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The Port Chicago Mutiny

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virtues. The author weaves together so many anecdotes, bits of gossip, and little-known facts that the reader cannot help but form a complete picture of the people and the times in which they lived.

In Our Image becomes even more fascinating toward the end, when the last twenty-five years of shared history become more familiar. Intimately acquainted with the Marcos' "conjugal dictatorship" and with virtually all the key players in the opposition movement which led to their ouster in 1986, Karnow provides fresh insights into the complex mixture of politics, corruption, greed, ambition, and idealism which culminated in Cory Aquino's victory. The chapter outlining the transition from Marcos to Aquino and the U.S. policy decisions relating to it are vivid and compelling.

The book touches briefly on the current insurgency, but, regretfully, was completed prior to subsequent coup attempts and the Philippines' present political malaise. Nonetheless, it provides such a measured and complete foundation that the reader cannot help but gain a firm grasp of the challenges and imponderables which now face Mrs. Aquino. Stanley Karnow has virtually created a genre of journalistic historicism; *In Our Image* is excellent from start to finish. Potential readers should not be put off by its nearly five hundred pages; it is a journey that is both enjoyable and worthwhile.

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Allen, Robert L. *The Port Chicago Mutiny*. New York: Warner Books Inc., 1989. 192pp.

The 1944 ammunition explosion at Port Chicago, California, is obscure today. It produced the most casualties of any U.S. domestic industrial accident connected with World War II. Yet Robert Allen's excellent book should help diminish that obscurity, for he discusses how the ramifications extended far beyond the actual incident.

On the night of 17 July 1944, two merchant ships at the Port Chicago pier exploded while crews of black navy enlisted men were loading ammunition for transportation to the war zone: the *E. A. Bryan*, a Liberty ship, and the *Quinalt Victory*, a brand-new Victory type. The accident killed 320 men, injured 390 others, and damaged or destroyed much of the ammunition depot. The Victory ship was broken up and hurled some five hundred feet from her berth while the Liberty ship was essentially atomized.

Perhaps the incident is so little known because naval history has traditionally concentrated on the strategic and operational aspects of wars. Logistics is far behind as a subject for study, but it is well to remember that Task Force 58, for example, would have been toothless in the Central Pacific campaign without the bombs, rockets, projectiles, powder, and machine gun bullets loaded aboard hundreds of merchant ships at Port Chicago, about forty miles east of San Francisco.

Dr. Allen has chosen to concentrate on the men and on the disciplinary

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consequences when stevedore crews expressed their unwillingness to return to the dangerous work after the explosion. The author, an African-American scholar, has focused on the fact that 202 of the men killed were black. Indeed, the stevedore crews were all black, reflecting a pattern found throughout the still-segregated U.S. Navy of World War II. Even though black enlisted men were permitted in the general service ratings and were not limited to food service jobs as they had been previously, they still had precious little opportunity to get into combatant billets. Instead, they were mostly used as laborers, both in the United States and overseas.

In the wake of the incident, the ship-loaders were willing to undertake any type of duty other than ammunition loading, especially in view of the unsafe working conditions they had experienced in the past. (The officers in charge, who were white, had bet each other which crews could load most quickly, for example. Loaders had rushed the jobs to comply with the directions of these officers.)

The Commandant of the Twelfth Naval District, Rear Admiral Carleton Wright, threatened the recalcitrant enlisted men with death, and all but fifty reluctantly returned to work. The remaining fifty were then court-martialed for mutiny because of their collective insubordination in wartime.

The defense legal team argued that the refusals were individual acts, not conspiracy, and in any event were

analogous to a sit-down strike that civilian stevedores might mount—far from active attempts to seize authority, which traditionally constitutes mutiny. Predictably, the fifty men were found guilty and sentenced to fifteen years apiece in prison. Eventually, because of the end of the war and pressure from a variety of groups such as the NAACP, the men were released from prison after only about a year.

Dr. Allen has done a superb job with this study, in part because of his near-compulsion to ferret out the story and commit it to paper. His research is compiled from both documentary sources and oral-history interviews with a number of the original ammunition-handlers.

Especially valuable to Allen's research was the cooperation he received from Joseph Small—one of the leaders of the group charged with mutiny—who describes the atmosphere in the depot and in the nearby town during the period before the blast, and also the dissatisfaction with the segregated system and with the psychological devices used by the men to keep working in such a situation. The explosion took away those compensating mechanisms.

In today's navy, it is likely that teams of psychiatrists would flock to help the men deal with their trauma; in 1944, however, they were accused of cowardice and then disciplined. Under the system then in effect a man either did his duty or he was punished; there was no middle ground, no mitigating circumstances. Thus the book offers a window not only into

the prevailing racial atmosphere in the navy of that era but also into its methods of dealing with people in a wartime environment.

As a consequence of the public attention engendered by the Port Chicago incident, black navy men were dispersed more widely than they had been and the service took steps toward reducing discrimination before President Harry Truman's watershed executive order that integrated the armed services in 1948.

Throughout the text, Dr. Allen portrays the viewpoint of the black ammunition-handlers. Given the progress that the navy has made in the last forty-five years regarding racial awareness, his description is valuable in pointing out how much needed to be changed. It is not easy for a group of men to refuse to do their duty in wartime, but this book helps us to understand why these men did so and to sympathize with their plight.

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Johnson, Loch K. *A Season of Inquiry: Congress and Intelligence*. Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1988. 317pp.

This is a new but apparently unchanged edition of a book originally published in 1985 about the 1975 Senate inquiry into alleged "abuses" by the U.S. intelligence community. According to the author, it was republished in the wake of the Iran-Contra scandal which had indicated that such abuses have continued

despite the establishment of a formal congressional oversight structure that resulted from earlier congressional investigations. The author was a staff assistant of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities, which became known as the "Church Committee" because it was chaired by Senator Frank Church (D. Idaho).

While the substance of the intelligence abuses uncovered by the investigation—assassination attempts, illegal telephone taps, etc.—are interesting in their own right, this book is really about the Church Committee: the senators, the staffers, the politics, and the problems involved when one branch of the government attempts to investigate another. Johnson details the inner workings of the Church Committee and provides a fascinating study of congressional activities—a "primer on how the Senate works," as a reviewer of the first edition stated. The author provides an insider's viewpoint of how that political power is manifested in Washington, along with the personal ambitions, jealousies, and priorities of our congressional leaders at work. It is well worth reading.

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Smith, Stuart W. *Douglas Southall Freeman on Leadership*. Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press. 1990. 262pp.

Shelby Foote is probably the best known Civil War historian alive,