



# Vice: One Cop's Story of Patrolling America's Most Dangerous City

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**Vice: One Cop's Story of Patrolling America's Most Dangerous City** John R. Baker , Stephen J. Rivele  
9 square miles. 10,000 criminals. 130 cops. A riveting memoir by Baker, California's most-decorated police officer.

Compton: the most violent and crime-ridden city in America. What had been a semi-rural suburb of Los Angeles in the 1950s became a battleground for the Black Panthers and Malcolm X Foundation, the home of the Crips and Bloods and the first Hispanic gangs, and the cradle of gangster rap.

At the center of it, trying to maintain order was the Compton Police Department, never more than 130-strong, and facing an army of criminals that numbered over 10,000. At any given time, fully one-tenth of Compton's population was in prison, yet this tidal wave of crime was held back by the thinnest line of the law - the Compton Police.

*John R. Baker* was raised in Compton, eventually becoming the city's most decorated officer involved in some of its most notorious, horrifying and scandalous criminal cases. Baker's account of Compton from 1950 to 2001 is one of the most powerful and compelling cop memoirs ever written - an intensely human account of sacrifice and public service, and the price the men and women of the Compton Police Department paid to preserve their city.

## Vice: One Cop's Story of Patrolling America's Most Dangerous City Details

Date : Published January 18th 2011 by St. Martin's Press

ISBN : 9780312596873

Author : John R. Baker , Stephen J. Rivele

Format : Hardcover 410 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Mystery, Crime, True Crime, Biography, Autobiography

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## **From Reader Review Vice: One Cop's Story of Patrolling America's Most Dangerous City for online ebook**

### **Eva Leger says**

This is yet another that should have been reviewed as soon as I finished it. It's been two months, give or take, and I forget so much of it.

I do remember how engaged I was and how fascinating I found Baker's story to be. I don't just take people as honest without really thinking about it and I definitely did feel Baker was as honest as possible. It seemed to me that he could have skirted a few things to paint himself in a better light and from what I read, he didn't do that.

I can definitely say this - if this country followed what Baker and the Compton PD had back then - this country would be in far better shape. You can say whatever you want about judge, jury and executioner but in the end, the numbers speak for themselves. And these numbers speak volumes.

Some ex-members of gangs that are somewhat well known to certain readers are even mentioned because Baker had run-ins with them. Some of them have even written books themselves.

The gang violence and racism is shocking. No, not shocking. It's not shocking. It's everyday in every corner of the world, just not with gangs, so it's not shocking. Disgusting? Horrifying? I can't get the right word.

How quickly people want to turn race into an issue to avoid the real issue at hand. Everything has to be racism these days. I truly worry for my daughter. How her life will be in later years, when I'm gone. This country has been heading toward civil war for a long, long time and I don't think we've ever been since close since, well, the last Civil War.

Baker included photos. (He's very proud of his women, by the way. He throws a few of those in and one can easily see why.) But the gang photos - they disgust me. These people standing there like they have every right to be the way they are. If I made and enforced the laws things would be so different. For anyone who thinks they have the right to take an innocent life.

It actually hurts me to say this but I can't comment on all I wanted to comment on. I waited too long and have forgotten. Baker doesn't apologize for himself. He not only tells how it was on the street but he tells how it was with the city officials. Many of whom were corrupt and only concerned with two things - money and race, and in exactly that order. These "officials" did what they did and for what? What is Compton today? Safe? A place where you'd want to raise your baby? I've never been but I'm going to guess no. I'm willing to bet it's a far, far more dangerous place today than when Baker and his fellow officers roamed the streets. But safe doesn't matter. Money does. Race does. And that's it. And this is the world I've brought my daughter into.

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### **pianogal says**

Ok, the idea behind this book was good. Follow a guy who was instrumental in fighting crime in Compton. Sounds good - but it was TOO long. It felt like he kept telling the same story over and over again. Hey look - we beat this guy up and he respected us for it. Oh yeah, I kicked the s@#4 out of this guy and he saved my life one day. Um, ok??? The author seems to have a hero complex about all the great things he did (that honestly would have gotten him locked in a cell anywhere else). It would be interesting to get another point of view to see how much was real and how much was Memorex.

Also, this John Baker was letchy perv who would sleep with anything female - even when he was married. Ugh. Then at one point in the story he goes, "Hey - I'm using sex as a stress release." Duh. Just b/c you're life

is tough doesn't mean you can be such a jerk.

I managed to plow through to the end, and I know now two things for sure: 1) I'm glad I didn't grow in up Compton and 2) I'm very glad I've never met John Baker.

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### **Jennie says**

I am super excited to read this for 2 reasons. #1 - the subject matter is very interesting to me. It sounds similar to The Shield, one of my favorite TV shows ever and #2 - I am receiving an advance copy through Goodreads!

I'm torn with my thoughts on this book. I loved the stories and I appreciated the background info so I could truly understand what was going on. It did remind me a lot of The Shield - the cops in a rough area doing what needs to be done for the community even when all the actions weren't 100% "by the book."

I didn't feel enough of a connection to the main character to feel like I couldn't put it down though. Because it was a memoir, I was really looking for that connection, but just felt like the main character was self promoting too much. No doubt, he was an amazing guy, but this is one of the few occasions that I think I'd enjoy it more if John Baker's memories/memoir was commercialized into a movie or TV series.

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### **Jordan Lombard says**

This nonfiction book reads like an action packed novel. And the action doesn't stop until the very end. The author, and Compton Police Officer, Rick, asked one of his fellow officers what he thought would be the legacy of the Compton Police Department. The officer responded with "Rick, it doesn't matter if the public ever knows what we endured, because we know what we did." I completely disagree with this statement. I'm glad I know what happened, I'm glad he told the story of how 130 police officers fought against 10,000 criminals for several decades, as well as the politicians of Compton who never seemed to care about the department or support it in any meaningful way, even when they were putting their lives on the line every day, fighting a WAR against gangs and militant factions like the Malcolm X Foundation and the Black Panthers.

The Compton Police Department was the one who didn't shoot first and ask questions later, similar to the LAPD. They preferred to use other less drastic measures. They talked the criminals down, they fought them with real fist fights. They knew the criminals because they'd grown up with them as kids, and the criminals respected the cops. Where else would you hear of a criminal calling dispatch on an officer's radio when the officer chasing him gets hurt? These guys knew the police meant business and they respected that. They respected the fact that the cops wouldn't shoot them without a serious need to do so.

This was one book I could not put down to save my life. I lost track of time continuously while reading it, and when it was over, I couldn't get to sleep because I kept thinking about it. I woke up thinking about it the next day. I have a feeling this book will haunt me for a long time, especially knowing what happened to the department in 2000, after everything they'd worked so hard to secure for themselves and the city for so many decades. How can so much hard work, blood, sweat, and tears, come to mean nothing at all to the very people they tried to protect? Even though I never lived there, wasn't born in Compton, or grew up there, I

appreciate everything they've done, and wish it had never come to an end.

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### **Ryan Madland says**

I received this book book via Goodreads First Reads program. I have not received any sort of financial reimbursement for this review. Opinions expressed are of my own.

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The book "Vice" by John R. Baker with Stephen J. Rivelle is an inside look at what it was like to be a police officer in Compton, California during some of its most bleakest times. Officer John Baker holds nothing back as he details how he and other members of the Compton Police Department dealt with crime in that area. This is the most in depth inside look inside what its like to be a cop I've read.

Throughout the book Officer Baker reveals that sometimes the Compton Police Department didn't go about things in the most ethical way, but as you read further into the stories, you understand why. They were in war zone and the regular rules of law did not apply to what they were dealing with. They were hugely outnumbered by gangs with higher powered guns who were not afraid to shoot to kill especially when it came to the boys in blue.

Not only does the author detail so of his most complex cases, but he goes into some great detail about some of most unusual and dangerous arrests. He does a great job at letting you see the dangers they were going through at the time. Nothing was a simple as it seems. They always had to be on their toes or otherwise they could wind up dead.

Although there are moments where you read and wonder how these cops got away with some of the unethical methods, the other is also talks about how proud he was of his members of his department because they didn't have the shoot to kill method like other police departments in the area. When faced with an armed assailant their first goal was to get them to drop the weapon and give themselves up. He also talks about how some members of his department were distraught when they actually did have to kill a suspect, showing that the cops were tough, but could still be effected by taking a life.

This novel is gritty, dark, and sometimes humorous. I am fan of true crime and also seeing things through the police's eyes, so I really enjoyed this book. This is one book I can highly recommend.

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### **Matt Atkinson says**

Amazing, in-depth and engrossing.

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### **Alicia says**

I won this book as part of the First Reads program. I hoped to win it, because I knew my father would love the book. I gave it to him as a birthday present, and he loved it. I am still in the process, but I know I need to write a review anyway. This is my first review, so it won't be all that amazing. I don't normally read non-fiction books, but so far this one is not bad. I don't like that this book was written out by someone else using

a man's recording. I would like to have had John either dictate or write out his experiences himself, so it would feel more personal. This reminds me too much of an extended newspaper article. The details are great. I can't stand to read a book with too few details, because I love to feel like I am with the character or person I am reading about. My father finished the whole book, and told me many of the stories John had to share were graphic and at times gut-wrenching. I have to say this novel is overall worth reading. It allows you to really see how hard it is to be a cop, and especially at such a dangerous time in that particular neighborhood.

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### **Terence says**

Having grown up in southern California, I was interested to read this account of crime fighting in Compton. This book is as much a cultural history of the city as it is a cop memoir. Compton, founded by Mormons, went from an all-white city, to one that was 95% African-American, to one that is now 55% Hispanic. Author Rick Baker himself represents that mix, with caucasian father, a hispanic mother, and an upbringing that found him in the thick of black culture. Baker has a healthy ego, and at times his story comes off as one of a super cop, though to his credit, he doesn't shy away from his own blemishes. To emphasize his overall theme that the "Compton style" of bending the law to keep order in a city with 130 cops and 10,000 gang members, Baker depicts the often gruesome underbelly of the city. Picture the most disturbing R-rated cop movie you've ever seen, double the action and triple the stomach-turning details, and you have this book. It is an often fascinating collection of anecdotes with occasional stylistic flourishes (such as comparing a police chief who tried to maintain his own loyal entourage to King Lear).

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### **Susan Olesen says**

While I understand the dangers, disgust, and mentality involved in policework, I am appalled by the admissions of blatant abuse, politics, graft, and criminal behavior of the Compton Police Department. I understand their desperation at times, the lack of support, and the horrific conditions they had to work in - I get that, and I get that at times when dealing with criminals rules don't apply - but I am deeply disturbed by much of it.

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### **Stephan says**

Sgt Baker handled police work in the manner of "compton style", which involved covering up accidental murders involving fellow police officers, threatening to "shoot the faces off" many hardcore gangbangers, and admitting to always carrying a "drop weapon" to resolve any questionable police involved shootings. His time with the Compton PD was during an era of corrupted police procedures and politicians, so standard operating procedures like discharging weapons inside a strip club while intoxicated and sleeping with suspected murderers girlfriends to gain information was the norm. The book itself is a fast paced read full of machismo stories and "attaboys!". I'm not a cop, so maybe I missed the point, or maybe it's a point I'll never understand, but I hope current police officers don't conduct themselves in a similar matter.

I do appreciate his honesty.

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## **Jen says**

I received this book for free book through First Reads. I thought it was a great book. The writing was very descriptive and at times I could picture what was happening. I have 2 family members who are police officers and while their day to day may not be exactly like what Compton was like, it does make you appreciate the work these officers do each day. The only thing I would have liked is a map of Compton. I have never been and could only try to picture in my head with the descriptions of the streets and neighborhoods, where things were happening. It would have been helpful to have a map to reference. Aside from that though, the entire account was amazing and the writing was very good and descriptive.

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## **Jon Thompson says**

The past will dictate the future.

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## **Shannon Evans says**

This book really tells the story of how Compton was back in 1970 & thru 1980. I personally have know Mr. Baker, now for 35 years & there is nothing phony, or made up in this book, or in Mr. Baker, he speaks the truth & to most people they can't even imagine what the dirty dozen went thru, to protect themselves & most of all the people in Compton.

Back in those days Compton was like another world, I can remember Mrs. Baker wrapping a scarf around my blond hair, when I would have to drive thru Compton.

Mr. Baker never brought his police work home with him. That was another side of him I never knew. He never told his family the danger he was in. He was amazing at hiding that part of his life from his family.

I remember when Mr. Baker was running from one club to another chasing women. That did become his drug, his escape from life on the streets of Compton. He was never able to have a true relationship with a women. His relationship was with Compton, & that made it hard for any women compete with.

S.J.E.

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## **Patrick O'Neil says**

There are two problematic and unforgivable issues with *Vice: One Cop's Story of Patrolling America's Most Dangerous City*.

One: a craft issue. Stephen J. Rivele, wrote this book using recordings of Sgt. John R. Baker telling his story. And the problem with using a person's narrative is that people tend to repeat themselves and it is the writer/editor's job to keep it to a minimum so the reader isn't constantly given the same information and

phrasing over and over and over again. Unfortunately Rivele didn't do this, or for some reason thought it a good idea to keep them in. The phrase: "Compton style" as in this was how we did it "police work Compton style." Or this was "justice Compton style" is nonstop continuous. Also instances, such as where Baker refers to the same killing (a homicide where a man killed his wife because she didn't cook his beans correctly) several times (I counted at least three times) as an example of how minor an incident need be in order to justify a killing. I mean really there had to be other references to use. Repeating the same information is annoying and could have easily been avoided – especially as this information wasn't that pertinent and the author should trust the reader to be able to remember. And finally the author's constant reliance on the formula of using a lead in describing certain problems or incidents and then saying: "like this one case," or "I'll never for get this case" etc. etc. Again, over used, repetitive.

Second: Sgt. John R. Baker. Not surprisingly I was not enamored with Sgt. Baker. I really didn't think I was going to be. I am used to reading "tell all memoirs" by thugs, mafia hit man, and nefarious squealers in witness protection programs where they almost always have a certain braggart air to their stories of murders and larceny – as if one should be in awe of what a bad ass they were. Although I figured Baker's would be in reverse, I wasn't prepared for his inability to take responsibility for propagating the atmosphere and perpetual state of violence his type of "police work" instigates in a community. That Compton was a violent arena full of killers and criminals isn't surprising when those who were sworn to uphold the law were as corrupt as the criminals. Nor was it surprising to read Baker justifying himself and his actions – such as his working as a police liaison at a drug rehab and having sexual relations with his clients – his excuse being there were no rules saying he couldn't. Yet obviously sex worker/prostitutes trying to get off drugs would be highly venerable while in rehab and then here's this person who is supposed to be helping them but instead is exploiting them for sex. Same with Baker's political tinged and denouncing rhetoric concerning the Black Panthers and other black power organizations of the 60's. Obviously he holds them in greater contempt than the lethal gangbangers because he found their ideology threatening. His consequent description of his and other Compton police's violent actions towards these organizations doesn't exactly read like the police were just doing their jobs. It reads more like a marked vendetta. I understand that police work is hard. I'm not saying that it's easy, that mistakes can't be made, that I, or anyone else, when faced with the environment of Compton could have done any better. What I am saying is that acknowledging one's role in the greater scheme of it all is more than bragging rights. And Baker's taking some responsibility would have been welcomed.

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**a.t.m. says**

### **Old school cop defends his old school approach to law enforcement.**

Tough read about crime in a small city plagued by gangs of every type. murderers, rapists, drug dealers, and thieves of every type abounded and street justice had to be administered to save lives and make arrests. I wonder why the author would publish this book, as the names and violent encounters mentioned, would only tend to hurt everyone involved. The author definitely attempts to portray himself as a crusader, but, he also paints himself as having issues with sex. Complicated book, complicated man, and, yet, has survived through it all. I recommend it.

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