

AUTHOR'S NOTE

ADVANCE READERS have remarked on what seemed to them a frequent flattering mention of, and reliance on, the *Wall Street Journal*, especially coupled with occasional critical references to its main competitors, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*. I have been employed by the *Journal* the past thirteen years, and my firsthand knowledge of the incredible care and integrity that goes into the reporting and editing of its contents leads me to rely on it more than on other newspapers. But I have not made it immune from criticism; several examples of misleading reporting cited in these pages are from the *Journal*, and one page-one *Journal* story is fairly ridiculed at length. I have tried also to put criticism of the *Times* and *Post* in the perspective of the fact that they are great newspapers, which is why their occasional failures are so important. If I have done this inadequately, let me note now: All three major national dailies, with hundreds of trained people working around the world, do a remarkable and generally reliable job of sorting through the billows of available information and obtaining, assembling, and packaging the important news. Whoever pays twenty-five, thirty or forty cents for any of them is probably getting by far the biggest bargain of his day, and whoever wants to be truly informed ought to plunk down a dollar and get all three; the recent addition of the *Washington Post Weekly* is a helpful contribution in areas where the *Post* isn't easily available. One wishes there were a similar weekly compendium of the best material from the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Des Moines Register*, the *Miami Herald*, and a score of other top-flight newspapers around the country, too. At any rate, the purpose of the press criticism in this book is to highlight a common fallacy of approach in the reporting of foreign relations that has caused great harm to the country, and maybe even to inspire some correction; the purpose is certainly not to take pokes at vital institutions like our major newspapers.

As I began this book, I determined to respect the sensitivity of many Latin Americans to the usurpation by the United States of the word *American*. This determination to use *U.S.* when I meant to refer only to one country and its people quickly collapsed in the face of practical

considerations, like being understood. I have still tried to use U.S. wherever the words seemed interchangeable, but there are many occasions where only *American* will do, and other occasions where that word provides added feeling or variety, and if Latins want to object they will need to come up with a graceful alternative. (Fidel Castro uses “North American,” which is hardly fair to Canada, Mexico, and some smaller countries.)

—Jonathan Kwitny