

Charles W. Fleming

Charles Walter Fleming, a native Clevelander, earned a bachelor's degree from Kent State University and a law degree from Cleveland Marshall Law School. By the late 1950's, he and George White, a future federal judge, had opened a downtown law practice.

In the 1950's, major law firms hired few, if any, black lawyers. Most were relegated to solo practices or loosely joined forces for a specific trial. Fleming and his colleagues formed the John M. Harlan Law Club, named for the former U.S. Supreme Court Justice who was a staunch defender of racial equality. Those contemporaries included Stanley Tolliver, Carl and Louis Stokes, Merle McCurdy and Granville Bradley. The club, part professional, part social, was where they talked of politics and the practice of law for hours at Rosie's, a soul food restaurant near the Lakeside Courthouse.

As young lawyers out to gain experience are known to do, Fleming switched sides, taking a position in the Prosecutor's Office in 1961.

"Charlie was a very able and very persuasive lawyer in the courtroom," said Rep. Louis Stokes. As a former defense attorney, Stokes faced Fleming, *"We had some real first-rate trials against one another, but we remained close friends."*

By the mid-'60s, he had rejoined the defense. It was then that Fleming and Tolliver found themselves involved in the Cleveland "case of the decade", which held national implications as well. Fred Evans was a Black Nationalist organizer accused of starting the bloody Glenville riot in 1968. In that turbulent time of our past, this case made national news, in print and on air, featuring daily coverage and comment from literally, the courthouse door.

In addition to his time spent with the County Prosecutor from 1961 to 1968, Fleming was Special Assistant to the Attorney General of Ohio from 1969 to 1975 and found time to instruct at Case Western Reserve University.

He was first elected to the municipal court in 1975, and served as Administrative and Presiding Judge. During his tenure the court saw the first efforts at computerization of court records and a variety of alternative sentencing programs. Though primitive by modern standards, computerizing any part of a court in the 1970s was a bold, futuristic step.

"He was a progressive individual who oversaw many innovative programs in the court," said the late Court Administrator John J. O'Toole, who worked with Fleming for 19 years.

He passed away in July of 1994 at the age of 66.

Charles W. Fleming served Cleveland Municipal Court from January 1, 1976 to July 11, 1994.

