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A prelude to conflict: the German ethnic group in Brazilian society, 1890-1917

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In April 1917, shortly after Brazil broke off diplomatic relations with Germany, Brazilians of German origin or descent were victims of numerous, destructive riots. Although death and personal injury were minimal, property damage was enormous as hundreds of residences, business houses, factories, and warehouses were damaged or destroyed by mobs gone out of control. Porto Alegre was the scene of the worst riots, but disturbances occurred almost simultaneously in São Paulo, Pelotas, and other cities of the south, where large numbers of German Brazilians lived. Six months later, following Brazil's declaration of war against the German Empire, another series of riots resulted in more destruction in the German districts of Rio de Janeiro, Petrópolis, Curitiba, and elsewhere.¹

Like most riots, these outbursts of violence may be attributed to immediate causes. In this case, intergroup tension was intensified by genuine dismay and anger over Germany's having torpedoed Brazilian merchant vessels, by virulent anti-German propaganda, and by the rhetorical excesses of pro-Ally politicians. But that is like saying that World War I itself was caused in 1914 by a Serbian nationalist who assassinated the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. The anti-German riots in Brazil are better understood within a larger context of ethnic history: the behavior of the dominant Luso-Brazilians (persons of Portuguese language and culture) and the minority Teuto-Brazilians (as the Germans were often called) may be best interpreted if examined historically in terms of ethnic group relations, perceptions, and images.²

Germans were among the earliest and most numerous of non-Portuguese Europeans to settle in Brazil. Beginning in the 1820s, a small stream of Germans entered the country, largely as a consequence of vigorous recruitment efforts sponsored by the Brazilian government. The number of German immigrants seldom exceeded 2,000 in a single year. Yet after nearly a century they had multiplied and prospered until they numbered approximately 400,000 persons, mostly Brazilian-born and German-speaking.³

Although colonies of German immigrants developed in several of the large cities and seaports of Brazil, the majority sought new homes in rural regions that had been ignored or bypassed by earlier Portuguese or Azorean settlers.

Locating chiefly in the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina and to a lesser extent in Paraná, they built a new society, different from what they had known in Germany and different as well from that of the receiving Luso-Brazilian society. The Teuto-Brazilians adapted their agricultural practices to subtropical realities, raised large families, and built churches, schools, and towns. They were the dominant group in some provincial cities, notably São Leopoldo, Blumenau, and Joinville, and became an influential minority in such major cities such as Porto Alegre, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro.⁴

Because of the accidents of time and place, the Germans in Brazil had been allowed to develop their own society without much interference. By the 1880s, the last years of the Brazilian Empire, they had become a society within a society — a large, diverse, and structured community with its own values, attitudes, language, and folkways. In general, they were well received, respected, and valued for the contributions they were making to Brazilian culture.⁵

With the advent of the republic in 1889, however, attitudes toward the Teuto-Brazilians began to change. The difference was partly a matter of confidence: the republic had to demonstrate its authority and its ability to govern, a task made more difficult by the diffusion of political power among the states and the development of political parties on a state basis. The abolition of slavery had its own repercussions as many thousands of new immigrants were recruited in Italy, Spain, and Portugal to supplement the labor supply. At the same time, the modernization of the economic structure of Brazil was under way, especially in the South. With the expansion of industry in relation to the production of agricultural commodities came economic and social dislocations that were new to Brazilian experience. As the world has witnessed so often in the twentieth century, modernization produced new social problems and tensions, especially in the cities. Some Brazilians, doubting the capacity of their society to absorb the flood of immigrants, demanded that the newcomers learn to conform to Brazilian ways. Others urged the revitalization of Latin Catholic culture, which in their view had been weakened by the infusion of foreign ideas and attitudes.⁶

Nativism was consonant with the doctrines of the Comtean Positivism that infused the thought of many of the new republican leaders. The commitment of the Brazilian Positivists was not merely to progress, but also to order, which they understood to include a harmony among the classes, races, ethnic groups, and sexes. They could applaud the diverse origins of Brazilian society and culture and yet insist that a new unity — a distinctively Brazilian unity — had to be achieved, by force of dictatorship, if necessary.⁷ Thus, in the 1890s, they were pleased to grant citizenship to immigrants but felt strongly that the newcomers should make a deliberate and conscious effort to assimilate. According to this view, the Luso-Brazilian society needed to resist the tendency of such ethnic groups as the Germans to remain separate. To speak a different language, to attend different schools, to eat different foods, to wear different clothing, to worship different gods — all these things were undesirable because they implied being not merely different but superior.⁸

Nativism also thrived on envy. Resentment and jealousy of the Germans was common among Luso-Brazilians, especially those who were illiterate and unskilled. It was obvious to them that the Germans had prospered in ways that they had not. The Germans were better housed and fed; their private school system was clearly superior; their homes and their persons seemed cleaner and healthier. They were committed to a work ethic, at least in contrast to the impoverished *caboclos* (persons of mixed Portuguese and Indian descent), among whom labor was intermittent and subject to frequent and long interruptions. Moreover, the Germans were savers. In order to counter the effects of inheritance laws that tended to break up farm properties into unprofitable units, the German *colonos* often saved diligently in order to provide their sons with agricultural land. Value conflicts were apparent in many other aspects of life as well. Emilio Willems has pointed out, for example, that whereas the Luso-Brazilians were tolerant of prostitution but intolerant of sexual intercourse for unmarried women, the Teuto-Brazilians were opposed to prostitution but permitted premarital intercourse under controlled conditions that normally led to marriage.⁹

Nativism displays itself most naturally in the field of politics. Even though the Teuto-Brazilians had experienced a great deal of success economically, their participation in the political process was quite another matter. Government at all levels remained firmly in the hands of the Luso-Brazilian landowners and in Rio Grande do Sul it was virtually complete. They usually controlled the local leader (*coronel*) of the established party. As a rural political boss, the *coronel* delivered the votes required of him, prevented the opposition from voting, controlled patronage, and dispensed favors. When enticement failed, he might resort to fraud and violence.¹⁰ It was difficult for the Germans to find a place in such a system. Most of the time they were happy enough to be left alone without harassment.

Political apathy has, in fact, been frequently noted as a characteristic of German immigrants everywhere and should be understood sociologically as an aspect of marginality.¹¹ In southern Brazil, where the cultural isolation of Germans was especially strong, social pressure often worked against political participation. For example, one German teacher in Rio Grande do Sul felt constrained to apologize for having become a Brazilian citizen. He explained that such a step was a prerequisite to becoming an instructor in a government school, a position to which he aspired.¹² As the descendants of northern Europeans in a land marked strongly by southern European culture, the German Brazilians were an obviously different sort of people. In their separated and isolated world, participation in the political process was usually not considered very important. Mostly they were ignored by the ruling classes, and if they attempted to become involved in politics, they were easily dominated.

Throughout the empire period the majority of the German *colonos* — perhaps 75 percent — never bothered to acquire citizenship. For example, in 1852 there were only 165 voters of German stock in the entire São Leopoldo *município* (county). The majority were of peasant stock and had no

traditions of political participation in Germany. Few were aware of the rights that were at least technically theirs.¹³

It was the redoubtable Karl von Koseritz, a refugee of the German Revolution of 1848, who led the fight for political rights and greater political participation among the Teuto-Brazilians. He was among the first of the Germans, and the first non-Catholic, to be elected to the provincial assembly of Rio Grande do Sul. In his speeches and publications he repeatedly urged the Germans to become naturalized and to vote. Like many of his counterparts in the United States at that time, Koseritz also urged his fellow immigrants to organize themselves into a political bloc or, as circumstances might demand, a political party, arguing that this was the only way the Germans could enjoy the political power that was commensurate with their numbers. In 1883 he confidently but prematurely declared that the Germans had been drawn into public life; as he pointed out, they had been elected to the councils of several cities and held important positions in the national guard. By the end of the 1880s, four Germans had served in the provincial assembly of Rio Grande do Sul.¹⁴

After the establishment of the republic in 1889, all immigrants were declared to be citizens, and in 1891 they were granted the right to vote, provided that they could meet a literacy requirement. Promising though this enfranchisement was, it did not lead to political acculturation. Since the literacy rate of the German Brazilians soared high above that of the nation as a whole, they represented a potential threat to the political dominance of the *estancieiros* — the established landowner class — in districts where German settlements were concentrated.¹⁵ In Rio Grande do Sul the regime of Julio de Castilhos and Antonio Borges de Medeiros (with its Positivist emphasis on order and commitment to social progress through republican dictatorship) solved the problem by negotiating a sort of gentlemen's agreement in which the Teuto-Brazilians exchanged their electoral support for the ruling Republican party in return for cultural liberty, that is, freedom from any coercive program designed to integrate them into the political life of the local communities, the state, or the nation.¹⁶

Electoral docility on the part of the Germans was guaranteed in Rio Grande do Sul by a second step — the gerrymandering of electoral districts in 1897. Even though the Germans constituted 24.7 percent of the registered voters in the state, they were distributed among three districts so that their chances of electing one of their number was seriously reduced. A subsequent reapportionment in 1914 preserved the minority status of Germans in all electoral districts. So effective was this arrangement that throughout the republican era from 1889 to World War I, rarely more than three deputies in the state assembly bore German names — approximately a third of the seats their numbers warranted.¹⁷

Such steps to neutralize the political potential of the Teuto-Brazilians did not go far enough to satisfy the concerns of some Rio Grande do Sul politicians. They believed that measures had to be taken to break up the existing colonies and to guarantee that in the future new settlements would

consist of a mixture of ethnic groups. Some nativists wanted to accomplish these goals through a commission that was established in 1897 to investigate the validity of the titles to the land held by the immigrants — Italians as well as Germans. It was a fact that many immigrants had acquired their land from swindlers; they could base the ownership of their land only on documents that had been falsified earlier by public officials. Naturally, such titles were thrown out, to the great consternation and bitterness of the immigrants, who perceived the work of the verification commission as a poorly disguised effort to force them off their lands and break up their colonies.¹⁸

A decade later another method was devised to restrict the growth of immigrant colonies, this time on the national level. In 1909 the national congress passed a law specifying that at least 10 percent of the land in an area of small-farmer settlement had to be owned by native-born Brazilians. The effect of this legislation was minimal because by that time the great majority of the German *colonos* were Brazilian-born.¹⁹

In some respects the Teuto-Brazilians fared better in Santa Catarina than in Rio Grande do Sul. The political power of the small landowners (as distinguished from the *estanceiros*) was greater in this smaller and poorer state, and the Germans benefited accordingly. Several German *colonos* attained a political prominence in Santa Catarina that was denied them in Rio Grande do Sul. The most distinguished was Lauro Müller. Born in Itajai of immigrant parents, Müller received a military education and became a follower of a well-known Positivist, Benjamim Constant. He served as an aide to Marshall Deodoro da Fonseca, a founder of the republic, and after the coup of 1889, Deodoro appointed Müller, then twenty-six years of age, as governor of Santa Catarina. Müller was subsequently elected to the same office three times and also served the federal government as minister of commerce in the Rodrigues Alves administration and as foreign minister from 1912 to 1917 under presidents Hermes de Fonseca and Venceslau Braz. Other second-generation Germans were active in Santa Catarina politics, including Müller's first cousin, General Felipe Schmidt, who served as governor from 1914 to 1918, and the four Konder brothers, who were active in state and federal politics in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁰

Along with these personal successes ran a counterpoint of hostility. Positivism was less of a political force in Santa Catarina than in Rio Grande do Sul, and the immigrants were more highly concentrated in communities, such as Blumenau, Joinville, and Brusque. Because the threat posed by the *colonos* to the ruling Luso-Brazilians had not been neutralized as in Rio Grande do Sul, tensions mounted in Santa Catarina and programs of assimilation were ardently espoused.

Several prominent Luso-Brazilian politicians in Santa Catarina spoke out against the further growth of the German colonies. One of the governors of this period, Hercílio Luz, condemned the Germans severely for their separatism. He was especially troubled by the German Protestants because, in his view, they wanted only to remain German. Everything they did seemed to reflect attachment for Germany; they wanted no other fatherland. Luz was

particularly galled by the opposition of the Evangelical clergy to marriages of Germans to Luso-Brazilians and by the refusal of Germans in general to adopt Brazilian customs.²¹

In Santa Catarina, as in the United States, the nativist attack on immigrant institutions focused on private schools. Whereas in the United States Catholic parochial schools were targeted for control, if not elimination, in Brazil it was the Protestant schools that were found to be objectionable. Another important difference is that in the United States the public schools were well developed and numerically preponderant, while in Santa Catarina they were an inadequate minority. Given this circumstance, any effort to expand and improve the public school system was perceived by the Teuto-Brazilian leaders as an attack on them. At least two laws, passed in 1904 and 1907 by the Santa Catarina legislature, were intended to assist in the development of government schools and the regulation of private schools. But it was not until 1911 when Orestes Guimarães was appointed inspector of schools that effective control was initiated.²²

Evidently private school teachers and administrators were less than co-operative with state officials. In 1913, Santa Catarina enacted legislation requiring them to supply all information concerning curriculum and statistics of attendance requested by the state officials and to permit inspection of their schools. The law further specified that the private schools were required to observe national holidays and to comply with hygienic regulations. It expressly recognized the freedom of schools that received no government support to develop their own curricula, but any institution that accepted subventions from either the state or the *município* was required to use Portuguese as the language of instruction. Remarkably mild by present-day standards, this law was sharply condemned, especially by the Protestant clergy, who saw it as a sinister effort to strangle their schools.²³

Among Luso-Brazilian leaders of the educated and governing classes there was a growing concern that the Germans in the southern states were becoming so numerous and so powerful that they could never be assimilated. Early in the twentieth century their fears were heightened by much discussion of 'the German danger' — a belief that Germany had set itself upon a course of world-wide imperialism, based in part on the presence of German immigrants in various underdeveloped countries, including Brazil. Before and after the turn of the century, German aggressiveness was observed in the South Pacific, China, the Philippines, and the Caribbean. When in 1904 the Germans threatened the integrity of Venezuela, Brazil's neighbor to the north, in a debt-collection controversy, alarmists in Europe, the United States, and certainly Brazil feared that Germany was taking the first steps in a plan designed to culminate in the creation of a German protectorate over southern Brazil and possibly an independent state that would be German in language and culture.

The Brazilians' suspicion of German intentions was not unfounded. Already in the 1840s there were propagandists in Germany who hoped to divert the flow of German emigration from the United States to southern

Brazil and the La Plata district of Argentina and Uruguay. If sufficient numbers could be directed there, German language and culture would predominate and the people could establish a state that would be a Teutonic equivalent to the English-speaking United States.²⁴ Other writers had argued that when Germans settled in the United States they would become rivals of German industry rather than consumers of German goods, as they were likely to be in undeveloped Brazil. Still others maintained that the typical German emigrant lacked the ability to withstand the assimilative power of Anglo-American culture; he and his descendants would be completely un-Germanized within a few generations. Brazil, by contrast, offered a setting in which *Deutschtum* could be rooted permanently.²⁵

German cultural chauvinists continued to beat the same drum until, early in the twentieth century, resistance to acculturation became a common theme. Teuto-Brazilians could read, for example, about Hermann Leyfers, a German journalist who argued that cultural characteristics were inborn, inherited, and inalienable and that a person retained them to death, regardless of residence or other circumstance. 'A German remains a German,' he wrote; 'to deny one's nationality is to deny one's self.'²⁶ Others carried the argument farther, asserting that maintenance of German language and culture was the duty of Teuto-Brazilians because they would thereby enhance and strengthen national culture, even as they contributed to Brazil's prosperity by their industry.²⁷ Some writers recommended resistance to assimilation on the grounds that Brazilian culture was worthless. 'Brazil is a crippled, poorly organized community of 16,000,000 souls,' wrote Walter Kundt, '[who are] frivolous, uneducated, unscientific, inartistic, unmilitary; who can neither colonize, establish proper means of communication, build a fleet, regulate finances, nor guarantee justice; a government that cannot be described as anything but a band of robbers.'²⁸

Meanwhile in Germany the noisy, chauvinistic Pan-German League had, by 1900, united twenty thousand supernationalists from the urban middle classes and fueled new fears of German imperialism. In its widely distributed publications, this organization emphasized the cultural kinship of Germans all over the world and agitated vociferously for a colonial empire, for an enlarged navy, for war as an instrument of national policy, and for the preservation of German language and culture in German settlements overseas.²⁹ A symptom rather than a cause of the rampant nationalism of the time, the Pan-German League was identified by English and French propagandists as the coordinating agency of German imperialism. Although the league's importance was grossly exaggerated, a flood of articles exposing the alleged Pan-Germanist conspiracy soon appeared in newspapers and periodicals in Europe, America, and elsewhere, climaxing with the publication in 1913 of a book, *Pan-Germanism*, by an American historian, Roland G. Usher.³⁰ Typically filled with misinformation and overstatement, these materials repeatedly drew upon the same sources – either German chauvinists or French and English counterpropagandists – and as a result they succeeded in stirring up much anti-German sentiment.³¹

Literature of this kind also appeared in Brazil. By far the most significant example is a short book by a noted Brazilian literary critic, Sylvio Romero, which was published in 1906. In *O Allemanismo no sul do Brasil*, Romero, who is distinguished for his recognition of the African contribution to Brazilian culture, warned his countrymen of 'the German peril,' outlined steps that could be taken to combat the threat, and urged that measures be taken to assimilate the German *colonos* into Brazilian society. Undoubtedly Romero's book contributed to the efforts of the government during the pre-World War I decade to limit the potential political power of the Teuto-Brazilians, to break up the exclusive character of the German settlements, and to improve the quality of the public schools so that they could indeed function as agents of assimilation.³²

The Portuguese-language press also warned against 'the German peril.' In August 1904, for example, *Correio do Povo* of Porto Alegre published extracts from several nationalistic newspapers in Germany to illustrate how Pan-Germanists considered the three southern states to be within Germany's sphere of influence.³³ Brazilians were especially offended by a remark by Gustav Schmoller, a German professor, regarding the options available to the three southernmost states: remaining a part of Brazil, becoming an independent country, or coming 'into closer relation' with the German Empire.³⁴ Concern was frequently expressed over the opening of German consulates in southern cities and over the subsidies the Prussian state church (always described as the German government) was providing for German Evangelical schools in Brazil.

German-language newspapers in Brazil were by no means united in support of Pan-Germanism. The movement had its partisans, of course, but most Teuto-Brazilian journalists were more moderate. They believed that it was possible, even desirable, to maintain the German language and culture in Brazil, but within the framework of loyal Brazilian citizenship. So keen was the opposition to Pan-Germanism in Porto Alegre, for example, that one weekly newspaper, *Rio Grandenser Vaterland*, was founded in 1902 on the proposition that the Teuto-Brazilian fatherland was Rio Grande do Sul and Brazil, not Germany. This paper expressly declared its intention to do battle with Pan-Germanism and its advocates; having the support of prominent and powerful Rio Grandenser politicians, it thrived and continued to publish for many years.³⁵

To the German imperial government the Pan-Germanists were a nuisance. Count Bernhard von Bülow, the German chancellor, explicitly repudiated the league. In a speech before the German Reichstag on 19 March 1904, he denied unequivocally any intention to annex territory anywhere in South America. 'In Brazil,' commented von Bülow in an interview with a Brazilian journalist, 'we wish to form no state within a state, and hope that the Germans there will become useful members of their country.' The same message was brought to the Teuto-Brazilians by Prince Henry of Prussia, the brother of the kaiser, when he stopped in Brazil on a world tour a short time earlier.³⁶ Such spokesmen for the German government readily admitted that,

while their country had no political aspirations in the Western Hemisphere, it did have a strong economic interest and that Germany, like France and England, was eager to develop its trade relations with South American countries.

Had the German government wanted to assume a political role in Brazil, the opportunity came in connection with the visit of the German cruiser *Panther* to the port of Itajaí, Santa Catarina, in 1905. When a sailor failed to return to the ship at a designated time, the ship's commander, Count von Saurma-Jeltsch, ordered several officers and a dozen marines to go ashore and apprehend the deserter, which they did, but not without resistance. The action was a clear violation of Brazilian sovereignty, and Baron Rio Branco, the Brazilian foreign minister, quickly demanded an apology. Meanwhile the Brazilian press became highly agitated over the affair. The German minister in Rio de Janeiro at first tried to defend Saurma's action, but in Berlin Chancellor von Bülow successfully insisted, despite Kaiser Wilhelm's reluctance to discipline the commandant, that the German government comply and that he be recalled.³⁷

Thus, during the decade before the outbreak of World War I, Brazilians in all levels of society, from the ruling classes to the despised *caboclos*, had begun to perceive the Germans, both Teuto-Brazilians and *Reichsdeutsche* (subjects of the German Empire) as a problem – an element that threatened the equilibrium of Brazilian society.³⁸ The Germans seemed rich and powerful, socially exclusive, and unwilling to be assimilated. To the more suspicious, they were eager accomplices in a Pan-Germanist plot to extend German power and with it German language and culture to all parts of the world.

The Brazilian image of the Germans, like most stereotypes, rested on insufficient and distorted information, rhetorical exaggerations, and myths.³⁹ There was little comprehension of the diversity within the group, such as the differences that divided Catholics from Protestants or the disparate values and behaviors that separated the rural farmers from the urban workers and businessmen. Perceptions were drawn primarily from the behavior of a part of the ethnic elite – the articulate, educated clergy, journalists, and businessmen who perpetuated the immigrant culture because it served their economic interest and satisfied their psychological needs. Meanwhile the ordinary German-Brazilian people went about their daily business, gradually adapting to their surroundings and rarely giving the problem any thought. If their assimilation was unusually slow it was because they had farther to go, culturally speaking, than the Italians, for example, to whom they were frequently and negatively compared. Because of this cultural distance they tended to gather in separate communities, especially in the rural districts. Since they were so numerous, it was relatively easy for them to create the institutions that maintained their distinctive cultural forms. Luso-Brazilians, no less than the Germans themselves, failed to understand how the physical environment in conjunction with the unique events of Brazilian history had promoted German isolationism. They had little appreciation for the diversity

of German immigrant society and of the sharp differences that often divided its members.

Luso-Brazilians were often mystified by the apparent separatism of the Germans. They could not understand why the Germans would even want to perpetuate their own language and culture indefinitely. In their view, the Luso-Brazilian culture was especially attractive; it was open, tolerant, hospitable, adaptable, nonideological, humane, and free of rigid social stratification. Brazilians were motivated by a spirit of conciliation that sought compromise and rejected extremist measures; above all, they considered themselves to be a nonviolent people.⁴⁰ In the view of José Honório Rodrigues, a contemporary authority on Brazilian national characteristics,

the basic Luso-Brazilian personality has a horror of violence and always seeks a way of smoothing things over, a path of moderation that avoids definite breaks. Cleverness, prudence in shunning extremes, an ability to forget, a rich sense of humor, a cool head, and a warm heart get the Brazilians through difficult moments. . . . Conciliation rather than revolution has dominated Brazilian history. In part this is because the people, with their spirit of concord, prefer to gain less than to have recourse to violence, in part because the dominant oligarchic groups prefer yielding a little to risking much, and finally because the armed forces – democratic, liberal, and progressive in their tendencies – wield a balance of power that is exercised to moderate minorities rather than subjugate majorities.⁴¹

Rodrigues also supplies a lengthy list of negative characteristics, among them a tendency to procrastinate, belief in luck and gambling, psychosocial instability, and weakness for the temptations of nepotism and for the cult of the personality.⁴² The typical German *colono* would have agreed, but would have added a few other traits to the list.

The vaunted tradition of nonviolence did not conform to the German Brazilians' experience. They recalled that many of the original German settlers were soldiers recruited by the Brazilian government to fight its wars on the southern frontier. The *colonos* remembered bloody slaughter and destruction in the wars with Argentina and Paraguay; they experienced devastation in the civil conflicts such as the *Farrapenkrieg* and the more recent *Muckerkrieg*; and from 1912 to 1915 state and federal forces numbering thousands of men were required to put down a revolt led by a religious mystic in the western territory contested by both Santa Catarina and Paraná. Beyond that, banditry seemed endemic in the interior.⁴³ Many of the Teuto-Brazilians were bitter about the government – national, state, and local – because it seemed oppressive, unfair, corrupt, and unwilling to respond to their needs. They felt excluded from the political process; they either had to fight for their rights or accept whatever was served up to them by the Luso-Brazilians.⁴⁴ They were criticized for not knowing Portuguese and yet the government gave them no schools. When they organized their own schools, they were criticized for that, too.

Why should the Germans want to assimilate into such a society, asked the most ethnocentric among them. It seemed obvious to them that the Luso-Brazilian culture was inferior to their own; they found little that might be worthy of adoption or imitation. Unlike the Anglo-American Protestant culture in the United States, where German immigrants were virtually unable to withstand powerful assimilative forces, Brazilian culture was thought to be weak. The Luso-Brazilians themselves seemed to combine indolence and ignorance with ridiculous conceit. As for their Portuguese language, it was useful to know but unimportant in terms of world cultures. Compared to German, it offered few literary treasures.⁴⁵ The Brazilian anthropologist Egon Schaden, reflecting upon his youth as a pupil in a German school in Santa Catarina before World War I, recalled that each child had a notebook with a firm admonition printed upon the cover: 'Remember that you are a German!'⁴⁶

It was precisely because Luso-Brazilian culture was so ineffectual, the German chauvinists argued, that Teuto-Brazilians should feel obligated to preserve their own culture. By infusing Brazilian society with their superior values and behaviors, they would perform their best service as loyal Brazilian citizens.⁴⁷ Some Germans held that each ethnic group should be allowed to develop its own potentialities, Teuto-Brazilian as well as Luso-Brazilian; each was to have equal rights to survive. According to this doctrine, cultural pluralism would bring strength to the state; assimilation, by contrast, was threatening to the state because it meant the gradual disappearance of ethnic vitality.⁴⁸

The preservation of the German language was equally essential, in the chauvinist view, because if it were to fade from use, so would valuable German customs, along with the German sense of duty and commitment to the work ethic. At the same time they agreed that it was important for the Germans to master the Portuguese language. Only by speaking it fluently could the Germans ever hope to find the places they deserved in Brazilian society and to influence Brazilian culture properly.⁴⁹ Proponents of this brand of ethnocentrism never questioned the loyalty of the immigrants and their children to Brazil. Brazil was their home and they were totally committed to it. Most had been born there and had never lived anywhere else. Their bonds were with German culture, not with the German state, its kaiser, or his ambitions.

Immigrant perceptions of the host society may be discerned in a variety of sources, including textbooks. For example, a geography published in 1916 specifically for German Evangelical schools offers a generally positive portrait of the Luso-Brazilians but also reveals German attitudes:

The greater number of the inhabitants of our state [Rio Grande do Sul] are Luso-Brazilians, descended from immigrant Portuguese. . . . But these Portuguese did not keep their race pure. For the most part they mingled with Indians and negroes so that with time the mixed race of the Brazilians has arisen.

The Luso-Brazilian country dweller has many attractive qualities. He is generally modest and hospitable, much more polite and sociable than the German, and he is not so addicted to the abuse of alcohol. He has no class prejudice. Rich and poor, ignorant and cultured meet together in the pleasantest way. But these good qualities are not so well developed in the Luso-Brazilian dwellers in cities. Among them are noticed rather some less agreeable Brazilian qualities, little sense of duty, unpunctuality, carelessness, and ingratitude.

The Brazilian is a zealous patriot and loves his country above everything.

The textbook writer follows with an assessment of his fellow Teuto-Brazilians. Protestant opposition to alcoholic drink is again apparent:

The German colonists are simple, industrious, worthy, and honorable men of good reliable character. All the more is it to be lamented that here and there one of them has hurt the name of the local Germans by quarrelsomeness or drunkenness. The significance of German things for Rio Grande is very great. A hundred years ago Rio Grande do Sul was a land on whose uplands the Luso-Brazilian grazed a few cattle and in whose primeval forest dwelt Indians and wild beasts. Then came the Germans and with them came agriculture, commerce, and industrial arts into the land. When we visit our thriving German colonies, when we see the German wholesale houses and factories in our cities, our hearts are proud of the things German industry and German capacity have accomplished.

What would Rio Grande do Sul be without the Germans? The future of the state depends on the further development of the German-Brazilian population.⁵⁰

The quotation exposes the conflict Germans felt as members of Brazilian society. Like any other ethnocultural group, the Germans felt the need to emphasize their desirable characteristics (and by implication the ways in which they considered themselves to be superior to the Luso-Brazilians). At the same time, however, they sought acceptance and recognition. They were eager to be considered an essential element in their country's history, and they wanted Brazilians to understand and appreciate how extensive their contributions had been to Brazil's development.

The literature of Teuto-Brazilian filiopietism therefore describes how individual Germans had participated in the exploration of the land, the independence movement, and the preservation of Brazilian territorial integrity through the wars with Argentina and Paraguay. In the Teuto-Brazilian view, the liberty of conscience that German leaders defended helped to initiate the renewal of national intellectual life. Filiopietists also stressed the role of the Germans in placing new value and dignity on work and in condemning slavery as morally and socially obnoxious. The Germans, they felt, had contributed significantly to the elevation of moral, cultural, and material standards in Brazil. Proud as they were of the role the Germans had played in the developing history of Brazil, they were eager to be recognized

for their contributions.⁵¹ The filiopietists were also convinced that the Germans could take credit, at least in part, for the emergence of the middle class in Brazil. Similarly, the fact that São Leopoldo, Joinville, Blumenau, and other strongly German cities were so well planned and administered could be attributed to the Germans' communal spirit and their sense of personal responsibility for the public welfare.⁵²

For a substantial but indeterminate proportion of the German sub-society in Brazil, this kind of ethnocentric talk was pointless. Like any other immigrant group, the Germans included persons who were favourably disposed toward the language and culture of the host society and wanted to become a part of it as quickly and painlessly as possible.⁵³ Unlike the cultural idealists who claimed that it was their right (if not their responsibility) to maintain their immigrant speech and folkways and who denied the right of the government to demand that they learn the language of the country, the rapid assimilators were eager to abandon the marks of immigrant status because they had become a source of social and economic deprivation.

Between these two — the cultural chauvinists at one extreme and the rapid assimilators at the other — were the majority, who saw no particular problem at all. They went about their daily activities without thinking much about the status of immigrant culture in Brazil or the problems of assimilation. Through daily contacts at work, at the store, at church, in school, or even at home, they learned Portuguese more or less automatically. Whether they learned quickly or slowly depended upon the individual circumstance and whether it provided good or poor opportunities for interaction with speakers of Portuguese. In any case, however, for them the ability to speak Portuguese became the symbol of higher social status; it was the avenue to social and economic progress, especially for the young.⁵⁴

When governmental personnel began to identify as problems the exclusiveness of the rural German colonies and the slowness of the Germans to assimilate, as they did in the 1890s and later decades, they thought first of the extreme cases — the highly isolated districts where there were no Portuguese-language schools and where hundreds of second- and third-generation children could be found whose knowledge of Portuguese was rudimentary at best. Similarly, when they tried to identify typical German attitudes they naturally paid attention to the most conspicuous persons — the noisy idealists who made speeches and wrote editorials, essays, and letters demanding the right to maintain their cultural separatism.

Thus the Luso-Brazilian majority acquired a distorted image of the Teuto-Brazilians. Some elements of the composite picture were correct, others were out of proportion, and a few, one might suppose, were simply wrong. For decades in the nineteenth century, the Luso-Brazilian majority had ignored the question of German assimilation, probably because it had not seemed important enough to demand action. Then, when the failure of the Germans to assimilate began to be perceived as a problem, some Brazilians tended to overreact and to press for extreme or far-reaching measures that would enforce greater conformity. When national rivalries exploded into world war

their sympathies were strongly with the Allies and Luso-Brazilian tolerance for the loyalty Teuto-Brazilians naturally felt for Germany was correspondingly reduced. Influential political and cultural leaders then attacked Brazil's German ethnic group as a menace to national security and recklessly charged them with a full range of subversive activity. The subsequent anti-German riots of 1917 were thus the natural children born of intergroup tensions in conjunction with events of world history.

Notes

1. Detailed accounts of the riots may be found in various metropolitan newspapers of Brazil, April 16–18, 1917. E.g., see *A Federação* and *Correio do Povo* of Porto Alegre and *Jornal do Commercio* of Rio de Janeiro. For summary accounts in the German-language press, see *Deutsche Post* of São Leopoldo, April 24, 1917, and *Germania* of São Paulo, April 25, 1917. *New York Times* published numerous translations of dispatches from Brazilian newspapers. See similar sources for the later riots, which occurred from October 28 to November 2, 1917.
2. Cf. my account of the impact of World War I on the German ethnic group in the United States. *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974).
3. Imre Ferenczi (comp.), and Walter F. Willcox (ed.), *International Migrations. Vol. I. Statistics* (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1929), pp. 695, 700–1.
4. The most comprehensive study of Germans in Brazil is by Jean Roche, *La colonisation allemande et la Rio Grande do Sul* (Paris: Institut des Hautes Études de l'Amérique Latine, 1959). A large number of filiopietistic histories have been published in German, the most useful of which is by Karl Fouquet, *Der deutsche Einwanderer und sein Nachkommen in Brasilien: 1808–1824–1974* (São Paulo: Instituto Hans Staden, 1974). The most important English-language writer on the Germans in Brazil is the anthropologist Emílio Willems, who has published a half dozen or more excellent articles in American journals since 1940. Willems is also the author of *A aculturação dos alemães no Brasil: Estudo antropológico dos imigrantes alemães e seus descendentes no Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1946). For examples of recent scholarly, monographic work in Portuguese, see the published proceedings of three symposia, each entitled *Colóquio de estudos teuto-brasileiros* (Porto Alegre, 1963; Pernambuco, 1974; Porto Alegre, 1980).
5. Gilberto Freyre, *Order and Progress: Brazil from Monarchy to Republic*, ed. and trans. by Rod W. Horton (New York: Knopf, 1970), pp. 56–7, 123–4, and 188–9. Freyre has noted that, of all the immigrant groups, the Italians were the most desired, the most imitated, and the most highly praised by Brazilian leaders who in those years hoped the influx of European immigrants would 'whiten' the population. Since Italians were closer than Germans to Luso-Brazilians on a sociocultural distance scale, they were less separatistic and thus more capable of producing the desired genetic effect. See pp. 256–7.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 123 and 197; E. Bradford Burns, *A History of Brazil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), pp. 250–4.
7. Freyre, *Order and Progress*, p. 13; Fernando de Azevedo, *Brazilian Culture* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), pp. 159–60 and 414–18.
8. Gilberto Freyre, *New World in the Tropics: The Culture of Modern Brazil* (New York: Knopf, 1966), p. 154; José Honório Rodrigues, *The Brazilians: Their Character and Aspirations* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), p. 96.
9. Emílio Willems, 'Some Aspects of Cultural Conflict and Acculturation in Southern Rural Brazil,' *Rural Sociology* 7 (1942): 379.

10. Joseph L. Love, *Rio Grande do Sul and Brazilian Regionalism, 1882-1930* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1971), pp. 118-20; Roche, *La colonisation allemande*, pp. 554-5; Max Dedekind, *Brasilien, das Ziel deutscher Auswanderer und die Deutsche Evangelische Kirche in Brasilien* (Eberfeld: Evangelischen Gesellschaft für die protestantischen Deutschen in Südamerika, 1924), p. 9. Cf. Victor Nunes Leal, *Coronelismo: The Municipality and Representative Government in Brazil*, trans. from the original Portuguese language edition of 1949 by June Henfrey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 1-25.
11. Egon Schaden, 'Der Deutschbrasilianer - Ein Problem,' *Staden-Jahrbuch: Beiträge zur Brasilkunde* 2 (1954): 193; Ernesto Niemeyer, *Die Deutschen in Brasilien* (Curitiba: Verlag der 'Impressora Paranaense,' 1926), p. 89; Arpad Szilvassy, 'Participação dos alemães e seus descendentes na vida política brasileira,' *I Colóquio de estudos teuto-brasileiros* (Porto Alegre: Centro de Estudos Sociais da Faculdade de Filosofia da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, 1963), pp. 247-61; Liene Maria Martins Schütz, 'Imigração alemã: Processo, costume e influências,' *Anais do 1º simpósio de história de imigração de colonização alemã no Rio Grande do Sul* (São Leopoldo, 1974), pp. 307-8.
12. 'Anteil des Deutschtums an der Politik,' in *Hundert Jahre Deutschtum in Rio Grande do Sul, 1824-1924*, ed. Verband deutscher Vereine (Porto Alegre: Typographia do Centro, 1924), p. 179.
13. *Hundert Jahre Deutschtum*, p. 179; Szilvassy, 'Participação dos alemães,' p. 249.
14. Karl von Koseritz, *Bilder aus Brasilien* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Friedrich, 1885), pp. 140 and 360; Carlos H. Oberacker, Jr., *Carlos von Koseritz* (São Paul: Anhambi, 1961), pp. 51-69; Hans Gehse, *Die deutsche Presse in Brasilien von 1852 bis zur Gegenwart* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1931), pp. 148-55; *Hundert Jahre Deutschtum*, p. 179; Roche, *La colonisation allemande*, pp. 534 and 555; Szilvassy, 'Participação dos alemães,' p. 250. Actually Koseritz might have been more successful if he had not been so impatient and intolerant of the church people, whom he inevitably alienated with his barrage of criticism aimed at Jesuits and the Protestant clergy.
15. Gerd Kohlhepp, 'Die deutschstämmigen Siedlungsgebiete im südbrasilianischen Staate Santa Catarina,' in *Heidelberger Studien zur Kulturgeographie* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1966), p. 220.
16. Szilvassy, 'Participação dos alemães,' p. 250; Freyre, *Order and Progress*, p. 270. Gilberto Freyre was not exactly approving of this arrangement. He wrote that 'descendants of Germans were allowed liberties or privileges entirely incompatible with Brazilian cultural basic unity (such as the right to have schools where Portuguese was not taught) by politicians who needed German votes in order to dominate or control their particular state.' Freyre, *New World in the Tropics*, p. 102.
17. Roche, *La colonisation allemande*, pp. 552-4 and 568; Love, *Rio Grande do Sul*, pp. 131-3.
18. Wilhelm Mönckmeier, *Die deutsche überseeische Auswanderung* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1912), p. 214; Gehse, *Die deutsche Presse*, p. 160.
19. Karl Heinrich Oberacker, 'Die sozialgeschichtliche Bedeutung der deutschen Einwanderung,' *Staden-Jahrbuch: Beiträge zur Brasilkunde* 2 (1954): 179.
20. Marcus Konder, *Lauro Müller* (Itajaí, SC: Edição do Centro Cultural de Itajaí, 1944); Rodrigo Octávio, 'Lauro Mueller,' *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro* 265 (Oct. Dec. 1964): 172-88; Karl H. Oberacker, Jr., *Der deutsche Beitrag zum Aufbau der brasilianischen Nation*, 3d edn., rev. and expanded (São Leopoldo, RGS: Federação dos Centros Culturais 25 Julho, 1978), pp. 401-5; Martin Fischer, 'O problema da conservação da cultura alemã,' *I Colóquio de estudos teuto-brasileiros* (Porto Alegre: Centro de Estudos Sociais da Faculdade de Filosofia da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, 1963), p. 344; G. Entres (ed.), *Der Staat Santa Catharina in Vergangenheit and Gegenwart unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Deutschtums: Gedenkbuch zur Jahrhundert-Feier deutscher Einwanderung in Santa Catharina* (Florianopolis, SC: Livraria Central - Alberto Entres, 1929; 'A morte do Senador

Felippe Schmidt' (unidentified newspaper clipping, May 10, 1930, Instituto Hans Staden, São Paulo).

21. Luz is quoted in Martin Braunschweig, 'Die rechtliche Stellung des deutschen Schulwesens in Südbrasilien,' in *Die Kulturbedeutung der evangelischen Kirche in Brasilien*, ed. by Bruno Geissler (Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1922), p. 51.

22. *Ibid.*; Entres (ed.), *Der Staat Santa Catharina*, p. 223; Ferdinand Schröder, *Brasilien und Wittenberg: Ursprung und Gestaltung deutschen evangelischen Kirchentums in Brasilien* (Berlin and Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1936), p. 356.

23. Braunschweig, 'Die rechtliche Stellung,' p. 51; Schröder, *Brasilien und Wittenberg*, p. 356; Dedekind, *Brasilien*, p. 24. Many Brazilians admitted that if the Germans had failed to assimilate it was not their fault, since the government had failed to provide Portuguese-language schools. For example, see F. de Leonardo Truda, *A colonização alemã no Rio Grande do Sul* (Porto Alegre: Typographia do Centro, 1930), pp. 141–66.

24. F. Schmidt, *Grundzüge einer geregelten Auswanderung der Deutschen, mit besonderer Rücksicht auf Südbrasilien* (Hamburg, 1842); *idem.*, *Die geregelte Auswanderung nach Brasilien und ihr erster glänzender Erfolg* (Rudolstadt: G. Froebel, 1852). Cf. Fritz Sudhaus, *Deutschland und die Auswanderung nach Brasilien im 19. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 1940), pp. 48–9.

25. Wilhelm Georg Roscher, *Kolonien, Kolonialpolitik und Auswanderung* (Leipzig and Heidelberg: C. F. Winter, 1856), p. 358; Sudhaus, *Deutschland und die Auswanderung*, p. 50.

26. *Joinvillenser Zeitung* [Joinville, SC], October 21, 1896.

27. *Deutsche Zeitung* [Porto Alegre], February 24, 1906.

28. Walter Kundt, *Brasilien und seine Bedeutung für Deutschlands Handel und Industrie* (Berlin: Verlag von Siemenroth, 1903), p. 119.

29. Mildred S. Wertheimer, *The Pan-German League, 1890–1914*, Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law, vol. 112 (New York: Columbia University, 1924).

30. Roland G. Usher, *Pan-Germanism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913).

31. For samples of such material, see Frederick W. Wile, 'German Colonisation in Brazil,' *Fortnightly Review* 79 (January 1906): 129–38, and Alfred F. Sears, 'German Influence in Latin America,' *Popular Science Monthly* 72 (February 1908): 140–52. More moderate or balanced are Stephen Bonsal, 'Greater Germany in South America,' *North American Review* 176 (January 1903): 58–67, and George A. Chamberlain, 'Germany in Southern Brazil,' *Independent* 56 (May 5, 1904): 1016–22. A later review of this material is provided by Loretta Baum, 'German Political Designs with Reference to Brazil,' *Hispanic American Historical Review* 2 (November 1919): 589–99.

32. Sylvio Romero, *O allemanismo no sul do Brasil: Seus perigos e os meios do os conjurar* (Rio de Janeiro: Ribeiro, 1906). A decade later Edgardo de Magalhães wrote a piece for English readers, but it merely repeated typical anti-German propaganda. See 'Germany and South America: A Brazilian View,' *Nineteenth Century and After* 81 (January 1917): 67–80.

33. Ernest Tonnelat, *L'expansion allemande hors d'Europe* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1908), pp. 144–5.

34. George Agnew Chamberlain, 'Germany in Southern Brazil,' *The Independent* 56 (5 May 1904): 1020; Fritz Bühler, *Dona Francisca: 70 Jahre deutscher Kulturarbeit in Brasilien im Staate Santa Catharina* (Berlin-Wilmersdorf: Hermann Pretel, [1919]), pp. 76–8. See also Gaston Gaillard, *Amérique latine et Europe occidentale: L'Amérique latine et la guerre* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1918), pp. 20–1.

35. Tonnelat, *L'expansion allemande*, p. 137; Gehse, *Die deutsche Presse*, pp. 24 and 159.

36. Chamberlain, 'Germany in Southern Brazil,' pp. 1021–2.

37. Alfred Vagts, *Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten in der Weltpolitik*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1935), 2: 1768–60; Tonnelat, *L'expansion allemande*, pp. 145–6.

38. Fischer, 'O problema da conservação'; Schaden, 'Die Deutschbrasilianer.'

39. Schaden, 'Die Deutschbrasilianer,' p. 184.
40. Rodrigues, *The Brazilians*, pp. 60-1; A. H. Neiva and M. Digues, Jr., 'The Cultural Assimilation of Immigrants in Brazil,' in *The Cultural Integration of Immigrants*, ed. by W. D. Borrie (Paris: UNESCO, 1959), p. 185.
41. Rodrigues, *The Brazilians*, p. 59. Apparently Rodrigues wrote these words before the Brazilian army assumed control of the government in 1964. Non-Brazilian historians have disputed the claim of a non-violent tradition. See Burns, *History of Brazil*, p. 254, and Henry H. Keith, 'The Non-Violent Tradition in Brazilian History: A Myth in Need of Explosion,' *Conflict and Continuity in Brazilian Society*, ed. by Henry H. Keith and S. F. Edwards (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1969), pp. 231-40, and commentary by Joseph L. Love, pp. 241-7.
42. Rodrigues, *The Brazilians*, pp. 62-5.
43. Tonnelat, *L'expansion allemande*, pp. 97-8; Burns, *History of Brazil*, p. 253; Fischer, 'O problema da conservação,' p. 343.
44. Dedekind, *Brasilien*, p. 9.
45. *Deutsche Zeitung* [Porto Alegre], October 20, 1917; Oskar Canstatt, *Brasilien: Land und Leute* (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler, 1877), pp. 251 and 416; Tonnelat, *L'expansion allemande*, pp. 125 and 141; Haring, *The Germans in South America*, p. 43.
46. Interview with Egon Schaden, January 8, 1982, São Paulo.
47. Schaden, 'Die Deutschbrasilianer,' pp. 183-4.
48. Emilio Willems, 'Immigrants and Their Descendants in Brazil,' in *Brazil: Portrait of Half a Continent*, ed. by T. Lynn Smith and Alexander Marchant (1951; rpt. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1972), p. 209.
49. Oberacker, Karl Heinrich, *Die volkspolitische Lage des Deutschtums in Rio Grande do Sul* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1936), p. 76; Dedekind, *Brasilien*, pp. 9 and 45.
50. Theodor Radlet, *Heimat und Naturkunde für Deutsche Schulen* (São Leopoldo, RGS: Rotermund, 1916) quoted in Mark Jefferson, 'Pictures from Southern Brazil,' *Geographical Review* 16 (October 1926): 546.
51. The classic example of Teuto-Brazilian filiopietistic literature is *Der deutsche Beitrag zum Aufbau der brasilianischen Nation*, by Karl H. Oberacker, Jr. Originally published in 1955, it was revised and expanded in its 1978 edition, which is cited above, n. 20. A second, revised edition appeared in Portuguese: *A contribuição teuta a formação da nação brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Prensença, 1968).
52. Szilvassy, 'Participação dos alemães,' pp. 248-53.
53. Fischer, 'O problema da conversação,' p. 344.
54. Schaden, 'Die Deutschbrasilianer,' pp. 189-93.