



WORDS, FIRST OF ALL, OF GRATITUDE. Translating a text of history from Spanish to English is never an easy task. As Emilia Viotti da Costa, who courageously decided to absolve a similar task by herself, eloquently commented in the Preface to her *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories* (1985), “The real problem was how to convert a Brazilian prose that is more suggestive than precise, full of long sentences, often written in the passive voice . . . into the short and assertive sentences of the American style.” In the case of my *Historia Contemporánea de América Latina*, the problem was compounded because although the book has found its main use in university courses in Latin American history, it had been written with a different audience in mind: those members of the general public who might be attracted to it by informed curiosity for things Latin American. Trusting that the readers would share—to quote again Emilia Viotti—“the same assumptions, the same codes, and the same anxieties and perplexities” that underlay my explorations, I felt even more free to do full justice to “the nuances, the interconnections,” and the complexities present in every historical process. Something more than a translation was needed to achieve the metamorphosis of the almost idiosyncratically Spanish American text that resulted from my efforts into a book capable of satisfying American students’ demands for clear answers to their precise questions. With reckless generosity, Professor John Charles Chasteen took time from his heavy and exciting intellectual and academic agenda to undertake the difficult task of translating and editing the text with that goal in mind. As a result of his effort, *The Contemporary History of Latin America* now reaches the English-reading public as a different—and I hope better—book than the one known by the readers of the original Spanish version and other translations. For this—and for the good grace with which he enter-

tained (within reason) my pleas for the text that underwent a not always painless metamorphosis—I shall be forever grateful.

Except for the Epilogue, rewritten for the present edition, and for the Bibliographical Essay, prepared especially for it, this is an edited translation of the enlarged thirteenth Spanish edition published in 1990.

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