

SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ

WE ARE TOLD THAT COLONIAL SOCIETY IN THE AMERICA WAS HIERARCHICAL, WITH RACE PLAYING A BIG ROLE IN WHO RULED, AND WHO WAS RULED. WE ALSO LEARN THAT THESE WERE SOCIETIES WITH PRETTY RIGID GENDER ROLES AND ONLY LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN. THE STORY OF SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ SUGGESTS THINGS WERE A BIT MORE COMPLEX THAN THIS GENERALIZATION SUGGESTS.

IN 1648, SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ WAS BORN IN THE VILLAGE OF SAN MIGUEL DE NEPANTLA, IN WHAT HAD ONCE BEEN THE AZTEC EMPIRE BUT WAS NOW THE COLONY OF NEW SPAIN.



AS THE DAUGHTER OF A SPANISH FATHER AND A MOTHER OF MIXED-HERITAGE, JUANA MOVED BETWEEN TWO WORLDS. SHE BECAME FLUENT IN THE ANCIENT LANGUAGE OF HER AZTEC ANCESTORS, NAHUATL, AS WELL AS SPANISH, LATIN, AND GREEK. SHE MEMORIZED MANY SONGS AND ORAL TRADITIONS THAT HAD BEEN PASSED DOWN FROM THE NAHUA PEOPLE AT A VERY YOUNG AGE.

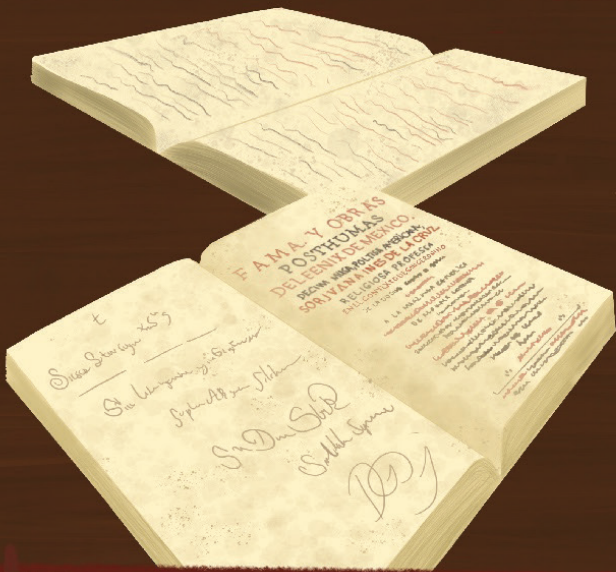


WOMEN IN SPANISH COLONIAL SOCIETY COULD NOT NORMALLY ENJOY A FORMAL EDUCATION, BUT JUANA COULD READ HER GRANDFATHER'S ENORMOUS PERSONAL LIBRARY. BY THE AGE OF EIGHT, SHE WROTE HER FIRST POEM, AND BY HER EARLY TEENS, WAS READING GREEK PHILOSOPHY.



SHE BECAME A LADY-IN-WAITING TO THE WIFE OF THE SPANISH VICEROY, WHO HELPED HER TO CONTINUE HER EDUCATION, BUT SHE ALSO QUICKLY LEARNED THAT FEW OTHER WOMEN HAD THIS OPPORTUNITY. AT JUST SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD SHE WROTE HER MOST CONTROVERSIAL POEM, HOMBRES NECIOS (YOU, FOOLISH MEN), IN WHICH SHE ARGUED IT WAS MEN, NOT WOMEN WHO WERE IRRATIONAL AND FOOLISH.

THOUGH SHE RECEIVED MANY MARRIAGE PROPOSALS, JUANA CHOSE THE ONLY OPTION AVAILABLE TO WOMEN AT THE TIME WHO WISHED TO STUDY: SHE BECAME A NUN. SHE WROTE POEMS, SONGS, LETTERS, AND PLAYS. MANY WERE PUBLISHED AND WIDELY-READ BUT SOME OF THEM GOT HER IN TROUBLE. IN 1690, SHE WAS CENSORED BY THE CHURCH FOR A PRIVATE LETTER THAT WAS SHARED WITHOUT HER CONSENT, AND WHICH CRITICIZED ESTABLISHED CATHOLIC IDEAS.



1694, JUANA STOPPED WRITING ALTOGETHER AND WAS FORCED TO RETAKE HER VOWS AS A NUN. BUT HER WORKS SURVIVED AND PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE NEW IDEAS GROWING IN EUROPE AND THE ATLANTIC ROLE IN THIS ERA.

WRITER: LINDSAY EHRISMAN
ARTIST: HELIA MILLER



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BIOGRAPHIES

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