

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Thomas Fleming

---

## Overview of the Collection

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com  |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Fleming, Thomas C., 1907-  |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Thomas Fleming,   |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | March 29, 2002   |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2002   |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:59:27).  |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Newspaper columnist, author, and newspaper editor Thomas Fleming (1907 - 2006 ) was an accomplished writer and the founder of two San Francisco Bay Area African American newspapers. He also wrote a syndicated column, "Reflections on Black History," which was sent to more than 200 African American newspapers nationwide. On his 90th birthday in 1997, Fleming published a collection of stories and photos from his early boyhood in Jacksonville and Harlem. Fleming was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 29, 2002, in San Francisco, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2002_035  |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.  |

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Thomas C. Fleming is the oldest and longest-serving black journalist in the country. Born in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1907, he lived in Harlem for a short time before relocating to Chico, California, in 1919.

After graduating from Chico High School in 1926, Fleming worked as a bellhop and later as a cook for the Southern Pacific Railroad. In the early 1930s, he began working as an unpaid writer for the Spokesman, a progressive black paper in San Francisco. In 1932, he began coursework in political science at Chico State College, completing just three semesters before returning to the San Francisco Bay Area. In 1944, he became the founding editor of the Reporter, the only black paper in San Francisco at the time. He stayed on as the editor when it later merged with another black paper, the Sun, to become the Sun-Reporter. Since then, Fleming has been writing consistently, covering civil rights issues and giving an editorial voice to the Bay Area's black communities. In July of 1997, Fleming retired as executive editor of the Sun-Reporter. However, he continues to write two articles a week for the paper, as well as his syndicated column, "Reflections on Black History." The column is posted on the Internet and sent to more than 200 African American newspapers nationwide.

On his 90th birthday in 1997, Fleming published a collection of stories and photos from his early boyhood in Jacksonville and Harlem. The following year, he published *Black Life in the Sacramento Valley 1850-1934*, co-authored by Michele Shover, a professor of political science at California State University, Chico. Throughout his long-spanning career, he has come into contact with such greats as Martin Luther King, Jr., W.E.B. Du Bois, Charles Houston, A. Philip Randolph, Mary McLeod Bethune, Duke Ellington, Thurgood Marshall, Malcolm X, Langston Hughes and Paul Robeson. Thomas Fleming is the 1997 winner of the Career Achievement Award for Print from the Northern California Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists.

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Thomas Fleming was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on March 29, 2002, in San Francisco, California, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Newspaper columnist, author, and newspaper editor Thomas Fleming (1907 - 2006 ) was an accomplished writer and the founder of two San Francisco Bay Area African American newspapers. He also wrote a syndicated column, "Reflections on Black History," which was sent to more than 200 African American newspapers nationwide. On his 90th birthday in 1997, Fleming published a collection of stories and photos from his early boyhood in Jacksonville and Harlem.

---

## Restrictions

### Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

### Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

---

## Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

---

## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Fleming, Thomas C., 1907-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Fleming, Thomas C., 1907---Interviews

---

Authors and publishers--Interviews.

---

African American newspaper editors--California--San Francisco--Interviews.

---

African American journalists--California--San Francisco--Interviews.

---

Rural-urban migration--United States.

---

Harlem (New York, N.Y.)--Social life and customs.

---

Chico State College.

---

Music--California--San Francisco.

---

San Francisco (Calif.)--Newspapers.

---

Pittsburgh Courier Publishing Co.

---

Race relations--United States.

---

Civil rights movements.

---

Black Panther Party.

---

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

---

Robeson, Paul, 1898-1976.

---

Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963.

---

Jackson, Jesse, 1941-.

---

Sharpton, Al.

---

Farrakhan, Louis.

---

African American press--History.

---

Southern Pacific Railroad Company.

---

## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

## Occupations:

Newspaper Columnist

---

Newspaper Editor

---

Author

---

## HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

---

## Administrative Information

### Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

### Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Thomas Fleming, March 29, 2002. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 6/7/2022 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

---

## Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

---

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas Fleming, Section A2002\_035\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:00  
2002/03/29

Thomas Fleming describes his family background, and details his early life in Jacksonville, Florida, and Harlem, New York. Fleming recalls his unique journey from Jacksonville to Harlem as a seven-year-old stowaway. Fleming

vividly recalls his time in New York, explaining how his time there influences his life even today.

Authors and publishers--Interviews.

African American newspaper editors--California--San Francisco--Interviews.

African American journalists--California--San Francisco--Interviews.

Rural-urban migration--United States.

Harlem (New York, N.Y.)--Social life and customs.

Chico State College.

Music--California--San Francisco.

San Francisco (Calif.)--Newspapers.

Pittsburgh Courier Publishing Co.

United States--Race relations.

Civil rights movements.

Black Panther Party.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Robeson, Paul, 1898-1976.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963.

Jackson, Jesse, 1941-.

Sharpton, Al.

Farrakhan, Louis.

African American press--History.

Southern Pacific Railroad Company.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas Fleming, Section A2002\_035\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:43  
2002/03/29

Thomas Fleming recalls his time growing up in Chico, California, describing a multicultural community in which he made friends across racial lines. Fleming describes his high school years and recounts his time working for a steamboat company and the Southern Pacific Railroad. Fleming also describes the music scene in San Francisco during the 1930s, and explains his decision to attend college back at Chico State College.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas Fleming, Section A2002\_035\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:02  
2002/03/29

Thomas Fleming discusses his early career in journalism, explaining how he first became interested in the profession through reading various newspapers and studying political science. He describes his short stints working for papers such as The Spokesman and the Oakland Tribune. Fleming remembers that very few blacks were journalists in the San Francisco Bay Area, and relates some racial conflicts. Fleming also discusses the impact of black newspapers with nationwide distribution, like the Chicago Defender and the Pittsburgh Courier.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas Fleming, Section A2002\_035\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:29  
2002/03/29

Thomas Fleming describes some early jobs he had as a journalist, including regular appearances on a local radio show. He then tells the story of how he was the founding editor of the Reporter, and how he formed a partnership with Carlton Goodlett to merge with the Sun. Fleming discusses the success of the Sun-Reporter and explains how his partnership with Goodlett helped the paper reach new heights.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas Fleming, Section A2002\_035\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:50

2002/03/29

Thomas Fleming considers the state of race relations and civil rights in America, voicing his opinions regarding many African Americans of great influence, including members of the George W. Bush administration, and past leaders like Martin Luther King, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Paul Robeson. Fleming also evaluates the efforts of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Panther Party during the 1960s, and shares his views on the situations faced by many African nations today.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas Fleming, Section A2002\_035\_001\_006, TRT: 0:31:23  
2002/03/29

Thomas Fleming shares his thoughts and views on a number of topics, including the black press, contemporary black leaders like Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton and Louis Farrakhan, race, religion, and the future of humanity. Fleming also considers his legacy and speaks about the strength of black people.