



# Red Hook Justice

## Discussion Guide

The RED HOOK JUSTICE Discussion Guide was developed and written by Outreach Extensions in collaboration with Faith Rogow, Ph.D., Insighters Educational Consulting and Meema Spadola, Sugar Pictures, LLC. The documentary RED HOOK JUSTICE and the Discussion Guide are part of the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign.

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation

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## LETTER FROM THE FILMMAKER

Dear Colleagues,

I first began working on RED HOOK JUSTICE in early 2000. Originally, my producing partner, Thom Powers, and I intended to make a documentary about New York City's Legal Aid Society – an inside view of the nation's largest and oldest legal services organization for low-income people.

Early on, we met Brett Taylor, a Legal Aid defense attorney, who told us that he was being transferred to the new Red Hook Community Justice Center (RHCJC), a pilot project that was slated to open in April 2000. We went to visit the Justice Center, and it was clear that we had found our story – an ambitious legal experiment taking place in one three-storey building in a low-income, underserved neighborhood in Brooklyn. The plan was to have a single judge hear multi-jurisdictional cases (criminal, civil, and family) in one court. This was radically different from the three separate and overburdened courts in downtown Brooklyn, which serve as a kind of revolving door for the people brought before the judges. I heard one Red Hook resident say, *“A lot of us are doing life [in prison] 30 days at a time.”*

The claims were grand: the RHCJC would stop the cycle of low-level crime, disorder, and family dysfunction, and heal the neighborhood by helping defendants with on-site social services, while administering punishment that would pay back the community. The Justice Center would be responsive to area residents, and build much-needed trust between the community and the legal system. The stakes were high: the Department of Justice was watching, and if this experiment succeeded, the Justice Center would be replicated in other low-income neighborhoods nationwide.

We planned to follow several different cases over a period of several months to see how the RHCJC worked in practice. As it turned out, the court first began hearing criminal cases, and only later phased in civil and family cases, so we were limited to portraying only the criminal matters before the court. It also became clear that criminal cases weren't always resolved as quickly as we had hoped. *“These are not complicated legal cases,”* Judge Alex Calabrese once noted. *“These are cases about people who lead complicated lives.”* Add to that the complex web of challenges in the Red Hook community that contribute to dysfunction and disorder.

It's tempting to think of the Justice Center as a silver bullet. I walked into this project imagining a place where justice was truly just, and if given a chance to succeed, people would turn their lives around. I now feel that it's innovative and part of a larger trend in alternative justice that I hope will continue to grow. But it's not a panacea.

I hope that viewers will watch RED HOOK JUSTICE and consider the successes or failures of the defendants in the context of the neighborhood – to think about the larger question of what we need *beyond* the Justice Center; and how we can balance personal and societal responsibility. What would it mean if quality housing, education, jobs, and healthcare were available in Red Hook, and in other poor neighborhoods nationwide? Of course, crime and substance abuse wouldn't be eradicated, but how would creating more opportunities for success help people thrive? (This point isn't news to the staff of the RHCJC – I've heard many of them complain about failing local institutions and lack of jobs.)

It's also important to think about the way police work in neighborhoods. Who's getting arrested, for what, and where? In addition, some criminologists have claimed that siting a Community Justice Center in a particular neighborhood "widens the net." Thus, in their view, the Center's prevention and early intervention policies and programs, rather than reducing the number of offenders processed through the justice system, actually subject *more* people to formal justice system intervention.

Finally, I know that the staff of the Red Hook Community Justice Center is committed, principled, and caring, but what happens when the model is replicated? When much of how the court works depends on the cooperation and subjective judgment of staffers, how do court planners and administrators ensure that the system is fair for both defendants and community?

In all, we filmed over 120 hours, beginning in June 2000. At the opening day ceremony, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, a major supporter of the Justice Center, joked that the project would make an "*excellent television program.*" Our last shoot day at the Justice Center was in May 2002. Final interviews with Judge Judith S. Kaye, District Attorney Charles J. Hynes, and Professor Todd Clear were shot in June 2003.

Of course there are many elements of the RHCJC, and numerous stories of people, both staff and defendants, which weren't included in the final cut of the documentary, but I hope this gives a sense of what community justice can be like in action, not just theory. I encourage you to seek out more information about local community justice and alternatives to incarceration programs (like courts devoted to domestic violence, guns, mental health issues, and drugs), and think about what approaches might be appropriate for the particular challenges you and your neighbors face.

Thanks for watching RED HOOK JUSTICE, and thanks for thinking about how we can make our legal system work better for us all.

– **Meema Spadola, Sugar Pictures**

## INTRODUCTION

### The Film

Over the course of nearly two years, Sugar Pictures was granted unique access to film the daily activities of the Red Hook Community Justice Center, a pilot project in Brooklyn that houses a court and an array of social services.



Credit: Jason Chopoorian

The hour-long documentary RED HOOK JUSTICE focuses on the dramatic stories of three defendants and a handful of staffers at the Justice Center. As the cases unfold, viewers see that the theories behind community justice and the reality of this new court aren't always in synch.

The cameras capture intense vérité scenes of intake interviews in the holding cells, arraignments and other court proceedings, heated staff interactions, community meetings, counseling sessions, and other day-to-day workings of the Justice Center.

RED HOOK JUSTICE provides a remarkable portrait of successes, failures, fatigue, hope, and quiet heroes fighting to make their community a better place to live.

Produced and directed by Meema Spadola, RED HOOK JUSTICE is a production of Sugar Pictures. It will be broadcast on PBS as part of the INDEPENDENT LENS series.

### People We Meet in RED HOOK JUSTICE

**Anthony Ward** is a 17-year-old with multiple drug arrests and other minor "quality-of-life" offenses. Both of Anthony's parents died years ago and he lives with his grandmother and extended family in the sprawling Red Hook public housing units. The middle child of eleven brothers and sisters, Anthony struggles to get his life on track while resisting the pull of the streets and a family legacy of death or jail. The film's epilogue tells viewers that Anthony made it through his one-year probation and left Red Hook. He is the proud father of a baby boy, and has been working for a moving company.

**Michael Ward** is Anthony's 18-year-old brother. He's brought to Red Hook's court on a minor marijuana possession charge. He also faces a more serious charge of reckless endangerment in Brooklyn's downtown Criminal Court, which might lead to jail time. Viewers find out at the end of the film that Michael still lives in Red Hook, although he's unemployed again. His case downtown was closed, with no criminal charges. And he's stayed out of trouble since then.

**Letitia Sanchez**, who has sold drugs and worked as a prostitute, becomes pregnant shortly after being arrested while trying to buy heroin. She has already lost two children to the foster care system when she was incarcerated on Riker's Island for selling drugs. Now, if she stays off drugs until the baby's birth, she'll have another shot at motherhood. At the end of the film, viewers learn that Letitia had a second baby. But she also had a relapse, and her two youngest children were placed in foster care. She completed another treatment program, and is working to regain custody of her children.

**Brett Taylor** is a passionate Legal Aid defender who handles over a hundred criminal cases at a time and wonders if this new court helps or hurts his clients. Late in the documentary, Brett heads west to Arizona to "play in the stock market." Viewers hear at the end of the film that he has returned to his job in Red Hook after thirteen months away.

**Leroy Davis**, a court officer who grew up in the Red Hook housing projects, returns to his old neighborhood to make a difference. He takes Anthony under his wing, providing some much-needed guidance for the teen.

**Gerianne Abriano**, a District Attorney who works to redefine the role of prosecutor, sometimes finds herself in the unlikely position of advocating for drug treatment rather than jail.

Judge **Alex Calabrese** is the public face of the court, addressing critics at community meetings and taking a hands-on approach with defendants. His commitment is clear when pushing defendants to succeed or expressing frustration when he resorts to giving out a jail sentence.

*In addition to Anthony, Michael, and Letitia, we briefly meet other defendants who don't fare as well at the Justice Center:*

**George Campos** is a heroin addict charged with a felony burglary. District Attorney Abriano pushes for in-patient drug treatment, but Campos resists, and ultimately he is sentenced to eight months on Riker's Island.

**Tracy Burns** is also a heroin addict with a 20-page rap sheet for prostitution and drug possession. She agrees to a sentence of drug treatment, but admits to Legal Aid defender Brett Taylor that she pleaded out because she was "dope

sick and needed a bag of dope." She doesn't return for treatment and a warrant is issued for her arrest.

### *Additional Expert Interviews*

**Todd Clear** is a Distinguished Professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York, and Executive Officer of the Program of Doctoral Studies in Criminal Justice, The CUNY Graduate Center. He is the author of several publications on community justice.

**Charles J. Hynes** was elected the District Attorney of Kings County (Brooklyn), New York in 1989. He is now serving his fourth term as the County's chief law enforcement officer. A key supporter of the Red Hook Justice Center, he began his career in public service as an associate attorney for the Legal Aid Society.

**Judith S. Kaye** became Chief Judge of the State of New York in 1993. She is the first woman to occupy the State Judiciary's highest office. She is the author of numerous publications – particularly articles dealing with legal process, state constitutional law, women in law, professional ethics, and problem-solving courts.

## **Background on the Red Hook Community Justice Center**

In 2000, an experimental court opened its doors in Red Hook, a Brooklyn neighborhood plagued by a cycle of unemployment, poverty, and crime. This new court seeks to stop crime and heal the surrounding



community. It is at the center of a legal revolution – the community justice movement. When it opened, it was the first of its kind. Now it has been replicated in communities across the United States. This innovative project draws both supporters and detractors.

### **COMMUNITY JUSTICE DEFINED**

According to the Community Justice Exchange on its Web site ([www.communityjustice.org](http://www.communityjustice.org)), community justice brings together citizens and the criminal justice system to solve neighborhood problems. Community justice programs are collaborations among a range of traditionally separate entities, including ordinary citizens, criminal justice agencies, other government agencies, and social service providers. They emphasize neighborhood-focused problem solving. They posit a belief that citizens are customers to whom the justice system must be accountable. They aspire to improve public confidence in the justice system. Some also pursue restorative justice, which aims to heal the damage crime does to the victim, the community, and the offender.

On the Web site for the Center for Court Innovation, ([www.courtinnovation.org](http://www.courtinnovation.org)), a partner in the development and administration of the Red Hook Community Justice Center (RHCJC), the project is described as the nation's first multi-jurisdictional community court. Operating out of a refurbished Catholic school in the heart of a low-income Brooklyn neighborhood, the Justice Center seeks to solve neighborhood problems like drugs, "quality-of-life" crimes, juvenile delinquency, family dysfunction, domestic violence, and landlord-tenant disputes. At Red Hook, a single judge hears neighborhood cases that under ordinary circumstances would go to three different courts – Civil, Family, and Criminal. The goal is to offer a coordinated, rather than piecemeal, approach to people's problems. The Red Hook judge has an array of sanctions and services at his disposal, including community restitution projects, on-site job training, drug treatment, and mental health counseling – all rigorously monitored to ensure accountability and drive home notions of individual responsibility.

But the Red Hook story goes far beyond what happens in the courtroom. The courthouse is the hub for an array of unconventional programs that engage local residents in "doing justice." These include mediation, community service projects that put local volunteers to work repairing conditions of disorder, and a Youth Court where teenagers resolve actual cases involving their peers. The idea here is to engage the community in aggressive crime prevention, solving local problems before they even come to court.

The Justice Center is the product of a unique public-private partnership led by the New York State Unified Court System and the City of New York. Planning was underwritten by the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance and Drug Courts Program Office. Other supporters include the Kings County District Attorney's Office, the National Institute of Justice, New York City Housing Authority, Scherman Foundation, Shubert Foundation, Fund for the City of New York and Booth Ferris Foundation. An array of local partners provides social services.

In 2003, the Red Hook Community Justice Center was awarded the Silver Medal Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence. In a Bruner Foundation ([www.brunerfoundation.org](http://www.brunerfoundation.org)) report\* called *Creative Community Building: 2003 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence*, the following history of the Red Hook Community Justice Center is provided.

- 1992 - Patrick Daly, beloved principal at the local Red Hook elementary school, is murdered by rival drug gangs.
- 1993 - Center for Court Innovation (CCI) opens Manhattan Community Court in Times Square.
- 1994 - District Attorney Charles Hynes commits to intervening in Red Hook; CCI initiates planning.
- 1995 - Community outreach starts with Public Safety Corps.
- 1998 - Youth Court begins.



1999 - Groundbreaking; construction begins.  
2000 - Construction complete; Criminal Court opens.  
2001 - Family Court starts operation.  
2002 - Housing Court starts operation.  
2003 - Domestic violence petitions accepted.

According to the report, the Bruner Foundation's Selection Committee "recognized Red Hook for having significant positive impacts on its community in a number of ways. They felt it was important in empowering community members to deal pro-actively with the issues that affect the community. They also noted that Red Hook provides services aimed at moving people from poverty to self-sufficiency, and that together with Midtown Court, (a sister project by the Center for Court Innovation), Red Hook serves as a model for change throughout the court system and abroad."

\* The report was written by Jay Farbstein, FAIA, Ph.D.; with Emily Axelrod, MCP; Robert Shibley, AIA, AICP; and Richard Wener, Ph.D.

### **Key goals of the Red Hook Community Justice Center include:**

- **Better Judicial Coordination**  
The Justice Center handles misdemeanors and some felonies, as well as selected Family Court and Civil Court matters. In hearing these cases, the Justice Center recognizes that neighborhood problems do not conform to the arbitrary jurisdictional boundaries of the modern court system. By having a single judge handle matters that ordinarily are heard by different decision makers at different locations, Red Hook hopes to offer a swifter and more coordinated judicial response.
- **Community Restitution**  
By mandating offenders to restore the community, the Justice Center seeks to make justice more visible to local residents and acknowledges that communities can be victims just like individuals. Restitution projects include painting over graffiti, sweeping the streets, and cleaning the Justice Center.
- **Help for Anyone Who Needs It**  
By using the coercive authority of the court to link defendants to drug treatment and by providing on-site services like domestic violence counseling, health care, and job training, the Justice Center seeks to strengthen families and help individuals avoid further involvement with the court system. Services are not limited to court users but are available to anyone in the community wishing to avail themselves of them.
- **Defendant Accountability**  
Compliance with social service and community restitution sanctions is rigorously monitored by the Red Hook judge, who requires litigants to

return to court frequently to report on their progress and to submit urine tests.

- **Prevention of Local Problems**

The Justice Center actively seeks to resolve local problems before they become court cases. The Justice Center's prevention programs include community mediation, the Red Hook Youth Court that offers intensive leadership training to local teenagers, and the Red Hook Public Safety Corps, which provides 50 local residents with full-time community service jobs each year.

The Red Hook Community Justice Center has uncommon involvement in defendants' lives, and cases that would be closed quickly in traditional courts can extend over many months. Before resorting to jail, the Red Hook judge mandates extensive drug treatment, job training, and community service. Because the Justice Center houses an array of social service providers in addition to the court, such sentences are convenient for the court to monitor. For defendants, however, Red Hook sentences are more demanding than simple jail terms, but proponents of the court hope they are deterrents to future recidivism.

Not everyone believes that the Justice Center is a step in the right direction. Some opponents in the Red Hook community and in the legal field claim that the Justice Center operates on a presumption of guilt in its haste to help defendants, and may overlook questionable or illegal arrests. At Red Hook, defendants either plead guilty and remain within the Justice Center system, or fight the case and risk jail time and a criminal record, so in that moment of crisis when they first meet their defense attorney, it may seem easier to plead guilty. Opponents also say that the long alternative sentences set up defendants for failure, after which they serve lengthier jail terms. They complain that targeting poor neighborhoods results in increased prosecution of the community and creates a separate standard of justice for low-income people. Critics also say that the multi-jurisdictional nature of the court may allow what might be inadmissible evidence to figure into the judge's legal decisions. And they worry that the close cooperation of the judge, prosecuting attorneys, and defense lawyers may mean less protection for defendants.

### **Why Use the Film RED HOOK JUSTICE?**

Each year, our nation's courts process over 11 million low-level crimes. Traditionally, the courts impose minor sentences, and nothing else. It has been a process that has been more successful at creating repeat offenders than at stopping crime. Those looking for more effective solutions will be interested in seeing how the Red Hook court has tried to close this



revolving door.

Shot over the course of nearly two years, RED HOOK JUSTICE shows the daily successes, frustrations, and failures of the Red Hook Community Justice Center. The in-depth look at defendants and staff who are part of this experiment provides viewers with a realistic picture of what it might take to bring an alternative justice program to their own communities. Without romanticizing or dismissing the difficulties, the film's examples of perseverance and commitment to the ideal of community justice provide inspiration to those who are willing to take on the challenges of making their neighborhoods, courts, and social services more effective.

In addition to helping people explore community justice and alternatives to incarceration, RED HOOK JUSTICE can spark discussions on:

- Crime prevention
- Social justice
- Legal rights
- Substance abuse treatment
- Conflict resolution
- Juvenile justice
- Recidivism

The film can also serve as a foundation for debates about:

- How to most effectively provide social services.
- Where to draw the lines between societal and individual responsibility.
- Whether the primary role of the justice system should be rehabilitation or punishment.
- What a project like this will mean if it is replicated in viewers' communities.
- Whether defendants can succeed when returned to distressed neighborhoods (e.g., poverty, unemployment, low-wage jobs, substandard housing, drugs).

## PLANNING & FACILITATION

### Audiences / Partners

RED HOOK JUSTICE offers an excellent springboard for exploring the lines where community responsibility and individual responsibility intersect. It is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- People involved with the justice system (e.g., youth in detention, guards and staff of youth detention facilities, judges, attorneys, police officers, parole officers, social service providers, educators)
- Community-based youth programs
- High schools
- Counselors and counseling training programs
- Youth groups at religious institutions
- Colleges, universities, and community colleges, especially in conjunction with departments of sociology, urban studies, law, criminal justice / law enforcement, social work / counseling, psychology
- Substance abuse prevention and recovery programs
- Policy makers
- Community stakeholders
- Civic organizations

### Using This Guide

This guide is especially designed to help you use RED HOOK JUSTICE to engage both youth and general audiences in a process of reflection, and eventually, action. It contains suggestions to help viewers explore the issues raised in the film, and to think more deeply about their own communities.

The prompts provided in this guide are designed to be used immediately following a screening of RED HOOK JUSTICE. They presume that people have seen the entire film. The “Exploring the Film” section divides prompts into four categories:

- *Opening Prompts* get a dialogue going.
- *Prompts for Youth* ask questions in ways that will help young viewers relate what they see to their own experiences.
- *Prompts for General Audiences* may also be used with youth audiences, but they are designed primarily to address issues of concern to adults.
- *Discussion Scenarios for Youth or General Audiences* provide brief descriptions of cases and judicial decisions for extended discussions.

Each prompt can be used to begin discussion or to start a writing activity. As you make choices about how to work with your group, consider the strengths and limitations of these methods of engagement:

**Discussion** – Engaging in conversation is an easy way for many people to share with one another. It is especially useful as a starting point for deeper reflection or action.

**Writing** – Writing provides more time to reflect than does discussion. Because it is done individually and allows for editing, it can also provide a safe way to explore emotional topics. In this context, writing is not an exercise in grammar. People should be free to write what and how they want. Be clear about whether writers will be asked to share what they wrote and with whom. Also be clear about what kinds of feedback writers can expect.

The suggestions in “Exploring the Film” are designed for use in a variety of settings, so not every suggestion will apply to your situation. Rather than attempt to address everything, choose several prompts that best meet the needs, abilities, comfort level, and interests of your group. You may also develop additional questions based on the film that you think will challenge your group.

No matter which prompts you choose, events will always be most effective if you can end with action or action planning. For people who are new to an issue, discussion is an important first step. For people who have already spent a lot of time thinking about issues related to community justice, however, talk alone can be frustrating. Whenever possible, allow time to plan specific action steps so that people walk out of the room knowing what the next steps will be and what their individual responsibilities are in completing those steps. Action planning gives people a sense of urgency. When done well, it will facilitate people leaving your event feeling energized and optimistic.

## **Things to Consider as You Plan**

*Who Should Facilitate?* – Because the film raises tough issues, and because young people can find themselves in uniquely vulnerable positions, it is important to have a facilitator who is experienced and who has (or who can easily develop) a trusting relationship with and among group members.

*Panel Discussion* – Your discussion event could incorporate a panel discussion, led by a facilitator, which could include people involved with the justice system, community stakeholders, policy leaders, neighborhood residents (including youth), and others.

*Goals* – Be realistic about what you hope to accomplish. If you are looking for major change, you may want to consider convening a series of meetings rather than a single event.

*Involving Stakeholders* – If groups of people are the topic of conversation, it is important to let members of those groups speak for themselves. So, for example, if you were discussing alternatives to incarceration for juveniles, it would be important to involve young people in the conversation.

*Effective Sharing* – Choose a method of sharing that will meet the needs of your group and help you reach your goal(s). As you choose, take into account the language levels and abilities of group members. For example, discussion can be difficult if group members are not all comfortable conversing in the same language. Writing might be an intimidating choice for people who have low-level literacy skills.

*Support (for youth audiences)* – Seeing the stories of Red Hook’s defendants and staffers may evoke intense emotions in some viewers. Know who your local support agencies and/or professionals are and how to contact them in case referrals are appropriate.

Also, pay close attention to how prepared participants are to tackle certain kinds of issues. Take special care not to push individuals too far. If a question or activity seems too personal, skip it. If you are dealing with young people who are not ready to talk about their own situations, try altering questions so that participants can consider them as if they were talking about someone else.

*Be Prepared to Facilitate* – Check the background information and resources so you have enough factual knowledge to keep people on track. Most importantly, review the film and other materials prior to your event.

## **Preparing the Group**

*Do introductions.* If group members do not already know one another, take some time for everyone to introduce himself or herself. (If you’re using a panel, ask members of the panel to introduce themselves.)

*Role of facilitator:* The facilitator should keep the discussion on track, encourage good process, and pose alternatives that may resolve differences. Rather than advocating a point of view, the facilitator should assume a neutral position.

*Set ground rules for discussion.* Involve the group in setting some basic rules that will support consensus building. Consider the following:

1. Open communication – Be open to each others’ ideas and feelings, and honestly try to accommodate them. Give people the opportunity to speak and actively listen to what they are saying.
2. Different viewpoints – Encourage sharing all viewpoints and discuss viewpoints and ideas in an atmosphere of respect.

3. Taking turns – Make sure that everyone who wishes to speak can do so, and that one person or a few individuals do not dominate the discussion. When you speak, be brief and to the point—and say it only once.
4. Work toward a solution – Be attentive to areas of agreement and disagreement within the group. Be committed to forging solutions that represent the consensus of the group.

*Remind participants that everyone sees through the lens of his or her own experiences.* Because who we are influences how we interpret what we see, everyone in the group may have a different view about the content and meaning of the film, and all of them may be accurate. If there are disagreements, ask people to be clear about the evidence they are using to reach their conclusions.

*Establish a time-out mechanism.* Have a pre-planned strategy for what to do if the intensity level rises. Agree on a signal that anyone can use to pause the discussion. You may want to ask everyone to take a deep breath before moving on to deal with the situation.

## EXPLORING THE FILM

### Opening Prompts

- What scene or character in the film surprised or affected you the most? Why did it surprise or affect you? What would you have done if you'd been in that situation or what would you have advised the person to do?



Credit: Jason Chopoorian

- Did the film challenge any of your ideas about community justice? What practices in the Red Hook Community Justice Center worked most effectively from your point of view? What changes would you suggest?
- Judge Alex Calabrese said that he's been in the justice system for twenty years. His experience with the Red Hook Community Justice Center makes him feel *"that I have a chance to really get to the problem that caused the person to come in front of me."* Based on what you saw in the film, what makes you agree or disagree with him?
- When their cases are closed, and defendants return to their Red Hook neighborhood, what personal characteristics or environmental situations might help them to stay away from criminal activity?
- Why do you think the Red Hook project is called the Community Justice Center instead of the Red Hook Court? Based on what you've seen in RED HOOK JUSTICE, what are the differences between a court and a justice center?
- If you could ask anyone in the film a question, whom would you ask and what would you ask them? Why do you want to know the answer to that particular question?

### Prompts For Youth Audiences

- Name one thing from the film that spoke truth to you. Explain why you think it is truth.



- Which do you think would be harder, serving time in jail or a juvenile facility, or being sentenced to the kinds of treatment and community service required by the Red Hook Community Justice Center? Explain your choice.
- Five years down the road, who would you guess would be better off, a person sentenced to jail or a person sentenced to “Red Hook time”? Explain your opinion.
- How do you define “justice”? What would your community look like if it were “just”?
- District Attorney Gerianne Abriano says, *“A lot of what we do here is essentially trying to help the defendants, with a goal of getting them to lead crime-free lives.”*  
What kinds of things inspire people to change? What could you do that would help those around you to change for the better?
- From what you hear in the film, why did so many of the Red Hook Community Justice Center staff choose to be there? Do you think they are making a difference? If there was a Justice Center where you lived, what could you do to help the staff make a difference in your community?
- Did the stories of any of the defendants in the film seem familiar to you? Which ones? If you had been the judge or one of the attorneys, would you have given each of them another chance? Why or why not?
- Defendant Letitia Sanchez felt a great deal of pride when her case was closed after the birth of her son. What kinds of things make you feel proud of yourself? Is there something you could do every day that would make you feel proud of yourself?
- Defendant Letitia Sanchez said, *“Everybody makes mistakes. And I think we all got a chance in life to change, especially if you really want to. The Red Hook Community Justice Center, they do give you chances.”*  
Do you agree with Letitia that everyone can change if they want to? Why or why not? In what way does the Justice Center give people second chances?
- Court Officer Leroy Davis says that the courts *“should treat the community with a lot more respect than we would normally give.”* What would “treating the community with respect” look like to you?
- Judge Alex Calabrese said, *“Well, let me hear from Mr. [Anthony] Ward, who’s now eighteen. It seems like everyone at the Justice Center makes a lot of effort to help you, and the only person who’s not putting in any effort*

*is you. And I want to know if you agree. And then if you do, then I want to know why.”*

Do you agree with what the judge said to/about Anthony? What would you say to the judge if you were the defendant in this situation?

- Judge Alex Calabrese says, *“In the traditional court, defendants and their families are seen as outcasts, community outcasts, and they’re treated as such. Here we recognize that defendants are part of our community, and they’re going to be a part of our community when they get arrested, and they’re going to be part of our community when the case is over with. And to a certain extent, we are all better off when we try to work with those defendants and their families.”*

Assume that Judge Calabrese made this statement at a press conference and you were a reporter. What would you ask him?

### **Writing Activity for Youth**

- Write a poem, essay, story, letter, or editorial based on your initial reaction to the film. If you have a chance, put it away until you have had a chance to think about the film for a while or even watch it again. Then read what you wrote and consider whether your original thoughts or feelings are still true. If things have changed, write about what has changed.

### **Prompts For General Audiences**

- What are the pros and cons of the approach to criminal justice that you see in RED HOOK JUSTICE?
- What does your community want from its justice system (including police, courts, and detention facilities)? How can you help your system meet the needs identified by the community?
- Judge Alex Calabrese states that traditional courts address *“just the criminal conduct.”* He believes that they don’t look *“behind the problem ...to see what you really need so that the defendant doesn’t come back before this court or any other court.”*  
How does the Red Hook court differ from this description of traditional courts? What kinds of additional strategies and services does the Justice Center use to keep defendants from coming back? In your own community, how might you help to increase coordination of these various services?
- In the film, Professor Todd Clear questions whether the solution to complex social problems (poverty, unemployment, bad schools, unfinished infrastructure, drug abuse) can be found in a court system.

Should courts help to solve social problems? Why or why not? What impact do you think the Red Hook Community Justice Center had on solving the social problems of the defendants in the film?

- Charles Hynes, Brooklyn District Attorney, said, *“I don’t believe that traditional prosecution makes any sense anymore. I don’t think it has any more relevance.”*  
Charles Hynes cleared the way for the establishment of the Red Hook Community Justice Center. Do you agree with the point of view he expressed in these statements? What is your position?
- Chief Justice of the New York State Supreme Court, Judith Kaye says, *“The courts are part of the problem.”*  
What do you think she meant? How could you transform the courts in your community to ensure that they are part of the solution instead of part of the problem?
- What qualities or skills does Judge Alex Calabrese have that makes him an effective (or ineffective) judge? How much does the success of a community justice center depend on the judge who presides – his or her attitudes, skills, and understanding of the issues? What might happen with a court in another community in which the judge might not be so well suited to this system of justice?
- What thoughts do you have about whether – or to what extent – the courts in your community achieve justice? What changes would need to take place for you to believe that they achieve justice?
- Defense attorney Brett Taylor points out that the defendants in Red Hook’s alternative court system are all charged with minor offenses. Do you think alternatives like Red Hook could work for more serious crimes? Why or why not?
- Community court challenges some of the basic assumptions about the proper role for lawyers in our system. Consider the implications of the following changes:
  - *“I think what really bothers people about the community court approach is you’re deviating from normal patterns of what courts*



Credit: Jason Chopoorian

*and lawyers are supposed to be... They say, you know you're not a lawyer, you're a social worker.*" – Brett Taylor (defense attorney)

- *"A lot of people on the defense side want nothing to do with community justice. They would think I'm a traitor for being involved in this."* – Brett Taylor (defense attorney)
- *"A lot of what we do here is essentially trying to help the defendants, with a goal of getting them to lead crime-free lives. I don't think that people think about a prosecutor's role as helping the defendant in any way. [But] it's helping the defendant that ultimately helps the community and helps society."* – Gerianne Abriano (District Attorney)

What are the benefits of replacing the adversarial process with cooperation or asking lawyers to deal with social as well as criminal issues? What are the potential problems with such changes?

- Defendant Anthony Ward says, *"Trouble is trouble and it's easy to get in, but it's hard to come out."*  
What kinds of things such as his home life, street life, education, and available resources, do you think make it "hard to come out" of trouble? What might the community do to reduce or eliminate some of those obstacles?
- Professor Todd Clear observes that court demands often sound reasonable, e.g., get a job or stay clear of drugs. But he points out that these demands may not sound reasonable to someone who lives in a neighborhood with few jobs and where *"every time you leave your house you're gonna walk by somebody who's wanting to sell you drugs."* From the defendant's perspective (e.g., Michael, Letitia), which of those demands sound reasonable? Why or why not? Is it reasonable to ask defendants to change their lives for the court when they live in a community that presents barriers to success?
- According to Brett Taylor (defense attorney), *"[Critics] say that I'm setting people up for failure. It's too early to say, are our clients getting [a good deal] or not. At this point, if you ask me, I think our clients are making out much better here."*  
In what way could the Red Hook court be setting up clients for failure? Do you think Red Hook's clients are better off? How would you evaluate the court based on the film?
- One of the keys to the success of the Red Hook Community Justice Center is the involvement of the community. What conduits exist in your municipal or town courts to give community members voice? How could you strengthen those conduits (or create them if need be)?

## Discussion Scenarios for Youth or General Audiences

Choose one of the following four case scenarios. What do they tell you about the practice of justice at the Red Hook Community Justice Center? Do you feel that they treat defendants fairly? How does it require individual responsibility on the part of the defendants? Do you think this type of justice results in better outcomes for defendants? If so, how? How well does it serve the community's need for public safety?

### The case of Anthony Ward

At Red Hook, Anthony Ward has been sentenced to job training, life skills classes, drug counseling, and community service. If he completes the sentence, the case will be dismissed. If not, he faces jail time and a criminal record.

Tanisha Simon, Assistant District Attorney, tells the court, *“Your Honor, based on the defendant’s non-compliance, the people are asking that he be given a minimum of 100 days jail for non-compliance.”*

Judge Alex Calabrese [to Anthony]: *“I think you should listen to this part. They’re asking for 90 days in jail. They’re saying, ‘Judge, finish the case, give him the maximum time.’ I could do 90 days in jail right now, absolutely no problem, legally. But I’m not willing to give up on you. I’m not going to sentence you to 90 days jail. I’m sentencing you to jail for the rest of today, tomorrow, Sunday, and part of Monday. You’re to be released Monday and on Tuesday, I want you back here and I’m going to want to hear what you’re going to do. If you don’t get your GED, if you don’t get some training, you’re not going to have a job.”*

### The case of George Campos

George Campos is a heroin addict charged with a felony burglary. In a traditional court, he might be sentenced to up to a year in jail.

Kristine Herman (Drug Clinic): *“Mr. Campos, the DA’s office came to your attorney and to me. You basically have two options in front of you. And you need to be honest with me about what you’re going to do about them and how you feel, okay? You’re either probably going to get one year in-patient residential treatment. If you don’t choose that option for treatment, it’s going to be jail.”*

George Campos: *“That’s not even in my favor, a year in in-patient program.”*

Gerianne Abriano [to Judge Calabrese]: *“This case has sort of some unusual circumstances. Based on the defendant’s history, we believe that treatment*

*would be appropriate. The treatment mandate would be one year in a long-term residential facility and that the jail alternative would also be a firm one year.”*

Judge Alex Calabrese: *“I have some reservations about whether I would go along with any treatment plan proposed by the clinic because of the nature of the defendant’s record and the charges here. I’m not convinced the defendant would successfully complete treatment. Sentence of the court is eight months in jail.”*

### **The case of Michael Ward**

Michael Ward has been charged with unlawful possession of marijuana.

Frank Maniero (Assistant District Attorney): *“Judge, at this time the people are not going to make an offer. This defendant does have an open case [in another court], the reckless endangerment charge.”*

Judge Alex Calabrese: *“Well, regarding this marijuana case, I do have a few questions. Are you in school or are you working?”*

Michael Ward: *“I’m waiting for a job, I was supposed to be going today, but it’s raining today, so I couldn’t go.”*

Brett Taylor (defense attorney): *“Mr. Ward has told me he would be interested in some of the job readiness training.”*

Alex Calabrese: *“People are not ready, and I’m not ready to resolve this case, Mr. Ward, because I want to see that you’re back on the right track. Okay, as conditions of release then, they are as stated. You’re going to do youth counseling today. They’re going to sign you up for the marijuana group and the life choices group. The job readiness can start Monday. I would consider dismissing this case. You may step out.”*

### **The case of Letitia Sanchez**

Letitia Sanchez was sentenced to drug treatment in the Red Hook court. She was charged with criminal trespass while trying to buy heroin. Shortly after her arrest she got pregnant, but continued to use. Now she’s in a methadone maintenance program. Letitia has been required to appear in court over twenty times for progress reports on her drug treatment sentence. Just prior to the baby’s birth, Letitia tells the judge she’s clean and sober: *“Yeah, because if the baby has drugs, they take the baby away from me.”*

Judge Alex Calabrese: *“Back in February I said I wouldn’t end the case until after you gave birth. Well you satisfied that condition. Sort of a strange court condition,*

*I guess, but I wanted to make sure that we were covered all the way through. Okay, tell me how you're doing."*

Letitia Sanchez: *"I'm feeling good. I'm doing good. I'm still going to my program."*

When Alex Calabrese asks Letitia whether she needs any more services, her defense attorney says that she's having some housing problems.

Alex Calabrese: *"Right across the hall, we have a housing resource center."*  
Beth Ettedgui, Assistant District Attorney, tells the judge she does not want to dismiss Letitia's case.

Alex Calabrese: *"I still have someone who's going to remain on probation. The real question is what's a proper resolution for this case? I think this is the rare case that deserves dismissal in the interest of justice. And I'm going to dismiss this in the interest of justice. That part is over the people's objection. [To Letitia] I want you to come up. I want to congratulate you."*

# UNITED STATES COMMUNITY JUSTICE CENTERS

## Existing Community Justice Centers

The following jurisdictions currently have community courts in operation:

Atlanta, Georgia  
Austin, Texas  
Brooklyn, New York (Red Hook Community Justice Center)  
Dallas, Texas  
Dakota County, Minnesota  
Denver, Colorado  
Harlem, New York  
Hartford, Connecticut  
Gresham, Oregon  
Hempstead, New York  
Indianapolis, Indiana  
Los Angeles (Van Nuys), California  
Memphis, Tennessee (4 courts)  
Minneapolis, Minnesota  
New York, New York (Midtown Community Court)  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Portland, Oregon (3 courts)  
San Diego, California  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
Syracuse, New York  
Washington, DC  
Waterbury, Connecticut  
West Palm Beach, Florida

## Justice Centers in Planning

The following jurisdictions are planning community courts:

Buffalo, New York  
Orange County, California  
Richmond County, New York  
Seattle, Washington  
Tacoma, Washington

*Beyond U.S. Community Courts, a Community Justice Center has been established in Liverpool, England.*



## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

### Production Staff

**PRODUCER/DIRECTOR/CO-WRITER Meema Spadola** is an award-winning director and producer of documentary television and radio, and a writer. Her past work has appeared on PBS, HBO, Cinemax, Sundance Channel, and worldwide and includes *OUR HOUSE*, *GUNS & MOTHERS* (co-produced with director Thom Powers), *BREASTS*, *PRIVATE DICKS*, *VAGINA MONOLOGUES*, and the series *SHORTS FROM THE UNDERGROUND*. She is the co-founder, with Powers, of Sugar Pictures, a documentary production company.

**EDITOR David Moore** most recently edited *WHEN OCEAN MEETS SKY* (which screened at SXSW, The Newfest, and the Los Angeles Lesbian & Gay Film Festival). His other editing credits include *GUNS & MOTHERS* and *JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDE*.

**NARRATOR LisaGay Hamilton** is an actor and documentary filmmaker. She starred on ABC's *THE PRACTICE* for seven years. Hamilton's film credits include *THE TRUTH ABOUT CHARLIE* and *BELOVED* with director Jonathan Demme. Her documentary *BEAH* premiered on HBO in 2004.

**DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY Justin Schein** is an award-winning cameraman and director who specializes in shooting cinema vérité documentary. In the past year he has shot for the BBC, National Geographic, MTV, and PBS. His own films have aired nationally on PBS and screened at festivals around the world. He received his master's degree in documentary filmmaking from Stanford University.

**ORIGINAL MUSIC Ethan Stoller** is a composer, multi-instrumentalist, and music historian living in Chicago. *RED HOOK JUSTICE* is his first full-length score. Since then, he composed original music for Thom Powers' Cinemax documentary, *LOVING & CHEATING*.

**CO-PRODUCER Thom Powers** is the co-founder with Meema Spadola of Sugar Pictures. He produced and directed *GUNS & MOTHERS* and *LOVING & CHEATING* and co-produced with Spadola *BREASTS* and *PRIVATE DICKS*. He is currently writing an oral history of documentary filmmaking for Faber & Faber.

**EDITING CONSULTANT Sam Pollard** is a documentary filmmaker and editor of documentaries and feature films. Most recently, he edited the POV documentary *CHISHOLM '72*, directed by Shola Lynch, which played at the Sundance Film Festival. He also edited the Spike Lee films, *4 LITTLE GIRLS*, *CLOCKERS*, *JUNGLE FEVER*, and *MO' BETTER BLUES*, among others.

**EDITING CONSULTANT Nancy Roach** is a documentary editor and producer. Past work includes Spadola's ITVS documentary *OUR HOUSE*; the American Masters program *FINDING LUCY*; and Jem Cohen and Peter Sillen's film *BENJAMIN SMOKE*. She also produced and edited segments for PBS's *LIFE 360*.

**CO-WRITER Eliza Byard** has worked on numerous award-winning productions for public television, including OUT OF THE PAST, SCHOOL COLORS, and GENESIS: A LIVING CONVERSATION WITH BILL MOYERS. She is currently the Deputy Executive Director of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN).

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800.876.1710 or mailroom@frif.com. Additional purchase information can be  
found at [www.frif.com](http://www.frif.com).

## RESOURCES

<http://www.courtinnovation.org> - The Center for Court Innovation is the independent research and development arm of the New York State court system and a developer and administrator of the Red Hook Community Justice Center. The Web site defines Problem Solving Courts, describes their methods, and provides links to research on their results, as well as additional information about the RHCJC.

<http://www.communityjustice.org> - This Web site, for a project of the Center for Court Innovation, includes an “Ask the Experts” section, strategies for involving the entire community, and links to best practices. Especially helpful is the project’s Planning Guide for how to go from idea to implementation, including a .pdf of the survey that the Red Hook Community Justice project used to determine community need:  
<http://www.communityjustice.org/frame.asp?heading=Planning+Guide%5F2>.

<http://www.brooklynda.org> - The Web site of the Kings County (Brooklyn), NY District Attorney’s office. Brooklyn DA Charles J. Hynes was an early advocate for the Justice Center being sited in Red Hook. The site also surveys some of the other alternative programs promoted by the DA’s office.

<http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/bja/197109.pdf> - This link connects to the U.S. Department of Justice publication, “Surveying Communities: A Resource for Community Justice Planners,” which describes the value of community surveys for community justice planners. It also relates the experiences that the Center for Court Innovation had in designing, implementing, and analyzing a community survey for the Red Hook Community Justice Center.

<http://www.ncpc.org/cms/cms-upload/ncpc/files/bestpractices.pdf> - The Web site of the National Crime Prevention Council includes this AmeriCorps report reviewing best practices. The Red Hook Community Justice Center is featured.

[http://www.advancementproject.org/resource\\_center.html](http://www.advancementproject.org/resource_center.html) - The Web site of Advancement Project’s Community Justice Resource Center (CJRC). A democracy and justice action group, Advancement Project has engaged in several activities that offer essential support to those using the community justice approach. In the CJRC umbrella, it has created a national clearinghouse and communication nexus for practitioners at all levels of racial justice work, from grassroots campaigns to national policy making.

<http://www.cjcj.org> – The Web site for the Center for Juvenile and Criminal Justice which promotes criminal and juvenile justice policy reform through strategic research, policy analysis, public education and model programs.

<http://www.brennancenter.org/programs/cj/cji.html> – The Web site for the Brennan Center for Justice’s Criminal Justice Program and Community Justice Institute which seek to bridge the chasm between the justice elite who make decisions and the communities most affected by them, by elevating the voices and concerns of community groups and activists. Brennan Center recently established the Community Justice Institute – a resource for community groups, activists and defenders working to improve justice policies at the local, state and national levels. Through publications, counseling, convenings, survey work, and direct action, the Institute is bringing new and vital voices to the criminal justice debate.

**RED HOOK JUSTICE** is one of the public television programs showcased in the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign. All productions incorporate the theme of **reentry into family and community by individuals who were formerly incarcerated**. These



and other programs are elements of the Making Connections Media Outreach Initiative (MCMOI), an outreach project supported by The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF). Launched in February 2001, MCMOI links media broadcasters to local stakeholders as a means to promote the Foundation's mission to help build strong and connected neighborhoods for children and families. Visit the Reentry Web site at: [www.reentrymediaoutreach.org](http://www.reentrymediaoutreach.org).

MCMOI campaigns are managed by Outreach Extensions, a national consulting firm that specializes in comprehensive, high profile educational and community outreach campaigns for media projects. Please visit the MCMOI Web site at [www.mcmoi.org/](http://www.mcmoi.org/) for more information and community-use materials for these exciting programs.

For more information on the Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign, please contact:

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