Name:

**Excerpt from “Letter to a King”**

**By Huaman Poma, 1613**

“I, the author of this work, went out into the world among other people just as poor as myself.

I wanted to compile a record for the benefit of Your Majesty and also the Indians. Leaving my house in my own town, I have worked for thirty years at this task. My first step was to dress myself in sackcloth so that I would really seem to be a poor man as I looked around at what the world had to show for itself…In consequence I was a witness of the way in which the Indians are robbed of their property and their wives and daughters…

“The Spaniards are pastmasters at robbery and seduction, but they go further and try to make horses or slaves out of our people. When they talk about taxpaying Indians, what they mean is slaves, and in face of such an attitude our people are unable to prosper. They are bearing a burden without any longer having an Inca to defend them. And the only person available to undertake their defense is Your Majesty.

“The fact is that the very people who are paid to cherish the Indians [the priests] are the ones who band themselves together to exploit and deceive them…

“At last I decided to return to… my own home…After the thirty years of my travels I also found my town and my province laid waste and the houses of my people in alien hands. When I came back, I discovered my own kin in a near-naked state, acting as servants to common taxpaying Indians…

“I expected to find the houses and gardens which belonged to me still intact. I had after all been the local chief… My own house and my gardens…had been handed over to Pedro Colla Quispe… They had formed a settled habit of robbing and maltreating those who were at their mercy, and the priests especially were merciless…

“Your Majesty ought to feel pity … if only because they represent so much lost property and wealth. I have seen the torments of such people and I have also heard a sermon preached by a Theatine Father, in which he said that all the Indians had to die, whether in the mines or at the hands of the Spaniards and their priests. This indicates that the Spaniards wish us ill and really want all of us to perish…

“I heard a dreadful sermon preached by the priest. He told his parishioners he was going to have them all ‘killed, skinned and salted down like mangy llamas’ and made other similar threats, until I found myself obliged to leave the church to avoid witnessing Indians in such a state of terror…

“I made the acquaintance of three old Indian women. Their persecutor was a priest…He accused these women of practicing as witches, worshipping idols and bowing down before stones. They had done none of these things, but in order to oblige them to confess Doctor Avila had them crowned, ropes tied round their necks and wax candles put in their hands. In this fashion they were made to walk in procession. It was explained to them that, if they confessed, the Visitor would be satisfied and they would be left in peace. But the three women, who were good Christians, protested that they had nothing to do with idols and only worshipped the true God. Thereupon they were tied upon the backs of white llamas and whipped, so that their blood dripped on the fleeces of the animals and dyed them red. At that stage, to avoid further torment, the three women agreed to confess to worshipping idols…

“Finally one of the old women said to me: ‘It’s true that our ancestors worshipped idols, but that applies to the Spaniards and other peoples as well. Nowadays we’re baptized as Christians. But thanks to people like [the priest] we’re likely to return to our old forms of worship in the mountains, which have become our only place of refuge. There’s nobody to grieve for us any more, except perhaps the Inca…We can look forward to nothing but pain and trouble.’…

“It was to remedy these ills of my country that I had changed myself into a poor man, endured many hardships and given up all that I had in the way of family and property. Among the Indians I was born as a great lord and it was indispensable that someone of my rank should communicate personally with Your Majesty, whose dominions are illuminated in turn by the Sun. Who but I, the author, could dare to write and talk to you, or even approach so high a personage? It was this consideration which made me venture upon my long letter. I have written as your humble vassal in the New World but also as a prince, or auqui as we say in our language, the grandson of our tenth King, Tupac Inca Yupanqui, and the legitimate son of Curi Ocllo Coya, a Queen of Peru.”