Preface

In the three decades before World War I, the grasslands of Argentina, the Humid Pampa, were transformed into one of the world's major foodstuff-producing and exporting regions. Simultaneously, the economy of the Argentine republic was closely meshed into the world trading system whose motor and chief beneficiary was industrialized Western Europe. The facts of geography dictated that the port of Buenos Aires would be the funnel through which would flow the bulk of the Pampa's foodstuffs and fibers in one direction, and of Europe's manufactures, capital, technology, and surplus labor power in the other. It was only in 1880 that civil strife abated sufficiently to permit the city's confirmation as both the political capital of Argentina and the nation's economic metropolis. Nevertheless, its population had been rising steadily since midcentury; growth accelerated with the economic boom of the years 1882-1889, and from the mid-1880s to 1914 population quintupled to one and one half million. The secondary cities of the eastern Littoral—Rosario, Santa Fe, La Plata, Bahía Blanca—also experienced great increases, though in smaller absolute numbers. Hence the curious fact that at the outbreak of the First World War, of the nearly eight million inhabitants of this eminently agricultural and pastoral land, just over half were classified as city dwellers. And urban preponderance would, of course, continue to increase.

The principal source of population increase was European immigration. Between 1857 and the beginning of the Great Depression of the 1930s (when the Argentine government for the first time restricted the entry of foreign workers), some 6.4 million immigrants entered the country; and their greatest demographic impact was felt in the eastern cities. By the 1880s four-fifths of the adult male population of Buenos Aires was foreign born; in 1914 the proportion was three-quarters. It entered upon a steady decline thereafter; however, as late as 1936 (by which time the city's population had risen to 2.4 million) 49 percent of the adult population had been born outside the republic. The immigrant avalanche markedly altered the genetic and cultural character of the original *criollo* population of Argentina, which had been little more than a million at the middle of the nineteenth century. Its effects would presumably have been greater still were it not for the fact that fully four-fifths of the immigrants were of the kindred,

easily assimilable, Latin peoples of Southern Europe—and for the fact, also, that nearly half of *all* immigrants to Argentina left the country again.

The textbook explanation of these twin phenomena—the agglomeration of immigrants in the gateway cities of the east, and the high incidence of reemigration—is that the promise of the thinly settled interior proved largely illusory to peasants forced out of zones of rural overpopulation in Western Europe. The vision of prosperous settlements of independent smallholders on the Pampa was precluded from the 1870s onward by the expansion of extensive, heavily capitalized, and export-oriented *estancias*. Would-be peasants unable to obtain property confronted the meagre alternatives of short-term, exploitative, rental agreements on the land or removal to the city. From either place it was but a short step to reemigration or continuation of the search elsewhere in the Americas.

This explanation, however, is valid only in a general way, and it is serviceable for only a relatively limited period of time—the two decades or so prior to the crash of 1889, during which the competition for the republic's remaining prime agricultural land was at its most intense. During the decade of the 1880s 70 percent of the economically active immigrants had declared themselves to be agriculturalists (the same percentage, in fact, had held since the beginning of immigration records). In the following decade, however, the figure fell sharply to 45.7 percent; it was 42 percent in the first decade of the new century, and less than 25 percent in the second. Peasants, in other words, were increasingly replaced by immigrants in commercial, industrial, professional, artisan, and service occupations—that is, urban occupations. They brought with them the skills and habits of Europe's high urban tradition. With few exceptions they had no intention of starting a new life on the Argentine land. Many, in fact, reversed what is sometimes proffered as the typical immigrant experience: having achieved a modest prosperity in urban pursuits, they might well follow the path of bourgeois entrepreneurship most appropriate to time and place, the purchase of rural property for productive or speculative purposes.

If unavailability of land was not the principal determinant of reemigration from Argentina—after the 1890s, at any rate—it is nevertheless true that possession of land was a powerful inducement to stay to a migrant whose mind was not otherwise made up, and there were many of these. The fact is that with the preemption of much of the Pampa by the *estancieros* and the coeval development of Argentina's investment, extractive, processing, transport, and utility structures as

extensions of the European system, the definition of immigrant itself became elusive. There was a spectrum of types. At one extreme were those who knew that, barring accident, they would return to their European homelands. They were the managers and technicians of the installations pertaining to the several informal empires that shared Argentina: the British, the French, the German, and, after World War I, the North American. Though relatively few in number, they were highly influential in directing both the development of the Argentine economy and the formation of attitudes among their own immigrant countrymen. Farther along the spectrum, in vastly greater numbers, were the immigrant workers, artisans, professionals, and small business owners who sought to "make America." For them Argentina was a temporary expedient; the goal was an honored and comfortable old age in the natal village in Swabia or Galicia or the Ticino. The archetypes were the golondrinas, the Spanish and Italian field laborers who in their thousands first followed the European harvest northward and then, on the approach of autumn, took steerage passage to Argentina to perform identical labor during the Southern Hemisphere summer. Similar motives, however, were equally compelling to British bank tellers and German engineers, Yugoslav stone masons and Catalan almaceneros, French pâtissiers and Italian architects. The range of possibilities among this great mass was of course almost infinite. Such persons could become "immigrants" at the end of an intricate skein of choice and accident, when the ties that held them to Argentina came to seem stronger than those that drew them away. Or, it was sometimes the children who were the true "immigrants," those who remained in the New World when their parents demanded to return to the Old to die. At the far end of the spectrum were those who had little choice but to stay, either because (before the steamships) they were unable to face the rigors of a return voyage to Europe, or because—like the East European Jews, the Armenians, the Volga-Germans—they had no homeland to which to return.

With the foregoing I mean to suggest a number of points. First, that great numbers of immigrants originated in European urban environments and were fully capable of functioning well in a similar Argentine milieu. Second, that our detailed knowledge of their experience there is even more rudimentary than of the rural settlements; we know virtually nothing of the processes that made Argentines of a portion of them, and returnees of the remainder. Third, that especially given the reevaluation of "ethnicity" and "the melting pot" that is at present taking place among students of the immigrant experience in

North America, it would seem consummate folly to translate North American concepts indiscriminately to the Argentine context. Hence my purposes in the study of the German-speaking community of Buenos Aires which follows are twofold: to find out what happened to one well-demarcated cultural group during a period of rapid demographic growth and apparent increase of pressures on foreigners to become Argentinized; and having done so more or less satisfactorily, to attempt to extract working hypotheses to be applied and refined in further investigations.

It scarcely need be said that German speakers made up one of the smaller Western European communities within the Argentine metropolis. They numbered some four thousand in the early 1880s, thirty thousand on the eve of World War I, and perhaps forty-five thousand on the eve of World War II. But it scarcely need be said either that the influence of German merchants, industrialists, academics, professionals, military men, and artisans was far out of proportion to their numbers. The German community's relatively small size makes it a more manageable object of study than, for example, the vast Italian or Spanish collectivities. By the 1920s it came to comprise all social levels, although its center of gravity was a large and occupationally diverse middle class; the community therefore serves in some ways as a litmus paper of social changes taking place in the larger urban society. One could anticipate, finally, that the surviving documentation would be ample and of high quality. This expectation was met in general, although time and a turbulent political history have left vast unfillable lacunae.

Precisely this political history, moreover, has created a problem which I do not feel that I have dealt with satisfactorily: the situation of German-speaking Jews within the community before and after 1933. Any historian or social scientist who has encountered in Buenos Aires the pervasive desconfianza toward anyone investigating anything will appreciate the difficulties inherent in the study of foreign communities. In the matter of two communities as sensitive toward the ambiguities and sufferings of their past as the German and the Jewish, the problems are greater still. A Germanic background and bona fides have made the one accessible to me. I regret that the other is not; I have no remedy. Also, in only a few places do the sources give voice to women among the immigrants. This too is regrettable, for it would surely be instructive to know something of the experience of this sizable minority of immigrants—particularly those who came unaccompanied. But again there is no obvious remedy.

North American scholars have considered the principal function of the urban immigrant community to be that of a sort of halfway house: a social environment in which the newly arrived migrant can find respite from the shocks of the new land and in which he may learn, as painlessly as possible, the techniques of adaptation. At some indeterminate point he may then, from a position of strength, pass from adaptation to assimilation. The community would thus last only as long as the flow of new immigrants; should the flow dry up the community would disappear once the last sizable immigrant generation had been assimilated. In Argentina, however, particularly among the Germans and other peoples who held themselves biologically or culturally superior to the criollos, the community's function could not be defined in such unequivocally teleological terms. Just as often it has resembled the extraterritorial quarter in which foreign merchants customarily lived and did business in the classic trading cities of the Mediterranean world and the Orient. At times it has been a citadel, occasionally a political bridgehead (as the German communities certainly were for the nazi activists of the 1930s). It is true, of course, that in Buenos Aires the German-speaking community has been swallowed up by the surrounding Argentine society since 1945, just as the comparable English-speaking community is undergoing the same process at the present time. But these developments are explicable in terms of specific historical events-chiefly the failure of the European mother countries to sustain their informal dependencies with emigrants, economic opportunity, and the intangible trappings of imperial prestige and it does not seem necessary to consider them the foredoomed consequences of inexorable processes.

The communal conviction of superiority to the surrounding culture profoundly affected the ways in which individuals experienced adaptation and assimilation (or behavioral and structural assimilation). Although spokesmen of the German community claimed special gifts of adaptation for the Germans, all the evidence to be presented indicates this was far from the case. At best, German business owners were quick to adapt sales and manufacturing practices to Argentine conditions. But as individuals the Germans throve only when there was little competition. Neither artisans nor farmers nor small business owners adapted themselves sufficiently well to meet the challenges of the more austere folk of Southern and Eastern Europe. From the *criollos* themselves, middle-class German professional and white-collar workers encountered increasing competition after World War I; they were thus forced to adapt themselves much more extensively to the usages of Ar-

gentine nationalism. It is worth noting, however, that middle-class business owners did not encounter the same upward thrust on the part of the *criollos* and had consequently less need to alter their behavior.

As to integration into the familial and primary group structures of the receiving society, or structural assimilation, it is well to remember the predominance of sheer numbers that the immigrants brought to the processes of social change. In the cities especially, lo criollo was not the core to which all others had to attach themselves; rather, in the decades around the turn of the century, urban society was in a process of fusion, a process of becoming. Hence it was quite possible for ethnic groups to maintain their existence over several generations, though not necessarily by remaining hermetically closed. In the German population the relative scarcity and low fecundity of German women caused concern, but the cultural subsystem was maintained nevertheless. Marriages tended to follow religious and socioeconomic class lines as much as ethnic lines. Germanic culture could be preserved and transmitted so long as the spouse (normally the wife) of an exogamous marriage could be induced to learn the language, keep a German household, and work for a German education for the children. This process of transmitting and preserving Germanic culture through non-Germanic media could only exist with the local reinforcement of a structure of voluntary associations which provided a nearly complete Germanic social environment; it was reinforced also, more distantly, by the prestige of German art and industry, science and military might. This was of course facilitated by the fluidity of urban immigrant society at the time, and the self-deprecation that criollos were wont to assume when confronted by European bearers of culture. Two world wars would be required to alter the latter.

The study is also meant to serve as the necessary preliminary to an understanding of the virulent nazism of the years from 1933 to 1945. In this regard, a number of points emerge from the following pages. After 1918 Argentina served as a bolt-hole for German political fugitives as well as capitalists unable to tolerate postwar instability in Europe. They were welcomed by the community's business leadership, which emerged from the war prosperous, arrogant, and utterly hostile to the new, postarmistice, Germany. These men apparently supported anti-Weimar causes in Germany with lavish donations. They also gained control of the community's schools and associations and worked to suppress dissent. Authoritarian and vestigially monarchist, they acceded to the coming of nazism in 1931 and sought to turn the movement to their own purposes. Insofar as nazism engaged mass sentiment, however, its appeal was essentially of the moralistic, antielite,

anticapitalist, "left-wing" variety. The nazi period, in other words, began amidst social class conflict and contradictions between appearance and reality. The further elaboration of these themes and examination of the mechanisms by which nazism entered Argentine public life are the substance of a second volume which will, I hope, appear in due course.