



Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals: The Political Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu

By David L. Swartz



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Power is the central organizing principle of all social life, from culture and education to stratification and taste. And there is no more prominent name in the analysis of power than that of noted sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Throughout his career, Bourdieu challenged the commonly held view that symbolic power—the power to dominate—is solely symbolic. He emphasized that symbolic power helps create and maintain social hierarchies, which form the very bedrock of political life. By the time of his death in 2002, Bourdieu had become a leading public intellectual, and his argument about the more subtle and influential ways that cultural resources and symbolic categories prevail in power arrangements and practices had gained broad recognition.

In *Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals*, David L. Swartz delves deeply into Bourdieu's work to show how central—but often overlooked—power and politics are to an understanding of sociology. Arguing that power and politics stand at the core of Bourdieu's sociology, Swartz illuminates Bourdieu's political project for the social sciences, as well as Bourdieu's own political activism, explaining how sociology is not just science but also a crucial form of political engagement.



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Editorial Review

Review

"*Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals* represents a major step forward in the ongoing task of coming to terms with the legacy of Pierre Bourdieu. David Swartz makes a compelling case that Bourdieu has much to offer both the field of political sociology and the study of power."

(Thomas Medvetz, author of *Think Tanks in America*)

"In *Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals*, David Swartz makes a convincing case that the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu is indispensable for understanding politics. Swartz helpfully outlines Bourdieu's distinctive contribution to the study of power, the political field, and the state, and offers a rich account of Bourdieu's view on the relationship between politics and sociology. Evenhanded and exceptionally clear, *Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals* should be on the reading list of every sociologist concerned with poetical life."

(Neil Gross, author of *Richard Rorty: The Making of an American Philosopher*)

About the Author

David L. Swartz is assistant professor of sociology at Boston University and a senior editor of *Theory and Society*. He is the author of *Culture & Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* and coeditor of *After Bourdieu: Influence, Critique, Elaboration*.

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