

Part III

The American Receivers

INTRODUCTION

On the western side of the Atlantic lay the major receiving nations: Argentina, Brazil, Canada, and the United States. As in Europe, migration flowed in more than one direction. Europeans went west to the New World, but some returned eastward; small numbers of people born in the Americas went to Europe; and north-south flows (both ways) existed between Brazil and Argentina and their neighbors in small numbers, and between Canada and the United States in quite large numbers. Some migrants stayed, some repatriated; some went to rural areas, others to cities; some succeeded in finding what they migrated for, others failed. Some migrants intended to make a fresh start in the New World, others to go back with enough to improve life at home or simply to survive another season. In any case, land or jobs were of the essence in all four countries. The United States was no exception.

Each of the four played a different role in the transatlantic migration story.¹ Because of their similarities in geographical and population size, Argentina has sometimes been compared to Canada (and to Australia), while Brazil and the United States have always been the *colossi* of their continents. Differences among the four are obviously great, but they shared a receptivity to European migrants, and implicit comparisons of the two pairs—Argentina-Canada, Brazil-United States—are worth remembering. The donor nations last looked at in Europe—Spain, Portugal, Italy—appear first here; the donors first considered above—Britain and Ireland—surface only later. To a larger extent, North Europeans traveled to North America, while Mediterraneans went to South America. But there are important exceptions: Italians, East European Jews, and some other peoples went to both.

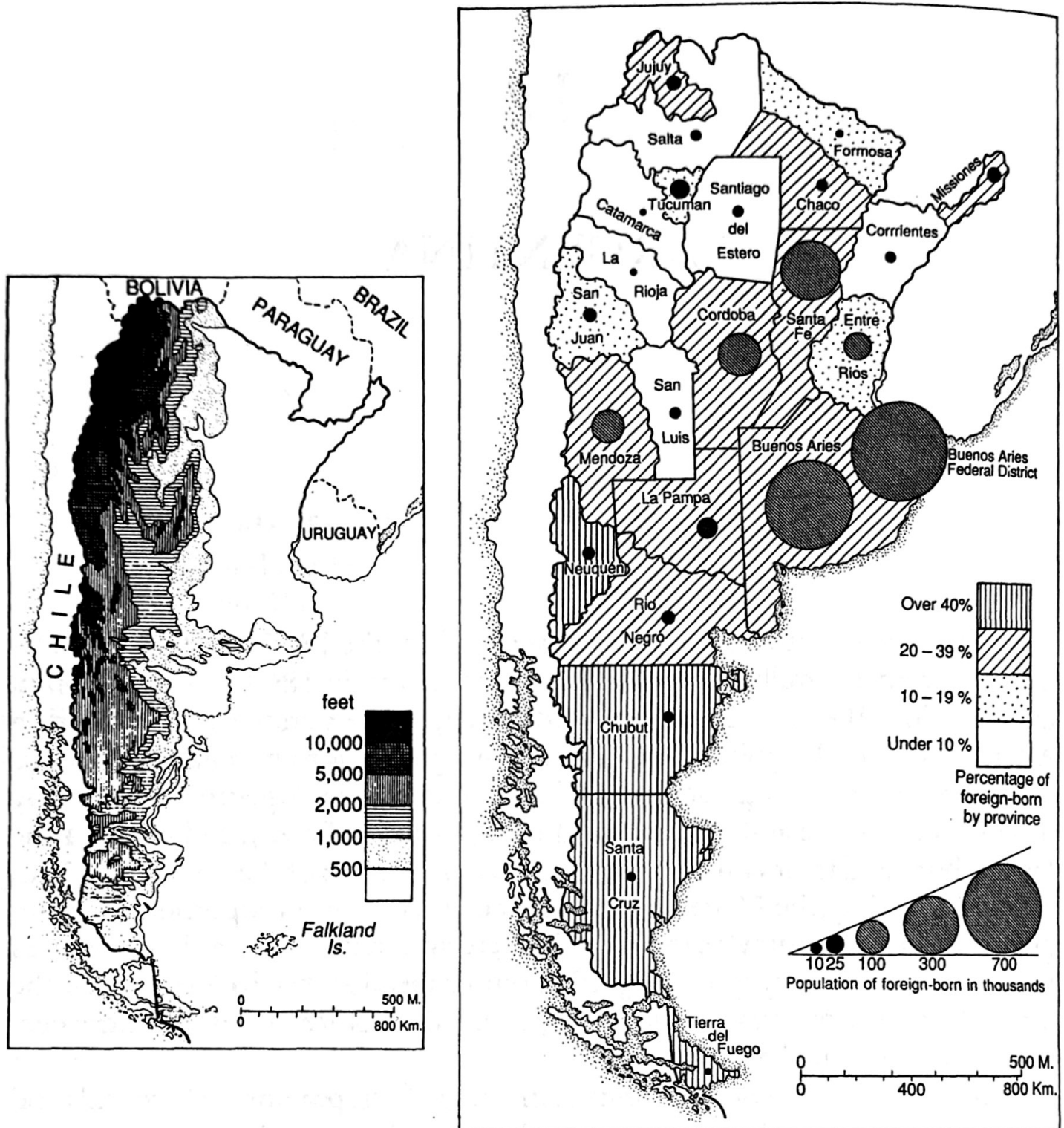
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ARGENTINA

Argentina underwent a remarkable expansion from the 1860s to 1914. Population rose from 1.7 million in the first national census in 1869 to 7.9 million in the third, in 1914. The gates were wide open; as the statesman Juan Bautista Alberdí announced, “gobernar es poblar”—to govern is to populate.¹ Migrants from Europe formed a greater part of the population in Argentina than in any other country (three and a half times the proportion in Brazil), and by 1914 the foreign-born and their children accounted for 58 percent of the 7.9 million.² No country, including the United States, had nearly so large a proportion of immigrants; no other country’s capital was 50 percent foreign-born, as Buenos Aires was for more than sixty years. The 1914 census revealed that 30.3 percent of the national population was foreign-born, more than twice the proportion ever reached in the United States.³

Before 1900, the majority of immigrants came from peasant backgrounds and sought places on the land or in agriculturally related work in the extremely fertile, recently opened provinces within reach of the coast. From the 1890s onward, migrants increasingly stayed in larger cities, particularly Buenos Aires. In 1895, the city of Buenos Aires held 74 adult foreigners for every hundred adults; the provinces of Córdoba, Buenos Aires, Entre Ríos, Mendoza, and La Pampa, 44; and the rest of the country, 11. In the 1914 census these figures were, respectively, 72, 51, and 20. When the Argentine-born children of immigrant parents are added to their parents, one sees clearly an overwhelmingly European, particularly Italian, people and culture in the capital and in several of the richest provinces.⁴

A liberal immigration law, passed in 1876 and revised in 1887 and 1889, removed almost all restrictions and also provided for lodging and maintenance, hostels, and other support. The law favored building a labor force in both



Map 5. Argentina. Physiographic and Political (*Map by Norman Pounds*)

The vast pampas included Buenos Aires and La Pampa provinces and most of several others northward to the borders of Paraguay and Brazil, nearly 1,000 miles with practically no land higher than 500 feet (152 meters) above sea level.

agriculture and industry.⁵ Not until 1931 did a restrictive law pass.⁶ President Domingo Faustino Sarmiento favored immigration during his term (1868–1874), and his successor, Julio Roca (1880–1886, 1898–1904), did so even more; the conventional wisdom was that mass European immigration was essential to develop the nation. Briefly stated, the pattern was acceleration during the 1870s, boom in the 1880s, followed by a halt and net loss during 1889–1895 because of political and financial upheavals. During Roca's second presidency,

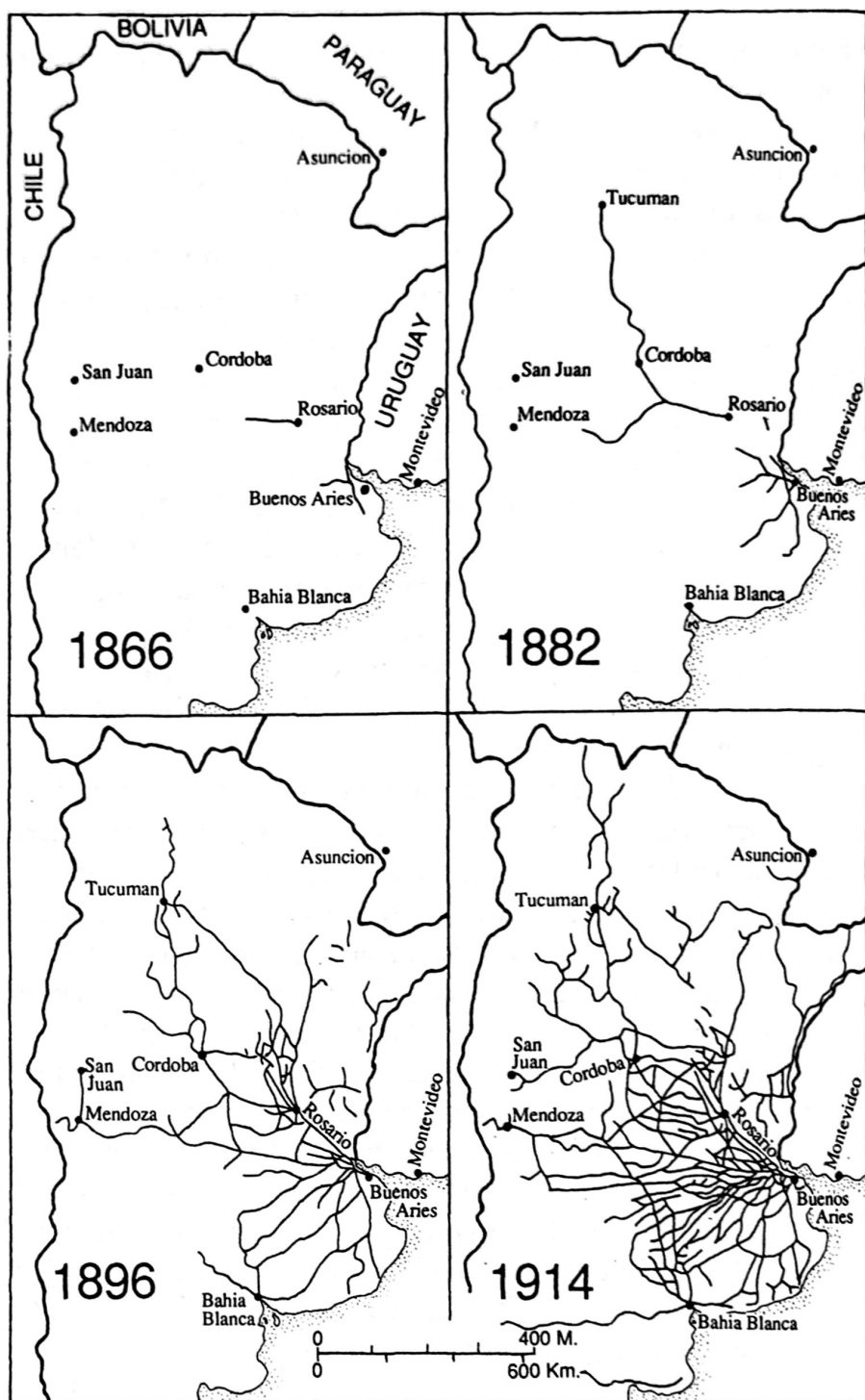
immigration soared through 1914. Although much of it was seasonal by then, many people visited once or twice and then stayed.

Between 1871 and 1914, 5.9 million Europeans came to Argentina, of whom 2.7 million returned and 3.2 million remained—the bulk of them in Buenos Aires, in the larger provincial cities, and on the land in Santa Fe, Córdoba, and Entre Rios provinces.⁷ The cities of Buenos Aires and Rosario increased ten times over in forty years, while Santa Fe province expanded at a “vertiginous” rate, from 41,000 in 1858 to 397,000 in 1895.⁸ Italians and Spaniards accounted for about 80 percent of the migration to Argentina, with Italians more likely to stay. Of gross migration, 1857–1926, 47 percent were Italians, 32 percent Spaniards; of those who stayed, 1860–1910, 55 percent were Italians, 26 percent Spaniards. The French were a distant third at 4 to 5 percent, and no other European nation contributed so much as 2 percent.⁹ Many immigrants recorded as Spanish or French were in fact Basque.¹⁰ Following well behind the Italians and Spanish, before 1890, were French (often Basques), British, Swiss, people from Austria-Hungary, and Germans; between 1890 and 1920, Russians, Austro-Hungarians, Germans, and British; and after 1920, Poles. Many later immigrants were Jewish.¹¹

Before 1900, northern Italians outnumbered southern, but from 1900 to 1913 the numbers were nearly equal. As seasonal workers, recruited in Italy to work the harvest for four or five months during the European winter, they took up a larger share of the migration than before.¹² An undefined number of Italians also traveled between São Paulo and Buenos Aires, forming “a link, albeit weak, between the Argentine and the Brazilian labour markets.”¹³ Lord Bryce, the peripatetic Englishman best known for his book of observations on American culture, also visited South America about 1910. He noted that north Italians “take to the land,” while southern Italians “stay in the towns and work as railway and wharf porters, or as boatmen.” The reason may have been that southern Italians arrived in Argentina later, when land was less available than it had been in the 1870s and the booming 1880s when northern Italy became linked by steamship to Buenos Aires.¹⁴ With Buenos Aires only a few weeks by steamship from Italian ports, and with the third-class fare about fifty dollars, Argentina was an attractive option.¹⁵

These Italian and Spanish migrants had demographic profiles already noted as they left Europe: 70 to 73 percent male; two out of three single; more than half in their twenties and thirties.¹⁶ Although male migrants outnumbered females 2.3 to 1 in the 1880s and 2.7 to 1 during 1901–1910, the sex ratio in the foreign-born population was not that distorted. In the 1895 and 1914 censuses the ratio was 1.7 to 1 nationally, and more balanced than that in immigrant-filled farm provinces. Females returned and repeated migration less often; once in Argentina, married and with children, they more likely stayed.¹⁷

In several ways Argentina in the 1870s to 1890s resembled the North American West at the same time. Flat, semi-arid, and nearly devoid of white settlement, the pampas had much in common with the American and Canadian Great



Map 6. Argentina's Railroad Network, 1866, 1882, 1896, 1914 (Map by Norman Pounds)

The network's expansion began in earnest after the "Conquest of the Desert" (that is, destruction of the Araucanians) in 1879. The isolation of Mendoza, San Juan, and Tucuman had ended by the 1890s. By 1914, as shown, the bulk of the network (and the target of migrants) lay across the southern pampas, from Bahia Blanca through Buenos Aires province to Rosario and Cordoba.

Plains. In both areas, railroad companies (using foreign capital and government bounty) began stretching lines into the interior. In both areas, military suppression of the natives occurred between 1876 and 1879: as Sitting Bull surrendered the last independent remnant of the Sioux nation, General Julio Roca destroyed the Araucanians and thus completed the "conquest of the desert."¹⁸ Native tribes were suppressed north of Santa Fe and Patagonia.¹⁹ Central authority replaced *caudillismo* in the provinces, and agriculture began to become oriented to international markets. The railroad reached Tucuman in the far northwest in 1876 and Mendoza, at the foot of the Andes, in 1885, linking them with the Atlantic. Until then and since their founding in the sixteenth century, the only safe way to reach those interior cities had been over the Andes, through Chile or Bolivia. Roca strongly backed railroad building across the pampas, and trackage rose from 732 kilometers in 1870 to 2,313 in 1880, 9,254 in 1890, 16,767 in 1900, and 27,713 in 1910. These lines brought settlers to the provinces and, soon after, their grain and livestock to seaports.²⁰

Up to 1879, the relatively small immigration to the then-unsafe pampas included North Europeans (Germans, Swiss, French, British). However, in the mass immigration after that, North Italians predominated and "were accommodated harmoniously as small holders, share croppers or tenants."²¹ The Italians had been coming since the mid-1850s and settling in agricultural colonies. By 1895, when Argentina held 735 colonies covering six million hectares, probably three-fourths of the people in them were Italian immigrants or their children. Indeed, three-fourths of the Italians who arrived in Argentina before 1897 went into agriculture, comprising seven-tenths of all of the foreign-born who lived on the land.²² The economic expansion that began tentatively in the late 1860s exploded into a major boom from 1879 to 1891. It ended as a result of the failure of the London financial house of Baring Brothers, which set off a drastic credit contraction in Argentina and other parts of the world whose financial progress depended on British investment. Immigration stopped as well. Financial health and immigration both resumed, however, in the late 1890s and continued to 1914 and beyond.²³

Thus in broad ways the timing of aboriginal "pacification," railroad building, and prairie-pampa cultivation was coincidental in Argentina and North America. Yet important differences existed between Argentine and North American frontiers. In his 1912 book, Lord Bryce was struck by how much "Argentina is like western North America. . . . It is the United States of the Southern Hemisphere." Yet he also saw that Argentina "is a country of great estates. . . . Though a tendency to subdivision has set in and will doubtless continue, *estancias* of sixty thousand acres are not uncommon; and the average holding is said to be even now about six square miles." Consequently, the land held "two classes, the rich *estancieros* or landholders, and the labourers."²⁴ Carl Solberg, writing in the 1980s, is equally blunt: in the Argentine pampas, "land remained concentrated primarily in the hands of a small group of wealthy and powerful

owners. Most pampa farmers were renters. In Canada (and the United States), by contrast, small individually owned farms characterized prairie land tenure."²⁵

The contrast between North American smallholdings (except for parts of Texas) and Argentine *latifundia* was indeed striking. A tradition of large landholdings had started with royal grants in Spanish colonial times and continued beyond 1879, when the government made extensive pampa tracts available to private holders, thus reinforcing and extending the previous pattern. "The Conquest of the Desert did not presage the rise of a small farmer class," Solberg notes; the newly opened land went to a few of Roca's soldiers, and the rest was auctioned off to speculators and the already landed.²⁶ Land laws of 1853, 1862, 1876, and 1884 attempted to promote colonization in various ways but did nothing to interrupt the concentration of ownership.²⁷ Provincial governments, dominated by the large landowners, were hardly eager to execute a broadly distributive homestead policy. In the meantime, the central government promoted unrestricted immigration and railroad development. The predictable result was that "Argentine agriculture was built on the systematic exploitation of the nation's tenant farmers. . . . property ownership remained highly concentrated . . . the educational system was primitive . . . the roads were abominable, and . . . the agricultural marketing system was left in the hands of grasping grain merchants."²⁸

A new land law of 1903 managed to transfer some fairly remote public land in the territories to smallholders, but by then the accessible and profitable pampas had long since been alienated.²⁹ In Argentina, then, land laws existed but did not have the function, as in the United States, of transferring title from the public domain to smallholders. An effective homestead act did not exist. No rectilinear survey had been carried out, and clear title to a defined tract was hard to come by.³⁰ The upshot was that while an agricultural ladder existed in Argentina, whereby an Italian or Spanish immigrant could climb in economic and social position, it was harder to climb than in North America. After the mid-1890s, the top rung, outright ownership, was almost always out of reach. If an immigrant arrived in the 1870s or 1880s with skills, intelligence, and some luck, he could do well. Mark Jefferson, an American sent by the American Geographical Society to survey the Argentine frontier, described the success story of Carlos Brebbia, a stonemason born in Como, who arrived in Santa Fe in 1872, made his first money on a public construction project, and started buying land. Some of it he rented to tenants, themselves immigrants who arrived later. He became a wealthy railway contractor, and his six sons included a grain broker, a commander in the navy, and an accountant. But Brebbia was an exception.

More typically, in Casilda colony in southern Santa Fe province, Jefferson found an Italian family with nine children who farmed twenty-five hectares (sixty-two acres) of their own land, but it had cost them twenty years' work. All of the Italians at Casilda "had prospered and had good houses of burnt bricks with solid roofs."³¹ The colony system (*colonización privada*) worked well for

many immigrants to Santa Fe and Entre Rios in the 1880s (as it did, also untypically for the country, in Brazil's Santa Catarina state about eight hundred miles to the northeast).³² As James R. Scobie describes the process, colonies involved assisted migration. Developers paid the steamship fare of a potential colonist, brought him to a *lote* of thirty-six unplowed hectares on the pampa, and let him get to work. If the colonist did work, he "stood a fair chance" to pay off his loans and become owner of the land.³³ On the way to ownership, the migrant might begin as a farm worker (*peon*) for wages and keep, or more likely as a sharecropper (*mediero*), turning over half the harvest to the *estanciero* who provided implements, seeds, and enough food to get started, as well as the land. On the next rung of the ladder he became a tenant (*arrendatario*), leasing the land for a fixed period, providing draft animals, tools, and labor by himself and his family, but keeping all or most of the harvest. This form of tenancy, which worked especially well in 1887–1895 in Santa Fe, permitted the migrant finally to grasp the top rung of the agricultural ladder, independent ownership.³⁴ But not many achieved that height, and virtually no one did so after the 1890s.

In the late 1890s, the price of land in the pampas rose sharply, beyond the reach of all but the luckiest migrants. After 1900, Argentina's flourishing economy depended on improved cattle requiring alfalfa rather than wild grass, as well as on successful wheat crops for international sale. In part of Córdoba province, Italians owned a third of the land by 1906, and this probably inspired the many migrants freshly arriving from Italy. Mark Jefferson remarked:

They may well have hoped to have the same good fortune. But in this they were to be disappointed. They could have work there only as renters. There was no more land for sale. The *latifundia* were to be kept intact. . . . Long, long ago the Creole landowner found his leagues of worthless land had become a fortune and made up his mind to part with no more of them. They had, it appeared, an astonishing value—if gringos [that is, Italians] could be got to work them. Long before the colonies had crept from Santa Fe into Cordoba the colonies were *renters'* colonies, with little chance that the renter would acquire ownership.³⁵

Tenants often found themselves in an "alfalfa contract," a four- or five-year lease requiring them to break the pampa soil and raise three or four wheat crops and, in the final year, a crop of alfalfa to be used as pasturage for thoroughbred cattle. The tenants made little progress toward owning their farms. The five-year contract ended, and they left "to make room for fine cattle."³⁶ As of 1900, fewer than two of five farmers in Santa Fe and Buenos Aires provinces had achieved ownership, fewer still after that.³⁷ By 1914, Argentina's economy had become enormously productive in per capita terms, but the country had reached its peak in area of land under cultivation, as the United States was shortly to do.³⁸

The land no longer attracted migrants. Latifundism went unchecked, with 70 percent of migrants on the land working as sharecroppers or tenants. *Arrendatario* status was about all one could aspire to, unless one moved to a city or

returned to Europe.³⁹ The immigrants of the 1880s, and their children, had often become landowners (and tenacious ones) by the 1900s, putting out land to tenants and sharecroppers and hiring mechanized combine teams, using migrant workers, for the harvest. Cheap migrant labor, mechanization, and closed access to land ownership—not simply, by then, the *estanciero* elite—throttled the colonization movement.⁴⁰ Not all tenant farmers were poor, and many were employers themselves.⁴¹ But the repatriation rate rose after 1900, *golondrinas* accounted for a larger share of migrants, and Italians headed for the cities, especially Buenos Aires.

Argentina then moved into a second stage of its immigration history. In the first, during the 1880s boom, emphasis lay on “populating the desert,” building the railroads, and creating the wheat and cattle export economies. In the second, post-1900 phase, new immigrants could become *arrendatarios* at best (70 percent of whom were foreign-born as late as 1914),⁴² more likely sharecroppers or migrant workers, on the land; or they could become wage earners (or better) in the cities. The result for the country was “expansion without development,” as some economists put it; “not development but a process of proletarianization coinciding with rapid urbanization without the industrial development to justify it.”⁴³ By this time, as Scobie observes, Argentina had a city rather than a frontier.⁴⁴ And the city had its class contrasts and ethnic variety—shantytowns of “the newest and poorest” from southern Italy and southern Spain, “a large and not very desirable element among whom anarchism is rife,” as Lord Bryce sniffishly noted.⁴⁵

In Buenos Aires and other cities, nonetheless, migrants from Italy, Spain, and elsewhere actually found a good measure of upward mobility after 1900. They could start at the bottom and move much farther up than they could in the countryside. Working-class immigrants saw their sons become businessmen, white-collar workers, civil servants—that is, successful, middle-class urbanites. By 1914, “an amazing 30.4 percent” of immigrants had risen from manual to middle-class positions.⁴⁶ In the 1895 and 1914 censuses, immigrants predominated overwhelmingly in the proprietorships of industry and commerce, constituted the majority of commercial and industrial employees and the liberal professions, and were underrepresented among domestics and artisans.⁴⁷

In manufacturing, the foreign-born outnumbered native Argentines more than four to one after 1895. Among owners of all sorts and sizes of industries, over 90 percent were foreign-born in 1895.⁴⁸ An Italian consul in Argentina reported in 1893 that “the vendor of ices becomes, say, a liquor dealer, the fruit seller a restaurant or hotel keeper, the tailor a cloth merchant, the bricklayer a building contractor.”⁴⁹ While the old-stock Argentines remained predominant in livestock raising, either at the top as *estancieros* or at the bottom as *peones*, immigrants, especially Italians, took over manufacturing and retailing, both as owner-employers and as employees.⁵⁰

In a peculiarity of the Argentine situation, almost none of these immigrants, despite their economic and social success, ever became naturalized citizens. The

result was to encourage migrants to return home and to migrate again, to prevent them from becoming a force promoting development strategies such as tariff protection, and to cut them off from the political-economic elite.⁵¹ As late as 1914, after several million immigrants had arrived in Argentina, only 2.3 percent of the foreign-born in Buenos Aires and 0.9 percent in the rest of the country had been naturalized.⁵² To be sure, their Argentine-born children enjoyed full rights of citizenship; and they themselves, though noncitizens, enjoyed all civil rights except the vote, plus exemption from military service. Thus the original immigrants lacked incentive to become citizens, because citizenship carried no short-run advantages. Yet the absence of it did carry long-run and severe disadvantages for Argentine development after 1914.

In the meantime, the immigrants assimilated very well culturally. Or, to say it better, because they were such a huge proportion of the population, they dominated the culture, which was hardly true of Italians in the United States.⁵³ Italians not only were a much larger presence within the Argentine population, but also they built a "multiclass society" with a solid "institutional structure." Some were workers, some shopkeepers, some professionals, whereas Italians in the United States in this period often were day laborers, one among many groups in the ethnic shuffle. The "tiny Argentine elite" considered Italians more civilized than most of the native-born.⁵⁴ Even the birds of passage contributed to cultural uplift, as Jefferson pointed out:

Madam [Adelina] Patti could and did sing in London and Paris in the winter and take steamer in March for Buenos Aires for another season of opera in June and July—the southern winter. . . . So did many a modest Italian company of small-city opera singers, chorus and all; for a South American city of 50,000 people would have felt disgraced if it had to go through the winter without a few weeks of opera. These people by their numbers were far more significant than the celebrities.⁵⁵

Compared with their countrymen in the United States, the Italians in Argentina involved themselves much more in agriculture, especially before the mid-1890s. But they were urbanites as well. They distributed themselves up and down the occupational scale more successfully than did Italians in the United States. By 1914, when 53 percent of the native-born lived in cities, 69 percent of the Italian-born and 78 percent of the Spanish-born did so.⁵⁶ With land ownership closed to them, and since Argentina lacked a mining sector, recent immigrants located in cities and engaged in construction, retailing, manufacturing, international trade, and almost all occupations ranging from manual labor to upper-middle-class positions. Perhaps one-third to one-half returned to Europe; some of these came back to Argentina. Before 1914 rural-to-urban migration within Argentina was rarer than new migration from the Mediterranean to Argentina.⁵⁷ That suggests a great deal of chain migration as well as kinship and same-village connections to jobs of all kinds.

A small industry has developed to provide comparisons among Argentina,

Canada, Australia, and other "settler societies" and to account for Argentina's relatively slow economic growth since the 1920s despite its extremely promising record before 1914. Tempting though it is to digress along those lines, it is appropriate here only to suggest keeping the Argentinian land situation in mind. It probably affected the rate and sources of immigration. Lord Bryce may have been correct when he concluded that Argentina "is not, like western Canada, a place suitable for British or Scandinavian immigrants of small means, not merely on account of the climate, but because they could not easily get small farms and the means of working them."⁵⁸ Solberg, trenchantly and in detail, makes the Canadian-Argentine comparison and comes down to three differences. First, "the prairies were a society primarily of small owner-operators. . . . The pampas, in contrast, were a society of tenants who rented land on short-term contracts and who moved about frequently." Second, prairie people, though mostly immigrants, "quickly became citizens" and had to, to gain clear legal title; Argentine immigrants seldom became citizens. Third, Canadian prairie farmers "formed vigorous and large cooperative movements" with political clout; "pampa farmers remained a marginal group in Argentine society" as cooperatives there "remained small and weak."⁵⁹ No one has said it better.