

# Hillary Rodham senior thesis

In 1969, **Hillary Rodham** wrote a 92-page **senior thesis** for Wellesley College titled "*There Is Only the Fight . . . : An Analysis of the Alinsky Model*". The subject was famed radical community organizer Saul Alinsky.

## 1 Thesis

The thesis offered a critique of Alinsky's methods as largely ineffective, all the while describing Alinsky's personality as appealing. The thesis sought to fit Alinsky into a line of American social activists, including Eugene V. Debs, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Walt Whitman. Written in formal academic language, the thesis concluded that "[Alinsky's] power/conflict model is rendered inapplicable by existing social conflicts" and that Alinsky's model had not expanded nationally due to "the anachronistic nature of small autonomous conflict."<sup>[1]</sup>

In the acknowledgements and end notes of the thesis, Rodham thanked Alinsky for two interviews and a job offer. She declined the latter, saying that "after spending a year trying to make sense out of [Alinsky's] inconsistency, I need three years of legal rigor." Rodham, an honors student at Wellesley, received an A grade on the thesis.<sup>[1]</sup>

## 2 White House and Wellesley limiting of access

The work was unnoticed until Hillary Rodham Clinton entered the White House as First Lady. Clinton researchers and political opponents sought out the thesis, thinking it contained evidence that Rodham had held strong radical or socialist views.

In early 1993, the White House requested that Wellesley not release the thesis to anyone.<sup>[1]</sup> Wellesley complied, instituting a new rule that closed access to the thesis of any sitting U.S. president or first lady, a rule that in practice applied only to Rodham.<sup>[2]</sup> Clinton critics and several biographers seized upon this action as a sure sign that the thesis held politically explosive contents that would reveal her radicalism or extremism.<sup>[3]</sup> Hostile Clinton biographer Barbara Olson wrote in 1999 that Clinton "does not want the American people to know the extent to which she internalized and assimilated the beliefs and methods of Saul Alinsky."<sup>[3]</sup> In her 2003 memoirs, Clinton mentioned the thesis only briefly, saying she had agreed with

some of Alinsky's ideas, but had not agreed with his belief that it was impossible to "change the system" from inside.<sup>[4]</sup>

Years after the Clintons left the White House, the mystery thesis held its allure; for example, in 2005 Clinton critic Peggy Noonan wrote that it was "the Rosetta Stone of Hillary studies . . . [which] Wellesley College obligingly continues to suppress on her request."<sup>[5]</sup>

## 3 Thesis unveiled

In fact, however, the thesis had been unlocked after the Clintons left the White House in 2001 and is available for reading at the Wellesley College archives.<sup>[6]</sup> In 2005, msnbc.com investigative reporter Bill Dedman sent his journalism class from Boston University to read the thesis and write articles about it; one of the students, Rick Heller, posted his article online in December 2005.<sup>[7]</sup> The thesis is also available through interlibrary loan on microfilm, a method reporter Dorian Davis used when he obtained it in January 2007, and sent it to Noonan and to Clinton critic Amanda Carpenter at *Human Events*, who wrote a piece<sup>[8]</sup> on it in March. Although publishing the thesis violates copyright,<sup>[1]</sup> it can nevertheless be found on various websites.

The suppression of the thesis from 1993 to 2001 at the request of the Clinton White House was documented in March 2007 by reporter Dedman, who read the thesis at the Wellesley library and interviewed Rodham's thesis adviser. Dedman found that the thesis did not disclose Rodham's own views much. <sup>[1]</sup> A *Boston Globe* assessment found the thesis nuanced, and said that "While [Rodham] defends Alinsky, she is also dispassionate, disappointed, and amused by his divisive methods and dogmatic ideology."<sup>[3]</sup> Rodham's former professor and thesis adviser Alan Schechter told msnbc.com that "*There Is Only The Fight . . .*" was a good thesis, and that its suppression by the Clinton White House "was a stupid political decision, obviously, at the time."<sup>[2]</sup>

## 4 References

- [1] Bill Dedman, "Reading Hillary Rodham's hidden thesis", msnbc.com, March 2, 2007. Accessed March 3, 2007.
- [2] Bill Dedman, "How the Clintons wrapped up Hillary's thesis", msnbc.com, March 2, 2007. Accessed March 3,

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- [3] Michael Levenson, "A student's words, a candidate's struggle", *The Boston Globe*, March 4, 2007. Accessed July 14, 2007.
  - [4] Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Living History*, Simon & Schuster, 2003, ISBN 0-7432-2224-5, p. 38.
  - [5] Peggy Noonan, "Eine Kleine Biographie", *The Wall Street Journal*, June 23, 2005. Accessed March 3, 2007.
  - [6] Available there for public viewing, but not dissemination on the Internet, due to copyright restrictions.
  - [7] Rick Heller, "Hillary Clinton's Bachelor's Thesis", Centerfield Blog, December 19, 2005. Accessed July 9, 2008. Archived June 14, 2011.
  - [8] "Hillary's Wellesley Thesis Shows Want of An Enemy", *Human Events*, March 9, 2007

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