

## Media In 2014: Who Is Saul Alinsky And Why Should We Care?

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Last night the Washington Free Beacon's Alana Goodman **broke yet another story about Hillary Clinton** by doing journalism any major media outlet could do but, for some reason, doesn't. The Beacon looked through archives at UT-Austin and discovered correspondence between Clinton and Saul Alinsky.

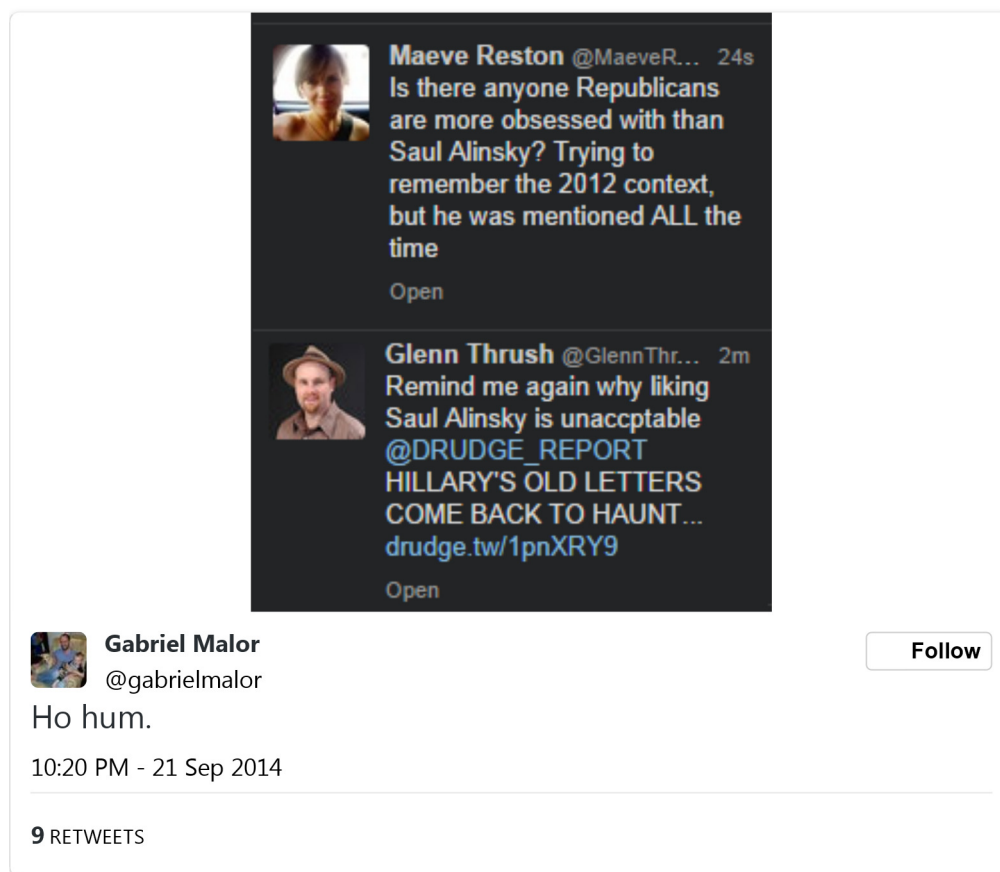
Now if you're a moderately well-read person, **you know who Saul Alinsky is**. You know that he wrote the book — influential particularly for folks on the left — Rules for Radicals. And if you were born before a few years ago, you know that Clinton has always been a tad touchy regarding her ties to Alinsky. When she was First Lady and it was discovered that her senior thesis was written on Alinsky's controversial tactics, someone — no idea who — gave her college the idea to seal her thesis from public view. She's largely downplayed his influence in the years since. And Clinton's ties to radicals are interesting because she is now running for president, obviously.

The right has done a lot of journalism on Saul Alinsky's influence of mainstream Democratic politicians such as President Barack Obama. This media coverage has been largely mocked or ignored. While conservative media outlets across the spectrum covered this influence in 2007-2008 — special recognition should go to **Stanley Kurtz**, who spent months digging up interesting stuff in Chicago, and David Freddoso, who also chronicled it well. Conservative reporters' knowledge of Alinsky has helped them see when Alinsky tactics — which are ostensibly ideologically neutral — have **been used on the right** as well. But in 2007-2008, the mainstream media was too busy fluffing Obama or sending dozens of reporters to investigate Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin's uterus or dig through her trash. (Remember when the Associated Press had **11 reporters fact check Sarah Palin's book**? Yeah ....)

The Beacon gets the story out showing that Hillary Clinton had a much stronger

relationship with the radical — and higher regard for his work — than her **one-paragraph dismissal of him in her memoir** would indicate. I know, all you non-media types are shocked that a Clinton would obfuscate.

OK, so let's go to Twitter to see what political journalists had to say about the matter. It's fascinating. Gabriel Malor took a screen shot of a Los Angeles Times political reporter and a Politico reporter pooh-poohing the matter:



Yeah, I can't put my finger on why people were talking about Alinsky ever... SAYS A POLITICAL REPORTER. I mean, seriously. I get if you're a normal person who lives a happy life unencumbered by discussions of politicians. But if you're a political reporter, how can you cover the manufactured War on Women without knowing from whence its tactics spring? How can you cover any political race without knowing how basic strategies of political change are employed by people on up to, oh I don't know, THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES? I'm sorry for shouting, but you see how it's kind of frustrating, no? Look at these 13 (or 24, depending on how you look at it) rules from Alinsky and you tell me whether the phrase "**Oh that's why Harry Reid and other Democratic operatives are constantly invoking the specific names of the Koch brothers**" doesn't immediately spring word-for-word from your lips when you get to

the end.

I'm not even saying that you should agree with conservative or moderate critiques of Alinsky but you should at least know who he is.

When Politico's Ben White admitted to **not knowing much about Alinsky**, fellow Politico Magazine White House reporter Glenn Thrush **assured him it was OK** to not know much about him. Deputy editor for Politico Magazine Blake Hounsell helpfully noted that **"He had some interesting organizing ideas."** White said, **"that's what Wikipedia taught me, yeah."** Later, **White said**, "The first rule of Twitter is never admit you don't know something. The second is to be outraged by everything. Those are the only rules."

Now, I certainly don't want reporters to pretend they know stuff they don't and I also don't want to get outraged about the knowledge base of the Politico staff but is there room here for me to suggest all y'all should start a book club or something? I didn't even get a degree in political science and I was forced to read and write a paper on **Rules for Radicals** by some lefty political science professor of mine (hard to distinguish them — I went to the University of Colorado) who thought we were living in **The Jungle** 24/7. You know what The Jungle is, right? Upton Sinclair? How about **Shakespeare**?

Of course, some reporters seemed to know Alinsky so they just went straight to **downplaying the report**. Why reporters are so interested in protecting some (read: Democratic) candidates and going for the jugular against (OK: Mostly Republican) others is something I didn't learn in journalism school because, it should be noted, I didn't go to journalism school. Here's Huffington Post's Sam Stein (who later said he thought the story was "totally legit and interesting" but just **"not a big deal"**):



**Sam Stein**

@samsteinhp

Follow

It was always there. we just refused to see it

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Alinsky

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10:27 PM - 21 Sep 2014

60 RETWEETS 104 FAVORITES

Why yes, that is the same Stein who **fact checked a Palin anecdote about appearing on Saturday Night Live**, why do you ask? And yes, totally the same exact Stein who thought it a **big deal that Palin's hometown paper hadn't been vetted by the McCain campaign**. Stop laughing.

See, here's the thing. I have absolutely no problem with reporters pooh-poohing random stuff from college, graduate school or early careers. If only they'd do it consistently. But I remember the Washington Post's **eleventy billion stories** about one Republican gubernatorial candidate's master's thesis. Or remember all those stories about how Sarah Palin's husband was a member of a third party in Alaska? The **New York Times sure gave that major coverage**. Or freaking Rick Perry walking near a rock that someone else painted with a bad word or something? Or Mitt Romney being engaged in high school pranks and that being given major coverage? Politico has **60 stories on Rand Paul and Aqua Buddha**, for crying out loud! Sixty!

Every time any GOP candidate does anything other than condemn novelist Ayn Rand to hell, **Politico knows to cover that**. At length. Ad nauseum. See, for example, the first three items that come up when you search for her name in Politico's search engine. Well, first there's a poll asking if Rand Paul is named after Ayn Rand (not at all, no). Then: "Ryan's love-hate with Ayn Rand," "7 pols who praised Ayn Rand," "Ayn Rand followers applaud Ryan." A similar search for Saul Alinsky yields very bizarre results,

most of them focused on making the claim that — I kid you not — it's the right who loves Alinsky. So we have "Right loves to hate, imitate Alinsky," "Newt Gingrich is no Saul Alinsky," and "A Saul Alinsky Republican?" and "Rudy: Newt acting like Saul Alinsky" and "James O'Keefe is Saul Alinsky in a funhouse mirror." You could write your own master's thesis on why the media portrays Alinsky as an albatross around the right's neck but then claims to not know who he is when there are fan letters between him and president-elect (too soon?) Hillary Rodham Clinton. If you did write that, you would not get a passing grade on that thesis at Wellesley or the University of Colorado, though.

This reminds me of a fun fact about Alinsky. Many people say that he dedicated Rules for Radicals to Lucifer, the Prince of Darkness. That is not technically true. Rather, he spoke fondly of him on the page preceding the Table of Contents. There he wrote, "Lest we forget at least an over-the-shoulder acknowledgment to the very first radical from all our legends, mythology, and history (and who is to know where mythology leaves off and history begins — or which is which), the first radical known to man who rebelled against the establishment and did it so effectively that he at least won his own kingdom — Lucifer." I love this quote from Alinsky because it gives a bit of a taste of how fun he is to read. He's joking, and yet you kind of see also how he's not joking. But if you read that and don't understand why Obama and Clinton would ever try to distance themselves from stuff like this, you should become a Politico reporter.

Anywho, that distancing is only made possible by the hard work and dedication of your media. How much you play along with that is up to you.

***Follow Mollie on Twitter.***

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