

Ny Times Bk Rev

Sun. 7-17-83

NONFICTION IN BRIEF

LOWENSTEIN

*Acts of Courage
and Belief.*

*Edited by Gregory Stone
and Douglas Lowenstein.*

*Foreword by Arthur
Schlesinger Jr.*

*Introduction by James A.
Wechsler.*

Illustrated. 369 pp.

San Diego and New York:

Harcourt Brace

Jovanovich. Cloth,

\$18.95. Paper, \$9.95.

By RICHARD J. MARGOLIS

The world could use a measured biography of Allard K. Lowenstein, that remarkable reformer remembered as the instigator of the Dump Johnson campaign that led to President Johnson's bowing out of office. Meanwhile, this collection of Lowenstein's writings, along with tributes and reminiscences from his friends, will have to do. The sampling in "Lowenstein" of his own speeches and articles is rather thin. As James A. Wechsler notes in an introduction, "Too much of what he said or did is not engraved in any official record or document."

Lowenstein's friends, however, afford us an affecting glimpse of both the man and his times. "A rare combination of generous passion and acute intelligence," as Arthur Schlesinger Jr. characterized him, Lowenstein became "the supreme agitator of his day." He appeared to have tapped some fountain of perpetual energy and hope until that moment in March 1960 when he was shot down in his Manhattan law office by a deranged young protégé.

As national chairman of Stu-

dents for Stevenson in 1952 and then as an aide to Senator Hubert H. Humphrey, Lowenstein plunged into mainstream liberal politics without forswearing his maverick credentials. By 1963 he was traipsing around Mississippi, riskily registering black voters. He spoke against the war in Vietnam, Jimmy Breslin reminds us, "at a time so early that the nation thought any such stand was treasonous."

A eulogy from The New Yorker recalls that Lowenstein

"shifted the boundaries of the possible so that other, more 'political' men could bring it into being." That was certainly the case in 1967, when he started the Dump Johnson movement, an idea, all the experts said, whose time would never come. Not all of Lowenstein's campaigns yielded victories. He ran for Congress in the unlikelyst of conservative districts, winning only once (in Suffolk County). Two years later the Republicans gerrymandered him out of office, but he kept right on crusading.

Lowenstein's enemies came from the left as well as the right. "Lowenstein is always ebullient," David Halberstam observed in a 1968 profile. "Probably that's one of the reasons the New Left doesn't like him, just as a lot of liberals now dislike Humphrey for the optimism of his tone, in what is to them an essentially dark time. Lowenstein is no Humphrey. He sees all the darkness . . . but he is resilient, optimistic and keeps saying that the system can work." "Resilient" and "optimistic" are the words that keep recurring in this affectionate anthology.
