The Man and His Work

Saul Alinsky grew up dirt poor in a strictly observant Jewish family on Maxwell Street in Chicago, Illinois...

After graduating from the University of Chicago he married Helene, adopted two children and pursued further studies in sociology and criminology. His interests continued to broaden as he searched for constructive responses to the poverty, racism, social disintegration and hopelessness of urban slums, beginning with the "Back of the Yards" in Chicago in 1940. In the process he discovered organizational principles that he advanced through creation of a non profit - the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF).

Alinsky scorned the ideologies of his day on the left and right that prejudged causes and precluded innovative responses to some of the nation's most pressing social problems. His disposition, reflecting his Jewish roots, was always to side with the cut out, the shut out, the powerless, the impoverished - what he called the "have nots". He understood his core mission to be the revitalization of American democracy under threat at home and abroad.

Before his untimely death at the age of 63 in 1972, Saul Alinsky spawned what is arguably the most expansive social movement alive in the United States today. His organizational progeny affiliated with the IAF constitute the oldest and largest network of community organizations in the US and abroad. Their work is arguably the gold standard of broad based organization. (Visit West-Southwest IAF, Metro IAF, and IAF Northwest) In addition, the PICO, Gamaliel, and DART networks are making an impact along with a host of local organizations that trace their inspiration and methodology back to the principles of organization that Alinsky devised.

"Wherever democracy is revered and citizens seek power over decisions impacting their lives, his spirit and organizational genius is present. We need Alinsky now more than ever."
-Anonymous

Alinsky's books:
Reveille for Radicals,
John L. Lewis, An Unauthorized Biography,
Rules for Radicals.
Saul Alinsky was first and foremost a true believer in democracy and the participation of ordinary people in decisions impacting their lives. He developed a robust expression of this democratic faith in a new organizational format, community organization, that brought together local congregations, unions, neighborhood centers and schools for positive collaborative action on vital issues. In the process he invented an entirely new profession - community organizer.

Attempts to curb the reach of his spirited defense of democratic practice and discredit the values ground from which he spoke and acted have failed miserably. The geometric expansion of broad based community organizations around the United States and abroad coupled with the scale and scope of the positive impacts these organizations have generated is testimony to this enduring legacy.

The Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) founded by Alinsky continues to evolve in new directions along with the changing times. Though many of the core organizational insights continue to bear fruit, the IAF affiliated broad based organizations now span entire metropolitan areas, counties, and states. IAF national presence is largely served by innovative local initiatives that have "gone national".

As word of the constructive contribution made by IAF affiliation has spread, congregational leaders in the United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have taken notice and launched organizing drives in relationship with IAF.

Increasingly, religious bodies interested in putting the values of the Holy Texts into action in public life have turned to IAF training and leadership development as a source of know how and congregational growth.

Sarah Palin, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Rush Limbaugh, Newt Gingrich, Barack Obama, Rudy Giuliani, Glenn Beck and a host of lesser known public figures have weighed in on the merits and demerits of Alinsky's accomplishments, methods and legacy. All agree on a central point: His impact was huge during his own era and ours.

Many of Alinsky's recent detractors seek to link false claims about his beliefs, methods and actions to Barack Obama. Rather than engaging Alinsky directly their method is to damn Obama as an "Alinskyite". In this mode Governor Sarah Palin sought to ridicule then Senator Barack Obama's experience as a community organizer in her acceptance speech for vice presidential nominee of the Republican Party Convention in 2008. Her limited grasp of what community organizers actually do coupled with a willingness to tear down a rapidly growing grassroots
Newt Gingrich launched one assault after another during the Republican Presidential Primary while seeking to advance his own candidacy. His attacks were patterned and amplified through diverse media megaphones. A phenomenon set the McCain/Palin campaign on a course that ultimately ended in the national political graveyard.

- APM Marketplace's Kai Ryssdal discusses "Why Saul Alinsky matters in the 2012 election" with Dr. Bob Bruno, University of Illinois.
- Professor Michael Kazin of Georgetown University weighs in: "Saul Alinsky Wasn’t Who Newt Gingrich Thinks He Was"
- See also Von Hoffman's challenging OpEd in Politico.
- Bill Moyers asks, "Who Is Saul Alinsky?"
Michael Voris and Stephanie Block launch their assault on "Alinskyites" as self styled "Catholic Church Militants". Both claim to be "real" Catholics fighting against the faith-altering philosophy and methods of the "Alinskyites". Voris and Block perform extensive genealogies connecting the hundreds of broad based organizations around the United States to the Industrial Areas Foundation and its founder, Saul Alinsky. Voris takes particular aim at Cardinal Joseph Bernadin and Cardinal Bernadin's "tradition destroying" articulation of the "seamless garment of life" which Bernadin advanced from his throne in the Archdiocese of Chicago. The "seamless garment" approach is an abomination for Voris because it links the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church to a continuum that includes the death penalty, poverty, child welfare and other issues that diminish human dignity. Voris parts company with Pope Benedict XVI and his predecessor John Paul II when he shrinks Catholic Social Teaching to the three issues he favors, namely, abortion, euthanasia and stem cell research. He further parts company with both Popes when he decries Protestantism as "heresy" and judges Judaism "a man made religion". Continue reading, click HERE

**Means/Ends Controversy**

A primary attack point used by both religious and secular critics focuses on a mistaken claim regarding Alinsky's view of the relationship between means and ends. Alinsky attended to both means and ends as parts of a process of democratic engagement. The "means" for Alinsky was participation in public life. The "ends" was a more just society achieved through inclusion and negotiation. In both regards he had high standards which he refused to sacrifice to the exigencies of the moment, financial or otherwise. During the course of his career the dual importance of means and ends is repeatedly evident.

**Critics on the Left**

From the beginning Alinsky had critics on the left. Although he worked first with John L Lewis, founder of the CIO, and later with Herb March and the Meatpackers in Chicago, Alinsky never bought into the radical expansion of governmental programs as a primary means of addressing inequality. His famous claims that the Great Society and Model Cities represented "political pornography" and "welfare colonialism" reflected Alinsky's deeply held viewpoint. Government programs seeking to address the divide between "haves" and "have nots" degenerated into a morass of bureaucracy without the engagement of robust citizens organizations powerful enough to demand accountability. Alinsky throughout his career refused the kind of ideological moorings that so many on the left (and right) required.
Religious congregations have always formed the nucleus of the broad based community organizations that Alinsky spawned. His focus on faith based institutions, however, was not drawn from the thin air of intellectual speculation but from the rich tradition of congregational engagement dating all the way back to the early settlements that became the 13 colonies.

Back then, as Alinsky fully understood, congregations were the teaching institutions as well as the values base of these first settlements. They were the social glue that undergirded emergent democratic practice and the confraternity of leaders conspiring together to build communities of robust faith and entrepreneurial vision.

Breathing the stale air of political opportunism, detractors like Gingrich, have sought to tag Alinsky and the many organizations that learned from his experience as "socialistic", "communistic", "anti-American" and worse. The community renewal - real, concrete, verifiable - that has flowed from the work of IAF itself is living contradiction of these characterizations.

Alinsky's was a democratic faith steeped in the moral claims of Hebrew Scripture. It was this mix of traditions - democratic and Judeo-Christian - that grounded his world view.

Pictured here is Alinsky with Bishop Bernard Sheil. Bishop Sheil joined the board of the Industrial Areas Foundation as a founding member in 1940. He was the longest serving Auxiliary Bishop under Cardinal Mundelein, Archdiocese of Chicago. In addition to supporting Alinsky's groundbreaking community organizing, he founded CYO - the Catholic Youth Organization. Bishop Sheil backed by Cardinal Mundelein saw in Alinsky someone who put Catholic Social Teaching into actual practice. The three were scandalized by the horrific conditions in which families lived and worked in the densely populated neighborhoods behind Chicago's stockyards. The stench, animal waste, and constant threats to child safety endured by poorly paid workers in the meat packing plants provoked their spirited and effective response.
Democratic Craft

Much has been written about the decline and possible fall of democratic habits and practices in the United States and abroad. In a nation that reputedly values democracy there is near universal agreement regarding what IAF Co-Director Michael Gecan calls the "mid life crisis" of American style democracy and IAF Co-Director Ernesto Cortes calls the "unraveling of the fabric of democracy". Alinsky's obsessive care for who did and did not have a voice in public life, who was or was not able to come to the table of decision making led to a remarkable series of discoveries - he called them "rules" - that inform successful public interventions by ordinary people and the institutions that represent them.

Iron Rule: Never do for others what they can do for themselves.

For Alinsky the first rule, the Iron Rule, was grounded in the Scriptural call to respect the dignity of the person. He believed that the capacity of individuals to do for themselves should be respected at all times and embodied in democratic practice.

Power, defined as the ability to act, is a relational concept dependent on having two or more people with a plan.

For Alinsky, ordinary people could learn about the exercise of power by participating in community organizations as they developed plans and relationships to effect positive change.
Community Renewal

Around the United States you will find remarkable examples of highly creative, locally driven transformation of whole communities or regions. While these stories of renewal occur in all kinds of places, a common thread is apparent to the discerning eye. San Antonio, Baltimore, the Rio Grande Valley, Greater Boston, El Paso, East Brooklyn, Tucson... vastly different but all much better off because broad based community organizing as embodied by the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) partnered in the building of powerful organizations of organizations with local leaders of all faiths and backgrounds.

IAF organizations meet this standard in ways that are concrete, measurable and long term. All exemplify change driven from below, informed by democratic and religious values aimed in directions that claimed new ground of community betterment.

These inspiring successes often happen largely outside of mass media attention as the careful work of relationship building only occasionally merits headlines.
As a social entrepreneur Saul Alinsky put himself at the center of much of the action of the organizations he helped build. He reveled in his growing prominence and the apprehension he inspired when he was invited into a community to begin work. Alinsky crafted his public persona to serve his growing notoriety which in turn increased his capacity to raise funds and gain the early respect of what he called the "have nots" in many communities around the country.

The generations of organizers inspired by Alinsky and informed by his organizational genius adopted a different way of doing business. IAF practice minimizes the public role of paid organizers relying instead on community leaders, volunteers, to speak for themselves and their own organizations. Unlike Alinsky, these organizers function deliberately behind the scenes viewing their role as teaching public skills and stirring latent hopes for change.

Upon Alinsky’s death in 1972, Ed Chambers and Richard Harmon assumed responsibility for the Industrial Areas Foundation. These men professionalized the field of community organizing and sought to establish standards related to training, salaries, practices and values.

A succeeding generation of great organizers radically expanded the range and reach of modern IAF broad based organizations and took the work to new heights of impact. This generation includes Ernesto Cortes, Jr. and Michael Gecan - the current Co-Directors of IAF - and Arnold Graf and Sr. Christine Stephens. Their groundbreaking achievements in the field are widely acknowledged and respected.
The medium of exchange for organizers and leaders in the IAF mode is primarily oral and face to face. Story telling lies at the heart of this endeavor. Stories first shared one to one then developed inside of public events stir imaginations and challenge moral sensibilities. Alinsky himself was a master, sometimes apocryphal, story teller. Stories of pain and hope, crafted to stand for the whole inside public events ("actions", assemblies, conventions), also find cultural expression in music, visual arts, essay, and videography. Many of the public events organized in the Alinsky tradition assume a near liturgical shape and incorporate facets of the "work of the people" into structured formats. An example of an event that embraces musicality inside of an IAF affiliated organization is the First Las Vegas Valley Community Convention held May 22, 2012 at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.
While the Industrial Areas Foundation dates back through the late 1930's, the modern IAF launched in the late 1960's/early 1970's with two key developments. One, spearheaded by Ed Chambers and Dick Harmon, established the curriculum and protocols for IAF's Ten Day Training. The other, pioneered by Ernesto Cortes, Jr., re-imagined broad based organizing as a powerful, enduring, institutionally grounded organization of organizations.

**IAF Ten Day Training**

Many of the universals that were ultimately included in IAF Ten Day Training were first identified by Saul Alinsky. It was Chambers and Harmon, however, who over a two year period sifted through their shared experience to further identify, refine and experiment with these universals. While Alinsky was spending most of his time speaking on college campuses, Harmon and Chambers were hard at work building an institution of organizational learning that attracted individuals seeking a career in the emergent field increasingly professionalized by IAF.

**Cortés Organizes C.O.P.S.**

Ernie Cortés moved to the Chicago area in 1971 to learn organizing from Chambers and Harmon but he quickly translated that experience into a new, more powerful creation. In 1973 Cortes conducted well over 1,000 individual meetings in San Antonio, Texas and from that ground was able to build an organization of unprecedented scale and power - **Communities Organized for Public Service - COPS**.

COPS became the flagship of IAF making massive improvements to the City of San Antonio, particularly in neighborhoods that had been ignored for generations by powerful local elites. As the victories of ordinary families flowed from the Cortés engineered organization, institutional leaders around Texas and the nation began to take notice. IAF grew in Texas, California, Maryland, and New York.
Saul Alinsky remains stuck in the craw of right wing demonology. Like something that can’t be digested or expelled. He remains lodged there, hard edged and multifaceted, too tough to handle. The latest testimony to Alinsky’s enduring status as an indigestible persona comes from the headline boomlet offered up by a former New York City mayor, Rudy Giuliani. Willing to probe his subterranean world for public benefit, Giuliani disputes President Obama’s big love for the USA and for Rudy himself. In the course of this internal excursion he invokes none other than The Man himself. He called Saul. Or rather recalled Saul.

“So Saul Alinsky,” he said, lying through his gritty teeth, “believed in basically the peaceful overthrow of the United States government...”

So there he is - Saul Alinsky - popping out from a story of unrequited love as told by a man in need.

What are we to make of this?

We can only speculate along with the good former mayor about who really loves who and why. What was Rudy exposed to early in his childhood that predisposed him to fabricate boogeymen? What psychic damage bound him for aspirational disappointment? Why now in the twilight remnant of a political career return Saul Alinsky to center stage in a right wing meme projectile?

Only his Shadow knows for sure.

"This, then, is the cause to which we here have bound ourselves. It is the cause of making democracy a dynamic force -- of making it work -- of breaking the strangle-holds of undemocratic practices - of smashing the apathy which has pervaded much of our society -- of doing all this so that democracy may grow in every way -- and grow it must if it is to live." Statement by Saul Alinsky to the IAF Board of Directors, May 8, 1942
wealth,
but I am confused as to why my father is mentioned in Lyle Rescott’s recent letter complaining about rich socialism backers ("A narrow view of money and politics," May 29).

Saul Alinsky’s yearly salary at the time of his death was $25,000. Hardly a princely sum. He owned no stocks, his life insurance policy was the totality of his estate. He owned an 8-year-old Chevy and we lived in a rented apartment. I guess the mention of his name is just included as a "dog whistle" for those who need a boogie man to convince them of evil.

David Alinsky
Read more: http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/opinion/bs-ed-alinsky-letter-20140602,0,3525270.story#ixzz33VgShkey

Charles Koch

Some years back Charles Koch parlayed a mid sized oil service and engineering firm founded by his father into a multi national conglomerate. In the process he became the sixth wealthiest individual in the world. Among other things his firm manufactures Dixie Cups, a product he didn't invent but had the acumen to acquire, and the chemical stew patented as "Stainmaster", a mix he didn't invent but also astutely acquired.

By virtue of his spectacular wealth Mr. Koch is now entitled to a Pharonic Pulpit to accompany the more run of the mill foundation establishing, lobbying and influence peddling that flows from possession of mega green. The Wall Street Journal has confirmed his standing. Mr. Koch is for liberty and he thinks you should be too.

About ten years ago, badgered by EPA and OSHA governmental nobodies to clean up his industrial act, Mr. Koch decided to up his political visibility and download hordes of cash on sympatico candidates. Now he's into politics big time, trading barbs with Senator Harry Reid who, unlike many politicos, doesn't think being unimaginatively rich always requires genuflection.

Mr. Koch is an admirer of Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises - the Austrian School of Economics and all that. He says they helped him understand who he was as a person and a business man. Forget Freud. Embrace the Austrian economists and you'll be better for it.

Guess who’s a burr under Mr. Koch's Pharonic saddle? **None other than Saul David Alinsky.** Here's how he goes at him while opining in the aforementioned Journal.

Says Koch: "Instead of encouraging free and open debate, collectivists strive to discredit and intimidate opponents. **They engage in character assassination. (I should know, as the almost daily target of their attacks.)** This is the approach that Arthur Schopenhauer described in the 19th century, that Saul Alinsky famously advocated in the 20th and that so many despots have infamously practiced. Such tactics are the antithesis of what is required for a free society—and a telltale sign that the collectivists do not have good answers."

Schopenhauer, Alinsky and the despots. Pity the poor victim of infamous practices.

BTW, Mr. Koch, Saul Alinsky never advocated character assassination and he certainly wasn't a "collectivist".

Ralph Benko
Take a look at this interesting piece by **Ralph Benko in Forbes.** It captures decisive
turns in the lives of both Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama that rotate around vocational decisions in which Saul Alinsky and his heirs play a decisive role. I think this piece is required reading for anyone interested in reflecting on the careers of Clinton and Obama and perhaps their own as well.

**Warehousing and Torture Proposed on...**

1/29/2014

Check out what's circulating on websites like The Blaze

**BOOKS**

The 10 most popular passages in Saul Alinsky’s ‘Rules for Radicals’

noslave posted Jan. 21, 2014 at 9:24am

"COMMUNISTS RAN AND HID LIKE COCKAROACHES DURING MC CARTHY ERA, THEN THEY CONNED EVERYBODY INTO SUBMISSION WITH POLITICAL CORRECTNESS, NOW THEIR EMBOLDENED??, if each true american patriot, drags one of these people off to wareouses quietly?tortures, then deposits their carcass in a dumpster or?? then we can begin to heal otherwise kepp watching the decline??ill its to late?look how far they’ve come with us being politically correct??"

Organizing for Action is one of those political phenomena that ranks right up there with fabricated hit pieces when it comes to deliberate deception. The only honest word of the three is “for”. The other two “Organizing” and “Action” aggressively misrepresent their meaning.

What the Obama crowd is doing here has nothing to do with organizing. What they call “organizing” is public relations, marketing. What they call “action” is selling. Linking organizing and action with marketing and selling is an attempt to mystify and in some fashion ennoble what is other wise mere advertising.

This may not matter much given the low profile and relatively small amounts of money committed to “Organizing for Action” in an advertising mode, but it does point to a deeper duplicity in the Obama modus operandi worth considering.

Years ago, in a seminar in Texas, one of America’s leading African-American intellectuals, when asked about then candidate Obama’s much touted community organizing experience, dismissed it as “resume padding” - part of the construction of a misleading story for public consumption designed to advance a political career.

Organizing for Action seems cast in the same mold.

**Lamb or Beef, Mr President?**

1/23/2014

Obama Visits Soup Kitchen On Martin Luther King Day
To interpret the MLK Day photo op on behalf of the White House public relations team:

"The Rev Dr Martin Luther King, Jr repeatedly risked his life and ultimately lost it to promote community service projects. He was really a nice guy with a quaint but timely message that we all need to remember."

Thanks to you, White House pr types, for the warm and fuzzy story that will inspire my gift of a can of beans to my local food bank. And here I thought Dr King was calling us to be the cutting edge of risky, conflict ridden political change.

**Promise them anything...**

1/21/2014

...but give them a zone.

Who is the Obama crowd trying to kid with this Promise Zone thing? Promise what? To whom?

Just when you thought the world was safe from failed enterprise like Enterprise Zones and failed empowerment like Empowerment Zones here comes the New Promise Zones. Oh boy, lets play gather the stakeholders again.

And I always thought recycling was a good thing.

Downton Abbey recycles the story line of Upstairs/Downstairs. Downtown Promise recycles the storyline of Downtown Enterprise, aka, Downtown Empowerment, aka been there, done that.

**Saul Alinsky in Business?**

1/16/2014

T-Mobil CEO John Legere

The saga of Saul Alinsky continues to unfold over forty years after his death. He makes an appearance in places one would never expect. Here he is in a business publication, depoliticized. His principles are used to interpret behavior of a corporate leader in fierce competition with a slow-footed AT&T.

I can only imagine the chuckle he would have gotten from all this post mortem attention. After all, he craved the public eye and was way ahead of his time in using cutting edge media to advance his public image.

At one point Alinsky wonders how organizations will be built without the aid of that establishment-bashing image he so successfully nurtured.
The Industrial Areas Foundation has done pretty well in this regard by finding ways to engage communities, regions and states in organizing drives since Alinsky’s death. A key reason is the strength of the leadership training protocols that Ed Chambers and Dick Harmon put in place in the late sixties/early seventies. Without this infrastructure IAF expansion would likely have died on the vine.

It's also worth noting that the Chambers/Harmon innovations were copied by others aspiring to build organizational networks.