

Revolution 67 Documentary Film Looks at Past and Current Issues of Race, Poverty; Film to be Screened this Month in Millburn, Berkeley Heights

NEWARK, NJ – In 1967, a black taxi driver was arrested and beaten by Newark police, sparking one of the deadliest racial disturbances in America’s history. Were these terrible events a reaction to what the police had done, or were they an uprising against years of economic and social injustice faced by the black citizens of Newark? Or were they both?

Revolution ‘67, a documentary film by the Newark-based filmmaking team of Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno and Jerome Bongiorno, recalls how the days of the Newark rebellion formed a fateful milestone in America’s continuing struggles over race, economic justice, and corruption. The film will be screened in three area locations through the end of the month: in Millburn on Saturday, Oct. 24 at 2 p.m.; in Berkeley Heights at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 26; and in Cranford on Wednesday, Oct. 27 at 7:30 p.m. All screenings will be held in the town’s public library.

Revolution 67 uses chilling archival footage and interviews with prominent social historians such as Clement Price of Rutgers University and Kenneth Jackson of Columbia University, as well as participants in the events, including Tom Hayden, former New Jersey Governor Brendan Byrne and writer Amiri Baraka. Revolution 67 is the winner of several prestigious awards for documentary filmmaking including two national awards for outstanding film of American history. It also has been broadcast on PBS’s award-winning series P.O.V.

After each screening there will be discussions led by scholars from area universities who will connect the topics in the film with the theme of justice and New Jersey history. The filmmakers will also participate in the discussions.

The film has been screened all over the world during the past year, and Tibaldo-Bongiorno said the discussions have been intense no matter what country they were in.

“We’ve been in the Czech Republic, Rome, Berlin... any place where you have poverty issues, you can have these discussions,” she said. “All of these cities have an immigrant population, people struggling to find work... this film is about Newark, but

it's not just about Newark. It's about America. It's about the world. This is a cautionary tale about what this means for the greater population, people who are oppressed."

Tibaldo-Bongiorno said there are ambiguities and complications inherent in any appraisal of right and wrong, and the film raises questions about linkages between race and the application of the law.

"How has the unequal distribution of resources resulted in deeply traumatic moments as well as the development of important social institutions?" she said. "How do we define justice in relation to these issues?"

Tibaldo-Bongiorno started the project as an offshoot of a project she was working on as a graduate student in film studies at NYU. She was working on a fictional film that lead to research into Newark's tumultuous history, and the more she learned the more she realized she needed to look deeper into those fateful six days of riots in 1967.

"People point to the Newark riots as the reason the city is in the condition it's in today," Tibaldo-Bongiorno said. "But we had to go back decades to really understand the level of neglect, not just those six days but to federal policies on everything from bank redlining, poverty, civil rights ... the list goes on."

From the broad scope of their research, Tibaldo-Bongiorno and her husband narrowed the issues down to poverty, corruption and racism. Those three key areas are the focus of Revolution 67 and the areas, they've noticed, that spark good discussions wherever the film is screened.

"Back in 1968 the Turner Commission's answer was jobs, jobs, jobs to cure the ills of all these cities," Tibaldo-Bongiorno said. "But it still hasn't sunk in and it keeps coming back to haunt us."

Given the economic climate all over America, she said, the post-screening discussions often end up focused on what the implications will be of unemployment. Those discussions have prompted the Tibaldo-Bongiornos to organize a poverty conference, which is being planned for next spring at Rutgers University in Newark.

"People talk about the problems in our school system, but not about jobs," Tibaldo-Bongiorno said. "They talk about job training, but not about jobs. Newark is not alone in this problem: Camden is in the same boat, Trenton ... we could go down the whole

list, but there are cities everywhere that have atrocious employment statistics.”

In Newark, for example, when the couple started making the film, unemployment was at 10 percent. Two years later, it’s at 17 percent.

“The idea of mobilizing and organizing people the way they did in the 60s is what his film is about,” Tibaldo-Bongiorno said. “There’s a spark of hope in Newark – can it be fixed?”

The most rewarding part of the making and screening of *Revolution 67*, she said, is the dialogue it starts.

“We’ve been talking with real people in New Jersey, and it’s been fantastic,” she said. “We have this broad perspective now on what the problem is, and it gives us hope that people are committed and wanting to change things.”

The screening of *Revolution 67* is sponsored by the New Jersey Council for the Humanities as part of its newest program, Justice: A Dialogue Through Film.

For more information, visit www.njch.org/justicefilms.html and www.Revolution67.com