



## P.O.V.'s "Revolution '67"

By Marylou Bongiorno

Tuesday, July 10, 2007 at 10 p.m. on PBS (Check local listings)

### Filmmakers' Statement

We live in Newark, New Jersey. And it's a city — like so many other American cities — that's suffering.

Most people associate Newark with its airport or its violent history. They especially remember the Newark riots of 1967; an event where 26 people died, hundreds were injured, and the city endured millions of dollars in property damage. People assume that it was this one event that left the city in a state from which it has never fully recovered.

We started researching Newark's past for our short thesis film at NYU's Graduate Film School. The film "1967" was fictional, an interracial love story set during that hot, turbulent summer in Newark. With Spike Lee as a teacher/mentor and later executive producer, we sought to write a longer, more substantial, screenplay, and needed to ask lots of questions. We also wanted to record the answers. This work became **Revolution '67** the documentary film.

Our first interviews with eyewitnesses Amiri Baraka (who in '67 was known as LeRoi Jones), former Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) president Tom Hayden (who had lived in Newark from 1964-68) and historians Ken Jackson and Clement Price brought many surprises. The most startling was the myth of the black sniper. According to newspaper articles of the time, and even today, most of the riot's casualties were said to have been the result of black snipers from the Newark community. This was information that we dramatized in our NYU thesis film. But our interviewees presented evidence that black snipers didn't exist and that most of the killings were committed by law enforcement: Newark police, State Police and the National Guard.

Another revelation was that the riots were a rebellion against deplorable conditions stemming from not a single day, nor months, nor years, but from decades of corruption and neglect. This led us to a reexamination of how slavery, the economic motives of the civil war, Jim Crow laws, unscrupulous real estate and banking practices, the civil rights era, the Vietnam conflict, and the veracity of media coverage factored into Newark's revolution of '67. As Newark's history unfolded, so did America's.

Tom Hayden states in our film: "To recover, you have to know what happened." Forty years later, after numerous Newark officials have been indicted and/or imprisoned and the vital signs of the city are still poor, we recognize that Newark has not learned from its past. The greatest lesson of the 1960s is that the people must empower themselves in order for that change to occur.

— **Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno and Jerome Bongiorno,**  
filmmakers

