

(Editor's Note: Taken from The New York Times OBITUARIES Sunday, September 29, 1991.)

J. P. COLEMAN, 77 , EX-GOVERNOR IN MISSISSIPPI AND U.S. JUDGE, DIES.

Jackson, Miss., Sept. 28 (AP) - J. P. Coleman, Governor of Mississippi during the infancy of the civil rights movement and later chief judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, died this morning at a nursing home in Ackerman, Miss., 90 miles northeast of Jackson. He was 77 years old.

He died from complications of a stroke suffered last December. A lifelong Democrat, Mr. Coleman was Governor from 1956 to 1960. It was during his administration that the state created the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission to counter attacks on racism in the Deep South.

Born on a farm near Ackerman, James Plemon Coleman went on to gain distinction as one of the few Mississippians to serve in all three branches of the state's government.

He began his public career when he was elected as local circuit judge in 1946. He was appointed to the newly created post of commissioner on the State Supreme Court in 1950 but resigned the same year to become State Attorney General.

Elected Governor in 1955, he was prohibited by state law from seeking a second consecutive term four years later. Instead, he ran for the State Legislature in 1960 and maintained his seat there for four years.

'A Great Admirer'

"Mississippi lost one of the most distinguished statesmen of my lifetime," said William Winter, who served as Governor from 1980 to 1984. "He's a man I have admired since I was a high school student, and I remain a great admirer of him."

The current Governor, Ray Mabus, said: "Governor Coleman was one of Mississippi's greatest public servants of the 20th century. He was both a visionary and a practical leader during a very difficult time in Mississippi's history."

Mr. Coleman is survived by his wife, Margaret; his son, Thomas, a lawyer in Ackerman, and five grandchildren.