



Abina

Teaching materials

Episode 4

(Trevor R. Getz * All rights asserted by author)

Introduction to Episode/Chapter 4

Episode 4 resumes Abina’s testimony under the questioning of James Hutton Brew, lawyer for Quamina Eddoo. During this testimony, Abina discusses not only her experiences in Eddoo’s household but also some of her experiences as a slave, previously, in Adansi. Her testimony has such an effect that the judge, William Melton, calls the two representatives – Brew and James Davis (for Abina) - into a closed meeting. We don’t really know what Melton ever said to Brew and Davis, as only the courtroom testimony is in the record, but this section represents the kinds of ideas that we know were flowing back and forth at this time!

The contents of two of the four pathways in the accompanying readings focus on a broad issue raised by both Abina’s testimony and the discussion that follows: **gender**. Specifically, the topic of the Biography pathway is marriage, and the topic of the Individual and Society pathway is the experiences of young girls at the intersection of Akan and colonial British law and society. In the Slavery pathway we finally get to discuss how the abolition of slavery in the Gold Coast came about and how it worked. This is a theme introduced by Melton’s discussion with the two representatives (note that I don’t say “two layers” because Davis wasn’t actually a lawyer!). In the Colonialism pathway students learn more about Davis, the last of the “important men” to be introduced to them.

By the end of this episode, students should be able to:

- articulate an understanding of gender as constructed differently in various places and times and apply this understanding to the specific constructions of ‘girls’ and ‘women’ that applied in Abina’s case.
- describe the intersection of slavery and marriage in the 19th century Gold Coast, and explain how the issue of marriage figured into Abina’s testimony.
- distinguish between the legal notion of ‘emancipation’ and the actual experiences of former slaves in the nineteenth century Gold Coast, and describe how Abina could have still been a slave when slavery was illegal.
- explain the position and background of colonial administrators, and make an argument as to how we should describe Melton’s role and that of colonial administrator’s more generally.
- define the civilizing mission and construct a depiction of Africans like James Davis who embraced elements of British culture that moves beyond a resistance vs. collaboration dichotomy.

Episode 4 learning outcomes

Episode 4 Lesson plan and activities

In Episode 4 students take a step deeper into Abina’s world. They see how issues surrounding the construction of gender complicate the operation and prosecution of slavery. They pursue an understanding of slavery by looking at the opportunities and limitations of the legal abolition of enslavement. Finally, the chapter also allows them to bring together their understanding of culture and colonialism by exploring the civilizing mission.

Potential lesson plans

The material in this section could be delivered in a single day or over several days. It will work whether or not the students have watched the Episode 4 video. It may help for students to have the accompanying materials for the episode available during the lesson, and in some cases you may wish to read sections out loud in class.

Gender 1: the girl “problem”

Much of Episode 4 is about “gender,” with two objectives: to help students understand gender as a constructed category, and to ask them to apply this

understanding by explaining exactly how gender fits into Abina's experiences and testimony.

You will probably want to start by asking students about where we see gender as a factor in people's experiences and in society. You may start by defining gender as a society's conception of how people should act and their identity attributes based around concepts of maleness and femaleness. So you may ask them:

- How do we expect men to act in our society?
- How do we expect women act?
- What kinds of emotions and values do we associate with males and females?

You will have to decide for yourself how much you want to talk about the move beyond "binary" males and females in our own society today. The more important point for our purposes, once students have gone through this exercise, is to let students know that gender values and identities are not universal but rather can vary greatly in different times and places. For example, they may be surprised to know that:

- any medieval Europeans thought that men thought about love than women, who were seen as being less emotional,
- some of the societies of eighteenth century Nigeria didn't have a collective category for 'women' but rather had separate categories for wife, mother, daughter, queen, etc.
- early modern Jewish notions of masculinity and femininity tended to revolve around men being scholarly and bookish while women ran the family and even businesses in order to allow men to study.

You may have other examples, and you may ask students to research additional examples. The lesson here is that gender identities are constructed. They come about through cultural agreement and the sharing of ideas in particular settings, and they change over time. This doesn't mean that there aren't common ideas or that there is no basis in biology, but it does mean that in order to understand what's going on in a particular place and time, we have to understand how gender is constructed in that setting.

In the late nineteenth century Gold Coast, two different constructions of gender came together. Students should be able to pick out some of the elements of these constructions by viewing/reading the episode and the accompanying Individual and Society pathway. They may be able to pick out some of the elements described below, or you may use these descriptions to jump-start their reading. The descriptions below are brief, and you may want to expand:

Colonial British notions of gender

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">- The dominant ideal of masculinity was that of the responsible "father" figure, described in earlier chapters through the idea of "paternalism." The adult |
|---|

- man was supposed to be the leader of his wife, children, and other dependents. Among the values associated with the male role were discipline, decisive leadership, responsibility, and authority.
- The notion of 'honor' was important to masculinity. It generally meant behaving like a 'gentleman': being loyal, true to one's word, and dedicated to the job at hand.
 - Colonial officials and settlers, especially, were also expected to be brave, adventurous, and loyal to each other. Violence, especially towards "natives," was accepted as a necessary evil.
 - Women were expected to be good mothers and to take care of the home. They were not generally expected to be in the political or public sphere. Women were considered to be more emotional than men and less reasonable or rational. They needed the protection of men – fathers and husbands – normally.
 - Children legally belonged in the custody of their fathers rather than their mothers.
 - Note that there were dissident ideas of masculinity and femininity (like those that show up in the writing, say of Jane Austen), but the ideas above were dominant.

Akan notions of gender

- Akan notions of masculinity took various forms at this time. There was an idea of adult masculinity, in which a man should be a husband who provided his family with food, shelter, and cloth and was a successful farmer (and possibly hunter). The family in this ideal was not only his wife and children but also a much more extended family of relatives to whom he was expected to contribute. Other ideas of masculinity included the successful merchant and the chief. All of these individuals expressed their masculine success partly by sharing – distributing wealth to their relatives and/or subjects – while still remaining wealthy and powerful themselves. Men's honor was mostly based on their reputation as a fair person and their participation in community problem-solving.
- Femininity among the Akan was similarly bound up in marriage. Being a wife was deemed respectable, and having children was even more important. Being a good and faithful wife was also considered to contribute to women's health (see episode 2). Unlike in British society, however, Akan society gave women custody of children and embraced the idea of women making money and, in some cases, being in the public sphere. Women could also easily divorce their husbands in most cases, and if they were mistreated by their husbands they could easily go back to their parents, something that was usually not an option for British women at the time.
- Nevertheless, Akan notions of women at this time similarly expressed the ideal that women should be attached to a man – father or husband, especially.

Gender in Abina's case

In the late nineteenth century colonial Gold Coast, British and Akan ideas about gender came together in a way that was mostly harmful for women. Because most British colonial officials were men, and they believed that only men should be in the public sphere, they worked out laws only with Akan men, and particularly those who were wealthy and powerful. Akan women were excluded. Some Akan men, in turn, used this fact to restrict the traditional rights of women, including in terms of divorce.

In colonial towns and cities, especially, laws came into effect to restrict women and girls to the households of men. Because of their own ideas about women, the British believed that they should be attached to men who could discipline and guide them. As a result, they frequently supported men – like Quamina Eddoo – who claimed to be protecting and mentoring young women, even when there was evidence that these women were slaves. This appears to be very much a factor in this case, and it shows in the kinds of ideas Melton expresses in his meeting with Brew and Davis.

Consider asking your students, How do you think this will affect his ultimate decision? They may not have an answer yet, but certainly there is evidence that in some cases the idea that women should be in the household of a senior man influenced judges to return girls – even those who claimed to have been enslaved – to the households of their ‘masters,’ sometimes as apprentices (as is discussed in this Episode).

Gender 2: marriage and slavery

Gender operated in this case in another way as well – in terms of the importance of marriage – and this can be seen in Abina's continued testimony about the importance of marriage. This topic, covered in the Biography pathway, builds on the one above (which is covered in the Individual and Society pathway). You may want to transition by asking students:

- Given the descriptions of Akan gender, above, why do you think Abina brings up marriage so often in her testimony?

The key point here, which students may not reach, is that marriage helped make a woman respectable, and Abina probably craved that respectability, as did most women in her society. As a relationship, it also contributed to their health.

But then, ask students, why did Abina not want to marry Tando? There are probably three answers to this question, and students will learn different lessons from each of them. They may come up with these answers, or you may need to relate them to the students:

1. Abina was already married, to Yaw, and marrying Tando would have made her 'unfaithful' and hence might have affected her health. Remember that health, for the Akan, was bound up in relationships, and breaking or being unfaithful in relationships was thought to negatively affect one's health.
2. The second answer is bound up in 'cloth'. Remember that a husband was supposed to give cloth to his wife. When Tando tried to give cloth to Abina, however, Quamina Eddo stopped him from doing so. This told Abina that, although she was to be married to Tando, she would do so only as a slave to Eddoo. Thus it was a key indication of her slave status, and being a slave was *not* respectable nor desirable.
3. Finally, Abina says she *did not like* Tando. This may very well have been an important factor in her decision, or it may be what she told a judge who, she knew, would not understand her culture.

In any case, it shows that marriage was possibly an important factor in Abina's decision to run away, and in the case!

Abolition and Emancipation: the end of slavery?

In his discussion with Brew and Davis, James Melton describes some of the history of British involvement in the slave trade and their eventual abolition of slavery in the Gold Coast Colony and Protectorate. This history is important partly for understanding British motives but also for understanding the historical context in which Abina was fighting – both the extent of abolition laws and their limitations!

You may want to begin by reminding students of the history of the Atlantic slave trade, and especially British involvement. Here is a brief timeline:

- 1440s – first evidence of European enslavement of sub-Saharan Africans by Portuguese ships passing the coast and kidnapping Africans on the beaches of West Africa.
- 1562 – Captain John Hawkins makes a deliberate voyage to West Africa in search of captives. This is the first English slaving voyage (we use the term "English" as "Britain" was not yet a united country, but you may use "British" instead if it helps students)
- 17th century – the height of the English (British) slave trade, as sugar plantations expand in the British Caribbean colonies of Jamaica and Barbados
- 1807 – Britain bans the Atlantic slave trade, the first major state to do so (Denmark banned the trade earlier, but was not a large state)
- 1834 – Britain abolishes slavery in its colonies, including the small forts it holds on the Gold Coast
- 1874/1875 – following the establishment of the Gold Coast Colony and Protectorate, the British governor abolishes slavery

Thus by 1874 Britain had moved from being the largest slave-trading nation in the world to the greatest abolitionist power. Yet what did this actually mean for girls like Abina?

It is important to begin your discussion by helping students to distinguish between *de jure* (by law) abolition and the actual *de facto* (factual) end of slavery. While the British government *de jure* abolished slavery in the Gold Coast in 1874, slavery as a practice did not, in fact, end then (and indeed continues to this day in limited situations, something discussed in episode 6).

Partly, this continuity is just a matter of reality: people break the law, in terms of slavery as well as other crimes. Murder is illegal in the US today, for example, but it still happens. But the persistence of slavery was also a result of the way the British structured their abolition policy in the Gold Coast in 1874/1875. As students will read in this pathway, the British:

- declared slavery and slave trading *illegal*
- but didn't put any money or effort into telling the enslaved they were now free, or in freeing them!

Why did they do this? As students will remember from the Colonialism pathway in Episode 2, the British administrators faced a conundrum:

- on the one hand, they were required by their government to abolish slavery (and many may have been abolitionists themselves)
- on the other hand, they depended on slave-owning important men ("grandees") for the profitability and stability of the colony.

This half-way measure was their solution to this problem!

But the question remains, did enslaved Africans in the Gold Coast liberate themselves under the new law? This question has been the topic of debate among a number of historians. You can briefly mention this debate to show students how historians still disagree on such topics, often based on their emphasis of different evidence. Two of the most significant interpretations (which also disagree the most) are those of Gerald McSheffrey on the one hand, and Marion Johnson, and Ray Dumett on the other. I will add my own interpretation to the chart as well:

Historian	Argument	Evidence
Gerald McSheffrey	Most slaves, when they learned of the new laws, emancipated themselves & left their masters	Mostly letters from missionaries, especially in one district (Akyem Abuakwa), that said hundreds of slaves had left there
Raymond Dumett (and	Few slaves left	Mostly official reports

Marion Johnson)	immediately, and slavery only gradually diminished	from administrators
My interpretation (Trevor Getz)	Slavery didn't diminish rapidly, but more specifically: mostly adult men were able to leave easily, and the enslavement of young women/girls increased	Primarily court cases

Note that these three interpretations rely on different sources. There are other challenges, however. Here are weaknesses of each interpretation:

- McSheffrey relies on the writing of missionaries, many of whom were personally antagonistic to the King of Akyem Abuakwa and wanted to portray a region in chaos. Also, his evidence is mostly confined to one region out of many.
- Dumett and Johnson rely on the reports of administrators, who mostly wanted to convince their superiors that everything was going smoothly and thus may have downplayed any big disruption.
- My main sources are a small number of court cases, and most of the choices made by the enslaved would not have made it to court. They would have likely chosen to leave, or not to leave, without actually going to court. Abina was exceptional in this.

Who is right? The answer isn't clear. What is clear is that young women like Abina Mansah were in a situation where they would only be liberated if they personally took action, something that was quite difficult for young women and girls, especially, in a place and time where – as we have seen – the rights and freedoms of women were very limited.

Important man: James Davis and the 'civilizing mission'

Discussion of James Davis may be limited, partly because key concepts like the "civilizing mission" have already been introduced, and partly because we know very little about him personally.

Because we know so little about Davis, his personality in the book is actually a composite of many other young men of mixed heritage in the 19th century Gold Coast, with the kind of educations (mostly from missionary schools) that a Court Interpreter (Davis' official job) would have needed.

Your students might wonder what these young men and boys (almost all were male) learned in these schools, run by independent Protestant missionaries. Certainly,

they received some religious training. They also learned to read and write in English and were taught some mathematics. Some may have also been taught Dutch (before the 1870s) or German (the language of the Basel Missionaries who ran some schools). They also received less formal training in European ideas of the time, especially the dominant cultural ideal of colonialism: the civilizing mission. What was the civilizing mission?

In the nineteenth century many Europeans became convinced that they were the most “civilized” people of the world and that they had a duty to bring their values and “civilization” to everyone else. As students will have learned in Episode 2, this “civilization” included Christian evangelism, a belief in free trade and free labor rather than slavery, and support for democratic ideals. It was a powerful set of ideals that found expression in the famous words of one of the great architects of the empire, Joseph Chamberlain:

We feel now that our rule over these territories can only be justified if we can show that it adds to the happiness and prosperity of the people, and I maintain that our rule does, and has, brought security and peace and comparative prosperity to countries that never knew these blessings before. In carrying out this work of civilization we are fulfilling what I believe to be our national mission, and we are finding scope for the exercise of these faculties and qualities which have made of us a great governing race . . . in almost every instance in which the rule of the Queen has been established . . . there has come with it greater security to life and property, and a material improvement in the condition of the bulk of the population.—Joseph Chamberlain, Speech to the Royal Colonial Institute, London, 31 March, 1897.

You might want to spend some time going over this quote carefully with students, until they can identify the main concept of the civilizing mission within it. They should also know that this was a principal justification for colonialism overall, including in the Gold Coast.

So what does this have to do with men like James Davis? As I stated above, the idea of the civilizing mission was taught alongside language, reading, and religion in the missionary-run schools of the period. It was also frequently cited by colonial administrators and other Europeans on the coast. Many Africans who studied in these schools and who worked for Europeans came to a certain degree to believe that British and European culture, government, and technology were desirable. Such ideas were often expressed in the newspapers and letters they wrote, including such African-published newspapers as the Gold Coast Times.

Does this make students want to condemn James Davis as a “collaborator”? Referring back to Episode 2, students may recall that those who worked with the British were not merely “collaborators,” They had many motivations. Ask students what these might be. Here are some potential answers:

- For somebody like Davis, who had an education but wasn't an important son of a powerful family (like Brew) or a big landowner (like Eddoo), espousing the ideas of the civilizing mission was a good career move.
- Men like Davis may have publically spoken of their support for British ideals like the civilizing mission, but privately may not have believed them at all.
- Men like Davis, of mixed heritage, may have taken on the ideas of the civilizing mission as part of their own heritage, but also may have believed that Africans should adopt British-style government and culture to some degree, but should do so as independent countries, and only mixed with their own local traditions.

The last, in fact, is an argument that many important intellectuals on the Gold Coast did raise in the early 20th century. These include Joseph Casely-Hayford (a relative of James Hutton Brew!) and John Mensa Sarbah. The writings of both of these Euro-African scholars from the Gold Coast are available online, and you may want to direct students to them.

Homework assignments or classroom activities

Biography Pathway activity

Below are three questions that students will best be able to answer after reading and discussing the Biography pathway in Episode 4 (on marriage). You may wish to discuss any of these in class or assign them as homework:

1. In this chapter there are many instances in which important men make statements or give orders that are meant to control Abina. Choose one of those statements and write it on the top of your page the sheet of paper. Underneath, discuss the statement, the stakes of that moment for Abina, and how she chooses to respond. What does all of this tell us about Abina as a person?
- 2: Imagine that Abina was released from the power dynamics that prevented her from fully speaking her mind to those who were trying to control her. Choose one of those statements. Draw a picture of her with dialogue bubbles in which she responds with her true thoughts about the men and their actions/statements.
3. In her testimony Abina says that she knew she was a slave because Quamina Eddoo told her she had to marry Tando, and she connects her understanding to the fact that Eddoo refused to allow Tando to give her cloth but instead gave her cloth himself. Imagine you are witnessing Abina's testimony with a friend who knows nothing about Akan society. Explain in a paragraph or two how Abina believed she had been enslaved from these events.

Individual and Society Pathway activity

The questions about gender below pertain to the Individual and Society Pathway of Episode 2. You may wish to discuss them in class or assign them as homework

4. Abina's story is not just about slavery, it is also about gender in 19th century Gold Coast. Abina's story could only take place in the way it does because she was a woman. Choose one statement by one of the characters that helps explain what it meant to be a female in her society. Then, underneath, connect that statement and others in this chapter to Abina's story. How does gender help explain Abina's life story?
5. Imagine that Abina could hear and understand the conversation between Melton, Brew and Davis about females and female slaves. Draw a picture of her watching this scene and a thought bubble of what she would have thought at that moment. Or, write a paragraph-long narrative of what you imagine her thoughts would be if she could hear their discussion about slavery.

Slavery Pathway activity

Below are two questions that students should be able to answer as they read the Slavery Pathway in Episode 4. You may wish to discuss these in class or assign them as homework.

6. Abina's court case takes place in 1876, one year after slavery was abolished in the Gold Coast. However, illegal slavery was still a pervasive reality in the colony. Choose one statement by one of the characters that helps explain why slavery still existed. Then, underneath, connect that statement and others in this chapter to Abina's story. How does it help explain why Abina could have been a slave? How does it help explain why someone like Abina was more likely than others to be enslaved?
7. Imagine that Abina could hear and understand the conversation between Melton, Brew, and Davis. Draw a picture of her watching this scene and a thought bubble of what she would have thought at that moment. Or, write a paragraph-long narrative of what you imagine her thoughts would be if she could hear their discussion about slavery.

Colonialism Pathway activity

Below are two activities that could be assigned to students as they read the Colonialism Pathway for Episode 4.

8. Write a sample Wikipedia biography entry for James Davis. What are the most important aspects of his identity to discuss in the entry? Will your entry take a positive or negative view of his contribution to the Gold Coast?
9. How should we feel about men like Davis, Africans who were pro-British? Write 1-2 paragraphs explaining your view of their role in the Gold Coast colony.

Episode 4 Glossary

emancipation – ending the enslavement of a group of people or in a community or region. The term “abolition” usually refers to the legal decision to outlaw slavery, but “emancipation” is more commonly applied to actual *de facto* liberation.

collaborators – in terms of colonialism, a problematic term that posits that some colonial subjects supported or went along with foreign rule. Usually, individuals seen as “collaborators” were pursuing more complex strategies that included accommodating or working with colonial rule in certain situations

gender – socially constructed understandings of people’s roles and identities based on their perceived maleness or femaleness, which differ across and even within societies

civilizing mission – the flagship justification for European colonialism in the 19th century, which posits that Europeans had a right and a duty to bring their “superior” culture and social systems to people living in assumedly “inferior” systems.