

Enid Charles: One Hundred Years 1894 - 1972 - 1994

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This brief note is designed to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Enid Charles in 1894. Since 1994 is also the International Year of the Family, it affords an appropriate opportunity to salute a demographer whose professional preoccupations in the 1930s and 1940s included the study of fertility and the family, interests she pursued while living and working in Canada from 1940 to 1946.¹ It is also fitting, given Charles' views on "race" that her centennial year is the year in which Nelson Mandela was elected the President of South Africa, a country where apartheid had been the rule for so long.

(Dorothy) Enid Charles was born in Wales on December 29, 1894, the only daughter by second marriage of a clergyman, the Reverend James Charles. From 1913 to 1916 she was a student at Newnham College one of two colleges for women at Cambridge University. There she studied, or as they say at Cambridge "read" mathematics, economics and statistics. After completing undergraduate studies in 1916, she went on to the University of Liverpool where she remained for about a year. Like other feminists of her day, Charles disapproved of the institution of marriage, but in 1918 she married Lancelot Hogben (1895-1975) whom she had met at Cambridge. Charles and Hogben parented four children born to them over an eleven year period from 1918 to 1929. The marriage lasted more than 39 years, ending in divorce in 1957. From about the mid 1950s to 1964, Charles worked as a Regional Advisor and Population Statistics Consultant for the World Health Organization, travelling extensively in connection with her duties in southeast Asia. She retired shortly before her 70th birthday, and died in 1972 in Torquay, England at the age of 77.

By 1923, Charles could report that she was "BA, MA, Cantab". Nevertheless, during the 1920s, she bore and raised children while following her husband as he moved from one university appointment to another, even crossing continents. Hogben's academic appointments outside of England brought them to Canada (in the 1920s, Hogben had a position at McGill University in Montréal), and also took them to South Africa and Scotland. During the family's stay in South Africa from 1927 to 1930, when Hogben was Professor of Zoology at the University of Cape Town, their fourth child

was born (in 1929), and Charles also completed Ph.D. studies at the same university (in 1930). Her doctoral dissertation was in the field of physiology, as were also a number of related articles, some coauthored with Hogben. These were published over the period from 1930 to 1933, some in South Africa, and some in England.

In 1930, Hogben took up a new appointment as Head of the Department of Social Biology at the London School of Economics and Political Science. In the early 1930s, Charles became a member of Hogben's Social Biology group, along with Kuczynski, Glass and others, and the focus of her work shifted to the study of human population. Charles' second publication in the population field, "The twilight of parenthood", released in a first and second edition (1934, 1935) aroused some controversy for a number of reasons, but mostly because it went against the prevailing eugenic views. Various investigations of this period in recent years demonstrate that, in the words of one writer "... orthodox eugenics was never unopposed..." (MacKenzie, 1981, 46).² Although Hogben and others shared Charles' views (amply documented by Kevles, MacKenzie and Werskey), a cloud seemed to attach itself to her in these years. This was not helped by Charles' extraordinary gift for making enemies. Some she acquired because of her own blunt behaviour and a habit of saying exactly what she thought; others she inherited "by association" as the wife of Lancelot Hogben. (He too made enemies by freely expressing his iconoclastic views, vocally and in print, a Hogben characteristic that has been much written about.) Nevertheless, Charles continued to do demographic research, notably on the family and in connection with the preparation of population projections. The results were documented in a variety of publications in the second half of the 1930s decade, and were also reported, especially the projections, in books authored by the leading British demographers of the day (Kuczynski, 1935; Glass, 1936, 1940). Although Carr-Saunders is said to have been critical of Charles in the 1930s, her projections and her 1934 volume were favourably noted in his work on world population (1936; 1964).

In the years from 1940 to 1946, Enid Charles worked in Canada, and from her arrival she was associated with the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, now Statistics Canada. She authored the 1941 Census monograph "The changing size of the family in Canada" (1948) and related publications. Eugene Grebenik maintains that her work in Canada in the 1940s was not particularly innovative from the point of view of method, but was based on "... the application of reasonably well known techniques to demographic data"; and that her contribution lay in the investigation of topics which heretofore had received scant attention in Canada (1991). Since she had training and experience that were in very short supply in this country in the

1940s, her devotion to work and considerable productivity helped to "get things started" here in demography.

A facet of her work recently brought to light by her children deserves mention. Her younger son recalls that of all her activities in Canada, Charles seemed most proud of having succeeded "... after a long struggle to have the word race eliminated from the Census" (Hogben, D., 1993). Although it was mentioned only very unobtrusively in a footnote in the monograph that the term "racial origin" in use up to and including the 1941 Census, had been changed to "ethnic origin" (p. 103), there is sufficient evidence in this work of what must have been her influence in the matter. She included a passage on the problems inherent in the Canadian census "racial origin" concept (pp. 52-55), and an appendix on the "Biological significance of racial origin classifications" (pp. 293-294). In the latter she noted in passing that "... the biological basis of the major so-called races is obscure..." Later, in a 1956 report for the World Health Organization in Burma (now Myanmar), Charles concluded with a lengthy note on the rules to be followed when using the term "race" in statistical documents. Mentioning her previous Canadian experience, she advised in every case the substitution of the term "ethnic group" for "racial group". Although this is now an old story, it should be recalled that in Charles' day, the biological and genetic bases of "race" were hotly-debated, and that in the interests of science and society, Charles never hesitated to make her position known.

Enid Charles left an impressive body of work, in both published and unpublished form, most of it hidden away in different places. The bibliography of her publications on population includes more than 30 titles, released over the years from 1932 to 1953. This does not include the early publications in physiology from 1930 to 1933, nor the 24 unpublished reports documenting her apparently tireless activities for the World Health Organization in southeast Asia. And in regard to her work in Canada... on the basis of six years spent here she firmly established the study of fertility and nuptiality, publishing analytical studies, articles and notes based on the Canadian census and vital statistics. Her work has served the social scientists who later pursued these and related areas of demographic research in this country. She deserves to be remembered and commemorated on the one hundredth anniversary of her birth which occurs on December 29, 1994.

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Footnotes

1. These have now been established as the correct dates of Charles' arrival to and departure from Canada, and should replace the dates noted in Wargon, 1992.
2. It is illuminating to consider the view, echoed by others, that the work of Hogben's Social Biology group was eventually "... instrumental in distancing the study of population from eugenics", giving it an independent status of its own and thus beginning "the evolution of demography as an independent discipline" (Grebenik, 1986, 11).

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