On January 23, 2002 sociology lost one of the most influential French thinkers of our time, Pierre Bourdieu. His death, following a brief bout with cancer, prompted public acknowledgment from all sections of French society ranging from intellectuals and grassroots activists to the French president and prime minister. Much of the press throughout Western Europe (and several U.S. newspapers) eulogized his death with comments from leading intellectuals of many countries. Within professional sociology his productivity was prolific and consequential. An International Sociological Association survey placed *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979) as the sixth most important social scientific work of the twentieth century. Contemporary Sociology (May, 1996) reviewed *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972) as one of the ten most influential books of the past 25 years. The Social Science Citation Index shows Bourdieu to have become the most frequently cited French social scientist since the early 1990s. Thus, his intellectual influence had become thoroughly international, including Asia and particularly Latin America, as well as Western Europe and North America.

Author of over forty books and five-hundred articles in several languages, Bourdieu founded and guided the journal, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* for over 25 years, the collection of books (*Le sens common*) with Editions de Minuit for over 25 years and in 1996 started his own publishing house Editions Liber-Raison d’Agir. His appeal, however, was not limited to the profession of sociology but much broader, particularly in the last several years, as he came to play an important and highly visible role of public intellectual in France and Western Europe. Given the number of close associates that worked with him over the years and the much larger network of social scientists drawing direct influence in their work from him, it is no exaggeration to say that Bourdieu founded a veritable school of sociology, the most important in France since Emile Durkheim.
Bourdieu’s career

Pierre Bourdieu was born in 1930 into a lower-middle-class family; his father was a small farmer who became a postman in the village of Lasseube in Southwestern France. He spent his early years in this remote rural region of Béarn and spoke the regional dialect. A particularly gifted and industrious student, he first entered the Lycée de Pau (1941–1947), then the prestigious and academically selective Parisian Lycée Louis-Le Grand (1948–1951). In 1951, he entered the academically elite École Normale Supérieure (ENS) in Paris where he prepared the agrégation in philosophy. Jacques Derrida was a classmate. Louis Althusser taught there. Alain Touraine preceded Bourdieu at the ENS in 1945 and Raymond Boudon followed in 1954. He simultaneously took courses at the Faculty of Letters in Paris (1951–1954).

ENS is known for cultivating an abundance of esprit critique, and in this Bourdieu excelled. Little escaped his critical flair: peers, professors, the school itself. Of humble social and cultural origins, Bourdieu experienced ENS not only as a miraculous survivor of strenuous academic selection, but also as a cultural and social outsider. This personal experience of alienation within French academe motivated him to submit French schooling – indeed all institutions – to critical examination. Indeed, one finds Bourdieu normalizing this critical disposition as a desirable – if not necessary – ingredient for the successful pursuit of sociology itself. It is striking that Bourdieu’s self-perception of being an outsider to the French intellectual world informs, throughout his life, his sharply critical posture toward this very world in which his phenomenal rise to intellectual renown occurred.

After finishing the agrégation in philosophy in 1955, Bourdieu, like so many agrégés before him, went to the provinces to teach philosophy at the secondary level. He began teaching at the Lycée Banville in Moulins (1954–1955) just outside of Paris. But the war with Algeria intervened, and he was called into military service in Algeria (1958–1960). Colonial Algeria and the war for liberation were important to Bourdieu’s career for it was there that he actually began his social scientific work as a “self-taught” ethnologist among the Kabyle peasant communities. His first book, Sociologie de l’Algérie (1958), several subsequent books and papers, and his early and revised formations of his theory of practices in Outline of a Theory of Practice (1972) and The Logic of Practice (1980) were directly informed by this first fieldwork experience.