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Abstract

This chapter provides an overview of how Saul Alinsky's practices of building democratic power have shaped modern day community organizing. It explains why the Alinsky tradition is useful to the study of community organizations through a description of his enduring core principles of collective power, "native" leadership, and confrontational politics. The chapter makes the case for the continued relevance of Alinsky's main tenets as well as the need to critique and adapt those methods to new contexts in the 21st century. While it focuses primarily on Alinsky-style organizations, this chapter takes into account a larger ecosystem of organizations and the varying schools of thought that influence the practice of community organizing. It also offers a critique of where Alinsky's approach falls short in confronting racial and gender barriers to engagement in building power for social change. In addition to exploring the development of Alinsky's organization, *the Industrial Areas*

Foundation, the chapter features themes of organizational structure and process as they relate to Alinsky's core principles that are reflected in similar types of organizations. The chapter brings together the theoretical underpinnings of Alinsky's approach with the practical implications for how community organizing has progressed. It describes where community organizing today diverges from traditional Alinsky-style organizing, especially in trends towards the professionalization of practice, new organizing practices, and the nationalization of grassroots organizing through intermediaries.

18.1 Introduction: The Alinsky Organizing Tradition

The last decade has seen a resurgence of interest in the organizing practices of Saul Alinsky. In particular, the presidency of Barack Obama who was trained in Alinsky-style methods as a young adult in Chicago and the rise of the Tea Party that embraced time-honored organizing tactics of member recruitment, leadership development, and grassroots mobilization activated a new conversation about the strengths, weaknesses, and impact of Alinsky's community organizing in the 21st century (LeTourneau 2016; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). While fraught with misconceptions about what community organizing

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is, this renewed fame for the controversial and colorful figure serves as an important opportunity for reinvigorating an exploration of Alinsky's methods of building power for collective change (Riley 2012).

Saul Alinsky (1909–1972) dedicated his life to the pursuit of organization building that would activate the voice and participation of seemingly powerless individuals into collective forces of strength, resistance, and power. He was politicized by the unjust effects of the great Depression and influenced by the burgeoning labor movement of the late 1920s and 30s (Horwitt 1989). In recognizing the oppressive conditions of the poor and working class of Chicago (made famous by Upton Sinclair's accounts in *The Jungle*) Alinsky believed that power structures—business, government, and civil society alike—needed to be held accountable for conditions of injustice in order to realize social transformation. To achieve such goals required the organization of local people who are affected directly by inadequate living and working conditions, by social unrest, and by the oppressive constraints of inequality. This belief propelled his forty-year career of teaching people how to organize to improve their lives and broader communities through direct action (Hercules and Orenstein 1999; Horwitt 1989; Schutz and Miller 2015).

The United States of the twenty-first century is marked by a more complex social, political, and economic landscape that abounds in all types of formal, informal, and hybrid organizations. As the global community has witnessed rapid-fire changes in technology, there also has been a steady rise in the porous nature of institutional boundaries. Organizations, businesses, neighborhoods, governments, and the nation-state itself have connections well beyond the narrow parameters that once defined these entities as bounded structures. The world today may be virtually unrecognizable to Alinsky, who died in 1972. Though many decades removed, Alinsky's work remains vital and important because it teaches bedrock principles of community organization. Alinsky's legacy of ideas and examples

has enduring relevance to professional organizers and everyday citizens today especially because of his practice of developing powerful, democratic organizations.

Alinsky began exploring structures that could build collective power in late 1930s Chicago, organizing the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council into what would become community organizing's primary organizational model—a *locally-based organization of representatives and leaders from churches, social groups, and other community institutions that aim to address common issues of local concern*. In the early days of the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council, issues such as unemployment, education, youth, housing, and health status were at the forefront (Horwitt 1989, 68). Biographer, Sanford Horwitt (1989), explains that for Alinsky, the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council became a “bulwark of democracy,” a vehicle for capturing the democratic imagination across diverse groups in the midst of the turbulent political landscape of the late 1930s (Horwitt, 79). With democratic structures for governance and decision-making in place, this unique organization crossed racial and ethnic lines and fostered an “evolving democratic spirit” in the neighborhood characterized by “a respect for individual differences and a new appreciation of the possibilities of communal action,” (83).

In *People Power: The Community Organizing Tradition of Saul Alinsky*, (2015) long time organizer Mike Miller describes the importance of Alinsky in the following way:

He was a small “d” democrat who knew that if people were to participate effectively in a democracy they had to have the latent power of their members brought forth and made manifest in effective people power organizations. He was a hardheaded realist who fully appreciate the maxim from abolitionist Frederick Douglass that ‘power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.’

Miller further explains that Alinsky was “a social inventor who developed and fine-tuned two instruments of people power—the broad based community organization and the professional

community organizer,” (xiv). This chapter focuses on the development and evolution of the organizational model that grew from Alinsky’s early days in Chicago.

18.2 Mediating Institutions and Community Organizing Networks

Alinsky would go on to found the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) out of the nascent Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (Horwitt 1989, 87), launching a “backyard revolution” (Boyte 1980) in which community groups around the country would take up local issues of common concern (Dreier 2012). He generated support for establishing the IAF from Catholic clergy, union leaders, and department store owner, Marshall Field III (Schutz and Miller 2015). According to Miller, the organizational structure of the Back of the Yard Neighborhood Council “established the pattern for Alinsky’s subsequent organizing,” (4) building from diverse, local institutional anchors as the base of leadership that could shape collective power and develop shared agendas around common demands. While his support from labor waned in the early years of the IAF, Alinsky found significant support among Catholics and mainline Protestants, both seeking ways to translate their values of social and economic justice into public action that confronted the problems facing their communities. Churches became the source of Alinsky’s “organization of organizations,” and the core method for how the IAF has organized in multi-racial communities since the 1970s (Schutz and Miller 2015).¹ This aspect of Alinsky’s history is important, especially given today’s misguided assumption by conservatives that Alinsky was a Communist and promoted communist or socialist ideals. Community organizing scholar, Peter Dreier, draws an essential

distinction about Alinsky’s relationship to ideology:

Alinsky was hardly the subversive, however, that Gingrich and other conservatives have portrayed. During the Depression, some of the key leaders of the industrial labor movement were members of or close to the Communist Party, and Alinsky worked alongside them in building an alliance between the neighborhood, the church, and the unions — but he was neither a Communist nor a socialist himself. He was fond of quoting Madison, Jefferson, and Tom Paine. He considered himself a patriotic American. He eschewed ideology. His closest political ties were with the Catholic Church. He frequently spoke at seminaries advising future priests to express their faith by putting Catholic social teachings into practice by helping to organize their parishioners rather than doling out charity. (Dreier 2012)

Alinsky’s sudden death at age 63 propelled the organization to a time of changing leadership and growth. Under Alinsky’s successors, Ed Chambers and Richard Harmon, the IAF grew to become one of the nation’s leading grassroots community organizing networks rooted in religious congregations. Other networks also developed from the Alinsky school of thought. They have been aligned closely in their practice of building organizations of organizations through the recruitment of churches and congregations as dues-paying member institutions, the development of local leadership through extensive training programs, and collective action rooted in local issues. These networks include the Pacific Institute of Community Organizing (PICO), Gamaliel, and the Direct Action and Research Training Center (DART). Like the IAF, the other organizing networks employ a federated structure in which local organizations are affiliated within larger regional and national networks. Churches, synagogues, and other local institutions including neighborhood associations and some unions primarily make up local organizations. Leadership training and congregational development are essential components of their strategy for building grassroots’ power. The organizations foster individual leadership within member institutions to recruit other leaders and members, to identify common issues of concern, and to develop action strategies for holding public and private entities

¹Warren (2001) focuses on the limited success of Alinsky’s organizations despite his philosophical contribution to organizing. Also see, *The Alinsky Legacy: Alive and Kicking* by Reitzes & Reitzes (1987).

accountable. The emphasis on strong leaders and strong institutions is a signature of the faith-based community organizing tradition that grew out of Alinsky's original framework. By and large, the basic practices and principles of organizing are fairly consistent across the networks. However, geographic competition, personality conflicts, and professional territorialism have impeded their ability to collaborate or convene around shared learning.²

Almost simultaneous to the emergence of the organizing networks, many of the great social movements had reached a crescendo. Activists and organizers crisscrossed movements for civil rights, women's rights, welfare rights, and farmworkers. Notably among those connected to Alinsky was organizer, Fred Ross, who later recruited Cesar Chavez and together developed the United Farmworkers (Schutz and Miller 2015; Thompson 2016).³ Other types of tenant- and neighborhood-based organizations were also born, including The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), founded by Wade Rathke and George Wiley⁴ and National People's Action founded by Gale Cincotta and Shel Trapp. Heather Booth founded a training institute, Midwest Academy, to support the development of progressive leaders and organizers searching for a path forward amidst the social and political foment of the 1970s.⁵ Unlike the Alinsky organizations, Booth and her colleagues have promoted innovations in

building community organizations including multi-issue organizations, statewide organizations, and organizations that engage in electoral work. These organizations and movements differed in their approach to organization building, yet engaged similar tactics and strategies for bringing poor, working class individuals into collectives that aimed to hold power accountable through direct action. Their founders and leaders offered indispensable critiques of Alinsky's method that led to great diversity of thought and practice in community organizing. The growth of organizing, and in particular the varied forms of organization building, matched the growth of robust social movements, fueled by the energies and passions of people coming together for large-scale change.⁶ The legacy of such organizational growth and social movement activity is myriad types of community nonprofit organizations that target a range of social and political issues, employing various strategies for addressing the causes and consequences of poverty, injustice, and inequality.

An outside observer may easily have difficulty discerning the differences and effectiveness of any one group. Such an explosion of groups (Skocpol 1999) has left a rather messy constellation of organizations that claim to "do organizing." While this chapter focuses primarily on Alinsky-style organizations, it accounts for this larger ecosystem of organizations and how it influences the practice of community organizing in the tradition of Saul Alinsky.

²There have certainly been exceptions to this often times toxic dynamic, but the overriding sense in the field is that these groups do not get along.

³The "house meeting" is an organizing strategy attributed to Fred Ross and the farmworker movement. Though not directly from Alinsky, this strategy is an essential element among some community organizing groups to recruit and identify local leaders and determine shared community concerns.

⁴See Swarts (2008) for a discussion of the variations in cultural and political strategies between ACORN and congregation-based community organizing networks. Also see Fisher (2009) for extensive discussion of ACORN's organizing practices and position within the field of community organizing.

⁵Also see Heather Booth: Changing the World (2017) A film by Lilly Rivlin; <http://www.midwestacademy.com/about/mission-history/>.

18.3 Principles

Alinsky's influential writing shaped the practice of organizing. His 1946, *Reveille for Radicals* and later 1971 *Rules for Radicals* have been used as foundational texts for understanding his core principles and approach to building collective power through "people's organizations." These books serve as the primary window into Alinsky's

⁶Swarts also takes up a useful discussion of the dynamics and differences in movement organizations and Alinsky-style organizations. For example, pp. 179–180.

theoretical perspective on the utility of community organizing as a vehicle for political transformation, the roles and responsibilities of the organizer as “outsider,” and the goals of cultivating independent institutions that can hold power accountable by increasing the democratic participation of ordinary citizens (Horwitt 1989; Schutz and Miller 2015; Warren 2001). Biographer Horwitt describes Alinsky’s first book as “a polemic” (166), one that notably attacks well-intentioned liberals. “In Alinsky’s view, reason was to the liberal what power was to the radical,” (168). Within a month of publication, *Reveille* was a *New York Times* bestseller. It quickly became a widespread and popular manual for budding organizers though it was short on the “how to” methods that some organizers have craved (Schutz and Miller 2015). When *Rules for Radicals* was published just before Alinsky’s death the ideological foment of the 1960s and 1970s was reaching new heights. As Warren (2001) writes,

In the midst of the highly ideological politics of the antiwar and Black Power movements, Alinsky argued that community organizations must base themselves on the self-interest of individuals and communities in a pragmatic and non-ideological manner. (44).

Alinsky’s call for independent organizations—separate from party allegiance or entrenched ideology—and his adherence to self-interest as a core tenet of organizing—reinforced his philosophy that people’s organizations are a critical vehicle for empowering the poor as a legitimate and credible political force (Schutz and Miller 2015; Warren 2001).

Three of Alinsky’s principles give shape to modern-day community organizing,⁷ collective power, native leadership, and confrontational politics. These central dimensions of Alinsky’s framework hold particular relevance for understanding the current context of Alinsky-style organizations and the most robust forms of contemporary community organizing. These principles are concrete

and specific with practical implications for today’s community organizer. They also reach for higher ideals of democratic participation in which a powerful citizenry holds public and private institutions accountable to their interests (Gecan 2002).

First, the notion of collective, or citizen, power is manifest broadly across community and grassroots organizations. Alinsky argued that understanding and claiming one’s self-interest is critical to realizing one’s civic potential and is a primary source of power to act. When brought together with others who share a mutual understanding of values and self-interest, and a common analysis of a local problem, the group can act on its collective self-interest for change. Alinsky agitated local leaders and politicians alike around their self-interest. He used agitation to uncover leaders’ anger at injustice and to fuel their action and he used it to galvanize politicians and business leaders to respond in favor of the community’s demands. For Alinsky, acting out of self-interest was the pathway to the collective power needed to fight city hall.

Second, without “native leadership” (Alinsky 1969) and the relationships that come with it, collective power is not possible. Seeking out native leadership is the job of the outside organizer—to locate those individuals who hold the key to broader communities of people. As Alinsky writes,

The building of a People’s Organization can be done only by the people themselves. The only way that people can express themselves is through their leaders...those persons whom the local people define and look up to as leaders. ... A People’s Organization must be rooted in the people themselves, (Alinsky 1969, 64)

Today’s Alinsky-style organizations adopt this focus on local, indigenous leadership in their approaches to building up a base of local constituencies (“base building”) and developing leadership among these groups through various training institutes and workshops. However, there are also many organizations that aim to mobilize people for action but do not invest in recruiting indigenous leaders nor support local leadership development aimed at forming the backbone of organizations beyond professional staff.

⁷Schutz and Miller (2015) offer a more expansive set of principles, each of which are important dimensions of community organizing. For this discussion, I emphasize three of the principles as fundamental pillars from which other principles follow.

Third, confrontational politics—the tactics and strategies for accountability, winning, and making political gains—remain a critical aspect of how the everyday practices of community organizing translate into tangible victories for organizations and communities.⁸ Alinsky’s notorious penchant for confrontational, in-your-face tactics with politicians and business leaders has been embedded over time within the cultural ethos of Alinsky-style organizations. By using conflict to politicize grassroots leaders and hold public officials accountable, a confrontational politics is the source of action and the demonstration of organizational power. It is intended to galvanize leaders and members to action and to yield a reaction from the opposition. Using such tactics as a tool for accountability is a strategy for winning. While there is wide variation in the extent to which these practices are used, confrontational politics plays a central role in citizen groups’ ability to leverage power for social change. Many scholars of organizing have documented this signature element of the Alinsky-style organization when a public official is “in the hot seat,” pressured by leaders to concede power and meet their demands for better schools, affordable housing, accessible health care, and higher quality jobs (Shirley 1997; Wood 2002; Warren 2001; Gecan 2002; Rogers 1990).

18.4 Why Alinsky Matters: Organizational Structure and Process

Understanding Alinsky’s tradition and organizational type is a useful and necessary dimension of studying community social change organizations. Organizations are at the heart of Alinsky’s legacy. For Alinsky and the IAF, effective grassroots political organizations take the form of mass-based, people-powered democratic institutions. Alinsky’s legacy is evident in the current landscape of community organizing: a rich organizational environment peppered with local,

state, regional, and national organizations that claim “grassroots power” as essential to their success. Likewise, we see artifacts of Alinsky’s philosophical ideas and tactics embedded within various social movements since the farmworkers. What exists today is an intricate and overlapping ecosystem of nonprofit organizations, grassroots groups, movement organizations, coalitions, and national intermediaries.

The strands of this broad and deep tapestry of organizations have adopted many of the core principles first articulated by Alinsky in the 1940s and refined through the 1970s and 80s by the early IAF organizers. Whether they are exclusively part of the major organizing networks that grew directly from Alinsky and the early days of the IAF, or they flow from other historical threads of organizing, these organizations have formed the infrastructure of grassroots democratic power in the United States. However, while some of these organizations reflect Alinsky principles, many of these groups do not practice organizing as Alinsky proposed and advocated, nor do they possess what long-time organizer, Michael Gecan calls “the hard edges of effective organizations,” (Gecan 2002, 133).

Given this history and the evolution of Alinsky style organizations, what organizational elements exist from Alinsky that other models of organizing and community building do not possess? The distinctive organizational features of the Alinsky style model—those specific characteristics of structure and process that are the hallmark of Alinsky and the IAF—are an important place to begin. These principles remain valid and essential, even as other organizing tools have been added to the toolbox and as refinements in techniques are made.

18.4.1 Structure

Over the years, the Industrial Areas Foundation has refined a set of organizational structures intended to build and sustain local institutions that are powered by the energy and work of ordinary men and women. IAF affiliates are structured to be an “organization of organizations” founded from

⁸For example, see Mondros and Wilson (1994) and Bobo et al.’s (1996) treatment of confrontational tactics in social action organizations.

the recruitment, development, and participation of local leaders from local institutions. These leaders determine a shared agenda, articulate collective goals, and hold each other accountable to those goals. They facilitate research actions to explore plausible solutions; analyze power dynamics; and develop campaigns that hold public officials accountable to the community's collective self-interest. Particularly notable campaigns have included Baltimoreans United in Leadership (BUILD) for living wage and affordable housing and Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS) for necessary school reforms.

These practices of organization building are one of Alinsky's major contributions to the field of organizing. Such elements not only help to grow and strengthen the power of grassroots organizations, but they also foster the civic skills and political muscle of its individual members. For example, local leaders in an Alinsky-style organization will learn the mechanics of face-to-face meetings (a "one-to-one"), house meetings, community convenings about issues, and accountability sessions with public officials. They will become skilled at formulating meeting agendas, rigorously keeping to a time schedule, recruiting and turning out meeting participants, and evaluating the successes and failures of actions. From these activities and the lessons learned, leaders with their organizer discern and develop a political strategy that will achieve concrete victories for local communities. In aggregate, these structures cultivate discipline, rigor, and focus in the everyday work of organizing for social action. They contribute to fostering a culture of democratic engagement as essential elements of "people-powered" organizations.⁹

18.4.2 Process

Without specific attention to the dynamic processes of citizen engagement such organizational structures will not yield the kinds of social and political change that communities seek. In particular, Alinsky-style organizations focus on the processes of (1) building power through local leadership and (2) garnering the political capacity necessary for winning. These processes create pathways for the voice and participation of everyday people. They are central to what Boyte and Kari (1996) term "schools for public life," spaces in which "people learn the arts and skills of everyday politics, politics far more multi-dimensional than voting," (145). They are environments of learning by doing—a kind of democratic practice with others to articulate one's political beliefs, values and interests, to negotiate and debate issues of concern, to strategize appropriate tactics, and to reflect on the ability of such actions to achieve desired changes (Boyte and Kari 1996). Learning in this context is contingent therefore on transforming the private individual into a public actor. It is also about transforming institutions once thought to be entities reserved for the private expression of one's religious or spiritual beliefs into spaces for public action. In the Alinsky tradition, the processes of building power and winning are key to achieving such transformation.

First, the leadership development of "ordinary citizens" is one of the most prevalent legacies of Alinsky-style organizing. Many existing groups do not embody the approach of organized local people made up of indigenous, native leadership, despite their identity as grassroots organizations. Alinsky-style organizations aim to develop a robust citizenry for political power and action. Professional advocates disconnected from the lived realities of communities facing poverty, injustice, or inequality have no place in Alinsky-style organizations. Organizers recruit, train, and mentor local leaders from member organizations. The primary task of any organizer is to develop leadership that can then mobilize followers for action. Fundamentally, organizing power relies on this process and the strength of

⁹Gecan (2002) explores the notion that organizing is not only about political change but also cultural change in three public realms: market culture, bureaucratic culture, and relational culture (151–166).

the relationships between organizers, local leaders, and their constituencies. Building leadership enables the Alinsky-style organization to have power to win.

Winning matters in Alinsky organizations. By and large, these organizations mobilize local power to influence public decision-making (policy) and private actors (business/industry). Without a large body of well-trained leaders who can turn out large numbers of people as an expression of power, the organization cannot make claims of accountability among policy makers and business leaders. The process of determining a political strategy that aligns with the organization's people power is critical to the success of any community organizing effort. In addition to "organized people," "organized money" plays a critical role in winning. IAF organizations emphasize that just as the leadership of the organization must be derived from within the member institutions, so too must the financial resources that sustain its work. IAF organizations rely on dues paying member institutions to support organizing and to demonstrate their organizational power. Organized people and organized money are therefore used to leverage the political muscle needed for influence. They are indicators of organizational strength and serve as negotiating tools for expressing the political heft of the organization.

18.5 Implications

Community organizing, and the Alinsky tradition itself, contributes to sustaining citizen engagement in democracy. By challenging injustice and abuses of power, and building collective power among poor, marginalized communities to achieve change, community organizing remains the primary vehicle by which broad groups of diverse people engage in the practice of democracy. Alinsky's core principles are visible in the multiple organizing schools of thought, and the elements of structure and process that give texture to what distinguishes Alinsky-style organizations today.

There also has been an evolution of the practice of community organizing since the days of Alinsky. Where Alinsky's influence on congregation-based organizing is prevalent, contemporary community organizing also has come a long way, integrating approaches and methods that reflect new communities, new realities, and deeper alignment with racial and gender justice (Wood and Fulton 2015). Since the 1970s, there has been considerable expansion of grassroots groups, training entities, community-based organizations, and movement organizations that apply Alinsky's core principles and, more importantly, adapt those methods within different political arenas and within different socio-economic contexts. Examining the organizational structure and processes of these groups is one way to see evidence of Alinsky's central tenets as well as how his approach has been adapted over time. For example, community organizing groups that are connected within larger state and regional networks, may have grown from the Alinsky tradition of local organizations built by local leaders, but they also reflect a reality that not all politics is local and that power in certain instances must amalgamate for particular types of political change (i.e. influencing state policy change for health care access or targeting federal immigration offices for improvements in the practices of adjudicating officers) (Stout 2010). Changes in organizational structure also reflect an evolution of methods, contemporary innovations that integrate new practices that Alinsky likely would have eschewed. These include greater emphasis on coalition and alliance building, more substantial engagement in electoral politics, and the increasing use of formal 501(c)4 organizations and political action committees aimed at direct political influence.

Community organizing today differs from traditional Alinsky-style organizing, especially in trends towards the professionalization of practice, new organizing practices (ex: digital organizing through social media tools), and the nationalization of grassroots organizing through

intermediaries like People's Action,¹⁰ The Center for Popular Democracy, and the Center for Community Change. Likewise, PICO, Gamaliel, and the IAF (to a lesser extent) have broadened their focus towards greater national presence. All of these organizations have had to face the challenges of financial sustainability and determine strategic responses to scarce resources that support organizing campaigns.¹¹ Technological advancements have not only improved communication, but also led to the invention of new organizing tools for engaging leaders and tracking data. With these technological advancements and beginning with the Obama campaign in 2008, community organizing strategies have been infused in electoral organizing in new ways. This integration has altered the nature of how campaigns are run on the left and the right (including the rapid rise of Tea Party candidates)—especially through the use of person-to-person recruitment, leadership development, and the growth of neighborhood-based team infrastructures (McKenna and Han 2014). Further, much of community organizing as a field has aligned itself with the Progressive left and its elected leaders, a relationship that for Alinsky would be too close to ideological strongholds and the targets of decision-making.

In the work of social justice, process matters. History has shown that organizations and movements are sustained by their people and how they engage with the opportunities and challenges of the day. While there is certainly continued relevance of Alinsky's main tenets, there is also a

need to adapt those methods to new contexts. For his time, Alinsky did much to cross barriers that divided ethnic groups in the Back of the Yards neighborhood. Yet he and his successors were widely criticized for an approach to organizing that falls short of the ideals of democratic inclusion. As early as the 1970s, organizers were seeking alternative ways to confront racial, ethnic, gender and socio-economic barriers to citizen engagement and promote community building that garners power for social change. The groups that diverged from Alinsky's model, such as ACORN and the Midwest Academy, developed and refined practices of engagement that are intended equally to build power for change through direct action and promote equitable and inclusive approaches to organizing (Sen 2003; Schutz and Miller 2015).

The changing political and institutional environment of the 21st century calls on those committed to the ideals of democracy to formulate new solutions to complex problems, relying on the lessons of history to inspire action for change. At this writing, Donald Trump's presidency has galvanized historic and unprecedented mass mobilizations, especially among women, immigrants, and people of color in opposition to his leadership and policy goals. Now more than ever effective organizations from these movements are necessary for large-scale social and political change.

Alinsky gave us ideas that are rich and adaptable for use in this changing environment. His methods are not without well-founded critiques and the practice of community organizing has benefited from the tremendous innovations and adaptations of its contemporary leaders. With this critique, the organizational form first developed by Alinsky has undergone essential transformations that have yielded a landscape of organizing that is richer and more sophisticated than ever before. There are more organizations, diverse in their structure but with similar goals of empowering citizens for action; there is greater knowledge about effective tools for organizing in different contexts, with different constituencies; and there is a flourishing and growing practice that has been refined to build sustainable

¹⁰People's Action and People's Action Institute were founded in 2016 as a merger of National People's Action, Alliance for a Just Society, and US Action and their 501 (c)4 sister organizations.

¹¹Just as the organizational structure of community organizations have shifted over time, so too has the structure of funding and fundraising. Alinsky-style organizations typically have been supported through dues-paying memberships with limited funding support from outside sources such as the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (a primary funder of community organizing for decades) or private foundations. Today, more and more organizations rely on grants to support their work. As a result, many organizations fall victim to the instability inherent in an inconsistent and unpredictable funding environment.

organizations beyond issue campaign or election and striving towards large-scale political impact. These are the necessary elements for realizing the democratic promise of which Alinsky dreamed.

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