# Prologue

I was honored to greet the distinguished group gathered at the Library of Congress to discuss a matter close to the heart of every Argentine. Our magnificent city, Buenos Aires, is 400 years old this year, and the celebration of its birth means so much to us.

It was a great pleasure to see there my friend the distinguished librarian and American historian Dr. Daniel Boorstin, as well as Dr. William Carter, chief of the Hispanic Division of the Library of Congress. In particular, I would like to say thank you to Dr. Stanley Ross, professor of history at the University of Texas in Austin, who has been the moving spirit behind this symposium, and was so responsible for making it a reality.

Dr. Boorstin is in the great tradition of scholarly administrators who often head the world's national libraries. As a justice of your Supreme Court once said, "There must be people who *read* books, *make* books, and *love* books."

Some, like Dr. Boorstin, are noted historians. Others have been well-known poets, like Archibald MacLeish, who occupied the chair that Dr. Boorstin now occupies. Argentina's greatest living poet and writer, Jorge Luis Borges, once directed our national library.

Borges wrote a notable book, *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, which is not well known in this country. The best sense of the title in English perhaps is *Passion for Buenos Aires*. However, it is a passage from another volume, *Cuaderno de San Martín* (A San Martín Notebook), that best expresses how we feel about our city. "To me it is a fairy tale," Borges wrote, "that Buenos Aires was ever created. It is as eternal as the water, as the air."

Buenos Aires was not very eternal during its first years. What has it become? What will it be like in the future? These are questions that occupy the contributors to this volume. I think Borges would like to concede that the eternal must have had a beginning, even though it may have no ending.

As if to assure its grasp on eternity, Buenos Aires did not have one beginning but two. The first, in 1536, was filled with noble hopes but came to an ignoble ending. The founder, Don Pedro de Mendoza, had an eloquent scenario for the drama he tried to stage, but not much plot or many characters. He said he came, and I quote, "to conquer for my Lord, and to proclaim the glory of the name of Him who, though born in a stable, is higher than all kings."

Don Pedro's city was nothing more than a collection of miserable mud huts. Its name, "Our Holy Lady Mary of the Fair Wind," reflected hope, not reality. The settlement soon vanished.

The second founding of Buenos Aires, by Juan de Garay in 1580, is the one we commemorate. De Garay brought less passion and more pragmatism to his task. A Creole, not a Spanish grandee, his ambition was to create a lasting city that amounted to something. The Buenos Aires we know testifies to his success. The people of Buenos Aires wanted to turn to good use the vast River Plate Grant, which they correctly believed was a region of extraordinary potential wealth.

One need only look at Buenos Aires and at Argentina today to see how sound their prophecy was.

This brings me to a point I have made often since I have been ambassador to this country. Our two nations have much more in common than most people realize. Certainly much more than that which sets them apart. Consider our great cities.

Boston is 350 years old this year. Buenos Aires is 400. Over such distance of time and history, the difference in age means nothing. What is significant is the way so many cities in this hemisphere began—Boston as well as Buenos Aires. We can hardly understand today the courage and determination of our early settlers. They came together for protection—and trade—in tiny communities far from what was then the civilized world. Vast, unknown continents stretched beyond, filled with dangers and opportunities they could not even imagine.

Their backs were to the seas they had crossed. In one sense, these people were not only adventurers, but also pioneers who would spread the word of God at the same time they conquered a new world. We know how well they succeeded. The cities from which they started—Boston, Buenos Aires, New York—remain as their monuments, and, of course, have become more than that.

One hears a great deal today about the growth and the importance of Buenos Aires. In the few moments of the program I have been asked to occupy, let me leave you with an impression, no more.

What is Buenos Aires like today? Does it project an image of the whole nation of Argentina? I believe it does. Like the legendary phoenix, it was born, died, and then was born again. My country shows a similar resiliency.

Argentines have a sharp sense of self-criticism that at times seems to become self-inflicted punishment. No matter what problem or condition exists at a particular time, an Argentine will say to a foreign visitor, "This whole situation in my country is a disaster. Nobody, not even the government, has the slightest idea of what they are doing. I see only trouble ahead." Fine for a member of the Argentine family to say! But if the foreigner agreed, and added observations along the same lines, an Argentine would draw himself up proudly. "You are attacking my country unreasonably. We don't have to put up with criticism from misinformed people like you." We have a great deal of national pride, you see.

So it is with Buenos Aires. Like any large city, especially any very old large city, it has problems and drawbacks, as does the nation which reflects its image. We know this is within the family that is Argentina, but we prefer to keep these matters within the family. Buenos Aires, after all, is the paradigm of Argentina.

I should say more about the family that is Argentina. Like yours, it is not merely a single tribe that has grown larger and larger. It is a melting pot of tribes from all over the world. A distinguished Frenchman once described my compatriots. Being French he thought of us in terms of food, and wondered what sort of recipe might have produced such a breed of people.

"Take an Indian woman with large haunches," he began. "Add two Spanish cavaliers, three gauchos well seasoned, an English traveler, a pinch of Basque shepherd, a soupçon of African slave, and simmer for three centuries.

"Before serving, stir in briskly five peasants from southern Italy, a Polish, German, or Russian Jew, a Spanish farmer, three quarts of Lebanese merchant, and a whole French cocotte. Do not let sit longer than fifty years before serving."

Thus, our two countries have a great deal in common. One thing we do not have in common is Buenos Aires, which we believe is the greatest city in the world. I am sorry you cannot have it, except as the topic for a symposium such as this. But we Argentines are not selfish. We will share Buenos Aires with anyone who comes there, as we have for 400 years.

Buenos Aires is more than the gateway to the Pampas. It stands on the Pampas. Before Buenos Aires, the Pampas were nothing but

grass and sky, sky and grass, and then more grass and still more sky. Today, they are a rich sea of alternating wheat, corn, and sorghum; a sea filled not with fish but with vast herds of fat cattle.

The Pampas, in other words, are the golden dream, the magic fountain, that first brought Pedro de Mendoza, Juan de Garay, and also our Buenos Aires to Argentina. Borges said that Buenos Aires is as eternal as the water, as the air. So are the Pampas. So is Argentina.

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