Some Books on Community Organizing

Compiled by classmate Lew Finfer, organizer with Massachusetts Communities Action Network and Faith in Action

1. *Activism that Makes Sense: Congregations and Community Organization* by Gregory Pierce. About an important segment of community organizing where the organization’s membership is from religious congregations. The four significant organizing networks using this form of congregation-based organizing are: Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), Faith in Action (formerly called PICO), Gamaliel Foundation, Direct Action Research and Training (DART).

2. *Reveille for Radicals, Rules for Radicals* by Saul Alinsky. Alinsky is seen as the modern founder of community organizing, starting with a group called the Back of the Yards Council in Chicago in 1939. He hired Fred Ross to build the Community Service Organization, a statewide group with chapters for Mexican-Americans; Ross hired Cesar Chavez and Delores Huerta, launching their organizing careers. Alinsky founded the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) to coordinate founding and supporting community organizing groups. The IAF remains a major organizing network.

3. *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* by Charles Payne. Has chapters on organizers and leaders and focuses on the work of the SNCC in Mississippi as led by Bob Moses. Other civil rights movement books: *The Children* by David Halberstam (about young civil rights leaders in Nashville like Diane Nash and John Lewis), John Lewis’s *Walking with the Wind* and *Good Trouble*, David Garrow’s *Bearing the Cross*, and Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters* (along with two others in his series).


5. *Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organization* by Rev. Dennis Jacobsen. Examines key organizing principles of power, self-interest, etc., through a religious perspective.


8. *Social Policy magazine* focuses on community organizing and is edited by Wade Rathke, the founder of ACORN.


11. *Building a People of Power; Equipping Churches to Transform Their Communities* by Robert Lithicum. How religious congregations can work on social justice issues, and the theological case for this within the Evangelical tradition.

12. *Ed Chambers Roots for Radicals*. Chambers was head of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) organizing network for many years.

14. Mike Miller's books: *Community Organizing, A Community Organizer's Tale.*

15. *Behind the Kitchen Door* by Saru Jayaraman. Saru directs the One Fair Wage campaign and is cofounder of the Restaurant Opportunities Center.

16. *The Fight for $15* by David Rolf. About organizing to raise the minimum wage, which was begun by New York City fast food workers organized by the SEIU labor union.

17. *Blessed be the Fighters* by Shel Trapp. Trapp was the longtime director of National People’s Action, which led the campaign to pass the Community Reinvestment Act. It continues today as the network called People’s Action.


19. *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization, and Strategy in the California Farm Worker Movement* by Marshall Ganz. Ganz was a major organizer for the United Farm Workers, led by Cesar Chavez. Ganz has been a major trainer of organizers here and around the world since the 1990s.


22. *Stand Up!: How to Get Involved, Speak Out and Win in a World on Fire* by Gordon Whitman. Whitman is a major organizer with the Faith and Action Network.

23. *Going Public: An Organizer’s Guild to Citizen Action* by Mike Gecan. Gecan is a major organizer for the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF)

24. *America's Social Arsonist: Fred Ross and Grassroots Organizing in the Twentieth Century* by Gabriel Thompson. Fred Ross hired Cesar Chavez and Delores Huerta for their first organizing jobs at the Community Services Organization in CA in the 1990s and was a major adviser to Cesar Chavez as he developed the United Farmworkers over the following three decades.