Not closing ranks with his staff demonstrated that Boone was dead serious about prison reform.

BECOMING BANTU—BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AT WALPOLE

The next few months were critical for Black prisoners. The class participants' study of Black history and Black Consciousness deepened. Their commitment was to abolition, not reform, and their dedication was rooted in their newfound consciousness, pride, and understanding of the unique way the penal system had been built not only to oppress them, but to re-enslave them. The history-class students formed their own cultural organization—the first cultural organization for Black men within the Massachusetts prison system: Black African Nations Toward Unity. BANTU was to become the vehicle the Black prisoners used to ensure racial parity within the prisoners' union. Hamm explains the group's impact on him and the other prisoners, and the context within which it had been created.

> I arrived at Walpole Prison in June of 1969. Years of watching Dr. King's marches for civil rights, reading of the lynchings and murders of Black people "down South," the FBI and COINTELPRO attacks and murders of Black Panther members, the riots in Watts and Grove Hall [in Boston], to name a few events of the times, had conditioned my attitude toward white authority figures. The above mentioned came in light of my own personal experiences with similar authority types during my years in the community, Essex County Training School, and the military. I despised them all.
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> Upon entering Walpole Prison, my first observation was the small number of Black prisoners confined there, in comparison to the number of white prisoners. In a population of approximately 465 prisoners, 48 were Black, 2 were Hispanic, and 1 was Asian.
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> Christian Action, the Italian-American Heritage Group, and the Irish-American Heritage Group were the three major programs of the time; with the Christian Action program the only one with Black prisoner participation (2 or 3). African-American books, specific newspapers and magazines, and Black History periodicals were all deemed contraband by the prison administration.
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> During the years 1969 to 1973, a number of significant events occurred in the community that radicalized the mindset of most of the 48 Black prisoners in Walpole—especially myself. These events were the Attica Prison revolt, the American Indian Movement takeover at Wounded Knee, the political rise of the Republic of New Africa, the formation of the Weather Underground, and the slaughter of students at Kent State University by the National Guard. These events gave me the ideology and blueprint to structure an organization of resistance that could benefit prisoners in their quest for meaningful rehabilitative programs designed around the outside community, with the assistance of community activists.
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> The idea and belief [that I'd been] betrayed by the judicial system via my conviction—an institution of just-us that I had been brainwashed by the educational system and the military to defend—as well as my compelling need to find my own spiritual identity as a Black man unfettered by what I had heretofore been forced to believe, by what I perceived then as the missionary-to-slave teachings of Christianity, led me to Islam and the Honorable Elijah Muhammad in 1970. Muhammad's teachings were at the far extreme of what I had heretofore been forced to believe, and fit my need to rebel against the establishment—while at the same time affording me an alternative spiritual foundation. However, my stay in the Nation Of Islam was short lived, as my quest for knowledge and love of books revealed to me Islam's role in the slave trade, and eventually afforded me with the perception that most of its upper echelon adherents were nothing more than poverty pimps (living high off the lower echelon's monetary contributions and ignorance).
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> Prior to the March 17, 1972, rebellion in Walpole Prison, David Dance persuaded the prison administration to allow him to teach a Black history course to 12 Black prisoners. The group was afforded space once a week in the prison general library. The prison administration pre-approved the books that we were allowed to read, by such authors as Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, Lerone Bennett Jr., Ralph Ellison, and Herbert Aptheker. It was within the framework of the Black History course that I met Big Bob Heard who not only entered as one of our course instructors, but also as a standing member of the Black Panther Party of Boston. It was through Big Bob that we received the Black Panther Party Paper, Weather Underground written material, and books authored by Franz Fanon, Paolo Freire, Kwame Nkrumah, Amilcar Cabral, Patrice Lumumba, Yusuf ben Jochanin, William Reich, Chancellor Williams III, and J. A. Rodgers, to name a few. This additional reading material rounded out our education of self, and allowed me to circulate the books and newspapers throughout the Black prisoner population via a mobile underground library (it was continuously moved from cell to cell, so that the prison administration would not find it). During this period of time I required that all prisoners who took out books from the library were to write a book report on what they had read; failure to do so would cost the individual a carton of cigarettes (which were donated to newly arrived Black prisoners to Walpole Prison population).
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> My newly founded education could be attributed to the Black history course.... My greater understanding of the Third World struggle against colonialism, imperialism, white supremacy, and racism ... as well as Black Consciousness awoken within me by Black poets (such as The Last Poets, Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, Etheridge Knight, Frederick Douglass, etc.), and the Black musicians of the era (e.g., James Brown, Curtis Mayfield, Gil Scott Heron, Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff, and Sly and the Family Stone) gave me my marching orders and anthems. All of the above led to the founding of BANTU in 1972, with all the members of the Black history course as its cofounders.

> BANTU was founded because there was a cultural need for representation for Black prisoners that was not afforded by the Inmate Advisory Council then and the other self-help groups that were established within the prison. Also, my newly awakened sense of Black/African history and pride instilled within me an obligation to assist in what I perceived to be the restructuring of the outside Black community. I believed that I could accomplish this feat by providing the prospective communities with educated and highly trained/motivated individuals (ex cons); rather than the uneducated, unskilled social parasites that the prison system was forcing down their collective throat. Community activists such as Obalaji Rust (Boston Black United Front), Amina Greene (college student), David Dance (Harvard University Undergrad), and the Reverend Edward Rodman were some of the people who made up BANTU's external board of directors. These community members were the individuals who continually impressed upon me the need for BANTU to become a voice in the newly recognized NPRA.
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> This was the most difficult period in my young life, as I had been conditioned up to this stage to react to political/social racial violence with violence. Ironically, it was not until the 1980s that those sessions on nonviolence with Ed finally took root in my conscious mind, so I could fully understand and appreciate the political and social significance of the principles of nonviolent resistance.[146]

Although BANTU came together in early spring, it would be officially formed with an internal and external board in September of 1972, as would the NPRA. Initially, BANTU members were not interested in even joining the NPRA, because the mainstream labor movement had always overtly excluded Black workers. Eventually, however, all of the BANTU leaders were on the board of the NPRA. Even so, BANTU maintained its own identity.

COMBATING THE NOD

By 1972, the prison administration at Walpole was using psychotropic drugs to control the prison population. Prisoners were put on Talwin, an analgesic narcotic usually used to control chronic or intense pain; it is used today in the preparation of Oxycontin, known to be highly addictive. Side effects included severe drowsiness, inability to focus, impaired reactions, and impaired thought processes. Talwin was the ideal drug to control the Walpole population.

Combating "the nod" would be a constant struggle for the NPRA. Dellelo describes a meeting of the general population where whole sections of the auditorium could not keep their heads raised. "The whole front row. It was like watching synchronized swimming. They all crossed their legs, folded their arms, and dropped their heads."[147] The guards would give each prisoner an entire day's worth of meds at one time. These prisoners would take all the pills at once and become "worthless."

By the end of 1972, the administrators of Walpole were intentionally turning the population into narcotics addicts. Once prisoners ceased being behavior problems, they would be transferred to Norfolk prison, where they would go through rapid detoxification. Sunny Robinson, who later became an observer, worked at the Medical Project in Norfolk. She reported what she was seeing to the AHC. When the AHC eventually was able to enter Walpole, they brought in doctors who could assess the extent of drug dependency within the prison. These doctors were scandalized. But undoing narcotics addiction is a very nuanced task.

Talwin also made people heroin addicts. Prisoners would be deliberately addicted to Talwin at Walpole, and then they would be transferred out to Norfolk, where they would begin to detox. The guards at Norfolk would then sell them heroin. All family members whose loved ones were bounced back and forth between the prisons attested to this pattern.[148] Many prisoners were unable to kick their habit even after they were released to the street and struggled for many years, cycling back and forth between prison and home because of addictions they picked up in prison.

The guards at Walpole not only manipulated the availability of Talwin to pacify the population, they also stemmed the supply to destabilize it. In the end, the NPRA had to secure its own supply of Talwin. When the guards would turn off the supply, the NPRA would use its stash to maintain the prisoners' self-control. They never sold it; they just gave it out one pill at a time. Dellelo and Hamm have spoken at length about the challenges presented by the dramatic substance-abuse problems within Walpole. Dellelo explains the problem with Talwin during the NPRA tenure.

> All prisons have drugs, even the super-duper ones. Most drugs come in through guards. They are the only ones who can bring that quantity.... The prison held 580 people; 265 people were on Talwin. When the NPRA had responsibility for running the prison, we came up with the number. What often happened was a deputy would send people to the hospital to put people on Talwin for a few days. It was very addictive. After a few days they were hooked.... Once someone was on Talwin, the supplier owned his ass. So they would make a round-up, put people in segregation and take away the Talwin. After a day or so they would go around and check with the cons and say, "What's wrong? Oh, you need Talwin? What are you going to give me?" They would pull a guy in and trade Talwin for information.[149]

ASSUMING LEADERSHIP

Despite the complexity of race relations and access to power Hamm described, he played a pivotal role in the Walpole prisoners' transition from a dispersed group to a body acting democratically in its own interest. Hamm describes the first step in this process.