



Jerome Bongiorno

CAPTURING A REVOLUTION

How Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno '84 and Jerome Bongiorno '84 made their breakthrough film.

“To recover you have to know what happened.” So says activist and author Tom Hayden in “Revolution '67,” by Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno '84 and Jerome Bongiorno '84. The feature-length documentary illuminates the impact of poverty, corruption and racial tensions on predominantly black urban areas in America by focusing on the six-day outbreak of violence in Newark in July 1967.

The film, which had its national broadcast premiere in July as part of PBS's acclaimed P.O.V. series, incorporates archival news footage, animation and interviews with such notables as activists

Hayden and Amiri Baraka (then known as LeRoi Jones), former New Jersey Governor Brendan Byrne, former Newark Mayor Sharpe James and journalist Bob Herbert (now of *The New York Times*), as well as historians and numerous eyewitnesses. All shed light on the revolt, which resulted in close to 1,500 people arrested, 725 injured and 26 dead, and on the conditions that led up to it for decades.

For the Emmy-nominated filmmakers, “Revolution '67” is personal. “I've lived in Newark my entire life and Jerome and I have been here since we were married 21 years ago so it has deep signifi-

cance for us,” Marylou said. “We wanted to understand not only why 1967 occurred but why it is a city that has continued to suffer. It's a very personal story for us because we live here and want things to get better.”

“Making ‘Revolution '67’ was one way we could do something about it,” added Jerome. “And really figure out what actually happened and what is happening today.”

The filmmakers — who met over a fetal pig dissection at Saint Peter's College — didn't initially plan on careers in the arts. Both majored in Biology; after graduating, Jerome enrolled in medical school and Marylou entered a graduate program in neuroscience. For 10 years, they taught high school science.

But all the while, Jerome composed music and the couple wrote and produced plays. An actor suggested they make a short film, which was part of Marylou's application to the graduate film program at New York University. While a

student, Marylou received the \$75,000 Richard Vague Film Production Fund award for her feature film, “Little Kings.”

Filmmaking allows the couple to work together; Marylou serves as producer and director, while Jerome is the cinematographer, editor and in the case of “Revolution '67,” animator. He also compiled the film's musical score, consisting of more than 60 contemporary jazz tunes performed by 20 international artists.

“Revolution '67” has been shown around the world, and earned the Paul Robeson Award for Best Documentary Film at the

Newark Black Film Festival. In July, to mark the 20th anniversary of the riots, Mayor Cory Booker hosted a weeklong series of screenings in Newark's Central Ward, the epicenter of the violence.

And yet the story resonates far beyond Newark.

"We wanted to understand not only why 1967 occurred but why Newark is a city that has continued to suffer."

— Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno '84

"There's relevance throughout our film," said Marylou. "It isn't really about the past. But after you've watched it you'll ask, have things changed? Or is this a repetitive cycle?"

Currently in pre-production for a fictional version of the film, executive produced by Spike Lee, the Bongiornos returned to Saint Peter's in October to host screenings of "Revolution '67" and related discussions, arranged by Dr. Anna Brown, a political science professor

and coordinator of the College's Social Justice program. They attribute the foundation for their successes to the College and professors who were role models of dedication and passion. "They were really into what they were doing," Jerome said. "As Jesuits, they aren't

gone at the end of the day. They are Jesuits 24 hours a day. I found them influential in my life."

"There's an integrity to the community that's palpable," Marylou added. "There's a sense of camaraderie and goodness, and Catholicism, too. It's infectious in a wonderful way."

"Even though we weren't majoring in the arts," she continued, "we certainly took advantage of them. That's the benefit of a liberal arts education. We found our life-long passion. It helped us to find who we are."

Filmography

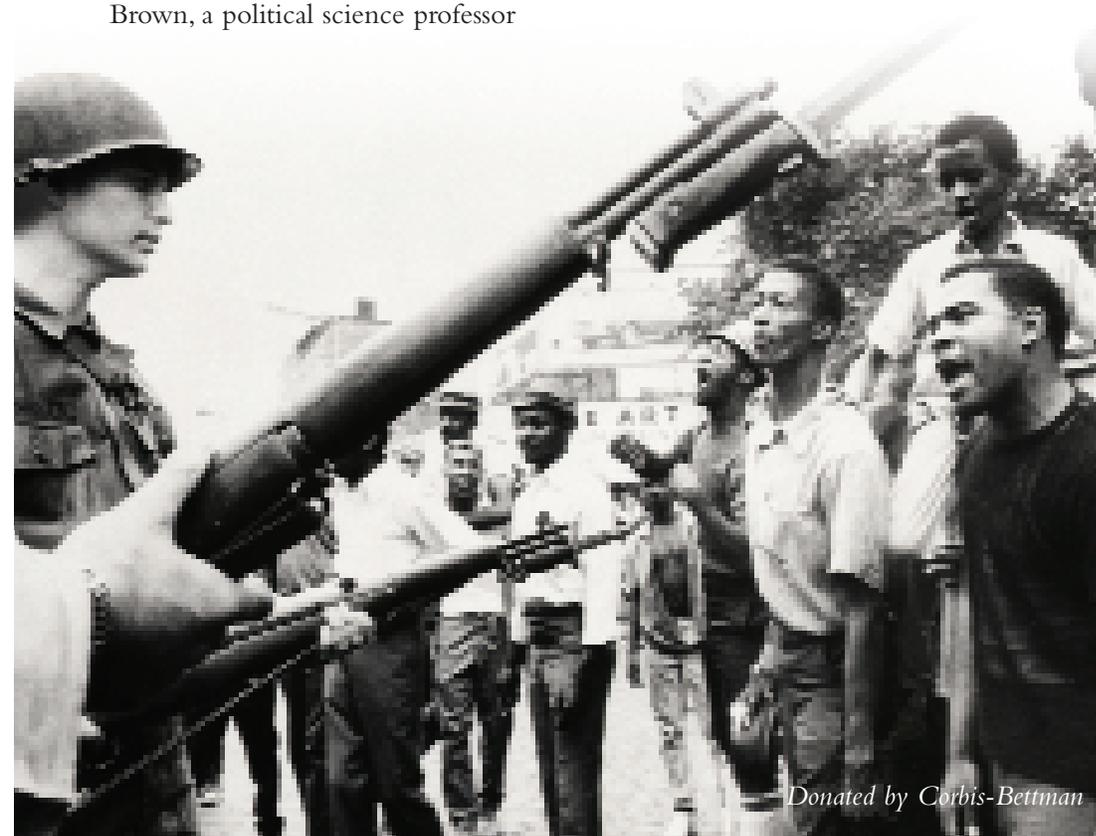
Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno '84 and Jerome Bongiorno '84 have made a number of award-winning films together. They include:

"1967" a fictional, interracial love story set during a summer of unrest in Newark. With encouragement from Spike Lee, the short thesis film for NYU's Graduate School of Film eventually led to the documentary "Revolution '67."

"Little Kings" a 2003 comedy/drama about three Italian-American brothers and their complex relationships with the women in their lives. The short film was nominated and received multiple awards at international film festivals.

"Mother-Tongue: Italian American Sons & Mothers" a documentary inspired by two of Jerome's relatives and featuring Martin Scorsese, Rudy Giuliani and the actor John Turturro. The film — shot on weekends on a budget of \$500 while Marylou was a graduate student at NYU — was nominated for an Emmy.

"Watermark" a fictional romance exploring the real life problems facing flood plagued Venice. The global warming-themed screenplay was presented at Sundance, the Tribeca Film Festival/Sloan Summit and the Johnson Foundation Wingspread Conference on Global Warming and Film in 2005.



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