

Jaspar: [[each inmate shall be issued..... Pillowcase, towels, 2, F blankets..]]

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

E: I remember it being like a khaki type of pants with a, some type of khaki type of shirt. No belts.

N: khaki? What are you talking about?

I thought it was blue Blue?

E: What ain't khaki.

No, when you were there is blue Yeah, blue. This, yeah. I don't know what y'all talking about.-Y'all losing me. They're like bunchy around the waist. Little they've got, they've got

Depends t

he ones you pull. Yeah. They got the elastic. Yeah. They jeans.

What are y'all? Yes. Jean material. I don't know.

Gene, that's Jean.

Well, this is street. This is street. I mean,

I love that there's three people that have three different ideas of what they, what people wear in prison.

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

A: Not at all.

N: And seriously, Earlonne, you were in prison for 20 plus years, right?

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

N: 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.

A: Right. And uh, the interesting thing about it when I went off and did some research is that I, 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.

E: Yeah, we should probably, uh, let our listeners know who you are.

A: Okay. Okay.

N: And what the heck we're doing here.

A: Uh, 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?

E: Sure. I'm Earlonne Woods. I am the co-host of Ear Hustle.

N: Ear Hustle brings you the everyday stories of life in prison told by those living it and post incarceration.

E: damn, you're goof

A amazing

And I'm NP the other co-host And so 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

[00:00:01] **Sherrill** : right now? Oh, we are at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery in New York.
Uh, [00:00:05] **Sherrill** : Yeah. Tanya represents me.

E: I did not expect to start things off in a NY gallery.

A: 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 Z, and photographs by Uta Barth and Gillian Wearing, like really big deal artists in this gallery.

N: Wait a minute. Wait a minute. I gotta jump in here because you're mentioning some of my art heroes here. Yes. Like Gillian Wearing? Amazing! Uta Barth?.

A: yeah. This is a really like avantgarde conceptual art gallery.

N: Okay. I cannot wait to hear how you're gonna tie this in to prison. Uniforms.

A: You'll see. So the story starts back when Sherrill was in art school. Sherril 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 was like he was raptured up. Then, just as quickly as he'd disappeared, he came back. But the problem is... school felt different. He couldn't feel comfortable there the way he used to.

You know, looking at the student body and their faces. I think at the time, what I had really noticed was the safety of it, of that enviro, that students possessed in their joy that I didn't have. Like the joy of just being in an environment where like, you're encouraged to learn, there's new people... it was just kind of like I don't wanna meet and talk to people; I don't want to share about myself. you know? it was just like the complete polar opposite of this, this environment and it was just very obvious. And I was, not necessarily jealous, but just kind of 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.

V: 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 had the idea to return to school. So like showing up after being [snapped] taken out of it... they had no idea.

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

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

Eventually after that first year, Sherrill did get his record cleared. And so you can imagine, it was a huge relief to not keep this secret anymore and to 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, 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 to just kind of juxtaposing both environments on top of each other?

Avery: So like, what's an example?

Sherrill : So like 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, uh, deviating from the path. There was no stopping to talk.

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

Sherrill : just be like, Hey, you gotta 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?

A: 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 was people who ran from me. I got, you know, cars honking at me...

A: I mean.. Sheril wasn't surprised. He knew this would get him noticed. He knew he had to cover his bases.

Before I even started this project, we spent like, you know, having introductory, uh, introduction meetings to campus police and patrolling regional city police, for my safety. Right? 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. And, uh, so I was like, no, that's that, uh, um, ambiguity needs to be there. People have to wrestle with what they are seeing, what they are experiencing.

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 even a real prison jumpsuit.

SHERRILL The jumpsuit is not real. Uh, I got it off Amazon. Um,

Avery: oh, it's not an actual

Sherrill : No, no, no. And that, 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: when you got it on Amazon, it wasn't like "Prison Uniform" like 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. me being African American male. Why am I a threat? You know, I'm just a student like everybody else, you know, I just so happen to be wearing this orange jumpsuit.

A: 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.

E: 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.

N: which basically looks like scrubs - like what you'd see in a hospital.. Like blue top and blue bottom

A: like it has a v neck?

N: ok the funny thing is I've seen V necks and scoop necks

A: But you don't get to choose presumably

N: maybe it's... crew neck. Scoop may be too fancy

A: but these are two pieces, not a jumpsuit

N: yeah, two pieces for sure

A: And I've heard of diff places where inmates wear khaki. So It depends on if its federal or state prison, if it's a private prison. 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.

A: 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, you know? They're like shipping 'em out. it lands on the desk of the supervisor, flipping through it...

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

A: of course Earlonne

E: I have always wondered this...is this guy that make the prison clothes, is this the Price-is-Right Bob Barker?

N: OK I looked it up, it's not. I'm sorry, it's disappointing.

A: different guy named Bob Barker. But I mean... I don't know, maybe this bob 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

you need. But anyone can go look at the Bob Barker catalog. They post the pdf on their site. Like, Emily showed it to me.

EMILY Click here for this 2020 Ball Barker catalog. Yeah. Look. Clothing,

MUSIC IN

When Emily and I looked, There were pages and pages of prison clothes, some on models, most abstractly floating in space. And sure enough, almost everything came in Orange. Or had an option to come in orange.

Avery: so there's a 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.

A: the Bob Parker catalog even sells the uniforms for security guards. And tools for the security guards.

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

N: Ok so Earlonne, so you knew Bob Barker from being in prison, right?

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

N: Not personally?

E: But everyone had Bob Barker jeans, they were like Levis.

E: You would see the emblem on the buttons. You know what I'm sayin? And there wasn't that many jeans inside prison. so any state jeans technically were from Bob Barkers...

N: So he was getting money from a lot of people.

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

N: Right. So the other day I was in SQ, you know a lot of young guys hanging out. I'd asked them who made the clothes they were wearing right then, you know?

Nyge and Tony_01: Can you look at the label on your clothes and tell me what it says?

Ryan and Sam Pablo: New era.

Mine is, uh A4. A4

Nyge and Tony_01: it say where it's made?

Ryan and Sam Pablo: China

NIGEL: What about in your pants? What does it say in the pants?

Ryan and Sam Pablo: Made in us. Oh, Cal PIA. Yeah. Oh, prison industry pants. Okay.

Nyge and Tony_01: Can you describe what PIA is?

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

A: But does that actually mean that some of the uniforms made by PIA could be made at least in part, in SQ

E: they could if SQ had a garment section. You have places like CMC makes clothes the T shirts the socks... the blues. The PIA do different things.

A what's CMC?

E CMC is the California Men's Colony. it's in san luis obispo.

Nyge and Tony_01: Out of all the clothes that you're wearing, what is PIA and what's not Pia? for you, Ryan first.

Ryan and Sam Pablo: Um, my pants are PIA. My shoes are vans.

TONY: Uh, my jeans are not jeans.. but they're the blue pants that look like jeans. They're made at PIA USA.

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

N: 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 the pant leg and on the back of the shirt: CDCR PRISONER.

E: 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.

N: yeah... but I mean no one 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 def guys inside who sew up their pants or change them to hide that big CDCR that's written on the side of the pant. And it's against the rules, but people do it anyway.

A Like they patch it up?

N I don't know exactly.. I don't know if they take two pairs of pants and sew two left legs together. I'm not quite sure

A so it's only one leg..

E so you might have two left legs

A: they're being... it's a brand..it's like a logo on the outside, which is kind of 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 – and I'm talking about England in the 1800s, with this one symbol..

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

A: 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.

A: Former Dress historian and professor emerita of the royal college of art, Juliet Ash is the author of the Dress Behind Bars, sort of the definitive book on this. And really, even though it might seem 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.

A: Which could be literally anything.

JULIET And so it could be rags, if you were an aristocrat it, could be a 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 like you're living in the 1860s, right? Men did not dress this 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 Redding prison for some time... prisoners became laughable to the outside world.

A: 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.

A: And so the black and white stripes lived on in film and cartoons long after they were largely removed from the population.

JULIET: After the iconic prison uniform was abolished in the 1920s, both in America and Britain. Then there was types of regulatory dress control.

A: So there was this move that like, ok what if we didn't make clothes humiliating, and instead make them more ... constructive. Like what if we connect 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.

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

Wearing orange became identifiable with bad behavior and criminality. And that, 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.

A: 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 like, you have to take it all the way off to go to the bathroom. You have to get completely naked.

A: And then 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

A: So this has been a longstanding thing. Political prisoners, around the world, have 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.

A: 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.

A: 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: And when they went on hunger strikes and they had peaceful sit-ins in Folsom Prison and San Quentin Prison, they were treated very roughly.

A: 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 Crumb, which is a reform organization. When the reforms happened in the 1970s and 80s, taking away the uniform was quite an important re-establishment of people's own identities.

MUSIC OUT

A: You two have visited prisons in diff countries, fairly recently right?

E/N: Yes. Norway, London, and Norway. Yep. London, Norway.

A: And what were they wearing? What did their clothes look like.

N: Okay. Well in England as far as I remember, they wear uniforms. Nothing that diff from California. But in Norway it went both ways. We were in one prison, e, where Dudes wore their own clothes, but in another, people wore their own clothes.

A: Wow.

E: Right, right, right. So in those prisons, it was choice based, definitely.

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

LONNIE: Then I got to San Quentin. If you didn't wanna wear no prison clothing, wouldn't nobody tripping.

AVERY: But how would you get new clothes?

LONNIE: You bought them

~~AVERY: Just like from any store?~~

E Before we got there, SQ was known for people wearing all their regular stuff.

N: OK well we'll get into that...

A: After the break, why the uniforms went away.. And why they came back

—BREAK—

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

A: Like from their closets, like their own clothes.

E: Yep.

N: Yeah. It reminds me of the, those, um, San Quentin archive photographs that remember those. Yeah. The 1970s. There's this beautiful photograph. Yeah. This guy in a three-piece suit holding this little kid that's wearing like the same outfit. You, you can't even tell that they're in prison.

E: this was when I was an infant.

N: a teeny tiny?

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

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

E Yep and you could have whatever clothes you wanted sent to you.

L: 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.

N: like, what would you be wearing?

230502_Lonnie: Well, sweaters and, you still had to have jeans, but they could be Levi's, not prison jeans, right? jackets, shirts, any of that.

230502_Nigel: any color,

230502_Lonnie: Any color. Yeah. Any color, any

Patterns,...

Lonne Any patterns, there was no restrictions on any of that.

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

E: I'm just thinking of seeing cats in platforms.

N: I would love that.

230502_Earlonne: So why do I have a picture in my head of like silk, nylon, butterfly collars, bell bottoms,

230502_Lonnie: I mean, some people wore, that was some people's move, but not mine!

230502_Nigel: So you could've, if you wanted to, you could've had on like a three piece suit,

230502_Lonnie: Well, I had a, I had a two-piece jeans suit that I had tailor made in the prison. Cause 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 you know how you got it going on, as we say, by how you dress.

230502_Nigel: but wait a minute, laundry had to be different then, because you wouldn't be putting your personal

230502_Lonnie: No.

They had dry cleaning.

230502_Nigel: What?!

230502_Lonnie: Yes.

230502_Earlonne: I just said what?

230502_Nigel: Like, like he went there and you dropped it off and they

230502_Lonnie: Well, no, you had no, so you, so you had your laundry man, right?

So you had a guy that worked in the dry cleaners, and you'd pay him a fee a week, right. To do your drying. Then you had a laundry. Man, he'd worked in the laundry and you'd pay him a fee week to do your laundry.

230502_Earlonne: laundry, your

230502_Nigel: own This was like above board? Yeah,

230502_Lonnie: Yeah, this was all aboard. Now they actually had a dry cleaning that was allowed for incarcerated people to utilize

230502_Nigel: Did it come back with one of those plastic things over it?

230502_Lonnie: Yes, it did. Yes But if you 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 sayin?

230502_Nigel: he would pick it up.

230502_Lonnie: he pick it up. Yeah. And he take it in. yeah.

N: Ever get your stuff dry cleaned at San Quentin?

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

N: But everything's washed in the bag.

E: In the bag. It don't come out the bag.

N: Mm-hmm.

N: Do, 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?

230502_Lonnie: no. So most definitely wearing your own clothes made you feel like you had some ownership over your personhood.

N: 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: in the early eighties, uh, we were informed that, uh, they were gonna 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.

230502_Nigel: Did you hear, like, was there buzz about it happening? Or did one day they just say..

230502_Lonnie: no, it was a buzz. So, so 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 'em from an administrator? And all that kind of stuff. So they used that as part of, part of the, the justification, right? And then the other thing was the property, how much property you can have.

And then the other part was we need to keep people in uniformed uh, outfits. You know, that everybody would know who's who and what's what.

And so we put 'em all in the same kind of outfits. We'll know who they are, right?

So all those things started becoming a reason for We need to crack down on these guys. That got way too much freedom.

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.

230502_Lonnie: so the warden had made an announcement that all personal clothing, all personal property that was not state issue property was gonna have to be sent home or they would be confiscated and they sent a memo to that effect.

PAUSE

We had a big meeting in the north block cafeteria. And, and the Warden came down, his name was George Sumners We call him Big George.

three, 400 people showed up. and the warden proceeded to telling us, that it was outta his hands. This was coming down from Sacramento. He had held him off as long as he could. But we are at the stage now where I gotta enforce this.

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

230502_Lonnie: , and we walked out to the yard and we decided, man, we gonna protest. Our thing was, we ain't going nowhere tell you, let us keep our clothes and keep our property.

So we had like a 45 minute standoff. Um, and then at some point, uh, they said, Hey man, this is like your last warning kind of thing, right?

And then they brought the guns and told us that, you know, if we didn't lock up, they were going to, you know, shoot us off the yard essentially. I mean, they may have used that words, but that's what they were saying.

230502_Lonnie: I start off with a few hundred people, right?

230502_Nigel: Just standing there

230502_Lonnie: More time, about 10 or 15 of us standing on the yard and we like, bro, what we going do, man, you know? . And it just so happened that 10 or 15 were all black. You know what I'm saying? So I think that might have something to do with our affinity, with our clothes and our, our, our desire to be dressed. We willing to be dressed until the death, you know what I'm saying?

But guys were really willing to die on the yard to get shot. Maybe not die, get shot though, for sure. People understood the import of being able to have something that gave you some personal identity.

E: Finally, courts ruled: guys in San Quentin could keep their clothes.

N:-but then ...

230313 Articles Lonnie: a few years later, they came up with this thing that, we can't take the clothes from yo-+u, but you can't wear 'em anywhere. Police literally told me, you can wear your street clothes in your cell, but when you step outside that cell, you gotta have CDCR clothes on.

230502_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?

230502_Lonnie: I did! I did! No, I did. No, it's crazy you asked that. I did used to do that, man. I just get dressed up in my cell and, you know what I'm saying? You ain't got no big mirror, but look at myself in the mirror, then look at me and me prancin around my cell with my little outfits on.

I mean, you gotta do things that keep you, uh, alive, man. You know, your spirit alive, not just your physical body, but your spirit alive.

So a lot of that stuff was about that, I think, you know,

230502_Nigel: Yeah.

N: I loved this conversation. Ilan, I could just see him in his cell, like delicately prancing around a little bit. Feeling really good about himself.

E: Definitely just, just looking at himself in the mirror, probably talking to the mirror, thinking he in the club, hm mm.

N: I would do the same thing.

E: I mean, it's a fantasy. You gotta live outside them walls. It's a fantasy.

N: yeah... 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?

E: Two of our inside producers, tony and sadiq took that question out to the yard

[yard talk vox pop]

230502_Nigel: So what changed for you personally when you couldn't have your own clothes anymore?

230502_Lonnie: , it was devastating, man. I mean, For a guy that likes to dress, you know, I've always liked to dress, you know, and so for me to be proud of that was really, really dev. And so I started trying to find work arounds.

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

E: 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 to the clothing — you know, like “CDCR prisoner” written down the pant leg and on the back of your shirts.

230502_Lonnie: I vowed that I would never wear a state issue clothing with the CDCR on it. And, and I was able to basically keep that up for most of my time in prison

230313 Articles E: Lonnie had a gang of button down shirts that probably was like on they last thread. Yep.

230313 Articles Lonnie: I wore

230313 Articles E: like, like, yeah. Yeah. Like, like they was just, just due to attrition, they were see through, they was like, silk,

230313 Articles Lonnie: I'm telling you. Yeah. Ain't he ain't lying. Yeah. I was like, man, I'm, I'm not wearing that CDCR stuff on me.

E: So, Lonnie held onto the clothes he had...

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

230502_Lonnie: and then guys going home. You, I catch some homeboys going home. Lemme see that shirt, bro. Oh, they ain't got no CDCR shit? Let me add that, bruh.

230313 Articles Lonnie: , I used to track dudes. You going home, bro?

Remember that jacket? That jacket you gotta let me outta at it. That shirt you got that long sleeves, I buy that. You know all that kinda stuff.

230313 Articles E: But for sure if you one of those dudes in prison that has like button downs and jeans When you're going home, are you on your way out? People are at you like, bro, what you doing with that

230313 Articles Lonnie: but they was at me.

Yeah. They

230313 Articles E: What you doing with what you doing with them Jean? What you doing with them boots? What you doing?

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

LONNIE: Dudes are really clocking, when you getting out and then they trying to sway you against giving the clothes that you promised somebody to give to them. But I'm your homeboy. You just met that dude in here and all that kind. I went through all that jacket. Oh my Lord. I, they was at me about that jacket.

E: The jacket. Legendardy.

N: It was the only jacket I saw him in.

E: Held on to that thing.

230502_Nigel: I remembering correctly that jean jacket had plaid inside of it?

230502_Lonnie: The Inlining? Yeah. Yeah, the lining.

230502_Nigel: Now that had to be

230502_Earlonne: But that was personal. Personal.

230502_Lonnie: It was personal. Yeah. That was that, a Dickie. That was a Dickie. It

230502_Nigel: had to be pretty old.

230502_Lonnie: Yeah, it was a little old.. But again, because of that, that, that, that law that was...

230502_Earlonne: the grandfather rule.

230502_Lonnie: Yeah, the grandfather rule. because of that, then they couldn't take my Dickie.

230502_Nigel: That's gotta be the title.

230502_Earlonne: You couldn't get no more Dickies.

230502_Nigel: No, "don't take my Dickie."

230502_Earlonne: Of course LonMo handed them down. We can't say to who, but he handed them down.

230502_Lonnie: That's right. I remember there was a, there was a passionate struggle to get that.

N: But Lonnie left his signature jacket behind. And i'm guessing... other stuff that reminded him of life inside.

LONNIE: When I got outta prison, I initially, I vowed when I got, I was never gonna wear jeans again. Never wear no blue jeans again in my life, right? Uh, and then I, I didn't wear 'em for a year. I wanted all the fly colors, man. Gimme variety of colors. And blue was not one of them.

A: So that emotional journey that Lonnie went through with Jeans... was sort of parallel opposite what happened to Sherrill, the artist. He knew he wanted to wear his 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 Sherill wore for his art piece was like, luxurious.

SHERRIL 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. You know what I mean? Like, it was just so nice, Like if I do have to do this, at least I'm gonna be comfortable doing it, you know?,

A: Although it's not like Sherill was actually emotionally comfortable wearing this jumpsuit.

SHERRIL Doing it for me was also personally hard, even though the jumpsuit wasn't real, it was torturous to put on this garment that, like daily reminders of the space that I just exited. Like, why am I doing this like, you know?

SHERRIL it got tough. It got real tough. Wearing it every day became activism in a way for me to illuminate. Like every work day 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 you know. 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.

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, 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. And I was like, why are you wearing this? She was like, oh, I just got out. Like, you know, 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 like 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 and this thing like, man, I would never.

So in his own life. When he's not performing with the jumpsuit. Sherrill is not one for a uniform.

I'm also an artist. Some people might be cool with wearing the same things. I like a little bit of spice and variety.

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

cuz some of my favorite, like sweatshirt, tracksuits or whatever, they have like resin on it. Like things you can't wash out

Sherrill says a lot his [00:30:00] artist friends have jumpsuits that they wear that they can get paint and resin all over their clothes. Something like a uniform.

And it dawned on me the other day. I was like, you know, I ha 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 and I'm like, oh wow. Like I need to get it together and maybe I do need a uniform.

A: 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, um, the practical side started coming up. Right. You know, you just can't be dressed up all the time, every day.

N: Practical, right

LONNIE: Uh, you can, but cost. Right. And, and not only that, it's just not comfortable all the time.

And so I started thinking about the gene thing and I was like, man, you know what if I. 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 gonna do that. And jeans feel good! So I bought me a pair of jeans, right?

230502_Nigel: was it like the first time you put the jeans on?

230502_Lonnie: You know what, it wasn't like I thought it was going to be? I thought, you know, I thought I was gonna have some kind of visceral reaction to it. But I didn't. It felt they felt comfortable. And the first thing was, you know, with me it's always do they fit good? Do they look good? Right? And they, the ones I got, the first pair I got fitted good. And they looked it good.

A: May I ask, E, N, what do you two wear when you go inside? Like, what do you wear when you go into prison?

E: You know. I try to dress up. I mean I go up in that motherfucker on point.

N truly you do

E i probably be too flamboyant

A: like in what?

E: I probably be in there with, what, Luis shoes on?

A: no way

N: yeah he always has those

E: might even mix it up with some gang attire, but nobody... luis shoes

N but you're always color coordinated, shirt, hat, socks

E: I'm always color coordinated. That's me.

A: and what do you wear, Nigel?

N: I actually dress the same way every time. I wear black jeans, at shirt and black button up over that. Anda pair of black sneakers.

A: I've seen you in the word before that's sedate. Nigel has incredible style. Fearless.

E: This low key Nigel, this is her on the low.

N: This is, this is low key me and it is very intentional cuz when I go into prison, really what I wanna say with the way that I look is that you can always count on me. I'm always gonna be the same person. I will always have the same outfit on. So my uniform says I'm always gonna show up and I'm always gonna show up as the same person.

A: But that like what are Earlonne's outfits saying? Because like you're saying something else too, right?

E: Oh, I'm saying, uh, Just keep doing right, and you'll be wearing this in a minute. Because when I go in there, that's, 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.

N: yeah. I mean, I see how people light up Oh, yeah. When, when they see you walk into yard, it's, it's really, it's beautiful.

E: They, they, they, they, they put themselves in my clothes.

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

N: No, I, I would say that, um, 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, um, through our selection.

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

N: Yeah, I totally get that.

E: Yeah.

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

N: with me, Nigel Poor, Earlonne Woods, Bruce Wallace, and Amy Standen, with help from Rahsaan "New York" Thomas, Neroli Price...

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

N: It features music by David Jassy, Antwan Williams, Earlonne Woods, and Derrell Sadiq Davis, and Rhae Royal.

E: Amy Standen edits the show. Shubnum Sigmun is Ear Hustle's managing producer, and Bruce Wallace is the Executive Producer.

N: Thanks to Acting Warden Oak Smith.

A: Thanks also to Olivia Melkonian, Anna Sinfield, and Mzwakhe Ndlovu and Claire Mullen

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

[Berry approval]

E: 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.

A: And this is your all's last episode... of the season right?

N yes it is.

A: Congrats!

N: Thank you

E ep 92

A whoa how many seasons

E 11 seasons, going on season 12

A damn

N for listeners, we will be dropping bonus eps between seasons, so keep your ears open . And I really wanna give some special thanks for help this season to our new friend at the calif institution for women, Lt Newborg the PIO there. He was really helpful, and we're looking forward to working with you next season.

E: Definitely. We'll be back on September 6th with Season TWELVE. Avery, tell me this, what are you on?

A: technically season 4? But I'm a one man band guys. Like, seasons is way too fancy for me.

N: well regardless of seasons or amt of episodes... Listeners, if you aren't already listening to and loving Articles of Interest, you gotta 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.

A: And to all the Articles listeners out there, you must check out EH. It's an extraordinary show and I've been listening since the beginning. And they also have a newsletter The Lowdown. And you can subscribe at earhustlesq.com/newsletter.

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N: Discover audio with vision at Radiotopia-dot-f-m.

E: I'm EW

N: I'm NP

A: And I'm AT

E: ok 3, 2, 1...

All: Thanks for listening.