

ALLARD LOWENSTEIN

This book illustrates the remarkable impact the life of Allard Lowenstein had on a generation of Americans.

With his gifts of leadership, sympathy and intellect, Allard Lowenstein would have made a difference in any age. But he came along, one feels, in an age that peculiarly suited his talents and concerns. Born in 1929, he was sixteen years old when Franklin D. Roosevelt died -- too young for the New Deal, a cheerful and untidy time he would have greatly relished; yet old enough to find his way to Frank P. Graham and Eleanor Roosevelt and serve an early apprenticeship in the liberal tradition.

As an undergraduate at the University of North Carolina in the 1940s, he observed at first hand the workings of the segregation system. The Yale Law School in the 1950s gave him an understanding of constitutional process and possibility. Thereafter on law school faculties he developed his skills as a teacher of the young. But he was by temperament an activist. He was never content simply to discuss and document the inequities of society. His commitment was always to redress and remedy.

He sensed the currents of discontent and idealism that accumulated under the stagnant surface of American life in the 1950s and that began to break through in the Kennedy years. He responded, a little earlier than the rest of us, to the bitter failures of the society -- to racial injustice, to the Vietnam war, to the misery of the poor and powerless, to the plight of a radicalism that had lost its bearings. A man without fear, he toured the fighting fronts from Mississippi to South Africa in the unending battle

against oppression. Returning to his recruiting grounds in the universities, he brought eye-witness testimony of suffering and of heroism. With casual, ruffled eloquence he inspired the young to live the next years of their lives on behalf of others. Hundreds hearkened to his words, and enriched and transformed their own lives.

He did all this within a larger philosophy of social change. He was sure that the energy released in the turbulence of the 1960s could be turned from destructive to constructive uses. A man of reason, he abhorred violence; a realist, he understood that violence sundered the bonds of humanity and defeated its own objectives. His mission in the 1960s was to replace violence by persuasion and to incorporate the disordered wrath of the New Left into the constitutional framework of American political action. He never forgot that democracy is the discipline of consent.

Allard Lowenstein was a rare combination of generous passion and acute intelligence. Wholly devoid of meanness and of pomposity, he radiated candor, humor and sweetness. With his faith in reason, he believed in dialogue across the barricades and commanded the respect and affection of political and intellectual adversaries. He called for action but not for action's sake. He knew that unbridled emotion could not cure the complex ills of modern society, that sentiment, however virtuous, was no substitute for substance.

He was the supreme agitator of his day. Agitator is a noble word that has too often carried a bad connotation in America. Allard Lowenstein was an agitator in the highest sense -- a man who touched the consciences of his fellow citizens, educated their sensibilities and drew forth their capacity

for humane action. "Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet deprecate agitation," as Frederick Douglass said long ago, "are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning."

Allard Lowenstein plowed up the ground and sowed seeds that will come to fruition for the rest of the century. The spectacle of man's injustice to man never destroyed his confidence in democracy's capacity for self-correction. He lived in perpetual commotion, but his apparently inexhaustible vitality sprang from a serene optimism about humanity. His exalted vision of democratic potentiality and his imperturbable confidence in human reason left a rich legacy to which this book bears moving testimony.

Arthur Schlesinger, jr.

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