

CIRILO

A LEGACY UNTOLD

From Panama to Chicago, a legacy that bridged the Americas



[Press Kit]

A FILM BY JUSTIN O. COOPER

CIRILO

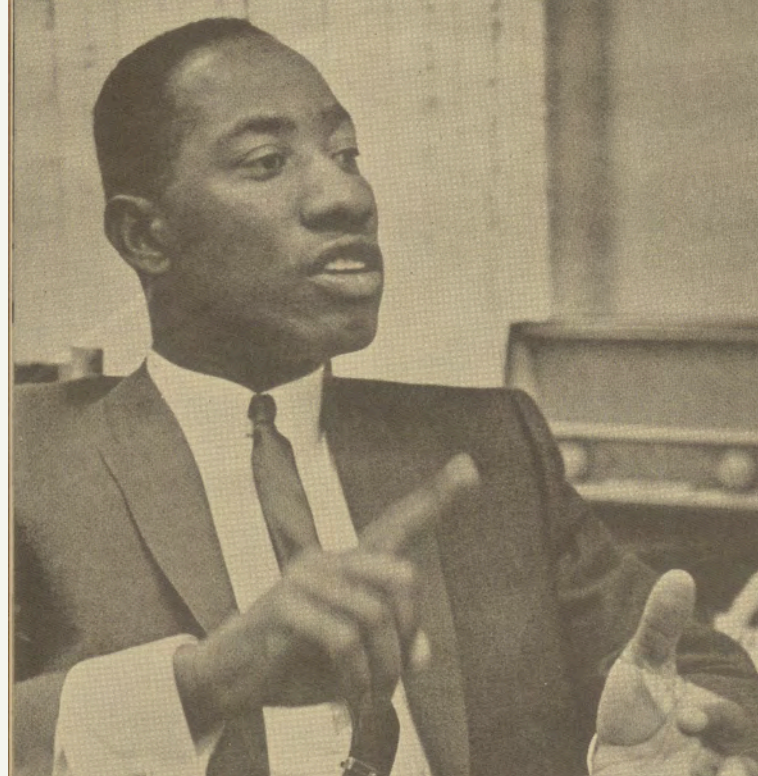
A LEGACY UNTOLD

Logline:

Born into poverty in Panama, Cirilo McSween defies the racism of Jim Crow America to pursue the American Dream, rising as an entrepreneur and civil rights activist whose legacy bridged the Americas.

Short Synopsis:

The inspiring story of Cirilo McSween, who rose from poverty in Panama to become a civil rights leader and pioneering entrepreneur whose legacy bridged the Americas.



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Full Synopsis:

CIRILO, A Legacy Untold chronicles the extraordinary journey of Cirilo McSween, a pioneering entrepreneur and civil rights activist. Born into poverty in Panama, McSween overcame systemic racism in 1950s America to rise as a trailblazing insurance executive, McDonald's franchisee, and trusted ally of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr.

"The extraordinary journey of a man who bridged the Americas."

Narrated by Grammy-winning singer and actress Ann Nesby, and featuring rare archival footage alongside interviews with Blanton Canady, Rev. Janette Wilson, and Jeanette Simpson, this powerful documentary celebrates a legacy of perseverance, leadership, and lasting impact.



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Director's Statement:

When I first encountered Cirilo McSween's story, I was struck by how profoundly it resonates across borders and generations. His life, spanning Panama and the United States, embodies the universal struggle to overcome adversity while fighting for justice and equality. From humble beginnings, McSween rose to become a pioneering entrepreneur, insurance executive, and trusted ally of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr. His legacy is not only personal but global, bridging the Americas in a shared pursuit of dignity, leadership, and progress.

"His legacy bridges the Americas in a shared pursuit of dignity, leadership, and progress."

With *CIRILO, A Legacy Untold*, my goal has been to craft more than a historical record — to create a cinematic experience that is both emotional and enduring. Through archival footage, personal testimonies, and rare insights, I aim to convey to audiences the immediacy of McSween's journey and its enduring relevance today. This film is a tribute to his extraordinary life and a reminder of the power of courage, community, and vision.



Justin O. Cooper
Director/Producer



Director/Producer

Justin O. Cooper is a Los Angeles-based filmmaker and founder of JOCMedia & Entertainment. He directed and produced the Oscar-qualifying documentary CIRILO, A Legacy Untold, which has screened at international festivals including Diversity in Cannes, Seattle Latino Film Festival, and the Detroit Black Film Festival. Cooper also consults for the Royal Film Commission – Jordan, liaising with Hollywood productions filmed in the Kingdom such as Aladdin and Dune: Part One. A former film liaison in Georgia and ASCAP Plus Award-winning writer, his career bridges film, music, and global production.



Narrator/ Executive Producer

Ann Nesby is a two-time Grammy Award-winning singer, actress, and songwriter with a celebrated career spanning music, film, television, and theater. She serves as narrator and executive producer of CIRILO, A Legacy Untold, and contributed the powerful song “We Rise” featuring the Sounds of Blackness to the film’s soundtrack. A former lead vocalist of the legendary Sounds of Blackness, Nesby has also appeared in feature films such as The Fighting Temptations, acclaimed television series including Queen Sugar and Atlanta, and the Broadway production Tina – The Tina Turner Musical. Known for her powerhouse voice and commanding stage presence, she continues to inspire audiences worldwide through her artistry and storytelling.



Director of Photography

Jeffrey Gabriel Silva is a Chicago-based, award-winning filmmaker and director of photography. His work has screened internationally at festivals including the Chicago Latino Film Festival, Seattle Latino Film Festival, PROOF in Los Angeles, and the Ícaro Film Festival in Guatemala. A versatile visual storyteller, Silva brings a cinematic eye shaped by global influences and independent film traditions. He holds an MFA in Film and Television Directing from DePaul University.



Sound Designer & Composer

Maverick “Baby T” Turner is a two-time Emmy Award-winning sound designer, composer, and audio mixing engineer. Over a two-decade career, his work has spanned music, television, and sports broadcasting, with credits that include American Idol, Fox Sports, ESPN, and the Big Ten Network. Also an artist and songwriter, Turner contributed his track “ICON” to the soundtrack of CIRILO, A Legacy Untold. Known for his precision and creative range, he brings an award-winning sensibility to every project, crafting immersive audio experiences that elevate storytelling.



Credits

Directed by
Justin O. Cooper

Written by
Justin O. Cooper

Produced by
Justin O. Cooper

Edited by
Justin O. Cooper

Executive Producer / Narrator
Ann Nesby

Director of Photography
Jeffrey Gabriel Silva

Sound Designer + Composer
Maverick "Baby T" Turner

Colorist + Assistant Editor
Alek Wagner

Sound Engineer
Timothy W. Lee

Sound Recordist
Brendan Reilly

Gaffer
Estrella Vargas

Key Cast
Ann Nesby – Narrator
Rev. Janette Wilson – Interviewee (Self)
Blanton Canady – Interviewee (Self)
Jeanette Simpson – Interviewee (Self)
Cirilo A. McSween, Sr. – Self (Archival Footage)

Archival Appearances
Harry Belafonte – Self (Archival)
Jimmy Carter – Self (Archival)
Omar Torrijos – Self (Archival)
Rosa Parks – Self (Archival)
Bayard Rustin – Self (Archival)
John F. Kennedy – Self (Archival)

Music
"We Rise" – Written & Performed by Ann Nesby featuring Sounds of Blackness

"ICON" – Written & Performed by Maverick "Baby T" Turner

Produced by
JOCMedia & Entertainment, LLC

Festival Selections & Awards



Official Selections

- **NewFilmmakers Los Angeles DocuFest** - Los Angeles, CA
- **Diversity in Cannes Short Film Showcase** - France
- **Freedom Festival International** - Columbia, SC
- **Detroit Black Film Festival** - Detroit, MI
- **San Antonio Black International Film Festival** - San Antonio, TX
- **Liberación Film Festival** - Brooklyn, NY
- **Seattle Latino Film Festival** - Seattle, WA

Awards & Nominations

- *Best Documentary Short Nominee* - **Detroit Black Film Festival (2025)**



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Contact

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