

PART 1: Super Custody Before 1970

Before the 1970s, those who lived and worked at the Washington State Penitentiary shared a stable culture where change was slow.

Chapter 1 THE PRISON

As the 1960s came to an end, the Washington State Penitentiary was an ordered and predictable world.

In a broad valley in the southeast corner of the state of Washington, the quiet town of Walla Walla straddles the banks of a small stream. At the western edge of town, north of the railroad tracks, is the town's largest employer: a prison. It's been there, in one form or another, since territorial days. The prison grounds are large—five hundred acres—and one property line extends a half mile along North Thirteenth Avenue. With that much frontage, the choices for an address must have been numerous, but long ago some postmaster with a wry sense of humor decided that the Washington State Penitentiary's address should be 1313 North Thirteenth Avenue.

Approaching this unlucky address from town, North Thirteenth Avenue climbs a gentle grade before reaching the level ground upon which the prison sits. Perhaps one of the prison's nicknames, "the Hill," refers to this little rise, but it's the prison itself that draws the eye.

In the 1960s, the ten-acre main compound was surrounded by a twenty-foot-high wall composed of a half mile of stone, brick, mortar, and concrete. Large structures dominated most of the real estate inside the walls. A long building, called "Big Red" by both staff and inmates, ran north-south down the middle of the prison, dividing it in half. Getting its name from the muddy red-brown bricks that made up its nearly five-hundred-foot facade, Big Red housed admissions and segregation. New inmates—or "fish," as the convicts called them—went to admissions when they first arrived. After that, a fish either found or was assigned a permanent cell. If he knew someone with an empty bunk, he could move in. Brothers, other relatives, crime partners, or friends from the neighborhood often shared a cell.

Break a rule, cross the superintendent, be unmanageable for any reason, and an inmate would likely find himself in what the convicts called "the hole." This was segregation, or "seg" for short. In the 1960s, a man might stay in segregation for months or even years. Those on death row (a smaller section of segregation) got out only by the gallows or a pardon. In one corner of seg, a half dozen strip cells, with blackout doors and nothing but a hole in the floor for a toilet, were used for disciplinary isolation.

A small, walled recreation yard stood next to segregation. A tower officer observed it all. Once, a ricocheted bullet—meant to stop a fight inside the yard—killed an inmate who wasn't part of the brawl. A man in segregation counted himself lucky if he could see the sky and smell the fresh air for as much as an hour a day.

The eastern half of the institution—sometimes called "East Berlin" by the inmates—included the auditorium, three cellblocks (called "wings" in Walla Walla), the gym, hospital, Central Control, school, and rooms for television and games. West of Big Red were two more cellblocks, the giant kitchen and adjacent dining halls, an abandoned power house, a chapel, and an administrative building

used by counselors for the inmates. To the north were the Big Yard and the industries area with its license plate factory, metal shop, laundry, and other areas for work.

South of the main compound, and looking something like a castle, was the old administration building, attached to the wall by a strongly gated entrance. Upstairs, the parole board met to decide men's fate. Downstairs, inmates and visitors gathered under the watchful eyes of a correctional officer. A long table separated inmates from their visitors. A man could hold his wife's hands across the table. A single parting kiss and embrace were the only other forms of touch allowed.

Inmates tended lawns and planted flowers within the prison walls. But the grass was to look at, not to sit on. A man could be "tagged"—given a disciplinary infraction report—for walking on the grass. At night, the shadows of the poorly lit facility competed with each other in overlapping shades of black.

Inside the wings where the inmates lived was a world of gray on gray. The outer walls of the larger wings were a bare concrete shell punctuated by tall, narrow bays of windows with hundreds of panes of glass. Inside, long rows of cells with steel bars and sliding doors were stacked back-to-back, three stories high. A row of cells was called a "tier," or a "deck." Two back-to-back tiers made a floor: A and B on the first floor, C and D on the second, E and F on the third. Catwalks in front of the cells provided access to the upper tiers. From the front of the cells to the outer wall was a tall fifteen-foot-wide void running the length of the wing.

At the north end of the long cell house, a large gang shower, with eighteen shower heads suspended from three long metal pipes, filled a tiled room. At the opposite end of the wing, guard stations with their lever boxes for opening and closing cell doors stood at the head of each tier. Metal stairs led to a single door letting inmates in and out of the wing. The first-floor officer controlled the telephone that was the only means of communication with the rest of the prison.

When the sun went down, an officer couldn't see the far end of the tier for want of light. In the morning, the stale breath and body odors of four hundred men filled the open space. At the top of the big cell houses, the summer temperature could reach 120 degrees or more.

Convicts called their cell their "house." At Walla Walla, the largest of these were ten by twelve feet. Twin bunk beds lined the two side walls. A small sink and lidless toilet were bolted to the back wall. The open bars of the remaining side let in all the noise and smells. Up to four men slept, snored, dressed, and shared the toilet here. There was no room for modesty in a four-man cell.

For many, the best "houses" were the tiny one-man cells in Four and Five Wing. Although each cell was less than fifty square feet, at least you lived alone.

Large or small, the cells shared the anonymity of similarity. Few decorations or special touches distinguished one cell from another. The walls were bare. Everything visible, except perhaps a small family photo, was issued by the state. All personal property, limited to a short list of permitted items, fit within a lock box assigned to each man. Every inmate was expected to make his bed each

morning. If a cell wasn't up to standard, an officer ordered the men to make it clean and tidy. Failure to obey an order could land them in the hole.

Crews of inmate workers swept the floors, wiped down the rails, collected and distributed laundry, emptied the garbage, and kept the showers clean. In the 1960s, the floors were polished to a gleaming shine, the warden's desktop was like a mirror, and the entire institution was spotless.

Like the cell houses, other buildings were similarly unadorned. Three times a day, two high-ceilinged chow halls, with their metal tables and chairs bolted to the floor, fed hundreds of hungry men self-segregated in their various cliques. The tiled floors and hard concrete walls echoed with the sounds of talk and clatter of dishes and metal trays.

Run-down and poorly ventilated, the gym and auditorium helped the inmates pass the time and engage the mind and body.

The bright spot—and everything was relative here—was the education building. Its classrooms could almost pass for normal—as good an environment as any well-used school.

Another benefit for the men who attended class: the teachers were often women. Unless an inmate was confined to the hospital and saw a female nurse, or was lucky and had a visitor, the school was the only place where a woman might be seen. In the 1960s, the penitentiary was a world of men.

Chapter 2 THE MEN

A strong system of control prevailed for decades at Walla Walla. It was a system designed to create dependent inmates stripped of initiative and identity.

From a distance, all the inmates looked the same. Each man wore state-issued jeans, a blue work shirt, and in cold weather, a denim jacket and watch cap. Two sets of clothes and three pairs of socks were issued to each new arrival. Except for the socks, every article of clothing had the inmate's number stenciled on it. Personal clothing was not allowed. Shirts were tucked in, hair cut to regulation length, beards prohibited. In the prison, an inmate was known by his number.

The men who called the prison "home" lived in a self-regulated world, a world designed to minimize conflict and smooth the passage of time. The prison's natural leaders—those long-term convicts who had proved themselves through the years—valued calm and order. Walla Walla was for doing time and getting on. A shared set of unwritten rules, the convict code, defined the inmate culture. One of the inmate leaders, who later became a successful businessman and motivational speaker after he'd finally made it on the outside, explained:

The do's and don'ts that [made] up the convict code [were] clear, and violators [were] subject to instant retaliation by their peers. You don't snitch to the Man, you don't steal from your brother, you don't talk to the Man except on business, you don't prey on the "good convicts," you support opposition to the Man even if it's insane, you don't talk to snitches or child molesters, you don't offend or mistreat women visitors.¹

Under the convict code, a man could shower and leave his smokes unguarded on top of his well-made bed. His radio, his comb, all his worldly possessions were safe in the prison of the 1960s. There was honor among the thieves.

To the inmates, the correctional officers were "bulls." From a distance, the bulls, like the inmates, all looked alike. Each officer wore his gray blazer unbuttoned over a freshly pressed white shirt and narrow black tie. Matching trousers were creased, black shoes polished to a high shine. An eight-pointed police hat with visor and badge completed the uniform. Like the inmates, all officers had regulation haircuts and clean-shaven faces.

The bulls carried nothing but a whistle and a set of keys—no weapons, no handcuffs, not even a radio. In most situations the officers were outnumbered by at least a hundred to one. They were able to do their jobs only because of a symbiotic relationship between their task of maintaining order and the values of the convict code.

Of course, conflict did occur. The officers could dole out punishment that by today's standards was unquestionably cruel and unusual. An "adjustment committee" frequently banished inmates to strip cells, confining them naked without light or companionship. It may be an exaggeration, but one man was said to have spent eleven years there. Officers administered drugs to control those inmates too difficult

to manage in any other way. One former correctional officer explained, "They would bring gallons of Thorazine from the hospital. They used to mix it with the food. They would give them a shot in their gravy, in their coffee, to the point where they would kind of go into a trance and almost freeze in place."² Not many received this treatment, but certainly more than medically indicated and none with informed consent. Guards used fire hoses to control groups of unruly inmates. The language of the officers (some of them at least) defined those who were caged as beasts.

While any number of transgressions could send a man to the hole, discipline in the wings might be more direct. A seasoned sergeant who ran a wing would help a new young officer. "I've got a problem with so-and-so," the new recruit might say. The sergeant would ask, "Can you whip him?" If the recruit answered yes, the sergeant replied, "Then you haven't got a problem." If the answer was no, the response was "Hold my keys." The sergeant briefly disappeared, and the problem went away. Even this approach, undeniably rough from today's comfortable vantage, was well within the rules of the day: it was bare fists one-on-one, and either man could lose.

Despite such practices, direct brutality, at least by the definition of the day, was probably rare. Not only rules, but also honor, drew the line: it was cowardly to strike a shackled man.

If the men tended to look alike, blue on one side, gray on the other, so too did the days. There was a predictable regularity in the interactions of the keepers and the kept. Every morning, the day shift officers arrived at each wing a little before six o'clock. They unlocked the wing door and relieved the single officer who had been locked in all night without a key with as many as four hundred sleeping inmates. In the larger wings, if it was a weekday, the day shift consisted of a sergeant and two correctional officers—one man per floor. If it was the weekend, the sergeant's day off, or someone's meal break, two officers ran the unit. When this happened, one officer manned the telephone and covered the front door, the two tiers on the first floor, and the doors to the shower, laundry room, barbershop, and janitor's closet. The second officer covered the tiers on the top two floors. To open and close cell doors on the upper tiers, the officer moved from one side of the wing to the other and up and down the stairs.

When the day shift took over, the first order of business was to count the inmates. With the inmates locked in their cells, two officers walked one side of the top floor, preprinted notepads in hand, and wrote down the number of inmates in each cell. As they walked, each inmate stood at the front of the cell, at least one hand clasping a bar. At the end of the tier, the officers added up the number of inmates recorded on their separate notepads. If the numbers agreed, the process was repeated for the other side of the floor and the other floors of the cellblock. When finished, the sergeant or one of the officers called Central Control and reported the count for the unit. The same process was conducted simultaneously throughout the prison, including in the kitchen where inmate workers were finishing cooking the meal and preparing the serving line. If the count cleared—that is, added up to the expected number—the prison day began. If the count

didn't clear, no one moved until the discrepancy was resolved. The whole process took about an hour. Count occurred three times a day.

After count cleared, and when the kitchen was ready, an officer in the chow hall telephoned the wings in a preset order and told the unit officer how many inmates to send—usually two tiers at a time. The wing officer called “Chow” and pulled a large lever in the lock box to simultaneously unlock the seventeen cells on one tier. If two tiers were called, the officer repeated the operation for the other side of the wing. With the clang of steel on steel, the inmates manually slid their cell doors open, exited the unit, then moved as a group to the chow hall under the watchful eyes of the tower officers, taking care to stay on the pavement and keep off the grass.

After the last inmate left the building, the outside door was locked. An officer closed the cell doors by going to each lock box and turning a small wheel with a flip-down handle. As the wheel turned, a long steel screw spun around in a metal chase above the cell doors. Gears at the top of each door engaged the spinning screw, and seventeen doors slid slowly closed until they collided with their locks and frames, like seventeen blacksmiths striking steel with hammers.

This process was repeated until the entire institution was fed, which took about an hour and a half. When an inmate finished eating, he could go to his prison job, return to his cell, or go to the Big Yard or other recreation area.

The rest of the day was similarly structured. Every morning the “sock man” came down the tier. This was an inmate who swapped out clean socks for dirty socks hung over the bars at the front of each cell. Once a week, a “sweeper” picked up bags of dirty clothes and carried them to large hampers on the ground floor for transport to the laundry. On another day, the sweeper gathered bed linens and towels. Movement in and out of the wing occurred once an hour, on the hour. There were callouts for the pill line, school, visiting, work, and various appointments.

It was a system designed to instill dependence. Officers and convicts alike called this mode of operating “super custody.”

In his lilting Irish accent, the prison's Catholic priest described the days of super custody. “Any little bit of responsibility [the inmate] might have possessed—we took it away from him,” he said. “We'll tell you when to get up. We'll tell you when to go to chow. We'll tell you whether you can wear your shirt inside or outside your pants. We'll tell you the length you can cut your hair. We'll tell you when to shave. We'll tell you when to breathe almost.”³

For many inmates, this regimented lifestyle had its comforts. “The old system was beautiful for doing time,” said one inmate. “You didn't have to think about nothing. Everything was provided for you. Every decision was made. . . . You could float along for months and months and never have to think at all.”

Throughout the 1960s, at prisons across the country, the warden made the rules. He was also the policeman, prosecutor, judge, jury, and executioner. His reach extended to convicts and staff alike. Such was B. J. Rhay. Variouslly known as Bob, Bobby, B. J., warden, superintendent, and Mr. Rhay, Warden Rhay had less kindly names as well. But these were never mentioned to his face. At least, not at first. For most of his twenty years as superintendent, he was King of the Hill.

As warden, Rhay could order an inmate be taken to segregation and—in his words—be “buried so deep they’d have to pipe sunshine to him.”⁴ If an officer offended, two others escorted him to the gate. At Walla Walla, the final words in an officer’s career might be those of Warden Rhay: “Get off my hill.”

If such incidents conjure a picture of a fearsome man, that would not be B. J. Rhay. A slender six-footer, Rhay could fill a room—occasionally through his fine, hot temper, but more often through charisma and a smile. Confident, direct, or devious as suited his needs, he could toss off sound bites long before that phrase had meaning. Standing there in his well-pressed suit, he looked taller than he really was. If he was your friend, he was very much your friend. And like a politician, Rhay had many friends.

Rhay never shrank from power. He would walk the breezeways and yards alone and chat with the convicts he met. Those in disfavor could feel his sting for years. Once he shot two men as they tried to escape. But despite his toughness, Rhay preferred the carrot to the stick. While the twentieth-century dungeon known as the hole played its part, small freedoms (and larger ones too) could buy a lot when convicts had so little.

Rhay’s control of staff was similarly firm. Even though prison jobs were no longer favors doled out by political bosses, staff had few protections. Rhay promoted and protected his friends, and he discouraged or discharged his foes. Some say that when he was at his height, Rhay was a better con than the craftiest convict who ever walked the breezeway. He was master of the game.

In his private life, Rhay grazed his quarter horses in the shadow of the prison wall and raced them at the county fair. He raised his seven daughters in the warden’s house, where years before, in front of the hearth, he had married a previous warden’s daughter. He rubbed elbows with the wealthy farmers and hobnobbed with the town elite.

A Walla Walla native, Rhay was a hero before he was a warden. Leaving college in 1941, he trained as a fighter pilot, then saw action in World War II on seventy-seven missions over North Africa, the Asian Pacific, and Europe. “Three Thunderbolts and a Mustang, that’s what I flew,” he said.⁵ In combat he used a trick he called a “lazy yaw.” Nonchalantly drifting to one side or the other, he’d lull the enemy into carelessness, pretending not to notice. Then he’d strike. He returned to Walla Walla in ‘45, a decorated ace with seven kills. For thirty years a weekend

warrior, he was current through the F-100, the Air Force's first jet fighter to reach supersonic speed.

After the war, Rhay got a job at the Hill. He worked as a tower officer, then left to complete his war-interrupted studies at Whitman College. His job prospects brightened with his degree in sociology—not to mention his marriage to the warden's daughter. He returned to the Hill and remained there until his father-in-law, thanks to a change in the occupant of the governor's mansion, joined the ranks of the unemployed. Rhay too was dismissed, only to resurface in New York as an investigator for Erle Stanley Gardner's *Court of Last Resort*, a 1950s radio and TV show dramatizing cases of people wrongly accused or unjustly convicted.⁶ Heady stuff for a small-town boy.

Rhay returned to Walla Walla—and to the penitentiary—in 1954, this time for good. After starting a reception/guidance unit at the pen, he was promoted to associate superintendent for treatment and then to superintendent. Rhay prided himself on being the first civil service superintendent in the state of Washington. But his party affiliation—conservative Democrat—must have pleased Washington's governor at the time, also a Democrat.

Rhay had friends both high and low. This circle of friends grew and strengthened until he became a formidable political force in his own right. The sparsely populated eastern Washington counties have always had to present a united front to accomplish anything in the state legislature. It was with politicians from his native southeast Washington that Rhay was most allied. He hunted and fished with his legislative friends. He entertained them and was entertained by them. The benefits of these relationships were all the greater for the genuine affection and admiration that flowed in both directions. These friendships and loyalties sustained Rhay long after his crown had slipped in the eyes of most citizens of the state.

In the 1960s, Rhay could dispense favors for information or compliance and reserve his temper for times that really mattered. The convict culture supported the warden's style. Rhay's control of the inmates was measured by his control of a few of their leaders. If the right six to ten men were on his side, Rhay could manage eighteen hundred convicts.

Of course, Rhay was not alone. Two associate superintendents—one for custody and one for treatment—did much of the day-to-day work. His chief of custody managed the officers and put the fear of God into the inmate population. His associate for treatment managed all but a handful of the remaining staff and did the nitty-gritty administrative work. Rhay was the public face of the penitentiary and the “good cop” as he walked the breezeways.

William P. Macklin was chief of custody for most of Rhay's early years. Runner-up for the superintendent position that Rhay won, Macklin was a hard-line, old-guard disciplinarian. If Rhay was the carrot, Macklin was the stick. As Macklin's one-time clerk put it, “He ran the penitentiary with an iron fist. . . . He'd walk in the front door in the morning and the inmates would run one way and the staff would run the other.”⁷ Every day Macklin ran his snitch line. He'd call for a group of inmates, including his regular informants and others selected as cover to hide the identity of

those who snitched. One by one they'd come to see him. To those who were not his favored informants, he might say, "Why do you think I've asked you here? What do you think you've done wrong?" Sometimes Macklin knew. Sometimes he fished. Using the information he gathered from his snitches, Macklin would reel in a new batch of troublemakers each evening and lock them up in segregation.

Like a good caricature, one inmate's story paints a telling, if not wholly accurate, picture of the chief of custody. According to the inmate, the "Macklin barometer" was his cigar. "If his cigar was in the left side of his mouth, he was listening. If it was dead center, he was still listening, but very doubtful. If it was shifting from one side to the other, the prisoner was lying and Macklin was madder than hell about it. And if Macklin bit the thing, the con was dead in the water!"⁸ Less colorful, but presumably closer to the truth, were Macklin's frequent last words at the disciplinary hearings he chaired: "Ten days isolation, twenty days seg."

Until staff proved themselves, Macklin intimidated them as well. According to one longtime penitentiary employee, if Macklin asked to see you, "that was a command performance. Bill Macklin was *the man*. Everybody just kind of knew that."⁹ Another officer implied that Macklin may have intimidated even Rhay. This officer overheard Macklin say to the superintendent, "You take care of the politicians. Leave my prison alone."¹⁰

Behind the scenes and in the backup role was Bob Freeman, the associate superintendent for treatment during most of Rhay's years. Self-effacing, ever loyal, Freeman played his quiet part. He was perhaps the smartest man at the Hill. It was Freeman who built the well-regarded education program. He wrote the memos and oiled the machine when the superintendent was otherwise engaged. It was Freeman who authored the journal articles and served on national committees. Thoughtful and cool, Freeman could keep a steady head when others, including Rhay, were getting hot.

In the 1960s, these three—Rhay, Macklin, and Freeman—had the bases covered. They were as politically correct as you could be in the last days of the absolute warden. Like a stool with three legs, this team was strong in its parts. And the ground beneath their feet—the prison and the culture it contained—seemed as fixed as the broad shade trees that comforted the quiet town of Walla Walla in its hot and lazy summers.

From his first term as governor, Daniel J. Evans was intent on prison reform. In psychiatrist William R. Conte, he had just the man for the job.

Three hundred miles to the west of Walla Walla—three-sixty if the weather has closed the pass—is Olympia. Here, at the foot of Puget Sound, the governor makes his home, the agencies keep their offices, the legislature comes and goes. Even today, with airplane service and better freeways, a long day's journey is needed to put Olympia and Walla Walla people face-to-face.

In the 1960s, adult corrections was a division within the Department of Institutions. The entire division consisted of three major institutions plus a couple of forest camps. Of the three, Walla Walla was the largest and most remote. The division had a director, two assistants, and a secretary. In theory, they oversaw it all. But with such a small staff, the other meaning of oversight was probably closer to the mark.

Daniel J. Evans was governor of the state of Washington for three consecutive terms. When he first took office in 1965, civil service prevented the wholesale replacement of state employees, a patronage practice that earlier governors had usually followed when they were elected. But civil service never protected agency heads—members of the governor's cabinet—so Evans would have been within his rights to replace all of them. Yet Evans retained the best of his predecessor's men. Foremost among them was Garrett Heyns, director of the Department of Institutions.

By all accounts, Heyns was an imposing, effective leader. Formidable in authority and intellect, Heyns enjoyed the advantages that sometimes come with age. Already in his seventies when Evans became governor, Heyns was making his mark on his final career. As Heyns's successor put it, "He used to go to legislative committee meetings and some criticism would be made. He would sit back . . . in his grandfatherly way and . . . giving them full credit for whatever they were objecting to, in a matter of a few words or sentences, completely destroy any dissident reaction they might have. . . . They didn't challenge what he had to say."¹¹

Early in his tenure, Heyns recruited psychiatrist William R. Conte to head the department's Division of Mental Health. In his years in this capacity, Conte led the first great wave of deinstitutionalization of the state's mental health facilities, greatly reducing the number of patients treated there. With increased services and decreased populations, for the first time ever, all three of the state's mental hospitals were accredited at the same time. As populations fell, one entire institution was closed. Caseloads at the other two shrank to a fraction of their former thousands. Heyns gave Conte full credit for these successes. The millions of dollars saved brought attention and admiration from legislators and the governor.

Before long, the bright and energetic Conte, thirty years Heyns's junior, was being groomed to succeed the older man. The two got on well. "Kindred spirits" was the phrase Conte used.

As director, Heyns was responsible for all Department of Institutions programs. But his greatest interest, due to his twenty years of experience in adult corrections, was

everything relating to prisons. Heyns made sure that Conte's grooming included guidance on prison issues. To Heyns's teaching, Conte brought his own understanding of human behavior. In Conte's words, "What I learned from Heyns was that the prison setting had the potential for being a social psychiatric setting."¹²

The concepts of social psychiatry and rehabilitation had deep roots for Conte. He had come of age professionally prior to the advent of psychotropic medications, during a time when many psychiatric conditions were considered untreatable. But Conte's experience showed him otherwise. In his years at Colorado state hospitals, in local community clinics, and in his private practice, Conte saw patients improve despite what the textbooks said.

"I was at first unbelieving," said Conte, "because I had learned that these people don't change. [But] I had seen too many examples of people who did. In the overall, I had to believe that [the prison population] was a population that could be reached. I was also convinced that it needed a social psychiatric approach—which to me meant use anybody that you can find, anywhere, who has the capacity and the willingness to give something of himself in the way of communication to an individual, and you can help him."¹³

Conte was not alone in his belief that criminal behavior was a treatable condition. This national movement, known as "the medical model," was enshrined in part in the 1967 report by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*. With proper diagnosis and appropriate intervention, criminals could be relieved of their symptoms and society rid of the consequences of criminal behavior.

Governor Evans, too, dreamed this heady dream. Some of his speeches included quotations from Dr. Karl Menninger's *The Crime of Punishment*, an influential book of the day. Evans knew for certain that society could create better outcomes for the men and women sentenced to prison. From the early days of his first administration, he was dedicated to prison reform.

State law, long ignored, echoed the same refrain. "Garrett Heyns," said Conte, "was probably the first to point out to me that if one reads the law in most states . . . you will find reference after reference after reference to rehabilitation as the goal."¹⁴ This was certainly true in Washington State. These statutes, a product of a far earlier era, gave impetus to a new period of reform.

These were halcyon days in Washington State. Booming economic times swelled the state's coffers. In the mental health field, psychotropic drugs made the word "incurable" seem obsolete. Even the unrest in the streets and campuses inspired Evans and his reform-minded cabinet. Optimism prevailed. "Government was fun then," said Evans.¹⁵ Anything seemed possible. But Garrett Heyns, in his decades of experience, had seen the tide turn a number of times. He counseled the younger Conte, "You know, you and I had better take advantage of the situation as it is, because never again will administrators have the freedom that we have now."¹⁶

When Garrett Heyns retired, Evans appointed Dr. William R. Conte director of the Department of Institutions. Conte set out to practice what he preached and to take advantage of the situation as it was.

As the 1960s drew to a close, the situation in Walla Walla was an entrenched culture resistant to change. Conte decided he would challenge Rhay to think in new ways about how prisons could be managed. And soon the tumult in the streets—the demonstrations and the riots, the challenges to authority, the widening use of drugs—would find its way behind the walls. The King of the Hill was about to lose his throne.

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1. Gordon Graham, *The One-Eyed Man Is King*, 1982, p. 61. © Instar Performance, LLC.
 2. James Spalding (former correctional officer, sergeant, lieutenant, captain, and superintendent, Washington State Penitentiary), in discussion with the author, April 20, 1993.
 3. Jim Cummins, Washington State Penitentiary Catholic priest, videotape transcript, “Walla Walla,” King-TV, 1972, Washington State Archives, Records of the Department of Social and Health Services, Division of Adult Corrections, 1971–81.
 4. B. J. Rhay (former superintendent, Washington State Penitentiary), in discussion with the author, August 13, 1993.
 5. Ibid.
 6. Erle Stanley Gardner is perhaps best known for creating the detective character featured in novels, short stories, films, radio dramas, and several TV series, Perry Mason.
 7. Spalding, April 1993.
 8. “Possible Medical Career Changes to Penology,” *Walla Walla Union-Bulletin*, November 28, 1971.
 9. Carol Moses (former administrator, Washington State Penitentiary), in discussion with the author, January 14, 1994.
 10. Parley Edwards (former correctional officer, Washington State Penitentiary), in discussion with the author, June 22, 1994.
 11. William R. Conte (former director, Department of Institutions), in discussion with the author, January 18, 1994.
 12. Conte, January 1994.
 13. Conte, January 1994.
 14. Conte, January 1994.
 15. Daniel J. Evans (Washington State governor, 1965–77), in discussion with the author, July 12, 1994.
 16. Conte, January 1994.