

“THE TREATY OF TORDESILLAS: JUNE 4TH 1494



**Prof. Ivan Van Sertima - Author of
“They Came Before Columbus”**

make trade more efficient, Portugal attempted to find a direct water route to India and China. By using a direct water route, Arab merchants, who owned land trade routes, were not able to make a profit off of the European trade merchants. After Columbus’ first voyage in 1492, it was clear that conflict would soon arise over land claims by Spain and Portugal. The Portuguese also wanted to protect their monopoly on the trade route to Africa and felt threatened. It was only after the realization that Columbus had found something big, that land became the important issue. The newly discovered land held great potential wealth which would benefit European nations.

On May 4, 1493 Pope Alexander VI took action to clear up any confusion that may have arisen over territorial

The Treaty of Tordesillas was agreed upon by the Spanish and the Portuguese to clear up confusion on newly claimed lands in the New World. The early 1400s brought about great advances in European exploration. In order to

claims. He issued a decree which established an imaginary line running north and south through the mid-Atlantic, 100 leagues (480 km) from the Cape Verde islands. Spain would have possession of any unclaimed territories to the west of the line, while Portugal would have possession of any unclaimed territory to the east of the line.

After further exploration, the Portuguese grew dissatisfied with the agreement where they realized how much more land Spain had been given. In June of 1494 the line was re-negotiated and the agreement was officially ratified during a meeting in the Spanish town of Tordesillas. The Treaty of Tordesillas re-established the line 370 leagues (1,770 km) west of the Cape Verde Islands.

It was evident that little exploration had taken place at the time the treaty was signed, because Spain was granted a much larger portion of land. Portugal was only given possession of Brazil. Portugal pushed over the next several hundred years to move the border of Brazil westward. Because the line was not very well defined, the Spanish did not put up any opposition to this Portuguese expansion.

The Treaty of Tordesillas was settled by two great European powers at the time-Spain and Portugal, on June 4th, 1494.

Professor Ivan Van Sertima, writing in his seminal work, "They Came Before Columbus: The African Presence in The Americas, Two Thousand Years Before Columbus", provides a very informative and descriptive account as to how this historic line came about.

According to Professor Van Sertima, the treaty came about as a direct result of a proposal by the King of Portugal, Don Juan, on the strength of his intelligence which he received from the Africans of Guinea along the west coast

of Africa.

King Don Juan of Portugal had conspired with Christopher Columbus on his return to Spain after his first voyage in 1492. Columbus' ships, we are told by historians, got caught in a storm which took them into Portugal's waters rather than Spain's.

It was therefore the King of Portugal who was the first to be informed that Columbus had in fact discovered new lands according to European knowledge at the time. His voyage, having been financed by the King and Queen of Spain, meant that Columbus's discoveries would accrue to Spain.

Don Juan, after much trepidation and consultation demanded of Columbus when he said, "I WANT A LINE, drawn across the map of the world from north to south, from pole to pole. This line should be drawn 370 leagues west of the western most islands of the Cape Verde. Let it be the divider between the two Catholic Kingdoms. Anything found west of the line goes to you and Spain. Anything found east of the line falls to me and Portugal."

This development led to unprecedented changes in the landscape of the world leading up to this very day.

The Treaty of Tordesillas represented many things. It signaled the beginning of modern day globalization, it ushered in the period of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade; it led to the period referred to as the era of European expansion; it marked the beginning of the most horrendous experience that Africans have had to endure for over four hundred years in the form of the Institution of Slavery, it resulted in the virtual extinction of one part of the human family- that is, the indigenous people of the Caribbean and the Americas; it changed completely and almost perma-

nently the human landscape of the world.

The Treaty of Tordesillas needs fresh study and research by contemporary historians, as well as students of history, for it represents an unmistakable landmark heralding the beginning of this era in world history, just over five hundred and thirteen (513) years ago.