

Former SRMC film liaison nominated for NAACP Image Award

By Matthew Adams | January 18, 2026

CLAYTON COUNTY — Jan. 12 marked a huge accomplishment for Justin O. Cooper, founder and Chief Executive Officer of JOCMedia.

The Los Angeles-based filmmaker was recently nominated for Outstanding Short Form Documentary at the 57th NAACP Image Awards for his film, "CIRILO, A Legacy Untold".

The film captures the life of Cirilo McSween, a Panamanian-born businessman turned civil rights leader, who became the first-ever black agent at New York Life and later was on the frontlines with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Rev. Jesse Jackson.

When Cooper learned he was nominated for the film, he said "I feel validated that my peers and members of the community see the value and the perspective that I have and want to honor that," he said. "It makes all of the sacrifice and the struggle to get to this point worth it."

As a filmmaker, Cooper reveals that the motivation for this project was McSween himself.

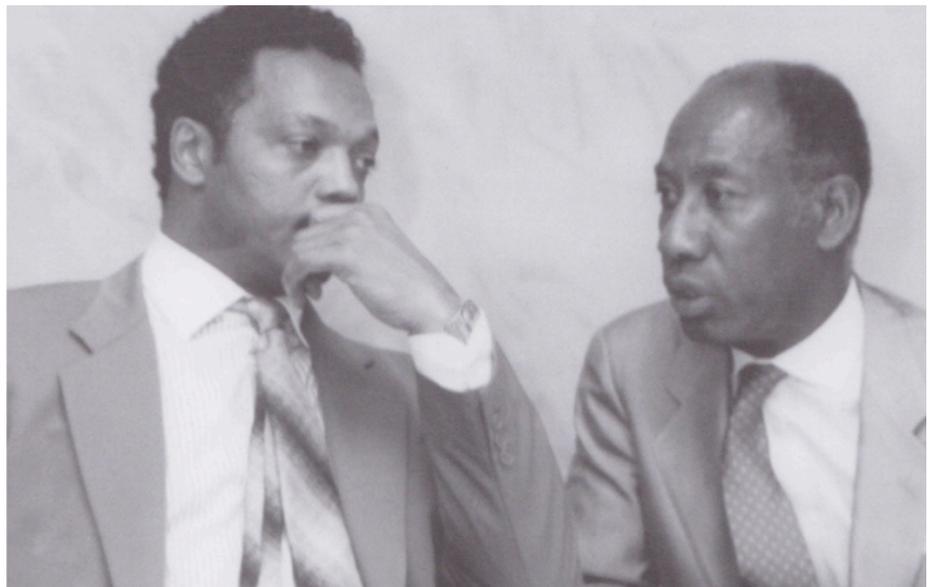
"Cirilo himself was a huge inspiration because I understood his journey of having to leave where you're from, to make a life for yourself somewhere else. When you do that, it's both exhilarating and terrifying," he said.

In addition to McSween, he also views himself as an inspiration, saying, "I was doing the research and reading about him. I even went back to school to take coursework for film and television. I was inspired by my own tenacity."

Even though the former Southern Regional Medical Center film liaison has achieved something that many won't throughout their journey, he ran into some roadblocks, such as money and support.

"I had to figure out how to complete this project," he said. "I was getting rejected left and right and money was one of the major challenges I faced as an independent filmmaker. This was originally going to be a feature film, but I was unable to come up with the backing or the support, so I had to pivot."

The roadblocks didn't deter him, and with that, he was able to enjoy the fruits of his labor, saying, "To have created this and hold a theatrical release in Atlanta and see people buying tickets, then watch my film, then sit down and not leave has been a very rewarding part of the process."



Cirilo McSween, right, with the Rev. Jesse Jackson in the 1980s.SPECIAL PHOTO

With the film's nomination, Cooper believes that anyone who wants to get into this industry should possess only one characteristic.

"Be courageous. Anyone in the humanities may deal with people or family who may not understand what they are doing, but you have to be able to tune out all of the noise of people projecting their fears onto you," he said

In the future, the Benedict College alumnus plans to add more films to his portfolio.

Cooper is developing a documentary on Ann Nesby, Grammy Award-winning lead vocalist for the Sounds of Blackness. He's also working on a scripted feature film based on the Bridge of the Americas in Panama called "The Bridge Between".

He also plans to provide the community with public screenings in 2026.

The 57th NAACP Image Awards air on Feb. 28 on BET and CBS

— To learn more about the award nominations, visit <https://naacpimageawards.net/nominees/>.
— To learn more about Justin O. Cooper, visit: <https://www.jocmedia.com/>.



Justin O. Cooper is founder and Chief Executive Officer of JOCMedia.SPECIAL PHOTO