

Official Statement regarding President Trump's Pardon of Joe Arpaio



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On Friday, August 25th, Donald Trump used the power of the presidency to pardon former Arizona Sheriff Joe Arpaio. The decision was announced late in the evening, just as Hurricane Harvey hit Texas. In his own words, Trump said that not only was the pardon “the right thing to do” but that he intentionally chose to do so during the occurrence of a natural disaster because people would be watching TV and “the ratings would be higher than they were normally” on a Friday evening.

Joe Arpaio served as the sheriff of Maricopa County for 24 years. Under his watch, nearly 1,700 inmates were housed in Tent City, an outdoor jail where inmates were forced to sleep in tents leftover from the Korean War, made to wear striped jumpsuits, pink underwear and endured blistering hot conditions as they were confined outside in the desert heat. He once referred to it as a “concentration camp.”

Moreover, Arpaio made a career out of racial profiling. He encouraged officers to engage in illegal practices that specifically targeted Latinos in Maricopa County, enabling them to stop anyone they suspected of being an undocumented immigrant and turn them over to immigration authorities. According to the *New York Times*, this was “a practice that had led to the detention of some Latinos who were citizens or legal residents.” He was also one of the country’s loudest advocates for the “birther” movement, assigning a five-man team to investigate the authenticity of America’s first African-American president. In 2012, he staged an elaborate press conference to announce that this team had discovered evidence that President Barack Obama’s birth certificate from Hawaii was a forgery.

He was found guilty in July 2017 of ignoring a 2011 court order from a judge, which specifically instructed him to refrain from the practice of racially profiling Latinos. This means that for six years, after he was legally mandated to stop, he continued to terrorize Latinos and detain them. He is responsible for the trauma and separation of countless families and remains unrepentant about his racist and bigoted behavior directed at black and brown people.

Donald Trump’s pardon of Joe Arpaio demonstrates a complete disregard for the dignity, humanity and civil rights of people of color in this country. It sends the message that abuse of power and blatant racist policy will not only be tolerated but will also be rewarded under this administration.

Ethnic Studies, as a discipline, was founded not only to investigate the meaning and implications of race and identity but also to fight against racial discrimination wherever it may exist in society. Ethnic studies has a long and distinguished activist history which can be traced back to the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s. As an organization we are comprised of academics, scholar-activists, students, teachers, community leaders, artists and activists, practitioners in various fields and anyone else who has an interest in understanding and advocating for the social, cultural, emotional and physical well-being of ethnic minority groups.

We believe that the pardoning of Joe Arpaio is an endorsement of white supremacy, structural racism, hatred and division that is so pervasive in our society. Ethnic minority communities face a number of grave threats under a Trump presidency and this move further solidifies that he is in no way committed to the advancement of racial and social justice. In this moment, now more than ever, we are all called to denounce hatred in all its forms and stand in radical solidarity with immigrant communities, people of color and other marginalized communities—the same persons who were at risk under the tenure of Joe Arpaio.

We ask you to join us in rejecting this clear abuse of the rule of law and racial hostility. We call on allies in the struggle for freedom and justice to stand up and continue to act in ways that affirm the humanity and belonging of members of vulnerable ethnic groups.

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