

School of Physical Sciences Journal Club, January 29, 2021

For 30 years, Daryl Davis has spent time befriending members of the Ku Klux Klan; about 200 Klansmen have given up their robes after talking with him.

Accidental Courtesy: Daryl Davis, Race, and America (available on Prime Video)



- “How can you hate me when you don't even know me?” It's that question that drove Davis to begin researching the Klan and other hate groups when he was in high school. Were there times in your life when this question would appear in your mind? What did you do?
- Daryl Davis' story is actually more than just a story. It is a recipe to change what people think and what they do. Here is how Daryl describes it himself:

“The most important thing I learned is that when you are actively learning about someone else you are passively teaching them about yourself. So if you have an adversary with an opposing point of view, give that person a platform. Allow them to air that point of view, regardless of how extreme it may be. And believe me, I've heard things so extreme at these rallies they'll cut you to the bone.

Give them a platform.

You challenge them. But you don't challenge them rudely or violently. You do it politely and intelligently. And when you do things that way chances are they will reciprocate and give you a platform. So he and I would sit down and listen to one another over a period of time. And the cement that held his ideas together began to get cracks in it. And then it began to crumble. And then it fell apart.”

Did you encounter any people in the past with whom this recipe could work? Can you think of someone you currently know? Do you think it is worth to try?

- On the first glance, it is hard to disagree with the following statements by Daryl Davis:

“People must stop focusing on the symptoms of hate, that's like putting a Band-Aid on cancer. We've got to treat it down to the bone, which is ignorance. The cure for ignorance is education. You fix the ignorance, there's nothing to fear. If there's nothing to fear, there's nothing to hate. If there's nothing to hate, there's nothing or no one to destroy.”

“I would rather sit down with my enemies and talk than to be out there fighting in the streets. My theory is if two enemies are talking, they’re not fighting and it’s when the conversation ceases that the ground will become fertile for violence, so let’s keep the conversation going.”

At the same time, Davis’s approach has made him distinctly unpopular among some black activists, who suggest his time would be better spent engaging in the communities affected by racism as opposed to befriending those who perpetuate it. For example, Kwame Rose, a prominent activist in Baltimore, told to The Washington Post reporter that when Davis makes friends with avowed racists, he validates their racism. Also, Rose told directly to Davis, *“Stop wasting your time going into people’s houses that don’t love you.”*

What do you think about this controversy?