

Digital Review

“Remember My Name: Dinah’s Story Performance and Panel Discussion.” Stenton, *The Dinah Memorial Project* and *Inequity in Bronze: The Plantation Memorial Project*, Creators. <https://www.stenton.org/remember-my-name>. Created February 23, 2021; Accessed March 2021.

“Remember My Name: Dinah’s Story” performance and panel discussion is a virtual program hosted by Stenton, a historic house in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Originally livestreamed on February 23, 2021, “Remember My Name: Dinah’s Story” exists as video recordings on Stenton’s website. It consists of three components: a YouTube video of a performance showing two fictional characterizations of a real-life enslaved woman named Dinah who once worked in the home; a separate YouTube video of a panel discussion; and the performance script. Other project resources, posted online, complement this program.

“Remember My Name: Dinah’s Story” is part of *The Dinah Memorial Project*, a two-year initiative supported by the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage’s *Inequity in Bronze: The Plantation Memorial Project*, which addresses how historic sites such as Stenton can best memorialize the lives of their enslaved communities. Beginning in 2018, Stenton has hosted meetings to gather local community input on the Dinah memorial and issued a call for artists to submit proposals for a new Dinah memorial. They have also hosted or co-hosted programs such as a scholarly conference and “Remember My Name: Dinah’s Story,” which is, at the date of this review’s writing, the most recent event considering Stenton’s place within this complex broader initiative.

This online program is intended for general audiences and can be used as a teaching tool in classrooms. With some content pertaining to how the performance was staged, including the special effect of simulating a fire, “Remember My Name” can also serve as logistical guidance for historical interpreters. At the same time, those who wish to interpret historical figures might also look to the way in which the actors and screenwriter portray and humanize Dinah as instructive material.

In the approximately twenty-minute performance, two costumed actors, Irma Gardner-Hammond and Marissa Kennedy, portray different versions of Dinah, one older and one younger, who sit at a table set with broken teacups, illuminated by the light of a crackling fireplace. They tell their stories, engaging with one

another like friends. The accompanying panel discussion, running about forty-five minutes and available on a separate video, consists of both actors, the screenwriter, and Stenton curator Laura Keim serving as moderator. Keim poses a broader question of the panelists, asking them to describe their experiences in rendering Dinah. Then, she opens a Q&A, which a live audience engaged with via a type-in chat function.

The panel discussion was wide-ranging. Actors Gardner-Hammond and Kennedy were evocative and eloquent in both their performance as well as during their candid discussion on the panel. The script by Robert Branch was resonant and thoughtful, humanizing Dinah just as it shines a light on the dehumanizing nature of slavery. Moderator Laura Keim was deft in addressing audience questions. For example, a question about broken teacups led the curator to describe finding these artifacts, which Dinah herself may have touched. Keim invited a member of the video production team to describe how he created the realistic light of a hearth in a historic site without lighting a real fire, which would be of particular interest to those who might want to achieve a similar effect without endangering a historic structure. Those in the field of historical interpretation can find value in ways “Remember My Name: Dinah’s Story” more fully realizes the lives of enslaved people.

Students and the general public might find it enlightening that the Dinah characters did not focus on the brutality we often associate with slavery, such as beatings. Rather, cruelty was quietly and constantly present: having to follow one’s enslavers wherever they move, being forced to live apart from one’s spouse, and the overall lack of agency in an enslaved person’s life. Moreover, an enslaved person was depicted as carving out slivers of joy (in this case as a wife and mother) within a system that sought to erase one’s identity. It is notable that “Remember My Name: Dinah’s Story” made room for explorations of resilience, which are so often missing in similar narratives.

A few small changes to the program would have highlighted Dinah’s need for such resilience and contextualized her story within the lives of other people enslaved during her time, and within her region. A tighter run-of-show during the panel discussion and more pointed prepared questions from the moderator could have allowed time for panelists to provide more background information on eighteenth-century slavery during the online program. As it is, the viewer is left to wonder how Dinah’s experiences fall within those of other enslaved people of the time and region.

The stenton.org/dinah site, which complements the online program, is comprehensive. Resources include reports from past community meetings, artist proposals for a new Dinah memorial, a report that documents findings from using ground-penetrating radar to scan the underground of a spot associated with a former Dinah memorial, and a PowerPoint of a past program, “Mammy as Myth.” The large “Dinah’s Story” banner at the top of the site takes the viewer to the panel discussion, performance, and script, all available on separate clickable bars, as well as performer bios and other contextual information.

On the other hand, this long list of resources may be overwhelming to some. For example, it might be better organized into subheadings: “Research,” “Memorial Plans,” “Events and Programs,” as well as “Press and Media.” As it is, “Dinah’s Story” gets lost within so many headings, and accompanying resources fail to provide the context that they otherwise could. Moreover, stenton.org/remember-my-name does not link back to the overall Dinah Memorial Project—thus any viewer who only finds the “Dinah’s Story” site misses out on this worthy additive knowledge.

Also, a light edit of the panel discussion video would more immediately pull viewers to the valuable informative aspects of the program. For the archived version of the video, the editor might have skipped over some expositional information that is necessary during a live event, but unwieldy in a teaching tool. They may have also considered eliminating minor tech glitches, long pauses, and other interruptions inherent in a livestreamed program. The video could have also included manually correcting auto-captioning, which would make it more accessible.

All that said, “Remember My Name: Dinah’s Story” takes what we know of Dinah to paint in some details of eighteenth-century slavery as a founding institution of the United States. Students, historical interpreters, and the general public can take note and take heart from this remarkable program.

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