

REVIEW OF**JOEL BELLIVEAU, *IN THE SPIRIT OF '68: YOUTH CULTURE, THE NEW LEFT, AND THE REIMAGINING OF ACADIA*, TRANS. KÄTHE ROTH. VANCOUVER: UBC PRESS, 2019.****Ian Milligan**

The 1968 moment swept Canada, but how that exactly unfolded varied from place to place as global currents interacted with local situations. Joel Belliveau, associate professor of Canadian history at Laurentian University, explores the “spirit of 68” as it engulfed Acadia, and in particular, the Université de Moncton in the late 1960s. *In the Spirit of '68* was originally published in 2014 as the award-winning *Le moment 68 et la reinvention de l'Acadie* (Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa) but has been masterfully translated by Käthe Roth for UBC Press. English-language scholars will benefit from this translation, not only in being able to engage with the work in their language, but also as Belliveau's work bridges the all-too-real gap between Francophone and Anglophone scholars of Canada's 1960s.

The key debate that Belliveau aims to settle in this book is whether the student activist explosion that transformed Acadia in the late 1960s was fundamentally influenced by local factors *or* should be seen primarily as part of a global youth culture phenomenon. The traditional interpretation is that the student explosions in Moncton—exemplified by thousands of students protesting in favour of bilingualism and free tuition, and which led to the eight-day occupation of a Université de Moncton building—represented the emergence of the Acadian neo-nationalist movement. As Belliveau notes, this interpretation holds that “the mass student activism there was fundamentally neo-nationalist” (4). Yet Belliveau shows that this narrative neglects the global dimension; students across the world and the province (as seen in the “Strax affair,” a conflagration at the University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, over the suspension of an activist professor, as recounted in Peter Kent's *Inventing Academic Freedom*) were engaged in similar struggles. By highlighting how student protest in Moncton, in its various phases, mapped onto global themes—and had a complicated relationship with mainstream Acadian organizations—Belliveau convincingly demonstrates that the real story is more complicated: “Neo-nationalism was therefore not solely the product of the local socio-political and economic situation; it also had to do with forces sweeping the Western world” (13). Given the enduring significance of Acadian neo-nationalism in New Brunswick today, this is an important argument.

Belliveau begins his book with an exploration of Acadia before the 1960s. This was a community dominated by a “defining elite” and grounded by a traditional national ideology and a shared sense of history. Until the 1963 founding of the Université de Moncton, student life was centred around classical colleges, with a high degree of student oversight from faculty and staff. By the mid-1960s, as students created an autonomous sphere in Moncton, the landscape rapidly changed. Students were inspired by factors as broad as global challenges (from fears around nuclear weapons to educational reform), invigorated by the move from rural settings to Moncton, and by the dramatic explosion of student numbers (the student population during the decade grew 170 percent). Yet this “unprecedented critical mass” (59) of students had a fraught relationship with mainstream Acadian organizations such as the Société Nationale des Acadiens, which many felt was holding back the modernization of Acadia. Students instead sought modernization through the state and equality through bilingualism. Indeed, until 1968, it is clear that the student activists at Moncton largely eschewed linguistic questions and divisions, instead “throwing themselves fully into the struggles most typical of student movements in North

America” (108). In other words, many students held the Acadian elite responsible for the underdevelopment of Acadia, as opposed to blaming Anglophones. All of this complicates the understanding of the Moncton student movement as a straightforward expression of neo-nationalism.

Everything changed in 1968, the year that serves as the central fulcrum of Belliveau’s analysis. In January 1968, three things combined to ignite the student movement: tuition hikes, antagonistic anti-Francophone comments from Moncton mayor Leonard Jones, and a local conflict around a new high school that would accommodate both Anglophones and Francophones. This moment witnessed dramatic changes in how students understood their situation, as they increasingly looked toward and understood the “huge socio-economic inequalities” (134) that existed between French and English communities. A new understanding emerged among students that saw Anglophones at least partially responsible for the plight of Acadia, as opposed to the elites (who, while still culpable, were now faulted for not standing up to Anglophone oppression). This process culminated in the student protests mentioned above, amid demands for not just parity of funding but even more funding for Francophone institutions to overcome decades of underfunding. Students were now solidly neo-nationalist in outlook. While established Acadian organizations originally resisted this, there was soon a “changing of the guard” in the early 1970s that saw these ideas rise to the forefront of New Brunswick politics (with the newly formed Parti Acadien in 1972, for example). As Belliveau concludes, “The advent of neo-nationalism meant that the identity-related referents in New Brunswick would remain ethno-linguistic in nature” (178).

While a well-written and provocative book, there are parts, as with all works, that fall a bit short. While the UBC Press translation was released in 2019, the literature is firmly grounded in that of 2014. Even as a 2014 work, the book occasionally relies a bit too much on the first generation of sixties’ scholars (Doug Oram, Cyril Levitt, and Myrna Kostash) to give the “big picture” of Canada’s nationalist 1960s. More reference to then-recent scholarship from the late 2000s and early 2010s would have strengthened the work. In particular, there was a missed opportunity to connect other areas of Canada that saw student protests similarly intermixing global and local issues. Perhaps fruitful comparisons could have been made with the work of James Pitsula (on Regina campus), Hugh Johnston (on Simon Fraser University), or Bryan Palmer (*Canada’s 1960s*). Finally, while this is often outside the control of the author, the title also promises a bit more than it delivers. This book is less about “youth culture” and more about student culture in Moncton. While access to post-secondary education dramatically increased in the 1960s, the majority of youth were still outside these institutional walls.

Minor points aside, *In the Spirit of ‘68* is an important book for those seeking to understand the evolution of the Canadian project in postwar Canada, as well as those exploring the long-term impact of the global 1960s on Canada. It should become a must-read for scholars who wish to comprehend the dramatic ways that Canadian society was transformed in the 1960s.

Acadian Fire, 1968 (podcast): Patrice Dutil discusses the student protests at the University of Moncton in 1968–69 with Joel Belliveau, Professor of History at Laurentian University, and the author of *In the Spirit of ‘68*. [This link](#) is posted with permission of The Champlain Society.

To comment on this review, please write to editorjnbs@stu.ca. **Si vous souhaitez réagir à cet compte rendu**, veuillez soit nous écrire à editorjnbs@stu.ca.

Ian Milligan is Associate Professor of History at the University of Waterloo.