

The Producers' Reflections on July '64



When “July ‘64” premiered on the 40th anniversary of this earth-shaking event—which one reporter characterized as being a defining moment in the history of Rochester, along with the opening of the Erie Canal—we knew that the message would be important, that the perspective would be eye-opening.

What we didn’t expect...

...was that what had always been called the “Rochester Riot” would come to be referred to as July ‘64,

...was to be nominated for an Emmy Award, following the broadcast of the film on the national PBS series, “Independent Lens,”

...was that we would receive a call from one of the founders of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, to ask permission to distribute the film nationwide,

...was that the film would find a home in literally thousands of college, university and public libraries,

...was that the film would be screened in venues worldwide from the Martin Luther King, Jr. Museum to the American University in Warsaw, Poland, to the Impact Film Festival in Japan,

...was that we would find reviews, analysis, syllabi, student videos and term papers reflecting on the events of July ‘64 posted to the internet,

...was that the film would be used to train police officers, court officers, Americorps volunteers and City of Rochester student interns,

...was that the film would still be finding audiences, being discussed, being screened more than 20 years after its release.

Our core premise in making the film, was the idea that history is often based on contemporary news reporting—and if that reporting was missing a voice or a perspective, the ongoing history would always be flawed. Our mission with the making of *July’64* was not only to capture those missing voices, but to lend understanding and perspective to the build up of pressure, solidly grounded in the human condition and life experience of those living in select Rochester neighborhoods, that led to that historic weekend’s event. We replaced the idea of “riot,” with that of “rebellion”— a concept that continues to be a topic of spirited discussion in the context of present day-events.

What we didn’t expect...was how this film went beyond every expectation to become the enduring teaching tool that it has become.