JBU vs. the Flu: Fighting the Global Pandemic

Though many admit that John Brown Sr.’s efforts to start JBU in the fall of 1918 were nothing short of spectacular, few take into account the actual obstacles that he would have faced by opening his college during that year—most notably, the threat posed by the 1918 flu epidemic.

Arkansas was no stranger to what became the deadliest global pandemic in history. Though state officials downplayed the power of the disease, a number of Arkansan military camps ravaged by the disease had to be quarantined in order to stop press coverage from lowering war morale. As World War I drew to a close, few wished the public to panic. In reality, over 7,000 Arkansans died of the disease, more than fourteen times the number of Arkansan soldiers who died while serving overseas in the Great War. Even today that toll is approximate since many rural cases went unreported, medical care was limited, and neighbors were too scared of the disease to help each other. Though the First World War ended on the 11th of November, the disease retained its grip on much of the country through the spring of 1919, and by the close of the year, had caused 675,000 American mortalities, permanently changing the lives of all who survived.

In light of the pandemic, it was obvious that JBU would need a nursing station from the first days of the school’s opening. Though there are no records of any infections at JBU, there is at least one photo in the school’s archival collection which indicates that the flu did reach JBU students or poultry, even if there were no student mortalities from the disease (see photo at right). Twenty-two nurses and doctors are known to have served as JBU physicians since 1923, though it is likely that a few more simply slipped through the gaps in care.

A 1920 photograph shot by a JBU student. Though the photo was preserved in a scrapbook, the caption and exact location remain vague.

Excerpt from “Can a Christian Go to War?”

Insights

From the works of John Brown, Sr.

I do not mean to be unkind in my criticism of this group, but I do insist that it is composed largely of the people who are moved more by their emotions than by reason. They are the people who are caught in the ebb and flow of the tide of nation-wide passion and nation-wide hate. If it is war today, they are for war. If it is peace tomorrow, they are for peace. If war is on and bands are played, flags are waved, armies are marching, they cry their indignation to heaven against any man who does not become excited as they are excited, who is not ready to march as they march, and wave flags as they wave flags! Then war is over and the wreckage is being gathered up – the dead buried and the maimed come limping home – unless you immediately join them in a wild crusade against any and all preparation for defense in preserving the rich inheritance for which armies marched and multitudes died, they are just as wild in their denunciation and just as vicious in their attacks.

I am writing this message from the Pacific Coast where, during the World War, a noted minister was driven out of his church and all but burned in effigy because he refused to turn his pulpit into a soap box from which, as a cheap war advocate, he would join the tirade which was best expressed probably in the cry across the nation – “Damn the Kaiser!” The tragic and yet beautiful fact is that patriotism is not something that can be shouted from the rooftops. True Christian patriotism is deeper than life and more serious than death. True Christian patriotism, like love, does not “vaunt itself, is not puffed up, does not behave itself unseemly.” It is a God-fearing, reverent, conscientious, courageous, uncompromising, beautiful something that would die before it would stoop to stain its soul with cheapness, hypocrisy or falsehood!

Excerpt from “Can a Christian Go to War?”
ECHOES OF THE PAST

“Dancing!” says the chapel speaker by accident, like many speakers in recent chapels. The word strikes fear in John Hill’s heart and excites the student body into an almost uncontrollable fervor, louder than the dull roar with which they reward boring speakers.

After the uncontrollable fervor dies down, the students return to studying and/or sleeping and wait for the next opportunity to stretch their vocal cords.

The speaker, taken aback by the sudden outburst from such a docile crowd, realizes his great fortune. He recalls from Speech 101 that bringing up an emotionally charged subject aids in getting across a point.

The speaker continues, “I remember the 1950s: the fun times I had as a student helping old ladies across the street and making sure that I had enough grease in my hair. But the one thing I learned from those life-changing years of education would be dancing.”

The uncontrollable fervor begins.

“Oops – did I say ‘dancing’? I meant dealing with people because the point of my chapel address is to stress the importance of dealing with relationships…”

By this time the students have realized that it was only a ploy, and they put their headphones back on.

Being the bastion of humanity and lovingkindness that I am, I have devised yet another plan, better than “Operation: No Nuke,” (issue two, Sept. 7, 1995) which, much to my chagrin, has not been implemented. My plan, “Operation: Down with that Dull Roar,” seems inappropriately named but in reality has a twofold purpose. If it had a threefold purpose it would create a great analogy, but it doesn’t, and life goes on.

I have noticed in chapel that when Bob Azzarito stands behind the podium, a muted version of the almost uncontrollable fervor begins (no offense, Bob, but I’m confident that JBU students don’t find you near as exciting as the “d” word).

During the muted uncontrollable fervor, Bob should repeat the “d” word four to five times, like a mantra, or until the desired effect is produced. The masses would tire, become complacent and fall back onto their pew in blissful sleep.

My mantra idea would not only solve the “d”-word problem but also the dull-roar problem by putting everyone to sleep, which for many conservative JBU students and liberal faculty (two descriptions that just about cover everybody) is a much bigger problem than Pat Buchanan.

My plan should be implemented before a “J. Alvin-esque” riot breaks out. I definitely don’t want to see half-naked guys pouring water over the Cathedral balcony.

Speaking of riots, isn’t college a great learning experience? In one column, I have solved complex problems with practical solutions.

I leave you with country philosopher John Michael Montgomery: “Life’s a dance. You learn as you go.”

(An excerpt from the February 29, 1996 edition of the Threefold Advocate)

October 16, 1987: SGA concludes its Alcohol Awareness Week activities with a square dance, the second JBU dance in a year (limited folk dancing took place the previous spring at the International Banquet).

November 1991: The new JBU mascot makes his debut at the TP Game. Dubbed “Conan,” the Eagle was beheaded during halftime by “the Bleacher Creatures,” only to reveal an imposter (student Jeff LaViolette). The identity of the student normally behind the feathery mask remained unknown.