

PROLOGUE TO THE
THIRTEENTH EDITION



FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1967, *The Contemporary History of Latin America* has required a new edition to include what have been, for Latin America, two very long decades since that year. After the process of revision began, it quickly became clear that updating was not enough. These twenty years have thrown a different light on Latin American history, especially on the last half century. Therefore, while I made few changes in the first five chapters of the original version, I decided to rewrite totally the materials covering the period since the crisis of 1929 and to add two more chapters beginning with the Cuban Revolution. The perspective of the last two decades has brought the period of Latin American history after World War II into sharper focus, and, of course, the period during which I first wrote also looks different in retrospect.

The zeitgeist of the 1960s is no longer with us. Gone is much of the optimism created by the great postwar prosperity of the developed world. Gone, too, is some of the impatience then awakened in peripheral countries unable to participate in that prosperity. More than we realized at the time, that optimism underlay both our diagnoses of past ills and our proposed remedies for them. During the 1960s, developmental theories and opposing revolutionary analyses alike rested on assumptions about a happier future seemingly almost within reach. Although neither of those rival faiths dominated this *Contemporary History of Latin America*, rereading makes plain to me how the spirit of the decade colored my own interpretation of those years, since even the grimmest descriptions of current problems revealed the impatient conviction that a solution lay tantalizingly near.

Today that eager confidence in a better future appears clearly as the hallmark of a past era. Need I say that very little of it remains in the new edition? Instead, the new edition must bear the mark of the

two decades that have passed since the first appearance of this book, among the most tragic periods in a history rich in tragedies.

What new moral shall we attach to the unfolding story of Latin America or adopt to guide our exploration of its past? The wisdom of disenchantment has replaced the faiths of twenty years ago in their ambition to guide Latin America into the future. I subscribe to no particular version of the current wisdom and propose instead that the future is likely to surprise us. For Latin America, far more than for more settled societies with a longer historical experience, the future will remain an elusive source of political inspiration but an untrustworthy starting point for the study of history.

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