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 determina-
tion and standards."

It seems that Cole was destined to be a leader. An ordi-
nary 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 initiat-
ing 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 other-
wise. 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.