

## Notes

*Guaman Poma was an indigenous noble born in Peru after the Spanish conquest, around the middle of the 1550s. He used his facility in several indigenous languages to compile a sustained and hard-hitting critique of Spanish colonial rule in Peru, The First New Chronicle and Good Government, written between 1600 and 1615. In the excerpt, the author imagines himself in direct dialogue with the king of Spain, making his denunciation of colonial problems directly to the king's ear. In fact, the Spanish king never saw Guaman Poma's book, which remained unpublished until the twentieth century.*

## Attribution

Chasteen, John Charles. *Born in Blood and Fire: Latin American Voices*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011

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# The First New Chronicle and Good Government

**Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala**

**Message to His Royal Catholic Majesty Don Felipe III, Monarch of the World**

## Prologue

I say to Your Royal Holy Catholic Majesty—shedding tears and crying out to heaven, pleading to God, the Virgin Mary, and all the saints and angels—I say that we, the poor, suffer untold punishment, ill fortune, and destruction. May God and Your Majesty not permit the end of us poor Indians or the depopulation of your kingdom.

## Dialogue

*Guaman Poma de Ayala:* Your Royal Catholic Majesty, I tell you that in the kingdom of Peru the Indians are coming to an end, utterly to an end. In twenty years, there will be no Indians in this kingdom to serve your royal Crown and defend our holy Catholic faith, and without the Indians, Your Majesty will have nothing because, remember, the labor of the Indians has made Castile [Spain] what it is today. Your grandfather and your father were monarchs of great power and renown because of the Indians, and Your Majesty also. And this valuable kingdom is already being depopulated. In places where there were a thousand souls, not a hundred remain, and all of them old men and women who can no longer multiply. Married women are being stolen away,

and unmarried men will have to marry old women who cannot have children. Besides, the Indians suffer great woes. Their sons and daughters are taken from them, and they can do nothing because all conspire against the Indians: Spaniards and mestizos; judges, officials, and *encomenderos*; inspectors and priests of the Holy Mother Church. All conspire against the poor. All have worked hand in hand to favor the Spanish *dons* and the lady *doñas*. They exploit the poor and enter their lands and houses by force. To write these things is to weep. No officials report these things to Your Majesty. Throughout the kingdom of Peru the Indians are losing everything, but I will tell the truth regarding the income and benefits which the Indians have enjoyed and should continue to enjoy. Your Majesty should know how you are being served by the Indians. Twice a year, they offer silver, corn, wheat, clothing, chickens, livestock, and other tribute. In addition, they serve in the mines and plazas and royal inns along the highways of the kingdom. They maintain the roads and repair the bridges. They produce all sorts of revenues—the personal tax, the tithe, and the royal fifth. Your Majesty does not get as much revenue from all the mestizos, pardos, and Spaniards put together. Therefore, the Indians are worth an inestimable amount to Your Majesty: Take care that this kingdom should not lose these Indians. If a Spaniard steals away four Indian women to make little mestizos, he will bribe the judges and refuse to recognize his paternity. The Spaniards have many women and many mestizo children. They extract women from scattered settlements and pursue them day and night, both in the women's houses and in public gathering places. If the women's fathers and mothers try to defend them, they suffer mistreatment also. The Spaniards do not let Indian women marry or, if they are married, live with their husbands. So the married ones are unable to have children by their husbands and instead give birth to little mestizos. The kingdom of Peru is now full of mestizos who wander around dressed like Indians. And when a poor Indian woman has a child by a poor Indian man, the church and civil officials and *encomenderos* immediately descend on her to make her the servant of some lady or priest. Then they fornicate with her, and she soon gives birth to more little mestizos. And eventually she prefers to live that way, and on and on it goes.

*His Royal Catholic Majesty:* Tell me, author Ayala. You have told me many disturbing things about how the Indians are coming an end and are suffering troubles and cannot multiply because Spaniards steal their wives and daughters and all their possessions, leaving them with nothing. I do not send my judges to rob or do harm; but rather to honor the nobles, *caciques* [native chiefs], local authorities, and poor Indians that they may thrive and multiply in the service of God and my royal Crown, and in the defense of the holy Catholic faith. Tell me now, author Ayala, how can these problems be remedied?

*Guaman Poma de Ayala:* I say to Your Majesty that the Spaniards ought to live like Christians, marrying ladies of equal status and leaving the poor Indian women alone so that they can have Indian children. They should leave the Indians; property alone, give back what they have taken, offer money for what they have used, and pay the legal penalty if they fail to do so. He who abuses an Indian virgin or gets a married woman pregnant or forces her to fornicate should pay the legal penalty and be banished to Chile or sentenced to six years of hard labor, and all his possessions should be confiscated to pay the Indian woman and the court expenses. And any

judge who fails to do justice deserves the same punishment. Enforce the laws, and the Indians will multiply.

Your Royal Catholic Majesty, about the community lands belonging to the Indians and the churches, religious brotherhoods, and hospitals: in order that they may prosper, I recommend that the Indians be asked to give an accounting to me as your second-in-command in this kingdom. They could report to me twice a year, paying me a salary so that I will be able to devote myself to the service of God and your royal Crown and increase the public revenues. I further recommend that all the Indian and royal authorities report to me as your second-in-command in this kingdom, so that I may inform you of their needs and deservings, for I know all there is to know, all the whys and wherefores. Let me and my descendants have this power, by law and in perpetuity, and I assure you that then no Indian will go around wearing Spanish clothes, or assume the title of *don* or *doña*, or assume a title of authority that he does not deserve. That way, the Indian authorities will have to prove themselves loyal and faithful Christians, eager to serve God and Your Majesty and favor the poor.

Your Royal Catholic Majesty, if one Indian pueblo prospers and its population multiplies while another pueblo declines and only a few Indians remain there, then Your Majesty, as the new Inca king of Peru, should transfer the croplands, pastures, jurisdiction, and property of the declining pueblo to the prospering one, so that its inhabitants may serve God and Your Majesty. The names of Indians who have strayed from their pueblos without permission should go on a list, and the authorities should assign a Spaniard, mestizo, or mulatto to search for them, receiving a reward of one peso per Indian brought back in shackles. The prisoner should do forced labor to pay for the cost of his capture and then be returned to his pueblo.

So that the Indian pueblos might remain well populated and multiply, Your Royal Catholic Majesty should order the local authorities to be removed and the priests also, if they commit a single infraction, and that will remedy the problem. Also, prohibit *encomenderos* from entering the Indian pueblos, ever, for any reason, and let that prohibition be strictly enforced by royal authorities. Indian authorities should be descendants of the great Inca lords of this kingdom, reaching back to *Wari Wiracocha Runa*, *Wari Runa*, *Purun Runa*, *Auca Runa*, and *Incap Runa*. Let none be a drunk, a coca chewer, or a gambler. Good Indian leaders will recover the wanderers who have left their pueblos, and all will live at ease and multiply in the service of God and Your Majesty. Furthermore, Majesty, the Indians should not be forced to labor in the mercury mines for a year. The Indians should be allowed to rest, without the mines stopping their production, to serve Your Majesty.

*His Royal Catholic Majesty:* But tell me, author, how can the Indians rest and the mines continue working?

*Guaman Poma de Ayala:* I say to Your Majesty that the Indians who serve as laborers in the Spanish cities of this kingdom should go to the mines and trade places with the Indians who are there for one year, because working in the mercury mines is the most dangerous thing of all. Let

Indians who have gone to the cities replace those in the mines and work hard for a year while the others rest. Remember, Your Majesty, the king who loses all his Indian vassals loses everything.

*His Royal Catholic Majesty:* Explain to me, author, exactly what you mean.

*Guaman Poma de Ayala:* I say to Your Majesty that the Indians provide all the income of this kingdom. Like you, I am a prince, and without my subjects, I would be nothing. Without Indians, the land will be left barren and empty. Therefore, let no Indian boy under the age of twenty be sent to the mines or sent to smelt ore or work in any way with mercury. The young ones get mercury poisoning very quickly, and, since there is no cure, they die, and that will be the end of all the Indians.

*His Royal Catholic Majesty:* Tell me, author. What is the remedy?

*Guaman Poma de Ayala:* Let only strong, full-grown Indians be sent to work in the mines, and let each work for one day at a time, no more, each alternating with others, so none will get sick and die. And Indians who are to go to the mines should be freed for one month from personal service before they go, so that they may commend their souls to God and Mary and all the saints and angels, singing and dancing and enjoying some time with their families. Also, they should go to confession, take Communion, and make a last will and testament. Finally, I say to Your Majesty that food and water should be stored in the mines so that if the miners become trapped inside, they can survive for a time with the help of God. And let those outside work day and night to open a way into the collapse mineshaft and deliver the trapped miners from the mountain.