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WRITINGS

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FELLOWSHIP ANNOUNCEMENT BY UCSF

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## 1963

**Robert L. Allen** (M.A., New School for Social Research) has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for a first-year doctoral student in Medical Sociology at the University of California's San Francisco School of Nursing. Alumnus Allen was awarded the fellowship to investigate the Port Chicago disaster of 1944 where over 300 American sailors lost their lives in an explosion at the San Francisco East Bay ammunitions depot.

All of the enlisted men who were killed were Black. Alumnus Allen is Editor of *The Black Scholar*, a journal of Black studies and research based in San Francisco, and an Instructor in the Ethnic Studies Department of Mills College, Oakland, California. He is the author of two books, *Reluctant Reformers: The Impact of Racism on American Social Reform Movements* (Howard University Press, 1974) and *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* (Doubleday, 1969).



# UCSF GAZETTE

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## SCHOOL OF NURSING

### **Guggenheim to sociology student**

Robert Allen, 35, a first-year doctoral student in the Medical Sociology program, has received a Guggenheim Fellowship to support his research in the coming year. Allen is studying the Port Chicago disaster, an incident in 1944 towards the conclusion of World War II, when 320 naval enlistees were killed and 1,000 injured in an explosion in Port Chicago an East Bay ammunitions depot. The men, mostly black, had complained of unsafe conditions prior to the disaster. Survivors were ordered to



return to duty and those who didn't comply were court-martialed and brought to trial. Allen, editor of *The Black Scholar*, a journal of black studies and research, lives in San Francisco with his wife and two-year-old son.





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A four-year interest in a little studied incident in American history has led to a Guggenheim Fellowship for a first-year doctoral student in medical sociology at the University of California San Francisco School of Nursing.

Robert Allen, 35, has been awarded the fellowship to investigate the Port Chicago disaster, a devastating incident in July of 1944 toward the end of World War II, when over 300 American sailors -- both merchant seamen and naval enlistees -- lost their lives in an explosion in an East Bay ammunitions depot. According to Allen, scholarly attention to the disaster has been scant, "most likely because the war's end overshadowed the incident, and stacked up with losses abroad these numbers seemed minor."

Guggenheim Fellowships are awarded on the basis of "demonstrated accomplishments" in the past and "strong promise" for the future. This year the John Guggenheim Foundation awarded a total of \$4,602,000 to 313 scholars, scientists and artists chosen from among 3,050 applicants from throughout the U.S. and Canada.

The Port Chicago disaster, according to Allen, raises a number of important questions regarding both naval racial policies and worker safety. All of the enlisted men who were killed were black -- their officers were white -- and many had complained of unsafe working conditions and inadequate training prior to the explosion. When survivors were ordered to return to duty, Allen found those who didn't comply out of fear of the explosives were court-martialed and

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(more)



brought to trial. Fifty were charged with conspiracy to mutiny, a crime which could have brought sentences of life imprisonment or even death.

"In a curious transformation of responsibility, the victims became the culprits and were brought to trial," Allen commented.

Allen said he is interested in exploring the mechanics behind what was essentially a spontaneous protest against unsafe working conditions. "In particular," he explained, "I want to better understand the 50 men who refused to return to work. What was the character of these men that led them to undertake this strike?"

The Guggenheim Fellowship will support Allen in the coming year, as he travels around the country interviewing survivors, witnesses, attorneys and officers involved in the investigation and trial. Other documents and records are available in the Library of Congress, the Pentagon and the National Archives, he noted.

Robert Allen is well-known to many in the black community as editor of The Black Scholar, a journal of black studies and research. He is also an instructor in the Ethnic Studies department of Mills College in Oakland. He has been widely published. One of Allen's books, Black Awakening in Capitalist America, is used in ethnic studies, sociology and economics departments throughout the country. He also has been vocal with groups striving to overturn the Bakke decision -- a case which may decide the future of minority admissions to colleges and universities.

Allen received a B.S. degree in mathematics from Morehouse College in Atlanta in 1973 and an M.A. degree in sociology from the New School for Social Research in New York in 1967. He lives with his wife, Pamela, and two-year-old son in San Francisco.

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