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## Oakah L. Jones, Jr., Guatemala in the Spanish Colonial Period

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*Guatemala in the Spanish Colonial Period.* By Oakah L. Jones, Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994. xxi + 344 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$38.95 cloth.)

To fill a noticeable gap in the historical literature, Oakah L. Jones, Jr., undertook this study of the Spanish imperial period in Guatemala, from the initiation of the conquest in the 1520s to the independence movement roughly three centuries later. He built his history of Spanish colonial Guatemala upon an exhaustive investigation in the abundant archival sources of Spain, Guatemala, and Mexico, and in the rich research collections in several countries, including the United States.

This clearly written historical narrative is organized topically, in sections that deal with the land and its indigenous inhabitants at the time of the Spanish arrival; contact, conquest, and colonization; the establishment and workings of governmental and religious institutions; Spanish-Indian relations in general and labor arrangements in particular; the development and maturation of a sophisticated colonial culture; the spectacular and devastating earthquakes and volcanic eruptions that afflicted colonial Guatemala, necessitating several relocations of the capital city; and the instability which followed Napoleon's attempt to add Spain and her colonies to his empire, leading eventually to Guatemalan independence from Spain.

Jones superimposed on this basic topical organization a chronological division into four successive colonial periods. The first includes the conquest

and colonization from 1524 to about 1550. The second period, from approximately 1550 to 1700, involves colonial consolidation and maturation. The third period in Jones's organization, the eighteenth century, deals with Bourbon attempts to make the imperial administration more efficient and the colonial economy more prosperous. The early nineteenth century is the last of Jones's four colonial periods, a time of increasing political and economic instability, marked by peninsular-creole as well as liberal-conservative ideological conflicts, culminating in Guatemalan independence, which was established, according to Jones, "by a small portion of its people serving its own interests, not by the majority of the population, who were never consulted" (p. 263). This summary appraisal of independence in Guatemala is no doubt accurate, but virtually the same evaluation could just as correctly be applied to almost any significant official event in Spanish Guatemala, beginning with the establishment of the *encomienda* system in the sixteenth century. In the latter instance, the indigenous majority was surely never consulted before a small portion of Guatemala's people serving its own interests created an abusive labor system.

Despite the excellent research manifest throughout this work, some of the conclusions in the summary chapter on the Spanish legacy are problematic. For instance, while Jones is no doubt correct in claiming that Spaniards in Guatemala to some degree forged a new society from its different races and separate peoples, the evidence he presents does not clearly support his blanket statement that colonial society focused on the "preservation of customs and traditions" (p. 266). Certainly colonial society did not focus on the preservation of the customs and traditions of the largest single group of its people. It seems probable to this reader that the degree to which indigenous customs and traditions were preserved owed less to Spanish encouragement than to the centuries-long, sometimes fierce resistance of Guatemala's Indians to the destruction of much of their own cultural legacy in the face of regular and repeated attempts at Spanish evangelization and hispanization. Furthermore, no unequivocal evidence is presented to support Jones's contention that Spanish society focused on the "dignidad, or respect, of the individual person" (p. 266), unless one ignores the indigenous people who were, of course, the vast majority of individual persons making up Guatemalan colonial society. Overall, however, this general history of Spanish colonial Guatemala is well researched, convincing, and successfully fills the intended bibliographical niche.

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