



Ear Hustle Extra: Antwan Williams, Journeyist
Air Date: November 15, 2019

Earlonne Woods: [00:00:00] Hey Ear Hustlers, this is Earlonne Woods...

Nigel Poor: [00:00:03] ...and Nigel Poor. And surprise! We are back sooner than you thought.

Earlonne: [00:00:07] Yup. This is a special bonus episode. If you are new to *Ear Hustle*, do not start here.

Nigel: [00:00:12] Please don't start here.

Earlonne: [00:00:13] Go back and start with Season One, Season Two, or really any season.

Nigel: [00:00:17] You know, can I say, go back to Season One and start with "Cellies."

Earlonne: [00:00:19] Yeah, that sound good.

Nigel: [00:00:20] If you've been with us the whole time, we're so glad you're tuned in now. Here's a little something to tide you over between seasons.

Earlonne: [00:00:27] Because we love you.

Antwan Williams: [00:00:29] [Whirring fan sound in background] I've been in this place, [Antwan's voice breaks] longer than I've lived anywhere in my entire life. So, you guys have been a part of my life longer than my family has been a part of my life.

Nigel: [00:00:45] This is Antwan Banks Williams. I call him Banksy. [Low, soft, atmospheric tones begin] And he's one of *Ear Hustle's* co-founders.

Earlonne: [00:00:52] And the beat maker.

Nigel: [00:00:54] Musician extraordinaire.

Earlonne: [00:00:55] Renaissance man.

Nigel: [00:00:57] And a very thoughtful guy.

Antwan: [00:00:58] And everybody been asking me, like, "how does it feel," you know. Am I anxious? And I've been telling everybody, "no." But the sad reality is, it's people in here that I may never get a chance to see outside these walls. So when I say it's not easy for me to go, and I'm not even rushed to get there, it's because I'm not. [Soft atmospheric tones end]

Nigel: [00:01:26] He was talking to his friends and colleagues down in the Media Lab where we record *Ear Hustle*.

Antwan: [00:01:33] Everything from walks to processing to understanding my own value. Like, you all played a part in it. Constant support, constant encouragement, not putting me down as a person, helping me value myself. So, I want y'all to know that I'm leaving with a heavy heart and I will be walking slow when I walk outside of these gates.

Earlonne: [00:02:10] This was recorded on the end of October, the day before Antwan got out of prison after serving thirteen years.

Antwan: [00:02:18] So with that, man, thank you, from the depths of my soul. Thank y'all. For everything.

Speaker 1: [00:02:28] You wearing skinny jeans? [People in the background laugh, voices chatter, crosstalk]

Antwan: [00:02:31] I'm gonna be the flyest— I'm gonna be the flyest one that left this prison, I'm tellin' you. [All laugh]

Earlonne: [00:02:38] We wanted to mark the occasion of Antwan getting out of prison and tell you listeners about a guy who has been so important to *Ear Hustle*. [Sound of van door sliding shut and voices chattering, cheering, and clapping]

Nigel: [00:02:54] And E, you and I were there the next day to greet Antwan as he got out. [Voices chattering happily in the background] He had on black leather sneakers with about an inch of wide, sort of platform around it. Fitted, but not skinny, black trousers, kind of casual. And then he had this beautiful, oatmeal color, kind of loose-knit

sweater, and a beautiful smile and a pair of sunglasses. And he was radiant. He was radiant.

Earlonne: [00:03:19] And he couldn't help but show off that t-shirt he was wearing [Nigel laughs]

Nigel: [00:03:21] You pulled up his shirt. Black Lives Matter.

Speaker 2: [00:03:25] [To Antwan] You know the t-shirt you got? [Voices chattering]

Earlonne: [00:03:27] Uh oh! Uh oh! [crosstalk]

Antwan: [00:03:27] Ya! Ya! Tradition, homie, tradition! [crosstalk]

Nigel: [00:03:33] It was just so beautiful [Slow, dreamlike synth tones begin] to see Antwan step out and to be able to give him a real hug for the first time.

Earlonne: [00:03:40] And a few days, I got Antwan into our outside *Ear Hustle* studio for a exit interview. [Nigel affirms] We talked about his history inside, the early days of *Ear Hustle*, and how we first met. [Slow, dreamlike synth tones end]

Nigel: [00:03:52] This was in San Quentin, right?

Earlonne: [00:03:53] Mmhmm.

Nigel: [00:03:54] What, did you just go up and start talking to him?

Earlonne: [00:03:56] Nah, one of my partners took me over there to him and introduced me to him. He was from Southern California and I'm from Southern California, so, we had something in common.

Nigel: [00:04:03] Yup.

Antwan: [00:04:04] I'm from South Central, Los Angeles. And my upbringing is pretty much like everybody else's in that neck of the woods, in that neighborhood.

Earlonne: [00:04:12] People that listen to podcasts don't know what the hell you talkin' 'bout.

Antwan: [00:04:14] And that's crazy, right. [Antwan and Earlonne laugh] So, it's so normal to us. And it's just like, oh yeah, it's just, it's growin' up. Nah, so, I grew up in a very, um, disenfranchised community. I grew up in what society calls a broken home but I realized it's just trauma-stricken. My parents were both addicts. You know, I come from a divorced home, I come from addition and abuse on every level. From physical, mental, emotional. I grew up just like with a— in a, with a very, very rough childhood. [Soft, atmospheric synth tones begin]

Nigel: [00:04:51] When Antwan was eighteen, he got arrested and convicted of robbery and kidnapping. He was sentenced to fifteen years and he did time at Corcoran, Old Folsom, and then in 2011, he got to San Quentin.

Earlonne: [00:05:02] Back when he got to San Quentin from those other high security prisons, he said he was a hothead [Soft, atmospheric synth tone continues with percussion added]

Antwan: [00:05:09] I would flash on people, like quick. And had no problem with it. You know, it's all gas, no breaks. It's not a, "hey man, let's talk," or "let's process this." It's a "nah, I'mma beat yo' ass if you try to play me." And slowly over time I realized people aren't in that place of living anymore. They're in a place where they're like, I don't want prison to be my reality forever, so, I have to redefine in this space and that's what I started to do. [Synth tones end]

Earlonne: [00:05:39] At San Quentin, he started getting really into producing music. Learning editing software and making beats.

Nigel: [00:05:45] He had started writing lyrics back when he was in L.A. County jail awaiting trial.

Antwan: [00:05:50] And it was just one white dude. And he's just like spittin' this spoken word, kinda rap. And I'm just sittin' up and everybody in the tank is silent, including myself. And just remember sittin' up like, "damn," like, "man, this dude raw." Like, "this dude is really, really dope." But it was more compelling and more powerful to me because it was a bunch of self-proclaimed enemies in the tank. You know, people that like, "I'm in jail for killin' somebody that represent what you represent." Like, those kind of enemies. And everybody was silent and everything was focused on him. And it was so, so powerful. And I actually went back to my cell that night and I just started writing poetry. And poetry was really my introduction into lyrics and expression. And people started to say that it sounded like raps, so I should start rapping or I should try it. So I started puttin' it to beats, and beatin' on desks, and beatin' on bunks, and tables and it just kinda continued to progress from there. [Upbeat, strong percussive beat begins]

Earlonne: [00:07:01] So at San Quentin, he got a volunteer job working in the Media Lab, supposedly to learn how to make videos.

Nigel: [00:07:07] Yeah, right. [Earlonne and Nigel laugh]

Earlonne: [00:07:08] But every time you'd turn around, [Nigel laughs] he was over there bobbin' his head on GarageBand. [Nigel laughs]

Nigel: [00:07:13] Basically, doing whatever he could do to learn more about making music. He was like [Laughs] a little music imp, man. [Laughs]

Earlonne: [00:07:20] Could not get away from it.

Nigel: [00:07:22] [Laughs] Nope. [Percussive beat continues with the addition of a bright, chimey melody]

Antwan: [00:07:24] That was my whole goal going in, like, “I’m finna get to this music. It’s something that I really, really wanna do” and I was able to do it. [Bright, percussive beat ends]

Earlonne: [00:07:32] But you got fired a coupla times.

Antwan: [00:07:33] I got fired a buncha times. [Earlonne and Antwan laugh]

Earlonne: [00:07:36] [Laughs] Tell us about it.

Antwan: [00:07:37] [Laughs] So, I got fired a buncha times, man. Every chance I got, I was making beats and it was just like, this ain’t a music studio. That was the whole thing, like, “they have bands. If you want to do music, go to the Arts and Corrections.” And I’m like, I hear that. I’m finna do me. [Laughs] I’m gonna do what I want to. [Crosstalk]

Earlonne: [00:07:58] But I think, I think one of the arguments used to be like, “Well, damn, if you do a video, you gotta have something to put under it. You gotta, [Antwan affirms] you know, you just not gon’ close with just credits goin’ up, you gon’ have music.

Antwan: [00:8:10] And I will never forget, the last– after the last time I got fired, me and you was like, we was spinnin’ laps on the yard, you was like, “man, just come back, my boy. Homie, you wanna do music, you need to learn this.” And yada yada yada so and so forth and I’m like, “yeah nah, that’s not gonna happen.” And again, like, you were persistent with your encouragement and I think that was one of the things that like solidified your role in my life. Like man, if you asked me to do it, I’mma do it. And even if I, you know, have like a hard problem with it, like I’mma talk to you about it, I’mma hear you out. I’m not just gon’ be like, “Nah, you can’t tell me nothing.” [Bright synth tones begin]

Earlonne: [00:08:48] Around this time, the idea for *Ear Hustle* started to percolate in Nigel’s brain.

Nigel: [00:08:54] Yup. I saw this thing called Podquest which was basically a contest put on by Radiotopia from PRX and they were looking for like, new voices. They were gonna help produce a new podcast. [Bright synth continues with the addition of percussion] And we got permission to apply.

Earlonne: [00:09:09] Back then, we had a public radio program in the Media Lab that had a certain format. But, we wanted to do something a little different.

Nigel: [00:09:17] Exactly.

Antwan: [00:9:19] We weren’t journalists. You know, we were people living lives and seeing life differently, so we couldn’t necessarily continue to tell stories in that fashion.

Earlonne: [00:09:27] Nah, man, you coined a term back then. We weren’t journalists.

Antwan: [00:9:30] We're journeymen. [Earlonne laughs] Because it's about a trip. Right? Our thing is to tell stories about people lives over time and we're escorting the outside through the lives of people inside.

Nigel: [00:09:42] We actually just dug up our entry for Podquest recently.

Earlonne: [00:09:46] Push play, Nige. [Ambient sounds that include repetitive beeping, metal door closing, voices chattering in background] I'm Earlonne Woods. In 1999, I was convicted of being a getaway driver of an attempted second-degree robbery. [Sound of car tires screeching] I was sentenced to thirty-one years to life, and I've been incarcerated for eighteen years. I'm the co-producer and co-host of *Ear Hustle*.

Antwan: [00:10:03] My name is Antwan Williams. And I've been incarcerated since 2006 for an armed robbery with a gun enhancement. [Sound of cocking gun] And I am the co-producer and sound designer for *Ear Hustle*.

Nigel: [00:10:14] I'm Nigel Poor and since 2011, I've been volunteering inside the prison. I'm the co-host and co-producer of *Ear Hustle*. [Quirky sound effects with chimes begin] In 2013, we started producing radio stories about life inside. Now, we're turning our attention to longer form storytelling.

Earlonne: [00:10:32] Our mission is to bring you the hidden stories of life inside [Podquest entry audio fades out]

Nigel: [00:10:33] [Laughs] The old days.

Earlonne: [00:10:35] That was the bomb. I liked that.

Nigel: [00:10:38] Yeah, I can hear the bones of *Ear Hustle*, but let's admit, we both sound much better now.

Earlonne: [00:10:42] Oh, of course! But that was the beginning. [Nigel affirms] That was, that was it. That was everything.

Nigel: [00:10:46] And you know what I really love? [Earlonne affirms] Is hearing Antwan's sound design. [Crosstalk]

Earlonne: [00:10:50] Indeed [Nigel affirms] And Antwan actually created some of the sounds that would become *Ear Hustle* signatures. He did the original version of our theme song, which was called "King Kong."

Nigel: [00:11:01] This still gives me chills.

[00:11:02] [Early version of theme song begins: minimal atmospheric tones with strong piano chords and light percussion, followed by tinny signature melody that ends in a fades]

Nigel: [00:11:31] He also did some early soundscapes, using recordings to build up a scene, like the one in our episode on Rauch.

[00:11:38] [Sounds of dripping water and bubbling]

Rauch [00:11:41] When I was a child, before I was removed from the care of my mom's custody, [Minimal piano chord tones begin, accented by dripping water sounds] she tried to drown me a couple of times in the tub. And then she stopped and she left the bathroom and she was crying. I, I knew she was unhappy or sad at something I did. I wanted to actually comfort her, but I didn't know how to do it.

Earlonne: [00:12:04] Later on, he became the master of *concretes*, which is a gang of different sounds he would collect around the institution and make them into this swirl of soup.

Nigel: [00:12:15] A collage!

Earlonne: [00:12:16] A collage, yeah. And, it was inspired by Pat Mesiti-Miller.

Nigel: [00:12:19] Yes, he actually called them, you say, *concretes*?

Earlonne: [00:12:22] Something to that effect. [Crosstalk]

Nigel: [00:12:23] But then Pat said we didn't have to use the French.

[00:12:24] [Sound collage begins with a dial tone that becomes abstracted, followed by sounds of voices over a radio transceiver, metal chains clanging, voices shouting, and other abstract industrial sounds oscillating in stereo sound]

Earlonne: [00:12:44] Just when we were about to launch, before anyone had even heard of *Ear Hustle*, somethin' crazy happen.

Nigel: [00:12:50] Oh my god.

Earlonne: [00:12:51] Tell us about this cardigan sweater before we launched. [Laughs]

Antwan: [00:12:54] So I've been, so again, in like my transforming myself, San Quentin is a place that'll make you realize that perception is everything. How people see you is how they will perceive you. And how they perceive you determines, like, which doors they will open and close for you. And I'll never forget, it was New Year's 2015, and I was looking at this GQ magazine. [Twinkling synth tone begins] And it was this white dude, he had this dope little fit on. It was like some red tailor-fitted jeans. Some white original chucks, low tops with a white tee shirt, and a blue blazer. And I'm like, man, that's dope.

Nigel: [00:13:30] He decided he wanted his clothes to be fitted, not the standard issue, baggy prison uniform look.

Earlonne: [00:13:35] And let's just say that he obtained himself some clothes from the outside, including a gray cardigan sweater. So when the folks from Radiotopia came

here for the first time to start figuring out how will we make this pod thing happen, Antwan had on that sweater.

Antwan: [00:13:52] I wanted to present myself in a way that people can see like, man, this is a person that can sit at the table. [Synth tone ends] So we took a beautiful photo that day and some warden in some other prison seen it, called up to the prison like, “aye, is this Antwan Williams dude, is he free? They’re like, “no.” Like, “why he looked like a free person” [Laughs]. And there it go– snowball. Um, went searched my area, found like some argyle socks, found some other like striped socks, found a cardigan sweater, found another gray pullover sweater. And it's just a bunch of clothes that I altered myself. Put pockets in thermals and you know, put lines on tee shirts and painted on shirts. And they was just like, “escape paraphernalia,” like, “you tryna get out.” I went to the hole for three weeks to loss of privileges for thirty days to being C status, which is another loss of privileges, loss of all privileges for six months. So from Episode One, up until Episode Ten, I was out of commission.

Earlonne: [00:15:02] What was it like when you came back and, uh, getting’ back into the groove of it?

Antwan: [00:15:09] Getting back into the groove of it was really, really hard for me. Our relationship was, not necessarily gone, but it was in question for me. And dealing with like personal traumas in my past that are filled with all kind of triggers, I had to be able to understand that this isn't a abandonment thing, right? This isn't, like, because of lack of love. It isn't because you aren't worthy. It's because we are already going and it's not even like a, you're being left out. But it's a, I need you to just find what you do and do it. Don't worry about catching up, like, we're all together. And I really feel like me leaving, it was by divine design because it allowed *Ear Hustle* to be solidified with you and Nigel. [Electronic synth tone begins with the words “*Ear Hustle Podcast*” spoken mixed in]

Nigel: [00:16:17] Antwan continues to be a big part of the team. One of the other things he's done are those beautiful hand-drawn illustrations for almost all of our episodes.

Earlonne: [00:16:25] That's right. Except for the couple that I had to do while he was in the hole.

Nigel: [00:16:28] That's right. You stepped up.

Earlonne: [00:16:29] But he's hella talented. And it's actually something he got from his parents. [Electronic synth tone ends]

Antwan: [00:16:34] My mother is an artist, my father is an artist. But my mother, like, forced a pen and a pencil into my hand. And for so long, I just hated it because it's what– she just always wanted me to do it! Like, I don't want to draw it right now. I don't feel like drawing. But I do realize that people, they get something out of the art that I create. [Piano music begins]

Earlonne: [00:16:54] And we're happy to say that now that he's out, he's gonna keep doing those illustrations for us. And like the Renaissance man he is, he got a whole lotta other stuff going on. [Piano music continues with the addition of bright flourishes and soft, steady percussion]

Nigel: [00:17:03] That's right. He and Maserati E, whose music has also been featured on *Ear Hustle*, are taking this musical show they created to a bunch of schools all over California. And I also have to add, as we keep saying, Antwan looks great, and if I were a clothing designer, I'd have him model my clothes. Stat.

Earlonne: [00:17:22] And I'll say this, when it comes to making music, he makes a different brand. He's a conscious person, so his music is very conscious. He's been working on that since he got out. Matter of fact, we was in the studio last night...

Nigel: [00:17:36] Nice.

Earlonne: [00:17:36] ...to give y'all this...

Nigel: [00:17:37] Nice, nice.

[00:17:38] ["Somebody" begins with strong piano chords with twinkling chime melody followed by lyrics rapped]

(Dream)

*Look, you see, I never really felt like somebody
(Nah)*

*Look, you see, I never really felt like somebody
Till somebody told me that I can be somebody
Now I'm somebody who just want to tell somebody
That you somebody, you somebody to me*

*Man, how do I reach beyond these walls and prison yards
When I'm just an inmate to a lotta the prison guards
With no more than the past perceptions I won't surpass
See, they hate, I got drive so they wishin' I crash (Ay)*

*I just laugh and smile
I see they all in denial
They thought prison was gon' break me
Man, look at me now
I have no doubts, but still figurin' out
How to make the sun shine, just break through the clouds*

Ay, see, I may never change the world

*But I'mma change how we see it
I'm a part of something greater
They just never believed it
If there is a book of life, then we write and not read it
Know your history and never repeat it*

*They always said black people didn't have it (Nah)
Said we were savage
We was born for a casket
Called us black bastards
Not pharaohs, not gods
Spreadin' rumors that it's safer to confine us to blocks*

*I'm turnin' back the clock
I'mma rewrite history
Show the power we possess
So it ain't no mystery, man*

*N'imma go chemistry, ancient kinetic energy
And build on the knowledge God is sharin'
My entity, now opened up mentally
Let's go beyond our pain
We are one, man
Let's go beyond our names*

*It's a shame we believe all the things that we heard
Like we doomed crack babies
Fiends at birth
On the real what it is, man
They seen we worth
Much more than would exist on earth*

*Church
Not religion, I'm the house of the Lord
And my body is his temple
You should worship my floor
Eternal*

*Man, I'm tappin' into more of my core
Watch my mind annihilate your sword
What's war but a way people prove they might?
What's race if you lose your sight?
No black, no whites, just wrongs and rights
Sometimes losing something can enhance your life, right?*

*Now, if you ever thought a prison was a place
Where they put bad people
Not a mind and not a state (nah)
Then I pray that your prison makes you feel like the warden
But I'm onto something much more important*

*I pray your prison make you feel like the warden
But I'm onto something much more important*

*Because I never really felt like somebody
Till somebody told me that I can be somebody
Now I'm somebody who just want to tell somebody
That you somebody, you somebody to me*

*You see, I never really felt like somebody
Till somebody told me that I can be somebody
Now I'm somebody who just want to tell somebody
That you somebody, you somebody to me*

*You see, I never really felt like somebody
Till somebody told me that I can be somebody
Now I'm somebody who just want to tell somebody
That you somebody, you somebody to me*

Man, I love you. (Dream)

Earlonne: [00:20:35] ["Somebody" beat continues] That's one of the Antwan's new song, hot out the gate called "Somebody." If you wanna hear more about Antwan's music and keep up with what he's doing, follow him on Instagram or Facebook at Antwan Banks Williams. ["Somebody" beat ends] [Electronic synth begins with atmospheric vocals]

Nigel: [00:20:54] Thanks for listening to this bonus episode. We are officially on break now and we will be back with season five in early March 2020. [To Earlonne] Does it feel like a long time E?

Earlonne: [00:21:03] Well, I mean, no. I'm finna go on vacation, I don't know what y'all talkin' 'bout. [Nigel laughs] It's time for that vacation. [Nigel laughs] [Synth beat continues with addition of percussion]

Nigel: [00:21:10] Okay. In the meantime, check out our website, earhustlesq.com for pictures of people in our stories to buy a t-shirt or a mug. Or, you can also sign up for our newsletter there.

Earlone: [00:21:20] We're also on social media: Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter @earhustlesq. And even though this is a bonus episode, we still need an approval. And since Lieutenant Robinson is missing in action, we're gonn go holla at Krissy in headquarters for approval.

Krissy Khokhobashvili [00:21:35] This is Krissy Khokhobashvili. I am the Acting Chief of External Affairs for CDCR. It's an honor to try to fill Lieutenant Robinson's shoes for this approval message. And I have to say that being involved with the podcast since the beginning and seeing it grow in so many different ways. Um, my favorite part is definitely watching people go home and hearing what they're up to on the outside. I've known Antwan for a while now, and I'm just so proud of him and I can't wait to see how he changes the world on the outside. So, with that said, I do approve this bonus episode. [Theme music begins]

Nigel: [00:22:16] Next time on *Ear Hustle*.

Earlone: [00:22:17] Hold up, hold up, hold up. [Theme music fades out] [Nigel laughs]

Nigel: [00:22:19] What?

Earlone: [00:22:19] I'm on my way on vacation. What you mean? [Earlone laughs]

Nigel: [00:22:22] Well, but– what if something come up?

Earlone: [00:22:23] Hey, it's a podcast, I can do it remotely. [Nigel laughs] [Bright synth tone begins]

Nigel: [00:22:28] Well, have a great time. In any case, check our feed now and then because you never know what's gonna happen. Otherwise, we'll see you in March 2020

Earlone: [00:22:35] 2020

Nigel: [00:22:37] I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlone: [00:22:38] and I'm Earlone Woods, about to go on vacation. [Nigel laughs] [Bright synth beat continues and then fades out]

END OF EPISODE.