



# Chain Gangs

chain gang • líð av fangum, ið eru leinkjaðir saman

plate • stálstyrkt

convictions • dómur

padlocked • læstar við heingilási

volunteer • melda seg til sjálvboðnar

lockdown • innistongsul

weeding • lúka illgras

violating probation • her: brot á treyðan dóm

juveniles • unglingar

for deterrence • sum ræðuvápn





**Sheriff Joe Arpaio** of Phoenix, Arizona boasts that he runs the only all-female chain gang in history and declares himself to be the toughest sheriff in the States.

Under Arpaio, the 8,000 inmates of the Maricopa County Jail system work seven days a week, are fed only twice a day, get no coffee, no salt, pepper or ketchup, no cigarettes and no organized recreation whatsoever.

They have to pay \$10 every time they need to see a nurse. If they want to write to their families, they have to use special postcards with the sheriff's picture on them. If their loved ones visit, they see them through thick plate glass or over a video link.

Most inmates are serving sentences of a year or less for relatively minor convictions or are awaiting trial because they could not make bail. Human rights groups regard it as the harshest jail system in the United States.

### **Burial Work**

One morning at 6 am, 15 women assemble for chain gang duty. They are padlocked together by the ankle, five to each chain, and then march military style out to a van that will take them to their work site – a cemetery half an hour's drive out of the city in the desert.

This morning the women in the chain gang have to bury the bodies of poor people who have died in the streets or in the hospital without family and without the money to pay for a proper funeral.

A priest and a nun are waiting for them. The first body lies in a tiny white casket. It is that of a baby, who does not even have a name yet. The priest says a prayer for the baby and the nun recites a psalm while some of the women weep silently. Then, they fill in the grave and move on to the next body. Altogether, the women lay to rest six people, before they are taken back to the prison.

This may seem tough, but actually many women volunteer for chain gang duty to get out of lockdown, where four prisoners are shut in a cell only 8 by 12 square feet 23 hours a day. If they spend 30 days on the chain gang, weeding, picking up trash or burying bodies, they can get out of the punishment cells. "It feels weird being seen in public, chained up together, wearing stripes. People honk their horns or shout at you," says one prisoner. She was put in jail for violating probation after renting a car and failing to return it for two months.

Arpaio says he wants to start a chain gang for juveniles soon too. **"I use it for deterrence to fight crime. I put them right on the street where everyone can see them. If a kid asks his mother, she can tell them this is what happens to people who break the law."**