

Vera Green (1928-1982)

Educator, Social Scientist, Author

Written by Vanessa Julye

Vera Green was born in Chicago, Illinois and was a member of its 57th Street Meeting of Friends. She attended William Penn College in Oskaloosa, Iowa, a college founded by Friends, where she studied sociology and psychology. In 1952, she received her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Sociology from Roosevelt College in Chicago, Illinois. After years of working at various social welfare jobs in Chicago, Green moved to New York to begin her academic study of anthropology at Columbia University where she received her Master of Arts Degree in 1955. Green then began to work in international community development with the United Nations. She was very concerned with the issue of international human rights. Her actions on behalf of human rights contributed significantly to interethnic studies, black family studies, and the study of poverty and the poor.

Green continued to work for the impoverished in 1963 when she served as one of American anthropologist Oscar Lewis's research assistants in his study of a poor urban area in Puerto Rico and in New York. After Green completed this fieldwork, she entered a doctorate program at the University of Arizona in Tucson, where she received her Ph.D. in Anthropology in 1969. Green carried out her doctoral fieldwork and dissertation on the Caribbean island of Aruba. She was one of the first African American anthropologists to study ethnic relations in the Caribbean.

Some of Green's more prominent positions were supervising anthropologist for a research project in Aruba, Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology for the University of Houston from 1969 to 1972 and Associate Professor of the Department of Anthropology in Livingston College and Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Green forced people of Color around her to disbelieve in their inequality that the world was telling them that they shouldn't be allowed to hold important job titles or be scientifically inclined. She conducted extensive fieldwork, gave many

speeches and wrote publications on the aged, international human rights, migration, voluntary associations and applied anthropology.

In 1973, Friends General Conference (FGC), a North American organization serving unprogrammed Friends, asked Vera Green to study “the problems of, and possible approaches for, attracting more Black members” • to the Religious Society of Friends. Her findings were to be distributed and discussed at a June 1973 session of FGC. In her “Blacks and Quakerism: A Preliminary Report,” • Green described her procedure and the small but still revealing sample of fourteen respondents she interviewed in person or by phone. Eleven of her respondents were African American. Of those, six were Friends, and one of them birthright. The five non-Friends did not belong to other churches and had a variety of professions. All but two of the African Americans were currently or had been students and/or teachers at Quaker schools or colleges. The other three respondents were of European descent, all of them Friends, two of those, birthright. Three research questions sought the “general Black reaction” • to Quakerism, the possible motivations for an African American to “attach themselves to the Society,” • and the factors that might keep them away from such an “attachment.” •

Some of Green’s observations were that previous to their introduction to Quakerism, her African American informants knew little about Quakerism; those who did tended to have similar socioeconomic and educational status as Friends of European descent. She also noted that the attractive features of Quakerism for her interviewees were patience, casual dress, lack of ceremony, and general Quaker “understanding towards humanity,” • though some also saw patience as a way to “cop out” • of the racial conflict of the time. There was also confusion about the terms “peaceful,” • “passive,” • and “passive resistance” • and, for some, these terms were too closely associated with the submissiveness demanded of enslaved people in order to survive.

During her long academic career, Green also served as director of the Mid-Atlantic Council for Latin American Studies and as convener of Quaker anthropologists. She was active in the Society for Applied Anthropology and president of the Association of Black Anthropologists. In each of these organizations Green encouraged African Americans and other Third World people to pursue careers

in anthropology. After a long fight against cancer, Green died on January 17, 1982. Her passion for anthropology and her encouragement of African American, Puerto Rican and other students of Color remained strong until the day she passed.

Resources on Vera Green

- Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics; By Irma McLaurin (editor); Rutgers University Press, 2001
- Black Quakers, Brief Biographies; By Kenneth Ives; (Out of print, available at some libraries)
- Migrants in Aruba: Interethnic Integration; By Vera M. Green; Van Gorcum, 1974; (Out of print, available used)
- “[Vera Mae Green, 1928-1982](#)” •; By Johnnetta B. Cole; American Anthropologist, New Series, Vol. 84, No. 3 (Sep., 1982), pp. 633-635
- [E-Museum @ Minnesota State University, Mankato](#)
- [University of South Florida Anthropology Department](#)

This document was downloaded from the website of Friends General Conference. Explore the many resources and opportunities we offer for Quakers, Quaker meetings, and all interested individuals. Go to www.fgcquaker.org.

