HISTORY 104-010: WORLD HISTORY II

SECOND WRITING ASSIGNMENT: *ABINA AND THE IMPORTANT MEN*

In the “Letter to the Reader” at the start of *Abina and the Important Men*, historian Trevor Getz and artist Liz Clarke state that their book “aims for accuracy and authenticity even while recognizing that all historical works are at some level speculative and subjective” (p. xvi). For this reason they insist that the book is a work of history, rather than historical fiction; a “graphic history,” not a “graphic novel.”

*Abina and the Important Men* is clearly not a typical history book. However, it raises questions that to some degree apply to all historical writing. How do we find reliable evidence about the past? How can historians write about individuals or groups of people who are unlikely to have left much trace of their lives in conventional historical documents? If evidence is scarce, is it impossible to write legitimate history?

Getz and Clarke’s book is built to a large degree on a single document that Getz found in the national archives of Ghana (the country that used to be called the Gold Coast), namely the transcript of the trial against the man accused of enslaving Abina Mansah. Considering that Abina appears only in a single document, the question I want you to answer in this essay is:

**To what extent is *Abina and the Important Men* a legitimate work of history?**

In order to write this essay, I recommend that you read the graphic history (part I), then the transcript of the trial (part II), then the section on historical context (part III), then the graphic history again. You might also find part IV useful. None of these sections take long to read, but they need to be read carefully to understand the way the graphic history was crafted. You then need to take the following steps and incorporate them into your essay:

1. Find at least one example of a detail in the graphic history that appears to be “authentic” (to use Getz and Clarke’s word): in other words, a reliable piece of historical information based on what we can read in the court transcript. Explain why the detail seems trustworthy.
2. Find at least one example of a detail in the graphic history that seems to you to be more “speculative” (again to quote Getz and Clarke). Explain why the detail appears questionable.
3. Find at least one example of a place in the graphic history where the authors were able to make a detail from the court transcript understandable to us by providing additional historical or cultural information.
4. Finally, provide your overall evaluation of the presentation of Abina’s story in the graphic history. You might even want to evaluate this as a percentage: for example, you might consider it to be 50% authentic, 50% speculative. However you express your opinion, you must give reasons to back up your point of view.

*[continues over...]*

You can decide for yourself on a suitable length for your paper, but as a rough guide less than two double-spaced pages is likely to be too little. This assignment is worth 30 points. Please pay attention to your spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

Assuming that *Abina and the Important Men* is likely to be your only source, you may cite the book simply by placing the page number in parentheses. If you use any other source you should provide a full citation. Plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty, as defined in the university’s Academic Honesty policy, will be reported; details at http://www.udel.edu/stuguide/17-18/code.html#honesty.

Your completed paper must be **uploaded to the Canvas page** for the class by **no later than 11:59 PM on** **Wednesday, 18th April**. I will not accept late papers.