On October 4th, 1966. A mysterious fire broke out in the theater causing $30,000 worth of damage. Fire officials stated that there was no forced entry into the theater. Fire damage had taken place mostly in the back within the stage and screen area of the building with smoke filtering into the neighboring stores. The Dipson Chain then removed the 900 seats from the auditorium and the theater would thus close in the early 70’s.

By the 1970’s, the transformation of the Apollo Theater turned into the first Black-owned and operated theater in Buffalo and thus marked a significant milestone in the city’s cultural landscape. Raymond Moss, with support from the Dipsons, ushered in this new era in 1972, infusing the venue with a vibrant Black identity.

Through meticulous renovations adorned with African artworks, Moss imbued the theater with a rich cultural ambiance reflective of the Black community it served. Despite facing stiff competition from downtown theaters for premier screenings and the challenge of attracting patrons in an economically distressed neighborhood, the Apollo quickly became a focal point for Buffalo’s Black residents. However, operating in an area plagued by high crime rates necessitated security measures and posed financial challenges. Despite these obstacles, Moss tirelessly organized community events, including live theater performances and children’s shows, offering affordable ticket prices to ensure accessibility. These prices ranged from $1.00 meant for kids and $1.50 meant for adults. The Apollo also played a pivotal role in cultural celebrations, such as hosting Buffalo’s first Juneteenth festival in 1976 and featuring a Black Film Festival showcasing works centered on influential figures like Malcolm X and Martin Sostra, as well as thought-provoking documentaries like “Lost, Stolen, or Strayed”. As the 1970s drew to a close, Moss relinquished ownership of the Apollo, and the theater. As the 1970s drew to a close, Moss relinquished ownership of the Apollo, and the theater once again transitioned into a religious center (which still held theater production and movies showcasing identity and the culture of the residents) marking the end of an era defined by cultural vibrancy and community engagement. By the late 80’s, the Apollo Theater became an abandoned, unused land that was then taken over by the City in a tax foreclosure preceding. Members of the community began to talk about rebuilding the Apollo Theater in hopes to provide an important service to the community, while also restoring Jefferson Avenue to the vibrant strip it once was years prior to create a “Jefferson Avenue Renaissance”. However, local theaters were a thing of the past; a change is needed if they wanted to restore the building as it could not compete with massive corporations found in downtown Buffalo.