

A Tribute to Floyd McKissick

Floyd B. McKissick, age 69, died April 28 at his home in Durham, North Carolina. McKissick, a lawyer, district judge, and early leader in the civil rights movement, is perhaps best known for his attempt to build a new town, Soul City, in rural Warren County, North Carolina.

McKissick conceived Soul City as a freestanding new town with its own industrial base, government, and residents. It was to be the only American new town of the period that was not near a major metropolitan area. McKissick envisioned that within thirty years the town would grow to have 40,000 to 50,000 residents on 5,000 acres, providing new jobs and opportunities for poor and black rural residents.

An association between Floyd McKissick and the Department of City and Regional Planning (DCRP) began in January 1969. At that time John A. Parker, department chairman, announced that planning faculty would offer special technical assistance to the planners of Soul City. Areas of assistance included town design, site engineering, transportation, land use, housing, community services, and water resources. Additional assistance came from the Rouse Co. and Hammer, Greene, Siler Associates, among others.

In the fall of 1969 a planning studio course, consisting of sixteen students, seven faculty advisors, and numerous other participants, produced a report entitled *The Planning Process*

for New Town Development: Soul City. This report was produced in collaboration with Floyd McKissick and other members of McKissick Enterprises, at that time still based in New York City. The report analyzed the economic base, land use, housing, transportation, and utilities for the new town.

Professor David R. Godschalk served as the secretary of the Warren Regional Planning Corporation, the agency guiding the Soul City planning process. He remembers the collaboration between DCRP and McKissick as "a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to work with a charismatic and courageous man of high ideals and vision, who was totally dedicated to building a new city to help people in need."

Following the release of the studio course report and numerous other efforts, Soul City moved closer to becoming a reality. McKissick relocated to Warren County in the early 1970s, and Harvey Gantt came down from MIT to become the planning director for the town. In July 1972 the federal government pledged up to \$14 million in loan guarantees for the new town. Soul City brought Warren County a number of advances, including a regional water supply system, rural health services, and a community recreation center, but due to the mid-70s recession, it was never able to attract the industry or jobs necessary to complete its growth.



Floyd McKissick (fourth from left) at a meeting of Soul City planning staff with faculty from the Department of City and Regional Planning. Faculty members include former department chairman John A. Parker (third from left), the late Robert Mayer (second from left), David R. Godschalk (end of table, left), Edward J. Kaiser (end of table, right), and David Moreau (second from right). Harvey Gantt (fifth from right) was the planning director for Soul City.