

Saul Alinsky

AKA Saul David Alinsky

Born: [30-Jan-1909](#)

Birthplace: [Chicago, IL](#)

Died: [12-Jun-1972](#)

Location of death: [Carmel, CA](#)

Cause of death: Heart Failure

Remains: Cremated

Gender: Male

Religion: [Agnostic \[1\]](#)

Race or Ethnicity: White

Sexual orientation: Straight

Occupation: [Activist](#)

Nationality: United States

Executive summary: *Rules for Radicals*

Saul Alinsky is considered a founder of modern protest tactics and the father of community organizing. He worked his way through the University of Chicago, earning a degree in archaeology, but with few openings in that field during the Great Depression he worked as a prison sociologist. In 1935 he became a part-time union organizer, and the next year he founded the Back-of-the-Yards Neighborhood Council, based in a declining section of Chicago's south side where he lived, organizing activists to demand city government address the area's concerns.

After turning the neighborhood's fortune around in just a few years, Alinsky used a sizable grant from millionaire [Marshall Field III](#) to set up the Industrial Areas Foundation in 1939, and repeated his organizing success in other neighborhoods and other cities. In 1959 he co-founded The Woodlawn Organization, a civil rights group that challenged Mayor [Richard J. Daley](#)'s political machine by registering tens of thousands of black voters.

Over Alinsky's long career he made news by organizing African Americans to pressure Eastman Kodak into hiring blacks, and by organizing workers' councils in Chicago, steelworkers in Pittsburgh, First Nationals (natives) in Canada, and Chicanos in the American Southwest, where he became a mentor to labor activist [Cesar Chavez](#). Alinsky's philosophy, in brief, was that working against injustice is a moral imperative, and he feared that widespread poverty could leave Americans and the nation as a whole vulnerable to demagogues. He always called himself a radical, but his "power to the people" tactics rejected violence, relying instead on rallies, marches, and public participation in pestering government officials.

His work was the subject of [Hillary Clinton](#)'s 1969 college thesis at Wellesley

College. A 1970 profile in *Time* described Alinsky as having "possibly antagonized more people -- regardless of race, color or creed -- than any other living American". He dedicated his book *Rules for Radicals* to Lucifer, whom he described as "the first radical known to man who rebelled against the establishment and did it so effectively that he at least won his own kingdom". In old age he said, "Once I get into hell, I'll start organizing the have-nots over there".

NNDB MAPPER



Patterns,
Peta,
Pot,
and

Politically Incorrect

Even decades after his death Alinsky remains enthusiastically despised among those on the political right, who prefer that communities of "have-nots" remain unorganized. Contrary to their common claims he was never a Marxist, communist, socialist, or bomb-thrower, and he was not the mentor of [Barack Obama](#), who was ten years old and living in Honolulu when Alinsky died in Carmel in 1972. The Industrial Areas Foundation is still headquartered in Chicago.



Requires Flash 7+ and
Javascript.

[1] "I got afraid my folks were going to try to turn me into a rabbi, so I went through some pretty rapid withdrawal symptoms and kicked the habit. Now I'm a charter member of Believers Anonymous. But I'll tell you one thing about religious identity: Whenever anyone asks me my religion, I always say -- and always will say -- Jewish."



Father: Benjamin Alinsky (tailor, b. circa 1860, d. 26-Apr-1952)

Mother: Sarah Tannenbaum Alinsky Rice (seamstress, b. circa 1880, div. 1922)

Brother: Harry Alinsky (half-brother from Benjamin Alinsky's first marriage, b. 1897)

Brother: Max Alinsky (half-brother from Benjamin Alinsky's first marriage, b. circa 1899)

Wife: Helene Simon Alinsky (one son, one daughter, m. 9-Jun-1932, d. 1947 drowning)

Son: David Alinsky

Daughter: Kathryn Alinsky

Wife: Jean Graham Alinsky (m. 15-May-1959, div. 1970)

Wife: Irene McInnis Alinsky (m. May-1971, until his death)

High School: [Hollywood High School, Hollywood, CA \(1926\)](#)

University: [PhB Archaeology, University of Chicago \(1930\)](#)

Fellow: [Criminology, University of Chicago \(1930-32\)](#)

[Illinois State Official](#) Illinois Prison Board, Sociologist (1931-36)

[CIO Organizer \(1935-39\)](#)

[Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council](#) Founder (1936)

[Industrial Areas Foundation](#) Founder (1939)

[The Woodlawn Organization](#) Co-Founder (1959)

[Institute for Juvenile Research](#)

[Heart Attack](#) Carmel, CA (12-Jun-1972, fatal)

[Lithuanian Ancestry](#) Paternal

[Russian Ancestry](#)

[Jewish Ancestry](#)

Risk Factors: [Smoking](#)

FILMOGRAPHY AS ACTOR

Author of books:

Reveille for Radicals (, politics)

John L. Lewis: An Unauthorized Biography (, biography)

Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Rebels (, politics)



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