The Thomas A. Fleming Collection at Eastern Michigan University is a compilation of several thousand books and pamphlets on varied aspects of African American life and culture. Collected largely from the 1960's to the turn of the millennium, they range over disciplines, historical periods and subjects, and include Africa and the global arena within their reach. The works represent the personal quest of Dr. Thomas Fleming—high school drop-out, armed forces veteran, educator, preacher, administrator and engaged citizen—to understand the broad currents of his times and their historical antecedents. With an emphasis upon literature, religion, history, and education, the Thomas A Fleming Collection is an intellectual cache for students, teachers, researchers and the greater public, indeed for any who wish to immerse themselves in the African American intellectual and cultural tradition.

This essay highlights historical, legal, social science, theological and religious literature contained in this unique compilation of materials. It is designed as a companion to other essays focusing more pointedly on the fields of education and literature.

I. Foundational and Illustrative African American Studies Texts in History, Humanities and the Social Sciences


*Buttressed by classics of black sociology such as Du Bois’ ‘Tire Philadelphia Negro’, E. Franklin Frazier’s ‘Black Bourgeoisie’, and Charles S. Johnson’s ‘Backgrounds to Patterns of Negro Segregation and Growing up in Tire Black Belt the Collection has a sizeable number of works that explore the family, the rural and urban environments of black life, black thought and education from a sociological perspective. Anthropological studies such as Melvin Williams’ ‘Community in a Black Pentecostal/ Church: an Anthropological Study, and Thomas Gwaltney’s ‘Drylongso: A Self-Portrait of Black America, are included here, as is Zora Neale Hurston’s ‘Every Tongue Got to Confess: Negro Folk Tales From the Gulf States and several other works by the literary folklorist/anthropologist. Literature in the vein of Elliot Lebow's 'Talley’s Corner: A Study of Negro Street Corner Men is also a part of this collection.*

The sometimes undervalued field of African American philosophy is represented well for a private collection. The several books by and about the seminal 20th Century African American philosopher, Rhodes Scholar Alain Locke are contained here, e.g., Locke’s Harlem Renaissance classic, *The New Negro*, Russell Linemann’s edited book, *Alain Locke: Reflections on a Modern Renaissance Man*, and Leonard Harris’ compilation *The Philosophy of Alain Locke: The Harlem Renaissance and Beyond*. Included here are several works by Angela Davis, i.e., *An Autobiography* and *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*. Edited volumes in this area include Fred Lee Hand’s and Jonathan Scott Lee’s *I am Because We Are: Readings in Black Philosophy*, Tommy L. Lott’s *African American Philosophy Selected Readings*, Anthony Pinn’s *By These Hands: A Documentary History of African American Humanism*, George Yancey’s *African American Philosophy* and Naomi Zack’s *Women of Color and Philosophy: A Critical Reader*. The Collection also includes several philosophically rooted works by Cornel West and Michael Eric Dyson.

The Fleming Collection also includes works by path-breaking Africancists such as Yosef Ben Jochanon, De Graft Johnson, and Chancellor Williams, and their respective works *Black Man of the Nile and His Family: African Foundations of European Civilization and Thought*, *African Glory: The Stan: of Vanished African Civilizations and The Rebirth of African Civilization*. The works of contemporary Africentric scholars such as Molefi Asante, and Francis Cress Welsing are also amply present in this body of materials. Several titles by Ivan Van Sertima, e.g., *They Came Before Columbus and Black Women in Antiquity*, are illustratively part of this assemblage of literature. *Asa Hillard’s The Maroon Within Us: Selected Essays on African American Community Socialization, and Free Your Mind. Return to the Source. African Origins: a Selected Bibliography (classified) and Outline on African American History From Ancient Times to the Present -a Resource Packet* are among numerous other Africentric works that bolster the utility of this collection.

Finally, here, the Thomas A Fleming Collection has assembled a core set of indispensable treatises for traversing the intellectual terrain of black life, thought and activism. Mention must surely be made here of the works by and about Harold Wright Cruse. Anchoring this set of works is Cruse’s “mind-plowing” polemical 1967 classic *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, a book considered by many to be the essential roadmap to the complex journey of African American ideologies and programs over the generations. Related works here include Cruse’s *Plural but Equal: a Critical Study of Blacks and Minorities in Americans ’ Plural Society, and Rebellion or Revolution and an edited compilation, The Essential Harold Cruse: A Reader.*


The collection also contains a set of important classic first person accounts written by central figures of the African decolonization and independence struggle of the 20th century. Works here include Allan Boesak’s *If This is Treason, I am Guilty*, Jomo Kenyatta’s *Facing Mt. Kenya The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu*, Nelson Mandela’s *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, Julius Nyerere’s *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism and his Man and Development*, Binadamu na Maendeleo, Kwame Nkrumah’s *Africa Must Unite*, Oliver Tambo's *Preparing For Power*, and Bishop Desmond Tutu’s *Crying in the Wilderness*, *The Struggle for Justice in South Africa*. These works are particularly important reading for those who wish to take the long intellectual measure of such continental challenges as Darfur, debt crisis, Zimbabwean democracy, AIDS and the United Nation’s Millennium Development Goals.
II
The African American Church, Religion, and Black Theology

Given the theological backgrounds of both Thomas and Diane Fleming, one is by no means surprised by the wealth of literature grounded in that domain. The books are, however, remarkable in their breadth and diversity for a private family collection. In hundreds of texts ranging across theology, preaching, institutional church life, the sociology of religion, and the intersection of religion and politics, this assemblage of books is superb.

With critical books ranging from seminal literature by DuBois, Franklin, and Lincoln, this collection is rich in volumes that explore the evolution of the African American church during its various phases of development through slavery, segregation and urban migration. There is a deep set of materials that explore the operation and legacy of the black church within the networks of challenges that define African American life in the late 20th century U.S. Another theme that emanates from the collected literature here is the church as institution of social change and transformation. Numerous volumes here highlight this phenomenon in cities like Detroit, Philadelphia and New York.

A second major category in which this collection excels is in that of black preaching, African American homiletics, and the artistry of the black sermon. The works here reach deep into the tradition of black spiritual and rhetorical expression rooted in the era of African American enslavement, trace this through the development of the spiritual and the gospel and musical genre, sermonizing in the Jeremiad tradition, and black liberation theology. Through the works here, one could devote hours to familiarizing himself or herself with an area of black culture that is key to understanding the experience of African peoples in the America. A final area in which this collection asserts itself is in terms of the assemblage of works by notable black theologians and preachers. These works give insight into the minds of African Americans as they chart out the intellectual and social intersection of race, religion and society. Prominent among these works are those of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. referenced elsewhere in these review essays. Included also are writings by individuals who clearly were prominent influences in the social-theological thinking of Dr. King. Thus, the legendary Rev. Benjamin Elijah Mays, the President of Morehouse College during virtually the entire reach of Dr. King’s journey as student, preacher and civil rights leader, is amply represented. Works here include Dr. Mays’ The Negro’s God as Reflected in His Literature, The Negro Church (co-authored with Joseph William Nicholson,) Lord, I’ve People Have Driven Me On, Disturbed About Man, and Born to Rebel: An Auto/Biography. The influential theologian Howard Thurman is represented by his Deep is the Hunger: Meditations for Apostles of Sensitiveness, The Centering Moment, and Deep River: Reflections on the Religious Insight of Certain of the Negro Spirituals.

In a political and social moment in our country when the essence of black worship, faith, and belief is highlighted by current events in American presidential politics, this Collection serves a central purpose. It answers the call of “must reading” for those interested in sorting through the complexities of African American culture and its intersection with the larger dynamics of American political and social culture.
As one deeply interested in understanding the currents shaping his times, Thomas Fleming gave considerable attention in the selection of books to those that helped to clarify the ultimate political forces that shaped the unique moment in which he lived during his years as an active collector. Hence, this repository of works is rich with materials that touch upon law as a constant force over the past four to five centuries. Contained within this collection are primary volumes that focus, for instance, on the famous Dred Scott case of 1857. Works on hallmark cases such as Plessy v. Ferguson, Brown v. Board of Education and Bakke v. University of California at Davis are also contained here. The literature here is more than ample to chart and explore the Modern Civil Rights Movement and the eras that came subsequent to it.

In this category, the Fleming Collection includes a wide range of works on civil rights, notable cases in American racial jurisprudence and biographies of great legal minds. In doing so, it also provides grist for examination for the study of the idea of law in African American life and culture, or, phrased differently, the African American legal mind. This is a frontier of study on the unique evolution of law as a component of African American thought and practice in American culture. When combined with earlier cited works on religion, and on political and legal thought among African descent peoples in Africa and the Caribbean, this compendium excels as a central tool for deciphering the complexity of the black mind, here specifically in terms of law.

The Thomas A Fleming Collection is a treasure trove of literature. It validates the place of the African American intellectual tradition in domestic and global culture. It gives critical teaching, research and resource support to the wide ranging pursuit of EMU’s academic and cultural mission. It embraces virtually all disciplines of inquiry represented in the institution. This collection reflects the eclectic roots of the African American intellectual and cultural tradition. Those seeking to grow in an understanding of that tradition in domestic and global affairs will find great reward and satisfaction in this collection.