

Henry S. Coleman, Popular Dean Held Captive During 1968 Protests, Dies at 79

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He was the guy students could talk to: the dean who showed up at small undergraduate events and invited advisees on picnics with his wife and kids. And when in 1968 students took over several campus buildings to protest the University's military-funded research and its plans to construct a gymnasium in Morningside Park, Henry "Harry" S. Coleman '46SEAS was the first senior administrator to talk face to-face with protest leaders.

So it's by a weird twist of fate that Coleman, who died January 31 at age 79, is best remembered for having been taken hostage by those students, barricaded in his Hamilton Hall office for more than 24 hours. Then the acting dean of the College, Coleman hardly embodied the authoritarianism the students said they were fighting against. "He voluntarily came in to talk to us," one protester told the New York Times on April 24, 1968. "[Students] are being very careful of his safety. "When released, Coleman "strode out calmly and briskly, showing no signs that he had been unsettled by the experience," reported the Times. And in a few minutes, he was back in the thick of things, helping to control a confrontation between leftist demonstrators and an antidemonstration group in front of Hamilton. He would later write letters of reference for several of his captors.

A tall, lean Korean War vet, Coleman made the news again in the summer of 1972 when a student suspended for poor grades walked into his office and shot him. Coleman was hit six times, including once in the chest, a bullet piercing his lung. By September, he was holding regular office hours again and "feeling fine," he told the Spectator.

Coleman, a native of Manhattan, earned a bachelor's degree here in mechanical engineering and began his administrative career as an assistant to the dean of the College in 1948, also coaching crew. As director of admissions from 1960 to 1967, he oversaw the University's first active efforts to recruit African-American students. After one year as acting dean of the

College from 1967 to 1968, he served as dean of freshmen until 1972 and subsequently as dean of students until 1979. Coleman was active on several alumni boards after retiring and received the University's John Jay Award for professional achievement in 1996.

Coleman lived in New Canaan, Connecticut, and is survived by his wife, Lila, and his children, Wendy, Carrie '79SW, and Hank. A memorial service was held on May 5, at St. Paul's Chapel at 4 p.m., followed by a reception.



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