

2014 KALMAN SILVERT AWARD RECIPIENT

## Tulio Halperín Donghi, Recipient of the 2014 Kalman Silvert Award

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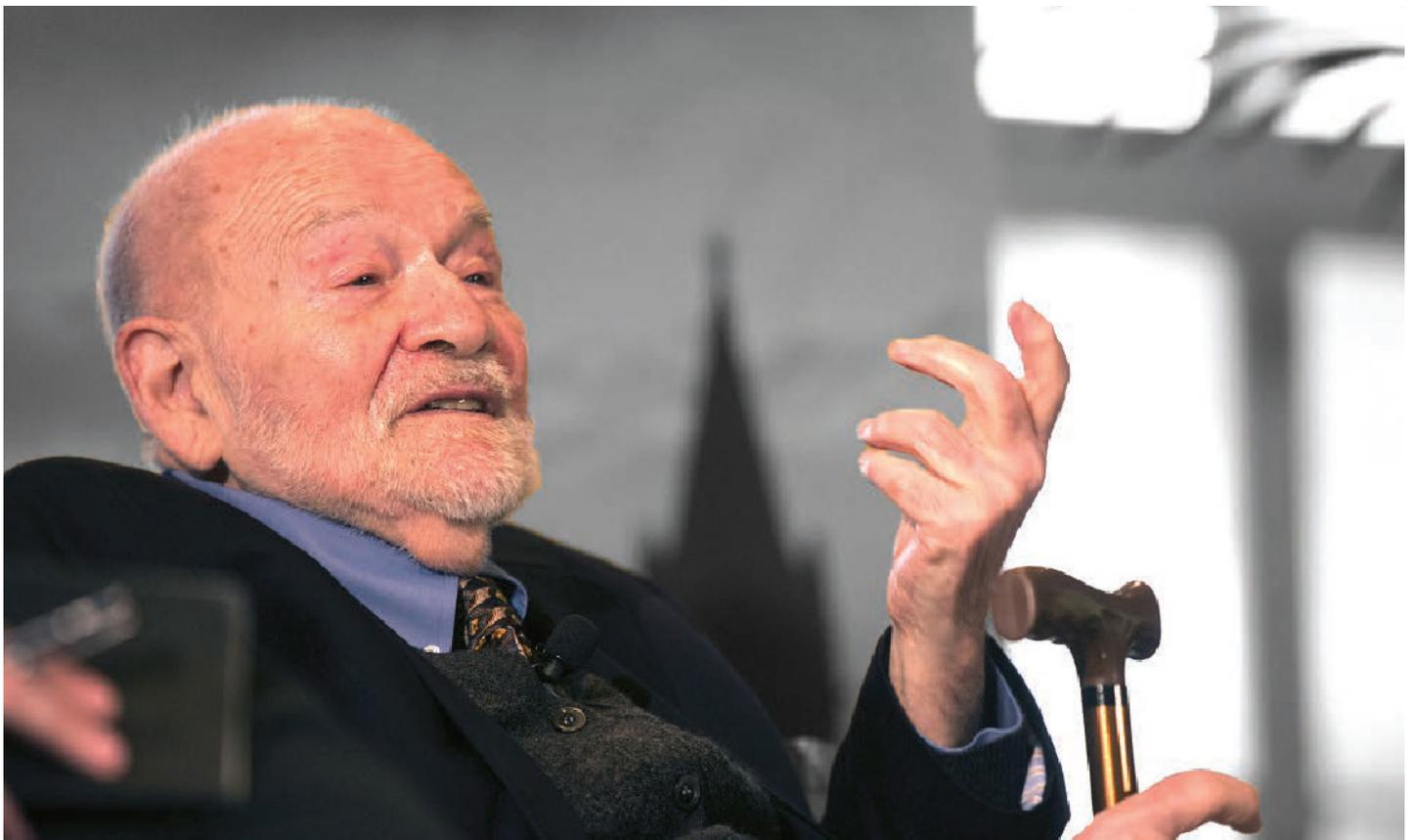
PETER H. SMITH | University of California, San Diego

Tulio Halperín Donghi is one of the most distinguished historians of Latin America alive today. He is revered across the United States, Europe, and Latin America, and he is a national institution in his native Argentina. Above and beyond his astounding productivity, erudition, and brilliance, his scholarship has had a broad impact on virtually all disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Being honored with the Kalman Silvert Award of the Latin American Studies Association is a wonderful capstone for a long and illustrious career.

Halperín has received numerous honors and awards, including a major prize for “scholarly distinction” from the American Historical Association (1998). He is one of only eight Latin American historians who are fellows of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He has received honorary degrees and awards from universities in Argentina, Chile, Mexico, and Uruguay.

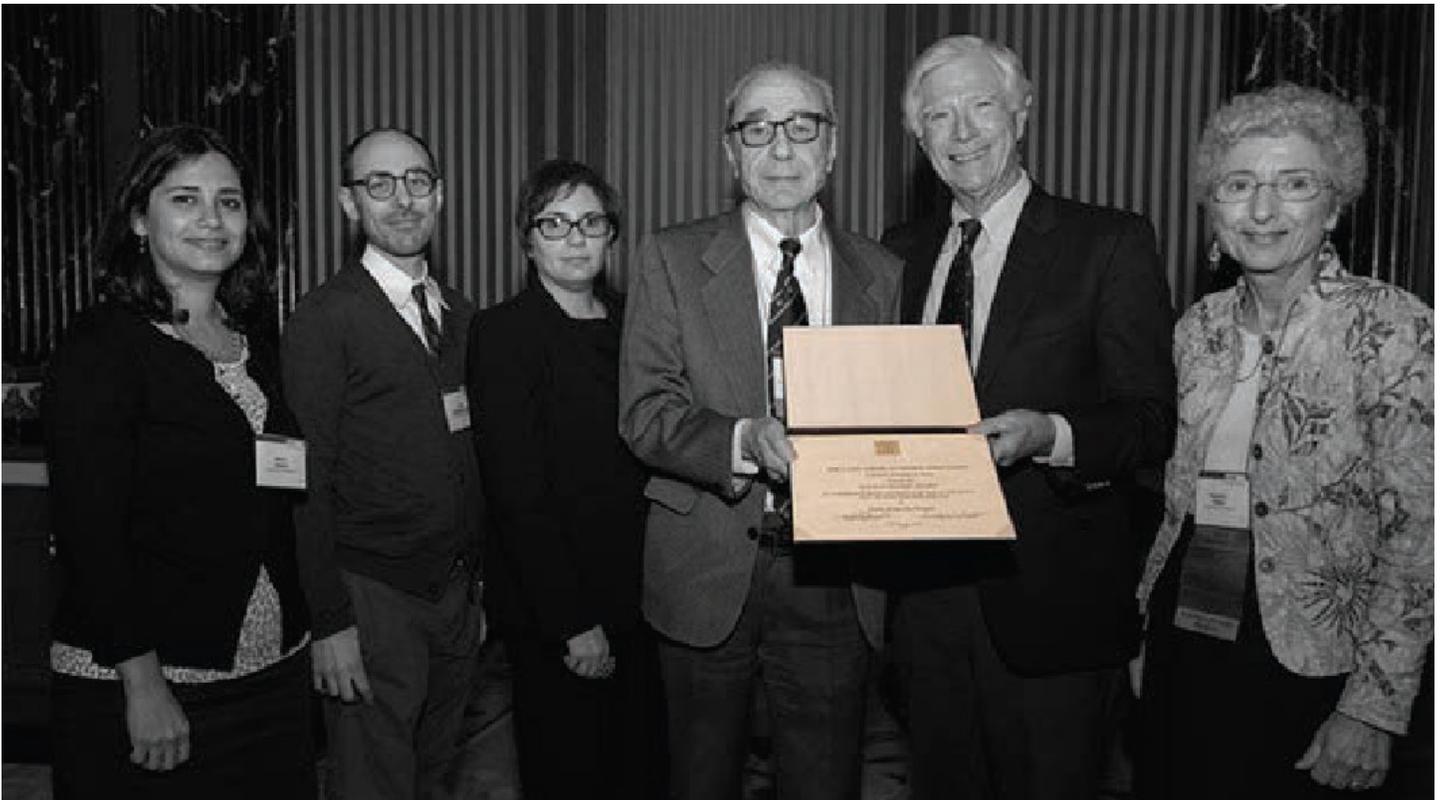
Halperín’s scholarly oeuvre is broad, complex, and not easy to pigeonhole because it eschews monocausal explanations and always explores the full

range of options in any given historical circumstance. He is the author of 22 books, including pioneering monographs, essay collections, crucial works of synthesis, and three anthologies with book-length introductory essays. His written work ranges from medieval Spain (his dissertation) to the late twentieth century, with particular focus on three areas: late colonial and early national Latin America, mid-nineteenth-century Argentina, and Latin America and Argentina from 1930 to the present. Halperín’s work has encompassed different historiographical approaches and perspectives, from



UC Berkeley, April 2014 / Photo by Jim Block/CLAS Berkeley

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economic and social history to political and especially intellectual history. His hypotheses and insights have driven major debates in a dozen subfields of history and the social sciences across Latin America.

By far his most widely read and probably most influential work has been *The Contemporary History of Latin America*. Originally published in 1967 in Italian, it thereafter appeared in French, Swedish, Portuguese, German, and (eventually) English editions. Written when Argentina and the entire subcontinent were undergoing political polarization and repression, *The Contemporary History of Latin America* privileges economic

structures and sociopolitical configurations during the “neocolonial” era and its crisis after 1930, but always insists on the individuality of politicians and political movements as determining the responses in each country to social and economic challenges and transformations. The book thus became a powerful indictment of the international, local, regional, and countrywide structures holding back the full development of the Latin American nation-states and their multifaceted social and ethnic groups. At the same time, it managed to celebrate the rich variety of social and political movements seeking to push forward distinct class and national agendas within this structural framework.

In a subsequent study, *The Aftermath of Revolution in Latin America* (1973), Halperín stressed the revolutionary nature of the struggles for independence and the subtle and complex political arrangements that new and old social elites established so that political upheaval could not impinge on their social domination. The book offers a masterful portrait of the complex mingling of continuity and change.

Broadly speaking, Halperín's prolific work on Argentina falls into three strands. The first relates to the creation of a new nation in the nineteenth century. The crowning achievement within this area is *Revolución y guerra*, published in English by Cambridge University Press as *Politics, Economics, and Society in Argentina in the*

*Revolutionary Period.* Halperín has claimed that it is “above all a book of political history,” but it is much more than that. Embracing geography, economics, and sociology, the book describes the destruction of old elites and the creation of new ones in the crucible of the war for independence. It thus recasts the history of a much-studied period in a totally new way, tying elites to society in a complex and nuanced way and making the familiar both new and more understandable than before.

A second strand consists of intellectual history, especially in the nineteenth century. Halperín’s first book was a pioneering interrogation of the ideas of patriot Esteban Echeverría; his latest book (2013) is a tour de force on the autobiographies of Latin American intellectuals. Especially outstanding here is Halperín’s study of José Hernández, the author of *Martín Fierro*. The book focuses not so much on the poem itself as on how this “rank-and-file journalist and second-tier participant in the tangled political life of his age” came to write the national classic. Examining Hernández’s intellectual formation through his long career as a journalist, Halperín manages to make the poet’s ideas both

clearer and more complex, while transforming the study of this convoluted era and recasting literary studies of a landmark work.

The third strand has focused on Peronism. Halperín’s essays in this area have influenced not only scholarly research but also public debates. One of his works, *La larga agonía de la Argentina peronista*, made best-seller lists and was broadly discussed in the country’s leading newspapers and professional journals. Here Halperín elaborates upon and refashions themes and ideas that he first explored 30 years earlier in *Argentina en el callejón*. He argues essentially that with the coming of Peronism, Argentina fell into a stalemate with contending political elites unwilling to accept each other’s legitimacy or to agree on basic social values. The final breakdown of this stalemated society finally came from the disappearance of the social structure that had given rise to it, and from the fear produced by the hyperinflation of the late 1980s.

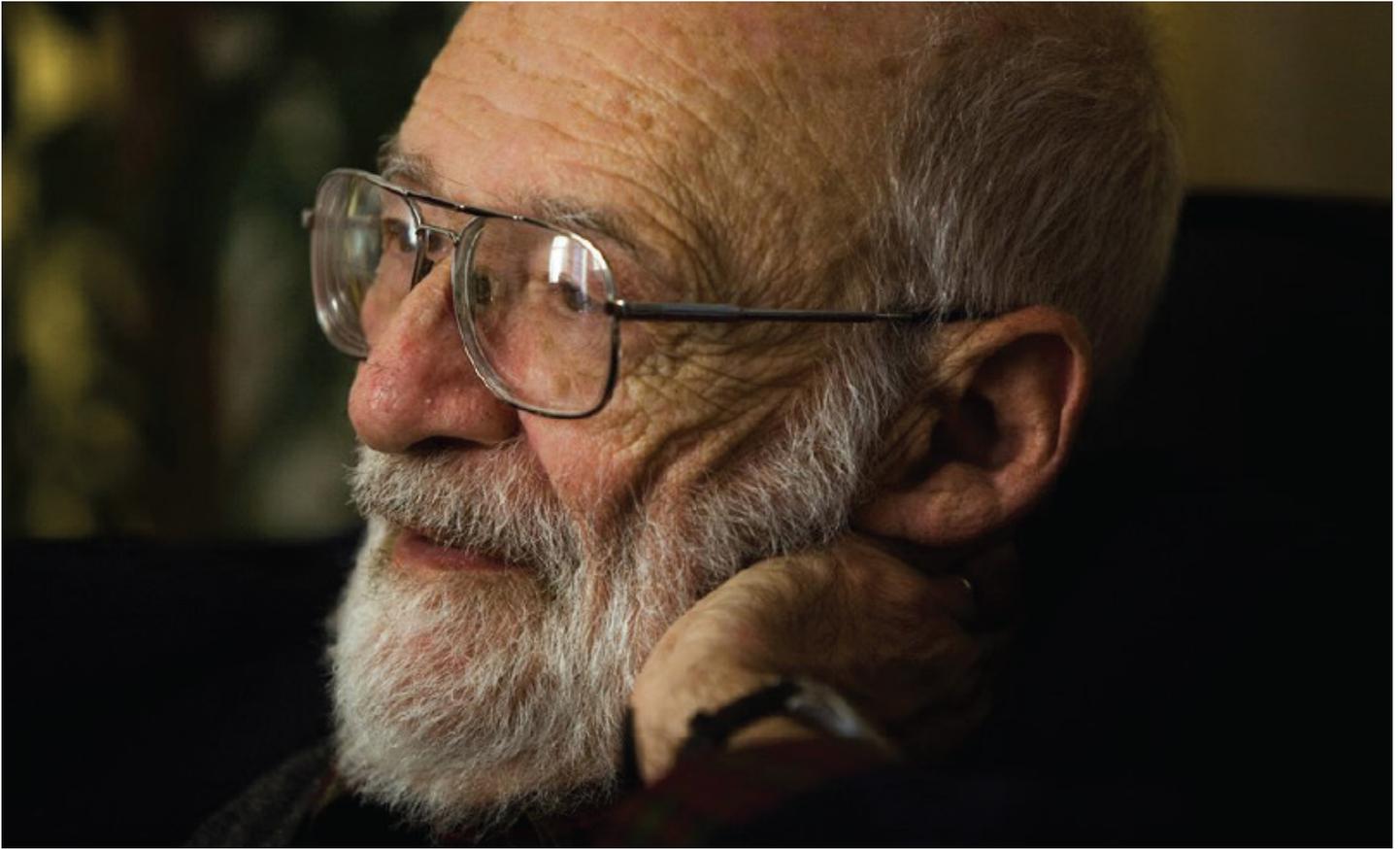
At the beginning of his career, Halperín played an active and leading role in the

renovation of Argentine academic life after the overthrow of Perón, providing intellectual leadership and administrative services at the University of Buenos Aires and the Universidad Nacional del Litoral. After leaving Argentina and teaching briefly at Harvard and Oxford, he landed at Berkeley, where he would become a powerful figure in Latin American history in the United States and mentor of dozens of doctoral students. With the return of democracy to Argentina in 1983, Halperín became a crucial figure in the renewal of Argentine history as his texts became centerpieces of scholarly debate and he became deeply involved in teaching and shaping the next generation of scholars. Today he remains a national icon, his pronouncements debated by presidents and taxi drivers alike.

Beyond his exceptional scholarly distinction, Halperín is one of those rare individuals who possess a deep understanding of many fields of intellectual endeavor and a seemingly unlimited curiosity about human affairs. He is widely read in the social science literatures of Italy, France, Spain, Germany, England, the



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United States, and, of course, Latin America. He has an avid interest in and knowledge of world literatures, and he can talk with authority about works, whether fiction or nonfiction, far removed from his chosen field of scholarship, aided by what appears to be a photographic memory.

For Halperín, living and studying appear to be seamlessly connected, feeding upon each other and connected by ceaseless observation, reading, and reflection. It is thus not surprising that he approaches his work with a profound appreciation of the human comedy, although balancing it always with a sense of caring about individuals and peoples. He has thus established a reputation as a brilliant commentator and sharp critic with an irreverent sense of humor.

For all these reasons we are delighted that Tulio Halperín Donghi was chosen for the 2014 Kalman Silvert Award. ■

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