

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and  
Social Sciences

Great Plains Studies, Center for

---

October 1996

**Review of *Decision at Midnight: Inside the Canada-US Free-Trade Negotiations* by Michael Hart with Bill Dymond and Colin Robertson**

Christopher D. Merrett  
*Western Illinois University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

---

Merrett, Christopher D., "Review of *Decision at Midnight: Inside the Canada-US Free-Trade Negotiations* by Michael Hart with Bill Dymond and Colin Robertson" (1996). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 303.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch/303>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

**Decision at Midnight: Inside the Canada-US Free-Trade Negotiations.**

Michael Hart with Bill Dymond and Colin Robertson. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1994. xvi+456 pp. Photos, glossary, chronology, tables, charts, notes, and index. \$C35.00 cloth (ISBN 0-7748-0514-5).

The issue of free trade has fueled political debate in North America for the past decade. The authors, members of the Canadian free trade negotiating team, provide an inside view and defense of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Their three-part story begins with an outline of the economic theory and macroeconomic reality that prompted Canada and the United States to consider free trade. It also reveals the political skirmishes in Canada and the U.S. that set the stage for FTA negotiations. Section two delineates the actual free trade negotiations, key negotiators, and issues. The authors describe how philosophical differences over the implications of free trade nearly derailed the FTA. While Canadians viewed it as the most important trade agreement in the twentieth century, Americans considered the FTA as a mere opportunity to resolve existing trade irritants and a step towards renewed multilateral trade relations. The final section describes how this impasse was surmounted by dogged determination and last-minute compromise (hence the title, *Decision at Midnight*).

While the book presents a Canadian perspective, there is much to interest American readers. The authors deftly summarize the history of U.S.-Canada trade relations and the personalities involved. They also explain why agriculture was such a controversial issue during the trade talks: Canada insisting on retaining its agricultural marketing boards and supply management programs; the United States staunchly defending its farm subsidies and import quotas. As a result, agriculture was largely exempted from the FTA due to non-tariff issues.

Readers also learn about the role played by Clayton Yeutter who served as a U.S. Trade Representative during the FTA negotiations. Yeutter, a native Nebraskan, former president of the Chicago Commodities Exchange, and former Secretary of Agriculture, was viewed by Canadians as a backslapping Midwesterner with a "corny sense of humor." The authors portray him as a

shrewd politician, but prone to occasional gaffes owing to his lack of a working knowledge of Canadian political issues.

Despite these strengths, the book is flawed by its portrayal of the FTA as though it were encased in amber, impervious to subsequent events. The authors recount the negotiations leading up to the successful signing of the FTA but provide no evaluation of the consequences of free trade for Canada. In their blind support of free trade, they claim that the FTA was a popularly supported agreement and conclude that their efforts were vindicated when Canada signed NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement. In a state of denial, the authors ignore the true measure of Canadian dissatisfaction with free trade which came in 1993. Four years after implementing the FTA, the Progressive Conservative Party was voted out of office in the most devastating political defeat in Canadian history. This otherwise excellent account could have benefitted by acknowledging this reality.

Nevertheless, *Decision at Midnight* is a worthwhile book aimed at both trade experts and the general public. The authors present a unique view of the evolution of the Canada-U.S. FTA without getting lost in the minutiae of the free trade documents. More importantly, the volume succeeds in presenting an inside look at how politicians and bureaucrats craft sweeping public policy initiatives that change our lives. **Christopher D. Merrett**, *Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, Western Illinois University*.