

FIRST BLACKS IN THE AMERICAS: The African Presence In The Dominican Republic—
A Project of the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute—
Comment No. 016 --Page 1 of 1

Date: 1504, August 26. Medina del Campo, Spain

Theme: Since early on in the colonization of La Española, there was an interest for including black women among the enslaved black population being sent to the new colony

Source: PARES, Portal de Archivos Españoles, Archivo General de Indias, INDIFERENTE,418,L.1,F.132R.-133R.

There is documented evidence, in the form of a historical memory alive in Santo Domingo at the end of the seventeenth century, of the presence of at least one free black woman in the colony before the beginning in 1502 of the tenure of colonial governor Nicolás de Ovando. (See Manuscript No. 091.) This other document of 1504 shows that at least as early as that year there was conversation among the bureaucratic elite of the new Spanish empire and more concretely among the Crown and its officials of the *Casa de la Contratación*) about the convenience of including females among the black enslaved population to be sent to La Española and the Americas.

For some reason, this particular document seems to have escaped until now the attention of the scholarship about the early presence of black people in the Americas, but it is clear proof of the concerns and questions that those in control of the new empire were grappling with in relation to cultural or ethnic issues like the religion of the people crossing the Atlantic to the territories they were controlling. On the one hand, the Crown seemed clear as to its interest in having enslaved black women being sent to La Española; on the other the Crown did not see a problem in having women that were Christian but Afrodescendant and black being enslaved and handled like chattel.