

REMEMBERING

Harry Augustus Cole '49

BY PATRICIA YOUNG

As the first black Assistant Attorney General in Baltimore and the first African American to hold a Maryland State Senate seat, the Hon. Harry Augustus Cole led a distinguished civil rights journey throughout his life.

In a letter to his wife on his passing on February 14, U.S. Sen. Paul S. Sarbanes remarked: "Judge Cole's accomplishments as a pioneer and trailblazer in the political, judicial and racial history of our state have inspired a generation of leaders to emulate his determination and standards."

It seems that Cole was destined to be a leader. An ordinary man, the youngest of five children, Cole was known as a "man of the people." Like Rosa Parks, who this June received the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor for her role in initiating desegregation for the nation, Cole integrated the Maryland State Senate, the Attorney General's Office, the Maryland Advisory Committee to the United States Civil Rights Commission, the Charles Center Complex and Maryland's highest court, the Court of Appeals.

These great acts originated from humble beginnings. Educated in the Baltimore City Public School System, Cole graduated from Frederick Douglass High School in 1938. Knowing he wanted to pursue higher education, but having limited means to do so, Cole worked for one year waiting tables and shining shoes to earn the \$69 admission fee to Morgan State College.

His years at Morgan shaped the type of man he would become in his professional career: a leader and activist. At Morgan, Cole held the office of president of the Student Council as well as of the Debating Society. He served as president for his junior class and was founder and editor-in-chief of the *Spokesman*, the campus student newspaper. Cole was inducted into Kappa Mu National Honor Society and was valedictorian of his 1943 class, graduating *magna cum laude*. Unable to attend his commencement exercises because he was called to serve in the Army for two years during World War II, Cole received an honorary discharge in 1946, as first lieutenant.

Three years later, Cole graduated from the School of Law, marking the beginning of his tireless work on behalf of the citizens of Baltimore. He concentrated his efforts in criminal law and civil rights, offering his services pro bono to those unable to afford otherwise. Cole's political career was sparked by the need to fight for civil rights, and his determination to correct wrongs was matched by his success in doing so. In 1950, Cole ran unsuccessfully for the House of Delegates; likewise a year later for the City Council. Though he



did serve as Justice of the Peace and Substitute Magistrate, it wasn't until he was appointed Assistant Attorney General in 1953 that his mission was set in a flurry of activity.

From 1954 to 1958, Cole served in the Maryland State Senate. In 1967, then-Gov. Spiro T. Agnew appointed Cole to the Municipal Court of the City of Baltimore. In 1968, Gov. Agnew appointed Cole to a 15-year term on the Supreme Bench, now known as the Circuit Court. In 1977, Cole was named to the state's highest court, the Maryland Court of Appeals, by acting Gov. Blair Lee III. From then until he accepted mandatory retirement in 1991, Cole continued to fight the fight of the "little man."

One of Cole's greatest honors was to be the first alumnus of Morgan State University appointed chairman of its Board of Regents in 1995. He served until his death.

Harry Augustus Cole is survived by his wife of 42 years, Doris Freeland Cole; three daughters, Susan Cole Hill, Harriett Cole Chinsee, and Stephanie Cole Hill; his sister Dr. Pearl Cole Brackett, and two grandchildren.