

**Ear Hustle**  
**"Articles of Hustle"**  
**June 7, 2023**

**Avery:** The following episode of Ear Hustle contains language that might not be appropriate for all listeners. Discretion is advised.

**Speaker:** 1991, section 3030B. Each inmate shall be issued, A, work shoes, one pair. B, shower thongs, one pair. C, sheets, two. D, pillowcase, one. E, towels, two. F, blankets, two.

**Avery:** I actually don't know what the uniforms in San Quentin are currently. Like what are they?

**Earlonne:** I remember it being like a khaki type of pants with some type of khaki type of shirt, no belts, just--

**Nigel:** Khaki?

**Avery:** What are you talking about?

**Nigel:** I thought it was blue.

**Lonnie:** [crosstalk]

**Earlonne:** Ain't khaki-- I'm talking about them little parachute pants they gave you--

[crosstalk]

**Nigel:** That's jeans.

**Earlonne:** Bruh.

**Speaker:** That's [crosstalk] jean.

**Nigel:** I love that there's three people that have three different ideas of what people wear in prison.

[laughter]

[quirky music ends]

**Earlonne:** So, Avery, did we clear that up for you?

**Avery:** Not at all.

**Nigel:** Oh, my God. And seriously, Earlonne, you were in prison for 20 plus years.

**Earlonne:** Right. And our friend, Lonnie Morris, who was in his studio, he did like 44 years.

**Nigel:** Right. And I've been going into San Quentin for over 10 years. And so, describing what guys wear inside, honest to God, should not be as complicated.

**Avery:** Right. And the interesting thing about it when I went off and did some research is that I assumed that prison uniforms were super static. Like I had this idea of what they were in my mind, but they've changed so much over time and over history to reflect like what we've thought prisons should be.

**Earlonne:** Yeah. We should probably let our listeners know who you are.

**Avery:** Okay. Okay.

**Nigel:** And what the heck we're doing here.

**Avery:** My name's Avery Trufelman. I host a podcast on Radiotopia about fashion called Articles of Interest. And can I ask y'all to introduce yourselves?

**Earlonne:** Sure. I'm Earlonne Woods. I am the cohost of Ear Hustle.

**Nigel:** Ear Hustle brings you the everyday life in prison told by those living it and post incarceration.

**Earlonne:** Damn, you're good.

**Avery:** Yeah, amazing.

**Nigel:** And I'm Nigel Poor, I'm the other cohost. For this episode, we are collaborating to explain what they actually wear today in prisons in the US and how it got that way.

**Avery:** Can I ask you to tell me where we are right now?

**Sherrill:** Oh, we are Tanya Bonakdar Gallery in New York. Tanya represents me.

**Earlonne:** I did not expect to start things off in a New York gallery.

**Avery:** Honestly, me neither. But I really wanted to reach out to this artist, Sherrill Roland. And so, I met up with him at the fancy gallery in the meat packing district that represents him. And we were surrounded by sculptures by Sarah Sze, and photographs by Uta Barth and Gillian Wearing, like really big deal artists in this gallery.

**Nigel:** Wait a minute. I got to jump in here because you're mentioning some of my art heroes here. Like Gillian Wearing? Amazing. Uta Barth?

**Avery:** Yeah. This is a really avantgarde conceptual art gallery.

**Nigel:** Okay. I cannot wait to hear how you're going to tie this into prison uniforms.

**Avery:** You'll see. [chuckles] The story starts back when Sherrill was in art school. Sherrill was in the middle of his two-year MFA Program when right in the middle of it, he disappeared. He was gone for almost a year. And none of his classmates knew where he had went or what happened. It's like he just been raptured up. And then one day, just as quickly as he left, he came back. When he was back at school this time, it felt really different. He couldn't feel comfortable there the way he used to.

**Sherrill:** *Looking at the student body and their faces, I think at the time, what I had really noticed was the safety of that environment, that students possessed in their joy that I didn't have. Like the joy of just being in an environment where you're encouraged to learn. There's new people. It was just like, "I don't want to meet and talk to people. I don't want to share about myself." It was just the complete polar opposite of this environment, and it was just very obvious. And I was not necessarily jealous but just seeing like, "Man, I don't feel safe in the one place that made you feel really safe, the last place that I had known to feel safe."*

**Avery:** *He couldn't tell any of the other students, but Sherrill had gone away because he had been in jail.*

**Sherrill:** *I was wrongfully incarcerated during my two-year program there. Served a full amount of time, came back into the world, and I had the idea to return to school. So, showing up after being [snaps finger] taken out of it, they had no idea.*

**Avery:** After Sherrill returned to school, he couldn't tell anyone where he had been. It was like he had this secret.

**Sherrill:** *My legal counsel was telling me not to tell anybody. It was tough, for lack of a better word, but it was very tough to do that.*

**Avery:** Eventually, after that first year, Sherrill did get his record cleared. And so, you can imagine, it was a huge relief to not carry this secret all the time and he could finally tell everyone where he had disappeared to and what had happened.

But Sherrill didn't want to reveal it little by little in small-talk conversations. He wanted to tell everyone exactly where he had been, and he wanted to do it in a way that only an artist could. He turned it into his work. It became a performance. Sherrill decided to live under the rules and conditions he had lived under while he was in jail.

**Sherrill:** So, I moved as a student, but under the rules of the jail, I was housing in Washington DC. So, those rules applied, just kind of juxtaposing both environments on top of each other.

**Avery:** What's an example?

**Sherrill:** My art department is my housing unit. And my graduate studio is like my cell. So anytime I went to the school library or the school gym, I had to report straight there. There was no deviating from the path, there was no stopping to talk.

**Avery:** So, people would be like, "Hey, Sherrill," and you're like--

**Sherrill:** Just be like, "Hey, you got to walk with me." And that inconvenience obviously rubbed people the wrong way because out in the free world it's like, "Why can't you stop and talk?"

**Avery:** And the most overt part of this project, the part that made Sherrill really stand out from the other art students was that Sherrill was always wearing a bright orange jumpsuit, which attracted attention immediately.

**Sherrill:** There were people who ran from me. I got cars honking at me.

**Avery:** I mean, Sherrill wasn't surprised. He knew this would get him noticed. He knew he had to cover his bases.

**Sherrill:** Before I even started this project, we spent having introductory introduction meetings to campus police and patrolling regional city police for my safety. Like, "This is what I'm about to do. So, people, don't call the police on me." So, the campus police was like, "It needs to say art project." I was like, "No, that ambiguity needs to be there. People have to wrestle with what they are seeing, what they are experiencing."

**Avery:** And Sherrill knew this was powerful, that the symbol was so potent so immediately that everyone knew what this jumpsuit was supposed to mean, even though it was just a jumpsuit that happened to be orange. It wasn't even a real prison jumpsuit.

**Sherrill:** The jumpsuit is not real. I got it off Amazon.

**Avery:** Oh, it's not an actual--

**Sherrill:** No. And that was also kind of like the point that injecting it into this space caused so much of a ruckus and fear, that there was nothing illegal about me wearing this orange jumpsuit.

**Avery:** I got to ask, when you bought it on Amazon, was it like "prison uniform"? How was it sold?

**Sherrill:** *It was a coverall. It came in many different colors. Anybody can buy this jumpsuit that I'm wearing. But when I wear it in this, I have to let the police know. I do believe it's because of color of my skin. Why am I a threat? I'm just a student like everybody else. I just so happen to be wearing this orange jumpsuit.*

**Avery:** And so, everybody around him, everybody on campus knew what Sherrill was getting at just by wearing this jumpsuit that happened to be orange. They knew this was supposed to be a prison outfit, even though there is no such thing as a prison outfit. There's no one prison outfit.

**Earlone:** Yeah, you don't really see orange jumpsuits at San Quentin at all. I mean, people wear them at intake, but then they get assigned to prison blues.

**Nigel:** Which are pretty much like scrubs, like what you'd see in a hospital.

**Earlone:** Pretty much.

**Nigel:** Like the blue top and blue bottom--[crosstalk]

**Avery:** And it has a V-neck.

**Nigel:** Okay. The funny thing is, I've seen V necks and scoop necks.

**Avery:** But you don't get to choose presumably.

**Nigel:** I don't get to choose. Maybe a crew neck, scoop might be making it too fancy. Maybe it's like a crew neck.

**Avery:** But these are two pieces, they're not a jumpsuit.

**Nigel:** Exactly. Two pieces for sure.

**Avery:** And I've heard of places where inmates wear khaki. It depends on if it's a federal or state prison, if it's a private prison, obviously, if it's a women's prison or a men's prison. There are a lot of factors that determine what the uniform is in any given facility. But the biggest factor is probably just what's cheap and available from the prison catalog.

**Emily:** *Okay, well, we need 200 quantity of pants in three different size parameters. Okay, here's the cheapest option. That's what I imagine the headspace is for the person that is ordering for their facility.*

**Avery:** That is Emily Rae Pellerin. She is a writer and a researcher and for her thesis, she studied prison uniforms. And she was the one who showed me the Bob Barker Catalog.

**Emily:** *It's like Lands' End. They're shipping them out. It lands on the desk of the supervisor flipping through it.*

**Earlone:** Avery, can I hop in here with a question?

**Avery:** Of course, Earlone.

**Earlone:** I have always wondered this, is this guy that make the prison clothes, is this *The Price Is Right* Bob Barker?

[chuckles]

**Nigel:** Okay, I looked it up, and it's not. I'm sorry. It's disappointing.

**Avery:** Yeah, it's a different guy named Bob Barker. But I mean I don't know, maybe this Barker is in some circles more famous, this is maybe the premiere catalog that prison administrators, especially where I live, on the East Coast order from. Like, if you're running a prison, this has everything that you need. But anyone can go look at the Bob Barker catalog, they post a PDF on their site. Like, Emily showed it to me.

**Emily:** *Click here for this 2020 Bob Barker catalog. Yeah, look, clothing.*

**Avery:** *When Emily and I looked, there were pages and pages of prison clothes. Some on models, or most abstractly floating in space. And sure enough, almost everything came in orange, or at least had an option to come in orange.*

**Avery:** *So, there's -- yeah, orange two-piece. Here's an orange jumpsuit.*

**Emily:** *Knock-off Crocs in black and in orange.*

**Avery:** *Gym clothes, sweatshirt, sweatpants, thermal underwear.*

**Avery:** The Bob Barker Catalog even sells the uniforms for security guards and tools for the security guards.

**Emily:** *They have combat equipment, tasers, backgammon, like fun things for the commissary. And it's like jarring from just general consumer perspective to see this document that contains all of those items at once.*

**Nigel:** Okay, Earlone, so you knew Bob Barker from being in prison, right?

**Earlone:** I mean, I didn't know Bob Barker.

**Nigel:** Not personally? [laughs]

**Earlonne:** But everyone had Bob Barker jeans, it was like Levi's. You would see the emblem on the buttons. And there wasn't that many jeans inside prison. So, any state jeans technically was Bob Barker's.

**Nigel:** So, he was getting money from a lot of people.

**Earlonne:** He was making dope. But he's not the only one that's supplying uniforms to prisons.

**Nigel:** Right. So, the other day I was in San Quentin, a lot of young guys hanging out. I asked them who made the clothes they were wearing right then.

**Nigel:** *Can you look at the label on your clothes and tell me what it says?*

**Ryan:** *New Era. Mine is-*

**Sam:** *A4.*

**Ryan:** *A4.*

**Nigel:** *But does it say where it's made?*

**Sam:** *China.*

**Ryan:** *Hmm, probably.*

**Nigel:** *What about in your pants? What does it say in the pants?*

**Ryan:** *Made in US.*

**Sam:** *Oh, CALPIA.*

**Ryan:** *Oh, prison industry pants.*

**Nigel:** *Okay. Can you describe what PIA is?*

**Ryan:** *PIA, it's called Prison Industry Authority. And they use inmate labor to make clothing, sheets, all kinds of products, mattresses, you name it.*

**Avery:** But does that actually mean that some of the uniforms made by PIA could be made at least in part in San Quentin?

**Earlonne:** They could if San Quentin have a garment section. You have places like, I think, CMC that makes clothes, the t-shirts, the socks, the blues, the PIA system do different things.

**Avery:** They're what, CMC?

**Earlonne:** CMC is the California Men's Colony. It's in San Luis Obispo.

**Nigel:** *Out of all the clothes that you're wearing, what is PIA and what's not PIA? for you, Ryan, first.*

**Ryan:** *My pants are PIA. My shoes are Vans.*

**Tony:** *My jeans are not jeans, but they're the blue pants that look like jeans. They're made at PIA, USA.*

**Earlonne:** So, if all you've got is prison-issue clothes, chances are you're going to be wearing a lot of PIA shit.

**Nigel:** Right. And you can totally tell PIA clothes because they have a very clear sign on them. They all have stamped in yellow writing, down the side of their pant leg and on the back of the shirt, "CDCR Prisoner."

**Earlonne:** Which stands for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Prisoner, it's their prisoner. So, if somehow you managed to bust out of prison, you'd have a real hard time fitting into society. That's the thinking.

**Nigel:** Yeah, but I mean nobody wants to have to wear clothes with "prisoner" stamped on it. And I know we have talked about this before on our show, Earlonne, but there are definitely guys inside who sew up their pants and change them to hide that big CDCR that's written on the side of the pant. And it's against the rules, but obviously people do it anyway.

**Avery:** Like they patch it up? How do they hide it?

**Nigel:** I don't know exactly how they do it. I don't know if they take two pairs of pants and sew two left legs together. I'm not quite sure.

**Avery:** Because it's only on one leg.

**Earlonne and Nigel:** It's only on one leg.

**Nigel:** It's the right or the left.

**Earlonne:** So, you might have two left legs.

[chuckles]



**Avery:** It's a brand. It's like a logo on the outside, which is a callback to some of the earliest forms of prison uniform, and I'm talking about when prison uniforms first emerged in England in the 1800s, those prison uniforms were stamped entirely from head to toe in this one symbol.

**Juliet:** *It was firstly, the symbol in the 14th century that sheep had burnt on their bodies so that sheep didn't wander off royal land.*

**Avery:** Literally branded like a sheep. The logo is of this very wide arrow that almost looks like an open-ended triangle. And this was stamped all over the uniforms, and therefore, all over prisoners' bodies. It was called the "Broad Arrow."

**Juliet:** *So, it is just exactly like it says, a broad arrow.*

**Avery:** Former dress historian and professor emerita of the Royal College of Art, Juliet Ash is the author of the *Dress Behind Bars*, which is sort of the definitive book on this. And really, even though it might seem a bit degrading to be branded like a sheep, these were, at least, new clean clothes. The institution of uniforms was supposed to be this progressive, benevolent thing. It was better than the system that prisons had before.

**Juliet:** *It was called "malign neglect," which is basically, you went in the clothes that you were wearing when you were convicted.*

**Avery:** Which could be literally anything.

**Juliet:** *And so, it could be rags. If you were an aristocrat, it could be silk garments and clothing. But prison visitors in the 18th century in England and also in America saw inmates just half naked.*

**Avery:** Therefore, the introduction of uniforms was part of a larger attempt to clean up the penitentiary system, to make prisons more sanitary, sure, but also to turn prisons into well-oiled machines.

**Juliet:** *It was meant to be a reform, like Bentham's model prison where conditions of prisons were meant to get better. They were more regulated and disciplined. And therefore, the uniform was part of this regulation both in America and in Britain.*

**Avery:** So, in the UK, this tightened up regulation looked like the broad arrow. And in the US, it looked like the black and white stripes. Which if you pretend, you're living in the 1860s, men did not dress that way. They were not wearing these big bold patterns. This was an unusual outfit.

**Juliet:** *Both the black and white stripes and the broad arrow were in Oscar Wilde's words who was in Reading prison for some time, prisoners became laughable to the outside world.*

**Avery:** They were a bit clownish looking. That was part of the punishment.

**Juliet:** *And that became then part of what films used prison uniforms as laughable characters like Buster Keaton or Charlie Chaplin, who were often in broad arrows or black and white stripes.*

**Avery:** And so, the black and white stripes lived on in American films and cartoons long after they were largely removed from the prison population.

**Juliet:** *After the iconic prison uniform was abolished in the 1920s in America and Britain, then there were types of regulatory dress control.*

**Avery:** Then, there was this move that was like, "Okay, what if we didn't make clothes overtly humiliating, and instead made them more constructive? What if we connected them directly to a system of good behavior?" So, in the UK, the uniforms became more like military uniforms, with little marks on the arm for good behavior and higher rankings.

**Juliet:** *What happened in America after the black and white stripes, there was a sort of regulatory system of clothing inmates according to the crimes that they committed, and also according to good or bad behavior inside so that there was a whole color-coded system.*

**Avery:** And one of the colors assigned to people who weren't following prison rules was bright orange.

**Juliet:** *Wearing orange became identifiable with bad behavior and criminality. And that's where I think the orange derived from. As far as the jumpsuit is concerned, I think it's very easy and cheap to produce. It's an all in one.*

**Avery:** That all-in-one quality makes the jumpsuit unusually punishing for different groups. Like, for some religions, women aren't supposed to wear pants at all. And also, you have to take it all the way off to go to the bathroom. You have to get completely naked. And there's the fact that wearing a jumpsuit, or really any prison uniform for that matter, automatically brands you as someone who has committed a criminal offense. And this is what led to the movement against uniforms, which is what brings us back to San Quentin and to the Black Panthers.

**Juliet:** *As far as the Black Panthers were concerned, in San Quentin and Folsom prisons, they considered themselves to be political prisoners and didn't want to be identified as criminals whatsoever in prisons. So, they wanted to have political status, which would mean wearing their own clothes.*

**Avery:** So, this has been a longstanding thing. Political prisoners, around the world, have always asserted that they should not have to wear prison uniforms.

**Juliet:** *It had been going on in Ireland for a long time, over the 19th century.*

**Avery:** Irish Republicans who wanted to be free from British Imperialism did not want to have the branding of the crown, the broad arrow, marked all over their body.

**Juliet:** *They considered they should be in their own clothes during the 19th century, and that carried on into the 20th century. And then, that was taken up by a lot of other organizations, like the Suffragettes in England in the 1920s and also Black Panthers in America.*

**Avery:** All of these groups, the Irish Republicans, Suffragists, the Black Panthers, they were like, "I'm being punished me for who I am. And I could never possibly be reformed." They argued that as political prisoners, they should be allowed to wear their own clothes.

**Juliet:** *When they went on hunger strikes and they had peaceful sit-ins in Folsom Prison and San Quentin Prison, they were treated very roughly.*

**Avery:** And so, the Panthers helped fuel an international movement around prison uniforms, and led to many countries wondering if they should get rid of them.

**Juliet:** *Organizations sprung up in England called PROP, the prisoners union and then in Sweden there was KRUM, which is a reform organization, when the reforms happened in the 1970s and 1980s, taking away the uniform was quite an important re-establishment of people's own identities.*

**Avery:** You two have visited prisons in different countries fairly recently, right?

**Earlone:** Yeah.

**Nigel:** Mm-hmm.

**Earlone:** Norway, London.

**Nigel:** London.

**Avery:** What were they wearing? What did their clothes look like?

**Nigel:** In England as far as I remember, they wear uniforms. There was nothing that was that different from California. But in Norway, it went both ways. We were in one prison, Earlone, where dudes wore uniforms, but in another, people wore their own clothes.

**Avery:** Yeah, so it not a given. In many prisons, there are no uniforms at all. And a few different places have experimented with making them optional, including San Quentin.

**Lonnie:** *Then, I got to San Quentin, if you didn't want to wear no prison clothing, wouldn't nobody tripping.*

**Avery:** *But how would you get new clothes?*

**Lonnie:** *You bought them.*

**Earlone:** Before we got there, San Quentin was known for people wearing all their regular stuff.

**Nigel:** Okay, well we'll get into that--

**Avery:** After the break, why the uniforms went away and why they came back.

[break]

**Earlone:** I had heard about these times, back in the day, when people in prison could actually wear their own clothes.

**Avery:** Like from their closets, like their own clothes.

**Earlone:** Yep.

**Nigel:** Yeah. It reminds me of those San Quentin archive photographs-- remember those?

**Earlone:** Yeah.

**Nigel:** The 1970s, there's this beautiful photograph. This guy in a three-piece suit holding this little kid that's wearing like the same outfit. You can't even tell that they're in prison.

**Earlone:** This was when I was an infant.

**Nigel:** A teeny tiny? [laughs]

**Earlone:** This was way before my time. But our friend, Lonnie Morris, was there for this era of San Quentin.

**Nigel:** Right. And you heard him at the top of the show being confused about what people actually wear in California prisons. Lonnie got to San Quentin in the late 70s, right around the time they started allowing people to have personal clothing there.

**Earlone:** Yep, and you could have whatever clothes you wanted sent to you.

**Lonnie:** *So back then, your family could literally send you packages. So, I could get my girl, my sister, my brother, whoever, put a package together, man, put this shirt in there, put this jacket in there, and they ship it to you. I had street shoes, everything.*

**Nigel:** *What would you be wearing?*

**Lonnie:** *Well, sweaters, you still had to have jeans, but they could be Levi's, not prison jeans. Jackets, shirts, any of that.*

**Nigel:** *Any color?*

**Lonnie:** *Any color. Yeah, any color.*

**Nigel:** *Patterns, you could have--[crosstalk]*

**Lonnie:** *Any patterns. There were no restrictions on any of that.*

**Nigel:** Earlonne, I'm curious what you think of this, but to me, the idea of seeing guys inside in these colors and patterns is mind blowing because all I think of is blue when I go in there. A sea of blue.

**Earlonne:** I was just thinking of seeing cats in platforms.

**Nigel:** I would love that.

[laughter]

**Earlonne:** *So, why do I have a picture in my head of like silk and nylon, butterfly collars, bell bottoms, platforms?*

**Lonnie:** *I mean, that was some people move but not mine.*

**Nigel:** *If you wanted to, you could've had on like a three-piece suit?*

**Lonnie:** *Well, I had a two-piece jeans suit that I had tailor made in the prison because they also had a tailor shop in the prison at the time. Black folks, we got a special accent on dressing. So, among us, you always show your flavor, your style, and how you got it going on, as we say, by how you dress.*

**Nigel:** *But wait, laundry had to be different then, because you wouldn't be putting your personal clothes--?*

**Lonnie:** *No. They had dry cleaning.*

**Nigel:** *What?*

**Lonnie:** *Yes.*

**Nigel:** Like, you went there and you dropped it off and--[crosstalk]

**Lonnie:** So, you had your laundry man, so you had a guy that worked in the dry cleaners, and you'd pay him a fee a week to do your dry cleaning. You had a laundry man. He'd work in the laundry and you'd pay him a fee week to do your laundry.

**Nigel:** This was like above board?

**Lonnie:** Yeah, this was all above board. Now they actually had a dry cleaning that was allowed for incarcerated people to utilize.

**Nigel:** Did it come back with one of those plastic things over it?

**Lonnie:** [chuckles] Yes, it did. Yes. But if you're like me, I'm a regular customer. So, every Tuesday morning before breakfast, before we go to work, "Hey, man, have your stuff bagged up." "This is what I got." You know what I'm saying?

**Nigel:** He would pick it up?

**Lonnie:** Yeah, he'd pick it up. Yeah, he'd take it in.

**Nigel:** Ever get your stuff dry cleaned at San Quentin?

**Earlone:** Nah, they don't have the dry cleaning. They got this other little laundry system where they give you these laundry bags, they're like net bags. You throw your stuff in there, they throw it over the tier, it goes to this big industrial something and then if you're lucky, it come back.

**Nigel:** But everything's washed in the bag?

**Earlone:** In the bag, it don't come out the bag.

**Nigel:** Mm-hmm. Do you think that being able to wear your own clothes put you in a different state of mind or did you just take it for granted because that's what everybody was doing?

**Lonnie:** No. Most definitely, wearing your own clothes made you feel like you had some ownership over your personhood.

**Nigel:** Then, in the mid-80s, while those clothing reforms were still going on elsewhere, California Corrections decided it was time to tighten up the rules around what you could wear inside.

**Lonnie:** We were informed that they were going to take our personal clothing and our personal property because the Department of Corrections was going in a different direction and changing the policies about what we could have in terms of personal properties, including clothing.

**Nigel:** Was there buzz about it happening? Or did one day, they just say--

**Lonnie:** No, there was a buzz. There had been an ongoing issue with people having too much clothes, safety concerns. So, part of their logic was, "Well, how do we tell these guys from the volunteers? How do we tell them from an administrator?" And all that kind of stuff. So, they used that as part of the justification. And then, the other thing was how much property you can have. And then the other part was we need to keep people in uniformed outfits so that everybody would know who's who and what's what. And so, "We put them all in the same kind of outfits, we'll know who they are." All those things started becoming a reason for, "We need to crack down on these guys, they got way too much freedom."

**Speaker:** 1980, inmates may possess only those items of personal clothing authorized by the warden or superintendent and as property acquired in accordance with institution procedures.

**Lonnie:** So, the warden had made an announcement that all personal clothing, all personal property that was not state-issue property was going to have to be sent home or they would be confiscated, and they sent a memo out to that effect. We had a big meeting in the north block cafeteria. And the warden came down, his name was George Sumners. We call him Big George. 300, 400 people showed up, and the warden proceeded to telling us, that it was out of his hands. This was coming down from Sacramento. He had held them off as long as he could but we are at the stage now where I've got to enforce this.

**Earlone:** They were going to come around and search the cells for all the outside clothes.

**Lonnie:** And we walked out to the yard, and we decided, "Man, we're going to protest." Our thing was, "We ain't going nowhere until you let us keep our clothes and keep our property." So, we had like a 45-minute standoff. And then, at some point, they said, "Hey, man, this is your last warning," kind of thing. And then, they brought the guns and told us that if we didn't lock up, they were going to shoot us off the yard essentially. I mean, they may have used those words but that's what they were saying. It all starts off with a few hundred people. [laughs]

**Nigel:** Just standing there.

**Lonnie:** [crosstalk] -about 10 or 15 of us standing on the yard and we like, "Bro, what're we going do, man?" And it just so happened that 10 or 15 were all black. So, I think that might have something to do with our affinity with our clothes and our desire to be dressed. We're willing to be dressed until the death. [laughs] But guys were really willing to die on the yard to get shot. Maybe not die, get shot though, for sure. People understood the importance of being able to have something that gave you some personal identity.

**Earlone:** Finally, courts ruled. Guys in San Quentin could keep their clothes.

**Nigel:** But then-

**Lonnie:** *A few years later, they came up with this thing that, "We can't take the clothes from you, but you can't wear them anywhere." Police literally told me, "You can wear your street clothes in your cell. But when you step outside that cell, you got to have CDCR clothes on."*

**Nigel:** *So, when you had just your clothes and you could only wear them in the cell, were there any times that you just put them on to feel good?*

**Lonnie:** *I did. [laughs] No, it's crazy you asked that. I did used to do that, man. I just get dressed up in my cell. You ain't got no big mirror, but look at myself in the mirror, then look at me and me prancing around my cell with my little outfits on. I mean, you got to do things that keep you alive, man. Your spirit alive. Not just your physical body, but your spirit alive. So, a lot of that stuff was about that, I think.*

**Nigel:** *I loved this conversation, Earlonne. I could just see him in his cell, like delicately prancing around a little bit, feeling really good about himself.*

**Earlonne:** *Definitely. Just looking at himself in the mirror, probably talking to the mirror, thinking he in the club. Mm-hmm.*

**Nigel:** *I would do the same thing.*

**Earlonne:** *I mean, it's a fantasy. You got to live outside them walls. It's a fantasy.*

**Nigel:** *Okay. So, thinking about what Lonnie had to say, we started wondering if guys could have one outfit to wear that wasn't a uniform, what would it be?*

**Earlonne:** *Two of our inside producers, Tony and Sadiq, took that question out to the yard.*

**Tony:** *Look, there's our first victim. Vernon?*

**Sadiq:** *Clothes in prison.*

**Nigel:** *We're working on a story about clothes in prison. I just want to ask you, if you can have any one outfit to wear in prison, from head to toe, all the details?*

**Vernon:** *I'm going to say a suit.*

**Nigel:** *Details. Details, my man.*

**Vernon:** *[laughs] I'm out of my element, let's see, gray. [crosstalk] -with lines.*

**Nigel:** *Yeah, I notice you're wearing a 49ers necklace. Would the necklace work with this outfit?*



**Vernon:** *The necklace works with every outfit.*

**Nigel:** *And can you just say your name please?*

**Vernon:** *My name is Vernon Evans.*

**Nigel:** *Thanks, Vernon. Appreciate it.*

**Vernon:** *Thank you. You guys have a good day.*

**Speaker:** *I would have to say Louis Vuitton everything. Back in the days when we used to flood, flooding is in now. So, I'll show a little skin on my ankles with no socks on with some nice Louis Vuitton loafers handmade from Italy.*

**Tony:** *So, would you have any jewelry on or accessories, the hat or shades or anything?*

**Speaker:** *Yes, I would. More than likely I would wear my trinkets that I plan on creating made out of gold, rose gold or platinum with diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires. Y'all better not steal my idea either.*

**Speaker:** *Oh, man I'd have to go with good boots that are actually waterproof, so when I walk through the giant puddles from H unit, then my feet don't get wet, and they're not wet all day.*

**Tony:** *Is there any brand that you like of these clothes?*

**Speaker:** *Well, I might as well go with some Red Wings.*

*[laughter]*

**Speaker:** *As long as we're dreaming, let's go big, right?*

**Tony:** *Yeah.*

**Speaker:** *Man, I've been in here for almost 25 years, let me see. I bought some 501 relaxed fit Levi's with some Oxford colored brown leather boots with leather laces, and maybe a nice soft cotton plaid Pendleton shirt.*

**Tony:** *What kind of shoes would you like with that?*

**Speaker:** *Red Wing.*

*[laughter]*

**Tony:** *Another Red Wing.*

**Akem:** My name is [unintelligible [00:37:23] Wade. But my identity name is Akem HaruHumona.

**Sadiq:** All right, if you can have any outfit from head toe in prison, what would it be?

**Akem:** If I can have a nice, smooth flannel-type fit with some nice open-toe gold-colored tan sandals and a nice fedora.

**Sadiq:** Can you state your name?

**Michael:** Michael Adams.

**Sadiq:** Okay, Michael Adams, if you could pick any outfit in prison that you can wear besides your blues, what would it be from head to toe, colors, everything?

**Michael:** Wow, that's crazy. I wouldn't have anything on my head because I think the bald thing is working for me right now. I would probably want to wear a vested suit, probably cream colored with a maroon tie, the slacks and a nice pair of Florsheims.

**Sadiq:** Florsheims. That's something I never heard of. Can you explain what Florsheims are?

**Michael:** Florsheim is a style of shoe. Might be old school, [laughs] like a Stacy Adams, but it's a style of shoes kind of as a throwback till like the 40s. That's what I would do. And I probably have my little bling, my watch, and maybe a nice chain and tie pin, that'd be about it.

**Speaker:** Fantasy outfit and Armani suit. Well, I've never actually worn an Armani suit. I used to see people going back and forth to work and dress very nicely and dressed for work, and I always thought that that's what I should be doing.

**Speaker:** I want some retro Jordans.

**Sadiq:** Okay.

**Speaker:** A cream color suit, a bow tie with checkers on it, kind of like ice cream man, [chuckles] And like a silk shirt with the bow tie.

**Tony:** That's what I'm talking about.

**Speaker:** With the fedora though with the feather.

**Speaker:** Since I'm a fashionista, I like to change three times a day. My ideal outfit would be-- it'd be a romper or a jumpsuit or any type of thing like that with some nice little heels, if not, like, some cute wedges or something like that. Or maybe some Doc Martens boots, since I see the boys around here walking around in boots.

**Nigel:** So, what changed for you personally, when you couldn't have your own clothes anymore?

**Lonnie:** It was devastating, man. I mean, for a guy that likes to dress, I've always liked to dress, and so for me to be deprived of that was really, really devastating. And so, I started trying to find a workaround.

**Nigel:** Lonnie spent nearly 30 more years in San Quentin after those events he told us about earlier, those protests around personal clothing.

**Earlone:** And in that time, the uniforms that he and other incarcerated people had to wear changed a few times. First, they were all blue. Then, the prison added the names on the clothing, like "CDCR prisoner" written down the pants leg and on the back of your shirts.

**Lonnie:** About that, I would never wear state-issue clothing with the CDCR on it. And I was able to basically keep that up for most of my time in prison.

**Earlone:** Like Lonnie had a gang of button-down shirts that probably was like on the last thread.

**Lonnie:** [crosstalk]

**Earlone:** Just due to attrition, they were see-through. They were like silk.

**Nigel:** I was like, "Man, I'm not wearing that CDCR stuff on me."

**Earlone:** So, Lonnie held on to the clothes he had.

**Nigel:** And he also had another tool, the intense sport of prison hand-me-downs.

**Lonnie:** And then guys going home, you got to catch some homeboys going home. "Let me see that shirt, bro. Oh, they ain't got no CDCR, let me have that, bro." I used to track dudes, "You going home, bro. Remember that jacket you got? That shirt you got, I buy that," all that kind of stuff.

**Earlone:** Yeah. But for sure, if you're one of those dudes in prison that has button downs and jeans, when you're going home or you're on your way out, people are at you like, "Bro, what're you doing with that shirt?"

**Earlone:** "What're you doing them with jeans? What're you doing them with boots? What're you doing?"

**Nigel:** Then in 2021, Lonnie wound up on the receiving end of that kind of attention, because after 43 years, he was finally going to be released from prison.

**Lonnie:** *Dudes are really clocking, "When're you getting out?" And then they're trying to sway you against giving the clothes that you promised to somebody to give to them. "But I'm your homeboy, you just met that dude in here," and all that kind of I went through all-- that jacket, oh, my Lord, they was at me about that jacket.*

**Earlone:** The jacket, legendary.

**Nigel:** Mm-hmm. It was the only jacket I ever saw him in.

**Earlone:** Yeah, held on to that thing.

**Nigel:** *Am I remembering correctly that your jean jacket had plaid inside of it?*

**Lonnie:** *The in lining?*

**Nigel:** Yes.

**Lonnie:** *Yeah, the in lining.*

**Earlone:** *That was personal.*

**Nigel:** *That had to be personal?*

**Lonnie:** *Yeah. That was a dicky.*

**Nigel:** *So that had to be pretty old.*

**Lonnie:** *Yeah, it was a little old. But again, because of that law that was stick--*

**Earlone:** *The grandfather rule?*

**Lonnie:** *Yeah, the grandfather rule, because of that, then they couldn't take my dicky.*

**Nigel:** *That's got to be the title.*

**Lonnie:** *[laughs]*

**Earlone:** *Couldn't get no more dickies.*

**Nigel:** *"No, don't take my dicky."*

*[laughter]*

**Earlonne:** *Of course, LonMo handed them down. We can't say to who, but he handed them down.*

**Lonnie:** *That's right.*

**Nigel:** *I remember there was a passionate struggle to get that.*

*But Lonnie left that signature jacket behind. And I'm guessing other stuff that reminded him of life inside.*

**Lonnie:** *When I got out of prison, initially, I vowed when I get out, I never going to wear jeans again. Never wear no blue jeans again in my life. And then, I didn't wear them for a year. I wanted all the fly colors, man. Give me variety of colors, and blue was not one of them.*

**Avery:** So, that emotional journey that Lonnie went through with jeans is sort of parallel opposite what happened to Sherrill, the artist. He knew he wanted to wear this orange jumpsuit as a statement, but he didn't want to feel that actual material on his skin again. That's really why he bought his prison uniform on Amazon rather than, say, the Bob Barker Catalog. Comparatively, the jumpsuit that Sherrill wore for his art piece was like luxurious.

**Sherrill:** *The one on Amazon was amazing. It had buttons, it had a zipper. Not only a zipper, it had a two-way zipper, which is highly functionable and great. So, you don't have to remove the entire coverall when you use the rest. It was just so nice. Like if I do have to do this, at least I'm going to be comfortable doing it.*

**Avery:** Although it's not like Sherrill was actually emotionally comfortable wearing this jumpsuit.

**Sherrill:** *Doing it for me was also personally hard. Even though the jumpsuit wasn't real, it was torturous to put on this garment that is daily reminder of the space that I just exited. Like, "Why am I doing this?" It got real tough. Wearing it every day became activism in a way for me to illuminate like every workday, I'm here on campus wearing this, somebody's going to trial, somebody's going to court. More bodies like me are getting in these cages and places.*

**Avery:** But it's also just so fascinating to subvert the meaning, to take this uniform and become the one who's unique and standing out.

**Sherrill:** *Yeah, exactly. And by all means, I wish anybody had their freedom to just be themselves and wear wherever they wanted to wear. I want the freedom to wear many things without being scrutinized or being feared, even though I'm not a threat.*

**Avery:** And that inability to wear whatever he wanted, both inside and outside jail was made very clear to Sherrill during a trip to New York where he presented the jumpsuit at an arts conference.

**Sherrill:** *I brought it in my backpack, changed in the restroom, came out, presented my project, went back to the restroom, changed out of it, put it in my backpack and left. And after leaving, I went out to the streets of New York, and I saw this young lady, she was white, and she had on the exact same jumpsuit. And I asked her, I was like, "I know where you got that jumpsuit. I know the brand. I can't believe you're wearing this. Why are you wearing this?" She was like, "Oh, I just got out," with a smile and a playful joke. And then, I was like, "Wow. This is so the opposite of all the things that I feel. You don't know what I just had to do to even wear this. And you're out here in New York streets just like breezing through town in this thing." Man, I would never--*

**Avery:** So, in his own life when he's not performing with the jumpsuit, Sherrill is really not one for a uniform.

**Sherrill:** *But I'm also an artist. Some people might be cool with wearing the same thing but for me, I like a little bit of spice and variety.*

**Avery:** But sometimes, as an artist, that's not the best for your clothes.

**Sherrill:** *Because some of my favorite sweatshirts, tracksuits or whatever, top and bottom, they have like resin on it. Like, things you can't wash out.*

**Avery:** Sherrill says a lot his artist friends have jumpsuits that they wear in the studio so they can get paint and resin all over their clothes. Something like a uniform.

**Sherrill:** *It dawned on me the other day. I was like, "I don't have one. I don't have an article of clothing that I just kind of go to work in, and it's terrible. Wow, I need to get it together. Maybe I do need a uniform."*

**Avery:** And Sherrill's considering it. He'd maybe even wear a jumpsuit. But definitely not an orange one. Like Lonnie said about jeans, it takes a while to unpair the clothes from the memories associated with them.

**Lonnie:** *About a year after I'd been out or close to it, the practical side started coming up. You just can't be dressed up all the time every day. [crosstalk] You can, but cost. And not only that, it's just not comfortable all the time. And so, I started thinking about the jeans thing and I was like, "Man, if refuse to get jeans, that means the lingering influence or impact of the prison is still controlling, dictating how I'm living my life as a free person. So, I'm not going to do that." And jeans feel good. So, I bought me a pair of jeans.*

**Nigel:** *What was it like the first time you put the jeans on?*

**Lonnie:** *You know what? It wasn't like I thought it was going to be. I thought I was going to have some kind of visceral reaction to it. But I didn't. They felt comfortable. And the first thing was, with me, it's always, "Do they fit good? Do they look good?" And the first pair I got fitted good and they looked good.*

**Avery:** May I ask, Earlonne, Nigel, what do you two wear when you go inside? What do you wear when you go into prison?

**Earlonne:** When I go in there, I dress up. I mean, I go up in that motherfucker on point.

**Nigel:** [laughs] Truly you do.

**Earlonne:** I'd probably be too flamboyant.

**Avery:** Like in what?

**Earlonne:** I probably be in there with Louis shoes on?

**Avery:** No way.

**Nigel:** Yeah, he always has them [crosstalk] see those a lot.

**Earlonne:** [crosstalk] Then I might even mix it up with some gang attire, but nobody knows because I got on Louis shoes.

**Nigel:** But you're always color coordinated.

**Earlonne:** I'm always color coordinated.

**Nigel:** From hat to socks.

**Earlonne:** That's me.

**Avery:** What do you wear, Nigel?

**Earlonne:** She color coordinates too.

**Nigel:** [laughs] I coordinate too but in a different way because I actually wear the same outfit every time I go in. I wear black jeans, a shirt and black button-up over that, and a pair of black sneakers.

**Avery:** I've seen you in the world before, that is extremely sedate. Nigel has incredible style and is very fearless.

**Nigel:** Oh, thank you.

**Earlone:** This low-key Nigel. This is her on the low.

**Nigel:** This is low-key me and it is very intentional because when I go into prison, really what I want to say with the way that I look is that, "You can always count on me. I'm always going to be the same person. I will always have the same outfit on." So, my uniform says, "I'm always going to show up and I'm always going to show up as the same person."

**Avery:** But what are Earlone's outfit saying, because you're saying something else too, right?

**Earlone:** Oh, I'm saying, "Just keep doing right, and you'll be wearing this in a minute." Because when I go in there, that's what I try to do. I know that it's an inspiration for others. Yeah, I try my best to be an inspiration to people.

**Nigel:** Yeah. I mean, I see how people light up.

**Earlone:** Oh, yeah.

**Nigel:** When they see you walk into yard. It's beautiful.

**Earlone:** They put themselves in my clothes.

**Avery:** Mm-hmm. Yeah. I mean, it's interesting that you're both sort of representing the two different approaches, like the pros and cons of having a uniform versus not having a uniform. And you're both saying really distinct things with your clothes. You're both projecting real messages with your clothes. Arguably, it's what we all sort of do in our daily life. It's just really, really finetuned.

**Nigel:** No, I would say that we both have the freedom to choose what we want our clothes to say when we go into prison. And that's the big difference, that we are making a choice through our selection.

**Earlone:** Well, I don't know. I think I wore the regular uniform too long just not to stand out.

**Nigel:** Yeah, I totally get that.

**Earlone:** Yeah.

**Avery:** This special combination episode of Articles of Interest and Ear Hustle was produced by me, Avery Trufelman.



**Nigel:** With me, Nigel Poor, Earlonne Woods, Bruce Wallace, and Amy Standen, with help from Rahsaan “New York” Thomas, Neroli Price.

**Earlonne:** And Tony Tafoya and Darrell Sadiq Davis inside San Quentin. This episode was sound designed and engineered by me, Earlonne Woods, and Avery Trufelman with help from Fernando Arruda.

**Nigel:** It features music by David Jassy, Antwan Williams, Earlonne Woods, and Darrell Sadiq Davis, and Rhae Royal.

**Earlonne:** Amy Standen edits the show, Shabnam Sigman is Ear Hustle’s managing producer, and Bruce Wallace is the executive producer.

**Nigel:** Thanks to Acting Warden Oak Smith.

**Avery:** Thanks also to Olivia Melkonian, Anna Sinfield, Mzwakhe Ndlovu, and Claire Mullen.

**Nigel:** And as you know, every episode of Ear Hustle has to be approved by this woman here.

***Guim'Mara Berry:*** *I'm Lt. Guim'Mara Berry, the public information officer here at San Quentin state prison, and I approve this episode.*

**Earlonne:** This episode was made possible by The Just Trust, working to amplify the voices, vision, and power of communities that are transforming the justice system.

**Avery:** And this is y'all’s last episode of the season, right?

**Nigel:** Yes, it is.

**Earlonne:** Yes.

**Avery:** Congratulations.

**Nigel and Earlonne:** Thank you.

**Earlonne:** Episode 92.

**Avery:** Whoa. How many seasons?

**Earlonne:** 11 seasons, going on season 12.

**Avery:** Damn.

**Nigel:** For listeners, we will be dropping a couple bonus episodes between seasons, so keep your ears open for that. And I really want to give some special thanks for our new friend at the California Institution for Women, Lt. Newborg, who is the public information officer there. He was really helpful this season, getting us into the prison, and we're looking forward to working with you next season.

**Earlone:** Definitely. We'll be back on September 6th with Season 12.

**Earlone:** Avery, tell me this. What season are you on, Avery?

**Avery:** [laughs] Like technically Season 4. But I'm a one-man band, you guys. Like, seasons is way too fancy for me.

[chuckles]

**Nigel:** Well, regardless of seasons or amount of episodes, listeners, if you aren't already listening to and loving Articles of Interest, you absolutely must check out Avery's show. It's delightful and you learn so much. And while you're at it, check out her newsletter, [articlesofinterest.substack.com](http://articlesofinterest.substack.com).

**Avery:** And to all the Articles listeners out there, you must check out Ear Hustle. It's an extraordinary show and I've been listening to them from the beginning. And they also have a newsletter, it's called The Lowdown. And you can subscribe at [earhustlesq.com/newsletter](http://earhustlesq.com/newsletter).

**Earlone:** Ear Hustle is on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, [@earhustlesq](https://www.instagram.com/earhustlesq).

**Avery:** Ear Hustle and Articles of Interest are both proud members of Radiotopia from PRX, a network of independent, creator-owned, listener-supported podcasts.

**Nigel:** Discover audio with vision at [Radiotopia.fm](http://Radiotopia.fm).

**Earlone:** I'm Earlone Woods.

**Nigel:** I'm Nigel Poor.

**Avery:** And I'm Avery Trufelman.

**Earlone:** Okay, three, two, one--

**Avery, Earlone, Nigel:** Thanks for listening.

**Earlone:** Hey, remember this? [in singing tone] I am a man of Southern Comfort.

**Lonnie:** Oh, yeah. [laughs] I like that movie.

[crosstalk]

**Lonnie:** That was a good movie.

**End of Episode**

*[Transcript provided by [SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription](#)]*