Stenton is participating in a grant through the Pew Foundation. In accordance with this, the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC) facilitated the fourth round of focus groups with community members from Germantown, Pennsylvania. The community discussion included the following focus areas: reactions to the current exhibition about Dinah, thoughts about Ayondela McCole presentation, and connecting the understandings from the fourth focus group to the previous three. The following summary provides key insights from the discussions that align with the needs of the grant.

Select Notes from Ayondela McCole’s Presentation:

A brief history of the “mammy” archetype:

- “Mammy” is a hybrid of “ma’am” and “mommy.” It is not based on an actual person, but on an idea/desire to contrast with the ideal white woman/mother of the time. What is white femininity and what does it mean to be a good, white mother - then, black women were placed in contrast. In actuality, black women who were nursing, caring for children, etc. were very different from the mammy archetype.

- “Mammy” was first used in writing in 1810 in travel narratives.

- The idea of a Black Madonna did not seem conceivable at the time as black women were seen as generating capital (more human beings), not as mothers. Mammy’s became the surrogate - mother to white children while still being the perfect enslaved figure. There was/is a difference between the idea/acceptance of black motherhood and black surrogate motherhood.

- Nancy Green - a formerly enslaved woman - was hired to perform the character of “Aunt Jemima” at the World’s Fair in 1893. A woman was hired to sell pancakes. Mammy figures were also seen previously in Negro minstrel shows (which are significantly different from minstrel shows using blackface), especially for the song, “Old Aunt Jemima.”

- There was/is a difference - though people often confuse the two - between consistency and loyalty.
The Mammy archetype was used as part of the North-South reconciliation of white people following the American Civil War. The Daughters of the Confederacy wanted to create a Mammy Institute to teach black girls how to be mammies. They, additionally, wanted to erect a Mammy Monument.

“"The use of the mammy archetype is a reassurance of black loyalty during times of white uncertainty - that everyone knows their 'place.'" Through the history of economic downturn/tensions, the mammy figure will return to public consciousness through commercials, ads, skits, etc.

The idea of the mammy is, “Remembering the past as it never was.” This is a form of nostalgic amnesia - wanting what white people perceived as the perfect black woman in contrast to the perfect white woman.

Mammy figures have changed over time - sometimes being lighter or darker in complexion, sometimes having different types of hair, etc.

Mammies depicted in media include such figures as: the Welfare Queen stereotype, Popeyes’ “Queen,” Pine Sol Lady, Madea movies, and the woman in Big Momma’s House. All of these portray a black woman in service to white society, many times to the detriment and/or neglect of a black family or black society.

Select Notes from the Discussions Following the Presentation:

Group #1:

• “As was historically the case, Black women are still often not believed - example being Serena.”

• “Do we include, or not, the original plaque in the memorial? Perhaps the figure could hold the plaque above her head.”

• “There needs to be a youth focus - we need to answer, 'What does this have to do with us?'”

• “We have to keep legacies in mind.”

• “We should put an emphasis on homes and communities.”

• “Let’s think about what it looks like to come from enslavement and into freedom - how Dinah continued to carve out a life for herself.”

Group #2:

• “Being portrayed as being bossy/angry - just because we speak up doesn’t mean we are angry.”
• There are multiple Dinah's [or ideas of Dinah] - the actual woman, the woman of the plaque, the woman being created for the memorial."

• “Connection to home.”

• “She was a complicated woman.”

• “We want to hold her in the highest esteem; we don’t want to treat her as anything less than. We want hope.”

• “Think of propaganda and stereotypes as the memorial is being designed, so that we don’t end up with that.”

• “Dinah was a mosaic and there is so much that we don’t know about her - she as not a ‘faithful servant’ period. She was a lot of things.”

• “What values do we carry? We value loyalty. We are the stalwart…. A values-based approach may ground us in creating the memorial.”

• “Maybe she shouldn’t have a face because we don’t know.”

• “I want a face. We know what African/ African American features look like.”

• “We do know that she was a queen - maybe we can use a mirror in some way.”

• “There is something I saw recently where a kitten is looking in the mirror and sees a lion in the reflection.”

• “She may not look like a mammy; she must look like a human being.”

• “What if we used something that depicts the lap of a woman - a place where people can sit together and feel safe?”

• “I can’t seen an abstract piece of art. Make her human with African American features. Give our children an image. Going back to Egypt, our history has been lost by abstracts. It somehow has to have a feature of her. I want something concrete that will last for generations.”

• “I want something that will reflect resilience - courage.”

• “Let’s make Dinah human however the artist can - not just another plaque. Let’s make a representation that reflects pieces of all of us [black people].”

• “I just don’t want our faces to be lost…. And, I saw what my mother went through in her life and I want to honor that.”
• “I don’t want to lose her - I want a form - a reflection of the pain, the joy, the spirit. It wasn’t just one moment in history; we have to encompass all of her years and all of her dimensions.”

• Any monument should be human…. But, I want it to be interactive as in something that we can interact with - not just something that is pretty.”

Participants Provided “one word” for their current thoughts:

*** Many words align with current thoughts on Dinah, though a few thoughts (“confused” and “uncertain” refer to how individuals currently felt).

*** If possible, artists should watch/listen to the recordings from this section of the sessions.

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