

“RUST” DOCUMENTARY FEATURING NEWARK IS SHOWN AT NJIT

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27.4% of the Newark population lives in poverty according to United States Census Bureau. To address this, two Newark-based filmmakers, Marylou and Jerome Bongiorno, produced the documentary “RUST.” The film first premiered on PBS in May of this year, and the couple appeared at NJIT to show the film to students in October.

“RUST” is the third in the couple’s 3Rs Trilogy of documentaries on urban America; the first, “REVOLUTION ‘67,” was released in 2007 and covers the civil uprising of 1967, and the second, “THE RULE,” was released in 2014 and focuses on urban school reform. “RUST” features Newark and Rust Belt poverty, also touching on aspects like industrialization, deindustrialization, racism and mass incarceration that have affected poverty levels. “This is all told through the voices of scholars, economists, physicians, activists and the community,” the Bongornos said.

They shared the inspirations behind making this documentary: “We live in Newark. Newark has a high poverty rate near 30%. So, every day, we see and feel the misery caused by this poverty and want to see the poverty reduced.”

This poverty as a result manifests itself in high crime and low graduation rates. The Bongiorno believe that any city with a poverty rate over 15% needs to take action now to reduce the poverty because that’s when crime and low graduation rates begin to rise to unacceptable levels.

“There is only one way to improve cities like Newark – reduce poverty. There is no other way – not build buildings or makeover the downtown,” they said. “This can only be done in the following three ways: improve the educational system so that it responds to the specific needs of inner city kids, stabilize families and ensure people have jobs.”

These proposals are mentioned in “RUST.” Having degrees in biology, the couple has extensive knowledge on how to not only look logically at the causes of problems, but present time-tested solutions to alleviate them. They then attended a New York University Graduate Film School to learn how to create something that would allow them to “reach large global audiences over long periods of time.” Marylou Bongiorno is the producer and director, and Jerome Bongiorno is the cinematographer, editor, animator and musician.

The filmmakers spoke about the reactions they received during the showing at NJIT. “First, [the students were] horrified by both the insidious and very blatant racism throughout U.S. history as well as the effects of poverty on health,” they mentioned. “Then, they were befuddled as to why, even though we have time tested solutions for educational improvement and jobs creation, the school system and government don’t get behind a comprehensive plan to reduce inner city poverty.”

The couple pointed out that students often raise the question of how they can get involved in our Newark community. One idea that’s been repeated by several students is a National Service Program, like Americorps, which is featured in “RUST” and is happening on campuses throughout the state and country to support anti-poverty work.

Getting involved with the community is often brought up in Newark Narratives, a class run by Senior University Lecturer in the Humanities Department Jon Curley. He put as part of the course description, “This course is a comprehensive survey of Newark; it will be provisional and investigative, based on knowledge accrued and acquired, delving into various possible lines and

intersections of inquiry. We will be cartographers of the cosmopolis, generating new insights into the various meanings about cities and city life.”

Curley added, “I work in Newark and have lived in Newark. I realized that Newark has important cultural productions worthy of critical scrutiny and most NJIT students have very little vital contact to the city and its issues despite living or commuting here.”

The Bongiorno met Curley when he attended a screening of “REVOLUTION ’67”; he invited them to his classes, and they visit Newark Narratives regularly. Along with Curley, the couple “loves to celebrate” with professors Tony Schuman, Maurie Cohen and Miriam Ascarelli.

“If NJIT students want to make a difference after they graduate, they should live and work in a place that needs their intelligence and talents,” the Bongiorno advised. “So, stay here in Newark. Sure, it’s a challenge, but challenges make vocations.”

For more information on the documentary and the filmmakers, visit <http://www.bongiornoproductions.com/RUST/Rust.html>.

About The Author



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Sangoi (Mathematical Sciences '24) is part of the Vector writing and copy editing teams. She loves dogs and the arts, especially music! She joined Vector to stand up and vouch for the Oxford Comma and has been thanklessly accomplishing this task ever since.

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