

# Dr. John W. Fleming

## Class of 1947

John Wilson Fleming was born the eleventh child of W. T. and Rebecca Avery Fleming of Morganton, North Carolina. He attended public schools in his hometown and graduated from Olive Hill High School as valedictorian of his class.

He spent the last six months of 1933 in the Civilian Conservation Corp, better known as CCC – one of the many “alphabetical organizations” started by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in an attempt to lift the country’s devastating depression.

On June 1, 1935, he was employed by Shaw University to work on the campus. By September of that year, he had saved enough money to enroll at Shaw. Having had a good record as a high school football player, he made Shaw’s football team in his first year. He met Hollis Creecy of Rich Square, NC and Claude Govan of Newark, NJ on the football field. The three of them played in Shaw’s backfield for the next four years and were a well-known threesome in the CIAA. They played under the tutelage of James E. Lytle, who became the first inductee into Shaw’s Athletic Hall of Fame. Fleming, Creecy and Govan were together inducted into that Hall in 1977.

Dr. Fleming dropped out of college the second semester of his senior year to serve in the military during World War II and returned to Shaw the summer of 1946. He graduated with the class of 1947.

Dr. Fleming met Hortense Gilmore of Oxford NC when he had returned to Shaw and they were married July 13, 1948. After graduating from Shaw, he enrolled in the Oberlin Graduate School of Theology, Oberlin, OH where he earned two graduate degrees.

He returned to North Carolina and worked with the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina as the Director of Christian Education. Dr. Fleming spent the 1953-1954 school year as Associate Professor of Religion at Shaw University. At the end of that school year he returned to the Baptist Convention and remained there until February, 1963. At that time, he returned to Shaw, where he served in several positions: University Minister; Director of Admissions; Instructor; Associate Professor and Director of Church Relations and – during the 1977-1978 school year – as Interim President.

**Pastoral Leadership:** John Fleming’s pastoral leadership work began when he became pastor of the Sandy Plain Baptist Church in Columbus County, a few miles from Clarkton, NC, which had worship service once a month. The congregation was very supportive and encouraged his efforts. Special commendation should be given to three members of that congregation: Mrs. Lena George; Deacon George Newell; and Deacon Charles Spaulding.

Dr. Fleming’s next ministerial leadership role was at Brookston Baptist Church in Vance County, NC. Among his strong supporters were Mrs. Maggie Davis; Mr. Leslie Davis; and Mr. Ernest Thomas.

His third pastorate was Metropolitan Baptist Church in Rocky Mount, NC. A new church structure was built during his tenure. Four Shawites extended words of encouragement and guidance during his ministry there. They were Deacon Samuel Gilliam and his wife, Dorothy; Deacon Earl Burnett; and Mrs. Mavis Knight.

Dr. Fleming’s fourth and final pastorate at First Missionary Baptist Church in Smithfield, NC was of an interim nature. The congregation was very cooperative. He can never forget the strong support that he received from Mrs. Carolyn Ennis; Deacon John McLean and his wife Georgianna; Deacon Hernando Palmer; Deacon Q. K. Wall and his wife Thelma; and Mrs. Velma Wall.

**Civil Rights Activist:** John Fleming's civil rights activities received inspiration from several sources. First was his father, W. T. Fleming, an oral historian who taught him respect and love for his Afro-American history. Second was his college roommate, Hollis Creecy, who listened to all of Fleming's far-fetched ideas. Then came Mr. Caulebert Jones, who arrived at Shaw University as a teacher in 1936, where he amazed most students with his knowledge of Black History, and students were happy to enroll in his courses. His next source of inspiration was Father George Fisher, who served for several years as Pastor of Saint Ambrose Episcopal Church in Raleigh, NC. Father Fisher was a brave man known for standing up and speaking out for civil rights.

Dr. Fleming's final source of inspiration was Dr. Miles Mark Fisher, longtime Pastor of White Rock Baptist Church in Durham, NC, who helped him understand that the church had always been the central institution in the Black community.

It was a telephone call that brought John Fleming into civil rights activities in Raleigh. The call came a few days after four students sat down at segregated lunch counters in Greensboro, NC. The caller was Mrs. Elsie Reid who said she knew that the sit-in movement would soon reach Raleigh. She stated that her father, J. Max Yeargin, together with Mr. Charles Irving and Lawyer Fred Carnage, had started a local civil rights organization in the 1940s and she thought Dr. Fleming could breathe new life into that organization. Ms. Reid wanted him to meet with and organize people for the purpose of bringing adult support to the student movement.

Dr. Fleming set up a meeting at the YMCA. He received unwavering support from ministers of Afro-American churches in Raleigh. At least one white minister, Reverend W. W. Finlator of Pullen Memorial Church, was a strong supporter of the movement.

Lay people who were strong supporters of the movement included Mrs. Harveleigh White; Mrs. Mable Wright; Mrs. Vivian Irving; Mr. Joseph Sansom; Mr. Jim Shepard; Mr. W. L. Greene; and Mr. Ralph Campbell, Sr. Mr. Greene suggested that the organization be called the Raleigh Citizens Association. The work of that organization was done primarily through committees, the main ones being Political Action, Economic and Bail Bond. The Afro-American community followed the advice and recommendations of the Raleigh Citizens Association - which is still a vital force in the Raleigh community.

Dr. Fleming is a member of Martin Street Baptist Church, UNCF, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity and the Shaw University Alumni Association, as well as a life member of the NAACP. He and Hortense are the parents of Dr. Sundar Fleming, Professor of Marketing, Vice Chancellor of

Assessment and Administration at NC Central University. Their daughter-in-law, Linda, is a teacher at Millbrook High School in Raleigh, NC. They also have three granddaughters: Marka B. Fleming, Attorney with Willie E. Gary and Associates; Pili L. Fleming, Attorney with Lucky T. Osho, P.C., at Charlotte, NC; and Sunni D. Fleming, freshman at the A & T State University at Greensboro, NC. Dr. Fleming has a brother, James E. Fleming, of Morganton, NC.



Mrs. Hortense Fleming