

AFRO-AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER

HISTORY

1974. The United States was assessing its wounds from the turmoil of the Civil Rights Movement. We were in the midst of the Vietnam War; bell bottomed jeans were the fashion of choice, and the Feminist Movement was just coming into full swing. "Blacksploitation" movies were a box-office phenomenon with "Superfly," "Foxy Brown," and "Coffey," while television shows with Black casts began to emerge as the flavor of the decade. "Sanford and Son," was in its second year, "Good Times," began its first - a second series spin-off of one of the most controversial sitcoms on TV, the racially-laced "All in the Family."



While our country was undergoing its change, in Charlotte, North Carolina (UNCC), a young, Black assistant professor of English at the University, Mary Harper, was also seeking personal advancement. Mrs. Harper (now Dr. Harper) was pursuing her doctoral degree through the Union Graduate School. One of the requirements of her course, she states "was to develop a project demonstrating excellence in which some societal change could be assured."

Dr. Harper began to examine her community. There was a rising interest in the city toward historical preservation. However, urban renewal projects were beginning in Charlotte and many people in the black community, Dr. Harper charges "felt urban renewal was synonymous with 'black removal.'" Churches, homes, and businesses in the predominately black communities of Brooklyn and First Ward were being torn down or moved. Although there was "talk" in the community about preserving history, Dr. Harper watched sections of the black community being dismantled and destroyed, and the question arose in her mind, "whose history did the community want to preserve?"

Dr. Harper's concern proved that there weren't many, if any, organizational efforts to preserve African-American history from Washington, D.C. to Georgia, at the time. So, she decided that Charlotte should form an African-American cultural center and it became the focus of her doctoral project, a proposal she titled, *Vistas Unlimited: The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Afro-American Cultural and Service Center*.

At this time, an associate at the University, Bertha Maxwell Roddey, (now Dr. Roddey) was directing the Black Studies center (which is now a degreed program at UNCC) where an emphasis was on students giving back to the community.

Dr. Harper met with Dr. Roddey to discuss her ideas about the cultural center. Dr. Roddey agreed to supervise the project because she saw the cultural center as a way to involve the larger community and the students at the Black Studies Center.

As they began to organize the goals and ideas that would make the cultural center unique, they found that there were many important contributions from black people, particularly in North Carolina, that people were unaware of. They wanted this proposed center to become a place where African-Americans could learn about their heritage, but also bring awareness to the contributions of other minority groups, as well. Together, they formed what would become the first mission for the center.



Still, additional support for Dr. Harper's project was needed. They met with the late Fred Alexander, a well-respected and influential political leader in Charlotte, who thought the concept for the center was necessary and important. Soon other influential leaders learned of the project including Harry Golden, a Jewish writer, Dr. William S. Mathis, Dean of Humanities at UNCC, Dr. William M. Britt, Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, and Mamie L. Brewington, a respected community leader who eventually became the first chairperson of the Afro-American Cultural and Service Center (AACSC) initiative.

[go to www.aacc-charlotte.org for The Rest of The Story]

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Mission Statement

Through comprehensive programs and presentations in the visual arts, performing arts and through innovative educational programs, the Afro-American Cultural Center (AACC) preserves, promotes, and presents African-American art, culture and history for the education and enlightenment of all.

Vision Statement [Adopted October 2001]

The Afro-American Cultural Center shall be the innovative, multi-disciplinary epicenter, celebrating the triumphant spirit of the African-American experience.

The Afro-American Cultural Center exists to:

1. Be a reflective prism of the African-American Experience
2. Be a catalyst for cultural, social-political and artistic development
3. Celebrate and nurture the creative process
4. Be a resource for historic and cultural inquiry
5. Be an engine for community development
6. Instill pride while educating others.