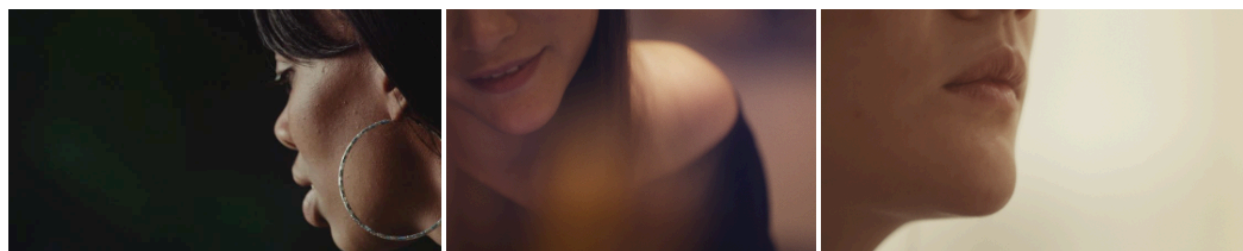


BLOWIN' UP

A Documentary By Stephanie Wang-Breal



**BLOWIN' UP WILL BE RELEASED THEATRICALY IN
NEW YORK ON APRIL 5th AND LOS ANGELES ON APRIL 12TH 2019.**



TRT: 97 mins. **Country:** USA **Language:** English, Mandarin, Japanese

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

"It's called blowin' up when you leave your pimp...so i blew up." - Kandie

Working within a broken criminal justice system, a team of rebel heroines work to change the way women arrested for prostitution are prosecuted. With intimate camerawork that lingers on details and brings the Queens criminal courtroom to life, BLOWIN' UP celebrates acts of steadfast defiance, even as it reveals the hurdles these women must face.

LONG SYNOPSIS

In 2004, the United States' first problem-solving court around prostitution was created in Queens County, New York. The court, presided over by the Honorable Toko Serita, attempts to redress the way women and young girls arrested for prostitution are shuffled through the criminal justice system.

With unparalleled access to the workings of the court, BLOWIN' UP captures what it feels like to go through these criminal proceedings as a female defendant. The overwhelming majority of women arrested are undocumented Asian immigrants, black, Latina and transgender youth. As the film unfolds, we hear directly from these women, in their own words, and we begin to understand the complex scenarios that bring them into the courtroom.

Never do we hear the words "sex worker" or "prostitute" spoken in the courtroom. Instead, Judge Serita and the court try to create a safe space for these women within the confines of a legal system where sex work and prostitution are criminalized. The question asked over and over by defense teams and social workers is: Why are these women arrested in the first place? As the film progresses, and a new administration takes over in the White House, the courtroom's fragile ecosystem is tested and the fates of those who pass through become less certain.

Through Wang-Breal's patient filmmaking, these women slowly come into focus to reveal the interplay of the larger forces at work in their lives. A decidedly people-focused film, BLOWIN' UP exposes us to how individuals can work together to create more humane ways to navigate an inhumane criminal justice system and allows us to witness this unique environment as an unfiltered, immersive experience.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

In October 2014, filmmaker Stephanie Wang-Breal came across an article in *The New York Times* about the Queens Human Trafficking Intervention Court (QHTIC), which was marking its tenth anniversary as an innovative alternative to the traditional model for prosecuting prostitution cases in New York City. Rather than treat defendants as criminals, the court addressed prostitution as a byproduct of human trafficking and sought a better resolution for women who had been arrested. Instead of going to trial or pleading guilty, defendants were given the option of attending a certain number of counseling sessions with a social services provider; if they completed the sessions and weren't rearrested during the six month period that followed, the charges would be dismissed and the case sealed.

There were numerous details in the article that piqued Wang-Breal's interest, including the increasing proportion of undocumented Asian immigrants among the defendants. As a first generation Chinese-American, she was committed to shining a light on untold stories of gender, immigration and culture. Her first feature, *Wo Ai Ni (I Love You) Mommy*, had followed an eight-year-old Chinese girl as she began a new life with her adoptive Jewish family on Long Island. Her second film, *Tough Love* had delved into the family court system and foster care, which puts children at high risk of trafficking. She also knew that 85% of trafficked youth in New York State come from the foster care system, and thus were likely to make up a significant portion of the young women in that Queens court.

Wang-Breal had spent four years making each of her films, immersing herself in the issues that impacted the lives of the people she was documenting. She had reason to believe many of those same issues – poverty, abuse, gender-based violence and bias, and more -- would factor into the lives of the women and girls arrested for prostitution. She and her business and producing partner, Carrie Weprin, had been mulling ideas for new projects to take on and this unusual court seemed like a promising lead. She sent the article to Weprin with a note: “this sounds like an interesting place.”

Wang-Breal and Weprin made their first visit to the QHTIC in January 2015. They watched as the presiding judge, the Honorable Toko Serita, engaged with the women standing before her, showing genuine interest in how they were faring and making sure that those who didn’t speak English understood what was being discussed. In contrast with the combative tactics of conventional courts, an ethos of cooperation prevailed. The judge, prosecution, defense lawyers, social workers and service providers focused their efforts on achieving a mutually desired outcome -- which was to put defendants on the road to having the charges against them dismissed and sealed. The defendants were treated compassionately and without condescension. And aside from a few court officers and an interpreter, everyone working in the courtroom was female.

It had been one thing to read about the court and quite another to witness it in action, as the filmmakers would over the coming months. “I was floored by the community inside that courtroom and the way that Judge Serita created a collaborative working environment with everyone in the court system,” says Wang-Breal. “These women had such different personalities, different ways of working, different ways of being and yet they were here together, doing something that was so special and humane. I’d never imagined the criminal justice system looking like this.”

The Queens HTIC looked unusual in a literal sense, too, she adds. “When you think about the criminal justice system, you think about men and the mass incarceration of men. This was a courtroom full of women and it’s about the mass incarceration of women and the inequities and intersectional issues that bring them into the system.”

The majority of the defendants were black, Latina and transgender youth and undocumented Asian immigrants. They’d been arrested on the streets, in hotel rooms booked through *Backpage* ads, and in raids of Asian massage parlors and brothels. “This was a room full of women of color,” says Wang-Breal. “And I was struck by the idea that in the same courtroom, you have this black young woman and this older Chinese woman, who have such disparate paths in life and come from such different backgrounds. Yet they have so many similarities as well, in terms of their life stories, in terms of how they got here, in terms of what they want out of life.

The first Japanese-American judge appointed to a New York state court, Judge Serita was five years old when she and her parents moved to Brooklyn from Sapporo, Japan. She has presided over the QHTIC since 2008 and her influential work there prompted New York Supreme Court Judge Jonathan Lippman to implement a statewide system of 11 HTIC courts. Wang-Breal and Weprin visited HTICs in Brooklyn, the Bronx and Manhattan as well, but the original court in Queens stood out as the story that had to be told.

Approximately three months after Wang-Breal and Weprin introduced themselves to Judge Serita, they approached her about filming the court. “Stephanie explained her background as a filmmaker, her familiarity with the court system and her desire to explore what happens in this

very unique court that was addressing the issue of sex trafficking by a woman of color judge,” Judge Serita recalls. “From the outset it was clear that they were interested in the political aspects of this issue and also how the film could be used as an educational tool to raise awareness about prostitution and sex trafficking. It all sounded great -- except that I had no interest in being filmed!”

Wang-Breal remembers that particular part of the conversation well. “Judge Serita said, ‘This is a great idea. But do I have to be in it?’ And we said, ‘umm, yeah ... you kind of play an important role. It’s not like we can put an actor in there or film around you.’ ”

Of course, a documentary about QHTIC would also necessarily involve at least some of the stakeholders who worked there -- court officers, attorneys on both sides of the aisle and service providers from the court’s partner organizations including Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS), Garden of Hope and Sanctuary for Families. In a court run on a collaborative basis, it was up to each individual stakeholder to decide whether or not they wanted to participate.

Wang-Breal typically takes up to a year to research and develop her films, immersing herself in the relevant issues and building relationships with the individuals who have agreed to let her into their lives. For the better part of 2015, she and Weprin went back to the QHTIC two or three times a month. During court recesses, they would meet with the women who were integral to the legal process, including Assistant District Attorney Kim Affronti and defense attorneys Leigh Latimer and Cate Carbonara of Legal Aid. “Carrie and I would go back two to three times a month and sit and talk and observe and learn,” says Wang-Breal. “We developed relationships with everyone. We wanted them to know that we were serious and that weren’t just there to grab a story and then leave.”

Some relationships took a longer time to build than others. One of the veteran service providers was Eliza Hook, a counselor with GEMS who had been working with the court for over five years. Smart, funny and dynamic, Hook was fiercely dedicated to the young women she served. She believed much of the media coverage of the court had been colored by individual opinions and didn’t exactly hide her skepticism when she met Wang-Breal and Weprin. “When Stephanie and Carrie first introduced themselves to me, I clocked them hard,” Hook acknowledges. “I purposely looked them up and down and sucked my teeth at them. I didn’t want them anywhere near me or anyone I was associated with. But they were watching us and I was watching them. Over the course of multiple conversations, they gained my trust and I developed a friendship with them. I realized they weren’t trying to pull a fast one. Their intentions were to tell a story, whatever that story looked like, however it unfolded. They weren’t going to direct it in a certain way to meet some sort of agenda.”

Judge Serita reached the same conclusion. With key stakeholders onboard, she told the filmmakers they could move forward. “I granted Stephanie and Carrie access because of many factors,” the judge explains. “They were coming from a feminist perspective but it wasn’t a judgmental or ideological one concerning prostitution and sex trafficking. They wanted to understand who the defendants were, what the service providers and counselors experienced, and how this process of restorative justice came together in the courtroom and beyond. Their ‘due diligence’ and the time spent doing things the right way -- doing their homework, nurturing relationships, paying careful attention to all the nuances at play -- earned them my trust. They were incredibly humble, considerate, patient, and not at all aggressive. They let the relationships they built unfold quietly, over time.”

Wang-Breal had been refining her ideas for executing the film since the early stages of its development. Her strategy owed as much, if not more, to narrative film as documentary. BLOWIN' UP drops the audience into the QHTIC at the start of a typical day, darting back and forth from the crowded, buzzing hallway to the orderly courtroom to evoke the confusion a newcomer to the court would feel. She used three cameras and 7-8 audio channels apiece, which allowed her to follow events in the courtroom and in the hallway outside and record multiple conversations. "During the very lengthy observation period when I was shadowing the lawyers and service providers, I really felt like I was in a Robert Altman film," says Wang-Breal. "Going from the hallway to the whispered discussions in the double doors before going back into the courtroom and sitting down and listening to a case. And then going back into the hallway and following Eliza as she grabs one of her clients to go over what's going to happen today, then going back into the courtroom. It was like this symphony of events all taking place at once. I knew early on I wanted these chaotic happenings to open the film."

She conceived BLOWIN' UP as a portrait of the Queens court's ecosystem, structured like a three-act narrative film. As Wang-Breal describes it, "The first act is immersive, sitting in the court, feeling like you're a defendant in this space, not knowing what's going on but figuring it out as the day proceeds. The second act is unpacking what happens in court and what happens outside of the court. I wanted to show who these women are beyond their positions standing in front of the judge."

Wang-Breal and her team observed specific rules of engagement throughout the filming process. Whenever they were filming in court, Wang-Breal would begin the day with an announcement in English and Mandarin, explaining that she was filming a documentary about the court and every defendant had the option to participate or not. It was an uphill climb, Wang-Breal acknowledges. "There were some lawyers and social workers who right off the bat said 'I do not want to participate and none of my clients want to participate.' And then there were some women in the audience who would tell me in Chinese 'I don't want to be filmed.' And most days that was pretty much the case for every woman. For us, if two to three women let us film them, that was a good day – and this was out of 90-120 cases."

Stakeholders played an important role in helping Wang-Breal tell more detailed stories: Legal Aid and GEMS clients "Kandie" and "Dee," and Garden of Hope clients "Xiao Cao" and "Xiao Yi."

Working with those four women made it possible for Wang-Breal to highlight the diverse individuals and complex societal conditions that lie behind the label "prostitute." And she was relieved that she could reflect the demographic reality of those affected. "I was so lucky to gain the confidence of two domestic women and two Asian women to become part of the filming," Wang-Breal remarks. "It allowed me to represent the two populations we see in Judge Serita's court. They're different people but similar intersectional issues have brought them into court, like being targeted by the police because they're women of color, and coming from a life of abuse, poverty and neglect... they've only been dealt with a bunch of bad choices in life."

Each woman determined how much of her story she wanted to share. In working with the case of Kandie, Wang-Breal found herself questioning some of her own assumptions. Bright and charismatic, Kandie was forthright and unapologetic about making money through sex work. "Kandie's story is so direct and honest," comments the director. "Kandie has a sense of agency, of her own path in life. She didn't have much use for feminist discussions about sex work vs. prostitution vs. human trafficking. She was like, 'I don't check all those boxes.' She made me

check myself. Who am I to say she doesn't have agency, who am I to say what she should be doing with her life? I loved that her testimony brought up these questions."

Kandie also gave the film its title when she explained that leaving a pimp is known as "blowin' up." Wang-Breal decided to put Kandie's matter-of-fact, funny and self-aware account of her experience in sex work at the top of the film. "I wanted to open the film with this beautiful, non-apologetic woman," she explains. "Like, 'Okay, this is what we're going to talk about here for the next hour and a half. But we're going to talk about it in a way that you haven't heard before.'"

Securing the cooperation of Asian women was a longer process, but the filmmakers eventually found a critical advocate in Susan Liu of Garden of Hope. Says Wang-Breal, "Susan was very angry that so many Asian women were being targeted by police. She understood from their stories in their counseling sessions that a lot of them were just in the wrong place at the wrong time. They might not have done anything. But because they're physically inside the massage parlors when these raids are happening, they're arrested. She told us, 'I'm going to talk with some of my clients that I think might be interested in sharing their stories. Because they, too, feel like they're wrongfully accused. And they're so angry, embarrassed and confused by this whole situation.'"

Wang-Breal and director of photography Erik Shirai took great care in arranging each shoot with the four women, knowing that their time was limited and precious. Scouting locations in advance allowed them to prepare shooting plans that were visually compelling and ready to roll as soon as their subject arrived. They were sensitive to the needs for privacy and distance, and arranged to film Dee, Xiao Cao and Xiao Yi in the familiar and non-threatening context of counseling sessions with the service providers they knew and trusted.

Hook and Dee were filmed at a park and their close friendship is palpable as they stroll together. Hook's experience that day aligns with what she sees on the screen. "Stephanie and Carrie were really mindful and respectful and were good stewards of the young women's stories. And they were good stewards of them as other human beings in the world and they treated them as equals. Honestly, I think they were very grateful for the young women being vulnerable in the way that they were and that gratitude shines through in the film."

Judge Serita may never have grown to like being filmed, but she is very glad she gave Wang-Breal and Weprin access to her courtroom. "I love the film and its immersive quality," she comments. "By portraying some of the defendant/participants in a nonjudgmental, dignified way, it really does put a 'human face' to trafficking survivors and sex workers because they are perpetually dehumanized and vilified. It is also a film that forces you to think about what prostitution and sex trafficking is because it doesn't rely upon the typical images you see of sex workers or trafficking victims. The reality is much more complicated and nuanced."

"For me, this is a film about a world we don't know much about," says Wang-Breal. "It has a cast of astonishing women that you don't get to see on the screen ever, and it shows you all the complex choices that they face right now."

Q & A With Judge Toko Serita

Queens Human Intervention Trafficking Court

Tell me about the process of getting to know Stephanie and Carrie and becoming comfortable with the idea of a documentary about the QHTIC. What do you remember from those initial conversations and what were your thoughts about their intentions and approach?

I remember when Stephanie and Carrie first approached me about filming the court. Their interest was piqued by the article they had read in the *New York Times* about how the court dealt with victims of human trafficking, many of whom were Asian defendants. Stephanie explained her background as a filmmaker, her familiarity with the court system and her desire to explore what happens in this very unique court that was addressing the issue of sex trafficking by a woman of color judge. From the outset it was clear that they were interested in the political aspects of this issue and also how the film could be used as an educational tool to raise awareness about prostitution and sex trafficking.

It all sounded great, except that I had no interest in being filmed! I told Stephanie and Carrie that I would give them permission to film the courtroom, but that I did not want to be featured in the film. Well, as it turned out - Stephanie overcame my initial resistance to being filmed by her quiet persistence and patience. She spent close to a year observing the court, talking to the various stakeholders and gaining their trust and confidence, and doing due diligence and research before she actually started filming.

As the presiding judge, you naturally had to think about the implications for your colleagues in the courtroom and for the women who come into your courtroom as defendants. Can you talk about weighing the different factors and how you got to 'yes' – why you felt it was a worthy endeavor?

We often get requests for interviews, which we treat with great caution. Service providers, particularly, are incredibly protective about their clients, many of whom are trafficking survivors, and will shield them from prying eyes in order to protect their privacy.

The court is premised upon a collaborative model, and discussion and communication are important aspects of how the court is run. I would not force anything upon the stakeholders if they were not comfortable with this process. Of course, there were some providers who did not give their consent, and their roles are noticeably absent in the film, which is a pity because their good work deserves to be seen. By the time we talked about it as a group, everyone was fine with it. After the first or second time, people became used to the cameras and film crew.

I granted Stephanie and Carrie access because of several factors. Even though they were coming from a feminist perspective, it was not a judgmental or ideological one concerning prostitution and sex trafficking. They wanted to understand who the defendants were, what the service providers/counselors experienced, and how this process of restorative justice came together in the courtroom and beyond. They didn't come with an agenda or preformed ideas about this issue, which I thought was important because it is such a highly ideological, divisive terrain when it comes to sex trafficking.

Second, it was their 'due diligence,' and the time spent doing things the right way – doing their homework, nurturing relationships, paying careful attention to all the nuances at play, that earned them my trust. They were incredibly humble, considerate, patient, and not at all bossy or aggressive. They let the relationships they built unfold quietly, over time. That is why they

got so much access to the various participants in the documentary. It was well earned. The process was just as important as the content and vision of this film.

As for the defendants, there was always a concern about their privacy and making sure that it would not be violated during the filming. This was of great concern to the service providers. Great care was taken to shield their identities if they did not wish to be filmed. There were service provider organizations and attorneys who didn't want to be on camera as well.

If it was going to be done correctly, it would be a worthy endeavor because these stories need to be told and we need to have a better understanding of what human trafficking entails.

You and Stephanie are both daughters of immigrants. Do you think that fostered a kind of understanding between you? Did you feel it made a difference to Stephanie's perspective and vision as a filmmaker and storyteller?

It requires an incredible level of trust to give someone access to one's world and also to trust in someone else's vision over which you ultimately have no control. This is especially true of judges and control freaks (both of which define me!), so it took a tremendous leap of faith and trust in Stephanie to let her into my world. She was incredibly aware of what she was asking of people by letting themselves be filmed, by having their space be occupied, and she was very sensitive and respectful towards me and everyone she was filming. I think the way she handled this entire project from beginning to end as a filmmaker was undoubtedly informed by her sensibilities as both a woman and an Asian American person.

Of course, it was an incredibly frightening process to give oneself to another in this way, not knowing what the end result would look like, and I had no choice but to trust that Stephanie would do the "right thing." It was because I felt confident about her as both a person and a filmmaker that I was able to go on this journey with her. It was a combination of her intelligence, her dedication, and her talent, but also the fact that she was an Asian American woman with many of the same interests and concerns. I loved the fact that she wanted to examine this issue from a woman of color perspective and highlight the role and leadership of Asian American women in this documentary (not just me, but the service providers as well). In terms of visibility, voice and power, ours have not been sufficiently documented or explored. Stephanie was committed to doing that. So yes, we bonded incredibly as Asian American women who are concerned about the racial and gender inequities that define the situation that so many trafficking victims are in.

Did you see the film as an opportunity to give the public a fuller understanding of the human reality behind the label "prostitution"?

I see this film as an opportunity to begin a dialogue about prostitution and the various myths and stereotypes that serve to oppress all women. By portraying the defendant/participants in a nonjudgmental, dignified way, it really does put a "human face" to trafficking survivors and sex workers because they are perpetually dehumanized and vilified.

It is also a film that forces you to think about what prostitution and sex trafficking is because it doesn't rely upon the typical images you see of sex workers or trafficking victims. The reality is much more complicated and nuanced.

Can you talk about the process of working with Stephanie and her team over the course of filming? Stephanie mentioned that there would be detailed discussions with whether and how they could film various moments.

Did I tell you how much I hate being filmed? So yes, I was the reluctant participant and the individual scenes were probably a bit more difficult because of that. The good part was that all I had to do was take direction! I didn't notice when they were in the courtroom, however, because I was focused on the work.

Stephanie and I talked throughout this filming process in terms of what her concerns were, what she was trying to express, what things were still missing, etc. I was not an adviser or artistic collaborator by any means, and didn't provide any input in the direction of the film. This film was a complete expression of Stephanie's artistic vision.

With regard to the filming process, Stephanie conducted herself as a filmmaker with real sensitivity, consideration and integrity. It was not as if Stephanie was without opinions (hardly), but she did not put herself at the forefront, and it wasn't about her. She was self-effacing, respectful, and non-threatening in a manner that allowed others to trust her and open up. It is the opposite of passivity or other traits one might attach to Asians, but rather, coming from a position of strength, albeit a quiet, determined one. Truthfully, I don't know that male filmmakers could have accomplished the same results because of the way they take up space and have a more pronounced need to assert that "I" in the equation.

You also agreed to let Stephanie come with you to visit your mother in Japan. Can you talk about that decision and what the experience itself was like? What's it like for you to watch those scenes?

It was a bit surreal because I thought Stephanie was never going to make it to Japan... She had wanted to come in 2016, but my father passed away unexpectedly so that was not a good time. Even before that, when I was having lunch with the film crew one day, they started joking around and saying, 'you didn't know that Stephanie plans to go to Japan and film you there?' I thought they were kidding, but they said, no, she's going to find a way. And she did.

By the time 2017 came around, I think I just gave in and invited her after talking with my mother and getting her consent. Stephanie had expressed real curiosity and interest about my relationship with my parents, their roles as artists, and my connection to Japan, as I have been traveling bi-annually for several years to spend time with them.

That was probably the ultimate expression of trust in Stephanie – that I let her into my personal world thousands of miles away. I am really happy that my parents' paintings and the short clip of my mother and me are captured in my parents' studio. The Japan scenes will always make this documentary a very personal one for me.

What are your thoughts about the film as a whole? About the story it tells and how that story is told, anything that might resonate for you on a personal level, whatever you'd like to say about it ...

I love all the characters in the film, many of whom I know very well, but it is also very hard to watch because of the untimely and sudden death of Kim Affronti, to whom this documentary is dedicated. We all loved her so much and she was a real force of change and compassion in my court.. I lost both Kim and my father that same year. The Queens Human Trafficking

Intervention Court, as my court is called, received visitors from near and far because it is considered such a special model of how one can create systematic change, one defendant at a time. Its success is no doubt due to the collaboration that exists between everyone, and that is something that registers strongly in the film.

The film gives you a perspective from the defendants/participants vantage point – from the outside looking in, instead of vice versa - and the viewer, much like them, may not be able to make sense of what is actually going on in the courtroom. I loved the film and its immersive quality, and the time it devotes to exploring the dynamics, the connections and the realities faced by those connected in some way to my court, as a nexus around which these experiences intersect.

Obviously, a lot of unforeseeable changes have taken place since those first conversations about BLOWIN' UP ... do you want to say anything about how Trump's election and the presence of ICE have affected your work? Stephanie mentioned that there was a detailed discussion about filming your talk to the team after ICE first showed up ... wondering if you want to address the decision to give the go-ahead on filming that.

Almost half of the women in my court are foreign born and the majority are undocumented. At least 25% of them have been identified as trafficking victims, and the remainder are at high risk of trafficking because of red flags identified through the interview process. It is incredibly tragic that some of them may be entitled to certain protections as trafficking victims but will never have that opportunity because they are seized by ICE agents or deported before their cases are heard.

So I have a deep concern where their involvement effects the administration of justice -- in this case – having a defendant deported before her case can be resolved in my court or before she has been interviewed by anti-trafficking immigration specialists.

I was not comfortable being filmed about this meeting because of its sensitive nature. But as you can see by everyone's faces, it was an issue that was profoundly upsetting to everyone who works with the victims/defendants in my court. I agreed to the filming because I knew how important it was to Stephanie to document the impact that this was having on the court.

BIOGRAPHIES

Stephanie Wang-Breal (Director):

Stephanie is an award-winning filmmaker and commercial director. She has previously directed 2 feature length films. The first, WO AI NI MOMMY (I Love You, Mommy), was nominated for an Emmy®, and was the recipient of three Grand Jury Best Documentary Awards at the AFI/Discovery Silverdocs Film Festival, the Asian American International Film Festival and the San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival, as well as a 2011 CINE special Jury Award. The film had its national television broadcast in 2010 on the award-winning PBS series POV. Stephanie's second film, TOUGH LOVE, premiered at the Full Frame Documentary Film Festival in April 2014. The film premiered on PBS' POV in July 2015. Stephanie has also directed pieces for Facebook, Minwax, ESPN, Vocativ, Verifone, Tiffany & Co., Apple, Nickelodeon and Goldman Sachs. Stephanie has produced content and commercials for UNICEF, CNN, A&E Television and MTV Networks. Stephanie sits on the Board of the New York Women's Foundation and resides in Brooklyn, New York with her son & daughter.

Hon. Toko Serita (Film Subject, Acting Supreme Court Justice):

Toko Serita is an Asian-American judge who is recognized as a leading judicial expert on human trafficking. She is currently a New York State Acting Supreme Court Justice who presides over three problem-solving courts in Queens Criminal Court – a drug court, mental health court and the Queens Human Trafficking Intervention Court (QHTIC), which is nationally and internationally recognized for its groundbreaking work with trafficking victims and survivors. This court, originally started in 2004 by Justice Fernando Camacho, was expanded in 2008 under the leadership of Justice Serita to respond to the arrests of trafficking victims on prostitution-related charges who were often overlooked in the criminal justice system. Working with a multidisciplinary collaborative team, the QHTIC serves approximately 600 women and transgender individuals a year to provide comprehensive, culturally competent, trauma-informed intervention and services as an alternative-to-incarceration. The QHTIC served as the model for this nation's first statewide initiative which established a series of similar courts throughout New York State, bringing the total number to eleven courts which handle about 95% of the prostitution-related cases in this state. Justice Serita regularly speaks on this topic and is involved with statewide training and policy, working alongside the NYS Office of Court Administration's Office of Policy & Planning. She is also the Chair of the New York State Judicial Committee on Human Trafficking, whose judicial members represent all of the trafficking intervention courts, and is the author of "In Our Own Backyards: The Need for a Coordinated Judicial Response to Human Trafficking," which was published in the NYU Review of Law and Social Change (2013). Prior to becoming a judge, Justice Serita was the Executive Assistant to two Administrative Judges of the Supreme Court, Queens County - the late Hon. Steven W. Fisher, and the Hon. Leslie G. Leach. She also worked as an appellate attorney for the Criminal Appeals Bureau, Legal Aid Society, from 1989-1999. She currently sits on the board of the National Center for State Courts, and was most recently the former president of the Asian American Judges Association of New York (AAJANY), of which she is a co-founder. She is a graduate of Vassar College and City University of New York School of Law, and is married to Paul R. Lewis.

Eliza Hook (Film Subject, GEMS Counselor):

Eliza Hook hails from the Ozark mountains. She has followed many different callings in life that range from set builder on movies to social worker at GEMS, working with at risk young girls and women, to her current occupation: concrete masoner and small business owner. She is a massive "civics nerd" who has recently settled down in Austin, Texas with her life partner, Tara Rose.

Carrie Weprin (Producer):

Carrie is a film, television and digital video producer. As an independent producer, Carrie has created content for A&E Television Network, MTV Networks, EPIX, Google, The New York Times and PBS. Most recently, Carrie has worked for The New York Times video department, where she helped bring the award- winning travel column, "36 Hours," to television on the Travel Channel. She also helped to bring episodic digital video series to nytimes.com, including: The Trials of Spring, Our Man in Tehran and the award-winning series, Retro Report. In 2014, Carrie produced the feature-length documentary film, Tough Love. Tough Love premiered at the Full Frame Documentary Film Festival in April 2014 and went on to screen in our nation's Capitol for a White House Policy discussion around parents and the foster care system. The film premiered on PBS POV in July 2015 and is the recipient of the 2016 American Bar Association's Silver Gavel Award. Carrie currently lives in Brooklyn, New York with her husband and son.

CREDITS

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Produced by
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David Panda Lee
Agnes Mentre

Co-Executive Producers
Ann Derry
Jean Tsien

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"Kandie", "Dee", "Xiao Cao", "Xiao Yi"

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Attorney's Office

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POST PRODUCTION

Post Production Facilities Provided by
Final Frame

Open Title Design and Graphics by The Mill

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Rerecording Mixer

Tom Efinger

Dialog Editor

Nicholas Montgomery

Sound Design

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LOCATIONS

Center for Court Innovation
Cutler Salon
District Social
Gleason's Gym
The Legal Aid Society
Oliloli Arts and Crafts Studio
Queens County Criminal Court

Paintings courtesy of Eiji and Ayako Serita

Radio pieces courtesy of
NPR
WNYC News

Music
"Foliage"
Written by Ming-Tang Cheng

"Tired AS Fuck" Written & Performed by The Staves
Courtesy of Atlantic Records UK
By arrangement with Warner Music Group Film & TV Licensing

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