

Dr. John Fleming

AAAM Board President: 1990–1996



Dr. John E. Fleming (1944–2025) was a pre-eminent scholar whose life's work was the preservation and interpretation of African American history and culture. He was firmly rooted in a historic Black community as he came of age. He served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Malawi, and went on to pursue advanced degrees, earning a master's degree and a doctorate in American History from Howard University.

Dr. Fleming's museum career began in 1980 when he joined the Ohio Historical Society as the Afro-American Museum project director. He was the founding director of the National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center in Wilberforce, Ohio, and later became the director and chief operating officer for the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati. Over the course of his career, he was directly involved in the development of six museums, including the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum and the National Museum of African American Music, where he served as immediate past director. He was also Director Emeritus of the Cincinnati Museum Center. His leadership extended across several respected historical and cultural organizations. He was president of the Ohio Museums Association, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, and the AAAM. He served on the commission for the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture. He served as chair of the board for the American Association for State and Local History and was on the Ohio Semiquincentennial Commission.

Dr. Fleming was also a prolific writer and scholar: he was author of three books and 50 articles. In addition to his scholarly works, he published two memoirs. He was a recipient of numerous accolades, including distinguished service awards from AAAM, the American Association for State and Local History, the National Peace Corps, Berea College, the Ohio Library Association, and the National Peace Corps. In his honor, the AAAM named its highest honor the John E. Fleming Lifetime Achievement Award because of his exemplary leadership during AAAM's most trying times. In 2020, he was named one of the Top Ten African Americans in Dayton. He was a member of Alpha Phi Alpha and Sigma Pi Phi.