

Charles E. Hall

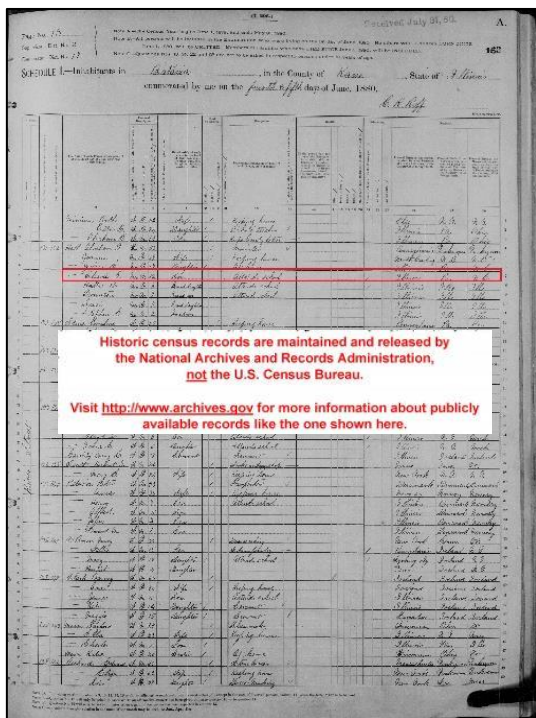
Statistician, U.S. Census Bureau Supervisor, Presidential Advisor

The U.S. Census Bureau is proud of its history of continually evolving to ensure an accurate count of the people of the United States. To accomplish this, the Census Bureau has long embraced the hiring of a diverse workforce representative of local communities and the people who were a part of the neighborhoods that they counted. For this reason, census work was often one of the few government jobs open to minorities. Beginning with the 1870 Census (the first after the abolition of slavery), the Census Bureau began hiring African Americans as enumerators and data processors. With the creation of a permanent Census Bureau in 1902, Black workers and statisticians found an environment with an inclusiveness far greater than many contemporary institutions.



The Pittsburg Press (Pittsburg, PA)
November 4, 1917.

Born on May 22, 1868, in Batavia, Illinois, Charles E. Hall was the son of Reverend Abraham Thompson Hall, the first African American to receive a license to preach in Chicago, and Joanna Huss Hall, a community activist and mother of 12 children. Charles attended the area's public schools and then business college at Spokane and Wilberforce Universities in Ohio. After attending university, Charles served as the first African American clerk for a senate committee in Illinois's legislature. In addition to his clerkship, he also worked as a reporter and eventually became the managing editor of the *Illinois Record* from 1897–1898.



Historic census records are maintained and released by the National Archives and Records Administration, not the U.S. Census Bureau.

Visit <http://www.archives.gov> for more information about publicly available records like the one shown here.

Charles and his Family's 1880 Census record.

While the historical record is vague about how they met, U.S. Congressman and future U.S. Senator A. J. Hopkins secured a political appointment for Charles to work at the Census Bureau as a clerk for the 1900 Census. Seizing the opportunity to advance his career and support his new bride, Lena Watters, Charles began a career that would span nearly 4 decades. He quickly established his talents and in 1905, researched and wrote a 165-page report entitled, "Pottery and the Clay Products of the United States." Charles's report served as the first time the U.S. government published a report on a commercial subject with statistics compiled by an African American.

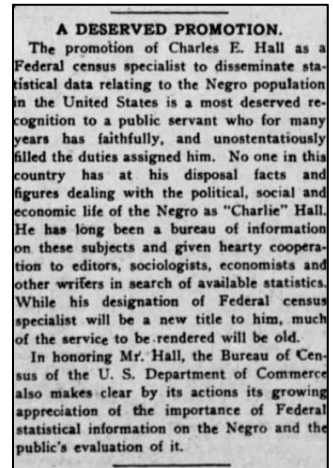
A few years after this, Charles, William Jennifer, and Robert A. Pelham cowrote the 1915 Bulletin #129, "Negroes in the United States." Published in 1918, this report provided policymakers and academics with a detailed history of the

African American population up to that point in time. Additionally, contemporary statisticians and civil rights activists recognized the 1915 report as an important document for how it identified and attempted to address inaccurate historical data on the Black population, and for how the authors used statistics to show Black progress in agriculture, social outreach, and population gains.

In addition to his clerical work, Charles gained field experience by collecting data on divorce records in Chicago and criminal records in Philadelphia. He also collected data from various industrial centers in the northern and western states that captured the early stages of the eventual “Great Migration” of African Americans from the southern states. The data Charles collected from these field surveys continued to enrich the Census Bureau’s various reports and helped draw the attention of lawmakers and social reformers to the unique experiences of African Americans.

In May 1935, Charles earned promotion to the position of specialist in what was then called the “Negro Statistics Section.” By earning this promotion, Charles became the highest ranking African American to hold a leadership position within the Census Bureau. Charles continued to diligently serve the African American community in numerous ways, including supervising the publication of *Negros in the United States: 1920–1932*, a newer edition of the 1915 Census Bulletin #129, and serving on President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “Black Cabinet.”

As a member of President Roosevelt’s “Black Cabinet,” Charles and 44 other prominent African American civil servants lobbied for African Americans to receive equal access to federal job opportunities that were part of the New Deal programs. This informal organization also pioneered the inclusion of the first anti-discrimination clauses in government contracts; championed further integration within the federal workforce; and fought for better treatment and broader inclusion of African Americans within the U.S. military. Finally, Charles and his colleagues laid the groundwork for future civil rights activism and legislation.



The New York Age (New York, N.Y.)
June 15, 1935.



Charles (front row, ninth from the left) and his colleagues on Roosevelt’s “Black Cabinet” in 1938. Image Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institutes’ Collections.

Two years after receiving his first promotion, Commerce Secretary Daniel Roper, wrote to President Roosevelt and informed the president that Charles was the most qualified person to serve as the leader of the recently combined Department of Commerce’s Division of Negro Affairs and the Census Bureau’s Negro Statistics Section. Upon accepting the promotion, Charles split his workday in half, so he could manage the activities of both individual offices within the Department of Commerce and offer guidance to those employees serving under him when needed.

Although he began his career as a clerk, through

persistence, talent, and some timely support from his colleagues and supervisors, Charles rose to become a senior leader in two agencies.

Ultimately, Charles led both offices for 2 years before retiring from federal service on May 31, 1938, after nearly 4 decades of federal service. Although the current historical record is silent about Charles’s life in retirement, there are a few snippets in newspaper clippings and the official records. Charles passed away in September 1952 at the age of 84, while visiting Dr. Lloyd A. Hall, one of his nephews, in Chicago. The obituary noted that Charles, a widower at the time of his death, was survived by three other nephews and five nieces. His obituary and the location of his gravesite in East Batavia Cemetery suggest Charles returned to Illinois, after living in the nation’s capital for almost 4 decades. We are grateful for Charles’s service to his community, the U.S. Census Bureau, the Department of Commerce, and our nation.



Charles E. Hall (right) in Washington, DC, around 1940. Image Courtesy of the Chicago Public Library, Harsh Research Collection.

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