

7-1-1999

## Saul David Alinsky Collection

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# SAUL DAVID ALINSKY COLLECTION

Saul David Alinsky, sociologist, was the son of orthodox Jewish emigrants from Russia, Benjamin and Sarah (Tannenbaum) Alinsky. Born in Chicago, 30 January 1909, he was raised and educated there. He earned a Ph.B. from the University of Chicago in 1930, did postgraduate work in the Graduate School, 1930-32, and earned an LL.D. from Saint Procopius College in 1958. He married Helene Simon on 9 June 1932, with whom he had two children (Katherine and David.) His first wife deceased, he later married Jean Graham, 15 May 1959, from whom he was divorced in 1970. He married for the third time, Irene Alinsky, May 1971. He died 12 June 1972.

Alinsky was a sociologist with the Institute for Juvenile Research, Chicago, 1931-36; a member of the state prison classification board, division of criminology, the Illinois State Penitentiary System, Joliet, 1933-36; co-founder of the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (Chicago); executive director of the Industrial Areas Foundation (Chicago), 1939-72. Author of *Reveille for Radicals*, 1946, and *John L. Lewis, A Biography*, 1949. Contributor of numerous articles to sociological, criminological, and psychological periodicals. Best known for his development of the "Alinsky method" of community organizing.

The collection includes miscellaneous letters and notes (17 items) to Jean Alinsky, dated 1972-84, some of which (7 items) were written on the occasion of Saul Alinsky's death.

The papers are organized into five folders:

- I. Background: Biographical Information
- II. Alinsky's writings, essays, memoranda
- III. Letters to Alinsky
- IV. Alinsky's letters to wife Jean
- V. Letters and sympathy cards from friends to Jean Alinsky

## **I. Background: Biographical Information**

1. Who Was Who in America, vol. V (1963-73)
2. Encyclopedia of the American Left (N.Y., 1990)

## **II. Alinsky's writings, essays, notes and memoranda**

1. Handwritten notes on Chicago architecture, "Ideas of Louis Sullivan."
2. Handwritten essay about racially segregated neighborhoods and blacks moving into white residential areas.
3. Handwritten notes (subject unclear), list of names.
4. Typed, double sided, pp. 13-14, about community organizing.
5. Typed, p.2, about blacks moving into Kenwood, Illinois, a professional community.
6. Typed essay "'Rubbing Resentments Raw' and Problems and their Solutions."
7. Typed essay "Jeckyle Field, Medlands: The Misguiding Light" about the integration hoax in the area around the University of Chicago.

8. Handwritten notes about the University of Chicago.
9. Typed essay about mass movements, challenging the status quo.
10. Typed note cards about "Strategy."
11. Typed paper assignment for a Humanities 195 course, 1974.
12. Typed 1/3 sheet of paper about Russian Jews.
13. Magazine cover of *Harper's* magazine, June, 1965, with the lead story "The Professional Radical, Conversations with Saul Alinsky."
14. Typed memo (copy) to the staff of the Industrial Areas Foundation from Alinsky about improving the group's image by changing its language, terminology in public.

### **III. Letters to Alinsky**

1. Paul A. McGhee, and editor, to Alinsky, 18 June 1960, New York, and postscript dated 20 June 1960. McGhee had many negative comments about Alinsky's manuscript and his flamboyant, off the cuff writing.
2. Archdiocesan Conservation Council to Alinsky, 6 June 1963, Chicago, about their disapproval of Alinsky's absence from Chicago and his being remiss in his duties for the Council.

### **IV. Alinsky's letters to wife Jean**

1. Letter on Hawaiian flight via United Air Lines" stationery (n.d.)
2. Letter on "Flying B.O.A.C. between New York and London" stationery; travel plans; meeting with Father Dunn (n.d.)

Letters on "Pont Royal Hotel" stationery from Paris, April, 19 ?:

3. Tuesday night (n.d.)- comments on travel details and hassles.
4. (Wednesday? n.d.)- met with publishers and they want him to write an introduction; Alinsky is not enjoying Paris.
5. Meeting with publishers "unsatisfactory," no agreement reached; leaving for Rome that day (n.d.)  
Letters on "Hotel Mertopole" from Rome.
6. Tuesday, 19 April 19 ?-- rejected working in South Italy because "They don't need a community organization- they need a revolution!"
7. Thursday, 21 April 19 ?-- has meetings at the Vatican; refers to Northern Trade Union leaders (non-communist); may go to Milan.
8. Meetings with the Vatican and I.A.F. are hard because "we exchange ideas as though from two different planets" (n.d.)

9. Friday (n.d.)- conferences improving; Italian politics; "The V(atican) is as closely involved with Christian Demos. as the opposition charges..."; travel plans.

10. Saturday (n.d.)- conferences a big disappointment, deteriorating- a lot of information about politics: Vatican is taking rigid rightist stance, not allowing for even a passive relationship with the Socialists, which Alinsky feels is "playing into the hands of the Communists." If country had a general election, he felt the Left would win. Regarding labor and politics conferences, "It would be a cinch to organize against V(atican) but it would be folly at this point and eventually you would end up a captive of the Communists."

11. Monday (n.d.)- biggest series of meetings at the Vatican in the Papal Secretary of State's office; decisions made about project sites, will apply to the Ford Foundation; Alinsky deciding if his family will move to Italy for five years; mentions Jean's physical and mental health.

12. Letter from Monterey airport before flying to San Francisco, Monday (n.d.)- talks about their home in California and their remodeling plans for it.

13. Letter on Royal Hawaiian stationery and envelope from Waikiki, Honolulu, Friday (n.d.)- spent time with Herb Cornville(?), President of Hawaiian Pine[apple?], who owns the island of Tanai, growing pineapples. Of Tanai he writes, "the problems fascinating and the mixture of races certainly the face of the future."

14. From Chicago to Jean in Carmel, CA, 30 June 1964- living apart, marriage not good; mentions his book *Crisis in Black and White* and has been fed up lately with community organizing and civil rights.

15. From Chicago to Jean in Carmel, 9 July 1964- planning to move, plans to fly to California to visit her.

16. Letter in progress (starts with probably p. 2 or 3)- argues that he loves her [Jean] very much, but can't take more vacation time and will be in Monterey on 26 July to visit; Jean has kidney problems of some sort (n.d.)

17. En route from Chicago to San Francisco, Sunday (n.d.)- marital problems: "I am respecting your request not to call or visit;" discussion of their finances and adds, "if you want anything and don't want to talk to me then just let Bernstein or Rosewall know and have them contact the office."

## **V. Letters to Jean Alinsky from friends, and miscellaneous**

A. Sympathy cards upon Saul's death from:

1. Leona Baumgartner Langmuir (n.d.)

2. "Ruth," 13 June [1972]- implies that Alinsky died in a plane crash; wrote that he had told her that his plane was "sure to crash in a thunderstorm and thunderstorms are forecast."

3. Betty and Frank Herlihy, 13 June 1972- refers to Saul as "a man of action."

4. Mr. and Mrs. Leon M. Despres, 14 June 1972- "His contribution to our democracy... was enormous and unparalleled."

5. Alice B. Adler, 14 June [1972]

6. Mrs. Harry Schneiderman ("Bea"), 15 June 1972.

7. "Chuck," letter and envelope, 16 June [1972].

B. Notes and cards from:

1. Mrs. Devin Bercet (from France), 19 July 1978- Jean's health is better.

2. "Lotte and Alan," "Year's End, 1971"- New Year's poem and well wishes.

3. Dick and Alicia Culbert, Christmas card (n.d.)

4. P. David Finks, 5 December 1978- he has been doing research and wants to publish a book about Saul Alinsky.

5. Romi (Whythe) El-Nagar, 15 December 1980, Christmas Card.

6. "Dorothy," 24 February 1982- talks about getting custody of 9 year-old Michael.

7. Therese Lewis (n.d.), letter and clipping of picture of dogs.

8. Ruth Mandelbaum [1981?], Christmas card.

9. 'Connie,' letter and envelope, 21 February 1984, Indonesia- she's working to learn the languages.

C. Miscellaneous

1. Small card of instructions for filling out a bank form (n.d.)

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This collection was processed by Rachel G. Schneider, Trinity College '95, in the fall semester  
1994.

Prepared for electronic publication by Michael J. Breen '99, July 1999.