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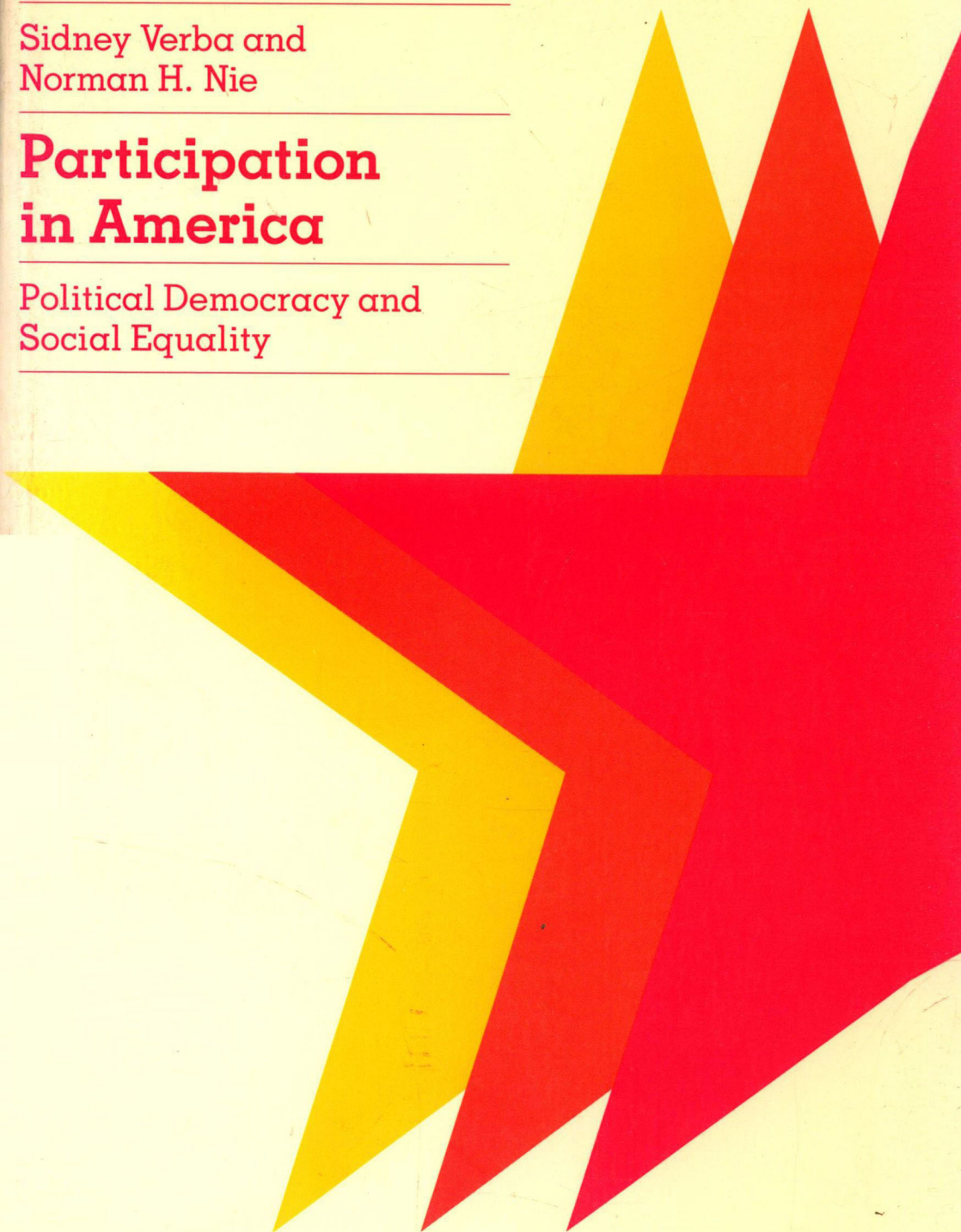
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# Participation in America

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Political Democracy and  
Social Equality

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# PARTICIPATION IN AMERICA

## Political Democracy and Social Equality

*Sidney Verba*  
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# PARTICIPATION IN AMERICA

To Our Parents

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# Preface

The political scientist is called upon to pursue two somewhat different goals. Those who want political science to be a generalizing science enjoin him to try to confirm the existence of general processes of politics. This involves abstraction from any particular situation and the development of theories or models of a general sort. On the other hand, many call upon the political scientist to be “relevant,” a word that is often used in silly ways but that can have a quite serious meaning—i.e., that one provide understanding of important political situations, in particular places, at particular times.

The debate sometimes sounds as if one must choose between the two positions. In fact, they are quite compatible—in theory if not always in practice. We have, in this book, attempted to pursue both goals: to say something about the processes of politics in general and something about American politics at the beginning of the 1970s in particular.

We consider two general political processes: that by which citizens come to participate in political life and that by which their participation affects the

responsiveness of governmental leaders. This involves the explication of some general variables—measures of various forms of political participation, measures of social status, of political attitudes, of voluntary association memberships, of citizen policy preferences, of leader policy preferences, and the like—and statements about expected relationships among them. These variables form the building blocks of a model of the causes and consequences of participation applicable to any nation. How that model works in a particular nation depends on the specific values of the variables in that instance.

It is by entering these specific values as they existed in the United States in the late 1960s that we see how these processes work in that particular context. This is what makes our work relevant to contemporary American politics. As we shall see, the particular values these variables have in the United States—the distribution of voluntary association memberships or party affiliations across social statuses, the particular political beliefs that exist, their distribution in the population, and so forth—when entered into the more general model tell us a lot about why American politics takes the shape it does.

The next step would be to test these models in other settings. This we hope to do, for the present volume is part of a larger, cross-national study of political participation. Later works will consider a similar set of questions in other nations as well as questions from a comparative perspective.<sup>1</sup> But though part of a larger enterprise, this book is meant to stand alone and to contribute to an understanding of contemporary American politics, and, more generally, to an understanding of some problems and dilemmas in democratic government.

<sup>1</sup>Some publications reporting cross-national comparisons on these issues are: Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie, and Jae-on Kim, *The Modes of Democratic Participation: A Cross-National Analysis* (Sage Professional Papers in Comparative Politics, no. 01-013, 1971); Sidney Verba, Bashiruddin Ahmed, and Anil Bhatt, *Caste, Race, and Politics: A Comparison of India and the United States* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1971); and Sidney Verba, "Cross-National Survey Research: The Problem of Credibility," in Ivan Vallier, ed., *Comparative Methods in Sociology: Essays on Trends and Applications* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971), pp. 309-356. Some parts of Chapter 4 were first published in Verba, Nie, and Kim, *op. cit.*, and some parts of Chapter 10 were first published in Verba, Ahmed, and Bhatt, *op. cit.*



# Acknowledgments

A large-scale empirical study of the sort we are reporting in this volume goes on for many years and involves many people. The years we would like to forget. The people we would like to remember.

To begin with, we owe a substantial debt to our colleagues in the Cross-National Program on Political and Social Change, of which the study of American participation is one component. The framework for the study and the research design developed in a collaborative context with these other scholars. And the study is much richer because of this contribution of non-American scholars. To be sure, they come to the study of America with presuppositions, but presuppositions different from those brought in by the U.S. contingent. The collaborators in this program included: Rajni Kothari and Bashiruddin Ahmed of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi; Hajime Ikeuchi, Joji Watanuki, and Jun-Ichi Kyogoku of the University of Tokyo; Ichiro Miyake of the University of