

Discovery Day

Dr. Cleveland W. Eneas Sr. addressed the Rotary Club of East Nassau October 1989. His remarks follow.

INTRODUCTION

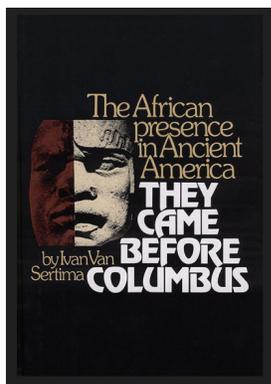
This weekend is a holiday weekend, and we are having a public holiday on Monday to celebrate Discovery Day. It is also called Columbus Day, and is celebrated in many parts of the Western world, including the United States. Almost 500 years ago, a celebrated Genoese sailor named Christopher Columbus happened upon an island in our archipelago, which none of his peers knew was there.

In the western part of this globe we now know about them, but the European of the 15th century had no positive knowledge that they existed.

I have told you, the last time I talked to you on this subject, about a study by an English author named Ivan Van Sertima entitled *They Came Before Columbus* in which he, in a very scholarly manner, discusses the African presence in ancient America. Ivan Van Sertima

Prof. Leo Wiener: *Africa and the Discovery of America*, which was published more than a half century ago. I quote Sertima: "Professor Wiener had been working on a grammar of American languages in the early years of this century, when he stumbled upon a body of linguistic phenomena that indicated clearly to him the presence of an African and Arabic influence on some medieval Mexican and South American languages before the European contact period."

This English author then went into a serious search for evidences to prove such a theory, and came up with some startling revelations about "the secret route from Guinea". For this discussion allow me to quote briefly from Sertima one evidence that he came up with: "Chris-



t o p h e r C o l u m b u s is at dinner, intriguing with Don Juan, the king of Portugal, who first tells him of a secret t r a d e

route that Africans have been travelling to the New World.

The news is easily confirmed by Christopher Columbus - because on his second voyage to the Americas, the natives described repeatedly to him the black men who traded with them, and whose spears were tipped with gold."

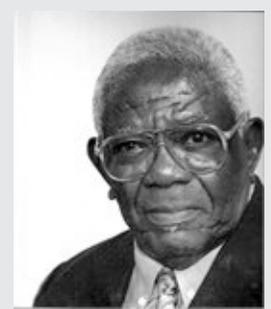
He went on with well documented notes and references to describe some of the possible evidences as to the likelihood of all this. This is not pertinent to this Discovery Day talk but I brought it up as a matter of interest related to the discovery of America. Our talk is about Columbus and the effect his discovery had on the world.

The people of Europe and Asia had written histories, many centuries before the 15th. They had gone through centuries of development and recorded their achievements so that the people of Europe, Asia Minor, and North America had certain knowledge in common. Marco Polo in the 13th century had travelled to the East and described graphically the kingdom of Prester John, the empire of the Grand Khan and the gold and silver of Java and India. The Portugese in 1415 attacked and

captured the Moorish stronghold of Ceuta in North Africa, and this inspired them to go further south along the coast of Africa finding peopled settlements all along the way.

CAPE OF GOOD HOPE

With the knowledge of what was in the East and especially what was in India, this achievement of the Portuguese, spurred them on



DR. CLEVELAND W. ENEAS

About the author

Cleveland W. Eneas Sr. is a some time practising dentist who is employed part time by his older son, Dr. Cleveland W. Eneas Jr. He is a Bahamian-Bahamian, having been born in the middle of Bain Town, in the middle of the summer of 1915. In spite of the fact that most people believe that he is the oldest man in Nassau, he's still in the youth of old age.

He is the son of the late Bishop W. V. Eneas of the Church of God. He was educated in the schools of Nassau, and then his father sent him to Tuskegee Institute, where he finished high school in 1933, and earned a B. Sc. degree in 1937. He and his wife Muriel, a retired headmistress of St. Anne's High-School, have just returned from Tuskegee University, where he celebrated his 15th class reunion.

He is a graduate of Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tenn., in the class of 1941. Upon graduation, he taught gross anatomy and oral surgery for six years at Meharry.

He has practiced general dentistry in Nassau since 1947. He is in partnership with his son, whom he describes as "a very benevolent boss." His other children are: Dr. Judson F. Eneas, who is practising internal medicine and nephrology in Nassau, and

to the desire to round the Cape of Good Hope, like Vasco da Gama, to get these treasures. Europe's dreams and ambitions in the 15th century consisted mostly of reaching India and the East. To reach the riches of the East was necessary for them, for as the Estates General of France complained in 1484: two Popes had drained France of more than two million in gold. Other countries must have suffered the same fate and needed a bolstering of their economies.

It never occurred to the Europeans that the riches of the East belonged to the people of the East and were not theirs to take. To them, the world was theirs. The Pope had divided the world up between Spain and Portugal in 1455 and France and Britain and the other countries of Europe assumed their ownership later and took the Pope's gesture as a joke.

Europe was bursting at the seams with people and its economy was being devastated. It was the period of the Renaissance and there was a renewed interest in geography. The medieval idea of the earth being flat had been dispensed with long ago. After reading Greek scholars, there was speculation that there was a possibility of reaching

the far East by making a western voyage. In the 13th century, Roger Bacon's scientific methods led him to speculate that there was land and ocean distribution all over the globe and by sailing west from Spain for a few days one would arrive in western Asia.

Columbus of Genoa was a sailor and navigator of great learning, especially of things pertaining to geography and mathematics. As a youth, he studied all that was available in these faculties and made "Marco Polo's accounts of China almost his bible." He, therefore, planned a voyage to put to the test Bacon's speculations, and was assured by the great Italian geographer, Pablo Toscanelli that his intention was sound.

AN INDEPENDENT PORTUGAL

Political and economic changes brought about much unrest in Europe. The nation state was on the rise and the shape of Europe was drastically altered. France had rejected England's claims to any of its lands; Portugal established its independence from Spain, which had become independent of the Moors and Ferdinand and Isabella became sovereign Lords of Spain. These two were ready to emulate in the West;

what Portugal had done in Africa with colonies and free labour.

The Crusades had failed but the zeal that was built up for the propagation of the faith and the saving of the Holy Land for the Christians was still present. This zeal had to have an outlet somewhere and so discovering new lands and expanding their overseas possessions ensured most of this, especially in Spain and England.

There were two economic factors that also spurred the interest in Columbus' venture. First, the European in the Mediterranean area had learned from India how to process sugar, and had their factories and plantations in Sicily and Cyprus. Second, Europeans had learned from the Portugese and the Moors how to tap colonial labour. When Columbus left Spain on August 3rd, 1492 (exactly 500 years to the day I was married - in 1992 I would have been married 50 years) he was equipped with a variety of helpful gadgets. He took with him the European wanderlust, a powerful economic impulse, the required technical aids, a dominant crusading motive and the knowledge that Africa was a reservoir of almost limitless labour.

Dr. Agreta Eneas, who is practising family medicine at the Princess Margaret Hospital.

Dr. Eneas is a charter member of the first Kiwanis club to be formed outside of the continental U.S.A. and Canada - the Kiwanis Club of Nassau - and is still an active member in that club. He has served in many positions in Kiwanis, from chairing programme committees, president in 1969-1970; Lt. Governor in 1974 for which he received a distinguished Pin.

His hobbies are many, but chiefly golf and writing, in which pursuits he is ably assisted by his wife. It is said that he is a very good golfer, but never learned how to make good scores. He has written and published three books: *Bain Town*, *Let the Church Roll on* and his latest, *Tuskegee, Ra! Ra!*

Dr. Eneas has been the chairman of the Bahamas Golf Federation for a number of years. He is the chairman of the boards of trustees for both the Southern Public Library and the Nassau Public Library.

He is a Presbyterian elder, and superintendent of the Sunday school at the Kirk in Nassau.

In the 1989 New Year's honours he was made an Officer of the British Empire.

GREAT CONTROVERSY

The certainty as to where he first landed is still a matter of great controversy. Historians have come to the arbitrary conclusion that it was an island in The Bahamas that we now call San Salvador. The natives called it Guanahani. Christened in San Salvador and by an Act of Parliament in 1927 we officially called it San Salvador. On the eighth of October 1986, I happened to have heard over radio station WKAT an announcement that National Geographic Research

team through the aid of computers, found that Columbus did land in The Bahamas but not at San Salvador, but at a place called either Savannah Cay or Samana Cay.

At this point, I wish to quote from the thesis of a Bahamian student, Karen Stewart, which she submitted for her bachelor's degree in 1988. She entitled her thesis: "Could the Real San Salvador please stand up."

"In November 1986, Joseph Judge, Senior Associate Editor of National Geographic startled both the public and academics alike by

claiming that the solution to the mystery (of the Columbus landfall) is Samana Cay. Why is it that many people since 1625 have done extensive research and come up with nine different possible solutions to the mystery? The unfounded certainty is due to the ambiguity and imprecision found in the third-hand copy of Columbus's *Diario de a Bordo*. Fray Bartolome de Las Casas, contemporary of Columbus, transcribed Columbus' diary from a copy of the diary (known as the Barcelona copy) in his book, *Historia de las Indias*. The fact that Las Casas worked from a copy of the diary coupled with the unavoidable navigational errors that a friar could easily commit allows a lot of room for error. Each advocate of a specific landfall theory used this high percentage of error in the log to his own personal advantage."

It is reported that the Minister of Education was asked about this and his reply is reported to have been, "I can care less as long as they don't try to take him out of The Bahamas".

Nevertheless, Columbus goes down in the records as our first European tourist, who left home on borrowed money, not knowing exactly where he was going and

didn't know where he was when he got there, and ended up in goal when he got back home. This has been the fate of many since him.

He, like the people whom he met on these islands, did not record very much, and not as accurately as he might have. Because of this, a German professor of geography named the lands that Columbus found America. This was done because a Florence adventurer by the name of Amerigo Vespucci reached the new world in 1492, but he wrote completely about his achievement to the point that it was read all over Europe and the thought persisted that he had eclipsed Columbus. It wasn't until the early part of the 19th century, when a country upon gaining its independence chose to call itself Columbia in honor of Columbus.

WHAT DID HE DISCOVER?

What did Columbus really find? He found land, where he hoped it would be, but he thought it was Asia. He found a kind and gentle people, whom he called Indians because he thought that he was in India. In our islands he found no gold or minerals, but a kind and gentle people who befriended him. There is no evidence that he ever saw the

two large continents that lay to the west of the islands of the Caribbean.

The whole object of his venture was to find gold and silver, and to spread the faith of the Catholic church. When he had sailed through our islands and found no gold, he lost interest in them, and established his first settlement on the north coast of Hispaniola, where he did find gold. Here he also found a gentle people, whom his people forced into panning gold from the streams from dawn until dusk. When they had exhausted the streams of the area, they were put to digging for the ore. This kind of work decimated them to the point that too soon there were not enough left to do the digging.

When the labour of Hispaniola was depleted, the Spaniards (if not Columbus himself, but those whom he caused to be there) remembered that Columbus had many "friends" in The Bahamas. They petitioned the king to allow them to bring these Arawaks to Hispaniola, so that they could convert them to Christianity, and to continue to dig for gold.

They beguiled these unsuspecting Arawaks by telling them that they were being taken to the land of their ances-

tors so they went singing and dancing to the prospect. In a strange land being forced to labour all day they began to fret and began to die in great numbers. Those who would not succumb to the deceit of the Spaniards were hunted like animals and suffered the great cruelty in being forced to work.

WHAT DID THEY FIND?

The people of these islands found that they were not able to withstand the cruelty and the ungodliness of the Spaniards, nor had they any resistance to the diseases that the Spaniards brought to the islands. When they had decimated the people that they found here, the Spaniards left the islands fallow for more than a hundred years and never did anything for the development of them.

It was good to have discovered these lands but they were useless unless they could be made to produce. Eventually, it was found that they could produce sugar cane on a big scale. To do this they needed inexpensive labour, and the people that they found here were not suited for the labour that they required.

It must not be forgotten that from his first voyage, Columbus was equipped with the knowledge

that there was an unlimited source of cheap labour in West Africa. The Portuguese had used black Africans as slaves long before Columbus left Spain, and he was sensitive to this. When the Spaniards found that they needed this labour, they remembered the knowledge of Columbus.

Thus he must be credited with opening up the way for one of the worst periods in the history of man's inhumanity to man - human slavery in the West Indies and the Americas. The dastardly "middle passage" followed the route of Columbus, and turned out to be the watery grave of many an African.

WHAT DO WE CELEBRATE?

Nevertheless in the face of all this, the results of his ventures, though bad for some, were good for the many. In 1992, this new world would have been included on the map of the globe for 500 years. In those five centuries, the thinking, the beliefs, and the demeanour of the earth have changed enormously and the question is: is the globe any better off for it? I dare say there is not one of you who will not agree that it is better. I am certain that it is "Better in The Bahamas" and for many

reasons. In spite of the fact that the Spaniards had no hand in making it better, we still have cause to celebrate.

A few years ago our government formed a committee to make plans for the recognition of this great event; what these plans are, has not yet been fully revealed, but we hope that they will

be worthy of our sovereign state and nation. It is only proper that anything that has changed the world as much as Columbus' discovery has, is worthy of great adulation. I plan to go to Adelaide for the weekend and enjoy it. Gentlemen, may you also have an enjoyable Columbus Day.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Eric Williams: From Columbus to Castro - The History of the Caribbean 1492-1969.
2. Gillian Bain: Bahamian History Book 2.
3. Eric Williams: Capitalism and Slavery.
4. Ivan Van Sertima: They Came Before Columbus.
5. Karen Stewart: Bachelor's Thesis - Could the Real San Salvador Please Stand Up?

Article from The Nassau Guardian, Monday, October 30, 1989