

PREFACE

Many books and academic articles have been published on North American economic integration in the last decade. In fact, this vast outpouring of literature has produced what one author referred to, only partly in jest, as one of the most dramatically expanding industries in North America, the "Free Trade Debate Industry" (Kresl 1991). Nevertheless, until the publication of this book there was, to our knowledge, no single volume providing a balanced and accessible introduction to this complex and controversial subject.

The project that led to the writing and subsequent publication of this book brought together economists from three North American universities: San Diego State University, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, and the University of Calgary. This endeavor, and the book itself, grew out of a larger project, entitled "North American Integration," funded by the United States Information Agency's University Affiliations Program. Subsequently, other organizations contributed the modest amounts necessary for the authors to convene and bring the book to fruition.

While there is considerable diversity among the authors in terms of background, training, and beliefs regarding the virtues of international economic integration, all share the view that North American economic integration has been under way for several decades. That is, North American economic integration did not start with the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in January 1994, nor would it have stopped had the agreement not been signed. Therefore, we regard the NAFTA, not as a milestone dramatically altering a historical process, but rather as a tool that may serve to better manage the ongoing process of North American integration in an efficient and equitable manner.

The authors' overall objective has been to produce a book that will help the reader understand the agreement itself, the context in which it was forged, and the various perspectives on its impacts. We hope that our readers feel this objective has been fulfilled.

We have subtitled the book a "primer" for understanding the history, theory, and practice of North American integration, suggesting that it is meant to be an introduction to