

00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	<b>Speaker:</b> <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and is distributed by NPR.
00:00:13	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:15	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. Delroy Lindo is an incredible actor. He’s one of the best to do it. His childhood was all over the place. He lived in London, then he moved to Canada. In his teens, he came down to the States. He ended up at the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco. And he was a theatre actor for about the first decade of his career. He got a Tony nomination. But Spike Lee changed Lindo’s life. He cast Lindo in <i>Malcolm X</i> as West Indian Archie. It wasn’t a huge part, but it made a huge impact.
00:00:53	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:00:55	Clip	Clip	<b>Music:</b> Upbeat, jazzy music.  <b>West Indian Archie (<i>Malcolm X</i>):</b> You like you’re new in town. From what I can see, you’re a—you’re pretty handy with a buckle.  <b>Speaker:</b> He had it coming.
00:01:04	Sound Effect	Transition	<b>Archie:</b> Pull up a chair. Music swells and fades.
00:01:05	Jesse	Host	All of the sudden, Lindo was a movie actor. He was in <i>Get Shorty</i> , <i>Gone in 60 Seconds</i> , a bunch of Spike Lee pictures. Their most recent collaboration was <i>Da 5 Bloods</i> . Lindo played a vet returning to Vietnam. If you saw that movie, you know how powerful Lindo was in it.
00:01:24	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:01:25	Clip	Clip	<i>[Jungle sounds.]</i>  <b>Paul (<i>Da 5 Bloods</i>):</b> It will not kill Paul. You hear me? And the US government will not take me out. I will choose when and how I die. You dig?
00:01:49	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:01:51	Jesse	Host	Delroy Lindo’s latest project is the Hulu show <i>Unprisoned</i> . It’s about a father, named Edwin, and his daughter, Paige. They’re—well, let’s just say they’re working on their relationship. Edwin is smart, handsome, charming, charismatic, and just got out of prison. Paige is his support on the outside. Only, she’s feeling pretty mixed about the whole thing. Actually, she is feeling very mixed about the whole thing. Lindo plays the father. The daughter is played by Kerry Washington.  In this clip, Edwin—the dad—is fresh out of the halfway house. He’s reunited with his daughter, and his parole officer wants to know: where’s he gonna live?

00:02:41	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:02:42	Clip	Clip	<p><b>Parole Officer (<i>Unprisoned</i>):</b> Once a week, check-ins for drug testing and career counseling. And I assume he'll be living with you?</p> <p><i>[Speaking over each other.]</i></p> <p><b>Edwin:</b> Oh, no, that's a no-go. No.</p> <p><b>Paige:</b> Oh, no, absolutely not.</p> <p><b>Parole Officer:</b> Well, we do recommend parolees live with family to give them the best chance of staying out.</p> <p><b>Paige:</b> Yeah, no, of course. That makes sense. But I only have two rules, and one of them is that he cannot live with me. The other is don't ask me for money.</p> <p><b>Edwin:</b> Don't ask for money. But what my daughter doesn't know is that I'm out for good this time! And you—<i>[chuckles]</i> you're gonna see. Free at last.</p> <p><b>Paige:</b> I have heard this before, in 1986, 1992, 1998. Actually, December of '97. And then, most famously in 2005! So, I—you know. I mean, what's different?</p> <p><b>Edwin:</b> What's different is that I mean it this time, Paige!</p>
00:03:26	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:03:27	Jesse	Host	Delroy Lindo, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> . So happy to have you on the show. So happy to get to talk to you.
00:03:33	Delroy Lindo	Guest	Thank you. Thank you for having me.
00:03:35	Jesse	Host	So, this show isn't a sitcom, but it is television comedy. And I wonder if that was something that had ever been offered to you or that you had ever thought about doing.
00:03:50	Delroy	Guest	Every now and again, comedic work has been offered to me, but there are—usually it is accompanied by the—there's a comment. "Well, we understand he's not known for being—for doing comedy." In this instance, Kerry and Tracy, in our first couple of conversations, described this or described the aspiration for this work as a dramedy. And so, I understood, or I had an understanding that it was—you know, a mix of comedy and drama.
00:04:36	Jesse	Host	Do you think of yourself as being funny?
			<i>[Delroy laughs.]</i>
			I'm not—I'm not asking you to brag on yourself. What I'm asking is do you find, in your career, that you're like, "Man, I'd like to do more of that. I think I—I think I'm as good at that as I am at the other thing."
00:04:52	Delroy	Guest	Um, well comedy is difficult. I mean, acting is difficult. Do I aspire specifically to do comedy? I guess I would say yes from the standpoint that it is another opportunity to show range in one's work as an actor. And so, from that standpoint—you know, I'd like to get

a crack at doing a range of work. And I think I have, to an extent. But certainly, you know, just out-and-out comedy has—they have been a smaller part of the work that I've done. Look, I don't know, I'm thinking *Get Shorty*. That's a comedy. You're really funny in it, too.

00:05:44 Jesse Host  
 00:05:46 Delroy Guest Thank you. Thank you. And if—and if I would've stretched my brain further, I could probably think of a couple of other comedies. But you know, certainly *Get Shorty* was a comedy. And it was towards the beginning of my film career. So, yeah. I'd like to do more of that.

00:06:07 Jesse Host I mean, I feel like one of your greatest strengths—I mean, obviously like I think people probably offer you work on the strength of your presence. You know? The intensity that you're able to bring, physically, emotionally, whatever. Right?

[Delroy agrees.]

But to me, one of your greatest strengths as a performer and one of the things I enjoy watching in your performances so much is how good you are at being sly—that there is, you know—you can play something head-on, for sure. You're fully capable. But like, I really enjoy watching you play someone who's got a trick up their sleeve or knows one thing more than the other people in the scene or—you know what I mean? That kind of thing. That's what I love.

00:06:52 Delroy Guest I do. I think I know what you mean. The thing is this: it feels to me that that's very lifelike. I mean, not that quality in me, per se, but the aspect of people that are communicating and communicating on one level—externally—but internally they may very well have a whole other agenda going on internally. And that's—that happens in life all the time. So, perhaps your recognition of that in me is in fact a recognition or an acknowledgement of kind of a lifelike quality. And let me say one other thing about—going back to your original question. The thing that, as comedy—as far as comedy is concerned, the thing that *Get Shorty* and *Unprisoned* have in common to an extent is that it's good writing.

I remember reading—when I read the *Get Shorty* script—the screenplay for the first time, it felt—“Woah! This is terrific writing!” Because initially, I was not aware that in fact [chuckles] it was based on—and even though it said it on the—I had not, at that point, read the Elmore Leonard book, so I didn't know that the source was terrific. So, I think what *Get Shorty* and *Unprisoned* have in common to an extent is the fact that A) it's well-written material, even though I'm—let me be clear. I'm not making a comparison between *Get Shorty* and *Unprisoned*. But what I'm saying is—

00:08:47 Jesse Host They're different things for sure.  
 00:08:48 Delroy Guest Yeah, they're very different animals. But what I am saying is on some level, the comedy comes out of the situations that the people are in.

00:08:58 Jesse Host We've got more from my conversation with Delroy Lindo still to come. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye*, from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

00:09:07 Promo Clip **Music:** Chiming synth.

**Jarrett Hill:** Hey there, beautiful people. I'm Jarrett Hill.

**Tre'vell Anderson:** And I'm Tre'vell Anderson. And we wanna know: have you ever had mixed feelings about the things that you looove?

**Jarrett:** Ooh, maybe about the things that you hate?

**Tre'vell:** Then *FANTI* is the show for you. *FANTI* is the podcast for all those complex and complicado conversations about the grey areas in our lives.

**Jarrett:** You might have conflicting feelings about Kamala Harris or copaganda or interracial friending.

**Tre'vell:** Mm-hm, mm-hm. That's alright, 'cause we do too. And we get into it every single Thursday. Catch this slay-worthy audio at [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org), that's [MaximumFun.org/fanti](http://MaximumFun.org/fanti). That's F-A-N-T-I. Come get all this good-good.

**Jarrett:** Or this great-great.

*[Music ends.]*

00:09:48	Music	Transition	Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.
00:09:53	Jesse	Host	Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. Our guest is Delroy Lindo. He is a veteran actor. He's been in movies like <i>Malcolm X</i> , <i>Crooklyn</i> , and <i>The Cider House Rules</i> . These days, he's starring on the TV show <i>Unprisoned</i> . It's about a father who reconnects with his adult daughter after serving 17 years in prison. There's some comedy. There's some drama. And Lindo is extraordinary at both. Let's get back into the conversation.
00:10:25	Delroy	Guest	I happen to have a clip from <i>Get Shorty</i> right here. So—
00:10:26	Jesse	Host	Oh, that's hilarious. For real? I think we should—I think we should listen to it. So, your character—so, this movie is—and the book—are about a mobster who goes to LA to basically end up breaking into showbusiness. That's John Travolta's character, Chili. And he ends up writing a script and it's like caught up in some stuff and your character is a shady investor in the project that he needs to shake loose in order to move forward.
00:10:57	Delroy	Guest	But it's interesting. You're describing it and you're laughing already, right? So, it's—it's—it's kind of sort of inherently funny. But please go ahead.
00:11:05	Jesse	Host	Well, I loved—I sure love Elmore Leonard. Like, I got to interview him one time while he smoked menthol cigarettes on a hotel balcony 'cause he wasn't allowed to smoke in the hotel room. And it was just a real highlight of my career, but—it's a wonderful movie. So, this is a scene where—this is a scene where your character knows that John Travolta's character is trying to shake him loose, but your character wants to stick around.
00:11:31	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:11:32	Clip	Clip	<b>Bo (<i>Get Shorty</i>):</b> Well, what do you think of the script?

**Chili:** *[Sighs.]* Well, the first thing that's gotta go is the title. I mean, this writer's name, Maurice Saffron, would be better than Lovejoy.

**Bo:** Now I'm doing that one. You know what I'm thinking? Why don't you and I, we sit down, we write the script over where it needs it.

**Chili:** You could write one of these?

**Bo:** There's nothing to it! All you do, you get an idea, you set down what you wanna say on paper. Then, you hire somebody else to fill in the commas and *[censored]* where they belong if you're not positive yourself. Maybe fix up the spelling where you have some tricky words. Although, I've seen some scripts I know words weren't spell right; there was hardly any commas in it at all! So, I don't think that's too important. Alright. You get to the end. You write in, "Fade out." And you're done.

**Chili:** That's it?

**Bo:** That's it.

**Chili:** That's all there is to it? *[Beat.]* Then what the *[censored]* do I need you for?

00:12:25 Sound Effect Transition

Music swells and fades.

00:12:26 Jesse Host

*[They laugh.]*

When you were making that movie, you were relatively new in the movie business. You had done a lot of theatre acting.

*[Delroy confirms.]*

00:12:54 Delroy Guest

But, um... what was it like to be in a satire of a world that you, yourself, were still kind of getting the lay of the land of?  
*[Sighs.]* Um... that's a really good question. 'Cause it's causing me to recollect. I'm not sure that I'm going to answer your question, but there are a couple of recollections that I have that may not be actually responding to what you've asked me. There were a couple of very significant differences on *Get Shorty*. So, the first thing that I recall is being in the meeting with Barry Sonnenfeld and the casting director whose name I can't remember. I don't remember. But it was my first meeting on *Get Shorty*. And I was in the meeting, and we would—Barry Sonnenfeld and I were talking. And then, he said to me, "Okay, should we—should we read a few—" You know, "Let's read a couple pages."

And the casting director said, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no. He's not auditioning. This is just a meeting. And internally, I'm thinking, "*[Stammers.]* Yeah, right! Right. I'm not—I'm not auditioning. This is just—*[laughing]* we're just talking!" But I was stunned, because even though I had not auditioned for the last two films, the previous two films that I had done, which were *Crooklyn* and *Clockers*, directed by Spike. I had not—I had auditioned for *Malcolm X*, but Spike actually just offered me—*[coughs]* excuse me—on the strength of what I had done in *Malcolm X*. Spike just called me up and offered me *Crooklyn* and *Clockers*.

So, in this *Get Shorty* meeting, I don't—I really do not recall whether it had been presented to me as an audition or just a meeting. I

really do not remember. But what I do remember, when Barry Sonnenfeld said, "Let's read some words," and the casting director just said, "No, no, no. That's not—that's not—that's not—this is—this is not what's happening here." And I was very pleasantly surprised. Then, I got a second meeting with Barry, the casting director, and a couple of other executives. Danny DeVito was there. The people who were involved with Jersey Films. Mm. Michael Shamberg. Stacey Sher, I believe her name was, and Danny DeVito. I think they were, at the time, partners in this company, Jersey Films. And I was asked to go and meet with all of them. And so, I went. And Barry had said, "The only thing—" Barry Sonnenfeld had said to me, "The only thing that I ask is that you—when we start working on this, you talk really fast. Just keep talking. Talk really fast."

So, I'm going into the room even though I was not specifically asked to read any pages from the script, but I went into the room, and I said, "I just wanted you guys to know that I can talk really fast when you need me to. And then if that's really what's required, I can do that no problem, hands down. It's not a problem, you guys. So, you know, whatever you guys decide—hey, it's good. I can talk fast." And *[laughs]* we were sitting—we were sitting at this long desk. And Danny DeVito was sitting at the end of the desk, and he said—and he leaned over to one of his partners, either Stacey Sher or Michael Shamberg or I don't remember. And Danny DeVito said, "Psh! He's got this. Come on. Let's just get out of here. Come on." And that was, um—that was a revelation to me, because it was the first—aside from Spike—you know, big studio film that I would be doing with big movie stars, and on some level, it was: Oh, if this is the way it is, I like this! *[Laughs.]* I'll take this all day long!

00:17:12 Delroy Guest

And then, the other thing about my first day of work on *Get Shorty* set, I walked into my trailer, and there was a big Adidas bag. And it was full of stuff: sneakers, sweatpants and sweat tops. And I remember I looked inside the bag and I said, "Oh, this is a mistake." *[Laughing.]* And I picked up the bag... and I went outside, and I spoke to one of the, uh, the ADs—the assistant directors—and I said, "Oh man, look here. This bag was in my camper. It's not for me. It must be a mistake. Here."

And the cat said, "No, no, no. That's for you."

And I, "Oh. I really like this!"

*[They laugh.]*

So, they—I don't know if I answered your question, but there are two very, very—two or three very specific recollections that I have that separated, after coming from the theatre, working in theatre—separated my experience as a film actor from my experiences working in the theatre or even working with Spike.

00:18:19 Jesse Host

So, how long did it take for you to feel like you weren't a visitor in film?

00:18:26 Delroy Guest

Huh. That's another really good question. That's a really good question, and I'm not being facetious. I'm really not being facetious. I'm not sure that I've ever—no, if I'm honest, that's a great question, and I would say to you I'm not sure. I'm not sure when or if I've ever

had that conversation with myself. I'm really not sure. I think as I sit here today and respond to that question, I have a certain comfort level, internal comfort level that I—you know, I can work well for and with the camera. But I'm not sure when I felt that internally. Again, I have a recollection of something that doesn't really address your question, but it was an interesting internal shift for me. And that was when *Malcolm X*—after *Malcolm X* had been released and had been in the theaters for a few weeks, I actually had been out of the country working on another film.

And I came back to New York, and I was walking down Lexington Avenue. It was Lexington Avenue in the '20s, and an African American couple came toward—were walking towards me. And as I got within earshot, the sister said to the brother, "Oh, that's that dude from *Malcolm X*." And that was the first time that that had happened for me. And it was, "Oh! Wow!" Because I was not at all prepared for the impact that my character in *Malcolm X*—the character I played, West Indian Archie—I was not at all prepared for the impact that that character had in the film, because in a three-hour film, I think that I—as an actor playing West Indian Archie—was probably only in the film—I mean, I would say less than 15 minutes. But the impact was significant, and I was not prepared for that.

So, the reaction to my work in *Malcolm X* was—as working on film—was very different than anything I had experienced up to that point. But to your question, I'm really not sure if there was ever a time when I said, "Oh, okay, I'm a film actor now." I don't know. I mean, I'm talking to you from the Bay Area, right?

00:21:32 Jesse Host

*[Delroy confirms.]*

So, I'm from the great city of San Francisco, born and raised, but I'm in Los Angeles, and I'm not even really in show business. I do comedy podcasts and a public radio show. I could tell that, man, from talking to you. I said, "This cat's not experienced. I mean, what the—?"

00:21:46 Delroy Guest

*[Jesse laughs.]*

I could tell that. *[Laughs.]* Take one look at my face, you can see that I'm not really in show business!

00:21:54 Jesse Host

Which explains why this is not an audiovisual. This is why it's just audio.

00:21:57 Delroy Guest

And why my television show ran for three months.

00:22:00 Jesse Host

*[Delroy laughs.]*

So, *[laughs]* I had to move to LA. Right? I was like—there came a point where it was like if I wanna do stuff, I gotta be in LA. And I've gotten used to it. You know. I like it pretty well. You live—you live in the east Bay, right? In Oakland or something?

*[Delroy confirms.]*

00:22:28	Delroy	Guest	<p>So, that's a choice that you made. And at some point, you made a choice not to move to New York or LA.</p> <p>No—well, no, no. I lived in New York for many years and certainly, working as a theatre actor, I was based in New York City. And I lived in New York for the first ten years of my acting career, working as a New York City based theatre actor. And then, I still have a place on the east coast, close to New York. So, I've always maintained my New York connection. I did make a choice not to move to Los Angeles, because I have always felt that I felt then, at the beginning of my career and I've always felt that LA would not be a good mix. To be more specific, that my personality and the personality of the city of Los Angeles would not be a good mix. And so, yes, I made a conscious choice not to move to Los Angeles.</p>
00:23:33	Jesse	Host	Did your film career allow you to move to Oakland?
00:23:37	Delroy	Guest	Well, evidently it did! <i>[Laughs.]</i> But—
00:23:41	Jesse	Host	'Cause you're talking about ten years—I'm trying to put a timeline together in my head. And if you're talking about ten years or so into your career in New York, that's right around the start of your film career.
00:23:50	Delroy	Guest	<p>Well, let me say this. Let me—let me explain. I had gone to school in the Bay Area. I studied at the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco in the late 1970s. My theatre career started in New York and moved to New York and worked from 1980—1979 to the early 1980s pretty much exclusively as a theatre actor. Every now and again, I'd get a day part on a soap. I did some soap work, and I did a couple of smaller parts in films that came to New York—feature films that came to New York and cast actors out of New York. I moved back to the Bay Area in 1996. So, by 1996, I had done the three films with Spike: <i>Malcolm X</i>, <i>Crooklyn</i>, and <i>Clockers</i>, and <i>Soul of the Game</i>, HBO. I had done <i>Ransom</i> with Ron Howard and Mel Gibson.</p> <p>So, when I moved back to the Bay Area in 1996, yes, my film career was often running, and it was in the ascendancy. In retrospect, did I—yes, I must have apparently felt secure enough even with the—even though I was at the beginning of my career, relatively speaking, I must have felt secure enough that—<i>[laughing]</i> which actually turned out to be a mistake! I felt secure enough that I could anticipate continuing to work in film without moving to Los Angeles, per se. So, the fact that I was familiar with the Bay Area—having gone to school here, I had friends in the Bay Area—made the Bay Area a doable, in my mind—a doable compromise.</p>
00:26:18	Jesse	Host	When I was a kid, my dad taught at USF—University of San Francisco—for a minute. And one of the highlights of my adolescence—and I guess this would've been shortly before you moved to the Bay Area. But one of the highlights of my adolescence was my dad had this horrible car that he had inherited: a 1977 Chevy Nova that was metallic brown. It was a horrible car. And—but it was our first—it was the first time we had had a car, so it was exciting that we had a car. And he—the car broke down or the battery died in the parking lot at USF. And my dad came home one day and he's like, "Oh, my car died in the parking lot at USF. And Danny <i>[censored]</i> Glover gave me a jumpstart." <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:27:07	Delroy	Guest	I knew you—! I knew you were gonna say something about Danny! I knew you were gonna say something about Danny! I love it. I love it.



00:27:14 Jesse Host And like, there's a short list of people who chose to be in the Bay while working in show business and had that kind of success, right?

*[Delroy agrees.]*

00:27:39 Delroy Guest And Danny Glover is one of them. You know, when I was a kid there was—you know, Whoopi Goldberg was making movies in the Bay and Robin Williams and—you know, there are people who have chosen that. But it's a short list. You're on that list, and I can't imagine that you didn't know Danny Glover before you moved back. No, Danny was—when I mentioned—when I referenced having friends in the Bay Area, Danny was absolutely one of them, one of the—one of the premier friends that I had. And he—while he was not the reason that we moved back, the fact that Danny was here and we were friends—and in fact, when we started—when my wife and I started looking, we had a place in Englewood, New Jersey, right outside of New York City. And when we started looking for a house in the Bay Area, we would come out and we would stay with Danny, stay at his house. So, when you started that story, I said, "Danny figures into this somehow." So.

*[Jesse laughs.]*

00:28:35 Jesse Host And it sounds like a very Danny thing to do, just to stop and give a cat a ride. It's great.  
I mean, I get the impression that he chose to live in the Bay because, you know, such a huge part of what he has done in his life is activism.

*[Delroy confirms.]*

00:29:26 Delroy Guest And you know, San Francisco is a place where that can be your life. And where—and I get that—the reason I mention that is because I get the sense from you and your career that there is a significant part of you, as least coming out of ACT in the '70s, who was committed to the idea that we can do acting, whether it's theatre or something else, and impact the world. That acting was an act of—you know—furthering social justice.

That's true, even—that is very, very true. And I'm sure that—I'm almost positive the reason that you're quoting that is 'cause you've heard me reference that in other interviews. And that's true. In 2023, it sounds almost quaint that one could believe that theatre could change the world. But yes, I did come out of that ethos. I absolutely did. I would say to you the reason for my not moving—the reason for my moving back to New York when I left ACT, rather than moving to Los Angeles, was—had nothing to do with activism. It had to do with the fact I distinctly remember feeling that I will be typecast. I know what I look like. I'm a big, dark, Black man. And I'll be typecast if I even get offers to do anything. In Los Angeles, I just feel like I'll be typecast based on how I look rather than being given an opportunity for whatever talent that I have as an actor.

And because I knew that in New York City, being a theatre town, that I would hopefully—knock on wood—get more opportunities to work as an actor and explore the craft of acting. It was a no-brainer for me. I'm going to New York because I wanna work in the theatre

and explore my craft. So, that's what my decision was. That's what caused me to move to New York. And I also felt—and I'm sure you've heard me reference this in other interviews. I just felt that I needed to, as an actor, learn the craft. Even though I had studied at the American Conservatory Theatre, I wanted to continue exploring and studying and honing my instrument as an actor. And I hoped that in doing that, when and if I ever got the opportunity to work for the camera, I would have more to bring to my work as an actor working for the camera.

And that's kind of the way it worked out, even though at the time there was obviously no guarantee that that would happen. But my decision to move to New York had to do with wanting to engage the craft and just get better as an actor, technically.

00:32:15 Jesse Host

One of the things about *Unprisoned* and your role and performance in *Unprisoned* that I really enjoyed is—so, your character is getting out of a federal penitentiary—is some kind of serious criminal. We know right from the start, don't fall backwards into it. But you have the body and the presence for it. You're 6'4", something like that. You're a big dude.

00:32:41 Delroy Guest

6'2".

00:32:42 Jesse Host

And your performance is a very light one. It's a pretty sort of warm show for the subject matter.

00:32:53 Delroy Guest

*[Laughs.]* And when you say light, you don't mean lightweight. Right?

00:32:57 Jesse Host

No! I mean that there's a—that there—you know, it does not call upon you very often to be threatening, for example. Right? Like, you could be—and there is—we can see in your body that this is somebody who's been through that trauma that requires occasional threateningness. But—or at least capable of passing through that physically, right? But like you're pretty fun and trying to figure out how to love and be a happy, real person in the real world.

00:33:29 Delroy Guest

Okay. I'm gonna attribute that in large measure to the person who inspired the part of Edwin. And that is Tracy McMillan's father, Harold. One of the—there are a couple things that I wanna just speak to. I am being released—Edwin—I am being released from a halfway house. So, it's—that's—I have already—and these elements are really important from the standpoint of how to approach this work and how to approach playing this part. So, I'm not being released. I've been in the penitentiary, in and out of the penitentiary, in and out of the pen over the years. Absolutely. But I'm in fact being released from a halfway house.

Which means that I have—as I'm sure you know—I have begun the process from the experience of being in this halfway house of interacting—reconnecting with society. So, it's not as if I am being actually released from the pen, per se. That's one—

00:34:40 Jesse Host

That's why your anklet's coming off in the first scene.

*[Delroy confirms.]*

00:34:45 Delroy Guest

It's not the prison gates opening or whatever.

That's exactly right. That's exactly—and that's an important distinction to make. An equally if not more important distinction to make is that this character, Edwin, having been based—inspired by Harold McMillan, Tracy McMillan's father—when I met Harold,

Harold had a light touch. Tracy said to me—and I will never forget—Tracy said to me, and this was really a key-in for me to how to approach this character. She said to me, “If you met my dad, you would never know. If somebody hadn’t told you, you would never know that this is a man who had been in and out of prison over the years.” And that was a key to me. And it was part of—it became part of the ethos of the show in a sense, because the part of the point of what we’re trying to communicate to actors is that these are human beings in the final, final analysis. And there is such a thing and there should be such a thing as redemption.

And I know that that’s a—you know, a hackneyed—in some instances hackneyed and overused term, but people do deserve a second chance. And somebody like Harold was somebody who did not possess—that I saw—he was not a man who walked into a room and one thought, “Oh [censored], what—who’s that dude?” He had a grace. He had a charm. Funny as hell. I mean, had a sense of humor even about his own foibles. And they were characteristics that I chose to try to investigate. Not tried—to investigate in my—as I started working on Edwin. Because they were exactly the kinds of characteristics that many people might not necessarily associate with an ex-con. And partially, that’s the point. Does that make sense?

*[Jesse confirms.]*

00:37:19	Jesse	Host	So, those—the components that you—the characteristics that you referenced, on many levels are characteristics that Harold himself possessed that I am now mining as I create Edwin.
			You corrected yourself when you said “based on” and changed it to “inspired by”. So, what was it about this character that you or the showrunner or creator felt should be different from this real human being that lived in real life? Lives in real life.
00:37:43	Delroy	Guest	Because I—I guess I wanna believe that I’m smart enough to know that it wouldn’t have worked for me to try to do an impersonation of this man. We’re very different. And on some level, my options creatively were broadened immeasurably in making the decision and agreeing with my—with Kerry and with Tracy that I would not be doing an impersonation of Harold, but rather I’d be selecting, unilaterally, frankly—I’d unilaterally be selecting certain components and using those components as points of departure for whatever it was that I was going to create so that—
00:38:28	Jesse	Host	Did you say that to—did you say the unilateral part to them? Like, did you say, “I know this is your dad, but at the end of the day I’m gonna—I’m gonna choose the things end up in my performance, ‘cause I’m the actor. I’m the one that’s onscreen.”
00:38:44	Delroy	Guest	Right, that sounds kind of—
00:38:47	Jesse	Host	That sounded rude—ruder than I meant it to, but— <i>[Chuckles.]</i>
00:38:49	Delroy	Guest	Yeah, so— <i>[laughs]</i> yeah, I didn’t—I didn’t put it in those terms. We all agreed that the way to go was to use Harold as inspiration. And that’s what Tracy wanted. That’s what Kerry wanted. We all agreed that that would be the smart way to focus in on this work. Look, I played Satchel Paige, right? In a film that I’m really proud of—a film called <i>Soul of the Game</i> . Similarly, and in preparing to do that work, I read everything that I could get my hands on about Satchel Paige. Obviously, Satchel Paige was long gone. This was in the—you

know—mid-1990s. But I took elements that I gleaned from reading all of this material about Satchel Paige, and I used them as points of departure for whatever my rendition of Satchel Paige would be.

I was never, ever trying to—I couldn't impersonate Satchel Paige, nor was it my desire, nor was it the desire of the director. But what we did want to do was to—and he pretty much left me alone, the director—Kevin Rodney Sullivan—to do my own work. By I was clear that even though I was playing “Satchel Paige”, quote/unquote, I was also selecting certain kinds—certain characteristics that I gleaned Satchel Paige had and then building on that. And even similarly playing... *[sighs]* Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, a man who I am—we are—you know, I think. I don't—I've never met the man. I don't need to meet the man, but diametrically opposed on so many levels. But similarly, I certainly was not trying to impersonate Clarence Thomas, but rather find, discover if there were any similarities between he and I and build on that as I created—you know—my version, my iteration, my interpretation of Clarence Thomas.

00:41:25 Jesse Host

This show is based on the life of its creator. This is—these are stories that have sprung from a real human being's real life.

*[Delroy confirms.]*

But when this show came to you, you must have been struck by the way that the themes—even just in the pilot—are connected to things in your actual life.

00:41:59 Delroy Guest  
00:42:03 Jesse Host

Actually, ish. Ish. Because—

I mean, this is what—this is the things I'm talking about and tell me if I am wrong. They're not things—they're not—I'm not talking about you relating directly to your character, necessarily. What I'm saying is, number one, this is a story about a character who had an absent father and like very mixed circumstances of being raised. You know. She has a foster family in the picture. She has her father's partner in the picture. She has all these different things going on. A big part of the foster family situation is race. And you, yourself, grew up with an absent father. You were an immigrant multiple times. And part of your childhood, you had not legal foster parents, I don't think, but like your—when your mom was in nursing school, she wasn't allowed to have kids on campus. So, you lived with a White family in England, where you grew up part of your life.

*[Delroy confirms.]*

And I wonder if that made this show more appealing? *[Chuckles.]*

00:43:25 Delroy Guest

Or whether you were like worried about it. You know what I mean? Right. I was not worried about it. At all. And I would—I guess I have to say, bravo, you've clearly done some homework, or you've looked at, you know, interviews I've done. *[Chuckles.]* So, all of the—pretty much, a lot of what you said is accurate. I—one thing I recall—one element that I recall we all shared in I think our very first Zoom call—if not the first, the second Zoom call. We all spoke about, broadly speaking—not in the specific; I really need to be clear about this—but we all referenced that we had daddy issues. *[Laughs.]* It's also very important for me to say to you, there was no

00:44:27	Jesse	Host	<p>script initially. There was a conversation between myself, Kerry, and Tracy, in which— That's Kerry Washington, the star of the show.</p> <p><i>[Delroy confirms.]</i></p>
00:44:31	Delroy	Guest	<p>And Tracy McMillan, the creator of the show. Yes, I'm sorry, yeah. Kerry—yes. Exactly. There was a—there was a conversation about what we hoped to achieve with this work. There was no script. So, what I was responding to was the content of the conversation. And as far as—as far as the content of the conversation was concerned, there were a couple of elements. We all referenced that we had had—it wasn't so much about daddy issues, but it was we all were recognizing that we have certain kinds of dynamics present in terms of our relationship with our fathers. Certainly, Tracy and I—we all—I mentioned that, yes, I had been unofficially in the foster system, that I had been in the system as a young person. Tracy obviously has, so we had that in common even though our experiences were very, very different.</p> <p>But to your question, none of that scared me. None of that scared me, but rather it was I had an awareness that that may be part of my way into this world and this character.</p>
00:45:50	Jesse	Host	<p>We'll wrap up with Delroy Lindo in just a minute. Stay with us. It's <i>Bullseye</i>, from <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and NPR.</p>
00:45:58	Promo	Clip	<p><b>Music:</b> Bright, cheerful synth.</p> <p><b>Speaker:</b> Since we reached our highest milestone during the Max Fun Drive, we're creating a Max Fun foley library full of sound effects from your favorite hosts. The whole Max Fun community will be able to use it! So, what would you like it to feature? People high-fiving? Walking through mud? Chicken clucking? Jazz kazoo? Head to <a href="http://MaximumFun.org/foley">MaximumFun.org/foley</a>. That's MaximumFun.org slash F-O-L-E-Y and submit your ideas. We're excited to make this silly thing together and even more excited to see what you all create with it! And thank you again for a great Max Fun Drive!</p>
00:46:45	Music	Transition	<p><i>[Music fades out.]</i></p>
00:46:50	Jesse	Host	<p>Thumpy synth with light vocalizations. Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i>. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking today with Delroy Lindo. His latest project is the comedy series <i>Unprisoned</i>. You can stream it on Hulu.</p> <p>You've got a really incredible performance in <i>Da 5 Bloods</i>, and it was one that was very resonant for me, because I grew up with a dad who was a Vietnam vet.</p>
00:47:12	Delroy	Guest	<p>Oh, dang! Oh, wow. Oh, wow.</p>
00:47:15	Jesse	Host	<p>And he worked with vets through much of my childhood. He was an organizer and, you know, he worked in the peace movement. He worked for an outfit in San Francisco, called Swords to Ploughshares. And when he was getting sober when I was little, it was after he split up with my mom but before he remarried. And so, sometimes I would be there, and we would go to meetings.</p> <p><i>[Delroy affirms.]</i></p>

And they would be vet's meetings. My dad went to a lot of vet specific meetings. And so, when I was little, I just spent a lot of time as a seven-year-old sitting in the corner drawing while vets talked about vet stuff and sobriety. And I just lived with a lot of trauma, through that.

00:48:06	Delroy	Guest	I really hear you. And—
00:48:07	Jesse	Host	My father's trauma and PTSD and, you know, many of the people that he knew and people he was attracted to being friends with were people that get that.
00:48:18	Delroy	Guest	Yeah. And thank you for—I really appreciate you sharing that, man. I appreciate you sharing that about yourself. But please, what's your question?
00:48:28	Jesse	Host	My question is that <i>Da 5 Bloods</i> is largely a movie about how you engage with trauma in your life. And first of all, I wonder how you came to understand war trauma and how it affects people's lives to the extent you were able.
00:48:52	Delroy	Guest	Right. First of all, I'm gonna say that it sounds—based on your description of your dad—that God bless him, he found—no matter what his experiences with PTSD may have been, he was able to find constructive outlets for himself. Is that fair?
00:49:12	Jesse	Host	Oh, very much so. Yeah.
00:49:13	Delroy	Guest	Yeah. Thank God, and God bless him. And God bless him, and I hope that that meant that your relationship with your dad or the circumstances that you were in with your dad were not as dire as maybe they might have been had he—
00:49:27	Jesse	Host	Yeah, a lot better than—a lot better than it could've been is a fair characterization.
00:49:31	Delroy	Guest	Amen. And that's fantastic. To your question, first of all, I will always consider Spike gifting me that part, the opportunity to play that part, as exactly that: a gift. And I'm so proud of that work, and I'm monumentally proud of that work. With regard to what I learned; I certainly became aware of my own relationship to "PTSD". And I'm saying PTSD in quotes, radio audience who can't see me. I've got my hands up into quotes. I'm saying PTSD in quotes because I am characterizing this dynamic as it relates to me, my own relationship to my own trauma. And I mined that. That wasn't the be-all-end-all of what I did in that work, but I certainly—I was mining certain aspects of my own trauma. And in some instances, making that work, I became aware of some things that I had not been aware of prior to starting that work. And the beautiful thing about that is that I could mine—I could mine that stuff and bring it to the surface in service of Paul George and the narrative and the film, overall.
			So, certainly, there were things that I learned about myself in the making of that work. And just as with your dad, your dad found constructive outlets to negotiate his PTSD, I would say broadly my acting career—and I think all actors probably are dealing with their stuff through the prism of whatever parts they're playing. And certainly, I have done that in various work that I've done, but certainly with Paul in <i>Da 5 Bloods</i> . That was very definitely the case. And I did learn some things about myself in the process of making that work.
00:52:04	Jesse	Host	Did you feel some relief from it? I mean you're a man—you were, you know, 67 years old or whatever when you were making that movie. But you know, I know 'cause I've seen it that that can happen at that point in someone's life.

00:52:21	Delroy	Guest	Relief. I don't know that I would characterize it as relief. I would characterize... whatever the experience of making that work gave to me, aside from the obvious creative benefits, I would say there's an added—I know more now. I know more about myself, a little bit more about myself, which I can now—I can now share parts of, perhaps, in a memoir that I'm writing. <i>[Chuckles.]</i> Plug, plug. A memoir that I'm writing. And in my writing—in the writing of this memoir, pretty much as a result of doing that film, I've been able to start unearthing some things that will be in the memoir that I wasn't necessarily aware of before doing that film. So, is it relief? I wouldn't necessarily characterize it as relief, but I would characterize it as an added awareness.
00:53:48	Jesse	Host	You know, you didn't want to talk about yourself publicly for a long time in your career.  <i>[Delroy confirms.]</i>  Like, talk about your personal experiences. And you went through a process of learning about your mother's life and the lives of your mother's contemporaries, people who came from Jamaica to the UK.
00:54:11	Delroy	Guest	The Caribbean. We're Jamaican, but the Caribbean in general, but certainly yes, in the case of my mom, Jamaican. Uh-huh.
00:54:17	Jesse	Host	Especially the British Caribbean, right? 'Cause people could—people could travel.
00:54:21	Delroy	Guest	Absolutely. The British Caribbean, yeah.
00:54:23	Jesse	Host	And it's a very different thing to have gotten to the point where you're writing a memoir.  <i>[Delroy confirms.]</i>  And like, what I hear you describing to me—and I'm sorry if this is grandiloquent—but like what I am hearing you describe to me is acting as a way to keep from revealing yourself or to reveal yourself in such a mediated form that no one has to know you. And being comfortable showing yourself.
00:54:55	Delroy	Guest	All of the above. They're not mutually exclusive. All of the above, depending on what the work is, depending on what the character is, etc., etc., etc.. And frankly, to the extent that—again, your dad, finding the work that he found, helping your dad maintain a balance, that has been—my work as an actor has been that which has helped me maintain a balance. Mental, emotional, etc., etc.. Balance. Yeah. You know, I've said in various interviews that, you know, "acting saved my life" in quotes. But I say that literally and figuratively. And I am extraordinarily fortunate that I have had these outlets in my life because I'm really not sure—had I not had those outlets, I'm not sure what would've happened. But thank God that I have had these outlets and been able to make a living in the bargain.
00:56:07	Jesse	Host	And acting is—or can be a home, too.  <i>[Delroy agrees.]</i>  Like, that's one of the special things about it is that you have a family when you're doing it.

00:56:16	Delroy	Guest	<p>This is true. That's absolutely true. Yeah. No question. And you know, to the question that you asked me 15 minutes ago—yeah, acting is home. The—acting is a home, is a place of solace, is a place—is a sanctuary even when it's rife with, you know, stuff. It's a place that as you—to use your term, that is mediated, that is specifically focused, that is specifically housed that one can express oneself, explore in the relative safety of either, you know, a play in the theatre or for the camera in whatever project one is doing. So, acting is home. The problem for me when I hear myself say that, it sounds really precious. It sounds so damn precious. And one does not want to sound precious.</p> <p>On the one hand, it's home. It's everything that I just said. On the other hand, it's a job of work. And it's a wonderful job of work, but it's a job of work that one engages. But it does constitute—it has constituted for me and continues to constitute a safe place, a home in your—to use your terminology.</p>
00:57:44	Jesse	Host	If it wasn't work, it wouldn't be the same thing. The work is the part that—I mean, that's the part that makes it stick.
00:57:54	Delroy	Guest	Knock on wood. I hope so. I mean, that's the part that gives it value. Or that's part of the part.
00:58:01	Jesse	Host	But that's—but I mean, if it wasn't work for you. I'm not talking about the work as the product. I'm talking about the work as the process. So, if it wasn't hard work for you, if you weren't really working hard when you are acting, it couldn't have that effect on your life or your traumas, right? Like, it's—my dad used to say go for a walk. <i>[Laughs.]</i> You know what I mean?
00:58:25	Delroy	Guest	Right. Absolutely. Right.
00:58:27	Jesse	Host	Like, you gotta do something.
00:58:28	Delroy	Guest	<p>You gotta do something, but yeah. For sure. Yeah, for sure. And I'll tell you something else as it relates to—as it relates to <i>Bloods</i>, as it relates to <i>Unprisoned</i>, as it relates to some other pieces of work that I've done, <i>The Cider House Rules</i>, the films with Spike—the other films with Spike, when they touch—and there have been others. These are the titles that come to my mind as I'm having this conversation, but there have been others. But certainly, another component of the reward for the work, to state the obvious, is the impact that it has on audiences. So that one does the work, one puts one—one <u>invests</u> in this thing, in this process, and one does the work. And then, the added component of the gratification and the affirmation that one attains when the audience responds so positively.</p> <p>One of the things that's been—certainly, it happened with <i>Bloods</i>. I mean, there are various pieces of work that I can mention in which I have been communicated with by audiences who have seen the work, and it's just incredibly—I mean, it's deeply gratifying and affirming. And certainly, that has been the case with <i>Unprisoned</i>. Some of the things that have been communicated, that have been said, that have been shared by journalists—by journalists, by friends, family, audience members, have been really, really, really gratifying about what this—what this work has meant and how it has touched people. So, that's another component having to do with the reward of making this work and being this kind of work.</p>
01:00:30	Jesse	Host	I bet you can feel it to some extent, like you're engaging in service.



01:00:34	Delroy	Guest	Hell yeah. Hell yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. That's right. That's exactly right.
01:00:40	Jesse	Host	'Cause I imagine some days when you're an actor, you're thinking like, "Oh man, am I some actor?" And—you know what I mean? Like, "Oh gosh, here I am in show business. And blah, blah, blah. I'm famous." And then, maybe you can say—you can think to yourself like, "Oh, but actually I'm working really hard on something that impacts people's lives."
01:01:00	Delroy	Guest	I'm working really hard on something that impacts people's lives. I can actually honestly say to you I've ever felt, "Oh my god, I'm in show business." Uh-uh. Certainly, I've had instances where I feel like I'm barely holding on to something. But I've never—for me, it's usually a question of thinning—again, this is gonna sound so precious, man. But <i>[chuckling]</i> really thankful, honestly. One, that I'm still here and still making work. I was talking with a friend of mine a few months ago, and we were—you know, we commiserated, a very good friend of mine. And we—and on some level, it's a skill. There are all these skills that one utilizes. You know? One goes to acting school, and you—and you engage—you know, learning the craft and becoming a skillful worker. But then, it's also a skill to get your career up and running and maintain that career. That's a skill.
			Because I'm sure you know, there's all kinds of garbage that one has to deal with and negotiate one's way through, which is what makes having an experience such as this and various other experiences that I've had as a worker, as a creative worker. That's what makes it worthwhile. Or that's one of the things that makes it worthwhile. <i>[Clicks teeth.]</i> And one must always be—again, I'm gonna sound really precious, but one must always be profoundly grateful that one gets the opportunity to do that.
01:03:08	Jesse	Host	I'm very grateful to you for taking all this time to talk to me.
01:03:11	Delroy	Guest	Not a problem.
01:03:12	Jesse	Host	It means a lot to me. I'm—your work has been so incredible.
01:03:15	Delroy	Guest	Thank you.
01:03:16	Jesse	Host	And I'm grateful that I've gotten to enjoy it.
01:03:19	Delroy	Guest	Thank you so much. That means—that does mean a lot. I really appreciate it. And—
01:03:23	Jesse	Host	And when I'm in Oakland tomorrow, driving up to Richmond, if my battery dies—
01:03:30	Delroy	Guest	<i>[Laughs.]</i> Don't call me!
01:03:32	Jesse	Host	You're responsible for everything from Treasure Island, east.
01:03:35	Delroy	Guest	So, look here. This is what I'ma say to you. Call Danny!
			<i>[Jesse laughs.]</i>
			Say, "Look. You did it for my pops. Come on, man. Do it for me."
			<i>[They laugh.]</i>
			Call Danny Glover and tell him I said that. <i>[Laughs.]</i> Alright.
01:03:49	Jesse	Host	Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.
01:03:50	Delroy	Guest	All the best. Take care.
01:03:53	Jesse	Host	The brilliant Delroy Lindo. He's incredible on <i>Unprisoned</i> . Nobody has charisma and presence like Delroy Lindo. It is amazing. You can watch it on Hulu.

01:04:06 Music Transition  
01:04:13 Jesse Host

Brassy synth.  
That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye*, created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. I haven't been in Los Angeles, California, though. I got to go to New Orleans, Louisiana, to officiate my best friend of 40 years, Pete's, wedding. Congratulations to Pete and Christine, who basically spent four straight days crying. I also visited the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, there in New Orleans. That is a cool museum. If you make it to New Orleans, man. That was a great place.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellows at Maximum Fun are Tabatha Myers and Bryanna Paz. We get help booking from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music, composed and provided to us by DJW, the legend Dan Wally. Our theme song by The Go! Team. It's called "Huddle Formation". Our thanks to The Go! Team. Thanks to Memphis Industries, their label, for sharing that music with us.

You can find *Bullseye* on YouTube, on Twitter, and on Facebook. Follow us there. We share all our interviews. We love it when you share our interviews with your people who really appreciate it. Recommend a *Bullseye* to somebody this week. It means a lot to us. I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

01:05:38 Promo Promo

**Speaker:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

*[Music fades out.]*