**BHM 2024 Theme:** **Culture/Diversity**

**Jessie Maple: Camerawoman and Independent Filmmaker**

## ‘I Work to Give Voice to My People and the Challenges We Face’

**By**[**Daniel E. Slotnik**](https://nl.nytimes.com/f/newsletter/CLI3l1WSB0NDjSyRIJt3BQ~~/AAAAAQA~/RgRmcBeMP0TEaHR0cHM6Ly93d3cubnl0aW1lcy5jb20vYnkvZGFuaWVsLWUtc2xvdG5paz9jYW1wYWlnbl9pZD0zNyZlbWM9ZWRpdF9ycl8yMDIzMDYxNyZpbnN0YW5jZV9pZD05NTM2NSZubD1yYWNlJTJGcmVsYXRlZCZyZWdpX2lkPTU4MzU2NDMyJnNlZ21lbnRfaWQ9MTM1OTc2JnRlPTEmdXNlcl9pZD1mMzVhYzI2ZGMxMTc5YjliMzg3NmU5ZTc2YzhlYTMwM1cDbnl0QgpkeIySjWTjJ4kLUhVwbWxvdmVsbEBzeW1wYXRpY28uY2FYBAAAAAA~)

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| **Jessie Maple,** who built careers as a camerawoman and an independent filmmaker when Black women were almost nonexistent in those fields, and who then left meticulous instructions for later generations to follow in her footsteps, died on May 30 at her home in Atlanta. She was 86. |
| Her death was confirmed by E. Danielle Butler, her longtime assistant and the co-author of her self-published 2019 memoir, “The Maple Crew.” |

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| Director and camerawoman were just two of Ms. Maple’s many jobs. She also worked as a bacteriologist; wrote a newspaper column; owned coffee shops; baked vegan cookies; and ran a 50-seat theater in the basement of her Harlem brownstone. |
| Ms. Maple had been writing a column called Jessie’s Grapevine for The New York Courier, a Harlem newspaper, when she moved to broadcast journalism from print in the early 1970s because she wanted to reach more people. |

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| After studying film editing in programs at WNET, New York’s public television station, and [Third World Cinema](https://nl.nytimes.com/f/a/aMAfLefFHOKV_aCavNL0jQ~~/AAAAAQA~/RgRmcBeMP4QBAWh0dHBzOi8vd3d3Lm55dGltZXMuY29tLzE5NzEvMDIvMjMvYXJjaGl2ZXMvdGhpcmQtd29ybGQtY2luZW1hLXRvLW1ha2UtZmlsbXMtdG8tZ2V0LW1pbm9yaXRpZXMtam9icy5odG1sP2NhbXBhaWduX2lkPTM3JmVtYz1lZGl0X3JyXzIwMjMwNjE3Jmluc3RhbmNlX2lkPTk1MzY1Jm5sPXJhY2UlMkZyZWxhdGVkJnJlZ2lfaWQ9NTgzNTY0MzImc2VnbWVudF9pZD0xMzU5NzYmdGU9MSZ1c2VyX2lkPWYzNWFjMjZkYzExNzliOWIzODc2ZTllNzZjOGVhMzAzVwNueXRCCmR4jJKNZOMniQtSFXBtbG92ZWxsQHN5bXBhdGljby5jYVgEAAAAAA~~), the actor Ossie Davis’s film company, and working as an apprentice editor on the Gordon Parks films “Shaft’s Big Score!” (1972) and “The Super Cops” (1974), Ms. Maple realized that she yearned to be behind the camera.

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| In 1975 she became the first African American woman to join New York’s cinematographers union (now called the International Cinematographers Guild), according to Indiana University’s Black Film Center and Archive, which holds a [collection of her papers and films](https://nl.nytimes.com/f/a/wJykErlW1vFl3AADIqMfbQ~~/AAAAAQA~/RgRmcBeMP0TtaHR0cHM6Ly93ZWJhcHAxLmRsaWIuaW5kaWFuYS5lZHUvZmluZGluZ2FpZHMvdmlldz9jYW1wYWlnbl9pZD0zNyZkb2Mudmlldz1lbnRpcmVfdGV4dCZkb2NJZD1WQUMxMTQ1JmVtYz1lZGl0X3JyXzIwMjMwNjE3Jmluc3RhbmNlX2lkPTk1MzY1Jm5sPXJhY2UlMkZyZWxhdGVkJnJlZ2lfaWQ9NTgzNTY0MzImc2VnbWVudF9pZD0xMzU5NzYmdGU9MSZ1c2VyX2lkPWYzNWFjMjZkYzExNzliOWIzODc2ZTllNzZjOGVhMzAzVwNueXRCCmR4jJKNZOMniQtSFXBtbG92ZWxsQHN5bXBhdGljby5jYVgEAAAAAA~~). But, she said, the union banned her after she fought to change rules that required her to complete a lengthy apprenticeship. |

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| “If I had waited, I never would have become a cameraperson,” Ms. Maple told The New York Times for  [2016 article](https://nl.nytimes.com/f/newsletter/718PF7bVUtQkBHS4VGseKQ~~/AAAAAQA~/RgRmcBeMP4QXAWh0dHBzOi8vd3d3Lm55dGltZXMuY29tLzIwMTYvMTIvMTYvbW92aWVzL2hvdy13b21lbi1mb3VnaHQtdG8tZ2V0LWZpbG0tYW5kLXR2LWNyZXctam9icy5odG1sP2NhbXBhaWduX2lkPTM3JmVtYz1lZGl0X3JyXzIwMjMwNjE3Jmluc3RhbmNlX2lkPTk1MzY1Jm5sPXJhY2UlMkZyZWxhdGVkJnJlZ2lfaWQ9NTgzNTY0MzImc2VnbWVudF9pZD0xMzU5NzYmdGU9MSZ0aW1lc3Bhc3RIaWdobGlnaHQ9amVzc2llJTJDbWFwbGUmdXNlcl9pZD1mMzVhYzI2ZGMxMTc5YjliMzg3NmU5ZTc2YzhlYTMwM1cDbnl0QgpkeIySjWTjJ4kLUhVwbWxvdmVsbEBzeW1wYXRpY28uY2FYBAAAAAA~) for a [2016 article](https://nl.nytimes.com/f/newsletter/718PF7bVUtQkBHS4VGseKQ~~/AAAAAQA~/RgRmcBeMP4QXAWh0dHBzOi8vd3d3Lm55dGltZXMuY29tLzIwMTYvMTIvMTYvbW92aWVzL2hvdy13b21lbi1mb3VnaHQtdG8tZ2V0LWZpbG0tYW5kLXR2LWNyZXctam9icy5odG1sP2NhbXBhaWduX2lkPTM3JmVtYz1lZGl0X3JyXzIwMjMwNjE3Jmluc3RhbmNlX2lkPTk1MzY1Jm5sPXJhY2UlMkZyZWxhdGVkJnJlZ2lfaWQ9NTgzNTY0MzImc2VnbWVudF9pZD0xMzU5NzYmdGU9MSZ0aW1lc3Bhc3RIaWdobGlnaHQ9amVzc2llJTJDbWFwbGUmdXNlcl9pZD1mMzVhYzI2ZGMxMTc5YjliMzg3NmU5ZTc2YzhlYTMwM1cDbnl0QgpkeIySjWTjJ4kLUhVwbWxvdmVsbEBzeW1wYXRpY28uY2FYBAAAAAA~) about women who broke barriers to work on film crews. “So I took ‘em to court.”**The New York Times [nytdirect@nytimes.com]****Saturday, June 17, 2023 7:00 AM****Race/Related: A pathbreaking filmmaker** |

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