Man with Foreign Accent: [00:00:08] This episode of ‘Ear Hustle’ contains language that may not be appropriate for all listeners. Discretion is advised.

Martin Gomez: [00:00:24] Mi nombre es Martin. Cuando yo ... [continues speaking Spanish under Miguel Sifuentes]

Miguel Sifuentes: [00:00:27] My boy Martin told me he was 15 when he first tried to cross the border from Mexico into the United States. [Martin continues speaking in Spanish; Miguel gives his interpretation].

Miguel Sifuentes: [00:00:38] His group was told two things: run as fast as you can, and if you get caught don't tell them who the coyote is. So they take off running and the Border Patrol comes out of nowhere on motorcycles and horseback, like a movie, like ‘Braveheart’ or something. Can you believe that shit? [Martin continues speaking in Spanish].

Miguel Sifuentes: [00:01:00] So they all get caught except this one guy, who just keeps running for some reason. [Martin continues speaking in Spanish].

Miguel Sifuentes: [00:01:08] Everybody's yelling, "Stop! Stop!" And it isn't just the Border Patrol. Even the coyote's telling him, "they got us, man. Stop! Stop!" [Martin continues speaking in Spanish, then laughs].

Miguel Sifuentes: [00:01:24] This fool just keeps running and he's jumping over bushes. And the damn Border Patrol on horseback is gaining on him, bush by bush. [Martin continues speaking in Spanish, laughs].
Eventually the horse catches up with him and bites down on his hair hard enough to knock him down. [Martin continues speaking in Spanish, laughing]. It was like some Looney Tunes shit. [Martin continues speaking, laughing in Spanish].

And that was it. He wasn't running anywhere.

That was Martin Gomez with Miguel Sifuentes telling his story in English. We don't know what happened to the guy who got his head bitten by the horse, but we do know that the next day Martin made it across the border.

He later got in trouble with the law and now he's here in San Quentin. [Theme music comes up]. You're now tuned into San Quentin's 'Ear Hustle' from PRX's Radiotopia. I'm Earlonne Woods. I've been incarcerated for 21 years and I'm currently housed here at San Quentin State Prison in California.

I'm Nigel Poor, a visual artist and now podcaster. I've been working with the guys here at San Quentin for about seven years.

And together we're going to take you inside. [Theme music all the way up].

I'm against illegal immigration. I don't consider that a racist stance. I believe strongly in citizenship. I have American citizenship. I was lucky enough to get it by birth. There's over 30 million people who have earned that right by becoming here legally and becoming citizens.

That's Wayne Boatwright. He's been on the podcast before talking about race in prison.

When it comes to the issue of immigration, he thinks American citizenship is sacred.

I think as an American, I find it sacred because I've been able to go to other countries and really appreciate what America gives us in the sense of liberty, and rights and protection of the law, which may sound kind of ironic given the fact that we're doing this inside a prison.

Ironic, indeed. [Plucky guitar music].

Earlonne, immigration and crime is a hot button issue. And when an undocumented immigrant commits a serious crime, it might even end up on Trump's Twitter feed.
Earlonne Woods: [00:04:09] So I've heard.

Nigel Poor: [00:04:10] It's outrageous.

Earlonne Woods: [00:04:12] Yeah ... but that ignores the fact that immigrants — documented or undocumented — commit crimes at a lower rate than native-born Americans.

Nigel Poor: [00:04:20] There's a fair number of guys here from other countries and I've seen tension between races, but I've never got the feeling that there's any hostility towards immigrants. I just haven't seen it come up.

Earlonne Woods: [00:04:31] Well, it does happen in prison. You know, I mean, all factions beef. You know, but not as much, like, probably like how they do it on the streets.

Nigel Poor: [00:04:41] Yeah, I mean, it's in the news every day; there's talk about it.

Earlonne Woods: [00:04:43] So I think, at the end of the day, we all have to follow the same rules in prison. It don't matter if you were born in another country. If you in prison garb, you in prison garb, you know? [Music fades out].

Nigel Poor: [00:04:56] So it makes me wonder, though, what is it like to be in an American prison if you're from another country? [Earlonne laughs]. It has got to be weird.

Earlonne Woods: [00:05:05] I used to always like, when I see like a Mexican prison on TV or on the news, I used to be like, "Damn, what would it be like if I was in there?"

Nigel Poor: [00:05:12] I know, if you — do you speak Spanish?

Earlonne Woods: [00:05:15] Because I'm just probably — No! I don't speak Spanish. I'm just — I'd be a black dude in prison, in a Mexican prison, like!

Nigel Poor: [00:05:19] Yeah ... Maybe not so good. I don't know.

Earlonne Woods: [00:05:21] They probably be trying to fuck me over.

Nigel Poor: [00:05:23] [Laughs]. You wouldn't know!

Earlonne Woods: [00:05:24] I wouldn't know what's going on. [Both laugh].

Nigel Poor: [00:05:27] Oh, man.

Earlonne Woods: [00:05:27] Well that would be one way to learn about another country.
Nigel Poor: [00:05:32] I could definitely think of better ways to do it.

Earlonne Woods: [00:05:35] So for this episode we talked to a couple of prisoners who were born outside the United States and we really wanted to know: what's that like?

David Jassy: [00:05:44] I came to America. I'm a songwriter and music producer. And I came ... A friend of mine was working on a Britney Spears record and he asked me if I wanted to help him, so I came to work with him for a few weeks and just write for different artists.

Earlonne Woods: [00:05:59] But yet you've been here ...?

David Jassy: [00:06:01] Now I'm on my 10th year in prison for second degree murder.

Earlonne Woods: [00:06:07] That's our very own David Jassy. He's been contributing monster beats to 'Ear Hustle' since season one.

Nigel Poor: [00:06:13] Yep, like this one. [Hip hop beat plays].

David Jassy: [00:06:23] I came to America to fulfill my dream and now I'm sitting in an interview on a murder charge. It's overwhelming. It's just too shocking. You know, being in that situation would never be anything that anybody could imagine, but when you add that you're in a different country, it adds to the fear factor. And the only thing I knew about American prisons was from movies.

Earlonne Woods: [00:06:49] The crime that Jassy's in for took place in L.A. while he was out here working on music.

Nigel Poor: [00:06:54] He was convicted of second-degree murder for an altercation at a crosswalk that turned deadly.

Earlonne Woods: [00:06:59] It was his first encounter with the American legal system.

David Jassy: [00:07:02] When I first came to jail I thought that, "Man, how am I going to survive in L.A. County Jail alone? There ain't nobody from Sweden, nobody from Europe, period. I don't run with nobody. You have all these different gang members, and that was a whole different world.

Nigel Poor: [00:07:23] One day while waiting to be transported to court, Jassy was put into a holding tank that was full of gang members.

David Jassy: [00:07:30] And it's tense. Everybody's serious. You got some big dudes standing there ready like, you know, they ready to fight. And I remember this day particularly. A young guy comes in all tied up and looking too hard for the yard. And he walks up to guys that are way
bigger than him and was like, "Where you from? Where you from?" And everybody was like, "I'm from so-and-so. I'm from duh-duh-duh." And everybody answered very aggressively back and just like their whole body movement was like, "What? What you want? You want it?" So he goes around the whole room and he walks up to me and he's like, "Where you from?" And I looked him straight in the eye and say, "Europe." And his eyes goes left-right-all-over-the-globe trying to figure it out. And he goes, "Oh, you messed me up with that one." And the whole tank starts cracking up. And we just all started laughing and just — it just broke the ice, and it was just funny because everybody knew that he was really going through like, "Where is that?" You know, he was geographically trying to locate Europe and see if he had beef with ... [laughs a little] beef with Europe. [Laughs harder, hip hop beat comes up].

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:08:47] Now that Jassy was in the system, he had to make a choice that we all have to make: who are you going to run with?

**David Jassy:** [00:08:55] So when you first get to the jail, [music fades out] in my case L.A. County Jail, they put you on a long bench, where everybody's sitting on a line on a long bench. And you walk up to this window. And I had no idea what he was going to ask me. And the first question I get is, "What are you housed as? Black, white, other, Asian?" And it's like really rapid questions. And I had never heard that before in my life. [Tonal music comes up].

**Nigel Poor:** [00:09:25] So we've talked about this before, but we should go over it again, Earlonne. Explain what he's talking about.

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:09:30] When you first go to prison or you first go to jail, you're asked, "What are you?"

**Nigel Poor:** [00:09:36] What do they mean, "What are you?"

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:09:38] Like what are you? You're black? You're white? You're Mexican?

**Nigel Poor:** [00:09:43] Everybody has to answer that question.

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:09:44] Everybody has to answer that question.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:09:45] And then you're housed by that.

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:09:46] Yeah, because they document it. It's just like probably on your driver's licence. It says what you are.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:09:51] I have to look. I don't know if it does.

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:09:54] What?!
Nigel Poor: [00:09:54] I just know it has my height and weight.

Earlonne Woods: [00:09:55] It's going to say, "white female."

Nigel Poor: [00:09:58] Oh my god, I gotta double check that.

Earlonne Woods: [00:10:01] I think ... It's only been 21 years since I've seen one. [Both laugh, music fades out].

David Jassy: [00:10:06] In Sweden we don't — they don't put you, "what race do you belong to?" I've never had that question in my whole life. So first I'm like ... I was confused by the question. My mom is white. My dad is African. And he was kind of speeding me like, "Come on. Make up your mind." I'm just thinking fast. I'm just going, "Black?" not knowing what that actually meant within the prison system.

Nigel Poor: [00:10:29] So from the get-go he was administratively categorized as black.

Earlonne Woods: [00:10:33] I'd say welcome to America! [Nigel and Earlonne laugh] But guys knew he was from a different place.

Nigel Poor: [00:10:40] Sort of.

David Jassy: [00:10:41] Even though I was housed as black, all the blacks knew me from being from Europe. They're hearing me in the visiting room talking Swedish. They're hearing me on the phone talking Swedish.

Earlonne Woods: [00:10:52] What is — what is ‘talking Swedish’?

David Jassy: [00:10:52] [Laughs; speaks in Swedish].

David Jassy: [00:11:02] And a lot of times I'd be on the phone talking like that and, "Man! You really speak that shit, huh!" Yeah, you know, they couldn't really make that connection that I learned that language. No, it's my first language.

Earlonne Woods: [00:11:13] You had that you was speaking differently — look the same, but you speaking differently.

David Jassy: [00:11:16] And the first question I always get: "I didn't know they had — do they really have black people in Sweden?" [Earlonne laughs] You know, I had a lot of funny questions like that. I remember one guy in L.A. County Jail, he was like, "You guys have hip-hop in Sweden?" I say, "Yeah." "You guys got Lil Wayne?" I say, "Yeah." [laughs] He says, "So every time Lil Wayne goes there, he rap in Swedish?" [Both guys laugh, tonal piano music, then sound of prison door slam].
Nigel Poor: [00:11:42] It was funny then, but later he wasn’t laughing about the choice he made. And we’re going to hear more about that in a minute.

Earlonne Woods: [00:11:48] But first we're going to bring in another guy with a very different American story.

Phoeun You: [00:11:53] What's happening?

Nigel Poor: [00:11:55] Hey, so can you start by just telling us your name?

Phoeun You: [00:11:56] Yes. My name is Phoeun You.

Nigel Poor: [00:11:58] But I know you got a different name.

Phoeun You: [00:12:00] Yeah. Most people call me “Sane,” but I'm trying to transition back to my birth name.

Earlonne Woods: [00:12:05] Wait a minute, there's nothing wrong with “Sane,” because that means that you're sane.

Nigel Poor: [00:12:07] Well that's what I was going to ask him. Where does that name come from, "Sane"?

Phoeun You: [00:12:10] "Sane" is short for “Insane.” And then I was trying to cut that out, trying to be a better person, so I came to “Sane.” And now I'm trying to come all the way back to my birth name, which is Phoeun.

Nigel Poor: [00:12:22] Phoeun was born in Cambodia. He left when he was five, but he still has a few memories of life there before his family had to flee.

Earlonne Woods: [00:12:30] He remembers his critters, like this beetle.

Phoeun You: [00:12:33] I would tie a string to it and allow it to fly in the air. You know, what I mean? And I'd walk with it, like it was a kite or something. But I remember me and my brothers doing that quite often.

Nigel Poor: [00:12:44] [Dark music] Phoeun's last memory of Cambodia was fleeing the Khmer Rouge. They were killing everybody who was educated. It became known as "The Killing Fields."

Phoeun You: [00:12:54] We had to leave. I don't remember packing up and leaving, but I remember traveling, like, on foot with me being on my dad's back. And I didn't know until later
on that we walked, like, for three days and three nights. And I see a bunch of other, like, refugees to try to get to safety in another country. We ended up in Thailand.

Earlonne Woods: [00:13:26] Phoeun and his family spent about two years in a refugee camp in Thailand before being admitted to the United States. They were sponsored by a Mormon family and settled in Ogden, Utah. [music fades out].

Phoeun You: [00:13:37] The people I lived with was white. The food was strange. Going to church was strange. [Laughs]. It was a culture shock.

Nigel Poor: [00:13:46] After four or five years in Utah there was another culture shock. His family moved to Long Beach in Southern California.

Phoeun You: [00:13:54] Now I gotta adjust to another life. Now it's the city life now. Now it's the gang life. Now it's a fast-paced place. And the people was different.

Earlonne Woods: [00:14:04] There were blacks, there were Mexicans, and there was also a Cambodian community on Long Beach. That's why his family moved there.

Nigel Poor: [00:14:11] Phoeun had a lot of brothers and sisters. And even though his parents were strict, they couldn't keep him away from the Cambodian gang.

Earlonne Woods: [00:14:18] This is around the time when he picked up that nickname, "Insane."

Phoeun You: [00:14:22] We were new arrivals to Long Beach. Blacks and Mexicans were already there. And I don't think they liked us invading their territory. So from school we started fighting with them, coming home started fighting with them, also. Oftentimes we would often lose because we were outnumbered. So that's when, for me, the gang started. We started building our own, like, core nucleus of guys, so that way we could start defending ourselves.

Earlonne Woods: [00:14:59] We hear this a lot in prison: [dark music, hip-hop beat] A guy looks for acceptance, joins a gang, then there's trouble. In Phoeun's case, he got into a conflict with a Mexican gang and he killed somebody. He was 21 years old.

Nigel Poor: [00:15:11] He'd never been arrested before. And he went from the streets to a maximum security, level-four prison: more culture shock. [Music fades out].

Phoeun You: [00:15:21] Going to the four was really scary for me. Yeah, I look around and I see men, huge men, different races, tattoos all over their faces, their bodies and I feel like I'm... I was a little boy amongst men.
**Nigel Poor:** [00:15:48] [High-pressure music] Phoeun faced the same choice Jassy had to make: which category would he belong to?

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:15:52] The choice is simple: Asian Pacific Islanders. That group includes anybody from Pakistan to Polynesia, Asia to the Pacific. And within that category Phoeun found other Cambodians to run with.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:16:04] For Jassy it wasn't so easy. Remember, Jassy is Swedish, but he identified as black.

**David Jassy:** [00:16:12] So now I'm at Solano State Prison and it's pretty far away from Los Angeles. And my girlfriend was flying in from Sweden, and I was really happy, you know? I hadn't seen her in a long time. I was really excited. And just before she came here, there was a black guy that had had a fist fight with a white guy. So all the blacks and all the whites were on lockdown, and just because I was housed as "black" I was not allowed to go out. Now I'm on lockdown and it hits me. I realize. I'm like, "Wow, she really took that trip in vain. She's on a plane now not knowing what's going on. There is no way for me to contact her." And it is just ... it's ... it's devastating. [Music].

**Nigel Poor:** [00:17:08] Jassy had to figure something out. He had a young son back in Sweden and he didn't want to be on lockdown when he came to visit.

**David Jassy:** [00:17:16] Over and over black kept going on lockdown. Not that blacks were more violent, it's just that the blacks make up a way bigger percentage in the prison population, so the chances of us going on lockdown, all the risks, I would say, are much bigger. [Full music up; interlude].

**Nigel Poor:** [00:17:36] This was a few years ago. Now in California state prisons, lockdowns cannot be done by race.

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:17:42] Whew! [Nigel and Earlonne laugh]. That shit used to suck.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:17:47] Yeah, I'm surprised they could do it, actually.

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:17:49] Yeah, I think it was kinda ...

**Nigel Poor:** [00:17:49] Seems illegal.

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:17:52] It might have been, but I'll tell you it sucked because you'd be sitting there like, "Fuck ..." seeing everybody else walking by. But, at the time, Jassy was in Solano State prison. Race lockdowns were still in play. And Jassy was regretting his choice. [Music fades out].
Nigel Poor: [00:18:08] He decided he didn't want to be classified as black anymore.

David Jassy: [00:18:12] I remember going to my counselor. I said, "man, there's been a misunderstanding, man." [Earlonne and Jassy laugh]. And he was like, "man, I wouldn't make that transition if I was you. You know, the blacks are gonna start tripping, and da-da-da-da-da." And I was like, "I don't care."

Nigel Poor: [00:18:29] [Hip-hop beats] He wanted to be reclassified as "other."

Earlonne Woods: [00:18:32] Yep. There's a racial category in prison called “other,” for everyone who doesn't fit in the usual categories.

David Jassy: [00:18:40] Everybody else that's black from a different country ran "other." I've seen all the Africans, the Jamaicans, everybody from Belize. They all ran "other." So I'm like, "why am I not doing that? Why am I making it hard for myself?"

Nigel Poor: [00:18:53] Jassy got in touch with the Swedish consulate, and they gave him the paperwork he needed to change his classification.

Earlonne Woods: [00:18:59] And three days later he officially became an "other." [Music fades out]. So we asked him what he thought about his new label.

David Jassy: [00:19:09] I felt like I was put in a situation where I had to choose something. That was their rule that they had implemented. I know who I am. I know my African roots. I know my European roots. I'm all of that. I never felt like, "Oh, man, oh you, you know, you're giving up on your own race." No, it was never that for me, because I'm not confused at all of who I am. It was just a matter of: I need to do this prison time in a way that works for me.

Earlonne Woods: [00:19:37] So what do people reference you as when you make a dope-ass beat? Are you a other, are you a black? Are you just a dope ass?

David Jassy: [00:19:44] They call me the "Swedish Phenom." [Both guys laugh, sound of prison door slamming shut].

Phoeun You: [00:19:53] So I got this tattoo approximately 20 years ago.

Nigel Poor: [00:20:01] Phoeun's tattoo is really noticeable. It covers half his neck. And it says, in cursive, "The Killing Fields."

Phoeun You: [00:20:08] And The Killing Fields represent two things. One, is the history of my people and what they've been through. And it also serves as an identity piece for prison, where the Asian Pacific Islander community, when they see it, they're going to acknowledge that, "OK, I know who he is, where he's from: Cambodia." And having this is almost — having this tattoo
that says "The Killing Fields" — almost served me as a protection piece from other races, whites, blacks, Mexicans. When they see this they're not going to understand that this is not my — this is my culture, this is my history. They're not going to understand that. But they're going to see it as potentially a threat, somebody that they don't want to mess with.

Nigel Poor: [00:21:02] When you see that what do you think? On his neck ... what would you think it meant?

Earlonne Woods: [00:21:07] Oh, shit. He's probably about the business, you know?


Nigel Poor: [00:21:12] All right. Here's one more thing about Phoeun we haven't told you yet. He had refugee status, but he never became a citizen. He said he never even thought about it. But now it's starting to weigh on him.

Phoeun You: [00:21:24] When you come to prison, being a citizen doesn't matter. People don't care. That's the last thing on their mind.

Nigel Poor: [00:21:34] So why is it starting to matter now?

Phoeun You: [00:21:35] It's starting to matter because I want to leave prison and return to the community that I harmed and make amends. So when I get out, because I'm not a citizen, there's a strong possibility that I'll get deported. [Sound of closing prison door, clunking].

Wayne Boatwright: [00:22:03] I mean, I would hate to have been in a refugee camp as a young child and have a chance to come to America and then be at risk of being deported after I'd served whatever sentence I had to serve, but I'm not at all bothered by that. It goes back to this concept of the sacredness of citizenship.

Earlonne Woods: [00:22:22] This is Wayne Boatwright again. He's obviously thought a lot about this issue.

Nigel Poor: [00:22:26] And we don't agree with him, but just like on the outside there's a huge range of opinions here.

Wayne Boatwright: [00:22:32] If they had been here since they were one-year-old they had every opportunity to become a citizen. Either their parents or they never learned how to do that, so they never finalized their citizenship status. They were just residents. And under our current law, if you're a resident and you commit a felony, and not a citizen, we can deport you. And I'm
fine with that. I mean, I'm not saying it's good for them, but it doesn't bother me because I consider citizenship sacred. [Sound of slamming prison door].

**Nigel Poor:** [00:23:05] So where would you get deported to?

**Phoeun You:** [00:23:08] I'll probably go back to Cambodia, probably Battambang. I'm not 100 percent sure. Yeah, I wonder about that.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:23:17] So you were four years old when you left Cambodia.

**Phoeun You:** [00:23:20] Yeah.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:23:20] And how old are you now?

**Phoeun You:** [00:23:20] I'm 42, turning 43.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:23:23] OK, so let's say you get out when you're 44. Let's just say. What would be waiting for you in Cambodia?

**Phoeun You:** [00:23:32] A whole lot of nothing, because family members that I left behind, I don't know them. I don't know if I, me, being a grown man, could knock on their door and say, "hey, I'm your family. Could you receive me?"

**Nigel Poor:** [00:23:48] Do you speak Cambodian still?

**Phoeun You:** [00:23:50] I speak Cambodian, but I can't hold a long conversation. I don't read or write, either. So that's going to be tough. Just walking through a strange land again, brand new, I'm gonna need somebody either to walk alongside me, or somebody, and I don't have that. That's a scary feeling.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:24:15] We asked Phoeun what's going to happen to him. How can he find out?

**Phoeun You:** [00:24:20] How do I find out? I have to rely on those who came before me, meaning the guys that are already deported or the guys who made it free and made it through the streets in America, you know.

**Borey Ai (PJ):** [00:24:44] [Music transition]. I was raised in a refugee camp until I was like four-and-a-half years old. And then after that we immigrated to the United States around 1985.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:24:53] And how old were you when you got here?

**Borey Ai (PJ):** [00:24:54] I was four-and-a-half, turning five.
Earlonne Woods: [00:24:59] [Intense music] This is Borey Ai, or P.J. as he's known here. PJ's story is like Phoeun's. His family left Cambodia to escape The Killing Fields, but unlike Phoeun, PJ never stepped foot in Cambodia. He was born in Thailand in that refugee camp.

Nigel Poor: [00:25:15] In the U.S., PJ got involved with gangs. When he was 14, he killed someone during a robbery. When he was 15 he was tried as an adult and sentenced to 25 years to life.

Earlonne Woods: [00:25:26] And like Phoeun he wasn't a citizen. His family got citizenship, but he couldn't because he was in prison. PJ's served 20 years, and in November 2016 he was found suitable by the parole board.

Nigel Poor: [00:25:39] That's right. He's out of prison. And I had to go to Oakland to meet with him. His story is so similar to Phoeun's.

Earlonne Woods: [00:25:46] Sure is.

Nigel Poor: [00:25:47] And I wanted to find out what happened to him when he got out of San Quentin. And maybe that would give us some sense of what Phoeun might be facing. [Music fades out].

Earlonne Woods: [00:25:55] PJ was ready. He had his parole plans all worked out, a job, a place to stay, even a new outfit: a gray shirt with two pockets, blue Levi's and Timberland boots.

Borey Ai (PJ): [00:26:07] They're pretty heavy, actually.

Nigel Poor: [00:26:08] They are heavy.

Borey Ai (PJ): [00:26:09] Really heavy, but comfortable.

Nigel Poor: [00:26:11] And then how did it feel when you got … when you put those clothes on?

Borey Ai (PJ): [00:26:15] It felt great. It felt odd. It felt like knowing like this is my last day in prison, knowing that this is different, right. You feel different, but then the clothes substantiate that I'm no longer in blue. I'm no longer in, like, a blue shirt or prison outfit.

Nigel Poor: [00:26:34] About a month before his date, his counselor told PJ that ICE — Immigration and Customs Enforcement — might be there waiting for him, but he didn't know for sure and he put it out of his mind. But the day of his release, when he was sitting in San Quentin's holding tank, he learned that ICE was going to pick him up.
Borey Ai (PJ): [00:26:53] I was walking out the tank and there's two ICE officers waiting. And they had handcuffs and everything. They told me to leave my property there. They pick it up. You can't take off my shoes, the Timberland shoes. They take that out because they can't have shoelaces. I took my belt out because you can't have a belt either. So I took my belt out. And then they shackled me right from head to toe.

Earlonne Woods: [00:27:13] And then the ICE officers put him in a van.

Borey Ai (PJ): [00:27:15] It was like a dog-cage van we call it, in that van, because all metal — like it's metal all way around. It's a metal bench. And so they put me in there and I sat on this metal seat and they drove me to San Francisco.

Nigel Poor: [00:27:28] In San Francisco, he was processed in an ICE field office then sent to Sacramento in that same van.

Earlonne Woods: [00:27:34] He was shackled again, so he couldn't get the seatbelt on.

Borey Ai (PJ): [00:27:39] So I'm sliding in and I remember, like, when he stopped and I hit my head in the cages and I cut myself. And that moment, I woke up. Like, I mean, you know, I'm back in prison again.

Earlonne Woods: [00:27:54] [Sad music] PJ was sent to a county jail in Sacramento that was serving as an ICE detention facility.

Wayne Boatwright: [00:28:06] I think they're just like a camp. I don't think it's like a prison. I think that they have extra rights and privileges in there. They have a good meal. They're taken care of. They're kept safe. They're not allowed to leave it. They go to school. They go to exercises. They do stuff in these detention centers. [Music fades out]. Obviously, I've never been to one. I have no idea what it is. [Sound of car engine starting].

Borey Ai (PJ): [00:28:34] I walk into a dorm. And it was shocking. People were running everywhere. I'm surrounded by people from all different cultural, people who has never been in prison before, people who is off the street, who detoxing from drugs. And I walk in there and it's, like, noisy. This is like 12 o'clock at night. And it's like people are banging on tables; people are yelling and screaming; the TV's on really loud. And it's just like … it was overwhelming. It was a lot. Then I looked around and it's like — the bunks are everywhere, right. And it's a small space. And then like they gave me this mattress that's right off the yard. But I remember looking at the mattresses, like bugs crawling all over it. It's so nasty. And and they don't give you any type of disinfectant to clean or nothing. They just give it to you, throw three wool blanket. "Here. Deal with it. Go in a pot." That was it. When I was in a county jail I didn't go anywhere for a year and a half. I was in a pod. I walked 20 feet a day. I was sitting on my bed most of the time. So my muscles was falling asleep and my joints and everything was falling asleep because I wasn't used to walking.
Nigel Poor: [00:29:42] [Piano music] PJ spent a total of 19 months in ICE detention. He was waiting to be deported, and we can't say "back to Cambodia" because he's never been there.

Earlonne Woods: [00:29:51] But that's where the U.S. government wants to send him. The problem is the Cambodian government hasn't provided the necessary paperwork, so ICE released him from detention. [Music fades out].

Borey Ai (PJ): [00:30:02] So I'm under ordered supervision right now, on the ankle monitor. At any time Cambodia can change their mind and issue documents. ICE will come and detain me again and deport me. So I've been out for three months. So I'm living in San Francisco and I'm living in limbo — I'm waiting to see what's going to happen next.

Nigel Poor: [00:30:23] But how can it end? What needs to happen to let you stay here?

Borey Ai (PJ): [00:30:30] Right now, if the governor will give me a pardon for my crime, from my past crime, that would take it.

Nigel Poor: [00:30:38] Is that the only thing?

Borey Ai (PJ): [00:30:39] That's the only thing.

Nigel Poor: [00:30:41] And how likely is that?

Borey Ai (PJ): [00:30:42] It's up to the governor.

Nigel Poor: [00:30:46] If you — If you did get deported, what's waiting for you in Cambodia?

Borey Ai (PJ): [00:30:50] Nothing. [Sound of car driving down a road, clanking of prison bars].

Marco Villa: [00:30:59] My release date will be September 25th. In 32 days I'll be gone.

Nigel Poor: [00:31:07] Marco Villa's been in the United States for 32 years, and in a California prison for ten-and-a-half. He's not a citizen.

Earlonne Woods: [00:31:13] When he's released he faces another one of those stark choices that prisoners have to make.

Nigel Poor: [00:31:21] And what's going to happen when you walk out that gate?

Marco Villa: [00:31:27] Well, I'm going to be asked by the — by immigration if I want to fight my case, find my papers, because I had a Social Security number, and a green card and I had it for 20 years. And that's what I know. As far as I know, it's about a five percent possibility for me to
win my case. So they're going to ask me if I want to sign my deportation. And that's most likely what I'm going to do, because if I fight my case it will take like two years or more. And I'm going to have to be in an immigration facility, and end up getting deported anyways. I mean, with a five percent chance to stay here I think it's not worth it to take that risk.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:32:21] [Sad music] Marco's heard what it's like in those deportation facilities and, Earlonne, we keep hearing the conditions in them are deliberately harsh so that undocumented immigrants won't stay there and fight their cases.

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:32:31] If that's so, it worked on Marco. [Music fades out, sound of prison bars clanking].

**Nigel Poor:** [00:32:41] If you knew, when you got out, you were going to be deported back to Cambodia, would you rather stay in prison or would you rather get out and go back to Cambodia?

**Phoeun You:** [00:32:52] This thought crossed my mind a lot. After 20-plus, 23 so far, I don't want to sit in immigration, be detained further. I want to be free. Yeah, I want to be free. So I don't know if I want to challenge the policy or not. At the same time, I do because this is all I know. I'm not an American on paper, but I still feel like an American.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:33:35] [Hopeful music] So Phoeun's probably going to fight deportation to Cambodia. He really doesn't know what his chances are and it's going to be tough for him to stay.

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:33:44] Same for the "Swedish Phenom." Jassy came over for work and he doesn't have U.S. citizenship either. [Music fades out].

**Nigel Poor:** [00:33:52] So when you get out what are you expecting? What's waiting for you when you get out?

**David Jassy:** [00:33:55] Well first thing is — [long pause, emotional, voice cracks] — my son and I always say that the first thing I'm going to do is I'm going to fly to Sweden, see my son and I always tell him that the day after we're going to fly to Gambia to see my dad. It bothers me a lot because I have a lot of guilt — [voice breaks, sniffles] — for getting into this situation, and to have him growing up without me.

**Earlonne Woods:** [00:34:52] [Sad piano music]. On a brighter side, Jassy has a familiar country to go back to. He has family there, and he speaks the language.

**Nigel Poor:** [00:34:58] So it's probably going to be easier for him to make his parole plans: where to live, where to work and all of that. But if you're facing deportation back to a country where there's nothing waiting for you, how do you plan for that?
Earlonne Woods: [00:35:11] I guess you don't. But this is when it finally matters in prison if you're a citizen or not: the day you get out. [Music up in full, hip-hop beat].

Nigel Poor: [00:35:34] Thanks to David Jassy, Phoeun You, PJ Borey, and Marco Villa for talking to us about their hopes and fears.

Earlonne Woods: [00:35:41] And don't forget about Miguel Sifuentes, who translated Martin Gomez's story at the top of the episode.

Nigel Poor: [00:35:47] And thanks to Wayne Boatwright for sharing his thoughts with us.

Earlonne Woods: [00:35:50] And shout out to 'Snap Judgment' for letting us record PJ in their Oakland studio. [Music fades out, new rap starts]. When we come back we'll have a Count Time for you. That's when we play a little some extra we want you to hear. [Rap in full].

Man: [00:36:40] [Bell tolls] Count Time! [Upbeat guitar music]

Nigel Poor: [00:36:54] Sometimes when I walk down into the yard I hear these guys and I can't see where it's coming from. It just gives me the biggest smile every time.

Earlonne Woods: [00:37:02] So when I recorded them I was afraid that I was just bouncing up and down [laughter]. But that's the 'Three Guitarists.' We've been trying to get them recorded forever. And the last time, if you remember, I forgot to push the record button.

Nigel Poor: [00:37:18] Oh, I remember. [Laughing] But this time you redeemed yourself.

Earlonne Woods: [00:37:23] I redeemed myself! I did good.

[Singing in Spanish, the music fades out, bell tolls].

Earlonne Woods: [00:38:09] That's Jose [Diaz], Vicente [Gomez], and Gerry [Sanchez-Muratalla], the "Three Guitarists."

Nigel Poor: [00:38:14] 'Ear Hustle' is produced by myself, Nigel Poor.


Nigel Poor: [00:38:19] With help from outside producer Pat Mesiti-Miller, who also comes in to work with our sound design team. This episode was scored with music by David Jassy and Antwon Williams.
Earlonne Woods: [00:38:29] Curtis Fox is our story editor. Erin Wade's our digital producer. And Julie Shapiro is our executive producer for Radiotopia. We want to thank Warden Ron Davis. And as you know, every episode has to be approved by this guy here. ["Three Guitarists" music ends].

Lt. Sam Robinson: [00:38:46] This is Lieutenant Sam Robinson at San Quentin State Prison. And I think this story demonstrates that just as divergent the views are outside the walls of the prison they are inside the prison. And so, as I always do, I approve this story. [Theme music].


Male Voice: [00:39:16] I had known since my boyhood that one of the principal causes of bitterness among imprisoned men is that invisible barrier, much more impregnable than a mere concrete wall between them and the outside world.

Earlonne Woods: [00:39:33] 'Ear Hustle' is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a collection of the best podcasts around. Hear more at radiotopia.fm.

Aly Tamboura: [00:39:42] This is Aly Tamboura, who used to be a resident here at San Quentin State Prison. I now work for the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. This podcast was made possible with support from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, working to redesign the justice system by building power and opportunity for communities impacted by incarceration.

Nigel Poor: [00:40:02] I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlonne Woods: [00:40:03] And I'm Earlonne Woods. Thanks for Ear Hustling.