

EXCERPT



***Beyond Racial Division***  
*A Unifying Alternative to Colorblindness and Antiracism*

March 8, 2022 | \$18, 224 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0184-4

We have struggled to effectively address racial tension in the United States. While colorblindness ignores our history of injustice, antiracism efforts have often alienated people who need to be involved. In his model of collaborative conversation and mutual accountability, sociologist George Yancey offers an alternative to racial alienation where all seek the common good for all to thrive.

## The Essence of Mutual Accountability

We must change how we communicate with each other, because what we are doing now is not working. We need an approach that not only meets the needs of most individuals but has a chance of gaining support across racial and political lines. It is with those ideas in mind that I discuss the mutual accountability approach.

So how do we find solutions that go beyond the needs of our own group? Let us dispense with one seemingly easy solution. We may be tempted to say that *our* chosen approach will create the best solutions for everyone, not just those in our group. That sounds great in theory, but it underestimates the power of confirmation and self-interest bias. We humans have a natural ability to convince ourselves that what we ourselves want is best for everyone concerned. In doing this we can be blind to the needs of others. We should have little confidence that our own solutions are free from a self-serving bias and truly meet the needs of everybody.

Ever been in the middle of a church split? I have. It was not pleasant. It was the classic example of a church with older individuals who were entrenched in the status quo and a younger cohort who wanted changes. Both groups felt they were doing what was best for the entire church. Neither group (including, I admit, the younger cohort, of which I was a part) seriously considered the interests of the other. For example, the older cohort was resistant to all changes in the musical style. They felt their traditional music was honoring to God and best for the church. It was connected to tradition and values essential to the founding of the church. Those in the younger cohort felt the music had to change with the times and help make the church relevant. Looking back now I can see that both groups had legitimate concerns. But we could not work our differences out because members of both groups clearly believed their position was best, and neither of us fully considered the needs of the other group. Even if you have not been part of a church split, I bet you have seen this dynamic play itself out in some other organization.

Often in our confidence that we have found the best path we presume to speak for everyone involved. We convince ourselves, just like the two factions in my church split, that what we are doing is for the greater good. We truly believe we are doing right by others. But what we are generally doing, even if we do not realize it at the time, is spinning what we want as the best thing for everyone else. We ignore evidence that what we want may harm others and amplify evidence that it will help them. That is the way confirmation bias works.

If we cannot on our own simply consider the interests of others, what are we to do? This is where the accountability element is critical. If I want to find solutions that serve the interests of everyone, I must listen to everyone. I consider their interests and perspectives and allow them to articulate those interests and perspectives in their own words. Instead of coming to my own conclusions and rationalizing why my solutions are best for everyone, I am obligated to gain the input of others so that their concerns are heard and incorporated into any path we take in our efforts to deal with racial alienation.

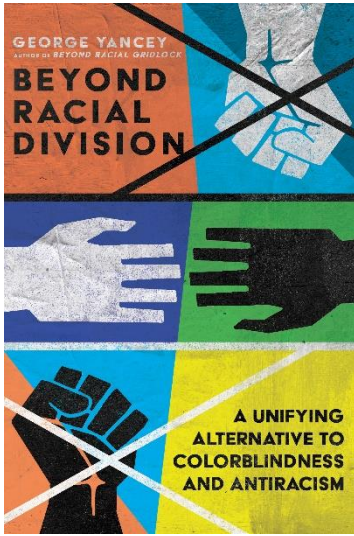


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*"Race relations in the United States are mired in acrimony, tribalism, and polarization. What is really needed as a key first step is the pursuit of better listening to one another. Yancey's Beyond Racial Division is a sensitive and sane proposal for how to go there while assessing current options with care and balance."*

—Darrell L. Bock, executive director for cultural engagement at the Hendricks Center for Christian Leadership and Cultural Engagement, senior research professor of New Testament studies, Dallas

I will never know if that church could have been saved. But what if instead of venting our frustration at the other side during our meetings we actually tried to talk to each other? What if both sides worked together to solve the problems before us in ways that met the needs of all? What if we sought win-win solutions rather than win-lose solutions? Concerning music, we could have held separate worship services devoted to traditional music and contemporary music, as I saw other churches do later in my life. Such an obvious solution, yet we never tried to implement it. To be sure, there were other conflicts that were not so easy to solve, and I do not want to make this too simplistic. But we did not listen to each other enough to even try to solve our problems. Instead we went to war. Kind of like the racial war we are in today.

We would have avoided a lot of pain with a mutual accountability approach. What is the essence of the mutual accountability model? This model stipulates that we work to have healthy interracial communications so that we can solve racial problems. In those communications we strive to listen to those in other racial groups and attempt to account for their interests. In this way we fashion solutions to racialized problems that address the needs of individuals across racial groups instead of promoting solutions that are accepted only by certain racial groups. By allowing those we disagree with to hold us "accountable" to their interests, we are forced to confront the ways we have fashioned solutions that conform to our own interests and desires.

Let me clarify what I mean by *mutual*. By this I mean we all, regardless of race and political outlook, have a responsibility to engage in interracial communication in a healthy manner. This means a constructive approach where we listen to others and find relevant ways to communicate with them. Efforts to cut off voices, whether by whites or nonwhites, are not allowed. What *mutual* does not mean is that we find solutions where the ultimate responsibilities of individuals in racial groups and the costs members of these groups pay are identical. Given our history of racial abuse, it seems to me unlikely that we will ultimately come to solutions involving identical responsibilities for members of different racial groups. But to get to solutions that work, we must enter into healthy conversations where everyone is responsible for communicating collaboratively rather than dehumanizing those in other racial groups.

—Adapted from chapter two, "The Mutual Accountability Model"

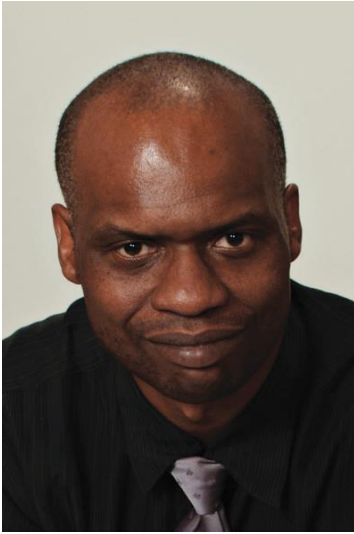


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*"There is not a more theologically sound, empirically informed, well-reasoned, or more rational voice addressing the complexities of race, class, and culture in America today than that of Dr. George Yancey."*

—**Mark DeYmaz**, cofounder, president, and CEO of the Mosaix Global Network, author of *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*

## Professor Focused on Race, Ethnicity, and Religion

"Dr. George Yancey argues that the two paths of colorblindness and antiracism have not worked and will not work to solve the country's problems and heal its pain resulting from a racialized society. Dr. Yancey contends that the path of colorblindness ignores racialized problems, and the path of antiracism causes a racially hostile society to be even more hostile and polarized instead of bringing ethnically diverse people together. Dr. Yancey argues for a third path that he calls 'mutual accountability/responsibility' or 'collaborative conversations.' This approach invites ethnically diverse image-bearers to be proactive and take personal responsibility to enter into collaborative conversations with the intent of working together with all ethnically diverse image-bearers of goodwill to solve racialized problems."

—Jarvis J. Williams, associate professor of New Testament interpretation at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

**George Yancey** is a professor at the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University, specializing in race/ethnicity and religion. He works to promote collaborative communication as a solution to racial unrest. His books include *Compromising Scholarship*, *One Faith No Longer*, *Hostile Environment*, *Beyond Racial Gridlock*, and *Transcending Racial Barriers*.

After graduating from West Texas State University with a BS in economics, Yancey attended the University of Texas at Austin and received his doctorate in sociology in 1995. He first began to study interracial romance but then was fortunate enough to work with Michael Emerson on a half-million-dollar grant to study multiracial churches. A few years ago, Yancey began to study academic bias and now has conducted research on anti-Christian attitudes in the United States. In 1999 he began teaching at the University of North Texas. Then in 2019 he started working for Baylor University with a joint appointment in sociology and the Institute for Studies of Religion.



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