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The Journal of Speculative Philosophy, New Series, Volume 16,
Number 1, 2002, pp. 50-66 (Article)

Published by Penn State University Press

DOI: [10.1353/jsp.2002.0002](https://doi.org/10.1353/jsp.2002.0002)



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Saul D. Alinsky and the Chicago School

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The Chicago School of Pragmatism is one of the most prominent intellectual and activist movements of the late 1800s and early 1900s, one that is receiving a fair amount of attention with the resurgence of American Pragmatism (Shook 2001). Initially led by John Dewey, the movement defies easy categorization and has influenced both scholars and social activists. Two of the most famous Chicago social activists of the twentieth century, Jane Addams and Saul David Alinsky, had ties to the Chicago School. While the relationship of Addams with the Chicago School has been persuasively shown (Seigfried 1996, Deegan 1988), the relationship with Alinsky, the “dean of modern community organizing” (Boyte 1983, 34), has not been examined. The following argument establishes that relationship.

Neither Alinsky’s intellectual roots nor the social theory of his Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) have yet to be definitively researched by scholars. IAF Executive Director Edward Chambers (1995) recognizes this as a weakness and acknowledges that the IAF has always been better at action than reflection. The classic community organizing texts are Alinsky’s three books and numerous articles as well as Chambers’s 1978 extended pamphlet *Organizing for Family and Congregation*.¹ These texts, however, do not provide a social-theoretical explicit grounding.

Alinsky’s Earliest Mentor

The word “mentor” refers to a counselor who guides the development of another’s professional and personal growth. In the first biography of

The Journal of Speculative Philosophy, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2002.

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Alinsky, P. David Finks argues that Alinsky's mentor was United Mine Workers leader John L. Lewis (1984, 45). Chambers (1995) concurs, adding that "Alinsky wrote the book on Lewis (*Lewis: An Unauthorized Biography*) and that the principles of organizing are in that book." However, Alinsky first met Lewis in 1939 through his work with the Back of the Yards Organizing Council, after he had already developed the central components of his organizing theory. If Alinsky had already formed his views, if Lewis was not his mentor, who was?

Alinsky attended the University of Chicago from the fall of 1926 through the spring of 1932, majoring in sociology. Finks recognizes the influence of sociologist Robert Ezra Park as Alinsky's "favorite professor," and Ernest W. Burgess, "a colleague of Park" (1984, 61). Horwitt, Alinsky's second biographer, agrees. Balancing the "intellectually stronger of the two," Park, with the "highly respected" Burgess, Horwitt (1989) furthers and reinforces Finks's claim of both sociologists' influence upon Alinsky. While both authors' purpose is biographical and their audience popular, it is nonetheless important to examine on what basis their claims of influence are made. Neither shows any bibliographic reference to the works of Park and Burgess to substantiate their judgments.

The Chicago School of Pragmatic Sociology: Alinsky's Intellectual Roots

The Chicago School of Pragmatic Sociology epoch (1915–1950) emanated from the single principle that "the science of sociology should be built upon empirical research" (Bogue 1974, ix), research that moved away from "general theory, social philosophy, or purely historical work toward the firsthand empirical investigation by means of personal documents, observations, and interviewing" (Bulmer 1984, xiii). The school originated in 1892 when President Harper recruited Albion Small who built a program that came to dominate American Sociology for thirty-five years. Small's coauthored *An Introduction to the Study of Society* (1894) was a "laboratory guide" for the study of American society and provided an outline for Chicago sociology. Small viewed sociology as a tool for democratic social change: "conventionality is the thesis, Socialism the antithesis, Sociology is the synthesis" (quoted in Smith 1988, 76). The exponents of this approach (George E. Vincent, William I. Thomas, Ellsworth Faris, Robert Ezra Park, and Ernest Watson Burgess, to name a few) pioneered research initiatives in urban Chicago that eventually became subdivisions in American sociology: urban studies, the family, criminology, race relations, mass media, and social psychology.² Alinsky referred to these sociologists as "men whose names were to be as famous in sociology as the Apostles are in Christianity."³

Small's sociology department intentionally drew upon the works of John Dewey and George Herbert Mead.⁴ The core features of this thought were acceptance

of the scientific method, empiricism, biological evolution, and American democracy (Morris 1970, 4). It was a philosophical methodology built upon an awareness of the emergent nature of reality, wherein experience was viewed as a laboratory where theories and practices were continually experimented with and their validities tested.

With the contemporary resurgence of American pragmatism,⁵ the Chicago School is receiving a fair amount of attention.⁶ William James's characterization of Dewey's leadership at the university with its own indigenous "real thought and a real school" remains the most lucid (1904, 2). The process orientation of Chicago pragmatism underscored the tentativeness and hypothetical character of all knowledge and human understanding. Truth and meaning were socially constructed concepts emerging within communal inquiry, which in and of itself was continually subject to the self-corrective processes of democratic life.

While Small worked closely with Dewey (Rucker 1969, 13, 131), it was the work of Thomas and his appropriation of Mead's ideas that lifted Chicago Sociology to national prominence. The 1918 publication of Thomas's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* marks the school's ascent to national leadership. A landmark of pragmatic sociology, the work employed novel empirical methods of research, such as personal documents and field observations as well as called for immigrants to develop their own democratic organizations in order to survive. Thomas argued that immigrants found themselves in a system of new relationships, political and economic, over which they had no control. They had to assimilate into a new culture and that meant "the individual should experience a sense of participation in the community and control over his or her own life" (Smith 1988, 106), and that required organization. Burgess, a student and later a colleague of Thomas, wrote that Thomas's thought was "profoundly affected by the pragmatic philosophy of John Dewey," whose influence "pervaded the university," and by the "social thinking of George Herbert Mead" (Burgess 1948, 760). Thomas was Mead's first sociology graduate student at Chicago and consciously applied his ideas, such as the role of hypothesis in social reform and the emergent nature of consciousness, in his work (Lewis and Smith 1980, 229).

During Alinsky's tenure at the university, the sociology department was chaired by Ellsworth Faris. Full professors were Robert Ezra Park, William F. Ogburn, Ernest Watson Burgess, and Edwin H. Sutherland. During his five years at Chicago, Alinsky completed twenty-eight courses within the department (Office of the Recorder, University of Chicago, Transcripts, 1926–1932). Eighteen of these courses were under the direction of three sociologists: Faris, Park, and Burgess.⁷

Robert E. L. Faris identifies Faris, Park, and Burgess as the "nucleus of the organism that was to grow so vigorously in the 1920's" (1967, 26). These men taught that society "was in a never ending process of flux" and that it was "an unending competition and conflict of interests" (Park and Burgess 1969, viii). They mentored their students in firsthand empirical investigations of Chicago's

neighborhoods, investigations that led to the development of the University of Chicago's Sociology series. The most notable student works were Nels Anderson's *The Hobo* (1923), Ernest R. Mowrer's *Family and Disorganization* (1927), Louis Wirth's *The Ghetto* (1928), and Harvey Zorbaugh's *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (Bulmer 1984, 3).

Faris studied at Chicago under Dewey and Mead, obtaining his doctorate there in 1914, and became department chair in 1925. He recognized both his own work and that of the department as carrying on the "tradition of Mead."⁸ Burgess concurred: "since Thomas left the University in 1918 his successor, Ellsworth Faris, has carried forward his courses with much more specific application of the theoretical formulations of John Dewey and George H. Mead" (Burgess 1948, 762).

Alinsky registered for Faris's course Social Psychology in the autumn of 1927, followed by four more courses with Faris, one at the undergraduate level and three at the graduate level. Social Origins was an introductory undergraduate course and The Social Attitudes was a three-semester graduate seminar sequence (University of Chicago, Transcripts). Social Psychology examined the origin and development of personality: "emotion and emotional expression, gesture and the rise of communication; nature and significance of language; conscious and unconscious imitation; objectivity and self-consciousness; society as an organization of interacting personalities." Social Origins addressed the sentiments and moral attitudes of human development and "was designed to give the student acquaintance with the evolutionary character of social processes and access to a considerable amount of concrete data" (Official Publications of the University of Chicago, 1927-28, 90). For each course, topics and texts were drawn from Mead's work. Alinsky earned grades of B and C, respectively. The three-part Social Attitudes graduate seminar was designed to define and illustrate a method for the analysis of "social attitudes, habits, and modes of behavior" and the process of social interaction through which these attitudes are "modified, generalized, and transmitted." Faris accomplished this with his students through the collection of "biographies, letters, psychoanalytical records, and other intimate documents" (Official Publications, 1931-32, 130). Alinsky earned a "Pass" in all three courses.

Burgess was of the first generation of University of Chicago trained sociologists. Burgess was of the first generation of University of Chicago trained sociologists. "Acknowledged," notes Donald Bogue, as the "outstanding student in the department," Burgess studied under Small, Vincent, and Thomas (1974, xiii). Bogue describes Burgess as "a social reformer" who had little faith in contemporary social work and who saw "social research as the solution to society's ills" (1974, x). In Burgess's doctoral thesis, "The Function of Socialization in Evolution," he wrote, "with the realization of democracy in our present age it is now possible to reconstruct our social order" (quoted in Bogue 1974, 5). This reconstruction, observed Burgess, was based upon the "harnessing of social forces" through the actions of change agents, the citizen who "in so acting . . . realizes his best self" (quoted in Bogue 1974, 5).

Burgess's impact upon American sociology has yet to be told. No biography has been published to date. In addition to prolific publishing, Burgess held office within and led such organizations as the American Sociological Society, Society for the Study of Social Problems, Sociological Research Association, Social Science Research Council, and the Gerontological Society. He was an editor for publications of the American Sociological Society as well as the *American Journal of Sociology* and *Marriage and Family Living*. Burgess's quiet determination and scholarship were overshadowed, however, by the flamboyant personalities of Thomas and Park. Bulmer perpetuates Burgess's secondary status with the following characterization: "Burgess shared, and operated in, the tradition of W. I. Thomas and Robert E. Park" (1984, 5). Deegan furthers the secondary status of Burgess by characterizing his work as antifeminist and as one of the leaders in downplaying the significance of Jane Addams and the settlement movement (1988, 148).⁹

Burgess, in the "Contribution of Robert E. Park to Sociology," examines his colleague's life. He recognizes the early, formative influence that Dewey, Mead, and Franklin Ford had upon Park at the University of Michigan. Each of the three "in his own way, was seeking to understand human nature and society as a basis for building a better world" (Burgess 1945, 256). Park, introduced to Ford by Dewey, would spend his next ten years after graduation as a newspaper reporter. Returning to graduate study at Harvard, Park worked under William James, Josiah Royce, Georg Simmel, and Wilhelm Windelband. Park then worked for Booker T. Washington and pursued an interest in studying race and nationalities. Friendships with Thomas and Small led him to become a faculty member at the University of Chicago in 1914.

In 1915, Park published the seminal article "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the City Environment." He argued that a city must be viewed as a "psychophysical mechanism—in and through which private and political interests find corporate expression," and as an entity that "is rooted in the habits and customs of the people who inhabit it" (1915, 578). Dissecting urban life, Park went on to describe neighborhoods, industries, church, schools, families, mobs and gang activity, and the ways in which these institutions interact and both shape and are shaped by the evolution of human life. Park concluded that Chicago was "a laboratory or clinic in which human nature and social processes may be most conveniently and profitably studied" (1915, 612). He did not discuss how the city was to be studied nor did he address the issue of democratic social change. For that, Park turned to his new colleague, Ernest W. Burgess.

Burgess joined the faculty in 1916, the same year in which he published "The Social Survey: A Field for Constructive Service by Departments of Sociology." The article argued that a survey could lead to social change and developed a new role for the sociologist. Sociologists were not to conduct a qualitative or quantitative survey; rather, they were to "organize the community for self-investigation" (1916, 14). The sociologist was to be understood as a community organizer,

a professional who entered into a neighborhood to organize a local committee that had three purposes: (1) train local workers to do a community survey; (2) educate these workers about social problems; and (3) develop a core group of leaders prepared to organize for “social advance” (1916, 12). Burgess defined the survey as “the scientific study of its conditions and needs for the purpose of presenting a constructive program for social advance” (1916, 12).

In 1919, Park and Burgess developed a Field Studies course. Both men devoted extraordinary amounts of time to students under their field supervision, spending long hours discussing topics and accompanying students in investigations throughout Chicago. Howard Becker, a student, recalls Park saying “one more thing is needful: first-hand observation. Go and sit in the lounges of the luxury hotels and on the doorsteps of the flophouses . . . In short gentlemen, go get the seat of your pants dirty in real research” (quoted in McKinnery 1966, 71).

In 1921, Park and Burgess coauthored *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, which became the leading American sociology textbook for the next twenty years. The text was a compilation of more than seventy-five articles from diverse authors and focused upon the theoretical categories of social processes, namely, adaptation, conflict, and competition. Dennis Smith suggests that the work was a “reworking” of Small and Vincent’s 1894 *Introduction to the Study of Society* and Thomas’s 1908 *Source Book for Social Origins* (Smith 1988, 8). The work contained the nucleus of readings for Chicago sociology students throughout the 1920s and 1930s. This core nucleus included selected works of Small, Vincent, Thomas, Dewey, Burgess, Mead, and Park.

In 1925, the two men coauthored *The City*, a collection of articles examining urban studies and life. Park’s articles are provocative dissections of the city from a theoretical starting point. Burgess’s articles take experimentation as the starting point. In “The Growth of the City: An Introduction to a Research Project,” Burgess outlined a model of urban growth that focused upon the tendency of a city to expand “radically from its central business district” (Park and Burgess 1925, 51). Following Thomas and Dewey, Burgess described this expansion as a constant process of “disorganization and organization,” a continual reorganization amidst an evolving urban organism (Park and Burgess 1925, 54).

Burgess’s second article in *The City*, “Can Neighborhood Work have a Scientific Basis?,” defined his notion of field investigation. He wrote that “in a series of research projects now in progress in the Department of Sociology . . . studies are being made of the social forces of community life” (Park and Burgess 1925, 54). Describing these forces as ecological, cultural, and political, Burgess argued that to find out precisely what these forces were and how they impacted specific communities, the sociologist had to have “direct contact with all the local dynamic personalities, including gang leaders, pool hall proprietors, leaders of all neighborhood organizations, and all professional persons, the representatives of social agencies, physicians, lawyers, clergymen at work in his locality.” The purpose of these direct contacts was to discover “the basic

interests, the driving wishes, and the vital problems of the men and women, the youth and children, living in the community” (Park and Burgess 1925, 153–54).¹⁰ Burgess, further refining his social survey, developed a science of neighborhood work, a science that took as its starting points the self-interests of local people, the traditions and cultures of the area, social problems, social forces, and community organization.

Also in 1925, Burgess edited *The Urban Community*. In the preface, he acknowledged that urban studies was a new field. Chastising the various movements (social work, settlement house, public health, etc.), he wrote that each was based on inadequate theory. To correct them, Burgess laid out his own theory, the “pragmatic, experimental program guided by studies of actual conditions and trends in urban life.”

In 1926, when the nineteen-year-old Alinsky entered the University of Chicago, the forty-year-old Burgess and the sixty-two-year-old Park had been collaborating together for a decade. Over the next six years, Alinsky was to register for three of Park’s and ten of Burgess’s courses.

Alinsky’s courses with Park were all graduate level: Race and Nationalities, Human Ecology, and Field Studies (University of Chicago, Transcripts). The first two courses were lecture courses, the first an examination of immigrant heritages with special reference to the problems of urban Americanization and the second focusing on human life and organization as evolving ecological realities.¹¹ The Field Studies course was “designed to provide direction and suggestion either 1] for special research or 2] for a community survey.” Credit for the course depended upon the submission and acceptance of a satisfactory report upon an investigation made under the direction of the instructor: “The approval of the instructor of the plan of the community survey is contingent upon the success of the student in organizing a local group to participate in the study of community problems” (Official Publications, 1931–32, 132). While it is unclear whether Alinsky took the course as a special research or a community survey offering, it is clear that he was familiar with Park’s writings and field work and that he had a personal relationship with Park. The relationship with Park is suggested by three corroborating factors: the course requirement of instructor consent, a course syllabus with required instructor conferences, and a student’s recollection of Park’s relationship with students in the course.¹² Alinsky’s grades for the three courses were B, Incomplete, and “Pass,” respectively. Alinsky later referred to Park as a “seminal mind” (Sanders 1970, 18).

Alinsky’s ten courses with Burgess, forty percent of these taken within the sociology department, provide the most substantial evidence to establish Alinsky’s intellectual grounding within Chicago’s pragmatic sociology. Burgess taught Alinsky in six courses as an undergraduate student and four as a graduate student. Alinsky’s first course with Burgess was in the fall quarter of 1928, Social Pathology. The course was listed as “a survey of pathological conditions and processes in modern society. A study of the social factors involved in . . .

alcoholism, prostitution, poverty, vagrancy, juvenile and adult delinquency. Inspection trips, survey assignments, and attendance at clinics” (Official Publications, 1928–29, 99). Bulmer recalls that for the course, students prepared maps of the distribution of social problems throughout the city and what emerged was “the realization that there was a definite pattern and structure to the city, and that many types of social problems were correlated with each other” (Bulmer 1984, 154). Receiving his first training in the empirical investigation of Chicago’s social problems, Alinsky earned an A for the course, his first in two years of study at the university department (University of Chicago, Transcripts). A paper written for the course identified the direction Alinsky’s life would take for the next decade, “the problem of social pathology in which I am specifically interested, occurs in the political process, namely, crime. . . . At present, through various political connections, I am in a position to observe the problems of vice as exemplified in liquor traffic, gambling, prostitution, etc., coupled with the graft accrued by the city allowing these places to operate” (Alinsky 1928, 1). Alinsky had found a professor who shared his interests in crime and the inner workings of Chicago’s street life.

Former Burgess student and teaching assistant Leonard S. Cottrell Jr. recalls that 1929 was the year in which Burgess protege Clifford Shaw’s book *Delinquency Areas in Chicago* (Cottrell 1967, 145) was published, a work that was based upon a social survey he implemented under Burgess’s direction. The work analyzed delinquent areas and found that social disorganization and its consequences, not genetic makeup or ethnic background, gave rise to problematic behaviors. Shaw’s next publication and perhaps most famous, *The JackRoller*, was published in 1930. Burgess and Shaw were also directly involved with the Institute for Juvenile Research, a state agency researching crime and juvenile delinquency. Burgess had Shaw hired as director of the program and Shaw developed the Chicago Area Project (Horwitt 1989, 27). The project, designed on Burgess’s social survey, sought to organize communities to combat juvenile delinquency, and grew out of Burgess’s course *Crime and Its Social Treatment*. As will be examined, Alinsky not only took the course but was hired by Shaw at Burgess’s recommendation for an organizer position.

In the winter quarter of 1929, the quarter following his first course with Burgess, Alinsky registered for *Crime and Its Social Treatment* and for an individual study project with Burgess. The first was a graduate course that experimented with “a method of investigation of delinquency, juvenile and adult, from the standpoint of human nature and social control. . . . Programs for the social treatment of crime including changes in the police system and criminal procedure, the modification of the physical structure of penal and reformatory institutions, and their economic, educational and social reorganization.” This further exposed Alinsky to pragmatic investigation and the role of the sociologist as organizer (Official Publications, 1928–29, 138). The individual study project with Burgess was offered “for those students who were interested in the further

study of a selected aspect or problem of social life and who have exhibited research capacity” (99). For this course, Alinsky wrote “Report on Dreamland Ballroom,” an account of one of his investigative excursions into Chicago (Alinsky 1929). He earned an A for the graduate course and a B for the project. This was Alinsky’s second A at the university (University of Chicago, Transcripts). From the three courses and the evidence thus far, it is clear that, at this point in his undergraduate career, Alinsky had found in Burgess a professor who (1) shared his interest in crime and motivated him to excel intellectually, (2) was impressed enough with Alinsky after one class to permit Alinsky’s registration in a graduate course as well as an independent study project under his personal supervision at the same time, and (3) was actively involved in the scientific investigation of neighborhood problems and their resolution through democratic organization. It is important to note that this occurred before Alinsky had any formal coursework with Robert Ezra Park.

The next quarter, spring 1929, Alinsky also enrolled in two Burgess courses. He earned an A in the graduate course Study of Organized Crime and a B in the next individual study project. Then, in the fall and winter quarters of 1930, Alinsky briefly enrolled in the School of Law. He returned to the Department of Sociology in the spring of 1930 and registered for his first course with Park, Race and Nationalities, and Burgess’s Theory of Disorganization (University of Chicago, Transcripts). Burgess’s syllabus included readings Alinsky had already been exposed to: Burgess’s *The Urban Community*; his coauthored works with Park, *The City* and *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*; Dewey’s *Human Nature and Conduct*; a collection of Mead’s articles; and Thomas’s *The Polish Peasant*.¹³ Alinsky earned a B in Park’s course and his first C for Burgess.

Alinsky received his undergraduate degree in June of 1930. His cumulative grade point average suggests average academic ability, hardly the “cum laude” status that he was to reminisce about years later (Sanders 1970, 40). Only three As are recorded on his undergraduate transcript and all three were earned in Burgess’s classes.

Graduating during the depression and failing to secure a job, Alinsky accepted a fellowship for graduate studies in criminology in the Department of Sociology. While the genesis of the fellowship is unclear, there is no doubt that the offer was made with the support, perhaps at the initiative, of Burgess. Burgess sought to develop Alinsky’s skills in investigating Chicago crime, an interest that Burgess shared. Of Alinsky’s seven quarters of residence, autumn 1930–spring 1932, he studied formally with Burgess during four of them. The courses were The Family and a sequence of three Clinical Sociology courses (University of Chicago, Transcripts). The 1930 course catalogue describes graduate sociology as designed for “research,” for those “actually engaged in investigation” (Official Publications, 1930–1931, 94). Alinsky’s research during this period was the West Side Italian gangs and the Capone gang (Horwitt 1989, 20). It was at this time that Alinsky made his famous entry into the Capone gang. Recalling this time

thirty-four years later in an interview for *Playboy*, Alinsky said the gangster Frank Nitti had taught him the value of primary relationships in five minutes when sociologists “spend lecture after lecture and all kinds of assigned reading explaining it” (Sanders 1970, 375).

In addition to field research, Burgess required academic research and report writing. Burgess’s paper “Field Studies in Sociology” provides a methodological overview of the courses with bibliographies. He writes, “the field study method of the sociologist that has developed in recent years represents a deliberate attempt not merely to arrive at scientifically defensible procedures of gathering facts, but also for testing generalizations or theories and for devising methods of control that are an advance over common sense and tradition.”¹⁴ The bibliographies contain the same works noted already within the department undergraduate program: *The City*, *The Urban Community*, and *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*. Data gathering, testing, experimentation, case studies, interviews, community organization, the sociologist as organizer—all were core components of both the undergraduate and graduate program.

Sometime during 1930–1931, Alinsky met Burgess protégé Clifford Shaw, Director of Research at the Institute for Juvenile Research (IJR). On 3 July 1931, Alinsky wrote a letter to Burgess: “Mr. Shaw suggested I write to you concerning an appointment on the staff of the proposed experiment in the community treatment of delinquency. . . . I would like to be considered as an applicant for the position. Remembering our conversation of some time ago, you will realize exactly what this opportunity means to me.”¹⁵ Alinsky was hired in December of that year (Horwitt 1989, 23).

Shaw’s research at the institute was patterned on the social survey. He dispatched his researchers into Chicago’s streets to study where crime was rampant and to organize delinquency programs. On the basis of the data collected by the field workers (census data, personal interviews, etc.), a detailed analysis of each high-crime area was prepared (Finks 1984, 10). Alinsky was assigned to work on the near West Side, in a slum known as “Little Italy.” He worked his way inside the juvenile gangs and, together with Shaw, began to work on *Companions in Crime*, a case history of delinquency and gangs (Horwitt 1989, 25).

Following Burgess, Shaw argued that the highest rates of delinquency were within Chicago’s transitional zones, which were concentric rings around the central business districts and which existed as transitional zones between business areas and suburbs. These zones were characterized by deteriorated housing, a low-income population made up largely of immigrants, and, among other slum-like conditions, a relatively high rate of juvenile delinquency (Horwitt 1989, 25). Their research showed that delinquency was a direct consequence of social disorganization. Realizing that traditional individualistic approaches to juvenile delinquency failed because they did not address the basic problem of social disorganization, the sociologists initiated the Chicago Area Project. The guiding vision for the project was that each community could be organized to respond

to its own problems, through the development of its own leadership and programming. The twenty-two-year-old Alinsky was in the midst of the discussions, the planning, and the organizing.

In 1933, Alinsky accepted a position as staff sociologist and parole classification officer for the Illinois State Penitentiary at Joliet, a career move that “reflected Ernest Burgess’s influence” (Horwitt 1989, 27). For the budding sociologist, experience with the Institute for Juvenile Research along with experience in prisons would be valuable credentials. During this period, Alinsky published his first academic article, “A Sociological Technique in Clinical Criminology” (Alinsky 1934). Alinsky’s early career shows him unquestionably under the mentorship of Burgess.

In 1936, Alinsky returned to work with Shaw in the Chicago Area Project. By this time, the project was in its third year of experimenting with organizing neighborhoods on the issue of juvenile delinquency. In the fall of 1937, Alinsky published another paper, “The Philosophical Implications of the Individualistic Approach in Criminology.” Critiquing individualism and capitalism, Alinsky argued that the Park/Burgess ecological studies had demonstrated that social disorganization, not individual pathology, was the cause of delinquency.

Also in 1937, Burgess published a list of organizing principles that underlay Shaw’s Chicago Area Project: (1) develop the program for the neighborhood as a whole; (2) stress the autonomy of the local people in planning and operating the program; (3) emphasize training and the development of local leadership; (4) maximize established neighborhood institutions; (5) activities are a device to create participation; and (6) evaluate progress on a regular basis (Bogue 1974, 82). These principles formed Alinsky’s job description.

In 1938, Shaw assigned Alinsky to the Back of the Yards area with the assignment of organizing the community to respond to juvenile delinquency. After a year of research, of interviewing, identifying and training leaders, and of constant evaluation, the Back of the Yards Organizing Council (BYOC) was launched. Church and labor united in a battle against the meatpacking industry and won, an issue and a victory that director Shaw did not see in the job description of his employee. Shaw was outraged because Alinsky organized a community on issues other than delinquency. He fired Alinsky. The BYOC responded with an ultimatum: “Keep Alinsky or stay out of the Back of the Yards” (Finks 1984, 19). Alinsky was reinstated, but the break with Shaw was a permanent one. Directly before the founding of the BYOC, Alinsky had worked with Burgess, either directly in coursework or indirectly through the IJR, for eleven years.

The Back of the Yards Organizing Council was a turning point in Alinsky’s life. The road that led to the BYOC was unquestionably constructed by the Chicago pragmatic sociologists. Alinsky, mentored within their ranks, nevertheless made significant departures from their thought and made new contributions in the areas of multi-issue organizing, power, tactics, and strategy.¹⁶ While the precise nature of Alinsky’s contributions merits further investigation, it is at

this point in his career when his relationship with John L. Lewis began. Alinsky's contribution was the melding of the principles of the social survey with those of union organizing, creating a new form of community organization. While it is clear that Alinsky was intellectually trained and mentored within the Chicago School, the ongoing significance of that theoretical grounding within his organizational work and social theory will now be shown. To accomplish this, a review of his post-1939 articles, books, and speeches is essential.

Alinsky and the Industrial Areas Foundation

In 1941, two years after the Back of the Yards Organizing Council was organized, Alinsky published "Community Analysis and Organization," in the *American Journal of Sociology*. The *Journal* was published by the Chicago School and was edited by Burgess from 1936 to 1940. Writing for his alma mater, Alinsky outlined the principles upon which the BYOC was built. He described the council as "an experimental demonstration of a community organizational procedure predicated upon a functional conception of a community and its problem. . . . the functional nature of community or of the socioeconomic strata of the community and its corresponding implications" (Alinsky 1941, 798).

Burgess first articulated that position twenty-five years earlier, in his 1916 doctoral dissertation, "The Function of Socialization in Social Evolution." He argued that the function of socialization is the development of persons and that an individual must realize that "in achieving his interest he must at the same time achieve functional relations with all other persons" (Bogue 1974, 7). Alinsky's functional analysis was that of the Chicago pragmatists.

Alinsky went on, "it is a rare phenomenon today to discover a community organization in which the indigenous interests and actions of groups of the community not only participate but also play a fundamental role in the organization" (Alinsky 1941, 800). It was a rare phenomenon, except within those organizations built upon the Burgess principles: the self-interests of the local people, the traditions and cultures of the area, social problems, social forces, and democracy (Burgess 1925, 143). A statement by Alinsky in one BYOC program exhibited Burgess's influence: "For fifty years we have waited for someone to offer a solution—but nothing has happened. Today we know that we ourselves must face and solve these problems. We know what poor housing, disease, unemployment, and juvenile delinquency mean, and we are sure that if a way is to be found, we can and must find it" (Alinsky 1941, 804). The quote also illustrates that Alinsky, Burgess's sociologist/organizer, organized on the basis of his mentor's view that organizations were built upon "basic interests, the driving wishes, and the vital problems of the men and women, the youth and the children, living in the community" (Burgess 1925, 143).

The BYOC was made up of eight committees chaired by leaders elected by the membership. In 1941, Alinsky wrote that the leaders were of “such an indigenous character that through their experiences and associations in the community they have all acquired a vast fund of intimate knowledge regarding . . . Back of the Yards” (804). In 1916, Burgess’s “The Social Survey” originally sketched the development of neighborhood councils made up of committees (Bogue 1974, 82). His courses and investigations at Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s further developed these ideas and provided opportunities for expansive neighborhood experimentation. His 1937 article, “The Chicago Area Project,” outlined his principles of neighborhood democratic organization (Bogue 1974, 82). In 1939, one of his students became a national star. The *Washington Post* called the BYOC an “Orderly Revolution” and Alinsky a “genius.” No reference to the work of Ernest Burgess was made. The flamboyant Alinsky, like Park and Thomas before him, had overshadowed his reserved mentor.

Alinsky’s fame was bolstered by his 1946 *Reveille for Radicals*, a *New York Times* bestseller (Doering 1994, 21). While no reference to his Chicago mentor is made, Burgess’s social theory is evident throughout the text’s examination of indigenous leaders, committees, self-interest, and democratic action. Almost twenty years later, Alinsky published an article entitled “Principles of Community Organization.” The enduring influence of Burgess and the Chicago School upon Alinsky is clear: “rooted in the local people . . . , a program arising out of the local people, carrying with it the direct participation of all the organizations . . . , functioning of numerous local committees . . . , concentrates on the utilization of indigenous leadership . . . , gives priority to the significance of legitimate self-interest” (1962). Alinsky’s debts to Burgess in his 1971 *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* are profound yet unacknowledged.

Without question, Burgess’s principles had become Alinsky’s principles and formed the foundation of his theory and praxis. Alinsky, the dean of community organization, was a pragmatic sociologist of the Chicago School.

Postscript

While the streams of thought and thinkers that flowed through the Chicago School defy systematization, it is clear that Alinsky was nurtured within these waters. Locating Alinsky within this tradition provides additional directions for the resurgence of American Pragmatism and for the challenges of deepening democratic life, directions that are both theoretical and practical in nature. Among the most intriguing directions are those that lead to the work of John Dewey and Jane Addams.

Recently, Michael Eldridge highlighted John Dewey’s self-acknowledged lack of a “political technology,” that is, his failure to identify concrete methods of

skill development for effective democratic action. Eldridge turns to Randy Shaw's *The Activist's Handbook: A Primer for the 1990's and Beyond* to suggest activist organizing as a practical expression of Dewey's philosophy (Eldridge 1998, 117). Locating Alinsky within the Chicago tradition has shown, far earlier than Shaw's work, within Dewey's lifetime, that Alinsky developed an effective pragmatic and practical political technology. But is Alinsky's eclectic and generically pragmatic approach in any sense Deweyan? An affirmative answer would further Westbrook's claim that Dewey was a far more radical democratic voice than is popularly understood (1991, xiv) and would further establish Alinsky as an American Pragmatist. Regardless, a comparative study would necessarily explore the role of experimentation in social reconstruction, the education of indigenous leadership, the nature of power in democratic initiatives, the multiple vehicles of democratic education, and the relationship between self-interest and social realization.

Mary Jo Deegan claims that while Jane Addams was a major figure within the Chicago School of Pragmatic Sociology, it was actually Alinsky's mentors Burgess and Park who consciously denied Addams's influence and marginalized her works within the school (Deegan 1988, 144–64). Indeed, their classic 1921 text *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, contains a scant three references to Addams (Burgess and Park 1969, 331–35). Deegan's argument is further supported by the early patriarchal division between sociology and social work, each with its own preferred gender-specific practitioners, a view Alinsky shared with his mentors. Although these male sociologists failed to acknowledge the significance of Addams, their work was nevertheless influenced by Hull House: its community-mapping techniques, its emphasis upon the social dimensions of democratic neighborhood life, and its institutional relationships within the community (labor, churches, city agencies, etc.). A fuller examination of these themes is necessary, one that may not only strengthen the respective social change strategies, settlement work, and community organizing, but further the project of deepening and enriching our democratic life.

The importance of Alinsky's work and that of the Industrial Areas Foundation for deepening democracy and rebuilding the public square should not be underestimated. The central core of his work is a focus upon the development of democratic leaders who act with institutional power, a focus sorely needed in contemporary public life. A growing number of scholars concur and are acknowledging Alinsky's work and that of the Industrial Areas Foundation as exemplary models of democratic organization with broad local and national implications.¹⁷

Notes

1. See Alinsky 1949, 1946, and 1971. While a full bibliography of Alinsky's articles needs to be developed, a good, though incomplete, listing can be found in Horwitt 1989. Also see Chambers 1978.

2. For good introductions to the Chicago School of Sociology, see Smith 1960 and Stein 1972.

3. Alinsky [1954–1955], 10 (chap. 3).

4. See a number of definitive studies: Rucker 1969; Lewis and Smith 1980; Faris 1967; Matthews 1977; Smith 1988; and Bulmer 1984.

5. See, for example, West 1993; Menand 1997; Hollinger and Depew, eds., 1995; Campbell 1992; and John Patrick Diggins 1994.

6. See, for example, Cook 1993. Also see the extensive recent scholarship on John Dewey, especially: Schilpp and Hahn, eds., 1989; Hickman 1990; Rockefeller 1991; Westbrook 1991; Campbell 1995; Boisvert 1997; and Eldridge 1998.

7. Courses taken by Alinsky that were taught by Faris were: autumn 1927, Soc. 220 Introduction to Social Psychology; winter 1927, Soc. 230 Social Origins; autumn 1931, Soc. 433 Seminar: The Social Attitudes; winter 1932, Soc. 434 Seminar: The Social Attitudes; spring 1932, Soc. 435 Seminar: The Social Attitudes. Courses taught by Park were: spring 1930, Race and Nationalities; spring 1931, Human Ecology; spring 1932, Soc. 466 Field Studies. Courses taught by Burgess were: autumn 1928, Soc. 270 Social Pathology; winter 1929, Soc. 373 Crime and Its Social Treatment and Soc. 268 Individual Study Project; spring 1929, Soc. 374 Study of Organized Crime and Soc. 269 Individual Study Project; spring 1930, Soc. 378 Theory of Social Disorganization; winter 1931, Soc. 351 The Family; spring 1931, Soc. 475 Clinical Sociology; autumn 1931, Soc. 473 Clinical Sociology; winter 1932, Soc. 474 Clinical Sociology.

8. Shortly after Mead's death, Faris wrote to Mead's son, "I have for years regarded it as one of my chief aims to interpret and, if possible, extend the ideas which his great mind originated. . . . For in an academic sense I call myself his son" (as quoted in Cook 1993, 201 n. 34).

9. Of interest here is that if one accepts Deegan's arguments about Burgess, one could easily make the case that Alinsky shared Burgess's contempt for social reform and social workers. Regardless, that path of argumentation is beyond the present scope but is intriguing in light of the IAF's openness to feminist thought and critique.

10. Of interest here is that Burgess's mention in this section of the article that the sociologist should have a "card catalogue" in which he keeps a "minimum of information" on these dynamic personalities. Standard IAF procedure is that organizers have a card catalogue on people they interview.

11. For a sample of the texts studied, see chaps. 2, 3, 7, and 9 of Park and Burgess 1969.

12. See Park, "The Survey," in Robert Park Papers, Special Collections: The University of Chicago Archives. The two-page description of requirements for students conducting surveys includes an outline of an organization plan and meetings with the instructor. For a description of the Park/student relationship see Faris 1967, 80.

13. Burgess, "Articles and Books on Processes of Social Disorganization," *Ernest W. Burgess Papers*.

14. Burgess, "Field Studies in Sociology," *Ernest W. Burgess Papers*.

15. Saul Alinsky to Ernest W. Burgess, 3 July 1931, *Ernest W. Burgess Papers*, Box 1, Folder 2.

16. These departures and contributions remain to be shown.

17. See Warren 2001, West 1993, and Wilson 1999.

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