

Books

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Allard Lowenstein's life made a difference

Reviewed by
JAMES CLOTFELTER

LOWENSTEIN: ACTS OF COURAGE AND BELIEF. Ed. Gregory Stone and Douglas Lowenstein. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 359 pages. \$18.95.

Three years ago, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro was planning a conference to honor the late Frank Porter Graham on the 50th anniversary of his installation as president of the old Consolidated University of North Carolina. Graham was, for many North Carolinians, the embodiment of idealism and service.

As we discussed the distinguished speakers to be invited — Benjamin May, Alexander Heard, Tom Wicker, Claude Pepper — we came to the keynote address. Only one person could do that. Only one person had Graham's idealism and his energy. Allard K. Lowenstein. Before I could reach Lowenstein by phone — he was usually between planes, usually on his way somewhere else — he had been killed by a deranged man.

This collection of essays is one of the memorials created by those he influenced. It provides some idea of what Lowenstein would have said, had he been in Greensboro for that conference in 1980, and what he would be saying now. There are articles by David Halberstam, Calvin Trillin, William F. Buckley, Jr., and others — and excerpts from several of Lowenstein's own writings and speeches, including a couple from North Carolina.

Lowenstein's credentials, in terms of offices held, are not terribly impressive. His life must be seen in terms of his success at mobilizing others.

Lowenstein arrived on the Chapel Hill campus in the late 1940s with a commitment to democracy and to social change. From Chapel Hill he went to the presidency of the National Student Association, leadership of Students for Stevenson in 1952, Yale Law School, several brief government and teaching appointments (one at N.C. State). He shared with the old New Dealers and referenced with whom he became close — Graham, Eleanor Roosevelt, Norman Thomas



Lowenstein

— a fierce optimism. Constructive change was possible. This optimism helped to convert many adversaries although, in the dark

days of the late 1960s, it infuriated many on the Left, who said the American system was beyond repair. It was this optimism, and his ability to infect others with it, that made him perhaps America's preeminent agitator, a great mobilizer of idealistic youth.

Often, Lowenstein was charged with acting like an adolescent, flitting from cause to cause, acting as if the possibilities for change were limitless, acting as if he really thought he could save the world.

Yet the realm of the possible may be enlarged by people with vision and energy. This book suggests how this enlarging happened in the "dumpy (Lyndon) Johnson campaign and in other Lowenstein efforts.

Although he was later to serve one term in the U.S. House, a few years as head of the liberal Americans for Democratic Action, and a few months with the American delegation to the United Nations, Lowenstein's greatest fame — and his only visit to "Meet the Press" — was during the "Jump Johnson" campaign in 1968. It was Lowen-

stein who decided that an incumbent president could be defeated by a party's renomination — then an outrageous notion — and that anti-war sentiment must be channeled into the political system.

The assassination of Robert Kennedy and the election of Richard Nixon that year kept Lowenstein from looking like a "winner." His work for seemingly just causes, from Madrid to Prague to Southwest Africa, led some to label Lowenstein a "loser," and his inability in the 1970s to regain a seat in Congress seemed to support that conception.

But, if life has any winners (and there is room for dispute here), I would suggest that Al Lowenstein was a winner. He had a vision larger than his own career and his own comfort, and he used his abilities unceasingly in behalf of that vision. More than that, he awakened in thousands of others their own sense of responsibility. He reawakened the lesson that one person can make a difference.

(James Clotfelter, professor of political science at UNC-Greensboro, is the author of three books.)