

## Book Reviews

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Walls, D. (2015). *Community Organizing*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. 184 pp., \$22.95 (paper).  
Schutz, A., & Miller, M. (Eds.). (2015). *People Power: The Community Organizing Tradition of Saul Alinsky*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press. 352 pp., \$34.95 (paper).

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As a community organizer in Chicago from 1985 to 1988, Barak Obama drew attention to the profession with his successful Presidential election in 2008. Since then, the field of community organizing has expanded with wide dissemination, adoption, and innovation (Christens & Speer, 2015). The two books in this review focus on community organizing and the leaders within the movements. *Community Organizing* by David Walls (2015) provides an overview of the profession with emphasis on Saul Alinsky and his work as well as the development of new networks and approaches that diverted from Alinsky. *People Power*, edited by Aaron Schutz and Mike Miller (2015), focuses on the ideas and practices of Alinsky and his top five colleagues from the 1950s to 1980. Alinsky's approach to community organizing began in Chicago in the 1930s and eventually spread across the world. Schutz and Miller's book complements Wall's introductory text with a more in-depth historical perspective of community organizing and provide an account of the role of leaders.

Community organizing is used to obtain effective change by bringing individuals together to take collective action against social issues of concern. Community organizing is a phenomenon that is of interest for social scientists, policymakers, and funders as a model for intervention to address social issues (Christens & Speer, 2015). Understanding the field and the role of community organizing can not only inform practitioners that social change is possible but also shed light on how it can include individuals in any community. Both books highlight the role of community organizing in American social movements. Wall, and Schutz and Miller believe that the tradition started by Alinsky that has been modified and developed over the years can be utilized today to change the world. As one of the editors, Mike Miller states, organizers of the liberation struggle in Egypt and Occupy Wall Street would have been more effective if they had read about and learned from Saul Alinsky.

Community organizing can contribute to building an organization's strengths, cultivating civic involvement of community members, and building coalitions across diverse groups that include race, class, religion, and political ideology (Swarts, 2008). Participation has been shown to be beneficial for community members and contribute

to their well-being, including sense of empowerment and membership (Christens & Speer, 2015). Participation provides many opportunities for members in terms of skill development and learning, including leadership development and understanding local power dynamics (Christens & Speer, 2015). Community organizing has contributed to increased availability and quality of social and educational services as well as influenced public policy (Orsi, 2014; Swarts, 2008).

In *Community Organizing*, Wall describes social movement analysis in Chapter 1 in terms of its application to understanding community organizing with approaches that include resource mobilization, political process and opportunity, social constructionism (movements with collective identities such as the women's movement), and new social movements. He discusses how the approaches help to frame and explain the chapters that follow. Chapter 1 also defines community organizing and its role in 20th-century social reform. Chapter 2 profiles Alinsky and how Chicago influenced his perspective on community organizing. The chapter also discusses the development of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) by Alinsky, the systematization of training and practice of community organizing after Alinsky's death, and other innovations introduced by the IAF. Chapters 3 and 4 survey the key concepts, tools, tactics, and skills needed in organizing in the Alinsky tradition. Chapter 5 examines the development of other new national networks of community organizations. Wall stresses that the newer networks have provided innovative contributions to the practice of community organizing and have taken community organizing to higher levels of policy issues. Chapter 6 explores the application of community organizing to political campaigns, online activism, and mainstream social movement groups. It highlights the work of Marshall Ganz who worked with Cesar Chavez and served as a political consultant for Barack Obama. Ganz's background, writings, and work in politics are detailed. Chapter 7 outlines alternatives to the Alinsky tradition that include popular education using the Highlander Research and Education Center in New Markey, Tennessee, as an example; horizontalism with examples such as the Occupy movement; and consensus organizing through the work of John McKnight, John Kretzmann, and Mike Eichler. Finally, Chapter 8 looks at the critiques of community organizing. It also considers the proposals for transformational change in alliance with labor and other social movements on a national level. Given that the chapter is titled "What's next?" it falls short in detailing the future or possible futures of community organizing and its challenges.

*People Power* examines the work of Saul Alinsky and his five most important colleagues. Part I is an introduction of the topic of community organizing, Alinsky himself, core concepts, and an essay of what an organizer is. Each of the five sections in Part II focuses on a different Alinsky colleague. Section A is devoted to Nicholas von Hoffman who worked at the IAF with Alinsky for 10 years and organized The Woodland Organization (TWO) focused on African American neighborhoods that contributed to the civil rights movement. Fred Ross, who was hired as an organizer for the IAF and worked with Mexican Americans in the West, comprises Section B. Section C focuses on Tom Gaudette, one of Alinsky's organizers who started the Northwest Community Organization (NCO) that was part of IAF. Section D is about

Dick Harmon, who was one of the few staffers left at IAF after Alinsky's death. Ed Chambers and his work with the IAF after Alinsky are emphasized in Section E.

Part III of the book is about different directions in community organizing. Section A talks about Heather Booth and her work with Midwest Academy and Citizen Action. The work of Wade Rathke and the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) is reviewed in Section B.

Part IV addresses the state of organizing and its future. The first chapter is a summary of Alinsky and his work and concludes with a list of issues that are important to Americans. The next chapter discusses training using particular organizing models and the utility of church-based and neighborhood-based organizing.

Wall uses social movement analysis as the framework and provides illustration and context with case studies throughout the book. Schutz and Miller use primary sources that include previously untranscribed audiotapes, speeches by leaders, articles, documents from organizations and organizers, and interviews. Because the sources were developed and used for specific purposes and times, they provide historical perspective of the issues and circumstances of that time. Schutz and Miller serve as the editors who also wrote some chapters of this book. They provide prefaces before presenting the original content. The combination of many sources, editors' notes, and editors as authors make it unclear at times who the speaker is when references to "I" and "My" are presented, particularly when a chapter states that there are "various authors."

Both *Community Organizing* and *People Power* provide a balanced approach with the inclusion of critiques about Alinsky and the IAF's approach throughout the book. As an example, Schutz and Miller note that Alinsky's organization was dominated by European American men. The editors attempt to supplement the focus on Alinsky's five European American male colleagues by noting the contributions of women as well as non-dominant racial and ethnic leaders in community organizing throughout the book. Both books credit President Obama in bringing attention to the profession. Wall also uses Obama to critique the profession whereas Schutz and Miller believe if supporters of Obama read about Alinsky's tradition, it would help them make Obama a better president.

Both books emphasize the role of Saul Alinsky's teaching and tradition as a key historical influence in the field of community organizing. Both books provide a background on Alinsky, his origins, beliefs, and what influenced his work. The two books also discuss Alinsky's writings, their influence, and how they made him known to a national audience. Schutz and Miller in *People Power* start with Alinsky's first organization Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (BYNC) in Chicago. Wall in *Community Organizing* outlines an interesting view of how the political culture of Chicago in the first half of the 20th century is central to Alinsky's approach to organizing. Both books trace the development of changes to IAF during Alinsky's time—known as "early IAF"—as well as after his death—known as "modern IAF."

In addition to IAF, *Community Organizing* profiles other networks that have provided innovative contributions to the field as well as strategies used to survive. Some networks that have leaders who started at IAF or are Alinsky's colleagues use the IAF approach of organizing, including the Pacific Institute for Community Organization

(PICO), The Gamaliel Foundation, and Direct Action and Research Training Center. Schutz and Miller connect the work of Tom Gaudette as an influence for PICO. *Community Organizing* also explores other networks one step removed from IAF that include the National People's Action, USAction, and ACORN. *People Power* highlights Heather Booth and her work with Midwest Academy and Citizen Action that was later founded as USAction. The book also connects the work of Fred Ross to ACORN and provides a discussion of the work of Wade Rathke and ACORN.

In *Community Organizing*, Wall argues that the IAF has kept to its methodologies throughout the years with some refinement by senior organizers. Meanwhile, the other networks have explored a variety of approaches but have still remained in the spirit of the Alinsky tradition. One of the new approaches Wall highlights is electoral politics that draw on the techniques of Alinsky traditions but based in new technologies. In *People Power*, Schutz and Miller mention Alinsky's view of electoral politics as not the most effective way for people-power organizations to negotiate or gain power.

Both books conclude with analysis of the current state of organizing, a look at the future or possibilities, and challenges it may face. Wall in *Community Organizing* states that there has never been as many institution-based community organizations (IBCOs) as there are today. Wall believes that the IBCOs are doing well and crossing racial and religious boundaries with success—building effective groups that bridge race, religion, gender, class, and geography. Wall contends that there is a major generational shift among the networks using the Alinsky approach in which the younger generation must take over. Wall questions the willingness of the younger generation to cooperate with each other because they have less of a stake in the historical relationships. In *People Power*, Miller stresses the need to utilize different approaches. In the same book, Schutz proposes the concept of flexible organizers who are trained to build power reflective of the context of a particular area or issue to avoid unintentionally ignoring other potential options.

Both books provide a different way to examine community organizing. Wall's perspective in *Community Organizing* is from the view of profession and practice that includes organizations and leaders. Schutz and Miller's perspective in *People Power* is from its leaders and their contributions to the profession, practice, and organizations. *Community Organizing* provides an introductory-level content that is easy to read. *People Power* is for the more experienced organizer with its editors hoping that the book “. . . will challenge established ways of thinking, provide new ways of understanding old truths, and spark ideas for moving forward into an always uncertain future” (p. 11). Both books demonstrate the enormous impact that community organizing has had in addressing injustice at every level of society. Miller makes a connection between local and global issues as “. . . local issues are manifestations of global inequities; global issues are manifestations of the absence of local power” (p. 321). As the gaps between the poor and the rich, the have-nots and the haves, and the powerless and the powerful continue to grow, there will be an increasing need for community organizing to fight for social, racial, economic, and environmental justice at all levels of society.

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## Reviewer Biography

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