

Document A: President Clinton Press Conference (excerpts)

On September 14, 1993, President Bill Clinton, a Democrat, signed two supplemental agreements to NAFTA – the NAALC and the NAAEC. NAFTA went into effect on January 1, 1994. Below is an excerpt from the remarks Clinton gave at the signing.

I want to say to my fellow Americans, when you live in a time of change the only way to recover your security and to broaden your horizons is to adapt to the change, to embrace it, to move forward. Nothing we do . . . can change the fact that factories or information can flash across the world; that people can move money around in the blink of an eye. . . . In a fundamental sense, this debate about NAFTA is a debate about whether we will embrace these changes and create the jobs of tomorrow, or try to resist these changes, hoping we can preserve the economic structures of yesterday.

So when people say that this trade agreement is just about how to move jobs to Mexico so nobody can make a living, how do they explain the fact that Mexicans keep buying more products made in America every year? Go out and tell the American people that. Mexican citizens with lower incomes spend more . . . on American products than Germans, Japanese, or Canadians. That is a fact. And there will be more if they have more money to spend. That is what expanding trade is all about. . . .

The second agreement ensures that Mexico enforces its laws in areas that include worker health and safety, child labor and the minimum wage. And I might say, this is the first time in the history of world trade agreements when any nation has ever been willing to tie its minimum wage to the growth in its own economy.

What does that mean? It means that there will be an even more rapid closing of the gap between our two wage rates. And as the benefits of economic growth are spread in Mexico to working people, what will happen? They'll have more disposable income to buy more American products and there will be less illegal immigration because more Mexicans will be able to support their children by staying home.

This agreement will create jobs, thanks to trade with our neighbors. That's reason enough to support it. But I must close with a couple of other points. NAFTA is essential to our long-term ability to compete with Asia and Europe. . . . It will help our businesses to be both more efficient and to better compete with our rivals in other parts of the world. . . .

Source: *President Clinton's comments on signing the supplemental agreements to NAFTA, September 14, 1993.*

Document B: Ralph Nader (excerpt)

Ralph Nader, an independent, is a long-time consumer advocate. For decades, he has championed consumer and labor rights and criticized corporate influence in American politics. He edited a book titled, The Case Against “Free Trade” in 1993. In this excerpt from the book’s introduction, he refers to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), another free trade agreement that went into effect in 1948.

Citizens beware. An unprecedented corporate power grab is underway in global negotiations over international trade. Operating under the deceptive banner of “free” trade, multinational corporations are working hard to expand their control over the international economy and undo vital health, safety, and environmental protections won by citizens’ movements across the globe in recent decades.

The megacorporations are not expecting these victories to be gained in town halls, state offices, the U.S. Capitol, or even at the United Nations. They are looking to **circumvent** the democratic process altogether, in a bold and brazen drive to achieve an **autocratic** far-reaching agenda through two trade agreements. . . . the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and . . . the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trades (GATT). . . .

The **Fortune 200’s** GATT and NAFTA agenda would make the air you breathe dirtier and the water you drink more polluted. It would cost jobs, depress wage levels, and make workplaces less safe. It would destroy family farms and undermine consumer protections such as those ensuring that the food you eat is not compromised by unsanitary conditions or higher levels of pesticides and preservatives.

And that’s only for the industrial countries. The large global companies have an even more ambitious set of goals for the **Third World**. They hope to use GATT and NAFTA to capitalize on the poverty of the Third World countries and exploit their generally low environment, safety, and wage standards. At the same time, these corporations plan to displace locally owned businesses and solidify their control over developing countries’ economies and natural resources. . . .

As the world prepares to enter the twenty-first century, GATT and NAFTA would lead the planet in exactly the wrong direction. One of the clearest lessons that emerges from the study of industrialized societies is that the centralization of power of commerce is environmentally and democratically unsound.

Source: *Ralph Nader, “Free Trade and the Decline of Democracy” 1993.*

Vocabulary

circumvent: find a way around something

autocratic: all powerful

Fortune 200: the 200 largest companies in America

Third World: A term often used to describe developing countries

Document C: Pat Buchanan (excerpt)

Pat Buchanan, a Republican, is a long time conservative commentator, columnist, and politician. He was a senior advisor for President Richard Nixon, President Gerald Ford, and President Ronald Reagan. This is an excerpt from a blog post on his website.

Why does the Populist Right **abhor** NAFTA? Because NAFTA **epitomizes** all that repels us in the modern state. Though advertised as “free trade,” it is anti-freedom, 1,200 pages of rules, regulations, laws, fines, commissions—plus side agreements—setting up no fewer than 49 new bureaucracies.

NAFTA is not really a trade treaty at all, but the architecture of the New World Order. Like **Maastricht**, it is part of a skeletal structure for world government. At its root is an abiding faith in the superior wisdom of a global managerial class—our would-be Lords of the Universe.

Contemptuous of states’ rights, regional differences and national distinctions, NAFTA would supersede state laws and diminish U.S. sovereignty. It takes power from elected leaders and turns it over to transnational bureaucrats whose allegiance is to no country at all. Though our Constitution specifically empowers Congress to regulate foreign commerce, Congress is not even permitted to amend NAFTA.

Under NAFTA, foreigners—Canadians and Mexicans, first—can inspect U.S. factories and impose fines on the United States. Such a treaty insults the memory of the men of 1776.

Why are we doing this? For love of money. . . .

To “conservatives of the heart,” even if NAFTA brings an uptick in **GNP** it is no good for America. No matter the cash benefits, we don’t want to merge our economy with Mexico, and we don’t want to merge our country with Mexico. We don’t want to force American workers to compete with dollar-an-hour Mexican labor. That’s not what America is all about. . . .

For true conservatives, NAFTA should be **hemlock**. It mandates \$7 billion in foreign aid and loan guarantees to clean up a border mess created by multinational corporations who took American jobs south to Mexico. To make this bitter pill go down easier with his party’s Left, Clinton is promising a big new job-training program. Republicans get nothing.

Source: Pat Buchanan, “America First, NAFTA Never,” November 7, 1993.

Vocabulary

abhor: regard with disgust and hatred

epitomize: a perfect example of something

Masstricht Treaty: Treaty signed in 1992 to create the European Union

contemptuous: scornful

GNP: gross national product

hemlock: a type of poison

Guiding Question

Document A: Clinton Speech

- 1) (Sourcing) What was the purpose of this speech?

- 2) (Contextualization) How might the purpose of the speech have influenced what Clinton said in it?

- 3) (Close reading) According to Clinton, what were the “changes” going on in the world that made NAFTA necessary?

- 4) (Close reading) According to Clinton, what were two ways that NAFTA would affect the United States?

- 5) (Close reading) According to Clinton, what were three ways that NAFTA would affect Mexico?

- 6) What evidence did Clinton provide to support his arguments for NAFTA?

- 7) Based on Clinton’s speech, what do you think were possible arguments being made against NAFTA at the time of the speech?

Document B: Nader

1) (Sourcing) What political causes has Nader focused on?

(Contextualization) How might that influence his evaluation of a free trade agreement like NAFTA?

2) (Close reading) Who did Nader think was responsible for promoting NAFTA?

3) (Close reading) According to Nader, what were three effects NAFTA would have on the United States?

4) (Close reading) According to Nader, what were three effects NAFTA would have on the developing world?

5) What evidence did Nader provide to support his claims in this document?

6) What were the main arguments that Nader made against NAFTA?

Document C: Buchanan

1) (Sourcing) What political causes has Buchanan focused on?

(Contextualization) How might that influence his evaluation of a free trade agreement like NAFTA?

2) (Close reading) What were three arguments Buchanan made against NAFTA?

3) What evidence did Buchanan provide to support his arguments against NAFTA?

4) (Contextualization) Why might Buchanan have compared NAFTA to the Masstricht Treaty?

5) (Corroboration) How are Buchanan's criticisms of NAFTA similar to Nader's criticisms?

How are his criticisms different?

Final Writing Assignment

Using evidence from all three documents, write a paragraph in response to the following question:

Many people, like Nader and Buchanan, opposed the ratification of NAFTA. How might that have influenced what Clinton said in his speech and how does Clinton's speech address the arguments against NAFTA that Nader and Buchanan made?