

PENDULUM PROJECTS

About Juvies **(from Juvies.net)**

If you would like to purchase the powerful documentary JUVIES, or hold a screening, please contact: www.juvies.net

LESLIE NEALE

Director's Statement

"When I started volunteer teaching at Juvenile Hall in Los Angeles, I was naïve to juvenile justice, thinking children were handled fairly and with care, not only for their safety, but also for the safety of the public at large. What I found is that scores of children are getting thrown away in adult prisons instead of staying in the rehabilitative environment of the juvenile system, a structure originally designed to protect them from ending up in the adult system. The making of "Juvies" has made my life make an irrevocable turn towards correcting the juvenile justice system, making it one that is run with intelligence, responsibility and mercy."

Four years ago, high school student Duc was arrested for driving a car from which a gun was shot. Although no one was injured, Duc was not a member of a gang, had no priors and was 16 years old, he received a sentence of 35 years to life.

Fourteen-year-old Anait, an Armenian immigrant, had been given a car by her parents. She drove two boys to a high school and dropped them off. The boys got into a fight with another boy and subsequently killed a third boy who attempted to break up the fight. Because she was the driver of the "getaway" car, Anait was charged as an accessory to first-degree murder. Originally facing 200 years, she has since accepted a deal for 7 years.

Being tough on crime is one thing. But trying children as adults, and dispensing brutal sentences that are shockingly out of proportion to the offense, is quite another. Most Americans would say this can't happen here, yet for thousands of young people, this is the reality of the present day juvenile justice system, which has turned its back on its initial mission to protect young people and now sends over 200,000 kids through the adult system each year.

From award-winning documentary filmmaker Leslie Neale (Road to Return) comes this riveting look at a world most of us will never see: the world of juvenile offenders who are serving incredible prison sentences for crimes they either did not commit or were only marginally involved in. For two years, Neale taught a video production class at Los Angeles Central Juvenile Hall to 12 juveniles who were all being tried as adults. Juvies is the product of that class, which was a learning experience for both students and teacher—and becomes a learning experience for all of us, as we witness the heartbreaking stories of children abandoned by families and a system that has disintegrated into a kind of vending machine justice.



Narrated by actor Mark Wahlberg, himself a former juvenile offender, *Juivies* follows the lives of a group of young people who will serve most, if not all, of their lives behind bars. The kids talk about the mistakes they made and what they would do if they had the chance to do things differently. They exhibit courage in the midst of the most despairing conditions. And they force us to ask, "Why is this happening? Why have we allowed it to happen? And what can we do now to change laws that are nothing less than draconian, that we as a citizenry have allowed to be enacted?"

Interspersed with the kids' stories are interviews with experts in juvenile justice and gangs, and with well-known faces, like former Los Angeles District Attorney Gil Garcetti, who, in an incredible scene, admits that sentences like the one Michael Duc Ta received—during Garcetti's own tenure as D.A—are unfair and should never have happened.

What has gone wrong with our juvenile justice system? And can it be changed before more young lives are destroyed forever? *Juivies* offers no easy answers, but it will make you think long and hard about what democracy and justice really mean.

