

Promoting Diversity in the Courts: Hon. John Zhuo Wang

John Caher: Welcome to Amici, News and Insight from the New York Courts. I'm John Caher.

For this Diversity Dialogue episode, we're joined by the Hon. John Zhuo Wang, a Criminal Court Judge in New York City, and the Presiding Judge of the Midtown Community Court. Judge Wang is a native of China whose family fled the communist country and moved to New York when he was a little boy.

Judge Wang, thank you for coming on the program. Let's go back to the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution if we could, one of the bloodiest eras in Chinese history, you're really too young to have experienced much of that era, but your parents and grandparents were really in the thick of it. How are they impacted physically, mentally, economically?

Judge Wang: Thanks John. It's a pleasure to be speaking with you. I've heard some of the podcasts that you've done and it's been nice to listen to my colleagues talk about their pasts and their origin stories.

The Cultural Revolution, for my family, was definitely one of the most traumatic experiences that they experienced in terms of my parents, particularly my father. The Cultural Revolution was a very turbulent and chaotic time in Chinese history. And what often happened at that time was that academics or other kinds of individuals that were in a certain standing in society were viewed as traitors to the country. And my grandfather at the time was the chair of a medical department at a local university, and he was persecuted extensively. Chinese culture is an honor culture, so the worst you could do was to shame an individual, and by extension, that person's family.

And my grandmother, my father and his two sisters, my paternal aunts were also victimized as well. My father was the oldest and he was about 15 to 17 when this period really affected his family, and it was deeply scarring for him. There's a show called "The Three Body Problem" on Netflix that's come out, and the very first scene in the first episode actually depicts one of these moments in which an individual in that society is being persecuted by the community. It's very, very raw and not often portrayed in the media that we see, but if you ever have a chance to check it out, I think it's a really good rendition of what happened to my grandfather.

John Caher: Did you say, "The Three Body Problem?"

Judge Wang: "Three Body Problem," yeah. It's actually a science fiction book written by a Chinese expat who I think was using the book as an analogy to what she had experienced, or at least what she knew about the Culture Revolution.

My grandfather suffered from major depression and eventually, because of the persecution and the strain of it, he committed suicide. So the trauma of losing his father at 17 for my dad was actually made worse by the fact that in that time you couldn't actually openly mourn the loss of somebody who was considered anti-revolutionary or a capitalist sympathizer. So the consequence of that was that even though my grandfather had died, nobody would bury his body. So I was told by my mother that my father had to take his father's body and carry it outside of town several miles and put him in a shallow grave.

So that was just a deep psychological scar that my father bore for the rest of his life. He never spoke about it and I had to learn it, like I said, from my mother, who told me this when I was a teenager. When the Culture Revolution subsided, my father eventually went to medical school, became a cardiac surgeon in China. I think because of his experiences, he was pretty intent on leaving the country. Although he desperately loved the Chinese people, I think it was just something he really couldn't get over, understandably.

So when I was about five, my father actually received a fellowship, a two-year fellowship, to come to the US to do research. Once he entered, he applied for asylum. And then around that time, the Tiananmen Square massacre occurred and Bush Sr granted amnesty to scholars from China, which included my father. So it mooted the asylum application and then we were given a choice to have the amnesty, and we accepted that because that was actually the shortest way for us to get legal resident permanent status. We naturalized after that.

John Caher: Wow! Now, I want to pursue something you mentioned somewhat in passing. I'd like to maybe know a little bit more about it. You mentioned "honor culture." What does that mean?

Judge Wang: I don't want to over generalize any people group, but I definitely think from my own experience, the concept of honor in its corresponding, I think, emotion, shame, is a driver for a lot of what my family had understood to be a primary value. We want to avoid shame, we want to save face, which is a colloquialism you might hear. Those were the values that were important to my family. And so if somebody in that family was considered immoral or bad, then the stain of that label would also afflict other people in that family. So, it was just a very, very difficult time because in order for individuals in a family to avoid getting that stain on them, they had to openly renounce their love, loyalty, fealty to their family member, which in a society in which there was a lot of fealty that was supposed to be owed to your parents and your grandparents was just a very, very difficult experience and very, very challenging.

John Caher: Did they bring any of that over here with them? Did you have maybe a heightened sense as a kid that you should not dishonor or shame your family?

Judge Wang: Oh, absolutely. I think that was just something that I was always brought up with.

John Caher: That's interesting. Now it's clear, very clear, why your family wanted to leave, but they had a number of options, I'd imagine. Why the United States and why New York City—probably, I don't know, 8- 9,000 miles from home?

Judge Wang: Well, when my father first arrived, I think because of the way the fellowship was set up, he had to go to a hospital or a research facility in Los Angeles. And then I think, I'm going to speculate because I can't remember exactly and I'm not quite sure, but we moved around a lot at first, and I think that had to do with maybe his fellowship. Once his fellowship was over, my recollection was he obtained a job at Maimonides Medical Center as a researcher because he couldn't automatically wave in as a doctor. He had to do his residency again. And so he decided he was going to put that on pause and he decided to become a researcher. And I think the job he got was at Maimonides in Brooklyn. So we moved to Brooklyn and I was there from about age seven to 13 or 14.

John Caher: So, that's how your father supported the family? He came over with a stipend and was able to support the family that way. Is that correct?

Judge Wang: Yeah, interestingly enough, the story that I was told by my mom was that for some reason the stipend was to be paid to him, but I don't know if it was to be paid to him later or it was paid to him in a bank account or held for him in a bank account. But he actually came over with \$25 in his pocket. I think they had housing set up for him, but he didn't have any food. It's interesting because he's a cardiac surgeon and he receives this fairly prestigious fellowship, but since everyone was paid the same and the standard of living was not very high, we were all quite poor at that time.

I remember my mom saying to me when I was a kid that we could afford meat once a week. She got an amount of money, but with the amount of money she had to spend, she could only afford to eat meat once a week and I could only have one piece of fruit once a day. And so that was the province we were in. I don't know if it was different in other provinces, but we were actually quite poor. And he arrived with \$25 on him, and I'm sure he made it work because the stipend probably came in later on. My mother, she also was a doctor, but she worked initially as an aide in a nursing home. And then eventually when we got to New York, she worked as a microbiologist in Columbia University, where she spent most of her career.

John Caher: Wow, a lot of science in your household!

Judge Wang: Yeah, well, it didn't carry through!

John Caher: Do you remember your family being subjected to discrimination when you were a child or thereafter?

Judge Wang: Yeah, yeah. This happened to be the subject of one of my answers on my applications to become a judge. When we moved to New York, we moved to Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, and at the time it was predominantly a working-class Italian American/ Irish American neighborhood. It's now predominantly actually Russian and Chinese. It's interesting when those things happen - the changes in a neighborhood.

But when I moved in, I was one of the few Asian American kids on the block, and in the neighborhood, I remember vividly experiencing a lot of racism at that time. I used to get into fights with kids who didn't like me just because of my race. And the racism was just so prevalent that even my friends, my Italian American or Irish American friends there, they held a lot of deeply ingrained stereotypes about me. Actually, when I was a kid, the band Green Day came out and they were a grunge band and they released a hit album called "Dookie." And my nickname in the neighborhood would eventually be "Gookie," which is obviously a slur, but even my friends called me that.

That was how people knew me around the neighborhood when I was a kid. And although I recognized that to be racial bias, I was just trying to fit in. It was only as I got a little bit older that I really started to realize how harmful that was, that racial animus or ignorance or bigotry directed at me. It made me feel ashamed, ashamed of my background, of the food I ate, of the language I spoke at home, and it really produced in me a longing to be accepted, fully accepted, including for my ethnicity.

When I was at the end of junior high school, I took the standardized tests to go to one of the magnet high schools and I was accepted to Bronx High School of Science. At that time, Bronx Science was about 60% Asian American. Most of the kids were from Queens. And so I thought when I got there, wow, this is a place where most of the kids look like me and should have a shared ethnicity or race. And I began befriending them. They became my friend group, and they were also from their own ethnic enclaves in Queens, Flushing, Bayside, a lot of those areas.

What's interesting was that over time I actually found that a lot of my Asian American friends also held deeply ingrained racist views about other races, and they could be just as biased as my friends from Bensonhurst. And so what happened to me was I started to understand this concept of bias as really the result or product of failing to interact with others who are different from you and sharing life with them.

I didn't know what to call it, but I knew that this phenomenon existed because I'd seen it in two different people groups and I didn't really want anything to do with it. And it really affected my college decision because I was accepted to the University of Michigan on a scholarship. I was a swimmer in high school and I got a scholarship for that. But I was also accepted to this little-known school called Vassar College, which I didn't know very much about other than doing a school tour. I knew that Michigan was about 25% Asian American. I knew that many of my high school friends who were Asian American were accepted. And I think even though there was a lot of pressure for me to go there, and some financial incentive to do that, I just knew that it wasn't the right decision for me. And that's because of my experiences both at Bensonhurst and Bronx Science.

So I decided to enroll in Vassar, which I genuinely did not really know very much about, but I thought it was a good school to go to. And it exposed me to a totally different population, not without its flaws and biases, but it was just one of those moments that I really realized I couldn't go to Michigan because of my experiences. I had to choose this other option.

One of my favorite authors, Parker Palmer, says it this way, "It's not just the door that opens that shapes our fate, it's also the doors that close," and they often have the same effect. And that was very true about my college decision.

John Caher: That's a great quote. Do you think your family heritage affected your career trajectory?

Judge Wang: Yeah, absolutely. In terms of family background and a career, or one's career or trajectory, is a very interesting question. It's become an unfolding revelation to me. I am personally very fascinated by the idea of "vocation" or calling and I think that our families are our first teachers, and often the most influential teachers in terms of shaping what we want to do with our lives. So for as long as I can remember, my father encouraged me to work for the government. I think he wanted me to run for elected office, and I didn't really understand it.

My father passed two years ago, but I started to get a better understanding of it since his death, and the years leading up to his death as well. I think because of what my father endured at the hands of the Chinese government, or maybe the absence of one, during the Culture Revolution. I think he felt powerless, truly powerless. I'm going to speculate, but as we reexamine our family patterns and things like that, which many of us do often through therapy, which I did, I recognized that or I think I began to understand that his hope for me to join the US government was born out of a conviction, not just in the virtue of democracy, which I do think he fervently believed in, but also a desire that I would not suffer the same feeling of powerlessness that he experienced.

I'm not sure if it worked for me because I was hoping to please him or I was an impressionable kid or that his dream simply aligned with my personality, but I knew pretty early on that I wanted to serve in government. And the judge thing was actually my own spin on my father's dream. My dad wanted me to run for office. I think probably he was thinking legislative or executive office, but even as a kid, I knew that I wanted a family and I wanted children, and I wanted to be an involved and present father. I'm not sure how I knew that, but I just knew that it would be difficult to campaign for your job as an elected official in legislative or executive office, and stay an involved parent. I'm not saying it can't be done because I now know a few politicians who are just absolutely amazing parents and are very involved, but I guess for me, it just didn't seem to make sense and I was really concerned I wouldn't be there for my kids if I decided to go down that path.

The judge thing was something I came up with as a compromise. So I'm not like other folks that you may have heard or interviewed or may have been on the podcast where they said, "I never thought I wanted to be a judge. It was the last thing on my mind." I actually wanted to be a judge before I wanted to be a lawyer. I think it was an opportunity for me to fulfill this idea of being in public service, of having the ability to make important decisions. Maybe it was partly influenced by my father in terms of what his experience was like. It was only when I got older that I came to appreciate even more why the judiciary really aligned with my values and my goals.

John Caher: So at Brooklyn Law, were you taking courses with the idea that someday I'd like to be a judge?

Judge Wang: Not exactly. I did most of my internships either in public service work for a public service firm or for the judiciary. There's not exactly a course in law school called "How to Be a Judge," but most of my internships explored some aspect of it. I was primarily initially interested in employment law, so I interned at the EEOC and I took employment law related classes there. But, yeah, the idea was I was going to try to find a path to becoming a judge when I was eligible.

John Caher: Now, how did you end up in criminal court? Your career has been almost entirely in the civil side, the housing part, New York City civil court, family court. How did you get here?

Judge Wang: When I graduated from law school, did a six-month postgraduate fellowship with South Brooklyn Legal Services, which is now Legal Services of New York. I was in the employment law unit and I was absolutely willing to stay at that job and continue to work in public service, but a clerkship opened up and it was an assistant law clerk in Supreme Court, and I thought that was the opportunity for

me to get my feet wet and the fellowship was a temporary one anyway, so it was a good move for me to go there.

John Caher: What do you think are the major qualities needed for a good criminal court judge?

Judge Wang: The answer I was going to go with is a meta-answer, like “presence,” but I think that's a little too abstract. If I could be more practical, I think the essential quality for a judge is humility. In my view, humility is the foundation for all other great qualities of a judge, including a criminal court judge. In my view, humility is not just a mindset, it's also a posture of the heart. It's the beginning of wisdom. To me, a judge that has humility, they start with the truth that there is so much that he or she or they don't know about the person and circumstances in the case in front of them and so much that they'll never know, and yet they're tasked with this responsibility, this awesome, literally awesome responsibility, to make a decision with the knowledge of the law and facts that they have before them. So I think the humble judge does their best to master the law, to marshal the facts and really understand the facts as best as they can. And then they engage in the work of interrogating assumptions.

They take an inventory of what biases or values or predisposed dispositions they may have that they're bringing to that issue and, assuming they're doing all that, they make a decision. I think with a humble heart and a humble head that there's often so little that we can fix in terms of the brokenness in this world, but a decision that is made with all of those things in mind. And hopefully because that process has happened, the ego is stripped away as much as it can be from that decision. The ignorance is confronted and acknowledged, and the highest virtues can manifest from that particular posture—courage, compassion, equanimity, fidelity to the law. And I would say in criminal court, I think the value that often crops up for me a lot is mercy, the recognition that I know so little and that mercy has an important role to play in many of the decisions that I have to make.

John Caher: I love the phrase you just used and I'm going to borrow it if you don't mind, “interrogates assumptions.” I like that. But let's not skip the meta version. You mentioned in passing “presence.” What does that mean?

Judge Wang: All right, let's go there! I think that presence is an awareness, a very deep awareness, of everything that is happening in the particular moment or moments in which a decision has to be made. It's an inventory of what's going on emotionally within the judge. It's an understanding and a deep wrestling with the law that maybe needs to be wrestled with, I think, for decisions that are often discretionary. There are lots of things that are black letter law, and I don't think it's a particularly difficult task to issue a decision if there's a decision that's

on all fours with the facts in front of you. But many decisions that have to be made that involve some level of discretion or some gray area. When there's a human being on the other side that's being affected— their liberty, their housing, their family—I think that there is such an incredible need to be fully present in that moment. And that is, like I said, an awareness of what is going on within that judge. What is the emotion that's there? What kinds of narratives has that judge possibly brought into this? What kinds of biases exist, and not just the kind of biases that have to do with protected classes, but also familiarity bias: “Oh, this is the kind of person I've seen before. So this kind of person is the same person that I dealt with before who was trying to pull the wool over my eyes, and I'm not going to be fooled this time.” There's a way in which we judges also import their own narratives, and I think it's important for them to see the person in front of them and be fully available in that moment.

There's an author that I also really love. His name is David White. He writes about vocation and he writes a book called *Crossing the Unknown Sea*, and he describes this quality of Capaciousness. It's this moment in which we are open, truly open to all the different things that are going on and not afraid, not interested in defending any particular ego aspect of what we do, but fully open to the moment. And then, because we're the one given the role to make the decision, we decide, we rule. So it's difficult - it's oftentimes easier to talk about what presence is not than what presence is, but when those moments are available, and I don't know that they're always available to me, but those are some of the times in which I feel like I've really made a decision with the best of me.

John Caher: Do you think your background affects the way you view things from the bench?

Judge Wang: Yeah, absolutely. I think it's really important to remember that we're all multifaceted individuals. Racially, as a person of Asian descent, I am defined as a “person of color,” but I'm also of a specific racial minority group. We suffer from negative stereotypes, but we also enjoy privileges that other people of color don't. And I try to be aware of that, especially as a judge in a court whose litigants are primarily Black and Brown. And also socioeconomically. Although we were raised in a more impoverished environment in China, when we got to the US, because both of my parents held these jobs as researchers, I was raised in a middle class family that exalted education. So I'm also aware of how I bring those values and sometimes those biases into the courtroom. I guess what I'm saying is that judges like everyone else, we're whole people. We have identities that are rooted in race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, religion, class, so many other facets that we really need to be vigilant in asking how they shape our views from the bench.

John Caher: Which is precisely why we need diversity on the bench, correct?

Judge Wang: I completely agree with that. The more diverse a group becomes, the more the individuals in that group attain the skill of navigating differences across others in a way that really benefits them all. They almost develop a lingua franca of how to engage with people with differences. The more diverse a group becomes, you get something more than just the constituent parts, something more. I think a higher value rises to the surface, and that is something that I think is just beautiful when you can have a very diverse group on the bench.

John Caher: That was a beautiful answer. Now, I mentioned earlier that you're the Presiding Judge of the Midtown Community Court. Let's explore that if we could. First, what is a Midtown Community Court?

Judge Wang: So Midtown Community Court, now known as Midtown Community Justice Center, is a community court. It began in 1993 as an alternative to incarceration court to address quality of life crimes that were afflicting the community. It's credited as the first community court in the country.

And back then, stakeholders in the community— especially the Theater District and elected officials in that area—saw that the revolving door of justice for a group of criminal defendants, criminal court defendants or criminal justice involved folks, misdemeanants, wasn't working. It wasn't working either for the defendant or it wasn't working for public safety. I think this group believed that addressing the root causes of the conduct that led to the arrest, that led them to being justice involved, was more effective than punishment through jail. So defendants who were charged in the community, in the catchment area, which is a number of precincts, had their cases returned to Midtown Community Court. And those charges were only a certain category of charges such as petty theft, prostitution, marijuana possession, and then summons for various traffic violations.

All of those cases were returned to be arraigned in Midtown Community Justice Center. And then those folks were offered programming, either as a part of a sentence or pre plea, and if they engaged in the social services, then they got the benefit of whatever the offer was at that time.

Over time, what happened with Midtown Community Court was the Manhattan District Attorney's Office stopped prosecuting a lot of those charges: low level prostitution cases and the legalization of cannabis led to fewer and fewer cases being heard in Midtown. So it became a court that dealt more with these, vehicle summons or trucking company violations. That was not quite the same as the original intent of Midtown Community Court, which is to help those who are criminal justice involved address their underlying needs. And then the pandemic hit and so Midtown, already experiencing lower volume, closed indefinitely.

In January 2022, OCA opened Midtown Community Justice Center for only one day and for one purpose, and that was to set up a misdemeanor mental health part. So actually today, I should say that we don't have the community court open yet. We're hoping to expand to another day, but right now there's only two parts open. One is the misdemeanor mental health part, and the other is the emerging adult part, which is 18- to 25-year-olds charged with low level offenses. And the logic, I think, for opening for these two populations was that Midtown had resources like social workers, case coordinators and peers that could be utilized for individuals such as those who are struggling with mental health challenges or those who are 18 to 25 and charged with misdemeanors or low-level felonies. Because of the low legal leverage in these cases, it was initially very challenging to get these cases to be sent here because I had to convince the defense bar that it was worth it.

But I think over time we demonstrated through the outcomes and the trust that people feel that it's a real viable alternative to traditional prosecution downtown. And since we started, we've had a 90% graduation rate. We've had over 250 graduates. That's from about the spring of 2022, with the majority of them ending with a non-criminal record. Notably, I think the biggest and most impressive thing about the services here is only a handful end up warranting after they complete the assessment, which means that once they do the assessment, they want to come back. And this is all pre plea, John, so there's no obligation for them to do this. And yet they do it because I think they get the benefit of the offer and they find that there's trust and there's welcoming here, and that's the secret sauce of the part. That's what I think makes it so successful.

John Caher: You mentioned a 90% graduation rate. That is extraordinary. Now you must have many, many success stories. Is there anything recent that really stands out?

Judge Wang: Yeah, actually. A couple of weeks ago, Governor Hochul came to announce her \$33 million investment in mental health courts and chose Midtown to be the site where she held the press conference. That was great. That was amazing. She was there, the Chief Judge was there. And it was wonderful to have such luminaries in the court. But actually what was even more amazing was later that day, CBS came to interview one of our prior participants. This individual was homeless before, charged with a misdemeanor, I think actually more than one case. And because of our engagement with him, his cases were dismissed. The day that he came in, he had just signed a lease for an apartment earlier that morning after about 10 years on the streets. He had just applied to be a member of a clubhouse, Fountain House, which is just a wonderful place for peers who are struggling with mental health disorders.

And he said that day that that was the best day of his life. And there's a link for that interview. You can see it on CBS News, but it's wonderful because he said

that Midtown Community Justice Center changed his life. Those things were because he had been engaged with us. And that's really just speaks to the incredible staff and dedicated and caring people here.

John Caher: For our listeners, I have inserted the link into the transcript <https://www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/new-york-state-budget-mental-health-services-kathy-hochul/>.

Judge Wang: Thank you.

John Caher: Now, let's turn the lens back on you. You mentioned that very early on you knew you wanted to be a family man. Are you?

Judge Wang: Gratefully, yes, I am. I actually married my college girlfriend from Vassar, and we have two kids. I have a 12-year-old son and a 9-year-old daughter. The older one is a speed skater, and the younger one rides horses. So most of my time is spent, as I imagined it would be, as a chauffeur taking them from practice or events. It's wonderful. I'm really, really enjoying this time and this phase in my kid's life.

John Caher: Have you retained any customs or traditions from your native land?

Judge Wang: I'm from the northwest of China, a region called Xinjiang. It has a really rich Muslim tradition that is part of my heritage as well. I wouldn't say that I retain any customs, but I do regularly expose my kids to food from that region through my mom, which often includes dishes with cumin and turmeric and other spices from that region. And they love it, and I love that they get a chance to eat non-traditional Chinese food. And we also do observe Chinese New Year as a family.

John Caher: Is there anything that you wish non-Asians better understood about Asian Americans and Asian American culture?

Judge Wang: Yeah. As I said, Asian Americans face a mix of stereotypes like we're smart, but we lack personality. And I actually listened to [Judge Oing's podcast interview](#) and he mentioned how a lot of Asian Americans are viewed as hardworking, but not good managers or leaders. And I think that's true. I think that's absolutely true. So just leaving aside the more overt negative stereotypes, I think it's important to acknowledge that often the undercurrent for a lot of those stereotypes and prejudices is the view that Asians in the US are the perpetual foreigner. There's a - or maybe - a belief, an underlying belief, that we will never be fully American, whether by design or by desire, and that's just absolutely not true.

The Asian American community is just as American as any other community in the US. We are part of the mosaic that shapes the verb that is not the noun, that is American culture. Our voices matter. And as the fastest growing population in

New York City. I think it deserves to be heard and valued. So for no other reason than just electoral self-interest, I think it's important to embrace the Asian American community as a growing and complex constituency of voters.

John Caher: That would be a wonderful place to end. But I do want to ask you one more question.

Judge Wang: Sure.

John Caher: We seem to have a crisis of confidence in many of our most important institutions, including the courts. What can judges do to restore that confidence?

Judge Wang: This is a great question and it's been something I've been thinking a lot about.

I think there's a lot of things that judges can do to restore confidence, but I'll just point to two. The first is to do what we always have done, which is continuing to champion the rule of law by deciding our cases without favor or fear. Number two is just an observation and maybe just a suggestion. I think public trust in the judiciary has eroded, but I think public trust in all branches of government has eroded in the last decades. But there's one, I think, difference between our branch of government and other branches of government, which is I think the judiciary still has credibility. It may be declining, but I think that we still have more credibility than perhaps the other branches of government. And my suggestion is let's leverage that.

Let's leverage that by educating the public about civics. Let's leverage that by informing them about the value that government plays in our society. I think judges should remember their roles as public servants, and that can include civic engagement because people listen when judges speak. I would exhort all of us, including myself, to use this opportunity while it lasts, to not only inform the public about what government does, but perhaps to become conveners on issues that are of public concern.

And I think the last point I'm making might be a little controversial, which is that while I support that judges should not and cannot insert themselves into local controversies, I do think they can play a role in holding space for the public to engage and debate the issues that are most salient to them. Because a lot of the tools that we use in the courtroom—hearing both sides, giving notice, using logic and precedent—all of those are invaluable in establishing frameworks for how we should as a public engage in the most challenging and complex problems facing our society.

I don't want to sound too opaque, so I'll just give a real concrete example of this that's right here in the heart of Midtown Community Justice Center. Most

recently, Midtown Community Justice Center hosted a forum on the prevalence of e-bikes and mopeds in the neighborhood, because that was actually the biggest complaint we were getting when the staff here was going around to community council meetings and community board meetings. We hosted this forum because we saw that this was an issue. It's not even a criminal law issue primarily, it touches on all sorts of other sectors and issues like local regulations, state legislation, infrastructure, labor relations—many, many other non-criminal factors. And it's a real nuisance at the same time to the community, but it's not going away because it meets an economic demand. Many of the people that are upset about e-delivery drivers are also ordering their food online.

So the idea in putting this forum together was for Midtown Community Justice Center to be a neutral forum, a neutral convener to hold space for proper conversation with subject matter experts, and engage in a fruitful and thoughtful discussion about this topic. And I would venture to say that it was a huge success.

And later this year, we're going to host another forum on retail theft, which is a little bit more in our wheelhouse, but that's the kind of concrete example that of how judges can engage in a way that doesn't jeopardize their ethical obligations, but also allows us to play a fuller role as public servants.

John Caher: Thank you for that insightful answer and thank you for a very insightful and enjoyable interview, Judge.

Judge Wang: Thank you, John.