This book grew out of a short chance visit to Quebec in 1964, after an absence of sixteen years. The almost palpable ferment in all spheres of activity was in such contrast to the province I remembered that I was intrigued by what was in prospect. It was clear that the changes under way had profound implications for the future of the Canadian Confederation. A Brookings Institution Federal Executive Fellowship gave me the opportunity to assess the situation in some depth and speculate on its consequences.

Essentially what is taking place in Quebec is a social revolution, supported by a dynamic cultural and intellectual renaissance. An air of self-confidence is replacing the siege mentality which had long wasted French-Canadian energies in defense of an outmoded political and social framework. Like the Negro in the United States, the French Canadian is no longer resigned to second-class citizenship. Where the Negro seeks assimilation, however, the Québécois demands national acceptance of cultural diversity and a free hand to be “master in his own house.”

To those for whom the North American melting pot is the norm, the vitality of the distinct cultural entity French Canada insists on maintaining in the Saint Lawrence Valley seems an anachronism beyond reason. As long as it remained a peaceful backwater, Quebec’s French-speaking community aroused little interest elsewhere on the continent. Only in the early 1960s, when Quebec’s new restlessness began to attract attention outside the province, was there some appreciation of the political effects of militant French-Canadian nationalism.

Although this is primarily a matter of Canadian concern, the United States has, of course, more than a peripheral interest in its evolution. Geographic, ethnic, and linguistic propinquity gives Canada a special status in the U.S. scale of foreignness. Canadians, in general, reciprocate this sentiment, as the close-knit continental defense system attests.
Nevertheless, U.S. nationalism looms large north of the border, where U.S. economic "imperialism" is a source of perennial resentment. The quickening interplay between the two language groups in Canada is restricted almost exclusively to an internal context, however, with little immediate relevance on the continental level. The aim of this study, therefore, is to delineate the dimensions of French Canada's malaise and to specify the conditions under which it could threaten the existence of the Confederation.