

ORDER NEEDED, JUDGE SAYS

The year 1968 got off to an exhilarating start for Judge Harry Cole. On Jan. 8 of that year, he was appointed to the Supreme Bench of Baltimore City. Just three months later, the city was rocked by riots sparked by the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

In the weeks that followed, Judge Cole found himself joining other black community leaders in responding to that outburst by calling for calm, reason and remembrance of some valuable lessons from the past.

"The one thing I knew as a judge was that you have to have order to bring about the realization of the many (goals) Dr. King struggled for," recalls Judge Cole. "Emotional outburst was not the way to do it. You have to become involved in the system to change it."

No one knows that better than Judge Cole himself. He had demonstrated the point handily during an earlier history-making year in race relations. In 1954, the year of the landmark Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court decision, Judge Cole became the first black to be elected to the Maryland State Senate.

• He won the race against all

odds, having just come out of law school and opposing a white candidate backed by a powerful political machine. Judge Cole did, however, have an ace in the hole: "We had conducted a voter registration drive and registered 2,500 people. I was single, living on Cokes and hot dogs, and taking folks downtown — as was the rule then — to register.

"So when I campaigned, I knew where the voters were. And I knocked on a lot of doors."

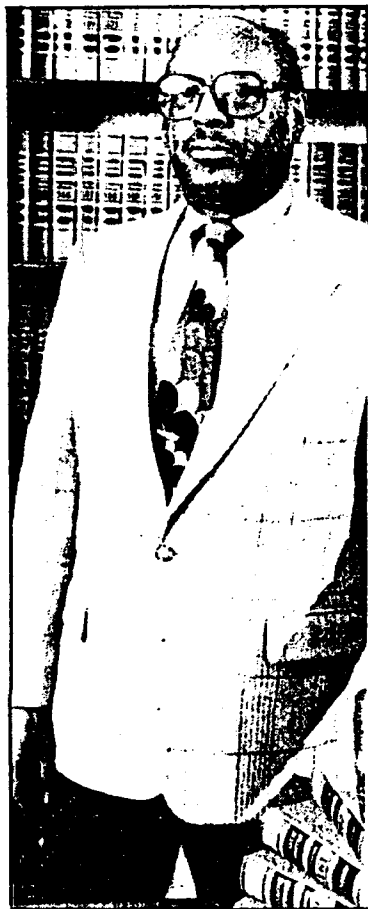
Judge Cole won the election by 37 votes. During his Senate term, he was one of only five blacks nationwide holding seats in state senates.

"Part of Martin Luther King's legacy is that now there's a real cadre of qualified blacks holding state offices across the country. It's all the power of the ballot box, and it's just as true now as it was in '68."

Judge Cole attributes the fact that there are now black state supreme court justices in California, Mississippi and Alabama to the increase in black votership.

"We're voting [for] people who are obligated to be more responsive to our needs," he explains. The judge himself was appointed to the Maryland Court of Appeals in December of 1977.

—Pat Olney



HARRY COLE