

# Harry Cole, trailblazer

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■ **Jurist:** *He challenged political boss to represent black constituents, then broke color bar in judiciary.*

**H**ARRY A. COLE was a first-rate judge in both the trial courts of Baltimore City and the Court of Appeals — the state's highest — in Annapolis. Yet it was as a trailblazer that Judge Cole, who died Sunday at 78, will best be remembered.

He was Maryland's first black assistant state attorney general. He was the first black senator in the State House, defeating an incumbent backed by a powerful white political boss. And he was the first black appointed to the state's top court in Annapolis.

These were enormous accomplishments. The most difficult may have been loosening the stranglehold of political boss James H. "Jack" Pollack in black sections of Northwest Baltimore. Mr. Pollack worked assiduously to keep his white slate of Democratic candidates in office. Mr. Cole had to run as a Republican to knock off a Pollack senator in the 1954 general

election by just 37 votes.

Mr. Pollack returned the favor in 1958, backing a candidate who defeated Senator Cole. But the door had been opened for others — Verda F. Welcome and Clarence M. Mitchell III — to destroy Pollack's racial blockade for good.

Mr. Cole served 10 years on the city's Municipal Court and Supreme Bench. His elevation to the Maryland Court of Appeals in 1977 marked another milestone — he became the first black jurist in that court's 200-year history.

For 13 years, Judge Cole participated in appellate decisions. He was thoughtful, scholarly and a staunch defender of a defendant's constitutional rights. Equality under the law was no theory to Harry Cole: He practiced it daily.

Racial attitudes have changed since the days when a bright Army veteran graduated from the University of Maryland School of Law in 1949 only to encounter segregation and discrimination. Harry Cole helped eliminate racial injustices. This state and this city are far better places as a result of his trailblazing work.