

Preliminary Conclusions

While it would be easy to conclude that the United States could be left out of the global movement toward free trade if it does not act quickly, we reject that position for three reasons. First, it is clear that the mere size of its market gives the United States options that few other nations can claim. Second, as noted above, there *are* serious problems with the NAFTA which should be addressed before its membership is expanded. Third, given the fact that any movement toward free trade creates both winners and losers, we see certain advantages to reopening the debate on North American free trade in the three countries before further changes are implemented. Such a debate, if properly focused on the various economic, social, environmental, and technical issues raised in this volume, might produce a better framework for managing the process of de facto integration that is taking place between the three countries.

Finally, any book on North American economic integration would be remiss were it not to mention, however briefly, the important and related topic of North American political integration. There are two broad issues here. The first revolves around the asymmetrical political systems of the three countries of North America. Although all three embrace a federalist form of government, there is great diversity with respect to degrees of centralization and the specific form of federalism utilized (e.g., Canada's parliamentary system versus the congressional systems of the United States and Mexico). The main questions here are: Will such political diversity inhibit or facilitate North America's economic integration? If so, how? These questions are of considerable importance in view of Mexico's current political reforms, Canada's constitutional crisis centered on Quebec, and the fiscal strains imposed by the New Federalism in all three countries.

The second issue relates to the future of overall North American integration. If North America goes the way of European integration, we can expect that some sort of "North American Trilateralism" might someday evolve that would bring the three countries together for increased integration in a variety of areas. Again there are two issues here. First, we might ask if the current NAFTA institutional structure is conducive to the growth of continental-trilateral integration in other areas. If so, how far are these institutions likely