

The Following Are the Things that You Are to Do

Instructions to Commander Nicolás de Ovando, Third Governor of Hispaniola,
from King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain [Excerpts]

1501

First of
all

The following are the things that you, Frey Nicolás de Ovando, Comendador of Lares of the military of Alcántara,¹ are to do on the islands and mainland of the Ocean Sea, where you will serve as Our governor:

You are to work diligently in those things that pertain to the service of God and ensure that divine services are conducted with the proper respect, order, and reverence.

Also

Because it is our will that the Indians be converted to Our Holy Catholic Faith and their souls be saved . . . you are to take care, without using any force against them, that the priests who are there teach and admonish them for this purpose with much love, so that they are converted as quickly as possible . . .

Also

You are to see that all the *vecinos* [Spanish householder settlers] and residents of the abovesaid islands and mainland submit to you personally and with their dependents, and that they obey you as Our governor in everything that you order on Our behalf. And you are to ensure that all live in peace and justice, treating all equally without exception . . .

Also

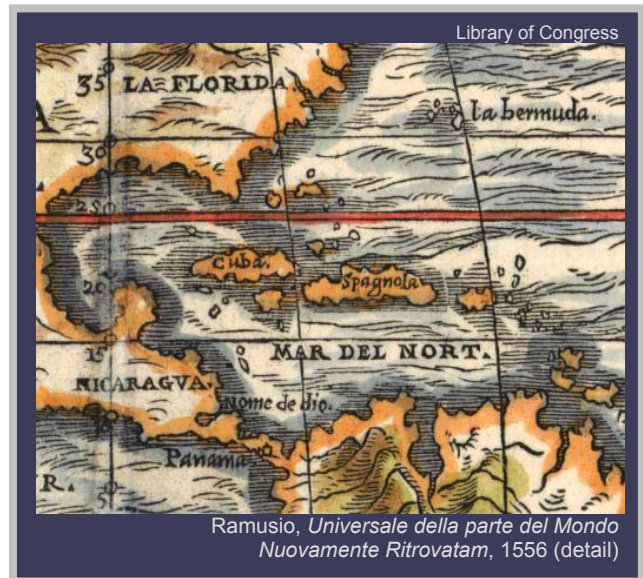
You are to ensure that the Indians are well treated and can walk safely throughout the country without anyone assaulting or robbing them or doing them any other harm . . .

Also

Because We have been informed that some Christians in the abovesaid islands, and especially in Hispaniola, have taken the Indians' wives and other things from them against their will, you shall give orders, as soon as you arrive, that everything taken from the Indians against their will be returned . . . and if Spaniards should wish to marry Indian women, the marriages should be entered into willingly by both parties and not made by force.

Also

Because it is Our will that the Indians pay the tributes and dues they owe Us as subject in Our Kingdoms and Lordships . . . you



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¹ Ovando was a priest in the Military Order of Alcántara in Spain.

are to speak with the caciques and *principales* [Indian leaders and headmen] and whatever Indians you think necessary, negotiating with them the tribute to be paid each year . . .

Also

Because it will be necessary to use Indian labor in mining gold and other tasks We have ordered done, you are to require the Indians to work in the things of Our service, paying to each the salary that seems just to you . . .

Also

Because it is necessary to found some towns on Hispaniola . . . you are to establish new towns in the numbers and at the sites that seem best to you, after careful inspection.

Also

Because it Our will that the Christians in the abovesaid island of Hispaniola live together from now on rather than being scattered through the countryside, [you should ensure that] no one lives outside the towns than are established on the island . . .

Also

Since the security of the land requires the construction of some forts, you are to determine the manner of building these forts and build up to three

Also

Since We have been informed that good practice has not been followed in the cutting of brazilwood, many trees being cut down so that more dye can be obtained, you are to give orders that no one is to cut down the trees

Also

Since there is the possibility of much deceit in the collection and smelting of gold and We may be defrauded in the share that We should receive, you will give orders that the extraction of gold be done by *cuadrillas* of ten persons . . . and for each *cuadrilla*, you shall appoint a trustworthy person to be present when they gather the gold and to accompany them when they take it to the smeltinghouse. . . .

Also

Because it benefits Our service that those who are foreign to Our Kingdoms and Realms not live in the abovesaid islands, you are not to allow such foreigners to settle in the said islands and mainland . . .

Also

In order that Christians and Indians shall live together in peace, friendship, and harmony, and that there be no fights or quarrels among them, you shall order that no one give or sell offensive or defensive weapons to the Indians nor exchange such weapons with them . . .

Also

Since there will be other things that cannot now be acted on from here as they should be, you are to inform yourself as soon as you arrive of what problems need to be dealt with and how . . .



Done in Granada the 16th of September, 1501.

I the King. I the Queen.

Ovando's seven-year rule of the West Indies was effective and brutal. Arriving with him in 1502 were 1500 Spanish families who provided a more stable population base for Spain's capital island, Hispaniola. He forced the Indians to work in the gold mines, accelerating their rapid population decline. He established the island's sugar cane industry, importing African slaves from Spain to work in the fields.

