

## **Tordesillas: Mapping the Binary Subjugation of the Africa and Americas**

The Treaty of Tordesillas, signed on June 7, 1494, was a pivotal agreement in the Age of Discovery, establishing a crucial demarcation line that divided the newly explored lands outside Europe between the two leading maritime powers of the era, Spain and Portugal. The treaty was necessitated by escalating tensions and disputes between these two nations over their claims to newly discovered territories and the lucrative trade routes leading to the riches of the East. The demarcation line was drawn approximately 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands, which are situated off the western coast of Africa. This line effectively divided the Atlantic Ocean and the expanse of the New World into two distinct zones of influence. According to the treaty's terms, Portugal was granted exclusive rights to all lands located east of this line, while Spain was accorded control over all lands to the west. This division was designed to provide each country with a monopoly over trade, navigation, and further exploration in their respective zones, thus minimizing conflict and competition between the two powers. The origins of the treaty can be traced to the intense rivalry between Spain and Portugal over control of the lucrative spice trade in the Indian Ocean. Portugal had embarked on an ambitious quest to reach India by navigating around Africa, leveraging its established maritime routes, while Spain, under the guidance of Christopher Columbus, sought to reach the East by sailing westward. Columbus's voyages led him to the Americas, a land previously unknown to Europeans, which he claimed for Spain. This unexpected discovery significantly altered the balance of power and trade dynamics between Spain and Portugal, making the Treaty of Tordesillas a critical instrument in resolving their territorial disputes and shaping the future of European colonial expansion. The treaty's implications were profound, influencing the course of exploration, colonization, and global trade patterns for centuries to come, and underscoring the strategic importance of negotiated agreements in managing international rivalries.

### **Impact on Slavery**

The Treaty of Tordesillas, while primarily focused on territorial division and trade routes, had significant and far-reaching consequences for the transatlantic slave trade, contributing to its expansion and the exploitation of African populations. Signed in 1494, the treaty effectively sanctioned the Portuguese and Spanish colonial ventures that laid the groundwork for the mass importation of African slaves to the New World. By delineating spheres of influence, the treaty facilitated the establishment of colonial enterprises in both Africa and the Americas. Portugal's claims included regions in West Africa where they established trading posts and forts, such as in Angola and Mozambique. These areas became integral nodes in the burgeoning transatlantic slave trade. The Portuguese began exploiting local African societies, capturing and trading

slaves to meet the labor demands of their colonies, particularly in Brazil and other parts of Latin America.

Spain, given control over vast territories in the Americas, also became heavily involved in the slave trade. The demand for labor to work in Spanish silver mines and plantations led to the forced importation of African slaves to Spanish-controlled regions. The harsh conditions and intensive labor required in the New World plantations and mines created a relentless demand for enslaved laborers. The treaty indirectly promoted this tragic aspect of colonial expansion. The territorial and economic divisions outlined in the treaty provided a framework for the intensified exploitation of both African and indigenous populations. Portugal's establishment of the Atlantic slave trade routes and Spain's integration of African slaves into their colonial economies were directly influenced by the increased access to and control over new territories granted by the treaty. Estimates suggest that approximately 4 million Africans were transported to various Latin American territories as a result of these colonial policies. Brazil, as a particularly significant Portuguese colony, received around 3.5 million African slaves, making it the largest single recipient of enslaved Africans in the Americas. The slave labor was crucial to the production of sugar, coffee, and other commodities, which were central to the colonial economies of both Portugal and Spain.

### **Spread of Christianity**

The Treaty of Tordesillas, signed in 1494, underscored the commitment of both Spain and Portugal to spread Christianity to the indigenous peoples within their respective territories. This pledge was a core component of their broader mission during the Age of Exploration, reflecting a deep-seated religious ambition alongside their economic and territorial goals.

For Portugal, the spread of Christianity was particularly significant in its African colonies. In places like Angola and Mozambique, Portuguese missionaries, primarily Jesuits and Franciscans, played a crucial role in the colonization process. They established missions and sought to convert local populations to Christianity, often blending Christian teachings with indigenous traditions. For example, in Angola, missionaries established the Kingdom of Kongo as a significant Christian stronghold in the 16th century, where local rulers and many of their subjects embraced Christianity. Similarly, in Mozambique, the Portuguese set up missions along the coastline and in the interior regions. These missions were not only religious centers but also acted as outposts for Portuguese influence, integrating local communities into the colonial administration while promoting Christian values. The conversion efforts often included the construction of churches and schools, aimed at educating and indoctrinating local populations.

Spain's efforts in the Americas were equally profound. The Spanish established a vast network of missions across their territories, including in modern-day Mexico, Peru, and the southwestern United States. Notable examples include the missions in New Spain (present day Mexico), such as those founded by the Franciscan friars in the early 16th century. These missions were instrumental in the conversion of large numbers of indigenous peoples, as well as in the cultural and social transformation of local societies. The establishment of missions in

Peru, including those in Cuzco and surrounding areas, facilitated not only religious conversion but also the consolidation of Spanish control over the Incan Empire.

The impact of these missionary activities was significant and lasting. In both Africa and the Americas, Christian missions led to the widespread conversion of indigenous peoples, reshaping cultural and social landscapes. This process often involved the integration of Christian doctrines with local traditions, leading to unique forms of religious expression. However, these efforts also had complex and sometimes adverse effects, including cultural suppression and the imposition of foreign values on indigenous societies.

In summary, the treaty highlighted the religious objectives of both Spain and Portugal as they expanded their empires. Through the establishment of missions and conversion efforts, both nations sought to spread Christianity, leaving enduring marks on the cultures and societies within their colonies.

#### **\*Views are personal**

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