

These families built decades-long lives in the US. Facing deportation, they might have to leave it all behind

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Amid the Trump administration's immigration crackdown, Alfredo Orellana, Rodney Taylor and Lewelyn Dixon face possible deportation. Lena Ferris/Mildred Pierre/Melania Madriaga

(CNN) — What was supposed to be a joyous time for Georgia barber Rodney Taylor after his

Liberia, a country he left when he was a toddler.

The reason ICE issued for his planned deportation: a felony burglary conviction that he pleaded guilty to at 19 years old and was pardoned from in 2010, his attorney told CNN. Rodney is now detained at the Stewart Detention Center in Lumpkin, Georgia.

Arriving in the US for medical treatment, Taylor had later been out of status and waiting to get his green card application approved, his attorney said.

“I feel like an American. This is all I knew. I didn’t even know I was an immigrant until I was 17 years old,” Taylor told CNN from inside the detention center. “Going back to Liberia is like going back to a foreign country.”

Taylor, who’s a double amputee, says he’s now struggling to receive care and carry out basic tasks while in custody.

CNN has reached out to ICE for comment on Taylor’s detention. The agency lists him as being in custody on its online detainee database but does not provide further details.

Amid the Trump administration’s immigration crackdown, some longtime US residents like Taylor who have visas, work permits or green cards face possible deportation. Though they’ve been building a life in the country for decades – raising children, contributing to their communities and excelling in their careers – they might soon have to leave it all behind.



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Immigration attorney Charles Kuck attributes the quick pace of detentions and deportations of long-term residents to the Trump administration’s focus on “easy cases,” facilitated by updated computer systems that flag any past convictions – even if they’re minor offenses that occurred many years ago. Those cases help ICE meet its quotas, according to Kuck.

While green card holders largely have the same rights as US citizens, they are subject to being questioned and put into deportation proceedings if they’ve committed a crime, multiple immigration attorneys told CNN. Those waiting for green cards, like Taylor, can also be removed.

“They can say this guy’s been a contributing member of society for 30 years. He’s a barber.

discretion.”

From Washington to Georgia, longtime residents are fighting to remain in the country as the Trump administration expands its deportation campaign beyond undocumented migrants, flaring anxieties two months into his second term.



Rodney Taylor got engaged to fiancée Mildred Pierre about 10 days before he was detained. Courtesy Mildred Pierre

A newly engaged barber who loves to give back

Taylor had been planning a health fair to provide free health screenings, resources and haircuts to undocumented immigrants in his community. He had already started putting flyers up at his Snellville, Georgia, barber shop.

Then, as his fiancée Mildred Pierre was pulling out of their driveway to drop the kids off at school, ICE agents surrounded the home and detained Taylor on January 15, Pierre told CNN.

“I was scared. terrified. but we were surprised and very shocked.” Pierre said.

it wasn't in their "five-year plan," she said. They were still on a high from the engagement when their life got turned upside down.

"Mommy, I miss daddy," Pierre's young daughter and Taylor's soon-to-be step-daughter told her after he was detained.

Born in Liberia with severe disabilities, Taylor was brought by his mother to the US so that he could receive treatment, he told CNN. He was a toddler at the time.

When he was detained, Taylor had been out of status "for a long time," but had a pending green card application and had the related work authorization approved, his attorney Sarah Owings told CNN.

Since Taylor arrived in the US so young, it's unclear what kind of visa he had, Owings said. His adult son, who is a US citizen, later filed for a green card for him.



Georgia barber Rodney Taylor is being detained at the Stewart Detention Center. Courtesy Mildred Pierre

Despite being pardoned for a burglary he committed as a teenager, he faces deportation, Owings said.

"How can the federal government not forgive me?" Taylor asked, speaking to CNN on the phone from inside the detention facility. "That's what I don't understand."

He became a barber about 16 years ago because he finds fulfillment in making people feel and look good, he said. He's loved by his clients, one of whom told Pierre he's growing his hair out until Taylor is released, she recounted. "When I sit in his chair, it's free therapy," the client told her.

Taylor regularly gives free haircuts at community events, he said. He's also been active in community health initiatives, particularly lung cancer awareness in the Black community.

"I got a lot of help when I got to this country with my disability and everything, so I just felt like I had to give back to people," he said. "I try to do good. I try to do stuff for my community. Help people out. And it seems like all that doesn't matter."



Rodney Taylor poses with his fiancée Mildred Pierre and their children. Courtesy Mildred Pierre

At the Stewart Detention Center, Taylor said his detention has been terrible because he's been unable to get needed accommodations or adequate medical care.

As a double amputee, Taylor has to charge his prosthetics at least eight hours a day, which he says has been difficult to do. When his prosthetics broke recently, he initially was given only tape to fix them, Pierre said.

While he has been provided a wheelchair, he has been unable to use it because he has missing

...aggs, he said.

“The facility cannot accommodate me at all,” he said. “So I’ve been deteriorating in here.”

Owings hopes to get Taylor released on bond at an immigration hearing scheduled in the upcoming week.

“I don’t believe that he is removable as they’ve charged him,” Owings said. “They’re ignoring evidence regarding the pardon that he received.”

With Taylor in custody, Pierre held the health fair on his behalf, providing medical services to over 100 people, she said.

“Although he’s detained, he feels like the community still needs to be served,” Pierre said.



Alfredo Orellana, 31, has been detained over 1,000 miles away from his wife. Courtesy Lena Ferris

A caretaker with a baby on the way

For the past four years, Virginia resident Alfredo Orellana has been a caretaker for a man with severe autism, the man’s mother Lena Ferris said.

“He is phenomenal at helping to take care of people who have special needs,” said Ferris, who has known Orellana for nearly his whole life.

married to a US citizen, was detained while returning from a vacation in El Salvador. His wife has been left to navigate the difficult situation alone while six months pregnant, Ferris said.

The 31-year-old was born in Argentina and has lived in the US since he was four years old, according to his attorney Ben Osorio.

“He would be deported to a country where he knows no one, has no connection,” Ferris said.



Alfredo Orellana is pictured with his mother and two sisters. Courtesy Lena Ferris

Orellana was detained because he was convicted in 2017 of obtaining less than \$200 by false pretenses, according to a notice from the Department of Homeland Security ordering him to appear before an immigration judge. “Under our immigration laws, if you’ve been convicted of something called a crime involving moral turpitude... (it) could potentially render you inadmissible from the United States,” Osorio told CNN.

“Lots of young American kids make mistakes, but he gets punished in a way that they don’t,”

With a baby on the way, Orellana and his wife had recently bought a house and were planning an elaborate baby shower, Ferris said. Now, he's detained at the El Valle Detention Center in Raymondville, Texas – over 1,000 miles away from his wife.



Alfredo Orellana, far left, is pictured with Ferris' family. Courtesy Lena Ferris

A final hearing in Orellana's case is scheduled for April 25 at an immigration court in Annandale, Virginia, Osorio told CNN. "I'm hopeful for a positive outcome," he said.

CNN has reached out to ICE for comment on Orellana. ICE's database lists him as being in detention in Raymondville.

With Orellana detained, Ferris said she had to leave her government job to care for her son – who gravely misses Orellana.

"My son is so beside himself right now," Ferris said. "He doesn't know how to articulate grief. He doesn't understand where Alfredo is."





University of Washington lab technician Lewelyn Dixon was detained in February. Courtesy Melania Madriaga

A lab tech who has been in the US for 50 years

Green card holder Lewelyn Dixon's family say they believe the stage was set for her February detainment at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport the year before.

In 2024, a ham sandwich Dixon forgot in her luggage triggered a prolonged search by Customs and Border Protection and warnings by agents that her bags would need to be checked anytime she returned from an international trip, her family said.

They indeed checked her bags again a year later when she returned from the Philippines – but this time she was questioned for over four hours, according to the family.

Two days later, the family of the University of Washington lab technician found out she had been in ICE detention.





Lewelyn Dixon has lived in the US for over 50 years. Courtesy Melania Madriaga

CNN has reached out for comment from ICE, which lists Dixon as being detained at the Northwest ICE Processing Center in Tacoma, Washington State.

“It’s easy for Trump’s people to do. It’s easy to pick up and find permanent residents,” Kuck, the immigration attorney, said. “A lot of times, they just fall into your lap at the airport.”

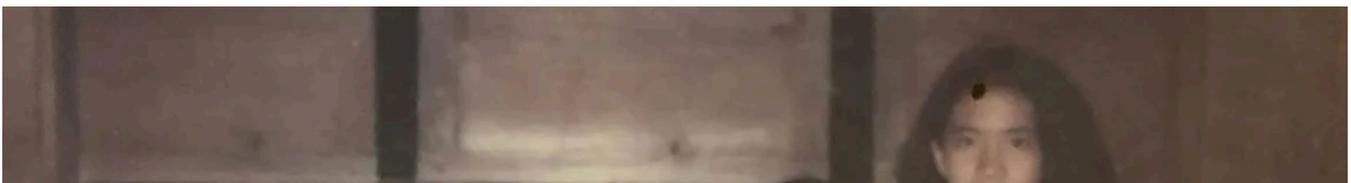
The 64-year-old has lived in the US for over 50 years.

“It didn’t even cross my mind that someone who is documented is at risk,” her niece Melania Madriaga told CNN. “Especially when she’s been in a country a long time.”

Dixon was detained due to a 2001 conviction for embezzlement, said Osorio, her attorney. Only after Dixon’s detention did the family find out about the conviction, when her attorney informed them about it. The family is “still puzzled” by the revelation, Madriaga said.

“It’s very out of her character,” Madriaga said, citing her aunt’s strong work ethic – often working overtime and during holidays.

Dixon is classified as an arriving alien – making her eligible for bond and subject to detention, Osorio said.





Lewelyn Dixon, far right, migrated to the US with family members. Courtesy Melania Madriaga

Dixon had decided not to become a US citizen because of a promise she made to her grandfather that involved property transfer conditions in the Philippines, Osorio said.

During her detention, Dixon has been helping other detainees, Madriaga said. “She helps other detainees, especially if their English is not very strong. She’ll help them read particular documents that their attorneys want them to look over,” she said.

That’s the kind of person Dixon is: she’ll do “whatever it takes to help” her family, friends and community, Madriaga said.

Osorio has filed a parole request and applied for cancellation of removal, with a court date set for July 17. But the current administration’s focus on “maximum enforcement” makes it challenging, he said.

“Given her long-term residence, given her presence in the United States since a young age, given her family ties, given her work and employment history, her taxpaying history, just the life she’s led, I would hope that we can establish that her good equities outweigh the bad,” Osorio said.

It’s been nearly a month since Dixon was detained, but Madriaga said her aunt is staying strong and keeping herself busy.

“My aunt is very, pretty strong,” Madriaga said. “She’s the kind of person (who) don’t want us to be worried for her. So she brings forward a very strong front.”

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