

**TRIBUTE
TO
THE HONORABLE JAMES H. COLEMAN, JR.**

*Honorable Christine Todd Whitman**

Among the many appointments I have made as Governor, few have been as gratifying as the nomination of James H. Coleman, Jr. to the Supreme Court of New Jersey.

Justice Coleman's background is impressive. He has served in the Judiciary since May 1973, when he was appointed a judge of the Union County Court. He served there until his appointment to the New Jersey Superior Court in December 1978. He served as a member of a special three-judge resentencing panel from October 1979 to February 1981. In March 1981, Judge Coleman was elevated to the Appellate Division of the Superior Court, and in May 1987, he was named presiding judge in Appellate Division. He served on three different occasions as a Justice *Pro Tempore* of the State Supreme Court, in 1989, 1991, and 1993.

Born in the segregated rural south, Justice Coleman recognized early that education was the key to a better life. He started working at age seven to buy clothing and school supplies. Faced with a political and social system that was separate and unequal, he channeled his energies into his education, excelling in high school, at Virginia State University, and then at Howard University Law School.

Much to our good fortune, Justice Coleman realized he could pursue opportunities in New Jersey. After graduating from law school, he moved here for good. And good it has been — for him and for all of us. He has served the people of New Jersey with honor, both in private practice and on the bench. He carries a record for fairness that would make any jurist proud. He judges each case on its merits and brings a balance to every decision, basing his conclusions on the facts and law. His experience as both a trial and appellate judge will add distinction to our highest court.

Justice Coleman was the best candidate for the job. His heritage was not a determining factor. We selected him because of the kind of person he is and because we were so impressed by what he has brought to the positions he has held thus far. But of course, I am aware that we have broken a barrier. Justice Coleman is the first African-American to sit on the New

*Governor of the State of New Jersey.

Jersey Supreme Court, and it has been a privilege for me to help make that happen.

New Jersey shares the pride that Justice Coleman and his family must feel. I looked for an individual who could bring the highest qualifications, intelligence, and integrity to the Court — and found him. Justice Coleman has a depth of knowledge and breadth of experience rare in any profession. As the first sitting judge to be appointed to the Supreme Court in many years, he has gained wisdom both on and off the bench. I congratulate him and his family on his appointment and will follow his career on our highest court with pride.