

Reviewer's Comment

African American Studies Research and Teaching Potential of the Thomas A Fleming Collection of the Bruce T. Halle Library Eastern Michigan University

**Ronald C Woods, J.D. Professor
Department of African American Studies
Eastern Michigan University
Summer, 2008**

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

The Thomas A Fleming Collection contains many foundational works in the field of African American studies. Among the rich set of seminal historical texts it contains are Benjamin Brawley's *A Short History of the American Negro*, W.E.B. Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction*, John Hope Franklin's *From Slavery to Freedom*, Charles Wesley's *Negro Labor in the United States: A Study in American Economic History* and Cartera G. Woodson's *The African Background Outlined*, and *The Negro in Our History* Included as well as are pivotal works such as Darlene Clark Hines, *A Shining Thread of Hope: A History of Black Women in America*, and Jeanne L. Noble's *Beautiful, Also, are the Souls of my Black Sisters : a History of the Black Woman in America*.

Buttressed by classics of black sociology such as Du Bois' *The Philadelphia Negro*, E. Franklin Frazier's *Black Bourgeoisie*, and Charles S. Johnson's *Backgrounds to Patterns of Negro Segregation* and *Growing up in the 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 Liebow's *Talley's Corner: A Study of Negro Street Corner Men* is also a part of this collection.

Works on the disciplinary foundations of African American psychology are represented, e.g., Reginald Jones' *Black Psychology*, Joseph White's *The Psychology of Blacks: An African American Perspective*, and Alfred Pasteur's *Roots of Soul: The Psychology of Black Expressiveness*. From the discipline of economics, one finds titles such as *A Different Vision* by Thomas Boston, *Entrepreneurship and Self-Help Among Black Americans: A Reconsideration of Race and Economics* by John Butler, *The Negro In the South: His Economic Progress in Relations to his Moral and Religious Development* by W.E.B. Du Bois, *Principles of Black Political Economy* by Lloyd Hogan, *Race and Economics* by Thomas Sowell, and *The Economics of Black America* by Harold Vatter.

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 Africanists 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 Story 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 Fleming Collection also contains nearly twenty works by or about W.E.B. DuBois. A prototype participant observer and public intellectual, DuBois was a stalwart contributor to the rich tradition of socially engaged intellectuals from the publication in 1896 of his *Suppression of the African Slave trade to the United States* to the time of his death at age 95 in Ghana in 1963. Beyond *Suppression of the African Slave Trade*, other representative books here are Du Bois' *Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, and *Dusk of Dawn: The Autobiography of a Race Concept*, Stanley Crouch's *Reconsidering the Souls of Black Folk: Thoughts on the Groundbreaking Work of W.E.B. DuBois*, and Eric Sundquist's edited volume, *The W.E.B. DuBois Reader*.

Other illustrative contributions to texts that exemplify or explore the intellectual tradition of thought and activism are *Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life* by William Banks, *Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life* by Bell Hooks, *George Washington Carver: In His Own Words, 7 Speeches* by Louis Farrakhan, *Black Separatism in America* by Raymond Hall, *Black Self-Determination; A Cultural history of the Faith of the Fathers* by V. P. Franklin, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African -American Political Ideologies* by Michael Dawson, *Foundations of the Black Nation* by Imari Obadele, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* by Harry Haywood, *Open Wide the Freedom Gates: A Memoir* by Dorothy Heights. Black conservative thought is represented by

several texts including *Black and Right: The Bold New Voice of Black Conservatives in America*.

In closing out this section, one must mention as well an important set of exemplary texts on ideology, thought and activism emanating from the African Diaspora. These include Lilyan Kestlelot 's *Intellectual Origins of the African Revolution*, C.L.R.James' *A History of Pan-African Revolt*, Farrukh Dhondy's *C.L.R.James: A Life*, Hollis Lynch's *Black American Radicals and the Liberation of Africa: The Council on African Affairs, 1937-1955*, Tony Martin's *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggle of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association*, Richard Wright, *Black Power in South Africa*, Allen Brooks' *The Whirlwind Before the Storm: Soweto Uprising* and Meredith Martin's *Our Votes, Our Guns: Robert Mugabe and the Tragedy of Zimbabwe*. There are also texts that assess the pivotal last years of the regime of apartheid, including David Ottaway's *Chained Together: Mandela, De Klerk, and the Struggle to Remake South Africa*.

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 *Longwalk 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 , The People Have Driven Me On*, *Disturbed About Man*, and *Born to Rebel: An Autobiography*. 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.

Law and the African American Legal Mind.

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.