

Guillermo “Bill” A. Camilo

Activist and Enumerator

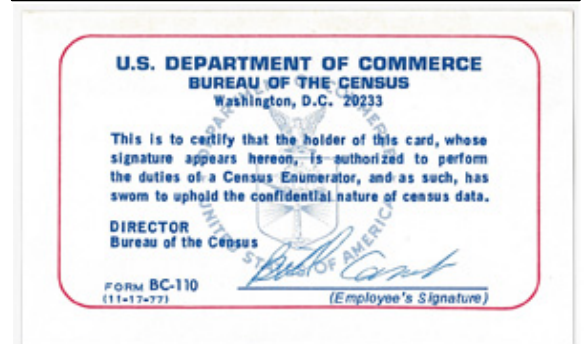
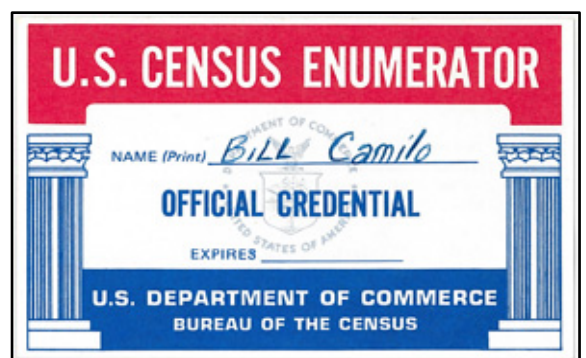


Bill Camilo (date unknown)

(Photo courtesy of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, San Francisco, CA)

Guillermo A. “Bill” Camilo was born in San Francisco de Macoris, in the Dominican Republic on January 8, 1959. In 1962, Bill’s parents, who were both doctors, immigrated from the Dominican Republic through Puerto Rico and settled in South Brunswick, New Jersey. Bill attended Christian Brothers Academy in neighboring Middletown, New Jersey, where he played on the chess team. Following high school, Bill went to Rutgers University where he was active in the gay and lesbian rights movements, most notably through his work with the Rutgers Gay Alliance (RGA). In 1979 Bill worked as head of the RGA Outreach and Dance Committees and in April 1980 the RGA elected Bill as vice-president. He advanced to president in the fall of that year.

The Census Bureau is proud of its history of working with different components of the American diaspora to ensure an accurate picture of the people of the United States. For this reason, the Census Bureau has always embraced the hiring of a diverse workforce. Once the Bureau began using professional enumerators (as opposed to U.S. marshals) to collect data in 1880, it sought to hire people who were a part of the communities they counted. For this reason, census work was often one of the few government jobs open to minorities and marginalized people.



Bill’s 1980 Enumerator Card

(Photo courtesy of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, San Francisco, CA)

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Census Bureau is revising its 1980 census questionnaire to better tabulate the number of Gay and straight couples who live together without being married.

Starting with the 1980 census, the Census Bureau will use the term “partner or roommate” to classify unmarried persons living together, said a Bureau representative. This category will hopefully make the questionnaire more acceptable to couples not fitting other, previously used categories.

The Blade (Washington, DC) 1 March 1979

The Census Bureau had long recognized that, in order to get accurate counts in marginalized populations, it must hire enumerators who were familiar with and known in the community. Although the decennial census has never collected information on sexual orientation or identity, Bureau leadership recognized the gay and lesbian community as one at risk of undercount. For this reason, the Census Bureau actively pursued gay and lesbian enumerators.

Furthermore, the 1980 census was the first to offer the option “partner or roommate” to classify the relationship of unmarried couples, both gay and straight. Prior to that, the head of household had to list the other as a “lodger or boarder.” For the first time, the gay community had a way to make their relationships visible to the government.

WASHINGTON — The Census Bureau is soliciting Gays to help in the 1980 Census as part of the Carter Administration's efforts to broaden the base of patronage jobs in an election year.

In a letter to the National Gay Task Force, Census officials wrote that "at the suggestion of the President," Gay organizations around the country were being asked if their members would like jobs, which pay about \$4 an hour.

The Blade (Washington, DC) 6 March 1980

Bill successfully passed the enumerators testing and training early in 1980, and became one of the 458,523 temporary census employees. Together they counted 226,542,199 American residents. He was a valuable enumerator both for his diversity as a gay Hispanic man, and, according to his friends, for his authenticity and ability to make people feel comfortable.

On May 1, 1980 the New Brunswick police arrested Bill for loitering. Bill received support from a myriad of gay rights groups and the ACLU, and had his case taken on pro bono by a prominent local lawyer. The state of New Jersey dropped the case, however, Bill decided to leave Rutgers and New Jersey in February 1981 and relocated San Francisco, CA. In San Francisco Bill continued his activism. He became a member of the San Francisco Democratic Club in 1981, served as co-chair of the media committee for the 1983 San Francisco Gay Pride Parade, and helped found the Gay and Lesbian History Center. In 1984 Bill worked with the Alice B. Toklas Lesbian/Gay Democratic Club. In 1987 Bill took part in the Second National March on Washington.

Bill also became one of the preeminent club and party organizers and worked with some of the most well-known entertainers of the day. Some of his memorable celebrations include the Bow Wow Beauty Pageant owner-dog lookalike contest, the Pigs in Paradise parties that supported the San Francisco Gay Police Association, and the Journey to the Center of the Earth party that drew over 30,000 revelers.

Harkening back to his days at the RGA in charge of the Outreach and Dance Committees, Bill used his skills and prestige to combine the San Francisco club scene and activism. The biggest cause in Bill's life was the fight against HIV/AIDS. Through his work with numerous groups such as Silence is Death, Stop AIDS, Pets Are Wonderful Support (PAWS), Positive Resources, and many others, Bill raised millions of dollars through events and parties to support research and victims of the AIDS crisis. Bill's colleague and fellow activist Bobby Moske, who worked on many of the same projects, described Bill as a "bulldog" activist who worked tirelessly towards the acceptance of LGTBQ people and the prevention and eradication of AIDS.

Bill's activism and outreach greatly influenced the gay rights and AIDS outreach movement in San Francisco, where his club was a prominent community meeting place for a large range of activities. When Bill himself became sick, his supporters and friends got together to raise \$50,000 to help take care of his living and medical expenses. Despite his illness, Bill traveled in 1993 to participate in the March on Washington for Gay, Lesbian and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation and see the AIDS quilt displayed across the National Mall. On November 15, 1993, at the age of 34, Bill passed away in San Francisco. In honor of his memory, the Board of Supervisors of San Francisco closed their meeting that day with a moment of silence. The Census Bureau proudly counts Bill Camilo as one of our ranks.



Bill participated in the 1987 Second National March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights

The Santa Cruz Sentinel (Santa Cruz, CA), 12 October 1987



The AIDS Quilt displayed in Washington, D.C.

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