

Hillary Rodham: Alinsky's Favorite Radical

By Samuel Blumenfeld

Hillary Rodham, born in 1947 and raised in a United Methodist Republican family in middle-class Park Ridge, Illinois, first met radical revolutionary Saul Alinsky as a teenager. She had been introduced to him at a church outing by her liberal youth minister, Don Jones, who greatly admired Alinsky. Jones, 26, a U.S. Navy veteran, would become the most important teacher in Hillary's life before college. Like many young liberal Methodist youth ministers, he had a passion for justice and social reform. He shepherded the middle-class children of Protestant Park Ridge to black and Hispanic churches in Chicago as part of their exchanges with their youth groups.

In 1965, after graduating high school, where she was a National Merit finalist, Hillary enrolled in Wellesley College in Massachusetts. There she became active in liberal college activities, and in 1968 left the Republican Party. In all this time she maintained a correspondence with Don Jones in which she revealed her evolving political views. For her Senior Honors Thesis, she decided to do a study of Saul Alinsky whose views had intrigued her as a teenager.

Alinsky had developed the idea of the People's Organization, which would effect change by confronting those in power--with protest marches, strikes, sit-ins and other intimidating practices. In *Reveille for Radicals*, first published in 1946 and revised in 1969, he wrote:

"A People's Organization...is a deep, hard-driving force, striking and getting at the very roots of all the evils which beset the people....It thinks and acts in terms of social surgery and not cosmetic cover-ups. This is one of the reasons why a People's Organization will find that it has to fight its way along every foot of the road toward its destination--a people's world."

What is "a people's world"? Is it a dictatorship of the proletariat? Is it a socialist state? Alinsky never defines "a people's world" for fear of being labeled something or other. What he says he wants is a free and open society. "The middle classes," he states, "must be organized for action, for claiming their rights and powers of citizenship in a free society. The organization must be committed to the values of a free and open society. The middle classes must begin to participate as citizens for those ideals which give meaning and purpose to life."

All vague enough for anyone trying to pin Alinsky down. Hillary had to read Alinsky's *Reveille for Radicals* as the first step in her senior project. Hillary was also an admirer of Marxist theoretician Carl Oglesby, whose articles she read in *motive* magazine, the publication of the Methodist Student Movement. Oglesby denounced America's "ruling class" and considered Ho Chi Minh, Castro, and Mao as praiseworthy heroes of the people. In other words Hillary was being fed a steady diet of radical leftist ideology by

the liberals in the Methodist church. As for the goals of Marxist revolution, Hillary had her own ideas of how to reach them. She described herself in a letter to Don Jones as “a progressive, an ethical Christian and a political activist.” By political activism she meant being involved in the anti-Vietnam war movement.

In the fall of 1968, Hillary returned to Wellesley for her senior year where she was president of the student body. In searching for a topic for her honors thesis, her political science professor, Alan Schechter, suggested she write one on Alinsky, since she already knew him and admired his work. So she interviewed Alinsky in Chicago, in Boston, and again when she invited him to visit Wellesley.

Alinsky was so impressed by Hillary that upon her graduation he invited her to become a Community Organizer. Obviously, she was a committed radical revolutionary who would be a perfect stealth socialist. Otherwise, he would not have begged her to accept his offer. But she turned him down to pursue a career in law. Alinsky told her that she would be wasting her life. But Hillary had her own ideas. Yale Law School would be the red carpet to a career that would eventually lead to elective politics. Hillary understood the need for power if she were ever to implement her radical revolutionary ideas.

All of this took place before Alinsky wrote his second book, *Rules for Radicals*, published in 1971, in which he may have incorporated some of Hillary’s ideas. It was in that book that Alinsky advocated the creation of organizations led by stealth socialist Community Organizers who would work within the system to gain political power via the Democratic Party.

Hillary had found Alinsky a man of exceptional charm, and his influence on her life would be long-lasting. In her thesis she wrote approvingly and critically of Alinsky’s ideas. She tried to pin him down on his philosophy, but he simply refused to be labeled. And so, while Alinsky spent much time writing about means--stealth strategies--he was too vague about ends, and that probably is why Hillary decided not to accept his offer of a job as Community Organizer.

At Yale she met her future husband and future President of the United States, Bill Clinton. In the budding romance, Hillary turned out to be the stronger of the two. She had the more assertive brain power that made her a leader at Wellesley. She probably introduced Bill to her own radical ideas. And it finally must have dawned on her that as an intelligent Rhodes Scholar he could be her vehicle to high office, which in fact he became, first as Governor of Arkansas and finally as President.

Indeed, their marriage was a perfect political partnership. She brought her Alinsky radicalism to the partnership, and Bill brought his liberal establishment connections. As a Rhodes Scholar he roomed with such World Government types as Strobe Talbot, who later would become a writer for Time. And as a student in Professor Quigley’s class at Georgetown, he learned how the big money powers controlled both political parties. And he must have read a biography of Cecil Rhodes and learned of his plan to create an

Anglo-American headed world government.

It is interesting that when Bill Clinton ran for the presidency, Hillary asked Wellesley to lock up her thesis so that Bill's opponents would not be able to use it against him or her. She had learned and adopted Alinsky's stealth strategy very well. Although Alinsky died in 1972, I suspect that he would have been joyously proud of Hillary's achievement as a stealth radical in the White House.

And, of course, the first thing she did when she became First Lady was to organize a secretive task force to come up with a plan for socialized medicine. But the Republicans shot it down. And then, of course, in 2008 she campaigned to become the Democratic nominee for the presidency. But who should oppose her? An Alinsky alumnus who had mastered the art of Community Organizing by the name of Barack Hussein Obama. The rest is history.

The teenage Rodham and the 60-year-old Alinsky met, of all places, on a Methodist church outing. Her youth minister, Don Jones, was introducing the youth of white, comfortable Park Ridge to social action. His "University of Life" took them to poor black and Hispanic churches, to hear Martin Luther King and to meet Alinsky.

When Rodham returned to Wellesley for her senior year and began scouting for a topic for her honors thesis, professor Schechter suggested she look up Alinsky again. She interviewed him in Chicago, in Boston and when he accepted her invitation to visit Wellesley.

Rodham opened the thesis by casting Alinsky as he cast himself, in a "peculiarly American" tradition of democrats, from Thomas Paine through Martin Luther King. "Democracy is still a radical idea," she wrote, "in a world where we often confuse images with realities, words with actions."

Rodham's thesis describes trying to pin him down on his personal philosophy: "Alinsky, cringing at the use of labels, ruefully admitted that he might be called an existentialist," she wrote. Rodham tried to ask him about his moral relativism — particular ends, he said, often do justify the means — but Alinsky would only concede that "idealism can parallel self-interest."

In her paper, she accepted Alinsky's view that the problem of the poor isn't so much a lack of money as a lack of power, as well as his view of federal anti-poverty programs as ineffective. (To Alinsky, the War on Poverty was a "prize piece of political pornography," even though some of its funds flowed through his organizations.) "A cycle of dependency has been created," she wrote, "which ensnares its victims into resignation and apathy."

In formal academic language, Rodham offered a "perspective" or muted critique on Alinsky's methods, sometimes leaving unclear whether she was quoting his critics or stating her own opinion. She cited scholars who claimed that Alinsky's small gains actually delayed attainment of bigger goals for the poor and minorities.

In criticizing the “few material gains” that Alinsky engineered — such as pressing Kodak Co. to hire blacks in Rochester, or delaying the University of Chicago's expansion into the Woodlawn neighborhood — Rodham placed part of the blame on demography, the diminishing role of neighborhoods in American life. Another part she laid charitably to an Alinsky character trait: “One of the primary problems of the Alinsky model is that the removal of Alinsky dramatically alters its composition,” she wrote. “Alinsky is a born organizer who is not easily duplicated, but, in addition to his skill, he is a man of exceptional charm.”

In the end, she judged that Alinsky's “power/conflict model is rendered inapplicable by existing social conflicts” — overriding national issues such as racial tension and segregation. Alinsky had no success in forming an effective national movement, she said, referring dismissively to “the anachronistic nature of small autonomous conflict.”