

## Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002)

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Description Pierre Bourdieu was author of more than twenty-five books of sociology and philosophy and founder of the review *Liber* and the journal *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*. At his death in 2002, he was chair of sociology at the Collège de France and arguably the most important intellectual in France — a status that he used over the last decade of his life to draw attention to the crises in politics and culture produced by neo-liberal globalization. Throughout his career, his work gave rise to considerable controversy and debate.

Bourdieu's work ranged widely, from studies of the gift economy amongst the Khable tribe in Algeria, to more recent work on the experience of poverty and social dislocation in France. He is best known for his exploration of the mechanisms of social reproduction and educational systems, and the role played by "cultural" or "symbolic capital" in ensuring the maintenance of existing class and social hierarchies. In his most famous work, *Distinction* (1977), Bourdieu highlights the complex ways in which supposedly individual expressions of cultural and even culinary "taste" are linked deeply and indelibly to dimensions of power and privilege. These linkages legitimate certain tastes (for example, of art or music) over others, thereby creating impediments to class mobility. In his later, more explicitly political and public writings, Bourdieu argued against the threats posed by neo-liberalism to the achievements of Western modernity and called for an internationale of intellectuals committed to defending the autonomy of cultural production.