

TRANSLATOR'S
PREFACE



FOR A QUARTER OF A CENTURY, Tulio Halperín Donghi's *Historia Contemporánea de América Latina* has been the most influential and widely read general history of Latin America in the Spanish-speaking world. Most historians of the region already know its fine-grained interpretation, unparalleled in breadth and ever attentive to the paradoxes of Latin American reality. The special purpose of this English-language version, then, is to make a landmark of Latin American historiography available to a totally new readership.

To produce a book that would read as though originally written for an English-language audience, the transformations of the Spanish text have exceeded those normally indicated by the term *translation*, extending beyond lexicon and syntax to prose conventions and addressing needs specific to new readers who possess less background knowledge of Latin America. Thus, the "lead story" has sometimes been highlighted more vigorously than in the original, which assumed prior familiarity with it, and some matters formerly left implicit have been made more explicit. In addition, a general streamlining occurred as the prose was recast using the shorter sentences and the patterns of paragraphing that are conventional in contemporary English usage. The paragraphs of the original interlock conceptually like links in a chain, a technique involving complex sentences that often reiterate or summarize an earlier idea before proceeding to elaborate on it, while the sentences of the English-language version follow one another more like beads on a string. In this sense, *The Contemporary History of Latin America* has been edited as well as translated. It would have been impossible to undertake such an ambitious task without the benefit of careful monitoring by the author, and I am grateful for his close cooperation throughout the process.

Something is inevitably lost in translation. In this case, the richness of nuance characteristic of the original, its relentless exploration

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of internal contradictions, nested one inside another, have occasionally been muted by the heightening of primary emphasis and the application of greater forward momentum. Consequently, this translation cannot substitute for consultation of the original on matters of particular interest to specialists. On the other hand, thousands of new readers—many of whom might have been frustrated by a more traditional sort of translation—can now explore a book that has exercised incalculable influence over Latin Americans' understanding of their history.

John Charles Chasteen
Chapel Hill, 1992