



PRE-DRILL CAMP 2026 · LEADERSHIP SEMINARS · DAY 1

Why Hazing Happens

"Understand It. Recognize It. End It."

Dr. Thomas L. Jones, Jr.

Director of University Bands · Saturday, August 1, 2026

The Hampton University Marching Force

HAMPTON'S HEARTBEAT

Icebreaker

Spike Lee's look at the pledge process at a Black college. As you watch, ask yourself: why do people endure it—and who has the power to stop it?



School Daze — “One Reason Why Not”

youtu.be/VKFHCBGxCyU

WATCH · 2:19

— THE PREMISE

01

No one joins The Marching Force to be broken. They come for the music, the family, and the legacy. Hazing takes that hope and turns it into fear—and it almost never starts with a monster. It starts with ordinary people, a real need to belong, and a room where no one says stop. To end it, you first have to understand exactly how it takes root.

— UNDERSTAND IT TO END IT.

Hazing Is a Culture Problem

And a culture problem is, at its root, a leadership problem.

- ◆ Rules alone have never stopped hazing. Every program that lost a student had a policy against it. Prohibition punishes what already happened—it does not change what people believe.
- ◆ Dr. Jones's research is direct about this: **hazing is a culture problem, and culture is a leadership problem.** Change the culture and you change the behavior at its source.
- ◆ Culture is set by the people members actually watch and follow—their **peer leaders**. That is you. What you permit, you promote; what you model, you multiply.

“People raised on love will do anything for you, but people raised on survival will do anything to you.” — **Najee Rayne**, quoted in Jones, *Beyond the Bruises* (2024)

Sources: Jones, doctoral dissertation, North Carolina A&T State University (2014); Jones, *Beyond the Bruises* (2024), quoting Najee Rayne.

What Hazing Actually Is

Strip away the euphemisms—“tradition,” “initiation,” “paying dues.”

- ◆ Hazing is **any activity expected of someone joining or staying in a group that humiliates, degrades, or endangers them**—regardless of their willingness. Virginia law (Code § 18.2-56) makes it a crime, and consent is not a defense.
- ◆ The clearest line Dr. Jones draws: **rigorous training, high expectations, and demanding standards are not hazing. Humiliation, exploitation, and abuse are never training.**
- ◆ It also hides in quieter forms—**hazing by omission** (withholding help or information to control new members) and the **normalization of harm** (“it’s tradition,” “it’s what made me”).
- ◆ And silence is not neutral: knowing and failing to report is **complicity**.

Sources: Virginia Code § 18.2-56; HUMF Revised Anti-Hazing Policy (2026); Jones (2014).

The Hidden Scale

It is far more common—and far more invisible—than people think.

55%

of college students in clubs, teams, and organizations
experience hazing

9 in 10

who are hazed do not recognize it as hazing while it
happens

95%

who do recognize it never report it to anyone

If almost no one names it and almost no one reports it, then silence—not cruelty—is what keeps hazing alive. **Leaders are the ones who can break the silence.**

Source: Allan and Madden, *Hazing in View: College Students at Risk*, National Study of Student Hazing, University of Maine (2008), n = 11,482 students across 53 campuses.

It Starts With a Real Need

To understand hazing, start with something good: the human need to belong.

- ◆ Belonging is a **fundamental human drive**—psychologists rank it alongside food and safety. Every new member walks in wanting to be part of something.
- ◆ Abraham Maslow placed **love and belonging** at the center of human motivation: once we are fed and safe, we reach for acceptance and connection.
- ◆ That hunger is not the problem. It is the fuel. Hazing works precisely because it **hijacks a healthy need** and charges a cruel price for it.
- ◆ Meet the need the right way, and no one ever pays the wrong price for it.

Sources: Baumeister and Leary, "The Need to Belong," *Psychological Bulletin* (1995); Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* (1943).

Belonging, Turned Cruel

How a good need gets weaponized into a rite of suffering.

- ◆ Groups instinctively want proof of commitment. The more someone **sacrifices** to get in, the more “serious” their membership feels to everyone watching.
- ◆ Researchers describe hazing as a way groups test loyalty—screening out the uncommitted and binding in those who endure. The logic feels ancient and automatic.
- ◆ But there is a fatal confusion here: groups mistake **suffering** for **commitment**. Pain is easy to inflict and easy to measure—so it becomes the lazy shortcut for proving devotion.
- ◆ Real commitment is built through shared work and trust, not through who can take the most abuse.

Sources: Cimino, "The Evolution of Hazing," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* (2011); Keating et al., "Going to College and Unpacking Hazing," *Group Dynamics* (2005).

“I Suffered, So You Will”

The mind's oldest trap—and the engine that keeps hazing running.

- ◆ In a famous 1959 study, people who endured a **severe, embarrassing initiation** to join a group rated that group as *more* valuable than those who joined easily.
- ◆ The reason is **cognitive dissonance**: “I went through all of that, so it must have been worth it.” The mind justifies the pain by inflating the prize.
- ◆ That single trick explains the cruelest line in hazing: “**I went through it, so you will too.**” Yesterday's victim becomes today's enforcer—not because they are evil, but because admitting it was pointless is too painful.
- ◆ Naming this out loud is how you break the chain: the suffering did not make it worth it. It never does.

Sources: Aronson and Mills, “The Effect of Severity of Initiation on Liking for a Group,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* (1959); Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (1957).

The Bonding Myth

“It brings us closer together.” The evidence says the opposite.

- ◆ The number-one excuse for hazing is that it **builds unity**. It is the myth that keeps good people participating.
- ◆ When researchers actually measured it, hazing did **not** produce real cohesion. Groups bonded by shared **positive** experiences were closer than groups bonded by shared abuse.
- ◆ What hazing builds is **compliance and silence**—people who are quiet out of fear, not loyal out of love. It also breeds resentment that surfaces for years.
- ◆ If the “bonding” only works through fear and humiliation, it is not bonding. It is control wearing a team jersey.

Sources: Keating et al., *Group Dynamics* (2005); Van Raalte et al., "The Relationship Between Hazing and Team Cohesion," *Journal of Sport Behavior* (2007); Lodewijckx and Syroit, "Severity of Initiation Revisited," *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality* (1997).

The Power of the Group

Why smart, kind people go along with things they know are wrong.

- ◆ Solomon Asch showed that people will **deny what is right in front of their eyes** to agree with a group—even on something as obvious as the length of a line.
- ◆ We are wired to read the room and follow it. When “everybody's doing it,” the brain treats the behavior as normal, even when it is clearly harmful.
- ◆ Dr. Jones's research found the flip side is just as strong: in a band, **peer leader influence is the most powerful driver of behavior there is**. The line follows its leaders.
- ◆ That is the whole opportunity. Be the **one voice** that makes it safe for everyone else to say what they already know.

Sources: Asch, “Opinions and Social Pressure,” *Scientific American* (1955); Jones, dissertation, North Carolina A&T State University (2014).

When No One Steps In

The bystander effect—the reason a whole room can watch and do nothing.

- ◆ Darley and Latané found that the **more people** who witness something wrong, the **less likely** any one of them is to act. Everyone assumes someone else will.
- ◆ Responsibility gets divided until it disappears. “It wasn't my place,” “I figured a leader would handle it,” “I didn't want to make it weird.”
- ◆ Hazing thrives in exactly that gap—a crowd of decent people, each waiting for another to be the first to say enough.
- ◆ Name it in advance and the spell breaks: **if you see it, it is your place. You are the one.**

Sources: Darley and Latané, "Bystander Intervention in Emergencies," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (1968); Latané and Darley, *The Unresponsive Bystander* (1970).

Losing Yourself in the Crowd

How groups do things no single member ever would alone.

- ◆ **Deindividuation:** inside a group, people feel anonymous and stop feeling personally responsible. “It was the line, not me.” The crowd becomes a place to hide.
- ◆ **Groupthink:** a tight group that prizes agreement will silence its own doubts, ignore consequences, and convince itself that obvious wrongs are fine.
- ◆ Give ordinary people a role, a uniform, and power over others with no accountability, and cruelty can drift in quietly—the warning the Stanford Prison study dramatized.
- ◆ Dr. Jones's answer is deliberate **counter-programming:** open dialogue and psychological safety, so doubt has somewhere to go besides silence.

Sources: Festinger, Pepitone, and Newcomb, “Some Consequences of De-Individuation,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* (1952); Janis, *Victims of Groupthink* (1972); Jones (2014).

The Cycle That Feeds Itself

Put the pieces together and you see a machine—one that runs on its own.

- ◆ A new member **needs to belong**. The group demands suffering as the price. The member endures, and the mind decides it must have been worth it.
- ◆ A year later, that same member enforces the ritual—to protect the meaning of their own pain, and because the crowd expects it.
- ◆ Each cycle, the tradition feels more sacred and the silence grows deeper. No villain is required. The machine runs on ordinary needs and ordinary fear.
- ◆ A cycle has to be **broken on purpose**. It will not stop on its own—and one leader, in one moment, is usually where it breaks.

Sources: Nuwer, *Hazing: Destroying Young Lives* (2018); Cimino, "The Evolution of Hazing," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* (2011).

A Hard Lesson: Robert Champion

Not a distant story. It happened to a marching band like ours—and it was a leadership failure.

- ◆ On November 19, 2011, **Robert Champion, a 26-year-old drum major** in Florida A&M University's famed Marching 100, died after a hazing ritual aboard a band bus following a game in Orlando.
- ◆ The medical examiner ruled it a **homicide**—he died of internal bleeding from blunt-force trauma. By every account, Champion had **opposed** hazing.
- ◆ Band members were criminally charged, the celebrated band was suspended, and its director departed—studied afterward as a **failure of culture and leadership**, not merely a conduct violation.



Robert Champion

Drum Major, Florida A&M Marching 100 · Died November 19, 2011, at age 26

A drum major—a leader—died to belong to a band that already loved him. Every reason on the slides before this one was in that room. **Not one of them was worth his life.**

Sources: Orange County (FL) Medical Examiner ruling (2011); State of Florida v. band members, Ninth Judicial Circuit (2012–2015); Nuwer, *Hazing: Destroying Young Lives* (2018).

The Real Cost

Hazing is not a prank that went too far. It is a crime with a body count.

- ◆ **Human:** death, lasting injury, trauma, and students who quit the thing they loved. There has been at least one reported hazing death nearly every year for decades.
- ◆ **Legal:** hazing is a crime. In Virginia it is prosecutable under Code § 18.2-56, and consent is not a defense. Nearly every state now has an anti-hazing law.
- ◆ **Federal:** the **Stop Campus Hazing Act** now requires colleges to publicly report hazing incidents. There is nowhere left for it to hide.
- ◆ **Institutional:** a single incident can suspend a program, end careers, trigger lawsuits, and stain a legacy built over decades. One night can undo a hundred years.

Sources: Virginia Code § 18.2-56; Stop Campus Hazing Act, Public Law 118-173 (2024); Nuwer hazing death record, StopHazing.org.

The Antidote Is Proven

This is not a theory. It was studied in a band like ours—and it worked.

- ◆ Dr. Jones's dissertation examined how **servant-leadership** was built into an HBCU marching band (the Blue and Gold Marching Machine at North Carolina A&T). The result: **hazing declined while excellence deepened.**
- ◆ Cohesion was built through **rigorous, respectful rites of passage**—hard because excellence is hard, never because harm was intended.
- ◆ The most powerful tool was **peer leader influence, trained ethically**—the “linking pin” leaders who bridge the staff and the members and set the culture day to day.
- ◆ Servant-leadership is the documented opposite of hazing: authority that exists to **serve the growth and safety** of members, never to control or initiate them.

Sources: Jones, doctoral dissertation, North Carolina A&T State University (2014); Greenleaf, *The Servant as Leader* (1970); see the Servant-Leadership seminar.

The “Is This Hazing?” Test

When you are unsure, run the activity through four questions.

- ◆ Would you be willing to do this **in front of a parent, a university administrator, or on public video?**
- ◆ Are new members being asked to do something **veterans have not done** or are unwilling to do?
- ◆ Would you be prepared to **defend the merit of this activity in court?**
- ◆ Does this activity **affirm the dignity, growth, and safety** of every participant?

The decision rule: if any one of these questions produces doubt—do not proceed.

Source: HUMF Anti-Hazing Decision Framework, adapted from Jones (2014).

The Non-Negotiables

Most of this seminar helps you think. These four do not require thought—they are bright lines.

- ◆ **No physical contact and no excessive physical punishment.** No hitting, no paddling, no “smoke sessions.” Conditioning is the staff's job, never a leader's weapon.
- ◆ **No off-campus activities.** Band business happens on campus, in approved spaces. Nothing that matters to the section happens at an apartment or across town.
- ◆ **No drugs and no alcohol.** Not at any band function, not tied to membership, and never as a price of belonging.
- ◆ **No activities outside approved operational hours.** If it is not on the staff-approved schedule, it does not happen. Unsanctioned late-night sectionals are where hazing lives.

Break one of these and you are risking your place in this band—and possibly a courtroom. There is no version of the story where crossing these lines ends well. **Do not test them.**

Source: Director's Non-Negotiables, HUMF Revised Anti-Hazing Policy (2026), retained prohibitions.

Build Belonging the Right Way

Every rite of passage we keep must pass four tests.

1 Transparent

Every activity is disclosed to participants and staff in advance. Nothing about belonging here happens in the dark.

2 Relevant

Tie it to real mastery—music, marching, academics, and our history. If it does not build the craft, it does not belong.

3 Equitable

Veterans complete the challenge alongside or ahead of new members. No one is asked to do what the leaders will not.

4 Dignifying

No humiliation, no harm, no financial burden, no distress. Bond through shared achievement, never shared suffering.

Source: HUMF Rites-of-Passage Redesign criteria; Jones (2014).

Recognize. Refuse. Report.

When the machine starts up, one leader can stop it. That leader is you.

1 Recognize

Name it early, before it escalates. You now know the signs and the science. Trust that knowledge the moment something feels off.

3 Report

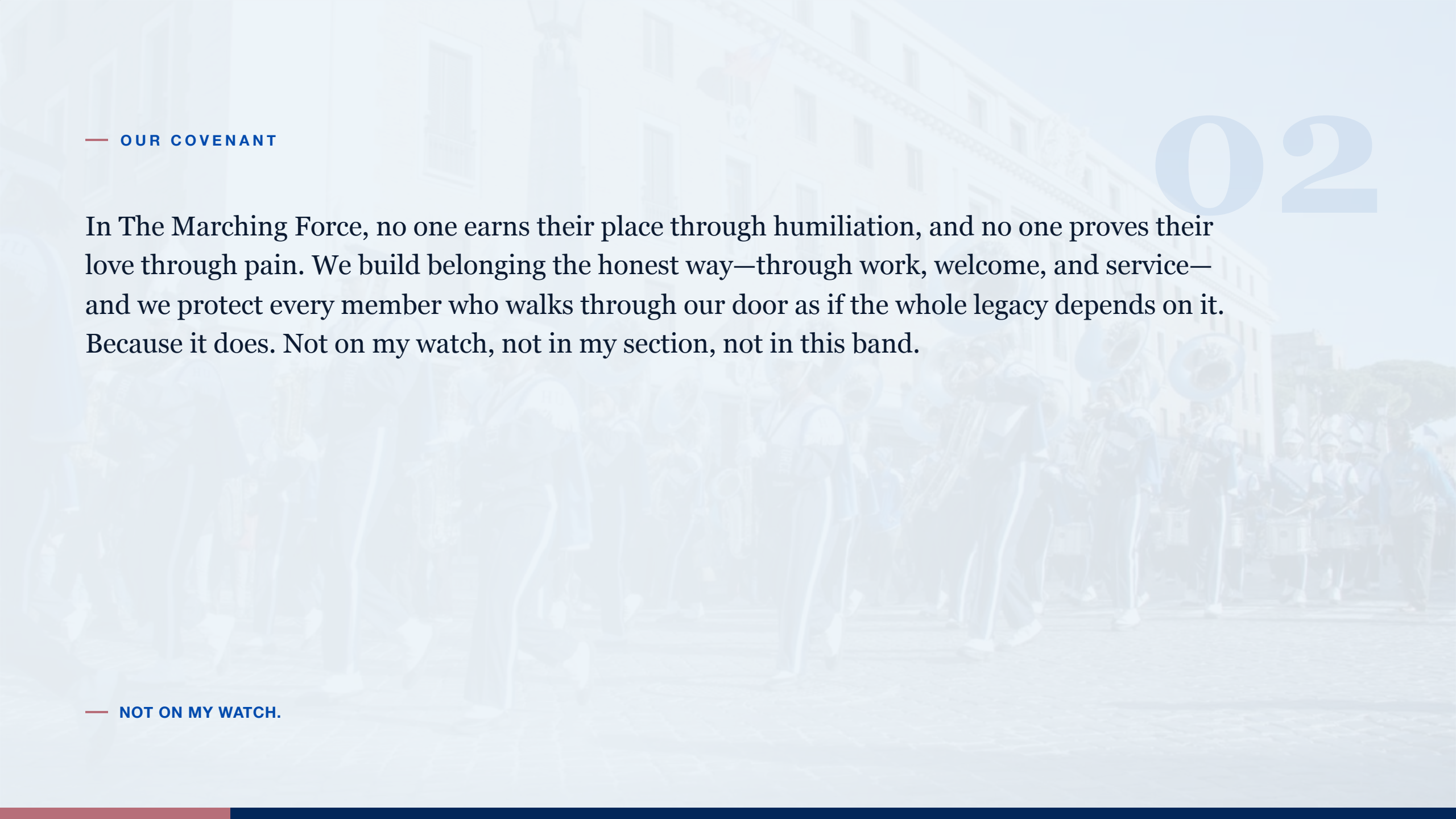
Tell a director or staff member. This is not snitching—it is protecting a life and the program. Silence is how everyone before you failed.

2 Refuse

Do not do it, do not permit it, and do not look away. “Not on my watch” has to mean it—especially when the crowd expects otherwise.

4 Replace

Give them the real thing instead: work, welcome, and genuine belonging. You cannot just ban the counterfeit—you have to offer the truth.



— OUR COVENANT

In The Marching Force, no one earns their place through humiliation, and no one proves their love through pain. We build belonging the honest way—through work, welcome, and service—and we protect every member who walks through our door as if the whole legacy depends on it. Because it does. Not on my watch, not in my section, not in this band.

— NOT ON MY WATCH.

02

YOUR CHARGE

Break the Cycle. Guard the Family.

You understand it now—the need it hijacks, the mind's trap, the power of the crowd, and the cost when no one stops it. That understanding is a responsibility. Build belonging the right way, refuse the counterfeit in every form, and be the one voice that says enough. The cycle breaks where a leader decides it will. Let it break with you.

Serve First. Lead Always. — **Drive the Legacy.**

The Hampton University Marching Force
HAMPTON'S HEARTBEAT