

SAUL ALINSKY ONLINE PROJECT



Saul Alinsky (1909-1972) was one of the most controversial figures in U.S. social/political history. He concerned himself mainly with helping poor people gain more power to help uplift their lives, participated in many Civil Rights campaigns to work for Black rights and improvement of life in Black ghettos, and—through his employee Fred Ross—had a major hand in shaping the work of Cesar Chavez and the Delano Grape Boycott. Born in Chicago to

Russian-Jewish immigrants, Alinsky organized Chicago's Back of the Yards neighborhood and, while organizing the Woodlawn neighborhood, founded the Industrial Areas Foundation, an organization helping to found other community organizations across the U.S. He virtually invented Community Organizing and what we now call grassroots organizing or mobilization. Though generally reviled by conservatives as a socialist and commie, many have admired him as well and some have noted Alinsky's influence on Tea Party tactics. Conservative icon William F. Buckley, Jr. said Alinsky was "very close to an organizational genius."

This online project provides some background material on Alinsky as a way to add to the assignment of reading the Prologue and first two chapters of his classic *Rules for Radicals*. The first item below, summarizing some of Alinsky's "rules for radicals," comes from a **Glenn Beck fan site**, and Beck himself, both admiringly and accusingly, has recently called Donald Trump the "GOP's Alinsky."

1) Read a [Summary list of "12 Alinsky RULES."](#) The rules come directly from Alinsky's later chapter on Tactics, with parentheses expanding on the rule. These expansions come partly from other parts of Alinsky's text, partly from whoever put this summary list together. It's a good editing job, though Alinsky actually lists 13 rules. This list leaves out Rule 10: *"The major premise for tactics is the development of operations that will maintain a constant pressure upon the opposition.* It is unceasing pressure that results in the reactions from the opposition that are essential for the success of the campaign. It should be remembered not only that the action is in the reaction but that action is itself the consequence of reaction and reaction to the reaction, ad infinitum. The pressure produces the reaction, and constant pressure sustains action."

2) Listen to an excerpt from an [Interview with Studs Terkel](#). What about these two distinctive Chicago voices?! About 6 minutes in, Alinsky acts out a conversation between an organizer and a person in a neighborhood, a conversation written out on p. 103 of *Rules for Radicals*.

3) Watch [Bill Moyer's defense of Alinsky](#).

4) Listen to Sufjan Steven's ["The Perpetual Self, Or What Would Saul Alinsky Do?"](#) The lyrics (with stanzas separated by "...") are: Everything is lost, uh oh / But I know that you can take it to the Lord / Everything you want, uh oh / Is it all that you can gather for yourself? Do you love a lot, uh oh? / It's the love that changes gifts to everyone / Everything is lost, uh oh / Is it strange that you perpetuate yourself? You wonder what it costs, uh oh / It's the joy that he will carry to the door / Everything is lost, uh oh / Still I know that you can take it to the world All that he has given to the world / All that he has given to the world / All that he has given to the world...

Questions to Consider:

Please post *short* answers to the following on Blackboard to your group's Group Discussion Board by noon Tuesday, then *briefly* respond to any one post from any of your group members. I'll set up the discussion threads for you. We'll continue the discussion online Wednesday.

- 1) What ONE aspect of the Alinsky readings attracted (or repelled) you the most?
- 2) How do you think Sufian Steven's song relates to Alinsky in any way?
- 3) I have paired the Alinsky readings with the Dick Gregory reading from my *Black Writing from Chicago* for many reasons. What main connection do you see between Gregory and Alinsky—or any of the other readings we have done this term?