

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Thomas Fleming

PERSON

Fleming, Thomas C., 1907-

Alternative Names: Thomas Fleming; Thomas C. Fleming

Life Dates: November 29, 1907-November 21, 2006

Place of Birth: Jacksonville, Florida, USA

Residence: Chicago, Illinois

Occupations: Newspaper Columnist; Newspaper Editor; Author

Biographical Note

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

Related Entries

Chico High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Diploma

P.S. 89 [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

California State University, Chico [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

none

University of California, Berkeley [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

none

Southern Pacific Railroad [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1926 to 1928]

Bellhop

Spokesman [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1934 to 1934]

Reporter

Oakland Tribune [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1934 to 1934]

Columnist

Sun-Reporter [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1944 to 1997]

Founding editor, reporter