During the fall semester of 1973, Robert Johnson, or as many of his friends called him, Bobby, stepped onto the John Brown University campus, the first African American to attend JBU. Bobby had heard about JBU through the music group Sound Generation. He and three of his friends auditioned for the Sound, and he got in and joined the summer of 1973. When he arrived at JBU the group practiced for two weeks straight, day and night. Then they hit the road, performing 130 shows that summer. The Sound became a kind of family to Bobby, and helped him get acquainted with JBU when he returned to campus in the fall. There were four African Americans that attended JBU in 1973 and again in 1974. Bobby remembers his time at JBU as “pretty good.” According to Bobby, people seem to have gotten along on the JBU campus, and race was not really an issue at this time. Bobby did admit that he could not date because of his race, which made social life more difficult, but overall his experience at JBU was really good.

Jerry Rollene, a Caucasian student who attended JBU from 1971-1975, readily agreed with Bobby. He said these people “were friends and classmates. We all played and got along with each other.” One of his greatest memories is from a chapel when three white friends came out with their faces painted black, and Bobby came out with his face painted white. The four men started singing as a harmonizing quartet, and the audience went crazy with laughter. “We had that kind of friendship, the kind that was able to poke fun at racism.”

The Siloam Springs community was unfortunately a different story. “In town, however,” Bobby said, “that was interesting, I would not go into town by myself. I would go with friends.” There were some fights in town, mostly because people in town didn’t know what to expect from African Americans. Jerry Rollene again agreed that the only resistance to these four African Americans that he saw was from the townspeople. However, students and faculty were very accepting of these four students and as Bobby said, he “loved JBU.”

Excerpt from the Fall 1971 Threefold Advocate

John Brown Becomes Hazard After Acceptance of Blacks
October 22

Dear Editor: G.A. writes a very pretty piece of “garbage” concerning the recruitment of blacks. (Reference is made to the editorial by staff editorial Glen Adam’s which appeared last issue in the Advocate . Ed.) One glaring weakness to me was “just go out and recruit some blacks”. It is my understanding that students must first show an interest in attending a private Christian school.

In order to recruit blacks you must GIVE them room, board, tuition, books, laundry money, spending money, and probably furnish them with transportation. On top of this, guarantee them a passing grade in whatever subject they choose to major in. I came from a school that had blacks on campus and that is one of the reasons that I left. Those who advocate bringing minority groups to campus haven’t offered their scholarship to them I am sure when they get here they will have them though. Want a protest group roving about campus everyday? You will have that. Want to be afraid to go out after dark? You will be (continued on back)
The third weakness of our modern system of education is that for ninety per cent of the American youth, it is training them away from life rather than back to life. Every man who knows anything of history will frankly confess that every civilization of the ages past that has ended in the congested centers of metropolitan life has rotted to decay. No civilization can long stand that strips its villages and towns, abandons its country places, and pours its millions into the city streets. Yet, that was the goal set—whether deliberately so or not, whether intelligently so or not—that was exactly the goal set by the system of education adopted in our nation!

I rode with of the leading superintendents of a southern state through the rural section where “Youth,” he said, “was turning from the farms in the droves and heading for the city. And,” said he, “I can see nothing but disaster ahead unless these young people are saved to the farms.” Good man that he was, I did not say to him in so many words, “But thou art the man responsible for this crime;” but I did undertake to show him that the system of education then operative in his district, which he had proudly helped to build, was doing the very thing which he deplored. In other words, directed by the orders or the exhortations coming down from those who sought a monopoly in the educational development of youth, he had fought for and secured the consolidation of school districts, had proposed and had seen adopted a system through which buses ran all through the country places, and with which the youth of the county was hauled into town. There in town or city atmosphere, with a great city plant and stadiums and athletic hall, the country youth was being trained; and before those students, constantly there was set a high goal of college and university life; and there most of the illustrations and appeals pointed to the so-called “giants” of the financial world, as though that was the only goal for life.

(continued from front) that way also. Want to buy a better lock for your belongings? If you don’t, you won’t have any.

Is the purpose of any college to serve its own community? Siloam Springs is not a black oriented community so let JBU force integration. There was a picture in the last Threefold issue of poverty within two miles of campus? Have you Christian brothers taken care of these people?

Did the man and child in the picture know that they were going to be exhibited? Are Christians a minority on this campus? Chapel attendance seems to indicate they are.

Talk is cheap and so is the few rabble rousers who are at JBU instead of an all black or state supported school.

-Name Withheld

Feed Back to Last Issue
Letter Expressed
November 5

“The recent letter reacting to Mr. Adam’s editorial remarks the concerning the recruitment of blacks is a source of great concern for me. My disappointment arises not so much from the dismissal of the editorial as garbage, the castigation of an entire race of people as criminals, or the criticism of sensitive students as cheap rabble rousers, though these remarks are far from encouraging. In fact, any fair-minded reader could see the fallacy in an argument which substituted emotion for concern, rhetoric for reason, prejudice for evidence, and anonymity for courage…”

-Dr. Robert M. Shurden

“...Are there no blacks who have money to come to JBU? Are there no blacks who can qualify for financial assistance through one of the government loan programs? Are there no blacks who can qualify for scholarships—both athletic or academic?...The answer to all of these questions is obvious since there are many colleges our size that have black students who don’t have to have anything given to them to them or guaranteed them just because they are black, but who pay their own way, to the same extent that white students pay their own way...Doesn’t the writer”

-Anne Rubble

Milestones

February 25, 1972: Threefold writes about a Danish missionary who went into Oaks, Oklahoma and opened a mission for Indian children there. The mission then served 65 Indian orphans.

February 9, 1976: Korean student, Dong Soo Yang, was accepted and began attending JBU. He was studying electrical engineering, and is married and has four children.

February 15, 2001: Lyceum, in the Cathedral of the Ozarks, teaches JBU students about the African American Harlem Renaissance through art, music, and theatre.