

# Judge's appointment was historic first in state

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BY FREDERICK N. RASMUSSEN  
[SUN REPORTER]

Mabel E. Hubbard, the first African-American woman to serve as a judge of the District Court of Maryland and later the Circuit Court of Baltimore City, died Saturday at Atrium Village, an Owings

Mills assisted-living facility, of complications from a fall. She was 69.

In 1981, Gov. Harry R. Hughes appointed her to the District Court and four years later to the Circuit Court.

She retired from the bench in August 1999.

"She had a stellar career and took seriously her responsibility as the first Afri-

can-American woman judge in the state. She served with distinction and touched a great many people along the way," Chief Judge Robert M. Bell of the Maryland Court of Appeals said yesterday. "She also mentored many African-American women. Her influence will be felt for years."

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HUBBARD

# Maryland's first black female judge dies at 69

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"Her appointment was history making, and what's even more amazing is that it wasn't until the 1980s that we got a black woman on the bench in Maryland," said Marcella A. Holland, administrative judge of the Baltimore Circuit Court.

"She was a woman of great dignity who had lots of humanity. She cared about people and didn't have a petty bone in her body," said Baltimore Circuit Judge Kathleen O'Ferrall Friedman, a colleague and longtime friend.

She was born Mabel Evelyn Houze on Dec. 22, 1936, and raised in Mount Clemens, Mich. The daughter of a restaurateur and a nurse, she earned a bachelor's degree in English in 1958 from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and did postgraduate work at the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Pennsylvania.

Judge Hubbard's path to the bench was somewhat circuitous. After teaching English in the public schools of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia and working as a vice principal and social worker, she moved to Baltimore in 1970 with her husband, Robert Hubbard, whom she had married in 1964. Mr. Hubbard, a Baltimore assistant housing commissioner from 1970 to 1973 and later a city official in Wilmington, Del., died in 1992.

After teaching English from 1975 to 1976 at Walbrook Senior High School, she took time off to raise her two sons.

While at home, she decided that she'd like to attend law school and enrolled at the University of Maryland.

"I was surprised to learn that there was a law school in downtown Baltimore. I was interested in learning for learning's sake," Judge Hubbard told *The Sun* in a 1986 profile.

But by her second year of law school, she was hooked.

"I knew by then they weren't going to just let me read the law. Law school is so seductive. There are very few people, I believe, who can go through law school



Judge Mabel E. Hubbard actively recruited black women as law clerks. "She said it was a 'duty to open doors of opportunity to African-American women,'" said state Sen. Lisa A. Gladden, her former clerk.

[SUN PHOTOGRAPHER 1986]

and not think like a lawyer," she said in the interview.

"She took care of two young boys while going to law school. She just loved it," said a son, Robert C. Young of Washington.

Three years after graduating from law school in 1975 and passing the bar, she became the first woman to be appointed a master in Baltimore's Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, a position she held until she was named a district judge.

When Judge Hubbard was appointed to the Circuit Court in 1985, she replaced Judge Robert B. Watts Sr., the noted civil rights lawyer, and the next year ran successfully for a 15-year term.

During her career, Judge Hubbard earned a reputation for being tough-minded but fair. She was balanced and methodical in her approach when hearing cases, colleagues said.

"I'm the same way when I prepare dinner for company. I decide what I want on the menu and spend two days preparing," Judge Hubbard told *The Sun*. "I'm the same way when I'm working on a speech. I've spent 10 hours pre-

paring a 30-minute speech. I just want to be right."

"Her term was defined by a lot of criminal cases. I'd sit in her courtroom watching her address uncooperative people, and it was amazing how she could turn them around," Judge Holland

said. "She spoke softly but carried a big stick. She knew how to deal with hardened criminals."

"She knew people and how to make decisions in a compassionate way that reflected her respect for them and her love of the law," said state Sen. Lisa A. Gladden, a for-

mer law clerk of Judge Hubbard's.

"I remember in child support cases, she'd order a father who didn't want to pay child support locked up. She'd tell them, 'Find someone who loves you.' They would and then the money would come rolling in," she said.

"She really was more like Mother Hubbard, that's what we called her, than Judge Judy," said retired city Circuit Court Judge Elsbeth L. Bothe.

Judge Hubbard knew the value of humor and wit, and enjoyed freely sprinkling her courtroom with witticisms that became known as Hubbardisms.

"One of her favorites was, 'If that is true there is not a dog in Georgia,'" said Senator Gladden, who liked to call them Judge Hubbard's "Southern sayings."

When a man appeared in court with a shirt unbuttoned to his navel, Judge Hubbard observed, "Be still my heart. Sir, please button your shirt so I won't be forced to lust after you."

On another occasion when a man wearing an undershirt and trousers entered her courtroom, Judge Hubbard advised, "Sir, I wouldn't entertain my husband in his underwear in my courtroom. You have an hour to go find a shirt or jacket and return to court."

When the man asked, "Where

do I find a shirt or jacket in an hour?" Judge Hubbard cracked, "Find someone who loves you."

In another on a list of Hubbardisms, she said in response to a defendant's incredible statement: "I've got to stop coming to court with my neon sign on my forehead saying 'Fool. Fool. Fool.' That way you'll be [less] inclined to spit in my face and tell me it's raining."

Judge Hubbard actively recruited African-American women as law clerks.

"She wasn't playing the race card, but she knew how difficult it was for them to get clerkships," Senator Gladden said. "She said it was a 'duty to open doors of opportunity to African-American women.'"

Judge Hubbard, who lived in Northwest Baltimore, enjoyed music, reading, and traveling.

She was inducted into the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame in 2002.

She was a member of Huber Memorial United Church of Christ, 5701 York Road, where services will be held at 10 a.m. Friday.

In addition to her son Robert, survivors include her son John Albert Houze of Baltimore and a brother, Albert Houze of Garland, Texas.

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