

"...this book demands to be read." — Rush Limbaugh

A close-up portrait of Sheriff Joe Arpaio. He is a middle-aged man with dark hair, wearing large, gold-rimmed aviator-style glasses. He is dressed in a light blue police uniform shirt with a dark tie. On his left shoulder, a circular patch is visible with a yellow star in the center, containing the text "MARICOPA COUNTY" and "SHERIFF". The background is a mottled, light-colored wall.

Sheriff Joe Arpaio

America's Toughest Sheriff

How we can win the war against crime

W I T H L E N S H E R M A N

AMERICA'S TOUGHEST SHERIFF

How to Win the
War Against Crime

By
Sheriff Joe Arpaio
and
Len Sherman

THE SUMMIT PUBLISHING GROUP



THE SUMMIT PUBLISHING GROUP
One Arlington Centre, 1112 East Copeland Road, Fifth
Floor
Arlington, Texas 76011

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Printed in the United States of America.

00 99 98 97 96 010 1 2 3 4 5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Arpaio, Joe, 1932-

America's toughest sheriff : how to win the war against
crime / by Joe Arpaio and Len Sherman.

p. cm.

ISBN 1-56530-202-8 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Arpaio, Joe, 1932- . 2. Sheriffs—Arizona—Case
studies. 3. Prisons—Arizona—Case studies. 4. Crime
prevention—Arizona—Case studies. I. Sherman, Len,
1956- . II. Title.

HV7979.A78 1996

363.2'82'0973—dc20

96-3207

CIP

Jacket and book design by David Sims
Photography by Leslie Sokolow



INTRODUCTION

The following pages will well acquaint you with Sheriff Joe Arpaio, his history and his ideas. As the coauthor of this work, and in the spirit of full disclosure, I thought you should know what I think and believe, and how I became involved in what I hope will be regarded as a noteworthy, provocative book.

I moved to Phoenix from New York for several reasons. Yes, the weather was a definite factor, as were several of the less pleasant realities of residing in New York City. Then there was the lure of the West, and the possibility of fulfilling that most fundamental and perhaps quixotic of American dreams: living as the rugged individual—albeit with air-conditioning.

But something else brought me to Arizona, something equally compelling. It was my growing awareness that Arizona was in the forefront of changes—political, sociological, environmental—that could sweep the country.

I met Sheriff Arpaio soon after arriving in town. I was busy talking to everybody, from opinion makers to the merely opinionated, in order to get a sense of the area when I called the sheriff,

affectionately called “Sheriff Joe” by his Arizona constituents. Thanks to the media, I had heard about him and his posse and tents, and I wanted to see for myself what the commotion was all about. I didn’t have a specific agenda in mind—such as writing this book—I just wanted to talk.

Within ten minutes of entering his office and shaking his hand, I knew I was in the presence of a phenomenon. Joe Arpaio was not just another politician spouting slogans, trying to suck up to the media and the public in order to get reelected. This was clearly a man who believed in what he was saying and in what he was doing. Perhaps more to the point, this was a man whose deeds matched his words, who took his experience and knowledge and convictions and put them to use in service of the people who elected him. And that’s a rare man.

The sheriff was heading out to the Tent City Jail and invited me along—“if you have the guts,” he said. By the end of that brief excursion, I was convinced that Maricopa County had implemented several ideas and programs worthy of notice by the rest of America, and that Sheriff Joe was the harbinger of a new force not only in American law enforcement but also in American political philosophy.

Hailing from New York, I have had enough personal encounters with crime to possess strong opinions about the problem. And though all my losses have been relatively minor—three stolen bicycles, two stolen car radios, and so on—particularly in comparison to what happens each day on the mean streets of every U.S. city, I was still outraged by having to contend with the endless threats to my person and property. And while I certainly recognize that many factors contribute to crime, that recognition does not in any way prompt me to excuse crime or those who perpetrate it. Nor is it the business of law enforcement to correct the societal conditions that can lead to crime. Law enforcement’s overriding duty is to stop crime.

We live in a society that increasingly equates isolation with security. We pretend not to see the homeless man as we scurry into

our guarded building or our gated community. We erect barricades to block off streets and keep out gangbangers, and we hire private cops to patrol our avenues and keep away drug dealers.

That, of course, assumes we can afford gates, barricades, and private cops. If we can't, then we are on our own.

Thus, while crime affects all of society, one quickly discovers that it affects some people more than others. Put bluntly, the rich don't ride the subways and so do not grasp that crime is the overriding concern of most Americans.

Hence, the privileged and protected and powerful, more often than not, approach the question of crime in the same manner they approach most communal issues—from a safe distance. They celebrate themselves with extravagant parties they call fund-raisers and write off as charity, and congratulate themselves for their compassion and leadership. They condemn society for its shortcomings and instruct their fellow citizens on the sacrifices that must be made in the name of justice, while refusing to consider themselves bound by the rules and conventions of the community in matters of morality.

Surely we see this throughout the country, but we see it in heightened clarity in New York, that central mecca for money and media to meet and join and bask in their mutual glory.

And so I came to Arizona.

You won't be reading a lot of overheated political rhetoric in the course of this book. It's not because the sheriff doesn't agree with the views just stated. He probably does. But speculative ruminating is not Sheriff Joe's style. Joe Arpaio is a cop, pure and simple. He was a cop for thirty-two years with the feds, and now he's the head cop of Maricopa County. Even though he's an elected official, he's not a politician in the conventional sense. He has his task, and it's always been the same: To fight crime. That's it, case closed.

So a terrific idea like the posse is widely acclaimed as a great crime-fighting tool, and stunningly cost-effective to boot. And since those obviously laudable attributes are exactly what the sheriff was seeking, he is satisfied with the result.

And while he recognizes that within the posse concept brews an important political message, that is secondary to the posse's practical intent. The posse embodies the height of the American spirit of self-sufficiency, a spirit we usually celebrate more in word than deed. This used to be a nation of volunteers: volunteers rallying to fight the British, to defend one another on the frontier, to build communities and make sure those communities were safe for everyone. People all over the country say they're tired of big government, which means we'd better do the job ourselves and not wait for bureaucrats to fix every problem. That's what the posse is all about: We the people, taking back our streets and taking back our lives.

This book is about much more than crime fighting. It's about Americans regaining the egalitarian spirit that made this land of individuals a great nation. Do we still believe in ourselves? Do we still believe in the very idea of what it means to be an American? Do we still believe in those revolutionary values that define an American? Do we still believe enough to fulfill the promise of America?

Government is not the enemy. Politics is not the enemy. Even political parties are not the enemy. They are all mere instruments of our collective will, and when that will falters, those institutions and those ideas falter. So if the government can no longer be depended upon to perform fairly and efficiently, and politicians and political parties are creaky and corrupted, then we must reinvigorate those organizations and those concepts with integrity and purpose, and jettison whatever and whoever cannot be redeemed.

The genius of America is our ability to change tangible reality without altering the intangible underpinnings of our society. We have grown from a loose confederation of communities into the mightiest empire in history, while ceaselessly expanding and restructuring the demographics of our population, incorporating new people and new traditions and new ideas into the fold without abandoning our individuality or our national character.

How is this possible? How can America not only survive such continual changes but also thrive on them?

At its heart, a nation is a myth agreed to by its people. All the other consequential factors, social, political, and economic, are tied together by the underlying belief and value system to which all citizens voluntarily and consciously subscribe.

But we are more than that. Unlike other countries, America is a faith, as tangible as a church. Unlike other countries, America is also tribal, permitting the supplicant to join or separate from the nation with relative ease. Once accepted into the tribe, one is instantly, totally American, no probation required. Try that in China or Germany, or a hundred other lands.

It is no accident that we refer to those who led our Revolution as our “Founding Fathers,” an intimate and personal identification. They are fathers to all of us, whether our families were here in 1776 or arrived last week, because we are all equally American. We have no titles to hand down, no familial privileges or special rights. All Americans originate from the same mythic parentage, from the beginning, from our Founding Fathers.

This myth, this faith, this tribe gives much and demands much in return. If triumphs will be gained, then we must earn them. If tomorrow is to be successful and happy, then we must work toward that day. We, the people.

And so we come to Arizona.

Americans fear crime as much as we fear for the American future. One anxiety feeds the other, and with good reason, for the cancer of crime imperils all promise and hope. So we have a sheriff, a veteran of the crime wars, a man who has spent half his life working as a cop, who is prepared to show the way. Joe Arpaio has risked his life countless times and his reputation even more frequently in the service of this nation. Now he’s prepared to do even more—he’s prepared to tell us the truth about crime and punishment in this country, what must change, and what we have to do.

The words “hero” and “courage” and “character” are used loosely these days. I’m not here to claim any such titles for Sheriff Joe. I leave that to the reader.

INTRODUCTION

But I shall definitively tell you that the sheriff has honorably and heroically fought the good fight throughout his career. Many cops have done the same. The difference is that Joe Arpaio has gone virtually everywhere and done virtually everything in pursuit of his duty.

And now he has come to Arizona. And this is where he has made his ultimate stand. Law. Order. Justice.

Right versus wrong.

Them or us.

Where do you stand?

LEN SHERMAN



PROLOGUE

America is losing the war against crime, and we've been losing it for years, on every level, from graffiti and purse-snatching to drugs and murder. We're losing, and the way I see it, we have to change, or it's only going to get worse.

But you already knew that. You knew that when you stepped out your door and clutched your bag tightly to your chest, held your breath when you walked by a bunch of kids hanging out on the corner, or looked around cautiously before removing money from a deserted ATM machine. And you knew that after arriving home, double-locking the door, turning on the TV and seeing the news dominated by old women being raped and kids shooting strangers.

A recent *Business Week/Harris Poll* discovered that more than 70 percent of Americans are pessimistic and disheartened about this nation's future. Did I say "discovered"? Surely you didn't need a poll to tell you that. You feel it. You know it.

But I also want to tell you something you don't know—and that's how Americans can turn around the situation and take back our country. I've spent thirty-two years fighting crime around the globe

on behalf of the American people. Now I'm the sheriff of a county the size of New Jersey, and I know what must be done. I'm doing it right here in my own stretch of Arizona, and it's working.

I want to emphasize that point. I'm not some journalist or politician spouting off about what *everybody else* has to do to clean up this terrible mess. A lot of people with sophisticated opinions about crime live in guarded neighborhoods, send their kids to private schools, never have to take a bus or have any contact with the problems they're lecturing about.

I have lived and almost died by my words. I spent most of my career in the Drug Enforcement Administration, a lot of it undercover, and I got very close and personal with some of the nastiest characters around. I've gone from the highest levels of federal law enforcement, where I was the only person ever to have been both the agent-in-charge in Turkey and then regional director for all of Latin America, to election as sheriff of Maricopa County, where I am responsible for maintaining law and order in an area that is actually bigger than eighteen states. (And I might be the only high-ranking law enforcement official who has made that very large leap from the feds to the locals.)

And as the sheriff, I've been elected by the people to do a job, and come hell or high water, or the media or the ACLU, I'm working as hard as I know how to make my home a place where people are safe and, just as important, *feel* safe.

And the people of the Phoenix area seem to appreciate it, which accounts for my approval rating in recent polls hovering around 90 percent, cutting across all ethnic and racial lines. These days a president hits 55 percent and he thinks he's ready to be carved into Mount Rushmore.

My popularity, and some of the things I've been saying and doing about crime, have caused me to be sought out by the media. And when I say sought, I mean *pursued*, and sometimes with a vengeance. But I'm not stupid enough to think that *The New York Times* is here one day and *20/20* the next because of my sparkling personality or endearing wit. The reason the newspapers, TV news magazines, and talk shows are trooping down to The Grand

Canyon State and knocking on my door is because crime is the number-one issue in this country. It's the number-one fear, the number-one problem, and anybody who stands up and actually does something about it is going to make news.

And that's exactly what has happened to me. I've been in the papers, and I've been on TV, and I've gone from being a lawman—which is what I've been my whole life, and which is all that I ever wanted to be—to being a symbol of how Americans can stand up to crime, defend their streets, and protect their quality of life. With this whirlwind swirling around me, I figure that if I'm going to be in the spotlight, I might as well lay out exactly what I see and what I believe, what I hope and what I fear, directly from me to you, no reporters, talk show hosts, or commentators in between.

So get ready, because I'll tell you up front, I'm not going to paint a pretty picture. The way I see it, we are either going to get smart and get tough and deal with this menace, or we are risking the very destruction of the country we love. I'm going to tell you how we permitted this threat to fester, grow, and almost overwhelm us. Then I'm going to tell you what I believe we must do, based on my experience combating drugs and crime all over the world—from Turkey to Mexico to Phoenix. Our task is as simple—and as tough—as taking back each street, each community, from the plagues of violence and fear. In my heart, I know we're up to the job.

Now for some cold facts, so we're all on the same page about the fundamental reality of the issue. Every so often, new figures are announced by one group or another, and sometimes the figures are up, and sometimes they're down. (The year 1995 saw categories of criminal activity showing dramatic reductions in many major cities, allowing politicians and police chiefs to claim semivictory and, more important, credit.) At times, the numbers can be both numbing and confusing in the same manner that on one day studies prove that coffee's bad for you, and on the next different studies claim it's okay. Ditto for exercise, chocolate, vitamins, and apparently everything else.

But some statistics are harder to ignore, particularly those that take a longer view, and here's a couple to chew on. According to

the Department of Justice, as quoted in the July 1995 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, the United States in the 1960s had 3.3 police officers for every violent crime reported per year. Some three decades later, those percentages had turned completely around, and the United States had one police officer for every 3.47 violent crimes reported. Imagine, this nation now has, as stated in *Atlantic Monthly*, “less than one tenth the effective police power of thirty years ago. Looking at it another way, each police officer today must deal with 11.45 times as many violent crimes as his predecessor of years gone by.”

Let’s deal with those numbers in more human terms. New Haven, Connecticut, experienced six murders, four rapes, and sixteen robberies in the year 1960. In 1990, New Haven, with a population now 14 percent smaller, sustained 31 murders, 168 rapes, and 1,784 robberies.

New Haven is not unique. New York City saw 244 murders in 1951. Last year, *the same as every year for more than a decade*, almost two thousand murders were committed in NYC.

And what of society’s penalties against these outrages? Three out of four convicted criminals avoid jail. Less than 10 percent of all serious crimes result in incarceration. When a criminal is finally locked up, time off for parole and good behavior can mean that the convict actually serves a mere one-sixth of his sentence.

And try this on for size: Eighty percent of felons who commit three violent crimes will commit a fourth.

Based on all its data, several years ago the Department of Justice surmised that 83 percent of all Americans—83 percent of *us*—would be victims of violent crime at least once in our lives. For approximately one-fourth of us, Justice expected that we would suffer three or more violent, criminal encounters.

And that’s not the last appalling word, because as bad as it is, the situation is only going to get worse. The reason is as simple as it is chilling, and the reason is the collapse of the American family. Children are having children, parents have forsaken their parental responsibilities, families have fallen apart—indeed, the very idea of the traditional nuclear family has been discarded in too many

quarters, from inner-city youth too young to comprehend the awesome burdens of bringing a person into the world to Hollywood stars too privileged to be bothered with common convention.

Too many of our young people have been abandoned to the streets, abandoned without any hope or purpose or morality. Whether those streets are mean, as in south central Los Angeles, or indifferent, as in Beverly Hills, the effect on our youth, on our children, is frequently the same: Left to their own devices, too many young people have substituted drugs and guns and gangs for love and discipline and education.

Compound that missing moral center with any teenager's inherent sense of invulnerability and immortality, and society is spawning a world of desperately dangerous children.

The result: Teenagers commit one out of every three violent crimes.

The result: The hackneyed phrase, "The children are our future," returns to mercilessly haunt us as we confront our brutal legacy. The teenage population, which has been stagnant for several years, is about to undergo an explosion as the children of children reach physical maturity.

In 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan alerted us that the growing numbers of black children born to single mothers heralded an era of individual and societal violence and chaos. When he spoke up thirty years ago, that percentage stood at 26 percent. Moynihan, of course, was denounced as a racist, and the issue was immediately abandoned by fearful politicians and academics. Moynihan, of course, was proved right over time, and his ideas gained mainstream acceptance long ago. Now juxtapose a few bits of information:

1. Thirty percent of all children in the United States live in single-parent homes, a notable increase from 12 percent in 1970. Sixty-five percent of black children born this year live with only one parent. But obviously children are not alone in being deprived of two parents. The percentage of single-parent families stands at 35 percent for Hispanic children, and 25 percent for white children.

2. More than 70 percent of the juveniles who commit violent crime come from single-parent families.

The conclusion is irresistible: Illegitimacy rises, violent crime rises, societal decay speeds up and spreads, and the cycle feeds itself with the ferocity of a cancer devouring its host.

So we are left with yet another grim Justice Department report that predicts that the juvenile arrest rate, which already had risen to almost one hundred fifty thousand in 1992, could double by the year 2010. Such a doubling will result in a terrifying increase in violence and pain and misery.

The underlying cause of youth crime has to do with many issues, from social to political to economic. The police only become involved after the other mechanisms of society—family, school, religion—have failed. Youth crime is neither caused by law enforcement, nor can it be cured by law enforcement. Nonetheless, the police are the last line of defense, and that is where I stand. My department, along with all other police departments, must be prepared to deal with this advancing onslaught.

Teenage criminals to career criminals, drug addicts to drug kingpins, gang members to mob families, muggers, murderers, and all the rest... We must all be prepared not only for the battle we are now fighting but also the battle we shall soon be fighting, because this is a fight for all of our futures.

Of course, we have been fighting, on one front or another, and we surely have the bills to prove it. Our criminal justice system costs us sixty-one billion dollars a year. Nationally, taxpayers spend an average of between twenty and thirty thousand dollars on each prisoner.

Justice is not getting cheaper. Breaking it down to just one example, the California Department of Corrections predicts it will have to build another twenty prisons, costing five hundred million dollars each, to accommodate the expected inflow of new inmates. (Incidentally, California already runs twenty-eight state prisons.)

Dissatisfied with the level of protection all this money has bought, Americans spend another sixty-five billion dollars on private security firms and crime-prevention measures. (The steering

wheel locking device “The Club” accounts for one hundred million dollars alone.)

All that money, and we’re still not safe. I have never believed that throwing money at a problem automatically solves it. Our national problem is crime, and our national spendthrift approach to finding an answer, any answer, no matter the cost, no matter the futility, validates my skepticism.

We cannot sit back and wait for the “experts” to arrive at neat sociological or statistical or philosophical solutions. The real solutions are going to be more difficult and, to be blunt, dirtier than that. The real solutions will not include pleasing political speeches shouted from sanitized studios for the television cameras. They instead involve daily, unending patrolling and investigating, planning and preparing, wrestling and battling between good guys and bad guys on the streets and in the trenches. Police work is not pretty. It is always hard and sometimes dangerous. But such an all-out effort is the essence of preventing crime.

Police work is not conducted in a vacuum. Rather, it is conducted as part and parcel of the community. Thus, real solutions will require the efforts of not only law enforcement officers, but the entire community.

The reality is stark—either the good guys will prevail and restore some sense of decency and honor and respect to our society, or the bad guys will come out on top and destroy everything we hold dear.

And it doesn’t matter if you’re reading this in Arizona or New York or Florida or California or Kansas, we are all facing the same hazard, the same threat. Just as you can go anywhere in this country and find a McDonald’s or a Gap, you can find graffiti and gangs and drugs and a general breakdown in the American quality of life just as easily. Crime is not only about being murdered, it’s also about feeling that the street—your street—is no longer a friendly place, feeling that you are under constant assault from harassing, intimidating forces. This degradation in the American quality of life is as ultimately destructive as any violent crime, because it causes us to lose faith in our community and our future.

As crime has changed over the years, so has law enforcement, sometimes for the best and sometimes not. When I was a police officer in Washington, most cops walked the beat, just as I did. That was how we got to know the neighborhood and how we administered the law. Over time, however, the patrol car took over, assisted by tactical units and SWAT teams and a catalog of technological toys.

Same for the war against drugs. When I joined the Bureau of Narcotics, we had little more than two hundred agents doing an arguably great job. Today, more than forty federal agencies have often overlapping jurisdiction over drugs, untold billions are annually expended, and we appear to be achieving less than the old Bureau of Narcotics accomplished, all by its lonesome.

On the other hand, on a personal level, being sheriff is the best job I've ever had. Working for the feds was great, but now I don't have to answer to any bureaucracy or chain of command. Now I answer directly to the people, who elected me.

You know, there's an irony in my new role. I spent most of my career undercover, which is about as anonymous as any person can get, and now I've become "Sheriff Joe," maybe the most public of public officials in Arizona; in the news, one way or another, for better or worse, almost every day, from here to Paris to Tokyo to God knows where.

Why all the interest? Maybe because we're trying a few things here that are working, and could work elsewhere. A few things I want to talk to you about. In fact, a lot I want to talk to you about.

Win or lose. Right or wrong. Good guys versus bad guys. Sometimes life is that straightforward.

As I said, we have a lot to talk about. So let's go.