

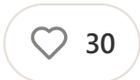
Air Jordan Tattoo Prompts ICE to Send Venezuelan Migrant to Guantánamo Bay

Tattoos have long been used by DHS to falsely accuse migrants of gang affiliations a facilitate expedited removal



PABLO MANRÍQUEZ

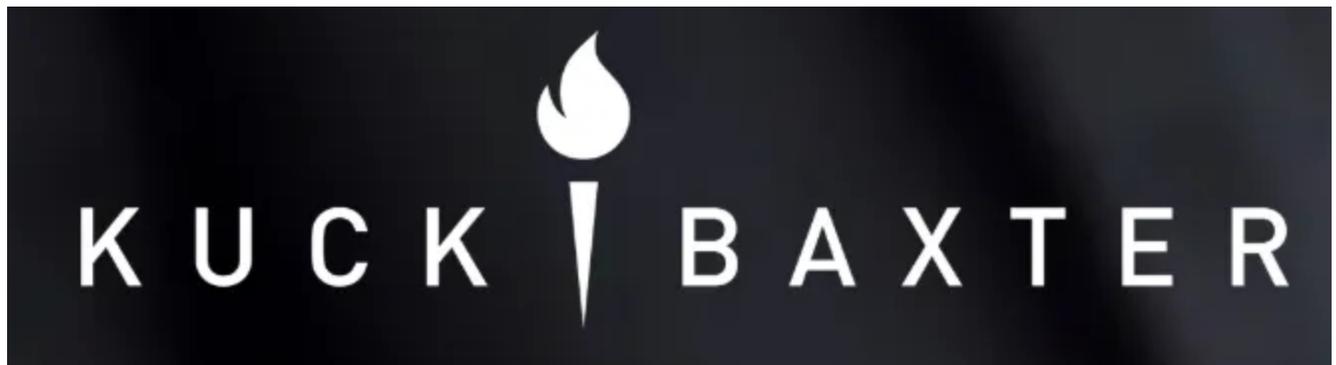
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Luis Alberto Castillo Rivera graduating from high school in Venezuela (Photo courtesy of his family)

Luis Alberto Castillo Rivera, a 23-year-old Venezuelan migrant, was sent to **Guantanamo Bay, Cuba**, in early February despite never having set foot in the United States as a free man, raising concerns about his treatment and the accuracy of accusations surrounding his detention.

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According to Castillo Rivera's family, he arrived in the U.S. through the CBP One appointment system, designed to help migrants legally enter the U.S. for asylum processing. Castillo Rivera, who had fled Venezuela's economic crisis and violence, had been traveling through Latin America for years.

His journey took him from Barrero estado de Trujillo in Venezuela to **Bogotá, Colombia**, in 2019, and eventually to **Panama** and **Guatemala**, where he worked to fund the remainder of his trip. He crossed into **Mexico** in 2024 and waited for his chance to enter the U.S. legally, opting not to hire a coyote (smuggler) despite the ri

On December 31, 2024, Castillo Rivera received his long-awaited CBP One appointment. He was overjoyed by the prospect of entering the U.S. legally, but his experience took a turn after arriving at the **El Paso Processing Center** on January 1 2025, the day before **Donald Trump's** inauguration.

Castillo Rivera's family says he called them on February 3, 2025, to inform them that he was about to be released. However, the following day, he was on the first flight of ICE detainees sent from El Paso to the **U.S. Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay**.

The family, who learned of his arrival at Guantánamo through photos shared by the **Department of Homeland Security** on social media, expressed shock and confusion over his detention at the facility.



Photo of ICE detainee Luis Alberto Castillo Rivera arriving on the tarmac at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba (DHS)

Guantánamo Bay is traditionally used to hold detainees accused of terrorism or gang affiliation, making it unusual for a migrant like Castillo Rivera, who had no criminal record, to be sent there.

“He signed the release form, but he was confused about whether he was being released to the U.S. or deported back to Venezuela,” said a relative, speaking on condition of anonymity. “He didn’t even know where he was going. He was just told to sign.”

Castillo Rivera’s relative further explained that he had tattoos, including an 'Air Jordan' logo and a crown, which CBP agents reportedly used as grounds to investigate him for gang affiliation.

In a phone call with his mother from the ICE detention center, the audio of which was obtained by *Migrant Insider*, Castillo Rivera expresses his concerns that he will be labeled as a gang member as a result of his tattoo.

Tattoos have long been a tool used by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to wrongfully associate migrants with gangs, often leading to false accusations that individuals are involved in criminal activities.

“People here tattoo themselves, they color their hair, they dress stylish with Air Jordans,” the relative said. “That doesn’t mean they are part of a gang. They just like the style.”

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In the past, CBP has been criticized for using tattoos, including those related to popular brands like 'Air Jordan,' to falsely link migrants to gang culture, resulting in wrongful detentions and deportations. According to a 2020 report from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), tattoos have often been used as a "visual cue" to wrongly label individuals as gang members, even though tattoos alone are not a reliable indicator of gang involvement.

According to ICE regulations, all detainees should be properly documented, and records should be updated regularly. Castillo Rivera's family questioned why ICE had failed to update his detainment status, especially since he had not committed any crime in the U.S. and had only entered the country legally through the CBP One system. As of now, ICE's website still lists Castillo Rivera as being processed in El Paso.

Despite his family's claims that Castillo Rivera has never been involved in gangs, they say he enjoys reggaeton music and is passionate about fashion, particularly the 'Air Jordan' brand. His tattoos, they insist, are not a sign of criminal behavior but part of his personal style.

"They took his possessions in Panama, including his passport and phone, but he never gave up. He wanted to make an honest living," said the relative, recalling how Castillo Rivera had traveled with three friends, facing hardships along the way, yet refusing to hire a coyote to cross into the U.S. illegally.

For now, Castillo Rivera remains in custody at Guantánamo Bay, and his family continues to seek answers. They are calling on the U.S. government to release him and clarify the reasons behind his detention in such an unusual facility.

"Somos gente humilde pero trabajadora," his relative said, which means, "We are humble people, but workers."

An open search of ICE records shows Castillo Rivera still in the El Paso Detention Center, which is disputed by his family and photo evidence. DHS did not immediately reply for an email request for comment. This is a developing story.

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