Introduction

Multiple-centennial celebrations are occasions for explosions of patriotic pride, with drums beating, bands playing, and flags flying. Not inappropriately, it frequently falls to the academic community to provide a substantive element to the celebration. The 400th anniversary of the founding of Buenos Aires became the occasion for a number of intellectual endeavors.

Just as the Argentine Academy of History dedicated the Sixth International Congress of the History of America in October 1980 to the anniversary celebration, so Latin Americanists at the University of Texas at Austin believed it to be appropriate to organize a symposium similarly dedicated. The event proved to be a national and international undertaking. Organized at the University of Texas at Austin and including scholars from all parts of the United States, the conference was held in September 1980 at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Like the Sixth International Congress in Buenos Aires, the Washington gathering was sponsored by the Municipality of Buenos Aires.

Buenos Aires has always been one of the most interesting, dynamic, and attractive cities of the Americas. One senses its spell and extraordinary appeal whether one first views from sea or air the vast, white mass of the city spread upon the endless green pampas. A year or so ago we were contemplating a series of studies of half a dozen Latin American cities for the *Texas Quarterly*. The decision to discontinue that publication ended the project; but when, in preparation for the undertaking, we surveyed a substantial number of people for suggestions for our list of six cities, only two—Buenos Aires and Mexico City—appeared on every list. Thus, it is particularly appropriate and significant to quote the distinguished Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, who describes Buenos Aires as the city which he has known best and loved most.

It is a city with a rich history, rewarding to those who are priv-

ileged to search its past. The settlement of 1580 grew little during the colonial centuries, from its beginning as a tiny palisaded outpost on the most remote rim of the Spanish Empire. The inhabitants chased cattle, fought off the pampas Indians, and prayed for the discovery of gold and silver mines, none of which existed in their land. By the year 1810, when the movement for independence began, in what was by then somewhat pretentiously named the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, Buenos Aires had only some sixty thousand inhabitants, who still chased cattle and fought off Indians but now also traded large quantities of hides and dried beef abroad.

All that had changed dramatically one hundred years later. Buenos Aires had become a city of 500,000 people, a world trade center for enormous amounts of agricultural and ranch exports, and the magnet for hundreds of thousands of European immigrants each year. One of the world's largest (at its fourth centennial, Buenos Aires had about eleven million inhabitants) and more sophisticated cities, the metropolis exercises a peculiar fascination over all who know it. Part of its attraction—mixed often with hostility and aversion, it must be admitted—may lie in the fact that it is a thwarted city, highly Europeanized and “Americanized,” yet remote from the power centers of the world and frustrated by unrealized dreams of continental and world leadership. Then, too, internal political strife has marred the city in recent years, but this may also be considered evidence of the degree to which Buenos Aires shares in the contemporary ills of all dynamic nations.

One point is clear: Buenos Aires, with 40 percent of Argentina's population, leads the nation despite the resistance of many people in the provinces. Whether in industrial production or in opera and poetry the *porteños* (the people of *the port*) deserve good historical study and continued world focus.

In preparing to organize the conference, we reviewed the contributions to the written history of Buenos Aires and of Argentina during the past decade. We gained a sense of the direction of our compatriots' scholarship, of the important new sources they have begun to examine, and of the significant role being played by those chosen to participate in this symposium. Both monographic literature and articles appearing in the scholarly journals reveal a focus on geography and urban growth and on social and economic history. Studies emphasizing the more recent period evidence a similar concern with socioeconomic issues, the evolution and growth of the metropolis, the role of ethnic subdivisions, and the political development of the nation as well as the pivotal place of the federal capital.

The initial section of the volume (like the first part of the con-

ference) is dedicated to the historical city, and it consists of three essays and a commentary. All four scholars have been in the forefront of the recent scholarly emphasis on economic and social history and on the use of new sources in an effort to illuminate and to place in a fresh perspective pivotal periods in Buenos Aires' past. It is our purpose here to describe briefly the contributions of each of the conference participants.

Jonathan C. Brown was responsible for the presentation on the colonial city. He tells how Buenos Aires grew from incredibly humble beginnings—from modest settlement and outpost—to a major colonial city. And he stresses that it was trade and commerce which effected the conversion. After detailing the importance of smuggling and contraband and the succession of illicit trading partners against whom Spanish authorities found it impossible to maintain commercial exclusivity, Brown details how the liberalization which resulted from Buenos Aires becoming the capital of the viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata ironically led to the triumph of protectionism and Spanish domination as a trading partner. However, viceregal prosperity was not without its price, as wartime disruptions, foreign invasion, and exhaustion of the Bolivian silver mines brought division to the city's merchant community and contributed to Spain's eventual loss of its wealthy port.

As a device for examining Buenos Aires in the period of independence, Susan M. Socolow employs the theoretical framework of José Luis Romero, specifically his theory of growth stages, in explaining the urban development of Latin America. The focus is on the transition from the *ciudad criolla*, which increasingly reflected mercantile power, interests, and zeal for progress and which reached its apogee at the time of the Bourbon reforms of the latter half of eighteenth century, to the *ciudad patricia* of the independent Latin America, in which the bourgeoisie governed but had to share power with the countryside.

Socolow chose to analyze the changes that occurred in urban ecology between the viceregal city and that of the early days of independence. Examining population and physical structure from 1740 to 1830, she describes conditions at the beginning of the period, documents new developments, and analyzes the nature and extent of change. She finds that the transition did not occur suddenly, nor did all types of change occur at the same rate. Both the physical growth of the city and population growth continue and are not markedly different in the early years after independence from the lines established during the colonial era. However, there is strong evidence

that this growth slowed in the decades following 1810. She does find a shift in the racial balance, as the city began the "whitening process" which would continue through the century. In many ways the independent city does not depart much from the earlier colonial city until somewhat later. "Rather than physical or population changes, the major shift would be in a new psychology of the port city, now free to determine its own economic and political future."

The distinguished senior scholar James R. Scobie, for whom this major contribution is quite unhappily posthumous, began his essay by raising two questions: why does Buenos Aires above all other Argentine cities emerge and flourish during the nineteenth century, and what is the pull, the power, the magic that Buenos Aires exerts over individuals and over other Argentine cities? Noting the recent increase in works of economic and social history and the use of techniques for ordering large amounts of personal data through collective biographies, and for recording and organizing data through the use of computers, he urges that three pivotal eras—the 1810s, the 1830s and 1840s, and the 1860s and 1870s—be studied by these methods. While much has been accomplished, much remains to be done if we are to understand the effect of independence in stimulating the city's economic and demographic growth, the manner in which the Rosas era made Buenos Aires viable as the region's political capital, and the importance of the first two decades in the development of the city and the nation. Suggestively, he lists five aspects which contribute to the city's magnetism: the development of the transportation system; the concentration of profits from new products and new technologies; Buenos Aires' imposition of a state of dependency on the provincial cities; the changing social and cultural environment of the provincial cities; and the political centralization that seemed to confirm *porteño* (the inhabitant of the port: Buenos Aires) power over the nation. Scobie concludes: "The Argentine capital changed enormously during the nineteenth century. But more important than mere growth and development are changes in its relationship with Argentina."

The commentator, Mark D. Szuchman, underscores the magnetism of the port city as well as its key role in the political, economic, and intellectual life of the nation. He notes further that rarely have historians, as historians, played such a fundamental role in the formation of the political ideology of a nation as in Argentina. While recognizing the divisions and the differences, he insists that Buenos Aires has had much in common with the rest of the country. He remarks on the emphasis on growth and development in the presentations, but stresses the process of selective modernization. In

that regard, he recommends that topics such as those of Brown and Socolow be considered in the comparative context suggested by Scobie. Finally, he recommends that research stress the manner in which *porteños* related their developing institutional forms, including law, the state, the school, and the family.

Only two issues arose during the brief period of public discussion following the morning presentation. Those who spoke during this period divided fairly evenly on the issue of whether the relationship between the provinces and Buenos Aires was friendly or rooted in antagonism and resentment. A common view seemed to develop that while historically and, perhaps, inevitably there would be tension arising from the preeminence and dominance of the capital, there were also strong ties, both economic and emotional, which provide the basis for a more favorable provincial view of Buenos Aires.

Not unrelated was the challenge to James Scobie's statement that Juan Manuel de Rosas represented Argentine reality. Luis Arocena observed that Rosas surely was a part of that reality, but not all of it. Scobie did not disagree, but stressed that he was endeavoring to show that it was Rosas who, in the political realm, had been able to project Buenos Aires as a capital and to enable it to assert its national role.

During the discussion on the historical city, tribute was paid to the influential nature of Scobie's contributions to the history of Buenos Aires and of Argentina. Therefore, it was not surprising that Richard J. Walter, initiating the session on the contemporary city, should take Scobie's work as his point of departure. Referring to Scobie's book entitled *Buenos Aires: Plaza to Suburb, 1870-1910*, Walter notes that he not only described the basic characteristics of the city's growth within the model of the "commercial-bureaucratic" city, but also suggested that many of the patterns and characteristics of Buenos Aires at the turn of the century persisted into the 1970s. In his paper tracing the socioeconomic growth of Buenos Aires from 1910 to 1980, Walter is concerned with both continuities and changes from the pattern described by Scobie. He does this by considering as principal themes the general demographic patterns, the impact of industrialization, the social structure, the social and ethnic ecology of the city, transportation, and the general features of everyday life. As supporting data he draws heavily on national and municipal censuses.

This scholarly evidence leads him to three conclusions. First, he confirms Scobie's suggestion that many characteristics of the city at

the start of the century and specifically of the commercial-bureaucratic model have continued to the present. Indeed, he concludes that the capital seems more "commercial-bureaucratic" than ever. However, he cautions that such continuity should not obscure changes which have occurred: massive migration from the interior, the increasingly important role of women, the growth of industry, the expansion of the suburbs, and the increased importance of politics. Second, he remarks that the history of Buenos Aires provides challenges and opportunities for scholars, because relatively little is known about the history of the city and its environs since World War I. Finally, Walter sees the growth of Buenos Aires as posing important challenges today for the nation's leadership. He concludes with the question: "In sum, will the future greatness of Buenos Aires be measured only by size and by numbers or instead by the improved quality of life of each and every one of its inhabitants?"

The difficult task of discussing the intellectual and cultural life of Buenos Aires fell to Merlin H. Forster. Sensitive to the complexity and richness of the city's intellectual life and conscious of the relative lack of organized material on the subject, Forster recognizes that his task is a formidable one. He does adduce evidence which conveys the centrality as well as the magnitude and intricacy of the cultural life of the great metropolis. He reaches the conclusion that "Buenos Aires in the twentieth century has a cultural and intellectual life unrivaled by any Latin American city, and indeed by few cities in the world."

Turning to the field of poetry as his principal illustration, Forster remarks on the effort by some modern Argentine poets to create an ancient lineage and appropriate mythology for their beloved city. He analyzes in detail Jorge Luis Borges' poem "La fundación mítica de Buenos Aires," concluding that for Borges, Buenos Aires indeed did not have a beginning point; that it "is really as eternal as the elements." With further illustrative material, Forster suggests the variety and richness of the city's cultural life as well as the responses from some of the city's most sensitive and committed interpreters.

While several of the speakers in this session had touched upon the contemporaneous condition of the city, and even remarked on key questions about its future, it fell to Roberto Etchepareborda to examine the present and future of his nation's capital. He is fully aware of the rocky terrain he must traverse with only extrapolation and presentiment available as tools with which to work. Rejecting any futurologist pretensions, the distinguished scholar—public official opts for extrapolating some present indicators and perceived tendencies in an effort to define what might occur.

Etchepareborda concludes that the future of Buenos Aires rests on how the city and its inhabitants come to grips with a number of problems: its disordered, uncontrolled, and even irrational development; the dangers of a gigantic city crisscrossed by superhighways; and the deficient location of industry forming a strangulating ring threatening the city and its environment. Culturally and socially, the urban conglomerate has achieved a homogeneous expression and a more defined character. In the political realm the writer stresses the need for autonomy as a municipality for the national capital and for "a democratic feeling" which "pervades the entire society with a sense of rejuvenation" as the only basis on which true progress will be possible.

Joseph S. Tulchin proved once again that last is not least. The commentator for the afternoon session began his remarks by noting that two Argentines who are resident in the United States and a North American have shaped the thinking of North American scholars and the writings about Argentine history in the United States. The North American to whom he referred is James Scobie.

In his remarks Tulchin stresses the sense of neighborhood which both historically and more recently differentiates Buenos Aires from other cities. He believes that one perceives this sense of neighborhood by walking through the city or even by riding through it using the famous *colectivo* (small public bus). What one finds is the persistence of the world of the small town in one of the truly great cities of the world.

Finally, three other Argentine presentations illuminated the conference, and they are included in this volume. His Excellency, Ambassador Aja Espil, set a high tone for the proceedings with his remarks of welcome, which comprise the Foreword to this book. Two distinguished Argentines living abroad offer perspectives from afar. Christián García-Godoy evokes an image of his nation's capital from the viewpoint of the provinces, while Luis A. Arocena has contributed an evocative view of Buenos Aires by a *porteño*. The latter two presentations compose the third and final section of the volume.

A successful conference implies the cooperation of many individuals. We are indebted to the former cultural attaché of the Argentine Embassy, Sr. Pedro Pico, with whom the concept of the symposium was first discussed, and to his successor, Sr. Alberto Carri, who did superb work serving as intermediary between Austin and Washington and between Austin and Buenos Aires. Special thanks are due to the Municipality of Buenos Aires, which provided the financial support for the event, and to the Library of Congress, which

afforded a most appropriate setting for commemorating in this country's capital city the 400th anniversary of the founding of another great capital in this hemisphere. Specifically, appreciation is due to Dr. Daniel J. Boorstin, the Librarian of Congress, and to the outstanding personnel of the Hispanic Division of the Library of Congress: William Carter, chief of the division; John Hébert, assistant chief of the division; and Mrs. Georgette Dorn.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Warren McKesson, graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin, in the preparation of the manuscript for this book. It is our hope that these pages will illuminate in ever greater clarity that exceptional city known as Buenos Aires, and in so doing will be a substantial contribution to the celebration of the 400th anniversary of its founding.

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