

*Revolution '67*. Marylou and Jerome Bongiorno. 90 minutes. 2007. California Newsreel. P.O. Box 2284, South Burlington, VT 05407. Phone: (877) 811-7495; fax: (802) 846-1850. Purchase: \$ 195.00. <http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2007/revolution67/index.html>.

*Revolution '67* is a case study of one city, Newark, New Jersey, but the events that transpired in Newark in July 1967 are so skillfully placed into their wider-socio-political milieu that the film succeeds in offering an explanation for the urban uprisings and riots that occurred in over 500 cities during the 1960s, as well as the racial discord and tensions evident to this day. It provides a succinct and fascinating history lesson, the nuances of which remain unknown to many students, even though topics such as slavery and the American Civil Rights Movement are widely addressed in high school curricula.

The uprising in Newark on July 12, 1967 was, in many ways, long overdue. It was the result of decades of industrial decline, racial discrimination in both employment and housing, unemployment, urban decay, government corruption, and police brutality. The precipitating event, as is so often the case, was an antagonistic interaction between a black male (taxi driver) and two police officers. Stopped for a minor traffic infraction, the taxi driver was taken to the local police precinct after being beaten so badly that he required medical attention. Rumors that the man had been killed by the police incited an angry mob who engaged in a campaign of destruction primarily targeting white-owned establishments that were easy targets because they reputedly short-changed their black customers.



With little consideration for the consequences of his actions, Mayor Hugh Addonizio hastily called in the New Jersey National Guard. By their own admission, the National Guardsmen were poorly trained, inexperienced, and lacked any means to coordinate their efforts effectively with the local police. As a result, they and law enforcement officers acted rashly and indiscriminately, firing over 13,000 rounds of ammunition into the housing projects. Twenty-four of the twenty-six people who were shot were African American. A further 725 people were wounded during the course of the six-day insurrection. Although the national media at the time—*The New York Times* and *Life* magazine most notably—widely reported that “black snipers” baited and endangered the lives of law enforcement officers, only 100 rounds of ammunition of the 14,000 examined, originated from anywhere other than law enforcement weapons, and there was not a single arrest of an alleged sniper.

While the details of the Newark uprising, from the perspective of several different witnesses (including two white activists, a National guardsman, local leaders, and several residents) are told in a way that makes fascinating viewing regardless of where one resides—for example one observer, a poet, discusses being sutured without anesthesia by medical personnel who assumed that he had been looting—it is the discussion of the broader sociological context that makes this documentary important and useful for sociology students. Concepts such as redlining and block-busting are discussed and offered as an explanation for the massive white flight that occurred in the mid to late 1960s, the results of which are still evident in the racial segregation that is widespread throughout the United States today. At the same time, there is also ample discussion of the recent attempts at gentrification and “urban renewal” in Newark, which, although much lauded by politicians, developers, and bankers, has done little to improve the fortunes and circumstances of an African-American community that continues to be poor, poorly educated, and disenfranchised. In fact, in 2007, exactly 40 years after the insurrection, unemployment and poverty in Newark is more than twice the national average and only 20 percent of students pass the high school exit exam compared to the national average of 70 percent. To make matters worse, the corruption that has been endemic in Newark throughout the last half-century has not abated. Its last three mayors have all been indicted, as have numerous other community leaders. An important link is illuminated

between corruption and the diversion of funds that could be used to defray the impacts of the social ills that are so adeptly addressed throughout the film.

The film is most appropriate for an upper level race class, particularly in a unit addressing residential segregation, or a social movements class. There is extensive discussion with two white anti-poverty activists who went to live in Newark after graduating from college. They outline their hopes, strategies, challenges and failures in the context of trying to mobilize poor communities to coalesce and press for social change. There is a comprehensive companion website for Educators which features a lesson plan (developed for grades 7-12 but easily adapted for an older and more knowledgeable audience), discussion guide, a set of short related video clips, and resources for further reading.

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