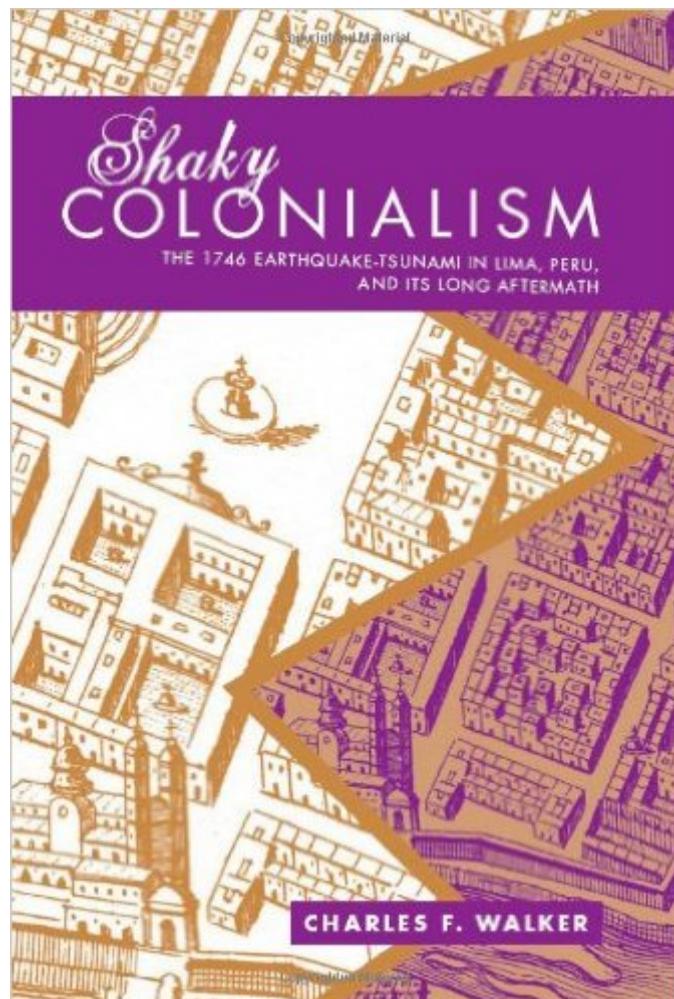


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Shaky Colonialism: The 1746 Earthquake-Tsunami In Lima, Peru, And Its Long Aftermath (a John Hope Franklin Center Book)



Synopsis

Contemporary natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina are quickly followed by disagreements about whether and how communities should be rebuilt, whether political leaders represent the community's best interests, and whether the devastation could have been prevented. *Shaky Colonialism* demonstrates that many of the same issues animated the aftermath of disasters more than 250 years ago. On October 28, 1746, a massive earthquake ravaged Lima, a bustling city of 50,000, capital of the Peruvian Viceroyalty, and the heart of Spain's territories in South America. Half an hour later, a tsunami destroyed the nearby port of Callao. The earthquake-tsunami demolished churches and major buildings, damaged food and water supplies, and suspended normal social codes, throwing people of different social classes together and prompting widespread chaos. In *Shaky Colonialism*, Charles F. Walker examines reactions to the catastrophe, the Viceroy's plans to rebuild the city, and the opposition he encountered from the Church, the Spanish Crown, and Lima's multiracial population. Through his ambitious rebuilding plan, the Viceroy sought to assert the power of the colonial state over the Church, the upper classes, and other groups. Agreeing with most inhabitants of the fervently Catholic city that the earthquake-tsunami was a manifestation of God's wrath for Lima's decadent ways, he hoped to reign in the city's baroque excesses and to tame the city's notoriously independent women. To his great surprise, almost everyone objected to his plan, sparking widespread debate about political power and urbanism. Illuminating the shaky foundations of Spanish control in Lima, Walker describes the latent conflicts "about class, race, gender, religion, and the very definition of an ordered society" brought to the fore by the earthquake-tsunami of 1746.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As Charles Walker explains in the first chapter, *Shaky Colonialism* is not so much a book about the 1746 earthquake-tsunami that engulfed the city as about Lima itself in its late colonial stage of development. The natural disaster generated masses of administrative correspondence, financial assessment, and clerical and lay discussion of the sins that might have brought God's wrath down upon the city, and these sources are a boon for historians. Walker crafts a richly detailed picture of Lima in the 1740s and 1750s, with chapters devoted to the reform-minded but frustrated viceroy, the clergy, women, American Indians, and other interest groups. He argues that both the lines of conflict that would eventually topple the Spanish government of Peru, and the fractured quality of opposition to the Spanish government, which slowed Peru's path to independence, were already evident in the 1740s. Walker's description of the earthquake-tsunami and its immediate aftermath is gripping; the rest of the exposition is a little dry, more focused on details than larger historical context, so a reader who already understands the broad dynamics of Spanish imperialism will probably get more out of the book than a beginning undergraduate would. But overall, it's a very informative picture of one corner of Spanish Latin America in the middle of the eighteenth century.

I had to buy this book for a history class. The book was somewhat hard to follow, I found it a bit disorganized. The events described are put in an anachronistic manner, but once you are able to follow what goes on you'll be able to extract information. You might have to reread it a few times.

Great book.

Good Stuff

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