

Mary Forte Grady

Singer, Community Builder, Career Census Specialist

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.



Mary in 1939.

The Aitchpe, Hyde Park High School Yearbook, 1939 (Chicago, IL)

Mary Forte was born on November 19, 1921, in Chicago, Illinois. Mary's father, Cyril, had first come to the United States from Barbados in 1900 to work as a porter on Pullman railcars, and Mary's mother, George Augusta, and four siblings joined him in 1920. Mary and her siblings benefited from their parents hard work and prioritized education, with all but one brother attending four years of college. After graduating from Hyde Park High School in 1939, Mary

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.

Mary and her family's 1940 Census.

attended Wilson Junior College (today known as Kennedy-King College) before heading to the Chicago Conservatory of Music. Throughout her life Mary would be known for her gifted soprano, and often used her voice to not only speak up, but to provide entertainment for several causes and fundraisers.

In 1947, Mary married Leonard W. Grady, a World War II veteran who served as an engineer in North Africa and Italy and who briefly worked in the US Post Office before starting a fuel delivery company in the 1950s. Mary and Leonard both believed in giving back to their communities and participated in local politics and community organizations like the Lions Club. Mary used her singing skills to help advertise and fundraise for several causes, like local schools and black history celebrations and worked as an organizer for Parent Teacher Associations and the United Negro College Fund. Mary also understood the power of media, and was quick to write in with both praise and criticism when newspapers covered, or failed to cover, important events. Mary's community involvement and media savvy made her the perfect recruit for the Census Bureau in 1969, when leadership created a new position directly aimed at community outreach for historically undercounted populations.

THANKS

Dear Editor:

Thank you for your interest in the Decennial Census, and your assistance in achieving a complete count.

We received many telephone calls, letters, "Were you counted" forms and other media coverage as a direct result of the excellent articles written by Chicago Daily Defender staff writer Faith Christmas.

**MRS. MARY F. GRADY
COMMUNITY RELATIONS
SPECIALISTS
U.S. DEPT. OF COMMERCE
BUREAU OF CENSUS**

The Chicago Daily Defender
(Chicago, IL) October 13, 1970.



CHICAGO DCC STAFF MEMBERS (first row, from l.) Ellen Malec, Elynore Chalberg, and June Schaumann. (Second row, from l.) Mary Nichols, Pat Curtis, Barbara Monroe, Judy Graham, Eleanor Voight, Georgia Martin, and Martha Klos. (Top row, from l.) Kem Worley, Robert Peterson, Andy Canger, Keith Rasmussen, Mary Grady,

Editor's note: This article on the Chicago Data Collection Center is the fourth of a series. Dallas will be highlighted in the November 10 issue.

in
the
field

The 1970 Census Community Education program marked a new direction for the Census Bureau. Although there had been a long standing policy of having people representative of their neighborhoods in census operations, there was still significant undercounts following the introduction of mail response for the 1960 Census. To counteract this, the Census Bureau instituted an program to educate respondents about the importance of completing the census for both representation of and funding to their neighborhoods.

Mary, standing fifth from the left, with the Chicago Regional Office in 1972.

The SESA Inquirer, October 13, 1972.

Mary joined the Census Bureau in 1969, and traveled to headquarters in Suitland, MD, for training in October. Mary then returned to Chicago and began working with approximately 120 clubs, schools, churches, social groups, business organizations, local governments, and other organizations. Mary primarily focused on increasing response rates among historically undercounted urban populations such as African American and Spanish speaking households. Although estimates vary based on methodology, the 1970 Census had an estimated undercount of the black population of 7.7 percent, compared to an 8 percent undercount in 1960.

Following the 1970 Census, Mary continued working with the Census Bureau on public outreach. She attended training at Census Bureau headquarters, and in between censuses worked on assisting community groups in Chicago on the use of census statistics to further their causes. For her work, Mary received one of the Department of Commerce's highest awards—the Bronze Medal—in 1975.

By the time the 1980 Census began, Mary had worked her way up the census ranks to regional coordinator for service programs where she continued her outreach to difficult to count populations. When the response rates from the mail-response surveys ended up being less than 60% for some predominantly minority districts in Chicago, compared to 80% response rates in other parts of the city, Mary helped to organize a "Black Census Day." The event drew thousands of people to 29 different sites and helped convince households to answer during follow-up operations in May.

Mary continued to work for the Census Bureau through the 1990 Census, where in addition to her normal outreach she focused on recruiting more senior citizens as census workers. Mary retired from the Census Bureau in 1991, although she remained active in her community and within her church. Mary passed away on January 15, 2000, survived by her two sons. Regarding his mother's devotion to her census work, one son remembered, "My mom had this perspective that



Mary Grady

Jet, January 24, 2000



RECIPIENTS from Census are, standing from l.: Paul Greenwell (CSvD), Ignatius Bellivan (ENG), Dorothy Bomberger (CUS), Mary Grady (Chicago R. O.), Joseph Breslin (BUS), and Joanna Barten (GOVS). Sitting from l.: Mildred Keull (DSD), Geneva Spence (CSvD), Stella Sutton (ISPC), Dollie Finn (CSD), and Clara Miller (SRD).

Mary, standing third from the right, was awarded one of the Department of Commerce's most prestigious awards, the Bronze Medal, in 1975.

The SESA Inquirer, February 1975.

everyone should be counted... she had a vision of democracy that included everyone." We are grateful for Mary's service to the U.S. Census Bureau, our nation, and her community.