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# Neither Jew nor Gentile: Exploring Issues of Racial Diversity on Protestant College Campuses (Book Review)

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**George Yancey.** *Neither Jew nor Gentile: Exploring Issues of Racial Diversity on Protestant College Campuses.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. vi + 189 pp. \$29.95, ISBN 9780199735433.

**Reviewed by David M. Johnstone, Residence Life, George Fox University**

American Protestants have taken part in presenting the Gospel in diverse cultural areas for over 250 years. Many Protestants have tried to be true to the biblical vision of many cultures, people groups, and languages united in their worship of God. Many also assume that within their own institutions of higher education this diversity would be present. Some might even assert that because of their biblical vision, which affirms that there is no distinction between “Jew nor Gentile,” these campuses are hospitable to all races. George Yancey, associate professor of sociology at the University of North Texas, provides research and reflections which start the conversation about whether or not Protestant universities are truly hospitable to all races.

Yancey has provided significant data within this book. His research draws from a wide range of different Protestant institutions, locations, and students. Using both quantitative and qualitative means, he has sought to discern why students of color are attracted to, retained by, and graduate from Protestant colleges. He seeks to discern how students of color within Protestant institutions understand and experience their campus culture. His underlying project involves comparing how a campus culture is perceived to the actual hospitality experienced by students of color.

The data have high relevance for Christian Higher Education (CHE). While there is a growing body of research on the experiences of students of color in higher education, there is a “dearth of systematic empirical work on why students of color are more likely to attend and to graduate from certain educational institutions” (24). This dearth is particularly evident when addressing Evangelical institutions. Yancey seeks to provide pertinent data that by their

nature are pertinent to CHE and its strategies.

Yancey directs much of his attention to scrutinizing the conventional wisdom which suggests that diversity initiatives and programs in and of themselves attract and retain students of color. These initiatives are generally not assessed to determine whether they are effective or not. Often, there is also a general assumption that Protestant campuses "have been able to overcome racial tensions because of their adherence to religious principles" (71). Yancey's data suggests that this reliance on the biblical vision may not be enough.

While Yancey has a strong understanding of American higher education, it is not clear how well he understands Protestantism and evangelicalism. He defines the nature of Protestant universities in general and evangelical ones in particular. The difficulties of this task became immediately apparent. Using the historical distinction of the modernist / fundamentalist controversy, he divides Protestant higher education into mainline and conservative Protestantism. He then links evangelical liberal arts, Bible colleges, and fundamentalist institutions together into conservative Protestantism. Unfortunately, the differences are vast and deep among these institutions. By grouping these together, Yancey risks sabotaging the data's implications. For instance, by linking Bible colleges with evangelical liberal arts colleges within the same data set, he provides reasons for dismissing some data as not applicable to certain institutions. His primary reliance on the modernist and fundamentalist distinctions is unfortunate because while simplifying his collection of data, he has made the categories of his study a little simplistic.

Regardless of this initial challenge, Yancey gathered some fascinating data. Christian colleges and universities have pursued countless programs with the intent of increasing the diversity of their campus demographics, transforming their curriculum, and marketing themselves as an educational option for students of color. Ironically, Yancey's data suggest that the "relative lack of students of color on Protestant campuses comes in spite of, not because of, the wishes of administrators and professors on those campuses" (5).

In his queries, he drew information that distinguished the racial background of students (African American, Hispanic, American Indian, or Asian). Gathering gender, class status, and other details, Yancey was able to narrow the focus of his study. Students were asked to identify how their current institution responded to their needs. He also asked for programmatic details in order to identify institutional diversity strategies. Using previously gathered information on racial demographics, Yancey correlated the data and began to develop implications for recruitment, retention, and graduation rates at these schools. He discovered that "educational institutions that attempt to downplay individual and institutional racism instead of confronting them are less likely to create an atmosphere in which students of color feel safe and/or respected" (26). As Yancey was particularly concerned about what attracted and kept students of color at Protestant universities, this was an important observation.

Yancey found that strategies which worked for one racial group were completely irrelevant for another. For example, he observed that there is "little that Protestant colleges and universities can do institutionally to enhance their ability to attract African Americans and Native Americans" (58). Also, while financial aid was not a major deciding factor for African American or Asian students, it was important for Latino students. Further, programmatic initiatives were significant for those of Asian heritage, but not necessarily for other groups. Then, counter to conventional wisdom for attending a faith-based college or university, Yancey observed that "fewer than one in five blacks mentions spiritual reasons" (110) for attending a Protestant university. Yet spiritual growth was an important consideration for Latinos.

In expanding his observations about African Americans, Yancey stated that "... African

American evangelicals are more likely to have structural attitudes on racial issues than other African Americans, and European American evangelicals are more likely to adhere to individualism than other European Americans" (25). Therefore if a college is aware and responsive to embedded racial concerns, its students of color perceive the institution positively.

Yancey indicates that there are three pieces of a diversity strategy which are welcomed regardless of race or ethnicity: the presence of professors of color, the presence of an office of multiculturalism and associated student groups, and the attempt to integrate issues of diversity into classes and curriculum. Together, all three strategies demonstrate that an institution is serious about engaging the priorities and dynamics of diversity.

Of minor but important note is the manner by which Yancey reports the data. It was presented with some lack of clarity, which required careful examination on the part of the reader. My concern is that laborious reading can provide a distraction from this seminal research. When readers need to tap into their personal tenacity in order to complete a volume, this experience detracts from the implications drawn from the findings.

Yancey could have also taken steps to define his objective more clearly. A definition and description of what a welcoming and hospitable community means and looks like would have been beneficial. In this vein, suggestions for how to create this type of community would have also been welcome and aided his readers. Further, Yancey did not explore the role of community in assessing campus hospitality. He stated that he stayed away from residential institutions (23). This approach is surprising because it is within residential settings where the most significant relationships are formed. His omission of this factor, while observing that relationships are important to students, seemed a little odd. One would assume that the residential impact on the retention of students of color would be important, particularly in creating a welcoming environment. These may be topics for further research.

However, these observations should not take away from the book's strength or value. It is a foundational work that has important implications for Protestant educators of all varieties to consider in light of their institutional mission. This is particularly true for those institutions which highlight the importance of racial diversity within their campus community.

Intriguingly, Yancey's work suggests that many of the strategies institutions are pursuing may not necessarily be accomplishing what they intend. Many of these strategies have been implemented with common sense in mind, but not with solid research. While this method of decision making is not necessarily poor or unusual, Yancey challenges institutions to assess the veracity and integrity of these programs, particularly if they have been in place for some time.

From my personal perspective, the most important aspect of this book is that he reflects on the importance of creating a campus community culture which allows and encourages students of color to flourish as scholars. Further, he engages with what it means to shape a campus culture which is welcoming and hospitable for all students, especially students of color who have inadvertently been marginalized on evangelical campuses.

Yancey's data are often startling and frankly a little demoralizing for those who are trying to be diligent in encouraging Christian colleges to become accessible to those who often find higher education inaccessible. However, Yancey does provide encouragement by identifying what initiatives seem to contribute to making higher education hospitable to students of color. While he indicates that many strategies are less sufficient than believed by many colleges, he also demonstrates that some are very helpful for specific racial groups. I believe that Yancey's research is particularly important for administrators and faculty within CHE. My hope is that his data becomes a stepping stone in our need to scrutinize, test, and imple-

336 ment creative ways of constructing campuses welcoming and hospitable to all cultures and races.