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The Silent Hands of Slavery: Dinah

The beginning of the semester, we dove into the world of monuments, museums, and the complex issues of inclusivity surrounding them. We learned that museums fundamentally serve to educate the masses: academically, but also in terms of propriety. Furthermore, we combined all of what we learned throughout the semester to erect a monument that attempts to avoid systemic issues commonly found in museums, as well as preserve history in an inclusive manner. Specifically, we did so with a former slave of the Stenton house, Dinah. The current Dinah monument is a simple bronze plaque, which circumvents her status as a slave and inadvertently upholds the “loyal mammy” stereotype. Our goal with the monument we designed was to address the complexities of race, gender, and memory within the Stenton house. The objective is to include Dinah more comprehensively within the space, and encourage visitors to discuss the contentions around her.

We christened our monument “The Silent Hands of Slavery: Dinah” to exemplify her position as a slave for the Logan household and to evoke the audience to keep that in mind as they learn of her throughout the tour. Our proposal is in two parts. The first part of the monument is a brick cylinder in the entryway. We placed it there so there would be enough space for people to move around it but it would still be unavoidable, forcing people to engage with Dinah. The Stenton tour, both guided and individual, can begin here. This opening would set the stage for interpretation of the house. The right side of the monument will have in a glass plate, and large

text that reads “What is a Mammy?” with an explanation of what mammy monuments are, how they came about, and how they are used to perpetuate a “loyal slave” narrative. Juxtaposed to the right side, we will have another glass plate entitled “Women’s Roles in Monuments.” The purpose for this side would address the often absent narrative of the role women’s patriotic organizations play in the erection of nationalist monuments, beginning with the United Daughters of the Confederacy at the turn of the twentieth century, to the Colonial Dames today. For the duration of the semester, we had firsthand experience evaluating a variety of museums in the greater Philadelphia area. That being said, we immediately noticed the lack of women in every narrative we were presented. In this monument, we strive to have Stenton, a place that has been managed by women for years, be at the forefront of the discussion of women in public spaces.

To continue, the original bronze plaque would be incorporated into the new monument. It will be placed on the back, alone, facing away from the Stenton house. The position will symbolize the notion of moving forward without ignoring the unpleasant past. The front will be the statement piece of the brick cylinder, facing the Stenton house. Dinah’s name will be engraved in a bold font towards the top. We felt compelled to make her name large and positioned above eye level to assert her importance as an individual in Stenton, but also to honor the struggles African Americans faced to rise from slavery. Underneath her name, we will have hands bound by ribbon protruding outwards towards the viewer. The hands will be bound to remind the audience that Dinah, no matter how well treated or not she may have been, was still working against her will. Beneath the hands we will have the title of our monument: The Silent Hands of Slavery. The title builds ethos and establishes a framework for the remainder of the experience. It serves as yet another reminder that Dinah was enslaved, as well as provokes the

reader to seek the “silent” or “hidden” narrative of slavery. American history was built by the hands of indentured and enslaved labor, yet it is not acknowledged fully in places of education.

Originally, we had planned to have our cylinder be a rectangular pedestal without a monument. We made the conscious decision to switch to a cylindrical shape, to demonstrate the cohesiveness of all different elements on the pedestal. One element of Dinah’s memory cannot be spoken about without the context of the others. They are undeniably intertwined that it can be broken down, but to understand the full picture, all components must be brought together. We hope the audience will view our monument as one large narrative, not separate entities. Moreover, we chose brick as the material for the cylinder so that it would match the exterior of Stenton. Again, this decision lends itself to cohesiveness. We are asserting that Dinah and Stenton are inseparable from one another.

We were also inspired to use brick from the Rose Hill plantation in South Carolina. Earlier this year, they had discovered that the bricks in the plantation contained fingerprints from the slaves that forged them.¹ The plantation showcases these fingerprints, and visitors put their fingers on these slave fingerprints. This experience creates a sort of magical connection to the past, by humanizing the experience and allowing visitors to feel as though they are interacting with the past firsthand. We wanted to produce the same feeling in Stenton, with Dinah’s hands in the pedestal, but also with the next part of our monument.

The second part of our monument is an interactive experience throughout the Logan household. It is six hands located in places that demonstrate how Dinah potentially navigated the space. We wanted to continue with the theme of hands to remind the audience of what they had engaged with at the cylinder outside. Additionally, touching the hands throughout the house

¹Mark Price, “Historians find fingerprints of long-forgotten SC slaves in 200-year-old bricks,” *Charlotte Observer*, February 24, 2019.

replicates the magical and humanizing experience they had outside with the brick hands. We chose hands altogether to humanize Dinah, without giving her a body. If we were to make a statue, we have the potential to buy into the exact mammy stereotype we are attempting to avoid. Unfortunately, there is no evidence of what Dinah may have looked like, so it is beneficial to her memory to abstain from misrepresentation.

The six hands would be here: the set on the cylinder, a hand on the inner doorknob, in the kitchen on a pot, on the door to the attic, in the entrance to “hidden” staircase, and in bedroom holding the curtain open. The doorknob was to pay homage to the legend of Dinah saving the house. She opened the door to speak to the British officers. Although the myth may or may not be true, we acknowledge the fact that Dinah most likely opened doors for all guests at Stenton. We decided to use the bedroom and the kitchen because it is highly probable some of her assigned duties were there. The staircase was described on our tour as a separate business entrance, but upon further discussion we came to the conclusion that it was most likely a slave passageway in the house to separate the family from the labor. There was a clear elitist hierarchy within the house; the slave labor was to be seen as little as possible by the upper class family members, and we want Stenton to address this segregation. The tour then ends with the attic. When we first visited Stenton, the attic was a storage room filled with boxes and spinning wheels. However, the attic is the most private space for the labor in Stenton. It is where Dinah and the other slaves would have slept, and where they would have the chance to express themselves as individuals beyond servitude. Placing the last hand here acknowledges the significance of this space.

To open a dialogue on race and slavery within Stenton, we will have a scavenger hunt for Dinah’s hands. This layout will appeal especially to elementary school age kids, which is

Stenton's primary audience. It will incentivize the kids to engage with the subject at hand. When they encounter Dinah's hands, their tour guide can ask them questions, such as "What was Dinah doing here?" While this script may work for kids, adults can delve deeper into the subject of race, slavery, and memory. We acknowledge that each tour has different needs based upon each individual. So, each tour should cater towards whatever provides an equal balance between emotional comfort and a learning experience, thus making the interpretation different for each individual.² Fundamentally, the tour will assist Stenton as an educational space for all ages.

When we presented our idea to the class, we received a great deal of approval and support from our colleagues. At the time, we were still working on the visual component of our presentation, and were told that the information presented was a lot to take in without it. We did include a thorough visual in our presentation to Stenton. Additionally, we were asked to make it clear what the hands stood for, and to push forth our symbolism behind them. We presented the hand idea to Stenton more concisely, opening by saying "We will have six hands scattered throughout Stenton" and then explained where and why. All in all, this experience taught us the extensive amount of work one must do to form a monument, and was highly rewarding.

² Amy Tyson, "Crafting Emotional Comfort: Interpreting the Painful Past at Living History Museums in the New Economy," *Museum and Society* 6 (November 2008): 246-62.

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