Opportunities to

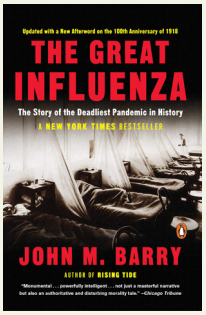
affect:

November 2020

In Reading Groups

Book Discussion Guide from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

By Jeff Langford



The Great Influenza

by John M. Barry

The Great influenza tells the story of the 1918 influenza pandemic that broke out in an army camp during World War I and killed up to a 100 million people in a matter of months.

1. The influenza pandemic that erupted in 1918 was "the first great collision between nature and modern science. It was the first great collision between a natural force and a society that included individuals who refused either to submit to that force or to simply call upon divine intervention to save themselves from it…." How would you describe the results of this collision?

2. Barry asserts that religion believes it can answer the question of "why" while science focuses on the question of "How." Do you agree?

3. A popular layman's medical movement called Thomsonism developed a rhyme to assert their belief that medicine could be comprehended by everyone: "The nest of college-birds are three/ Law, Physic, and Divinity / And while these three remain combined / They keep the world oppressed and blind / Now is the time to be set free / From priests' and Doctors' slavery." How would you respond to the Thomsonists?

4. Barry asserts that Welch's "failing was this: in science as in the rest of his life, he lived upon the surface and did not root. His attention never settled upon one important or profound question." How important to success is having a singular purpose or focus?

5. Barry says public health was and is where the largest numbers of lives are saved….This usually means prevention." How has your understanding of public health changed since the COVID-19 pandemic began?

6. Were you surprised to learn that the Spanish Influenza pandemic probably first surfaced in Haskell County, Kansas?

7. What stuck out to you most about Barry's explanation of viruses, how they work and how the body fights them?

8. President Wilson is believed "America was born to exemplify that devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from the revelations of Holy Scripture." How do you think this affected his approach to World War I? How did it affect his response to the epidemic?

9. Were you surprised by the way the press was manipulated during the war? How did this affect reporting about the influenza epidemic?

10. Nursing is described as "one of the few fields that gave women opportunity and status, and that they controlled." What is your impression of the affect women had on responding to the epidemic?

11. "By 1918 humankind was fully modern, and fully scientific, but too busy fighting itself to aggress against nature." How would you describe humankind's relationship with nature and itself in 2020?

12. Keeping the public calm was the goal of many government officials and news outlets during the pandemic. Was this a good idea or not? What would you have done differently?

13. "One cannot look at the influenza pandemic without understanding the context….Every element of the nation… was willingly or otherwise enlisted in the war." What elements of our current context are affecting America's response to the coronavirus pandemic?

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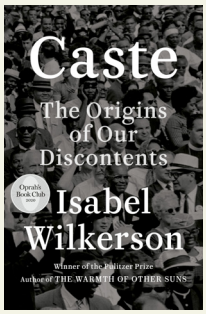
NEXT MONTH



Caste

by Isabel Wilkerson

Beyond race, class, or other factors, there is a powerful caste system that influences people's lives and behavior and the nation's fate. Isabel Wilkerson provides an eye-opening story of people and history, and a reexamination of what lies under the surface of ordinary lives and of American life today.

14. Barry noted that "people became isolated, increasing the fear" in Philadelphia. Have you noticed a connection between isolation and fear in your own life?

15. Were you surprised to learn that young adults and the healthiest and strongest part of the population were the most likely to die during the 1918-19 pandemic?

16. Oswald Avery seemed to learn a lot from failure. He said, "Whenever you fall, pick up something" and "Disappointment is my daily bread. I thrive on it." How did this approach help him in his work?

17. Barry notes that the "federal government was giving no guidance that a reasoning person could credit. Few local governments did better. They left a vacuum. Fear filled it." How would you describe government's response during the 1918-19 pandemic?

18. "The writers of the 1920s had little to say about" the pandemic. Why does the pandemic not have a larger presence is American literature?

19. Would you describe the scientific community's efforts against the pandemic as successful? What about their results in other areas?