

## Acclaimed Lawyer, Poet

**SAMUEL W. ALLEN**, 97, a College of Arts & Sciences professor emeritus of English, on June 27, 2015.

Allen, who often wrote under the name Paul Vesey, was an acclaimed lawyer and a professor, translator, and poet, whose work was influenced by the oral tradition of African American culture, particularly that of Southern African American churches.

Born on December 9, 1917, in Columbus, Ohio, the son of an African Methodist Episcopal bishop, Allen attended Nashville's Fisk University, where he majored in sociology and graduated with high honors in 1938. He went on to earn a law degree from Harvard Law School in 1941.

Allen served in the US Armed Forces during World War II and studied at New York's New School for Social Research in 1947. The following year, he moved to Paris on the GI Bill and studied at the Sorbonne. While in Paris he met fellow African American writers James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, and Richard Wright, and published his first poems in Wright's journal, *Présence Africaine*, in 1949.

Upon his return to the United States, Allen embarked on a legal career, which included serving as a deputy assistant district attorney in the New York district attorney's office, an attorney with the federal government in Washington, D.C., in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, and an attorney in private practice. He also taught law at Texas Southern University from 1958 to 1960.

"Although he had trained as a lawyer, he told me that he so hated—as a prosecuting member of the DC District Attorney's office—sending his fellow African Americans to jail that he quit the law and turned to teaching," says Helen Vendler, the Arthur Kingsley Porter University Professor at Harvard University and a former BU College of Arts & Sciences professor.

Allen taught literature at Wesleyan University and the Tuskegee Institute,

where he was named Avalon Foundation Professor in the Humanities. He then came to Boston University, where he taught from 1971 until his retirement in 1981. He is remembered as "a valued and remarkable colleague," Vendler says. "He

was an excellent teacher, with a sobriety gained from the law and an enthusiasm generated by his learning and practice alike."

On April 2, 2010, Allen was inducted into the International Literary Hall of Fame for Writers of African Descent at the Gwendolyn Brooks Center for Black Literature and Creative Writing at Chicago State University.

"He loved poetry, as a poet himself, and to quote Frost, his avocation was his voca-

tion," says Vendler.

His collections of poetry include the bilingual *Elfenbein Zähne* (1956), *Ivory Tusks and Other Poems* (1968), *Paul Vesey's Ledger* (1975), and *Every Round and Other Poems* (1987), and he translated Jean-Paul Sartre's *Orphée Noir* and Léopold Sédar Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*. His essay "Negritude and Its Relevance to the American Negro Writer" (1959) continues to be widely reprinted.

In his poem "To Satch," Allen writes:  
 Sometimes I feel like I will never stop/  
 Just go on forever/  
 Til one fine mornin/  
 I'm gonna reach up and grab me a handfulla stars/  
 Swing out my long lean leg/  
 And whip three hot strikes burnin down the heavens/  
 And look over at God and say/  
 How about that!

JENNIFER BATES (COM'16)

## A "Classical Meritocrat"

**MARK G. FIELD**, 92, a College of Arts & Sciences professor emeritus of sociology, on October 21, 2015.

A renowned expert on the Soviet health care system, Field was born in Switzerland in 1923 to stateless Russian parents who had fled their home city of Odessa. The family arrived in the United States in 1940.

Field attended high school in Jackson Heights, Queens, and spent a year at Hamilton College before enrolling at Harvard University, where he studied Russian.

He was drafted in 1944 and assigned to a World War II unit designed to communicate with Soviet troops. Shortly before the end of the war, he was sent to Germany, where he remained stationed until he was severely injured in an accident. After an eight-month hospitalization, he resumed his studies at Harvard, graduating with a bachelor's degree in 1948.

He later worked at Harvard's newly opened Russian Research Center and was one of the first students to graduate from the Soviet Union program, receiving a master's degree in 1950. He earned a PhD in sociology from Harvard in 1955 and published his first book, *Doctor and Patient in Soviet Russia*, in 1957.

Field taught at BU from 1962 until his retirement in 1988. He was also an adjunct professor in the Harvard School of Public Health department of health policy

and management and an associate of the Harvard Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies for more than six decades.

Colleague Paule Verdet, a CAS professor emeritus of sociology, remembers Field as "a true gentleman," who was always welcoming to new faculty.

"He was truly decent and rigorously honest," says Jeffrey Coulter, also a CAS professor emeritus of sociology. "Mark was not in the least concerned about what you studied, in which journals you published, in which paradigm you worked, just as long as they made the standard of excellence which he insisted upon. He was a classical meritocrat. May he rest in peace."



Allen



Field