The historiography on European migration to Brazil is rich in references to the official policies adopted by this country since the nineteenth century. However, few comprehensive studies have analyzed the evolution of pre–World War II immigration ideologies, expressed through legislation, official institutions created to manage the flow of immigrants or the writing of established public figures, as well as counterresponses by immigrants themselves.

As described in my first chapter, in the late nineteenth century, Brazilian supporters of immigration challenged the traditional view that race and climate combined to produce degraded and backward nations. A Brazilian thesis of white acclimatization in the tropics emerged, running counter to the common European view that for climatic reasons the white race was unable to work and thrive in extreme heat and that the low productivity and birth rate of the Brazilians was due to permanent features of climate and race.1 While some intellectuals defended immigration ideologically, other more nationalistic views emerged in the early twentieth century.

My discussion will start with Sílvio Romero’s 1906 attack on “the German danger,” *O allemanismo no sul do Brasil, seus perigos e métos de os conjurar*, followed by a brief discussion of Alberto Torres’s main arguments in which he denies the importance of “scientific race” or, rather, substitutes for that category a “national character.” Graça Aranha’s novel *Canaã*, published in 1902, plays with these fears of German separatism, racial degeneration, and
national character and tries to solve this debate by referring to a chronologic and geographically mythical place: a promised land, Canaan.

I will then conclude this chapter by examining the “cosmopolitan” way in which immigrants were imagined in Brazilian “urban writing” of the 1920s, focusing on Modernismo in São Paulo. I suggest that although the Modernistas were certainly deeply involved in new, shocking ways to express their reality, they also form part of a larger debate concerning which “national” and “foreign” cultures are “suitable” to import and export.

The German Danger

As Jeffrey Lesser observes, to ask questions about the public construction of immigrant ethnicity opens windows to Brazilian national identity. Acculturation of immigrant groups has not been recognized by both outsiders and insiders until very recently. Generally speaking, most studies of Italian or other ethnic groups concentrate on the uniqueness of their particular experience and rarely on policies and racial or ethnic ideas of the host society. Lesser shows that racial prejudice existed side by side with the acceptance of undesirable groups for economic reasons and that these elements provide an important model for the study of ethnicity in a society such as Brazil’s, which officially denies its multiculturalism. Already in 1888, in the heyday of positivist thought, Sílvio Romero used the language of chemistry in asserting that immigration was a social “reagent” to be handled with the greatest of care since Brazil had “a singular ethnic composition.” All immigrants and their subsequent generations, no matter their origin, argues Giralda Seyferth, faced the tension between becoming Brazilian and retaining an original ethnic or national identity. This tension has been expressed in a variety of forms. Social clubs, schools, and specialized commercial sectors associated with specific immigrant groups remained strong. According to Seyferth, between 1886 and 1936 around 280,000 native German speakers entered Brazil. She points out that European immigrants were expected not only to provide the precious labor for agricultural and artisanal production but also to assimilate into Brazilian culture and whiten its racial pedigree. For these immigrants and their descendents, the notion