
Is a North American Community Feasible? Can Sovereignty Be Transcended?

The sad truth of North America is that very few leaders of Canada, Mexico, and the United States have ever entertained a serious discussion of North American goals or plans, as outlined in the previous chapters. A lack of imagination is only a small part of the reason for this absence of debate. The three governments are not organized to approach North American issues, and officials in each government prefer to deal with problems by themselves or bilaterally. An even more important reason why these ideas have not been discussed is the complex set of fears and prejudices that lurk deep in the souls of the three countries. This dark side sometimes overwhelms the hopes that each country has toward its neighbors; more often, it simply leads to deadlock, leaving the relationship static, working on one issue, two countries at a time. The anxieties stem from similar sources: unknown language, unfamiliar culture, prejudice, or fear of domination because of size, power, or numbers.

Some Americans think that if its government relaxes its border controls, Mexicans would overrun it from the south, and terrorists and drug dealers might infiltrate across its northern border. Some Americans think the Mexican political system is hopelessly corrupt and that there is nothing to be gained by a closer relationship and much that could be lost. Few Americans who do not live close to their northern border pay much attention to Canada, and Canadians and Mexicans pay little attention to each other. It is hard to see each other over the expanse of the United States. "The one relationship that overwhelms all the others," said Canada's former ambassador to Washington, Raymond Chrétien, "is the one with the United States of America."¹ Canadians are preoccupied with

1. Cited in *Time/Canada*, 10 July 2000, 27.

Americans, who they feel can be arrogant and condescending, but also disinterested and sometimes disarmingly friendly. Some Canadians also fear if they eased their border restrictions, they “would be inundated with American fugitives, firearms, and drugs.”² The Mexican view of the United States is similar to that of Canada; they are irritated by the imperious, unilateral approach to so many issues. Added together, it is not hard to see why the three governments settled for a narrow definition of NAFTA and have reservations about deepening the relationship.

The problems that beset North America today, and the opportunities that await the region, however, cannot be addressed effectively unless the three—or at least two—begin to organize themselves around a concept like “community.” Let me offer examples on the two issues—drugs and immigration—that continually disrupt US-Mexican relations because both are handled unilaterally and in a patronizing fashion by the United States. The truth is that drugs constitute a far more serious threat to the national security of Mexico than of the United States. The reason is that the amount of drug money available to corrupt the Mexican political system is such that its president can never be sure who works for him and who works for the drug traffickers. To have the United States annually grade his government on its performance, as required by US drug laws, is not only unhelpful in stopping drugs, but also is demeaning and generates mistrust when it does not provoke resistance. In other words, if a partnership is necessary to cope with drug trafficking, then a unilateral certification process is counterproductive to that goal. If the problem is defined as a shared one, then joint teams should solve it, and the spillover effects on the rest of the relationship would be positive.

Why has this been so difficult? US officials have shared sensitive intelligence with senior Mexican officials in the past, and they later learned that the Mexicans passed it—for a fee—to the drug traffickers. The simple way to cope with such a betrayal is to distrust all Mexican officials, but such an approach is a cul-de-sac. So the answer to past problems is caution and precaution, but it should not be to cease cooperation. Indeed, the new Fox administration proved that patience was the wiser course. It assembled a new team to work with US government officials, and that team has shown itself worthy of being trusted. This new level of cooperation has permitted the most effective operations against drug traffickers that either side had seen in many years.³

Illegal migration from Mexico increased sharply after the peso crisis, and Congress reacted by doubling the personnel in the INS.⁴ The US

2. See Val Meredith, M.P., *Trade Corridors: A Report to the Canada-U.S. Inter-Parliamentary Group* (Ottawa, 2000), 8.

3. Tim Weiner, “Mexico’s New Anti-Drug Team Wins the Trust of U.S. Officials,” *New York Times*, 18 July 2001.

4. Mirta Ojito, “Once Divisive, Immigration Is a Muted Issue,” *New York Times*, 1 November 1998, 28.

government must enforce its immigration laws, but in the long term, there is only one way to inhibit immigration, and that is to narrow the difference in income between Mexico and the United States. On the basis of the premise of community, the three countries of North America could work to raise wages and reduce pressures for migration. That will not occur easily or soon, but programs aimed at reducing this disparity need to be undertaken without delay.

Let us explore, in turn, why the three governments have been uncomfortable with trilateralism; how the governments could reorganize better to address North American issues; what are public attitudes in the three countries and whether traditional arguments of sovereignty can be overcome.

Why Trilateralism Is Contrary to Habit but Essential

To the extent possible, the three governments should work together to try to fashion continent-wide or trilateral responses to issues, recognizing that some issues might not lend themselves easily to such an approach. Nonetheless, the policies that emerge from trying to incorporate the interests of all three countries are likely to be fairer and more effective than if each government acts alone.

Of course, this is not the way the three governments approach most issues. The United States, as the most powerful and paradoxically insular of the three, faces a constant temptation to act unilaterally, although this infuriates its neighbors. The number of examples is legion, and every administration repeats the mistake. Why?

There are three reasons. First, the structure of the US government is such that Congress plays a critical and independent role in making US policy, but its entire incentive system is aimed at meeting local needs. There may be no institution that has more power to affect the globe and less awareness of that fact than Congress. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Congress not only resists any international obligations, but also presses the Executive Branch to take actions that serve a partial interest at the expense of the national interest.

The second reason is that the Executive Branch itself is ill-equipped to retrieve its historical memory and apply it in a way that would avoid repeating past mistakes. One is not surprised when this occurs when a new administration takes office, but these are not the only times the government stumbles. US foreign and civil service personnel are rotated so frequently that at any one time the career officers might be just as green as their new superiors.

The third reason is psychological, and it derives from American power and the feeling of "exceptionalism." The combination explains why

Americans do not feel a need to consult or take into account other views. This trait is what our neighbors call “arrogance,” a not inappropriate word.

Beyond the American temptation of unilateralism, *the other obstacle to moving toward a trilateral approach is the Canadian and Mexican preference for bilateralism.* This is also a perfectly natural reaction by two countries that can barely see each other over the giant elephant that sleeps or stampedes between them. Moreover, each country sees its “North American” problem as unique, and many of those problems are, in fact, different. For example, the drug, immigration, and border problems look very different on the northern border of the United States than on the southern border. There is some debate as to the principal cause of the difference—whether it is the greater economic disparity between Mexico and the United States or cultural differences. But “culture” is not static or immutable; it has changed markedly in the past three decades because of immigration, improved communications, and travel.

It is precisely because the cultural gap has narrowed, while the economic gap has not, that a trilateral approach would be more effective in framing the future relationship. To the extent that the three governments employ their distinct perspectives but also think like North Americans, they will be more likely to locate a fair and reciprocal policy. For example, on drugs, if Canadian officials could join Americans and Mexicans on drug raids in the three countries, all three would soon appreciate both the similarities of their problem as well as the differences. Through such joint approaches, the three countries might find it easier to devise more effective policies and more genuine partnerships.

Reorganizing the Governments

NAFTA represents a fundamental shift in the relationship of the three governments, but none have fully incorporated or adapted to that new relationship. One reason is that the governments are organized to respond to and pursue the old agenda, one issue at a time by an agency whose principal responsibility is to assist a local constituency. All three governments should reorganize themselves more effectively, not just to advance their national interests but also to respond to the proposed North American Commission and to North American issues. Because of the asymmetric nature of the relationship, Canada and Mexico have always given highest priority to their relationship with the United States. In July 2001, Canada reconstituted the office responsible for the bilateral relationship so that its staff would also be responsible for Mexico and therefore able to see the North American connection.⁵ Mexico might want to do the same.

5. Interview with Michael Kergin, the Canadian ambassador to the United States, and Jon Allen, who will be the first director-general for North American affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Washington, 20 June 2001.

The most important governmental reorganization needs to be done by the United States. Its existing system is excessively compartmentalized, with each agency defining its own approach to a problem. The result is that each interest often holds the entire relationship hostage. The US Drug Enforcement Administration—angry that one of its agents was tortured and killed in the mid-1980s in Mexico—sent a team into Mexico to kidnap a doctor who was allegedly involved in the murder. The State Department was not informed; the Mexican government was furious; and several years later, a US judge released the doctor for insufficient evidence. The US government privately promised that it would not do anything like that again. But a decade later, several agencies of the US government lured some Mexican bankers to California, where they were arrested in a grand money-laundering scam called Operation Casa Blanca. In his inaugural address, President Fox pointed to both incidents as the kind that would make it impossible to have a close relationship with the United States. But unless the US government fundamentally changes the way it approaches its neighbors, these incidents will continue to recur.

In June 1998, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright undertook the first department reorganization for North American issues but it was so inadequate that it was almost laughable. She moved the Office of Canadian Affairs out of the European Bureau and into a newly constituted Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. The reorganization had two flaws. First, the Office for Canada and the one for Mexico report to *different* deputies. This defeats the whole point of trying to build up a capability to understand and analyze the trilateral relationship. Second, the two office directors and the Bureau are all located at too low a level to get the attention of the domestic Cabinet officers, who do most of the business on Canadian and Mexican affairs.

There are two models for dealing with the bureaucratic problem—one based at the State Department and one at the White House. If the State Department is going to oversee North American affairs, it needs to establish a position at the rank of undersecretary of state and staff it with a person of independent stature. That person needs to obtain the authority from the president and the secretary of state to relate to domestic Cabinet secretaries as equals, because they are the ones with the most responsibility in the different compartments of US policy toward Mexico.

The second model would place the position in the White House and appoint an adviser to the president for North American affairs. The position would be comparable to the special envoy of the Americas, a post created by President Clinton for his former chief of staff, Thomas M. McLarty, but the adviser on North America would play a more substantive role as coordinator. The adviser should chair a Cabinet or sub-Cabinet-level council to manage those issues, and he or she should report to the president after getting concurrence from the national security adviser and economic adviser.

The US government should have learned from decades of handling Canadian and Mexican issues that it is simply not organized to deal effectively, constructively, and imaginatively with either relationship. There is a bias in the way the government is organized that leads it to adopt again and again a segmented, parochial perspective rather than to see the connections between the issues and project a continental strategy to advance US interests. A strong secretary of state might be able to manage the process, but it would make more sense for it to be managed in the White House by a senior advisor to the president.

Alternative Approaches to Sovereignty

Even if the leaders were convinced to adopt a trilateral approach, and they reorganized their governments accordingly, they would need to cope with the long-standing argument against collective action—"sovereignty": We will not accept an international initiative, because it constitutes "interference in our internal affairs." None of the three governments is immune to this argument. The Mexicans, of course, championed this warning for decades, and the Canadians insisted on exempting "culture" and information from NAFTA to safeguard its national essence from foreign ideological pollution. The United States, the principal creator of the most important international institutions in the 20th century, should be taking the lead in establishing North American organizations. But in recent years, many American leaders have sounded like third-world populists. The US Senate has refused to ratify or even consider numerous international conventions, and in 2000, the then-chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Jesse Helms, went to the United Nations to warn the Security Council not to interfere in US internal affairs. So "sovereignty" is not just a tactic that Mexicans use; it is one that is used by leaders in all three countries.

The truth is that the concept of "sovereignty" is one of the most widely used, abused, and least understood terms in the diplomatic lexicon. Leaving aside the debate on its juridical meaning, and instead examining how it has been defined in practice, one soon realizes that it barely resembles its old self. Europe, the site of the birth of the multistate system in the 17th century and of its most violent struggles in the 20th century, also was the first to look beyond the original definition. In an address in 1962, Jean Monnet, the leader of the European unity movement, marveled at how much had changed in a relatively short time. "Today," he said, "people have almost forgotten that the Saar was ever a problem and yet from 1919 to 1950, it was a major bone of contention between France and Germany. European unity has made it seem an anachronism. And today,

at French invitation, German troops are training on French soil.”⁶ The frigid issue of sovereignty was melting.

Within North America, no one understood the transformation of the meaning of sovereignty better than Mexican President Salinas, whose country had long used the “defense of sovereignty” as a shield to protect its ruling party and exclude influence from its northern neighbor. Still, Salinas woke up one morning in the spring of 1990 and realized that the shield was *harming* Mexico, *not* protecting it. In his third message to the Mexican Congress, he explained: “Historically, nationalism has responded to an external threat. Today, that threat has become the prospect of remaining outside, at the margins of the worldwide integrationist trend . . . To fail in that challenge would be to weaken oneself.”⁷

In 1980, Mexico rejected US proposals to reduce tariffs or modify its foreign investment law as constituting interference in its internal affairs. By 1990, Mexico invited US proposals in this area. In 1990, Mexico regarded efforts by the international community to monitor its elections as interference in its internal affairs. By 1994, Mexico invited international observers. In the 1970s, Mexico’s ambassador to the United States was instructed to avoid the White House and Congress and present formal messages to the Department of State. Two decades later, Mexico launched one of the most intensive and expensive lobbying campaigns Washington has ever witnessed, blanketing every member of Congress and collaborating with the White House to persuade the United States to approve NAFTA. In an assessment by a Mexican scholar, this last shift—from diplomatic niceties to a no-holds-barred public relations campaign—was characterized as “the beginning of the end of the discourse of sovereign democracy.”⁸ The boundary of sovereignty—the line separating internal and external affairs—had been moved.⁹

The harder question is whether a Community—a political entity that could transcend traditional conceptions of sovereignty—exists or even is possible in North America. Karl Deutsch wrote that as states become

6. Jean Monnet, “A Ferment of Change,” in *The European Union: Readings on the Theory and Practice of European Integration*, ed. Brent F. Nelsen and Alexander C-G. Stubb (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 23.

7. Cited in Guadalupe Gonzalez and Stephan Haggard, “The United States and Mexico: A Pluralistic Security Community?” in *Security Communities*, ed. Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 314.

8. Jorge Chabat, “Mexico’s Foreign Policy after NAFTA: The Tools of Interdependence,” in *Bridging the Border: Transforming Mexico-US Relations*, ed. Rodolfo de la Garza and Jesus Velasco (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), 43.

9. For an extensive discussion of the many issues swirling around “sovereignty,” see Joyce Hoebing, Sidney Weintraub, and M. Delal Baer, eds., *NAFTA and Sovereignty: Trade-Offs for Canada, Mexico, and the United States* (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1996).

more integrated, they begin to develop a sense of “community,” which he defined as an assurance “that they will settle their differences short of war.” Adler and Barnett build on this idea and define a “pluralistic security community as a transnational region comprised of sovereign states whose people maintain dependable expectations of peaceful change.”¹⁰ Gonzales and Haggard test whether this definition applies to Mexico and the United States, and they conclude that the relationship falls short because of a lack of trust and common identity.¹¹ They reach this conclusion after reviewing the swings in the relationship after the 1940s. Despite determined efforts by Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Manuel Avila Camacho to press their countries toward a new level of respect, Gonzales and Haggard believe that “collaboration remains segmented and the extent of mutual confidence limited.” In short, no community.

Shore, however, explored the long-term relationship between Canada and the United States, and concluded that the two countries had become a “community,” and the main reason was that the long (5,000-mile) border was not defended. That fact became a “powerful trust-generating mechanism: the longer the two sides refrained from arming, the more trustworthy they appeared to one another.” That, plus their reaction to the wars in Europe, created the basis for a “shared North American identity.”¹²

Of course, the US-Mexican border has been demilitarized almost as long as the US-Canadian border, so other factors explain the difference. Some obvious candidates are shared language and culture between Canada and the United States and the sharp differences in political development, social class, and language between Mexico and the United States.

The most serious omission in the otherwise perceptive essay by Gonzalez and Haggard was their failure to examine public opinion. Do the people of each country think a community exists in North America? Although we do not have as precise survey data on this subject as one would like, there are numerous polls from which one can splice an answer.

Fertile Soil for a North American Identity

As Europe became more integrated, many people began to change the way they identified themselves. Germans did not give up their citizenship, but roughly 30 percent of them (and of most of the other nations) became

10. Adler and Barnett, *Security Communities*, 3, 30.

11. Gonzalez and Haggard, “U.S. and Mexico,” 295.

12. Sean M. Shore, “No Fences Make Good Neighbors: The Development of the U.S.-Canadian Security Community,” 1871-1940, in Adler and Barnett, *Security Communities*, 333-35.

“as attached to the EU as they are to their own country.”¹³ Marks analyzed public opinion in Europe and concluded that people were adopting multiple identities: that their attachments were “mutually inclusive,” not exclusive. In Canada, Mexico, and the United States, the three publics do not see themselves as “North American,” but that should come as no surprise because the idea is still so novel. A related problem is that the term “Norteamericano” is currently the Mexican word for a US citizen. If the term is to apply to the citizens of all three countries, Mexicans will first need to become comfortable applying it to themselves.

An analysis of public opinion surveys suggests that the public in all three countries is open to the idea of being part of a larger unit. This conclusion emerges from answers by the public in each country to the following four sets of questions: (1) Are the attitudes of people in each country toward family, government, and the economy similar or different? Is there, in other words, a cultural unity or divide among the three peoples? (2) Does the public in each of the countries view the others as friends or enemies? (3) How does each view NAFTA? (4) And how does each view the prospect of growing integration? Under what conditions might the people of each country want to combine into a North American entity?

Convergence of Values

Under the direction of Ronald Inglehart of the University of Michigan, scholars conducted the World Values Survey evaluating the values and attitudes of people in about 43 countries. Miguel Basañez of Mexico and Neil Nevitte of Canada joined Inglehart to do surveys of the three countries of North America in 1981, 1990, and 2000. Rather than documenting cultural differences, they found a convergence of values among the people in the three countries in 12 of 16 key domains. For example, people in all three countries more and more emphasize independence and imagination in child rearing; there is less support for state ownership of industry, and national pride is waning; church attendance rates are falling; and respect for authority is declining. This last point is particularly significant.

In most of the industrial democracies, the World Values Survey has found that people more and more question the authority of government and other institutions. Some see this decline of confidence as alarming and a trend that could lead to the erosion of democracy; others see it as a positive sign of increasing autonomy by individuals.¹⁴ Public opinion

13. Gary Marks, “Territorial Identities in the European Union,” in *Regional Integration and Democracy: Expanding on the European Experience*, ed. Jeffrey J. Anderson (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 73-74.

14. A concern about the decline in confidence in American institutions is the premise of Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Philip D. Zelikow, and David C. King, eds., *Why People Don't Trust Government* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). The opposite premise guides Inglehart's work. See his *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

surveys suggest that the “political cultures” in Canada and Mexico have undergone fundamental changes. Canadians have long been viewed as having a “culture of deference,”¹⁵ but in the past two decades, the traditionally restrained debates in Canada became heated on critical issues like the Constitution, the independence of Quebec, the environment, and such social issues as gay rights and equality for women. Mexico’s long-standing political authoritarianism had led many scholars to describe a political culture that was corrupt and coercive, and yet the past decade has seen an astonishing advance toward democracy and free elections.¹⁶

Indeed, there has been a convergence in North America toward similar values, also basic public policies. In all three countries, there has been movement toward political liberalization, market-based, regulatory economic policy, and more respect for the rights of groups—notably minorities and indigenous peoples—that had been marginalized. Attitudes—the civic culture, if you will—and policies converged not toward an American average but toward a different point. “North Americans,” Basañez and Nevitte concluded, “have become *significantly more alike*.”¹⁷

Trinational Perceptions

Despite suspicions that each country was said to have harbored toward one another, public opinion surveys suggest that the three peoples of North America have very positive views of each other. The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations has been doing public opinion surveys on US views of the world every 4 years since 1974. One question measures “favorability”—the warmth that Americans feel toward other countries. During the past 25 years, Americans have consistently given Canada the

15. In his important book, *The Decline of Deference* (North Guelph, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1996), Neil Nevitte offers a persuasive critique of the interpretation of Canadians as historically and culturally different, if not opposite, from Americans—a view most effectively developed by Seymour Martin Lipset, *Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

[emphasis added]16. The literature on the political culture of authoritarian Mexico is vast, but a good summary is by Wayne A. Cornelius, Politics in Mexico, in *Comparative Politics Today*, ed. Gabriel A. Almond, Bingham Powell, Jr., et al. (New York: Longman, 2000). For an analysis of the July 2000 election and its implications for Mexico’s political culture, see Robert A. Pastor, “Mexico’s Victory: Exiting the Labyrinth,” *Journal of Democracy* 11, no. 4 (October 2000).

[emphasis added]17. Ronald Inglehart, Neil Nevitte, and Miguel Basañez, *The North American Trajectory: Cultural, Economic, and Political Ties among the United States, Canada, and Mexico* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1996). For a summary and update of the argument, see Nevitte and Basañez, “Trinational Perceptions,” in *The Controversial Pivot: U.S. Congress and North America*, ed. Robert A. Pastor and Rafael Fernandez de Castro (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1998), 149 for the quote. [emphasis added]

highest favorability rating among all nations. The US view of Mexico is also very positive, just below that of Canada and the United Kingdom and on roughly the same level as some of the leading countries of Europe (Germany, France, and Italy).¹⁸

Roughly three-fourths of all Mexicans hold a positive view of the United States (almost the same as the percentage of Americans with a positive view of Mexico) and particularly of the US political system. More than 80 percent of Mexicans believe that the United States exercises the most influence on their country. But it is rather surprising that 67 percent of Mexicans view US influence as positive, a marked difference from the way that the elite had long portrayed the Mexican public's views. A 1998 poll showed that 77 percent of the Mexican public felt relations with the United States were good.¹⁹

Canadians also have warm feelings about the United States, although not quite as warm as Americans have toward them. For example, in a 1999 survey in Canada, 49 percent of Canadians viewed Americans as similar to themselves, whereas 71 percent of Americans viewed Canada as similar. When asked for a word to describe Americans, the two most frequently chosen words were "arrogant" (16 percent) and "aggressive" (8 percent), whereas Americans chose "friendly" (29 percent) most often to apply to Canadians.²⁰ The problem, according to several Canadian commentators, is that Canadians feel that Americans take them for granted and never take the time to learn about them. "Canadians," writes Ferguson in *Maclean's*, "love to be misunderstood and unappreciated—especially by big, strong America."²¹ The more telling point is that 26 percent of the Canadian public would become US citizens if they could, and 25 percent of the American public expressed a similar preference for Canadian citizenship.²²

Canadians and Mexicans have had much more contact since NAFTA than before. There are many anecdotes but few surveys to assess the relationship. Only since 1990 has Canada looked to Latin America in a serious way, joining the Organization of American States that year and negotiating free trade agreements with several countries since then. It is

18. Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy*. The polls have been done every 4 years beginning in 1974 and published the subsequent year. The most recent was published in 1999.

19. See Nevitte and Basañez, "Trinational Perceptions," for a description of this and other polling, 152-57.

20. Canada's leading magazine, *Maclean's*, did an extensive survey in 1999 in both Canada and the United States, and devoted an entire issue, "Vanishing Borders" (29 December 1999) to analyzing it; see 23-25 for the polls on mutual perceptions.

21. Cited in Andrew Phillips, "Benign Neglect," *Maclean's*, 20 December 1999, 25.

22. *Maclean's*, 20 December 1999, 22.

clear that Canada has invested more economically and diplomatically in Mexico than anywhere else in Latin America.

So, in brief, not only are the three countries of North America *more alike today than ever before*, but *their people like each other more than before* or than those of most other countries. This is both cause and consequence of a gradual shift occurring in the way people in the region are identifying themselves—from their local communities to national ones. In addition, the percentage of the public that identified themselves as “North American” doubled during the 1980s, although that was only from 2 to 4 percent.²³ One possible explanation for the shift is the arrival of a younger, more cosmopolitan generation, dubbed the “Nexus,” because they are more connected across borders.²⁴

Views of NAFTA

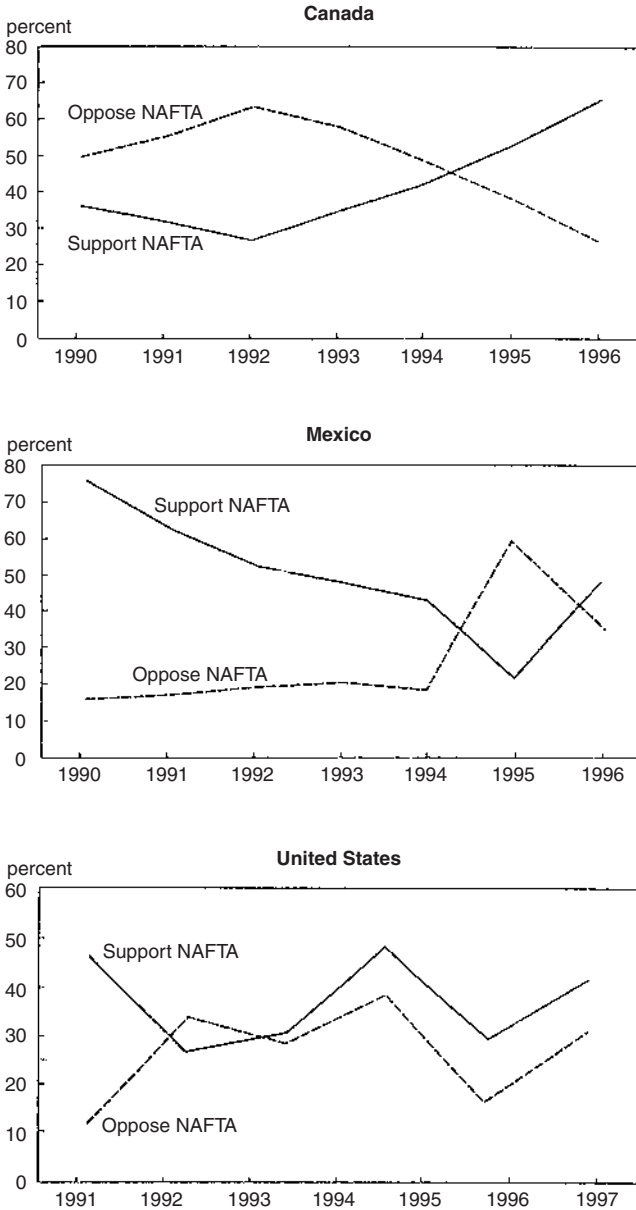
During the past decade, public attitudes toward NAFTA in the three countries have traversed a rather curious path. One might expect that the convergence in values and the accelerating pace of integration would have led to a rather consistently positive view of NAFTA, but as figure 7.1 shows, all three countries traveled a roller-coaster ride on the NAFTA train. The US public was very supportive from the time negotiations began in 1991 until a year later. From then until NAFTA’s approval by Congress in November 1993, public opinion was almost evenly divided. The intensive public campaign on behalf of NAFTA managed to lift the support slightly above that of the opposition. After Congress approved NAFTA, support for it rose until the peso crisis. From that point on, both support for and opposition to NAFTA plummeted for the next year, and then began to increase again—while all the time, the margin of difference remained consistent through 1997.

In the fall of 1997, the US Congress faced the question of whether to extend fast-track authority to allow the president to negotiate the expansion of NAFTA to the Free Trade Area of the Americas. A Gallup/CNN poll in August 1997 showed that 52 percent opposed and only 44 percent

23. Inglehart, Nevitte, and Basañez, *North American Trajectory*, 158-60. They surveyed attitudes in the three countries in 1981 and 1990 as to the principal geographical unit with which people identified: town, region, nation, North America, and world, and they found “a consistent pattern: in all three countries, there was a substantial shift from emphasis on the town . . . toward the broader geographical units.” One should not exaggerate. Even though, for example, the number of Americans who identified with “North America” doubled in that period, that only went from 2 to 4 percent. Still, the shift toward “nation” was impressive in all three countries—from 20 to 30 percent in the United States, 30-40 percent in Canada, and 18-28 percent in Mexico.

24. Jennifer Walsh, “Is a North American Generation Emerging?” *ISUMA/Printemps* (Spring 2000), 86-92.

Figure 7.1 Public opinion on NAFTA in Canada, Mexico, and the United States, 1990-97



Source: Nevitte, Neil, and Basañez, Miguel. 1988. "Trinational Perceptions" in *The Controversial Pivot: U.S. Congress and North America*, eds. Robert A. Pastor and Rafael Fernandez de Castro, 158-59. Washington: Brookings Institution.

favored its extension. This was consistent with an NBC/*Wall Street Journal* Poll in November 1997, which showed 42 percent saying NAFTA had a negative impact on the United States and only 32 percent declaring a positive impact. But it was inconsistent with a Pew poll at the time, which showed that 47 percent of the public thought NAFTA was a “good thing”; and only 30 percent, that it was bad. In a poll 2 years later, on 29 October 1999, 35 percent of the US public said that NAFTA had helped the United States; 32 percent that it had hurt; and 24 percent that it had made no difference.²⁵

Other surveys on trade and international issues are of help in interpreting these polls. It is also useful to recall that after the passage of NAFTA, and particularly after the peso crisis, the issue largely disappeared from the public debate. In August 1999, when people were asked in a *Washington Post*/Henry K. Kaiser/Harvard University poll whether they had heard enough about the issue to decide whether NAFTA was good or bad, 51 percent said they had not. In comparison, 24 percent said NAFTA had been good, and 20 percent thought it had been bad.²⁶ Pockets of constituencies remained engaged in the issue, but by and large, the US public had moved on to other issues. When asked about trade agreements in general, a substantial majority—by a ratio of more than 2:1—have expressed support, provided that the agreements are genuinely reciprocal and fair. When asked about the impact of a particular agreement, the public’s response tends to correlate with the state of the economy at the time.²⁷

Public opinion in Mexico and Canada on NAFTA also experienced some radical swings. In Mexico, supporters of NAFTA outnumbered opponents 5:1 when Salinas first proposed the idea, but during the next 4 years, as the negotiations dragged on, support declined. Opposition remained steady at about 15 percent of the public until 1994, when a series of crises lifted the number of opponents above the number of supporters. The two sides remained in their respective positions until the beginning of 1996, when support for NAFTA once again surmounted the opposition. The trajectory in Canada was just the opposite. Opponents outnumbered supporters from 1990 until 1994, when the economy began to grow again. Since then, most Canadians have indicated their support.

25. The polls are: Pew (17 October 1997) on NAFTA a good thing (47-30); Gallup/CNN (August 1997) opposing its extension (52-44); NBC/*Wall Street Journal* (November 1997) on NAFTA’s negative impact (42-32); and NBC/*WSJ* (October 1999) on free trade agreements helping the United States (35-32-24). For these sites, see the *National Journal* Web site <http://www.nationaljournal.com/polltrack/nationalissues/trade.htm>.

26. Cited by Steven Kull, *Americans on Globalization: A Study of U.S. Public Attitudes* (College Park: University of Maryland, Program on International Policy Attitudes, 2000); see <http://www.pipa.org/onlinereports/globalization/appendixb.html>.

27. Kull, *Americans on Globalization*, International Trade, 1-4.

The swings of public opinion in the three countries need to be placed in the context of declining interest in the issue. In the elections of 2000 in all three countries, NAFTA was not an issue. Indeed, international issues faded from the debate as the candidates focused on domestic concerns. By then, all three countries had accepted NAFTA as a reality, and despite one poll in the United States that indicated that as many as 40 percent of the public would like it changed, the candidates thought it would be far better to let the issue lie quietly rather than offer any ideas for reform.²⁸

A recent round of polls, however, demonstrates a curious symmetry on NAFTA. When *Americans* were asked about NAFTA's effect on themselves, 39 percent thought it had been good for the United States, and 35 percent thought it had been bad. But when Americans were asked about NAFTA's effect on Mexico, 57 percent said it had been good, and only 11 percent thought it had been bad. When Mexicans were asked, 43 percent thought it had been good for Mexico, but 47 percent believed it had been bad. In contrast, 73 percent of *Mexicans* thought NAFTA had been good for the United States, whereas only 16 percent thought it had been bad. Moving to the third corner of the triangle, a 1999 survey showed that 9 percent of *Canadians* believed they had benefited more than the United States from NAFTA (twice as high as a decade before), but 60 percent thought the United States benefited more. Only 17 percent thought both sides had gained.²⁹

This is an unusual display of reverse compliments. All three peoples agree on NAFTA's effect: *The others have benefited more than they have!*

A More Perfect Union

The point of departure for our discussion of public opinion in the three countries was to explore whether a new approach toward NAFTA—one that deepened the relationship—was practical, given the strong nationalist feelings in all three countries. The assumption was that the three peoples were so different and such zealous defenders of their sovereignty that any movement toward collaboration, let alone confederation, would be resisted vigorously. The opinion polls suggest that this assumption should be relaxed, if not discarded. Still other surveys provide a more focused test of whether a new relationship in North America is possible; indeed, of whether political union is a legitimate subject for discussion.

28. The one poll in 1999 by EPIC/MRA was commissioned by the Association of Women for International Trade. It found that 24 percent of the American public thought NAFTA should continue; 18 percent favored withdrawal; and 40 percent wanted it changed. See the *National Journal* Web site above.

29. For Mexican and US views, see the Harris Poll in April/May 1999 (*National Journal* polltrack); for the Canadian views, see *Maclean's*, 20 December 1999, 42.

In the 1990 World Values Survey, about a fourth of the Canadian and Mexican populations were in favor of erasing the border with the United States, and nearly half (46 percent) of Americans favored eliminating the border with Canada.³⁰ In 2000, a survey of US attitudes found Americans still evenly divided (42-42 percent, with 16 percent not knowing) on whether to do away with the border with Canada, but more than 3:1 (72-19 percent, with 9 percent not knowing) against doing away with the Mexican border. The Mexicans agree with the Americans on this issue, though not in quite such a one-sided way. Fifty-five percent of Mexicans oppose doing away with the border with the United States, and only 36 percent favor it (with 9 percent not knowing).³¹

When Americans, Canadians, and Mexicans are asked whether they are prepared to give up their cultural identity to form one nation-state or a union, all overwhelmingly reject the proposition. But when asked whether they would be prepared to form a single country if that would mean a higher quality of life for their country, *a majority of the people in all three countries answer affirmatively*. Specifically, 56.2 percent of Mexicans favor (and only 31.5 percent oppose) forming a single country with the United States if it would improve their quality of life, and 53.4 percent favor union if environmental issues would be handled more effectively. *Joining* with the United States to establish a separate entity elicits support, but Mexicans oppose being *incorporated* into the United States. Nearly half (47.8 percent) of all Mexicans opposed being absorbed into the United States; only 30 percent of the Mexican public would be in favor of that.³²

Forty-three percent of Canadians think it “would be a *good thing to be part of a North American Union* in ten years” (emphasis added), and only 27 percent think it would be a bad thing. Moreover, *nearly half (49 percent) think North American union is likely to happen*. As with the Mexicans, Canadians are much more willing to contemplate a union in a new North American entity than to be part of the United States. A majority (57 percent) would oppose joining the United States, whereas only 23 percent would consider it.³³ When asked whether Canada and the United States should have a common currency, the Canadian public split: 45 percent in favor,

30. Inglehart, Nevitte, and Basañez, *North American Trajectory*, 139.

31. Inglehart and Basañez, *World Values Survey / USA and Mexico*, 2000. I am indebted to Miguel Basañez for sharing the data and his insights and comments.

32. Inglehart and Basañez, *World Values Survey*.

33. Ekos Resesarch, Canada, *Shifting Perceptions of Globalization and the New Economy*, 21 September 2000. Ekos prepared a compilation of surveys. The ones cited were in 1999. This information is available at <http://www.ekos.com>.

and 44 percent opposed.³⁴ This suggests that Canadians are much further along than their leaders in thinking about some of the practical, but sensitive, questions of integration.

Among the US public, a relatively higher percentage favor continental political union than is true of Mexicans and Canadians. Support for union soars when the contingency options—for example, if that would mean a better quality of life—are included. In 1990, 81 percent of Americans said they would favor forming one country with Canada *if it meant a better quality of life*, and 79 percent agreed *if it meant the environment would get better*.³⁵ These numbers declined a bit in 2000, but remained relatively high—63 percent approved of forming one country if it would improve the quality of life, and 48 percent if the environment would get better.³⁶ When one disaggregates the data, it's clear that young, wealthy Americans are readier to contemplate political union than old or poor citizens.³⁷

What should one conclude from these data? First, the *majority* of the people in *all three countries* are prepared to contemplate a reconfiguration of the North American political system—if they can be convinced that it will produce a higher quality of life and handle problems (e.g., the environment) more effectively than is done by each country. Second, the principal motive is *economic*, the approach is *pragmatic*, and the main drawback is the fear of its effect on *culture and identity*. To the extent that people perceive their cultures to be at risk, they resist integration. Third, *young people* are more connected and ready to experiment with new political forms and so the prospects for *future* integration are likely to get better. Fourth, as Deutsch predicted a half-century ago, *more contact and trust* among peoples can facilitate integration, which, in turn, can increase trust. In disaggregating the data on a regional basis, one finds greater support for integration among those regions that have the most commerce (i.e., the southwest of the United States, the northern part of Mexico, and along the Canadian border).³⁸ A *clear majority* of the public in *all three countries* supports political union, *if they could be convinced that it would improve their lives. The people, in brief, are way ahead of their leaders.*

John Kenneth Galbraith, the former Harvard economist, who was born in Canada, offered a simple anecdote to indicate the power of pragmatism: “I was brought up in southwestern Ontario where we were taught that

34. *Maclean's*, “17th Annual Poll,” December 25, 2000. The 1999 poll by *Maclean's* was consistent with that survey, showing 44 percent of Canadians believing Canada would benefit from a common currency, and 42 percent believing it would be very costly. In Bruce Wallace, “What Makes a Canadian?” *Maclean's*, 20 December 1999, 36.

35. Inglehart, Nevitte, and Basañez, *North American Trajectory*, table 6.2.

36. Inglehart and Basañez, “World Values Survey.”

37. Inglehart, Nevitte, and Basañez, *North American Trajectory*, 135-48.

38. *Ibid.*, 139.

Canadian patriotism should not withstand anything more than a five dollar wage differential. Anything more, and you went to Detroit.”³⁹ The underlying basis of a community exists. Provided people are not threatened by a loss of culture or identity, and incentives for productivity and improvements for standard of living are evident, the three peoples of North America are ready to listen to ideas on how to combine in order to accomplish those ends.

Subterranean Anxieties

Although Americans, Canadians, and Mexicans are prepared to consider a broader community in North America, one should not discount the underlying fears that impeded integration in the past and may do so in the future. Indeed, the concerns that are often raised about sovereignty may function as a mask, covering a deeper anxiety. Like most fears, the legitimate blends with the subconscious. To the extent that one can dispel the rational concerns, then perhaps one can reduce the anxieties. Let us therefore address the core anxiety for each country. For the United States, the principal fear stems from Mexican immigration. For Canada and Mexico, it is the fear of being dominated by the United States or having the latter take control of their natural resources.

Every significant wave of immigration to the United States has generated a nativist reaction, particularly if the wave comes from a country or region that had not previously sent large numbers of immigrants. In the middle of the 19th century, native Protestant Americans reacted against the wave of Catholic immigrants from Ireland and Germany. At the end of the 19th century, the arrival of Chinese immigrants led to the first “exclusion act” passed by Congress. At the turn of the century, the arrival of millions of people from Southern and Eastern Europe finally moved Congress to pass the first immigration laws (in 1921 and 1924), setting quantitative limits on immigration. The most recent wave, beginning with the 1965 immigration act, has come from the developing world, but the single largest source has been Mexico.

In a recent essay, Huntington argued that Mexican immigrants are demonstrably different. “Mexican immigration,” he wrote, “is a unique, disturbing, and looming challenge to our cultural integrity, our national identity, and potentially to our future as a country.”⁴⁰ These are strong words from a distinguished Harvard professor. He identifies five charac-

39. Cited by Michael Hart, “The Role of Dispute Settlement in Managing Canada-U.S. Trade and Investment Relations,” in *Canada among Nations 2000: Vanishing Borders*, ed. Maureen Appel Molot and Fen Osler Hampson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 23.

40. Samuel P. Huntington, *Reconsidering Immigration: Is Mexico a Special Case?* (Washington: Center for Immigration Studies, 2000), 6, <http://www.cis.org/articles/2000/back1100.html>.

teristics of Mexican immigration that makes it a unique problem: contiguity, large numbers, illegality, concentration in the Southwest, and persistence. "The really serious problem," in Huntington's view, is not immigration; it is "assimilation." And yet he acknowledges that by most indices—education, intermarriage, language—the results are "uncertain." What seems to disturb him the most is the fear that "America is moving in the direction of becoming a bilingual and bicultural society."

Much of the data, however, point in a different direction. The *Washington Post*, the Henry K. Kaiser Foundation, and Harvard University conducted one of the most comprehensive polls on Hispanics and non-Latinos ever done. The survey found that 9 of 10 Latinos who are new to the United States believe that it is important to change so they can fit into American society. Among those children born in the United States to Hispanic immigrants (the second generation), only 1 in 10 mainly uses Spanish.⁴¹

The fears many people like Huntington have with Mexican immigration stem from the continued high level of immigration, which skews the statistics and disguises the changes that occur from one generation to the next. Of the 35 million Hispanics in the United States, roughly half were born abroad, and they have a much lower level of education and income than those born in the United States. The *Post/Kaiser/Harvard* survey focuses explicitly on the "assimilation" issue and finds that the patterns of assimilation of past immigrant groups also apply to the new immigration from Mexico and Latin America. About 73 percent of the first generation speak only Spanish at home. Of those born in the United States, 17 percent speak Spanish sometimes at home, and only 1 percent of their children (the third generation) speak only Spanish at home. This is a far cry from a bilingual nation.

Much more interesting is the change in their attitudes from immigrant to third generation. Take the issue of "fatalism." About half of all newly arrived Latino immigrants believe it is pointless to plan for the future because they cannot control it. But by the third generation, only 18 percent believe that, which is fewer than non-Latino Americans (20 percent). Across a range of issues—even on abortion, the death penalty, declining optimism—the attitudes of the third generation of Latinos are comparable to those of the non-Latino population.

Despite the relatively low level of skills of Mexican immigrants, another study found that the second generation earns levels comparable to native-born whites.⁴² The United States is a diverse blend of cultures, of which

41. Amy Goldstein and Roberto Suro, "Latinos in America: A Journey in Stages," *Washington Post*, 16 January 2000. The survey was conducted between 30 June and 30 August 1999 of 2,417 Latino adults (divided between first, second, and third generations) and 2,197 non-Latino adults.

42. Roger Waldinger, *Strangers at the Gates: New Immigrants in Urban America* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2001).

the Mexican is an important ingredient. The idea that US culture is endangered by a new wave of migration is an old one that has no more validity than it had in the past.

Canadians feared that US investors would purchase their country's major corporations. But as we have seen, the overall share of foreign direct investment in Canada owned by Americans actually declined in the 1990s. A recent analysis of Canadian views on trade and the United States concludes that a majority have come to believe that trade liberalization has a positive impact on innovation and jobs, but they are concerned about its effects on social programs and human security. Over time, Canadian views are "highly correlated with assessments of the economy"—the better the economy, the higher the support for trade. Like Americans, Canadians acknowledge that they do not know much about trade, but they do care about the swirl of issues that have been raised in the debates on trade—issues such as magazines, the environment, and beef hormones.⁴³ In other words, the original anxieties of the 1980s have been transformed.

The same dynamic appears to be at work in Mexico. The World Values Survey found that about 65 percent would accept the erasing of the border and 70 percent would migrate to the United States if they thought they could benefit economically. Federico Reyes Heróles, a Mexican analyst, analyzed the data and concluded with a rhetorical question: "Are we really very nationalistic?"⁴⁴ Mexico had also shed some of its anxieties.

It would be a mistake to conclude that each nation's long-standing fears of integration had simply disappeared. The differences among the nations and the asymmetry of power and wealth guarantee that each country—or, more accurately, groups within each country—will worry about the pace and the direction of integration. And if the United States behaves in an arrogant or offensive way, it will evoke a nationalistic response in its neighbors. What these data show, however, is that as a whole the *people in each country* have traveled a considerable distance toward a *pragmatic*—that is, a nonideological—*acceptance* of an *integrated community*. And they have done so with *practically no leadership*. No leader, except Fox, has dared to articulate a vision of where the community should go. That is the subject of the final part of this chapter.

The Nature of the Community: Three Options

What should a North American Community be? Should it be just a thin mechanism for consulting or coordinating policies? Or should it be a

43. Matthew Mendelsohn and Robert Wolfe, "Probing the Aftermyth of Seattle: Canadian Public Opinion on International Trade," 1980-2000, paper prepared for the 2000 National Policy Research Conference, Ottawa (1 December 2000).

44. Federico Reyes Heróles, *Sondear a México* (Mexico: Editorial Ocfano de México, 1995). Reyes Heróles is the brother of the former Mexican ambassador to the United States.

confederation of three states or even a unified multinational state? Let us review three basic options.

Option 1: the market approach. This option represents the status quo: Remove trade and investment barriers and cross one's fingers. This is the most likely scenario, simply because of inertia or fatigue. It is also the most problematic, in the sense that it is the least able to cope with either the windfall or the fallout from integration. The business cycle will carry the three economies through periods of growth and decline, but NAFTA will remain oblivious to distributional effects and to the many mistakes or missed opportunities described in previous chapters.

Option 2: North American confederation of nation-states. The rough equivalent of the Articles of Confederation, this option would leave most power in the hands of the three governments of North America, but they would be working together under the auspices of a weak central government to guarantee the security and prosperity of the continent. One might expect the most powerful country to propose this option, but the United States is an unusual superpower. Since the Republican Senate voted against the League of Nations in 1919, a strong element in the party has viewed international organizations and agreements as undesirable restraints on the unilateral actions of the United States. This position has sometimes been confused with isolationism or protectionism, but it is quite different. It accepts that the United States has important interests in the world that it must defend, but it views international organizations as anchors that weigh the country down and prevent it from fulfilling its proper role. This unilateral internationalism would be skeptical, if not fervently opposed, to any efforts to establish a supranational body to guide or plan the integration process. The idea of a North American Confederation is a nonstarter in all three countries, at least in the foreseeable future.

Option 3: a unified, multinational state. This option would eliminate or fundamentally change the three existing nation-states. Instead, the people of North America would elect leaders to a strong central government that would be respectful of the different cultures and languages. This option is the least likely of all.

The European Union has been considering variations on these three options since the Treaty of Rome. More than 40 years later, they have still not chosen. As it contemplates expansion to include Central and Eastern Europe, three of Europe's leaders offered very different proposals in 2001. The German chancellor proposed a federation with a strong central government—a variation on a multinational state with a more accountable European executive and a more powerful Parliament. The French prime minister responded by saying: "I want a Europe, but I remain attached to my nation." He insisted on a "federation of nation states"—a variation on the confederation. Romano Prodi, the President of the European Commission, suggested that the European Union be

permitted to directly tax European citizens.⁴⁵ A choice remains on the distant horizon.

Unless President Bush embraces Fox's proposal, and Chrétien follows, the three governments of North America are likely to remain anchored to the status quo option, despite the evidence of its inadequacy. A more serious crisis than the peso devaluation and a graver threat than illegal migration may be needed before they contemplate the kinds of supranational organizations that could anticipate and prevent future crises.

In the interim, what is needed is the nurturing of a regional identity and small steps that could help the peoples of the three countries understand the need for deeper integration. Here again, it would be enlightening to reflect on the experience of Europe. In the early 1950s, Europe had its visionaries. While they were in prison in Italy during the Second World War, Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi, two antifascist leaders, drafted a manifesto for a "European Federation." Winston Churchill, the British prime minister, and Robert Schuman, France's foreign minister in 1950, also had grand ideas on how Europe should reorganize itself, but the preamble to the Treaty of Rome mentioned only "an ever closer union among the peoples" and the need for solidarity and cooperation. The exact configuration of the final Europe was not defined. Monnet, the "father of Europe," believed that the best way to move Europe toward cooperation was with small collective steps that set off "a chain reaction, a ferment where one change induces another."⁴⁶

This is the neofunctional approach to integration, and it worked within certain limits. In an analysis of public opinion in Europe during a 15-year period, Eichenberg and Dalton concluded that "the growth of intra-EC trade has been a major stimulus to Europeanist sentiment" and that elections for the European Parliament also had a "moderately positive impact on citizen support for the community."⁴⁷ In other words, trade and elections encouraged a European identity, much as Deutsch had predicted. This is a worthy lesson for North America.

The European Union also learned that the logic of neofunctionalism was inadequate to the task of getting all the EU governments to make difficult decisions about harmonizing policy and simplifying decision making. Progress on the path toward European integration required leadership and intergovernmental negotiations at critical moments when

45. "Debating Europe's Future," *New York Times*, 7 June 2001.

46. Monnet, "Ferment of Change," 19.

47. Richard C. Eichenberg and Russell J. Dalton, "Europeans and the European Community: The Dynamics of Public Support for European Integration," *International Organization* 47 (Autumn 1993), 523.

Europeans feared their experiment was failing.⁴⁸ Only then did prime ministers find the strength to make the essential and difficult decisions.

For similar reasons, it would be unhelpful for North America's three leaders to decide between the three grand options—status quo, confederation, or unified state—at this time. It would be far better for them to follow Monnet's advice and move forward with small steps—the first one being the North American Commission, the next ones being sectoral plans. The surveys of opinion in all three countries point with great clarity in the same direction: The people are prepared to undertake new collective efforts if they can be persuaded that these efforts could improve their standard of living. Those are the marching orders for the three leaders: Take some risks, establish some practical organizations, and if growing integration works, take some more.

48. Andrew Moravcsik, *The Choice For Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).