



Dr. Alice Paden Green

Sustaining the Legacy of Social Justice Activist Dr. Alice Paden Green

By Dr. Brenda M. Greene

Social justice and criminal reform activist **Dr. Alice Paden Green** was Founder and Executive Director of the Center for Law and Social Justice in Albany, New York. She was also committed to ensuring that there was a presence of writers, and particularly Black writers in the Adirondacks, also known as the North Country. Dr. Green transitioned in August 2024 and is survived by her husband Charles Touhey.

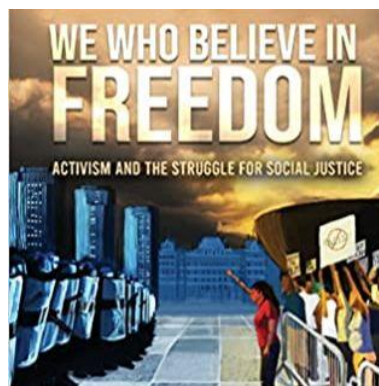
Meeting Dr. Alice Paden Green was a transformative experience for me. I met Alice and her husband Charles Touhey when I was writer-in-residence at the Paden Institute and Retreat for Writers of Color. The Institute, founded in 1997 by Alice and Charles, is one of New York's best-kept secrets for writers. Located in a cottage in Essex, New York, it sits behind a big house referred to as "Content." Stories abound that this Revolutionary-era house, with its false ceilings, was a stop on the Underground Railroad. Writers selected for the Paden Institute stay from one to four weeks while working on their writing.

I stayed at the Paden Institute and Retreat for four weeks in August 2001. At Paden, I had a chance to write, read, and relax in solitude. I was able to retreat into my own inner sanctuary, to reach into the depths of my soul, and to begin the journey of remembering those experiences

that had brought me to a place where I felt compelled to share my life and observations on living as an African American child, woman, wife, mother and scholar in America.

As Executive Director of the Center for Black Literature at Medgar Evers College, CUNY, I was also searching for a place to hold a retreat for writers of color. While at the Paden Institute, I found out that the Valcour Conference Center, located on the shores of Lake Champlain and owned by SUNY, Plattsburgh, was a place that could be rented for retreats. In 2004, the Center for Black Literature collaborated with the English Department at SUNY, Plattsburgh, and the Paden Institute and Retreat for Writers of Color to host the North Country Retreat for Writers of Color. We renamed it the **Wild Seeds Retreat for Writers of Color** after the Valcour Center became too small to host our retreats.

In 2024, I founded the **Alice Paden Green Writers' Institute and Residency for Black Writers** in Essex, New York. The institute and residency sustain the legacy of Alice Paden Green by providing a nurturing space for Black Writers whose work focuses on social justice to work on their writing and to fellowship in a supportive community.



Green's memoir, *We Who Believe in Freedom: A Memoir of Activism and the Struggle for Social Justice*, provides a vivid and gripping portrait of the injustices faced by many as a result of racism, the prison-industrial complex, and police brutality. She ends her stirring and poignant memoir with the words "We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes." These

words embody how Green, the victim of a racist incident that occurred when she began her first job, is committed to living a life of activism. The seeds of activism were thus sown and became a central part of Alice Green's DNA. She used her voice and her writing to become a strong advocate for prison reform, fairness, and equity in voting, housing, employment, and education. Readers will be inspired by her persistence in the face of many obstacles and her description of politics and civic unrest in Albany and will become witnesses to her portrayals of the many Black people who have been victims of social, economic, and political injustice.

Dr. Brenda M. Greene is an Author, Professor Emerita, and Founder and Executive Director Emerita of the Center for Black Literature at Medgar Evers College, CUNY. For more information, visit <https://www.drbrendamgreene.com>