facilitators and actively target raising awareness about and action regarding justice, equity, inclusion, and diversity .