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052158759X - *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life*

Nina Eliasoph

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Nina Eliasoph's vivid portrait of American civic life reveals an intriguing culture of political avoidance. Open-ended political conversation among ordinary citizens is said to be the fount of democracy, but many Americans try hard to avoid appearing to care about politics. To discover how, where, and why Americans create this culture of avoidance, the author accompanied suburban volunteers, activists, and recreation club members for two and a half years, listening to them talk – and avoid talking – about the wider world, both within their groups and in their encounters with government, the media, and corporate authorities. Unlike interview-based studies of political participation, civic culture, and public opinion, *Avoiding politics* shows how citizens create and express ideas in everyday life, contrasting their compassionate, curious, and open-minded private conversations with their mysterious lack of publicly voiced political engagement. This is a unique book which challenges received ideas about culture, power, and democracy, while exposing the hard work of producing apathy. Its clear exposition of the qualitative methods used also makes it exceptionally useful for students of political and cultural sociology, communications, and politics.

NINA ELIASOPH teaches in the Department of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She was a Visiting Scholar at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, 1994–95, and has published in the areas of sociology, politics, and communications. She has also produced news and public affairs programs for radio. This is her first book.

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Acknowledgments

While writing this book, I have felt like one of those cartoon characters who has an angel perched on one side of her nose, arguing with a devil perched on the other. Luckily, I have had an imaginative, politically and morally committed, and gentle population of angels engaged in a good-humored debate there, on the bridge of my nose.

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