

they came before columbus ivan van sertima

****They Came Before Columbus: Ivan Van Sertima and the Rewriting of History****

they came before columbus ivan van sertima is more than just a phrase; it's a powerful assertion that challenges the traditional narratives of history. Ivan Van Sertima, a Guyanese-born historian and anthropologist, revolutionized the way we think about pre-Columbian trans-oceanic contact. His groundbreaking work, particularly in his book **They Came Before Columbus**, argues that Africans reached the Americas long before Christopher Columbus set sail in 1492. This perspective invites us to reconsider the established Eurocentric view of history and to explore the rich, intertwined histories of ancient civilizations.

Who Was Ivan Van Sertima?

Ivan Van Sertima was a pioneer in Afrocentric scholarship. Born in 1935, he dedicated his life to uncovering the contributions of African peoples to world history, particularly in areas often overlooked by mainstream historians. His expertise spanned linguistics, anthropology, and history, and his academic rigor brought credibility to ideas that were once dismissed as fringe theories.

Van Sertima's work sought to illuminate the evidence of African presence in the Americas before Columbus, challenging the dominant narrative that the Americas were "discovered" solely by Europeans. His approach combined archaeological findings, linguistic analysis, and cultural studies, offering a holistic view of early human migrations and interactions.

The Core Thesis of They Came Before Columbus Ivan Van Sertima

At the heart of **They Came Before Columbus** is the claim that African explorers and traders reached the Americas centuries before Columbus. Van Sertima examined artifacts, linguistic similarities, and cultural practices across continents to support this thesis. He argued that the Olmec civilization of Mesoamerica, known for their colossal stone heads, provides some of the most compelling evidence of African influence.

The Olmec Heads: A Closer Look

One of Van Sertima's most cited points is the resemblance of the Olmec colossal heads to African facial features. These enormous stone sculptures, dating back to around 1200 BCE, have sparked debate among archaeologists. Van Sertima suggested that these sculptures indicate direct contact or the presence of Africans in ancient America, rather than mere coincidence or artistic interpretation.

This hypothesis has encouraged further research into transatlantic voyages in antiquity, pushing scholars to look beyond Eurocentric paradigms and explore alternative explanations for cultural diffusion.

Evidence Supporting Pre-Columbian African Contact

Van Sertima's arguments are supported by various strands of evidence, which include:

- **Maritime Technology:** Ancient African civilizations, especially those in West Africa, had advanced maritime skills that could have enabled transatlantic journeys.
- **Linguistic Parallels:** Similarities between African languages and some indigenous American languages suggest historical contact or migration.
- **Cultural and Religious Symbols:** Shared motifs in art, religious practices, and mythology point toward cross-cultural exchanges.
- **Botanical Evidence:** The presence of African crops in the Americas before Columbus hints at early contact.

These elements combined create a compelling argument that challenges the simplistic notion that the Americas were isolated until European arrival.

The Role of Ancient African Mariners

One of the most fascinating aspects of Van Sertima's work is his exploration of ancient African maritime history. The peoples of the Niger River region and the Senegambian coast had sophisticated boat-building techniques and navigational knowledge. This made long-distance sea voyages plausible.

Van Sertima suggested that these mariners could have crossed the Atlantic Ocean, intentionally or inadvertently, bringing their culture and influence with them. This idea reframes African history as dynamic and interconnected with the rest of the world, rather than isolated and static.

Impact and Controversy Surrounding Van Sertima's Work

His work came before Columbus, and Van Sertima remains both influential and contentious. His work has inspired a generation of scholars and activists to explore African contributions to global history. However, it has also faced criticism from some mainstream archaeologists and historians who argue that the evidence is circumstantial or insufficient.

Despite the debates, Van Sertima's scholarship has undeniably opened doors for Afrocentric perspectives in academia, encouraging a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of history.

Why This Matters Today

Understanding the possibility that Africans reached the Americas before Columbus has profound implications for how we view cultural identity and historical narratives. It challenges the dominance of Eurocentric history and validates the experiences and histories of African descendants across the Americas.

This perspective encourages greater appreciation for diversity in ancient human interactions and helps dismantle myths that have long marginalized non-European civilizations.

Exploring Further: Related Topics and Insights

If you're intrigued by **they came before columbus ivan van sertima**, there are several related areas worth exploring to deepen your understanding:

- **Pre-Columbian Trans-Oceanic Contact Theories:** Examining other proposed contacts, such as Polynesian, Asian, or European arrivals before Columbus.
- **Afrocentric Historiography:** Studying how African-centered perspectives reshape global history.
- **Archaeological Discoveries in the Americas:** Investigating finds that suggest diverse origins and influences.
- **Maritime Archaeology and Ancient Navigation:** Learning about the seafaring technologies that made ancient long-distance travel possible.

These topics help place Van Sertima's work within a broader scholarly context, enriching the conversation about early human migration and cultural exchange.

Tips for Engaging with Alternative Historical Narratives

When exploring alternative histories like those proposed by Van Sertima, it's helpful to:

1. **Maintain an Open Mind:** Be willing to question established narratives and consider new evidence.
2. **Critically Evaluate Sources:** Look for peer-reviewed research and credible scholarly work.
3. **Understand the Broader Context:** Recognize how cultural, political, and social factors influence historical interpretations.

4. **Engage with Diverse Perspectives:** Explore voices from different disciplines and communities to get a well-rounded view.

By doing so, you can appreciate the complexity of history and the ongoing process of discovery and reinterpretation.

Ivan Van Sertima's *'They Came Before Columbus'* invites us to rethink the story of human exploration and cultural interaction. His work stands as a testament to the power of questioning dominant narratives and seeking a fuller, more inclusive understanding of our shared past. Whether or not all of Van Sertima's conclusions are universally accepted, his scholarship undeniably enriches the conversation about who truly shaped the world before Columbus set sail.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is Ivan Van Sertima and what is his connection to 'They Came Before Columbus'?

Ivan Van Sertima was a Guyanese-born historian and anthropologist known for his book *'They Came Before Columbus,'* which argues that Africans reached the Americas before Christopher Columbus.

What is the main thesis of 'They Came Before Columbus' by Ivan Van Sertima?

The main thesis is that African explorers made contact with the Americas long before Columbus's voyage in 1492, challenging the traditional Eurocentric narrative of history.

What kind of evidence does Ivan Van Sertima present in 'They Came Before Columbus'?

Van Sertima presents archaeological, linguistic, cultural, and botanical evidence to support the idea of pre-Columbian African contact with the Americas.

How has 'They Came Before Columbus' influenced discussions about pre-Columbian history?

The book sparked debates about the role of African civilizations in early American history and encouraged reexamination of historical narratives regarding exploration and cultural exchange.

What criticisms have been raised against Ivan Van Sertima's

claims in 'They Came Before Columbus'?

Critics argue that some of Van Sertima's evidence is speculative or misinterpreted and that mainstream scholarship lacks consensus supporting widespread African presence in pre-Columbian America.

In what ways does 'They Came Before Columbus' challenge traditional Eurocentric historical perspectives?

It challenges the idea that Europeans were the first to discover the Americas by presenting evidence of African exploration and contact, thus promoting a more inclusive view of history.

How has Ivan Van Sertima's work impacted Afrocentric scholarship?

His work has been foundational in Afrocentric studies, emphasizing African contributions to global history and inspiring further research into African diasporic connections.

Are there modern archaeological findings that support or contradict Ivan Van Sertima's theories in 'They Came Before Columbus'?

While some findings hint at trans-oceanic contacts, mainstream archaeology generally remains skeptical of Van Sertima's broad claims, citing a lack of conclusive evidence for widespread African presence before Columbus.

Additional Resources

****They Came Before Columbus: Revisiting Ivan Van Sertima's Controversial Thesis****

they came before columbus ivan van sertima is a phrase that has sparked considerable debate and intrigue within the realms of history, anthropology, and cultural studies. Ivan Van Sertima, a Guyanese-born historian and anthropologist, is best known for his groundbreaking yet contentious work that argues for pre-Columbian African contact with the Americas. His influential book, **They Came Before Columbus**, challenges conventional narratives about the discovery and peopling of the New World, suggesting that African explorers reached the Americas long before Christopher Columbus in 1492. This article delves into Van Sertima's thesis, examining its evidentiary basis, scholarly reception, and ongoing implications for our understanding of transatlantic history.

Ivan Van Sertima and the Central Thesis of They Came Before Columbus

Ivan Van Sertima's **They Came Before Columbus**, published in 1976, presents a revisionist perspective on the history of the Americas. Contradicting the Eurocentric narrative that credits

Columbus as the first to “discover” the New World, Van Sertima proposed that West African mariners, specifically from the Mali Empire and other advanced African civilizations, embarked on transatlantic voyages that predated Columbus by centuries. According to Van Sertima, these early African explorers not only reached the Americas but also influenced indigenous cultures through trade, cultural exchange, and the introduction of new technologies.

Van Sertima’s thesis is built around multiple lines of evidence, including linguistic similarities between African and Native American languages, the presence of African-style artifacts in the Americas, and the existence of African features depicted in pre-Columbian American art. One of the most cited pieces of evidence is the Olmec civilization’s colossal stone heads, which Van Sertima argued bear striking resemblance to West African physiognomy. He also highlighted botanical and agricultural parallels, such as the presence of crops like cotton and yams, which he suggested could indicate transatlantic diffusion.

Historical Background and the Need for Reevaluation

The traditional historical consensus has long maintained that the Americas were populated exclusively by peoples migrating from Asia across the Bering Strait during the last Ice Age. This model, however, often leaves little room for alternative contact theories. Van Sertima’s work arrived at a time when scholars were increasingly questioning Eurocentric historiography and seeking to acknowledge the contributions of non-European civilizations.

By situating African explorers in pre-Columbian transatlantic narratives, Van Sertima sought to address gaps in knowledge about early American history and prove the global interconnectedness of ancient civilizations. His thesis resonated strongly within Afrocentric circles, where it served to reclaim African agency and challenge the marginalization of African accomplishments in world history.

Evaluating the Evidence: Strengths and Critiques

While **They Came Before Columbus** gained popularity for its bold claims and extensive research, the academic community remains divided over its validity. Some historians and archaeologists regard Van Sertima’s evidence as circumstantial or speculative, cautioning against drawing definitive conclusions without more concrete archaeological proof.

Artifact Analysis and Interpretations

One of the most compelling aspects of Van Sertima’s argument lies in the analysis of artifacts and iconography. The Olmec heads, carved from basalt and dating back to around 900 BCE, have been central to debates about African presence in the Americas. Van Sertima and supporters argue that these sculptures’ broad noses and full lips resemble African physiognomy. However, critics counter that these features could simply represent indigenous Mesoamerican populations and caution against projecting modern racial categories onto ancient art.

Other artifacts include reported African-style pottery and tools found in various parts of the Americas. Yet, the provenance and dating of these items are often contested, and some scholars suggest they

may have been misinterpreted or even introduced post-contact through trade or migration.

Linguistic and Botanical Evidence

Van Sertima's study of linguistic parallels attempts to draw connections between African languages such as Yoruba or Mande and certain indigenous languages of the Americas. While intriguing, these comparisons have not been widely accepted as proof of transatlantic contact due to the complexities of linguistic evolution and the risk of coincidental similarities.

Similarly, botanical evidence, including the presence of crops like cotton and okra in both Africa and the Americas, is used to support the thesis. However, the diffusion of plants can occur through various mechanisms, and some argue that natural dispersal or later trade explains these agricultural commonalities better than pre-Columbian voyages.

Pros and Cons of Van Sertima's Thesis

- **Pros:**

- Challenges Eurocentric historical narratives and promotes a more inclusive view of world history.
- Encourages interdisciplinary research combining archaeology, linguistics, and anthropology.
- Sparks important discussions about cultural exchange and globalization in ancient times.

- **Cons:**

- Lack of unequivocal archaeological evidence supporting transatlantic African voyages before Columbus.
- Some interpretations rely heavily on subjective readings of art and artifacts.
- Risk of overemphasizing similarities that may be coincidental or the result of independent development.

The Legacy of They Came Before Columbus in

Contemporary Scholarship

Van Sertima's work has had a lasting impact beyond academia, influencing cultural and political movements that seek to recognize African contributions to global history. His thesis remains a cornerstone of Afrocentric historiography and has been instrumental in inspiring research into alternative historical narratives.

In recent decades, new archaeological methodologies such as DNA analysis and underwater exploration have provided fresh avenues to investigate ancient transoceanic contacts. While no definitive genetic evidence currently supports large-scale African migration to the Americas before Columbus, ongoing studies continue to explore the complexities of early human movement.

Moreover, **They Came Before Columbus** serves as a case study in the challenges of revising established historical paradigms. It underscores the importance of critical analysis, openness to new interpretations, and the necessity of rigorous evidence in reshaping our understanding of the past.

Comparative Perspectives: Other Pre-Columbian Contact Theories

Van Sertima's thesis fits within a broader category of pre-Columbian contact theories, which include claims of Viking exploration, Polynesian voyages, and even possible Asian or Mediterranean interactions with the Americas prior to the Age of Discovery.

- **Viking Expeditions:** Archaeological sites like L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland provide concrete evidence of Norse presence in North America around 1000 CE.
- **Polynesian Contact:** Some scholars suggest Polynesian seafarers may have reached South America, supported by botanical evidence such as the spread of sweet potatoes.
- **Mediterranean Theories:** Less widely accepted, these propose that ancient Egyptians or Phoenicians crossed the Atlantic, though evidence remains scant.

Van Sertima's African contact hypothesis stands out due to its cultural and political significance, as well as its emphasis on African maritime capabilities that have historically been underestimated or ignored.

Reassessing Historical Narratives Through a Critical Lens

The phrase *they came before Columbus* in *Van Sertima* encapsulates more than just a historical claim; it challenges how history is written, taught, and perceived. By advocating for the recognition of African explorers in pre-Columbian America, Van Sertima invites scholars and readers alike to

reconsider the dynamics of cultural contact, power, and identity.

While the academic community continues to debate the extent and nature of these early contacts, the conversation sparked by Van Sertima's work has undeniably broadened the scope of historical inquiry. It reminds us that history is not a static record but a living discourse shaped by new findings, perspectives, and interpretations.

In the end, exploring the question of who truly "discovered" the Americas involves not only examining artifacts and linguistic traces but also confronting the biases embedded in traditional historiography. Van Sertima's **They Came Before Columbus** remains a provocative and influential contribution to this ongoing quest for historical understanding.

They Came Before Columbus Ivan Van Sertima

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they came before columbus ivan van sertima: *They Came Before Columbus* Ivan Van Sertima, 2003-09-23 *The African presence in ancient America*--Jacket subtitle.

they came before columbus ivan van sertima: Blacks in America Before Columbus Aylmer von Fleischer, Christopher Columbus was not the first person to 'discover' the Americas. Several other peoples had already been there, including the Chinese, Norwegians, Japanese, the Vikings and Romans. This work, however, proves that Blacks were the first peoples in the Americas. Those who have a copy of 'Retake Your Fame' need not buy this book.

they came before columbus ivan van sertima: The Battle over America's Origin Story Brian Regal, 2022-05-06 This book examines the legends of who 'really' discovered America. It argues that histories of America's origins were always based less on empirical evidence and more on social, political, and cultural wish fulfillment. Influenced by a complex interplay of Nativist hatred of immigrants and Aboriginal people, as well as distrust of academic scholarship, these legends ebbed and flowed with changing conditions in wider American society. The book focuses on the actions of a collection of quirky, obsessed amateur investigators who spent their lives trying to prove their various theories by promoting Welsh princes, Vikings, Chinese admirals, Neo-lithic Europeans,

African explorers, and others who they say arrived centuries before Columbus. These myths acted as mitigating agencies for those who embraced them. Along with recent scholarship, this book makes extensive use of archival materials—some of which have never been employed before. It covers the period from the sixteenth century to the present. It brings together separate historiographic ideas to create a unified history rather than focusing on one particular legend as most books on the subject do. It shows how questions of who discovered America helped create the field of historical scholarship in this country. This book does not attempt to prove who discovered America, rather it tells the story of those who think they did.

they came before columbus ivan van sertima: From Eden to Egypt Michael S. Williams, 2001-06-20

they came before columbus ivan van sertima: *No Sense in Wishing* Lawrence Burney, 2025-07-08 “Among the most profound and dazzling debuts I’ve ever read.” —Kiese Laymon, award-winning author of *Heavy: An American Memoir* An essay collection from culture critic Lawrence Burney that is a personal and analytical look at his home city of Baltimore, music from throughout the global Black diaspora, and the traditions that raised him. There are moments throughout our lives when we discover an artist, an album, a film, or a cultural artifact that leaves a lasting impression, helping inform how we understand the world, and ourselves, moving forward. In *No Sense in Wishing*, Lawrence Burney explores these profound interactions with incisive and energizing prose, offering us a personal and critical perspective on the people, places, music, and art that transformed him. In a time when music is spearheading Black Americans’ connection with Africans on The Continent, Burney takes trips to cover the bubbling creative scenes in Lagos and Johannesburg that inspire teary-eyed reflections of self and belonging. Seeing his mother perform as the opening act at a Gil Scott-Heron show as a child inspires an essay about parent-child relationships and how personal taste is often inherited. And a Maryland crab feast with family facilitates an assessment of how the Black people in his home state have historically improvised paths for their liberation. Taking us on a journey from the streets of Baltimore to the concert halls of Lagos, *No Sense in Wishing* is a kaleidoscopic exploration of Burney’s search for self. With its gutsy and uncompromising criticism alongside intimate personal storytelling, it’s like an album that hits all the right notes, from a promising writer on the rise.

they came before columbus ivan van sertima: Toni Morrison's 'Beloved' Justine Tally, 2008-11-18 Toni Morrison’s *Beloved: Origins* explores the multifarious ways in which memory works to conserve a legacy of the ancient past. The vestiges of both Classical Greek and Ancient Egyptian belief systems call to a concern with myths of regeneration.

they came before columbus ivan van sertima: *Exiting a Racist Worldview* Daurius Figueira, 2004-06-06 This book is the second volume in a trilogy of works which commenced with *Jihad in Trinidad and Tobago*. It is in fact a journey of liberation traced through a series of texts of western discourse culminating in the discursive rupture that the works of Michel Foucault constituted. Liberation is then premised upon exiting the racist worldview of the North Atlantic via/towards alternate non-western discourse one of which is Islamic discourse. The third volume of the trilogy deals with the discursive origins of Al Qaeda within the ambit of Islamic discourse (forthcoming).

they came before columbus ivan van sertima: *Jazz Dance* Lindsay Guarino, Wendy Oliver, 2014-02-25 The history of jazz dance is best understood by comparing it to a tree. The art form's roots are African. Its trunk is vernacular, shaped by European influence, and exemplified by the Charleston and the Lindy Hop. The branches are many and varied and include tap, Broadway, funk, hip-hop, Afro-Caribbean, Latin, pop, club jazz, popping, B-boying, party dances, and much more. Unique in its focus on history rather than technique, *Jazz Dance* offers the only overview of trends and developments since 1960. Editors Lindsay Guarino and Wendy Oliver have assembled an array of seasoned practitioners and scholars who trace the many histories of jazz dance and examine various aspects of the field, including trends, influences, training, race, gender, aesthetics, the international appeal of jazz dance, and its relationship to tap, rock, indie, black concert dance, and

Latin dance. Featuring discussions of such dancers and choreographers as Bob Fosse and Katherine Dunham, as well as analyses of how the form's vocabulary differs from ballet, this complex and compelling history captures the very essence of jazz dance.

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Gerald G. Jackson, 2005 Professor Gerald G. Jackson incorporates the perceptions, ideals, hesitations and proclamations of the Hip-Hop and post Hip-Hop generations into the Africana Studies field. He pulls evidence from a rich tapestry of history, classroom learning exercises, student reports, scholar and professional led lectures, discussions and educational tours to create a groundbreaking multicultural and pluralistic model for the application of Africentric helping to the educational sphere. While the mode varies, the greater number of compositions compiled here are biographies of ordinary and extraordinary African Americans. Culturally affirming, introspective and expansive, *We're Not Going to Take it Anymore* is a rarely seen educational innovation.

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Sujan K. Dass, 2020-02-01 Who invented the traffic light? What about transportation itself? Farming? Art? Modern chemistry? Who made...cats? What if I told you there was ONE answer to all of these questions? That one answer? BLACK PEOPLE! Seriously. And this book is like a mini-encyclopedia, full of more evidence than WikiLeaks and just as eye-opening! Do you know just how much Black inventors and creators have given to modern society? Within the past 200 years, Black Americans have drawn on a timeless well of inner genius to innovate and engineer the design of the world we live in today. But what of all the Black history before then? Before white people invented the Patent Office, Black folks were the original creators and builders, developing ingenious ways to manage the world's changes over millions of years, everywhere you can imagine, from Azerbaijan to Zagazig! With wit and wisdom (and tons of pictures!) this book digs deeper than the whitewashed history we learn in school books and explores how our African ancestors established the foundation of modern society! Have you inherited this genius? What can you do with it? Inspired by solutions from the past, we can develop strategies for a successful future!

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2005-09-20 A New York Times and USA TODAY Bestseller "50 Most Impactful Black Books of the Last 50 Years." —Essence Nominated as one of America's best-loved novels by PBS's The Great American Read The instant classic from the #1 New York Times bestselling author of *Life After Death* brings the streets of New York to life in a powerful and utterly unforgettable novel. I came busting into the world during one of New York's worst snowstorms, so my mother named me Winter. Ghetto-born, Winter is the young, wealthy daughter of a prominent Brooklyn drug-dealing family. Quick-witted, sexy, and business-minded, she knows and loves the streets like the curves of her own body. But when a cold Winter wind blows her life in a direction she doesn't want to go, her street smarts and seductive skills are put to the test of a lifetime. Unwilling to lose, this ghetto girl will do anything to stay on top. Twenty-five years and over one million copies later, *The Coldest Winter Ever* is a bestseller and a national treasure, a classic handed down from one reading generation to the next. Whether you are reading it for the first time or have cherished it for years, you will never forget this Winter's tale.

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Songhay Patricia McKissack, Fredrick McKissack, 2016-03-01 For more than a thousand years, from A.D. 500 to 1700, the medieval kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay grew rich on the gold, salt, and slave trade that stretched across Africa. Scraping away hundreds of years of ignorance, prejudice, and mythology, award-winning authors Patricia and Fredrick McKissack reveal the glory of these forgotten empires while inviting us to share in the inspiring process of historical recovery that is taking place today.

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2022-10-13 *Misanthropology: Science, Pseudoscience, and the Study of Humanity* introduces students to key concepts in critical thinking across the four core branches of anthropology: cultural, linguistic, biological, and archaeological. It combines a critical analysis of anthropology as a field

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they came before columbus ivan van sertima: *Pictures of My Days* M. Perry, LaVora, 2005-03-31 Ages 8 to Adult:: Illustrated:: Black/White:: Synopsis: A creative goal-setting and visualization workshop in book form. This book helps readers use their own writing, drawings and imaginations to envision and bring their their goals to life. Readers are guided toward choosing the thoughts, words and deeds that will lead them to their desires. The book includes historical and contemporary stories and quotations to highlight concepts. The book also includes 28 supplemental sets of work pages. Additional stories, quotations and work pages are available in the companion book *Daily Pages to Create the Life You Want--A Companion to Pictures of My Days*:: ### Endorsements:: .captures.what is important in our multicultural society and asks children and adults alike to be more purposeful in our living.. an excellent piece of work. --Tim Ewing, Management Consultant and Trainer:: More than a book, *Pictures of My Days* is an artistic and literary workshop.

Readers of all ages will be prompted to release their creative muses. B.J. Robinson, Author of LeBron James: King of the Court:: This book is a gift to children everywhere. Patricia Elam, Author of Breathing Room, Writing Instructor, Duke Ellington School of the Arts, Washington, D.C.: ###

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