

afoul Fundamentals

The ban on interracial dating at Bob Jones is unjust, but change needs to come from within



Meet Bob Jones.

The university.

Bob Jones is in Greenville, S.C. It was founded by Bob Jones. His grandson, Bob Jones III, runs it now. Bob Jones is a Christian, a fundamentalist Christian to be exact, the kind of Christian who considers Catholicism a satanic cult. He says so in his president's message, which can be found on the university's Web site, www.bju.edu.

What this Web site did not say, until a few days ago, is that Bob Jones has a ban on interracial dating. This ban, along with the anti-Catholic rhetoric, has presidential hopeful George W. Bush in boiling water.

During his primary campaign in South Carolina, Bush spoke at Bob Jones. Bush never brought up that he opposed these policies. He acted as if they didn't exist. Sen. John McCain, who calls the policy "idiotic," was not invited. Bob Jones' Web site calls McCain one of the "political tenors" along with Bill Bradley and Al Gore.

The Web site heading, "The Truth About Bob Jones University," serves as the university's official response to any questions media or curious surfers might have. About the "political tenors," the "Truth" says:

"Isn't it really a compliment to Bob Jones University that the likes of John McCain, Al Gore and Bill Bradley fulminate against us? Would we not be embarrassed if they, with their philosophies, spoke well of us?"

Bush won South Carolina. And he may lose the entire election because of his one stop at Bob Jones University. On Sunday, he was forced to write a letter of apology to Catholic leaders. Minority groups are not pleased. It will likely cost him significant Republican moderate votes down the road. Gary Hart had his Donna Rice; Bush has his Virgin Mary. To each downfall his own. But it's not an issue the national media will or should let go.

Bob Jones hates the publicity and the media. When the gold foil of its reputation was unwrapped, few liked what they saw. A backlash was imminent.

Now only one individual — public relations director Jonathan Pait — is allowed to talk about the issue at all, and he's not talking. Instead we get the elaborate Web site response.

As much as the university would like to shrink into obscurity, its values — or lack thereof — transcend its privacy. God, government, money, race and tradition are all wrapped up in this tiny temple of learning.

Let us begin the descent southward.

In this corner is the university. In another, its opponents. Its students and alumni, somewhere in between.

Bob Jones is 73 years old. Its teachings are based firmly in the teachings of Christ; more fundamental than fundamentalist. It does not believe simply in believing in God, but a way of life beyond most of our concepts of conservative. A liberal arts school with more than 110 majors, Bob Jones sets forth some strict guidelines.

You have to gain permission to live off campus. There is no drinking. No smoking. Girls wear skirts. Boys;

pants. Girls and boys are not allowed to touch each other. They are kept separate most of the time. And few complain about any of it.

This information was relayed in an interview with Terry Haskins, Bob Jones graduate and current Speaker Pro Tempore of the South Carolina House.

"It's a strict, fundamentalist education," Haskins said. "Students who go there know exactly what they're getting into."

Bob Jones is upfront about its standards, Haskins said. And it includes a ban on interracial dating. It's not a policy with which Haskins agrees. Nor do a lot of the students that go there, he said. Nor do they care that it's in place.

"Nobody ever talked about it," Haskins said. "It just wasn't an issue. Nobody has the right to take away or criticize them

One thing is clear: God wanted a divided world, not a federalized world."

Religious beliefs aside, consider the ramifications of the above statement. Bob Jones would rather have some people oppose its ideas than a unilateral agreement, because that would be unification.

And if language was God's tool for separation, couldn't the argument be made that it's too late? Clearly, Bob Jones would not be a World Trade Organization supporter, yet it draws its students from many different countries.

One wonders where the university's principle ends and the manipulation of its own policies begin — at what point Bob Jones simply crafts the Tower of Babel analogy to whatever ideas it can legitimately hold onto.

At one time, Bob Jones could legit-

stood that interracial marriage was best avoided."

Back then, the Tower of Babel argument must have been one hell of a pitch. Of course, it easily could have been racism, too, because blacks weren't even allowed to attend in the 1950s.

The principle is only one plank. The execution of such a policy is entirely another.

It's a finely delineated outline that Bob Jones uses to differentiate one race from another.

Three races: White, black, yellow. Or as Haskins put it, Caucasian, Negroid and Mongoloid.

So Bob Jones bases its entire policy on a pair of eyes.

According to UNL Associate Anthropology Professor Dr. Robert

Hitchcock, Bob Jones isn't getting too close to achieving its goal if black, white and yellow is its standard.

"Those categories are essentially the 19th Century standard of racist anthropology," Hitchcock said. "If you look at the biology of it, race is more than just a look, more than just the color of someone's skin. Bob Jones isn't separating race very well with those three categories."

What about genetics, Hitchcock asked. And what about mixed races? These are questions Bob Jones has no answers to. If the policy was so serious, so based in firm biblical belief, an anthropological certainty ought to be part of the rules.

But at Bob Jones, nobody seems to know just how they're categorized, when they were categorized and why they might be categorized the way they are. No one asks. No one tells. No one cares.

Haskins, who attended in the 1970s, does not remember how

it was determined he was Caucasian.

"It might have been on the application," he

said. "I don't know."

He also doesn't remember how the policy was enforced, or even if it was enforced at all. In fact, he never remembers ever hearing anyone trying to break the rule.

In today's Bob Jones setting, awareness seems just about the same.

I talked to a staff writer of the Collegian, Bob Jones' bi-weekly newspaper. She had little idea how people had their race determined. Or what happened if someone was of mixed race. Or if anyone did anything, ever, that might have violated the rule.

"We just don't focus on that," she said. "No one ever talks about that. I don't understand the big deal. It's just a rule of the school."

Apparently she was befuddled that anyone could find any offense at such a policy. When asked about Bob Jones'

pre-'70s non-black policy, she answered, "Well, that's the way it was back then."

Yes, it was. And this is how things are today.

Haskins has a Colombian wife, also a graduate of Bob Jones. And thank the sweet Lord she was white like him. Otherwise, who knows?

"I don't see it that way," Haskins said. "She was Hispanic, which is a nationality. White is a race. Hispanic is a nationality."

So a Christian marriage from Bob Jones University isn't based on science, but word play. English professors everywhere should be proud. So should staunch defenders of the First Amendment.

Intolerance in America has one indestructible out clause: religion. It comes from the First Amendment in the separation of church and state. Often, religious organizations get burned by this rule when prayer in school and the posting of the Ten Commandments are shot down by Constitutional gurus.

How quickly the tables turn. By all logical, humanist and ethical standards in today's society, Bob Jones should end its ban on interracial dating. But the school answers to a higher power. And this is protected because it is not a state institution. It could discriminate against anyone, as long as it can be found in the Good Book.

I would hope it stays that way. As strong as my belief is against BJU's policy, First Amendment protection must exist. Otherwise, rivers flow the other way and with it the bag of horrors we never want to open on this nation.

Faith, in the 21st Century, cannot be allowed to become a producer of fear. Rather, change can only come from within — the Bob Jones students and alumni, many of whom disagree with the overall policy. But signs don't point toward any significant movement toward tolerance.

For one thing, the school's tuition runs under \$10,000, far less than most Christian universities of its type. Fact of the matter is, ban or no ban, the school is a good buy.

And think about it: Just how many fundamentalist Christian families really want their white/black child dating other races? Is that a stereotype? You betcha. Am I right? I'm almost positive.

By all accounts, students and employees see nothing wrong with the school or its policy.

Nearly all of them want the media to leave the school alone, as several of the Web site responses border on the petulant tone of, "Why is everybody picking on us?"

It's not how society works. Perceived injustice, whether real or not, has been fought since the creation of man. And Bob Jones' policy of banning interracial dating is unjust, rooted in a belief system born of the segregation age. It is not even accurate by scientific standards, then or now, thus nullifying any certainty of the policy.

Beyond that, the belief has been transformed into a clause against universalism that is contradicted every time a BJU student surfs the Web.

If the students don't agree, they ought to stand up. But nobody there seems to care. Because they think that if a ban on interracial dating can sort of be justified through some Bible hokum, then it's OK. Personal beliefs, humanist beliefs and good-natured beliefs can all go to hell.

God bless them for their faith. God help them, too.



Scott Eastman/DN

for exercising their religious beliefs."

The ban, not surprisingly, emanates from Scripture — a principle, more so than an exacting law. It's based on the Tower of Babel allegory, found in Genesis 10 and 11. The tower was built by humans as a direct route to heaven. God struck down this tower to make sure that humanity never tried such an action again.

And God spread humanity across the land, giving them different races, different cultures and different languages, to prevent such a satanic unity from ever occurring again.

From the Web site:

"At the Tower of Babel, God used language to disrupt man's plans for a one-world government. As a result of this disruption, the people were scattered, and the races were polarized.

imately keep out blacks altogether, all the way until the 1970s. Bob Jones is quick to point out that its 1998 Alumni Appreciation Award recipient was a black BJU graduate and the student body current president is an Asian-American. The Web site asks the question: "Would that happen at a racist university?"

Let's examine this from the opposite end: Would a non-racist university disallow interracial dating? Bob Jones will land on a philosophical conundrum every time. And it will sink itself with the very statement that follows its big question on the Web site:

"Did the University's dating policy originate to regulate black/white relationships? No. It was first stated in the mid-1950s when dealing with an Asian-Caucasian dating couple. At that time, Christians nation-wide under-

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