



Klan-destine Relationships: A Black Man's Odyssey in the Ku Klux Klan

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While marching in a cub-scout parade, young Daryl Davis was pelted by rocks and bottles. As a teenager he was told he would be shipped back to Africa. Driven by an intense need to understand those who hate him because of the colour of his skin, Davis decided to seek out the roots of racism. This often dangerous journey took him to the very heart of the fanatical and infamous Ku Klux Klan and he finds that the Klan is active in many areas of modern America - not just in the Deep South. The Grammy award winning pianist and author meets with Roger Kelly, Imperial Wizard of the Invincible Empire Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Over several meetings, the two slowly form as close a friendship as a black man and a Klansman can. Through Kelly and others, Davis infiltrates the Klan, gaining real insight into its workings and its member's minds. Using music to cross a seemingly unbridgeable racial divide, the author travels an uncharted road filled with gripping highs and lows. Among them: bringing the Imperial Wizard to meet a black woman upon whose lawn a cross was burned, seeking out a self-proclaimed White Supremacist Grand Klaliff who, while claiming not to believe in violence, issues Davis a warning of race war with "your uniform the colour of your skin". He is attacked by two Klanswomen, but is defended in court by a Klansman. Throughout his investigation, Davis treads a fine line - on the one hand he is spat upon, kicked and threatened, and on the other, given a standing ovation at a Klan rally and deeded robes by those who decided to leave the organisation. Davis' courageous quest into the heart of ignorance and hatred delivers a ray of hope for harmony between the races and the future of humankind.

Klan-destine Relationships: A Black Man's Odyssey in the Ku Klux Klan Details

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From Reader Review Klan-destine Relationships: A Black Man's Odyssey in the Ku Klux Klan for online ebook

Susan says

I'm so glad I read this book. I wasn't sure what to expect. Would it be a diatribe against the Klan? A history? A voyeuristic look at the weirdness of white supremacists?

Davis's book was none of these things. It was instead a thoughtful balanced discussion of how Davis went about answering the question: How can someone hate me when he doesn't even know me?

I was very impressed not only with Davis's persistence in seeking out Klan members and getting to know them, but also with how insightful his perspective on race relationships really was. The premise is almost alarming in its boldness: a black man reaching out to Klan leaders and interviewing them about their perspectives on race relationships, and even forging unlikely friendships with some of them.

But even more interesting than that is Davis's discussion of equality and fairness. The majority of the book is simply reporting the things Davis did, events he attended and the conversations he had with various individuals. However, he does occasionally let his personal opinions peek through, and these were the sections I found most fascinating.

Davis believes strongly that equality means equality for all--even Klan members. For example, one situation Davis describes involves a Klan member whose hood was stolen by a white bystander. The Klan member was falsely accused of assaulting a police officer during the incident, but no such thing actually happened. As an eyewitness, Davis defended the rights of the Klan member to a fair trial. Ultimately, the Klan member was convicted of an assault which never occurred and the bystander was not prosecuted. Davis concludes the discussion with these comments: "It was sad to see that if someone belongs to a minority group or holds beliefs that are not in alignment with the general sentiment of the majority, they will not find justice; at the same time those who uphold the sentiment of the majority can count on the support of the legal system to allow them to commit "permissible" unlawful acts.

Davis is in no way defending the Klan. He is instead defending the right of every citizen to receive justice--even if that citizen holds unpopular (and even clearly wrong) views.

Still, Davis concludes with a more encouraging note: "The change in Tom Tarrants [a former member of one of the most violent Klan groups in the south, who later became a Christian and renounced his former views and associations] is perhaps the best argument that with God's help, all is possible. Like Tom, I believe the healing power of God is so great, a person, organization, or even a nation can be reborn...I pray for the time when people focus on showing each other what they are capable of accomplishing, rather than concentrating on what color they are or from where their family originated."

I love his final statement in the book: "Perhaps my experiences will shed more understanding and others will be inspired to seek out and eradicate racial prejudice with education, not only the academic type one receives in school, but the kind we attain when we learn about our fellow human beings from one-on-one, non-confrontational encounters. It is my dream, that through this new discourse, in a new millennium of brotherly love and friendship, we will overcome hatred and prejudice."

Don't read this book for the beauty of its prose. Davis isn't a writer; he's a musician. But he has an important

message to communicate, and that's what makes this book so powerful. Read it to gain a new perspective from someone who was willing to give his enemies a chance, and in so doing, turned a few of them into friends.

Larisha says

I heard Mr. Davis speak on an NPR program called: 'Snap Judgement'
I liked the interview, so I requested this book from the library.

I commend Mr. Davis's courage. One thing you learn right away is that there is no one Ku Klux Klan - there are many splinter groups, some of which are rivals. Some more violent than others. (And yes, he gets to know some hate-crime murderers) There are the white supremacists and the white separatists, and they consider themselves very different.

This book is meant to inform, to battle ignorance, and it does just that.

Samarth Gupta says

"Racism is similar to cancer; unless treated, it will spread and eventually consume the whole body. If the afflicted body procreates after being attacked with such a deadly malady, whether it be cancer or racism, there is a good chance that any offspring will be exposed to it as well. And the terrible process will begin all over again in a new generation."

"The FBI in the 1960's devised a top secret counter-intelligence program which they named 'COINTELPRO.' Information was gathered by informers on the groups that were under surveillance. Then, through dissemination of misinformation, internal strife was created within the power structure and rank and file of an organization."

"It amazed me that while Klansmen know where Hoover stood in regard to them, they still insist that Dr. King was a Communist because they assert J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI said so. For whatever reason, although they also state Hoover made up lies about the Klan, they refuse to believe that Hoover could have lied about MLK Jr."

"There is one thing people don't realize. A Klansman is not punched out of a standard cookie cutter. You have all walks of life coming into here for all various reasons. Some of them hate basically just hate Jews. A lot of them just hate Negroes. Some of them hate both. Some of them don't like Orientals and that's why they joined. It depends on what part of the country you're from as to what your problems are.' I wondered, as I gazed at the man before me, if he realized the full meaning of his words - that people who joined the Klan had problems and that perhaps the most significant similarity between them was the feeling of hate."

"In fact, I was discovering some common traits of the Klan members and one that surprised me was that hardly any Klansmen have visited places outside the United States and many have never gotten beyond the state in which they reside."

"Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black had been a Klansman in Alabama in the 1920's. Senator Robert Byrd

from West Virginia, who is still a Senator today, had been a Klansman in the 1940's."

"I work with a newspaper. I feel it is wrong that the newspaper ignores a lot of things. I have probably never seen as many news stories incorrectly printed as I have since I have been a Klan member."

"Nevertheless, I believe the best way to reach the hearts and minds of those who oppose you is to allow them to be themselves."

"Though the idea of being friends with a person whose belief system you despise sounds like an impossibility, I believe I have demonstrated that it is indeed, very possible for two diametrically opposed human beings to learn and accept enough about each other to co-exist without strife."

Joel Alex says

An amazing look into one man's mission to better understand racism through members of the KKK. Daryl Davis recounts his conversations with members and leaders of the KKK. Instead of seeing them as hate mongering racists, he sees them as people. This builds a foundation of decency and humanity which, at times, turns into deep friendship. I found myself amazed at the ability of Davis to carry on meaningful discussions with people from a completely different and antagonist worldview. These discussions may not have changed a person immediately, but they have certainly, over the course of his life, made our world better. During this political climate, I often find myself wondering how I can carry a meaningful conversation with someone of a different political view or opinion, Davis provides me ample motivation and a wonderful example. I listened to Davis on the podcast "Snap Judgement" <http://snapjudgment.org/unrequited> and I needed to learn more.

Jennifer says

It was a crazy story, but it could have been much more than that in the hands of a more capable writer. Also, the constant name dropping got pretty old pretty quickly

Kat Robey says

Daryl Davis engaged in his beliefs by listening and learning about fellow human beings one-on-one in non-confrontational encounters. Hatred, name-calling, and avoidance do not serve those who hope to end prejudice. Engagement with the "other" whose ideas are diametrically opposed to ours and seeking common ground is the only way to shift the discussion toward unity.

Lori Rising says

Really excellent book that I highly recommend. It's Davis' true story about being a black man who wants to understand how others can hate him simply because of his skin color. He begins reaching out to KKK members and having face-to-face conversations with them. What he learns and how he goes about it is a

journey the ready is changed by. I wrote a full book review on my blog at <http://www.loriannerising.com/blogger> and posted in on March 16, 2018.

I did have to get this book as an inter-library loan because it is out-of-print, but it was well worth it. There's also a documentary out now called "Accidental Courtesy" that picks up where the book left off and follows Davis to some of these conversations. I found the documentary on Netflix.

Whether you read the book or watch the documentary, you'll see a level of possibility in bridge-building across divides that is unequalled and paradigm shifting.

Mist Willingham says

Daryl Davis is not a wonderful writer, but he IS a wonderful human being who embarked on a momentous journey to delve into the reasons for racial hatred. This journey is both moving and eye-opening, and I enjoyed traveling every step with him. This is a wonderful book for anyone who either hates or is hated for the colour of their skin, their religion or their sexual orientation.

Priscilla says

This book and its author are extraordinary. What courage! Daryl is an inspiration for us to always strive to see the humanity in others and seek common ground, rather than dismissing folks with polar opposite views out of hand.

"Time and exposure is a great healer--perhaps the only healer for irrational fear and hatred. Laws can be made to take people out of the Klan, but laws cannot be made to take the Klan mentality out of people. The best way we can learn to respect each other is to know each other."

"There are people who feel that racism and those who propagate it should be ignored. They think that giving such beliefs any type of attention will only promote them. I believe some things can be ignored and will eventually go away, like the teaser or bully we have all encountered in grade school. However, I do not feel that racists fit into that category. Racism is similar to cancer; unless treated, it will spread and eventually consume the whole body. If the afflicted body procreates after being attacked with such a deadly malady, whether it be cancer or racism, there is a good chance that any offspring will be exposed to it as well. And the terrible process will begin all over again in a new generation."

Melissa says

This book was a real eye opener. It gave me a lot to think about.

Onionboy says

This book was promoted as the story of a black man who personally got 200 people to leave the KKK by

individually befriending them. That's not what I found when I read it. He befriended many people in the KKK and had many honest discussions with them, but I only noticed one person who changed at all and left the KKK because of Daryl. And that was because he saw how Daryl was treated during a court case. Many people commented about the author's apparent lack of writing skills. I did not notice this in any way that bothered me. Others commented that they felt the KKK people who met with Daryl were using him to their own end. I wondered about their motivation in meeting with him and telling him so much about the KKK. The most likely reason in my mind is to make themselves feel better and justify their beliefs by treating him well.

I got something out of this book that I never expected, and I don't think was the intention of the author. KKK members are a group of people I have never met and know nothing about. Rather than seeing them as one-dimensional hate machines, I came to see them more as I think Daryl sees them, as real people with real life issues. They have come to a different belief for reasons that they can clearly explain. That does not justify their beliefs or actions, but it does explain them, and that is the first step in making a change.

I think Daryl's friendship did a similar thing for them regarding black people. It replaces a one-dimensional stereotype with a real person, who is much harder to hate.

Still, in the end, the main feeling I am left with is that this book presents a false premise - that Daryl personally "coverted" 200 KKK members into non-racists. I wish it were true, but I just don't see that in the book at all.

Doug says

It has been a while since I got captured by a book that I could not put down until it was finished. Daryl Davis is a musician who experienced racism all his life. And so he decided to start meeting leaders of the Ku Klux Klan. He would call (or have his secretary call - he was a successful musician) Klan people to set up meetings, and just forget to mention he was black, and they would be surprised! Woo!

The thing is... they would still talk to him. And they weren't all what he expected. And he started to make friends with them. And he'd attend Klan trials and Klan rallies and it would weird people out when these leaders would greet him friendly by name, and boy howdy we have a book.

One thing you learn right away is that there is no one Ku Klux Klan - there are many splinter groups, some of which are rivals. Some more violent than others. (And yes, he gets to know some hate-crime murderers) There are the white supremacists and the white separatists, and they consider themselves very different.

How do you make friends? You find common ground, and he does find common ground with people who believe Blacks are an inferior species who should all go back to Africa. The Klan members are mostly very anti-drug, as is Daryl. And who doesn't like country music?

I'm writing this review the way I write, which is nothing like he writes, so I'm giving you the wrong impression. The book is sometimes funny, but it isn't a humor-book. It is fascinating. Some of Daryl's new friends change a bit as a result of their relationship, and some don't. But the conversations they have... wow. And it isn't just a bunch of interviews. Things happen. A Klan-friend of Daryl gets arrested on a trumped up charge, just because cops and judges often discriminate against people in the Klan. And the irony does not escape Daryl, although it does escape the Klan member. And if Daryl is friends with the leader of one Klan faction, members of another one don't really take kindly to that.

In some cases - I really do mean "friends." Like socializing, calling on the phone, "how are you, pal?"

friends.

Three flaws: One - everyone in the book speaks in a similar voice. Given that I doubt Davis was allowed to tape-record his conversations, I'm assuming that the quotation marks are not to be taken literally, and he is writing dialogue around his memories. So that took some getting used to. Also, the chapters of the last fourth of the book get short and have a little less depth, as if he finished his book, and saw all these post-its and notecards that he forgot to include, so he wrote quick chapters. Still interesting, but weak pacing. Finally, (and I didn't realize this until I was writing the review), while I got to know Klan leaders, it would have been nice if the book was a bit longer and had some more about rank-and-file members. My hunch is that Davis didn't talk to a lot of them; while a leader might be able to get away with talking to a Black person at a restaurant or home, I doubt a regular member would. But still, it would have been interesting.

I am sure people got mad at this book, because we are supposed to think of The Klan as cardboard villains, or (if we are all progressive and liberal) as tragic ignorant manipulated figures. After reading this book, you see them as people, which was really Davis' point, but it puts you in another kind of minority.

Sharon says

After reading "Natchez Burning" I wanted to read a nonfiction book about racism in Maryland, where I live. A friend recommended "Klan-destine Relationships" by Daryl Davis. Daryl is a local black man, who wanted to better understand the causes of racism and hate. Daryl is a unique man, who had the courage to infiltrate the KKK, interview them, go to their homes, meet their families, and learn their history. Daryl was able to patiently listen to their hate, calmly ask them questions that made them think, and eventually he became friends with most of them. His story is worth reading and is courageous, hopeful, and an eye opener of our past history.

Clarissa says

Very interesting and to be read by all to start understanding racisms. I was able to relate to Daryl Davis on a special level as we both grew up in different countries (not the one from our parents) and we learned earlier to accept all human without discrimination. Could you not stop reading it.

Byron Fike says

Daryl Davis is not a reporter or civil rights worker. He's not politician nor does he even appear to be that politically active. He doesn't particularly like to be called African-American although he did live in Africa for 10 years and has great appreciation for his African heritage. He's a professional musician who happens to be black. His music resume is impressive. He's played with Ray Charles, Jerry Lee Lewis, Willie Nelson and Chuck Berry (to name just a few).

The book records his journey of discovery. Daryl wanted to know the roots of racism. He wanted to know why people hated him simply because of the color of his skin. He begins meeting with individual members of the Ku Klux Klan. The purpose of the meetings was not to argue, or to change their mind. Rather, he wanted to listen. He wanted to learn what would cause someone to be a racist.

I loved his approach, and so did most of the Klansmen and Klanswomen he interviewed. He did not set out to develop friendships but that happened on more than one occasion. He did not set out to influence people to leave the Klan, but that also happened on more than one occasion. The reader doesn't discover that Daryl is a Christian until one has read 2/3 of the book. However, his approach is one that Jesus would certainly endorse.

When Imperial Wizard Chester Doles was arrested, his pregnant, 19 year old girlfriend was left caring for his other children. Without telling Chester, Daryl called the girl and asked her to meet him. Knowing she was without any means of support while Chester was incarcerated, he gave her some money to help. Davis writes, "Whether or not Chester Doles ever changes his feelings towards members of another religion or race, one thing is for sure: he is a Klansman who will never forget and can never deny that a Black man helped keep food on his children's table" (p. 251). What a beautiful illustration of the teaching, "If your enemy is hungry, feed them" (Prov. 25:21; Rom. 12:20).

At a Klan rally, Davis was talking to one of Klansmen with which he has previously met. Specifically he was conversing with the Grand Klaliff, the Grand Knighthawk and the Grand Dragon. After the Klan members walk away the officer asked, "Just whose side are you on?" Daryl's answer was prophetic, "Our future's" (p. 178). Indeed Daryl Davis shows a way for our divided culture to move forward. What would happen if we became serious about meeting with those with whom we disagree simply to listen and understand?

In meeting with those who hated him because of his skin color, Daryl discovered that often there would be things said that he could agree with. He suggested they work together to get drug dealers off the streets, for example. Likewise, those who met with him would often say horribly offensive remarks at first, but over time they came to see that their racial stereotypes were not present in the man meeting with them. They developed respect for Daryl Davis and would often protect him from potential threats.

In thinking about his journey of discovery Davis writes, "Racism is perpetuated when people have little personal experience with those they fear or hate. I only hope my relationships with Klanmembers can act as an antidote. You can't force anybody to change, but you cannot disavow a friendship when you see it in the making" (p. 303). He also wrote, "I remained honest with each and every Klanmember I met, and, most importantly, I remained honest with myself. I did not pretend to be anything other than what I am, and though I allowed each Klanmember to know where I stood, I never forced my beliefs upon anyone. Over a period of time, this, I believe, became the basis for their trust and respect for me" (p. 308).
