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Burlington County Times

Documentary spotlights Newark riots of '67

By: **Peg Quann**
[phillyBurbs.com](#)

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WILLINGBORO — For American history and movie buffs, filmmakers Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno and Jerome Bongiorno will present their award-winning documentary "Revolution '67" at the Willingboro Public Library on Thursday.

The 90-minute film about the civil rights riots in Newark in 1967 will be shown at 6:30 p.m., followed by a question-and-answer session with the filmmakers and Wayne Glasker, director of African-American studies at Rutgers University in Camden. The program is free. The library is at 220 Willingboro Way in the Town Center off Route 130.

Tibaldo-Bongiorno said she and her husband had started to work on a fictional film about the riots with director Spike Lee. During an interview of former Gov. Brendan Byrne for historical perspective, he suggested they film the eyewitnesses to record the history.

"We just got hooked," she said.

The couple is still working with Lee on the fictional movie but decided to make the documentary as well. Tibaldo-Bongiorno said the same problems Newark faced before that tragic summer are visible in society today, including high unemployment, racism and poverty.

"My husband and I live in Newark. I've lived here my entire life. We wanted to understand why cities like Newark are suffering," she said. "Why haven't we recovered? The same conditions still exist."

But, she added, the problems are not just America's. The film has received acclaim in other countries where racial and ethnic tensions are exacerbated when jobs are scarce. It also received the grand prize for best documentary at the New Jersey International Film Festival, according to the couple's website.

The July 1967 Newark riots started after a black taxi driver was stopped for a minor infraction and beaten by two white police officers, the film summary states. When a rumor surfaced that he had died, people took to the streets. With the arrival of the New Jersey State Police and National Guard, using firepower, the violence escalated. By the time the riots ended, 26 people were dead.

"The triggers can be sometimes fairly innocuous," Tibaldo-Bongiorno said, but they ignite "a powder keg of tension."

The evening is sponsored by the New Jersey Council on the Humanities as part of its program "Justice: A Dialogue Through Film," which is being shown in libraries around the state. A curriculum for high school teachers also has been developed.

The Bongiornos call themselves a "two-person band" when it comes to filmmaking. He was in medical school while she was pursuing a master's degree in science when they decided to switch careers.

"We still have high regard for these fields (but) wanted to do something more artistic," Tibaldo-Bongiorno said.

She has a master's in film from New York University and works as the producer and director. Her husband does the cinematography, animation and editing.

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Library director Christine Hill said the Council on the Humanities sponsors many interesting programs. When she saw this one available, she applied for it. For more information, contact the library at 609-877-6668.

For more information about "Revolution '67," visit www.bongiornoproductions.com.

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