The last musketeer of the French revolution: Exploring the Republican political agenda of Pierre Bourdieu

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Abstract:

This paper argues that Pierre Bourdieu was motivated by the frustration of the French Revolution. His work continually criticized the gap between the ideological promise of the Enlightenment and the actual persistence of inequality in modern France. This paper exposes the centrality of the failed revolution in Bourdieu’s oeuvre by visiting four topics he delved into: Education, gender, globalization and the role of social science. The analysis shows that the contrast between the ideals of equality and meritocracy and their poor implementation in schools and universities has motivated his sharp critique of the French system of education. Similarly, the failure of the State to support gender equality drove him to expose the deeply embedded cultural mechanisms that guarantee the advantages men have over women. The further paper shows that Bourdieu also extended this preoccupation with the failure of the Revolution to global politics. Specifically, his recent critique of globalization and global organizations suggests that capitalist Western elites betray the cosmopolitan vision of the Revolution while using international law and global companies to exploit third world countries. Finally, the paper shows that Bourdieu’s preoccupation with the Revolution reappeared in the role he projected for social science and concludes that, for Bourdieu, the French Revolution is still to come. In that sense, Bourdieu was consistently preoccupied with the Revolution, and it is thus most fitting to see him, emphatically, as the last Musketeer to fight the betrayal of the French republic.
remained committed to its unwavering promise. In that sense, this exegesis of Bourdieu’s political agenda should be read as an exemplar – an extremely clear one, indeed – rather than as an exceptional political analyst. Indeed, it may be just to argue that France was for Bourdieu as it was for Michelet a century before: “The “true” France was the France of the Revolution of 1789, the France that carried on the generous ideals of a nation identified with Joan of Arc” [3, p. 179] Bourdieu, in that sense, fought to keep the enlightenment alive. his paper argues that Pierre Bourdieu was motivated by the frustration of the French Revolution. His work continually criticized the gap between the ideological promise of the Enlightenment and the actual persistence of inequality in modern France. This paper exposes the centrality of the failed revolution in Bourdieu’s oeuvre by visiting four topics he delved into: Education, gender, globalization and the role of social science. The analysis shows that the contrast between the ideals of equality and meritocracy and their poor implementation in schools and universities has motivated his s