

# Inspiring Passionate Dialogues at Community Screenings

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I recently read an article by Dana Gioia titled “Connect the Prose and the Passion.” In the article, Gioia explored the etymology of the word “passion,” revealing that it comes from the Late Latin word *passio*, which means “suffering”.

What does any of this have to do with documentaries? This month, I attended a screening of [Revolution '67](#) (POV 2007) hosted by [Civic Frame](#) and [Alpha Phi Alpha, Inc.](#) at the New York Public Library’s [Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture](#).

The screening was followed by a discussion with **April Yvonne Garrett**, president of Civic Frame, and filmmakers **Marylou** and **Jerome Bongiorno**. Given that Newark, NJ is just across the way from New York City, many audience members had had experiences there as teachers, residents, and visitors. One woman from California recounted her experience living through the Watts and Rodney King riots. “We didn’t get a supermarket in Watts until 1989,” she added. “The riot was in 1965.”

The personal stories that people shared after the screening showed the pressing need for documentaries not only to be *seen*, but to be discussed. These types of films record a shared history and engage viewers on a personal level. But another thing that the discussion made me realize was the inherently subjective nature of documentaries when an audience member asked, “What is the role of the filmmaker?”

It is always interesting when conflict arises from a screening. Many times, people are just happy to be part of an event or too bound by social norms to complain. However, at the end of this particular screening, there was one gentleman in the audience who was upset over what he perceived to be the filmmakers' hands-off approach to making any real change in Newark. Essentially, he argued that they "made a good film" but still spoke from a pulpit, and not from the trenches. April graciously gave him time to speak, and the filmmakers accepted his critique while offering their own opinions. It may have been a heated, uncomfortable moment, but this exchange also addressed an important point. It heartened me to see that the films we air on POV are able to entice such provocative commentary and encourage communities to come together through constructive, even if sometimes painful, dialogue.

I know I've digressed a bit, but let us go back and revisit the idea that passion is linked, at least etymologically, to suffering. Perhaps it is the case that when people — whether they are filmmakers or audience members — are passionate about certain subjects, there may be an element of suffering involved; that learning is not always simple, that it can bring us to question our motives and ourselves, and ultimately, that though grappling with different perspectives is complex, it may help us gain a better understanding of difficult issues.

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