



Dr. Charles Wesley Harris

September 12, 1927 - November 15, 2025

DR. CHARLES WESLEY HARRIS

Charles Wesley Harris, affectionately known as “C” and “Charlie” by family members and friends, was born on September 12, 1927, in Lee County (Auburn), Alabama. He was the third of six children of the late John Wesley and Leila Magby Harris. While growing up in the rural Auburn area he attended the historic (Rosenwald) Longwood Elementary School. The Rosenwald schools were a network of approximately 5,000 schools specifically built to educate Black children in the segregated South that involved a collaboration between Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald, then chair of the Sears and Roebuck Company. He graduated from the Lee County Training High School in Auburn and was valedictorian of his class. He served in the United States Army with the 3523rd Transportation Corps Truck Company receiving an Honorable Discharge. Dr. Harris was awarded the World War II Victory Medal and Army of Occupation Medal for his service.

Dr. Harris received the B.A. Degree from Morehouse College in 1949 (cum laude). He was a schoolmate of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and was mentored by Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, President of Morehouse, and Dr. Robert Brisbane, chair of the Political Science Department. He was a member of the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity while at Morehouse. He earned his M.A. degree from the University of Pennsylvania and his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin Madison, both in Political Science. He completed post-doctoral and/or special studies at Harvard University, University of Michigan, The John Hopkins University (SAIS), and the Georgetown University Law Center.

Dr. Harris' career was divided mainly between academe and public service, with a short tenure in private industry with the Xerox Corporation in Rochester, New York. He began work in government in 1967 at the US Civil Service Commission, now the Office of Management and Budget, (OMB), as Associate Director of the Executive Institutes. Although he spent many years in government, his most notable government position was as Senior Specialist and Chief of the Government Division (GS-18, prior SES) at the Congressional Research Service (CRS). Congressional Research Services' non-partisan research consistently earned high respect and distinction in the national Capital area and beyond.

During the 1960's, Dr. Harris taught History and Political Science at Coppin

State College (now University) and was widely regarded by students and faculty peers as a distinguished, indeed impressive, member of Coppin's elite professorial staff. Notably, Dr. Harris played an instrumental role in collaboration with his fellow faculty member, Dr. Lawrence Reddick, to persuade Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to visit the Coppin campus and deliver an address extensively covered by the press.

In 1970, Dr. Harris, by virtue of his impressive scholarship and stature, was recruited by Howard University to join its Political Science Department. During Dr. Harris' full-time tenure at Howard, he was also an adjunct faculty member at Georgetown University. Dr. Harris was awarded full-time research grants by the Ford Foundation and the Woodrow Wilson Center of the Smithsonian Institution. He also received research appointments at the Brookings Institution.

Most of his academic years were at Howard University, where he was a professor, research scholar, administrator, and mentor of students. As a full professor of political science, he taught courses in political theory, human resources, and urban politics. Dr. Harris held significant leadership positions at Howard, serving as Chair of the Department of Political Science and Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts (now the College of Arts and Sciences).

While serving as Department Chair, Dr. Harris was instrumental in securing a two million dollar grant from the Ford Foundation to enhance graduate programs in the Department and the College. The Ford Foundation grant enabled the Department to hire additional faculty members and increase the number of graduate student fellowships. He chaired the doctoral dissertation committees of many students. Following his retirement from Howard, Dr. Harris donated funds to endow an annual public affairs lecture (The Charles W. Harris Lecture) in the Political Science Department, which began in 2007.

Dr Harris' honors and awards include: the American Political Science Association's Distinguished Scholar Award; appointment as US representative to HM 151st Wilton Park International Conference in Steyning Sussex, England, UK; James Fund Graduate Fellow, University of Wisconsin Madison; Pi Gamma Mu National Honor Society, University of Pennsylvania; appointment by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education to serve on a national panel of scholars to review graduate and undergraduate political science programs at the eleven public universities and colleges in the State of South Carolina, including Clemson and the University of South Carolina.

He authored five scholarly books and monographs, including Perspectives of Political Power in the District of Columbia and Congress and the Governance of the Nation's

Capital. He also published many articles and essays in professional journals. His book, Congress and the Governance of the Nation's Capital, was cited in The Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, and several political and social science journals. He also published a book of historical fiction, Neeka and the Squirrel Highway, an easy reader for children. Dr. Harris was married to Edna Jefferson of Texarkana, Texas and they are parents of two daughters, Neeka (Gary) Jones of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and Angela (Seyi) Olurotimi of Fort Mill, South Carolina. He is predeceased by two siblings, Mr. Benjamin F. Harris, and Mrs. Bernice (John) Dickerson. He is survived by his sister Mrs. Juanita (Clarence) Jairrels of Anniston, Alabama, five grandchildren, several nieces and nephews, and a host of cousins and extended family members.

Cemetery Details

Green Chapel Missionary Baptist Church

390 Lee Road 106
Auburn, AL 36832

Previous Events

Visitation

DEC 12. 2:00 PM - 6:00 PM (cst)

Peterson and Williams Funeral Home
1016 McCoy Street
Opelika, AL 36801
(334) 745-6473
pw1016mccoy@hotmail.com

Service

DEC 13. 11:00 AM (cst)

Green Chapel Missionary Baptist Church
390 Lee Road 106
Auburn, AL 36832

Tribute Wall

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“ We would like to extend our deepest condolences to the family of Dr. Charles Wesley Harris. Our prayers are with you during this difficult time. Although we were not honored to meet Dr. Harris personally, we are truly grateful for his generosity and the impact he made on so many lives.

Our son, Taylor Smith, was a recipient of Dr. Harris's scholarship at Green Chapel Missionary Baptist Church. Taylor also attended and graduated from Howard University, where Dr. Harris served as a professor. We are thankful for the legacy he leaves behind and the many young people he inspired through his dedication and service.

With heartfelt sympathy,
The Smith Family

Troy and Tammy Smith - December 12, 2025 at 03:39 PM

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“ I am a doctoral graduate of the Political Science program at Howard. It is the 2nd largest program for undergraduates and a nationally recognized graduate program. I am honored to be the recipient of the hard work of Dr. Harris in creating the program. Thank you Ms. Judy Battiste for sharing this information on this scholar!

Joe Grant, PhD - December 09, 2025 at 09:41 AM