



Black Klansman: Race, Hate, and the Undercover Investigation of a Lifetime

Ron Stallworth , Jordan Peele (Foreword)

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The extraordinary true story of the black detective who goes undercover to investigate the KKK, the basis for the major motion picture written and directed by Spike Lee, and produced by Jordan Peele.

When detective Ron Stallworth, the first black detective in the history of the Colorado Springs Police Department, comes across a classified ad in the local paper asking for all those interested in joining the Ku Klux Klan to contact a P.O. box, Detective Stallworth does his job and responds with interest, using his real name while posing as a white man. He figures he'll receive a few brochures in the mail, maybe even a magazine, and learn more about a growing terrorist threat in his community.

A few weeks later the office phone rings, and the caller asks Ron a question he thought he'd never have to answer, "Would you like to join our *cause*?" This is 1978, and the KKK is on the rise in the United States. Its Grand Wizard, David Duke, has made a name for himself, appearing on talk shows, and major magazine interviews preaching a "kinder" Klan that wants nothing more than to preserve a heritage, and to restore a nation to its former glory.

Ron answers the caller's question that night with a yes, launching what is surely one of the most audacious, and incredible undercover investigations in history. Ron recruits his partner Chuck to play the "white" Ron Stallworth, while Stallworth himself conducts all subsequent phone conversations. During the months-long investigation, Stallworth sabotages cross burnings, exposes white supremacists in the military, and even befriends David Duke himself.

Black Klansman is an amazing true story that reads like a crime thriller, and a searing portrait of a divided America and the extraordinary heroes who dare to fight back.

Edit

Black Klansman: Race, Hate, and the Undercover Investigation of a Lifetime Details

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From Reader Review *Black Klansman: Race, Hate, and the Undercover Investigation of a Lifetime* for online ebook

Emily Mac Rae says

I found this book to be searing. I am reading this book and *Between the World and me*. I cannot help but interject myself as a character in these two books. As an African American and mother of a son I take the moments of benign hatred and violence personally. There are no solutions given. There are no concluding words of comfort. I consider Ron Stallworth courageous for his work in the police force at that time. I consider him a hero for sharing his story. Many have criticized his writing style. I think his stoic "just the facts" style leaves the space for you to have your own emotional response.

Rebecca McNutt says

To really appreciate this book, you have to ask yourself, "what if I had to befriend my enemies?" For Detective Ron Stallworth, it goes beyond that - diving deep into secret rituals, cross-burning, race meetings and more, he joins the Ku Klux Klan undercover as one member of one of the most frightening and frankly bizarre groups to exist within the United States. As the story continues, at its core it becomes less about racism and more about morality or lack thereof, and why such hatred thrives in supposedly one of the most tolerant and free countries in the world. Instead of painting the KKK as pure evil, Stallworth looks at the complexity of the group and what drives its members towards heinous acts and an irrational aversion to non-whites and multiculturalism. As he gets closer to Grand Wizard David Duke, his position becomes even more endangered of being discovered.

Black Klansman is a disturbing tale at times, and one that I'd hope wouldn't be a reality in this day and age, but the KKK still exists today, spreading to new audiences using the internet and still doing the ol' cross-burning in the woods bit, among other things, including petty crime and spreading propaganda. It can't be denied that though the KKK is more of a fringe group these days, it's still fully functioning, which is a scary reality. *Black Klansman* is therefore very timely, but it's also a strong image of the 1970's era and one man's dedication to understanding. It's honestly one of the best memoirs I've ever read, with all the integrity and spirit of the film *Fried Green Tomatoes* and all the depth and humanity of *Schindler's List*. I wasn't expecting it to be as complex as it was, but it's such an amazing story and one that everybody should read.

Emily says

Black Klansman is such an intriguing story. It's a true story about a black undercover cop who infiltrates the local KKK over the phone. A movie is coming out by Jordan Peele & Spike Lee, and I'm really looking forward to it.

It was interesting to see what's changed since the 70s and what hasn't. I know some people think that racism doesn't exist anymore, or it's so much "better" now, but so many of the fucked up things that were said in this book felt familiar to today's shitty American culture. People are still hateful, they're just expressing it a little differently sometimes.

One thing that was so crazy to me was that the KKK members were so driven by hatred that they wanted to talk about it on the phone ALL THE TIME - to the point that Ron was able to build relationships / infiltrate over the phone. All of their other behavior was already weird, and this was just another piece added on to all the strangeness. The members were delusional, sad, cowardly, and afraid, and this book sheds some light on their behavior. There were some cult aspects, and the leaders sort of reminded me of Manson in the way that they were trying to bring about paranoia and panic because of race.

Ron was brave, bold, and amusing. I really enjoyed reading the story from his point of view, and there were some pretty hilarious parts, especially his interactions with David Duke. I appreciate that Ron was willing to tell his story.

Thank you so much to Flatiron Books for sending me a copy of this!

Keka says

It was ok. Not particularly well-written. Kinda boring. I didn't really like the author for several reasons which I will not go into detail about so as not to spoil it for those of you who haven't read it yet. But, this "brotha" is kind of a coon. Plus, the overwhelmingly hateful rhetoric spewed by the Klan and regurgitated in this book was simultaneously hilarious and devastating. Reading it definitely affected my mood.

June Volz says

Read like a police report, sort of dry and repetitive....The story is compelling, but a shame he had to wait so long to tell it. Biggest take away - people who belong to hate groups are not very bright.

fortuna.spinning says

I respect Stallworth's tenacity, but this fell flat. This had the trappings of a compelling story, but for all the build up, it completely fizzled out. Some parts didn't add up. And the writing and audio narration were mediocre at best. I haven't seen the movie, and don't plan to, but it has to be better.

Leah says

This book was actually a 3.5 star for me. It is a super quick read. I am still trying to process the fact Ron Stallworth was able to pull off this unthinkable plan of infiltrating the KKK. His book clearly, emphatically and repeatedly calls out the KKK as the national terrorist organization that it was, is and always shall be. I was especially taken by the history of the KKK in the state of Colorado. "Our history is always in our present."

Lauren says

A fascinating story that made for a mediocre storytelling experience. Stallworth could have benefitted from a ghostwriter and a heavy-handed editor. Forty year old petty grievances against co-workers don't belong in a biography, and neither does repetition after repetition (...) His sidebars and commentary are flat with little to no nuance and description.

Where this book shines (entertains?) is in exposing what a hack many of these hate groups are/were in the 1970s. Advertising their meetings in the newspaper? David Duke answering the national headquarters phone line?

2.5/5, rounded up because of anticipation for the Spike Lee film (which will undoubtedly include better storytelling).

Licha says

I wanted to like this book. There's a great story here, it's just that it was boring, I didn't quite like the way the author came across, and I had a hard time getting through some parts of this. There were so many abbreviated groups that after a while I stopped caring which group was on what side. I also hated how every so often the author had to remind the reader how he was the one in charge of the investigation by parenthesizing that *he* was the one the KKK members were talking to, even when some of the conversations were with his partner playing him undercover. He didn't need to keep reminding me that it was him running the show.

The story lacked suspense for me. I never felt fear wondering if Ron and his crew were going to get caught in their lie. I failed to learn more than what I already superficially know about the KKK. I was hoping to learn something here but I don't feel like that was the case.

The pictures included here were as boring as the story. And I don't want to say how "conveniently" that picture of Ron and David Duke disappeared, but I didn't buy that it got lost throughout the years. Such a historic picture, one that you could pass on to your grandkids for its historic importance, and I'm supposed to believe it's not one of your most guarded treasures? Not buying it.

Also wish to know what the KKK thought of being infiltrated by a black man. I'm hoping the movie will be much better.

Becca says

I'm glad to have read this book but I did not enjoy reading it, if that makes any sense. Stallworth's story is so interesting, but his telling of it was, in my reluctant opinion, surprisingly uninteresting.

Stallworth is detailed in outlining series of events, but I was hoping for more reflection and analysis. I wanted him to talk more about what it was like to navigate his identity in all of these different contexts. How he encountered racism in the Colorado Springs Police Department even as he worked to undermine white supremacy by investigating the KKK as CSPD's first Black detective. How being a Black police

officer resulted in both Black political organizers and white police officers distrusting his integrity. How his actual and undercover personas repeatedly experienced such close proximity despite needing to be kept separate for the investigation to survive.

Stallworth describes many occasions where he felt pulled in different directions, but instead of exploring that more deeply, he doesn't offer much beyond, "I had to compartmentalize"

And I'm sure he did compartmentalize, but I wished he would have integrated his opinion more throughout recalling the course of the investigation.

There are moments where Stallworth shares his opinions, but to me they felt a little disjointed in contrast to the dry tone in which he describes his work. You catch glimpses of passion and conviction, but they don't feel as justified as they would if he gave you more alongside the impassive "and then this happened...and then this happened" etc.

The story would be more compelling if he wasn't trying so hard to pretend he or any person can volitionally distance themselves from something like this. Maybe it was an attempt to gain credibility, to make the narrative feel less politically skewed, but I don't understand why a story about a Black Klansman would aim for an apolitical tone. I wanted him to tell us the story and then say something about the story he told, but the book was primarily the former and sorely lacking the latter.

I wanted a book not only about the impact of the investigation but also about the impact the investigation had on him. How it altered his view of law enforcement, of politics, of race, of America, and all the combinations thereof. What it reaffirmed, what it threw into question. How it's shaped his assumptions and priorities. I needed more of that.

To end on a somewhat positive note, all in all, I am glad to see Ron Stallworth's story told, and by him, even if he somehow managed to make it boring as hell.

Bert Zee says

What a story!! The cover and description makes it seem like something it kind of isn't, however, it's still a pretty bizarre story.

I do think the author could've been a bit more lively with his writing, it's not badly written, but it's a pretty eccentric story and I think it deserves an eccentric voice to tell it.

Looking forward to the film getting released next week.

Mehrsa says

I haven't seen the movie yet. The book is fascinating. It's a bit odd that it took so long to write and it's quite tragic that it's still relevant. This book (coupled with a few other profiles of reads of the klan and white supremacist groups) makes me realize that "they're all a bunch of dumb clowns," as Stallworth overhears. I mean, David Duke is the Grandmaster Clown. It's unbelievable that the man still has any relevance at all.

Stallworth also infiltrates the black power movement. I wish he spent a bit more time on that. I couldn't gauge exactly what he was communicating about meeting Carmichael. Seems like he thought he was charismatic, but that he should be watched? Not sure. It was a complicating factor, which I appreciated.

Ken says

I'd first heard about Black Klansman after seeing a trailer for the forthcoming Spike Lee movie. I've always been interested in the period of American history, so I instantly wanted to see it.

As my local multiplex has delaying the release by a week (possibly because of the Bank Holiday in England?) and then discovering that it's based on the memoirs of Ron Stallworth, the book instantly jumped to the top of my reading pile.

It tells the story of Stallworth a black police officer in Colorado Springs who infiltrated the 'KKK' during the late 1970's.

As Ron responds to an advertisement about joining the group whilst posing as a white man.

As it's a memoir the writing style does feel slightly police procedural at times but it gave a sense of authenticity throughout.

I instantly could hear Ron's voice from the opening chapter.

It's such a fascinating account, I'm really hoping to catch the movie this weekend!

Dotty says

Underwhelming. Poorly written. Fascinating story, but the writing was never compelling.

I'm hoping for much more from the upcoming film by Spike Lee & Co. (Which was the reason I read the book in the first place.)

Petra X says

The best part of the book, the pee your pants, snork your coffee, kick your legs up laughing part of the book was when David Duke came to town and despite protestations to the higher ups, Stallworth (our hero, the black cop) was detailed to protect him. Stallworth asked Duke if he could have a picture taken with him and Duke was ok with that, so Stallworth put an arm around him and Duke freaked and Stallworth was very apologetic. Stallworth then arranged with his no. 2 to take a pic on the count of three, one, two, arm around Duke again, three, pic taken. Duke and Stallworth looking like buddies smiling. What would this do to Duke's White supremacist image with his neo-nazi type fans, followers, future voters and fellow Klan members!

Duke not only freaked he tried to grab the camera but Stallworth got it first. Duke tried to wrestle it from him, whereupon Stallworth told him that would be an assault on a police officer and in that state, 5 years minimum. YAY!

How the Black policeman became a member of the KKK was quite clever. Stallworth ran everything from the phone where the KKK were convinced that all Blacks gave their ignorant selves away by the way they spoke. Stallworth enjoying this, decided to pronounce certain words in a "Black" way as his contact at the KKK was convinced he was White. This was quite amusing. Stallworth had a White officer working for him and he had to be aware of all conversations (which were taped) and every interaction, because the few that were real life were handled by the White officer. The KKK, even David Duke, never knew.

Notes on reading And now for something completely different... Officer Stallworth is talking about his 19 year old policeman self and the sometimes unconscious racism from the other policemen.

He and a white policeman friend are talking about their ideal date, both of them talking of white women they found attractive. The author then mentions Lola Falana who was a popular Las Vegas entertainer. The white officer said he could not relate to Lola Falana as a "beautiful" woman, because he did not know what constituted beauty in a "colored" woman. He said, "I don't know how you people define beauty in a woman." The author, who defines attractiveness as a shapely, sexy woman regardless of colour is dumbfounded that the older officer thought he had no sense of value in terms of a woman's physical attractiveness that was equal to his as a white man. He felt that underneath the kindness, this white guy was still reflecting an unexamined basic sense of White superiority.

Years ago I wouldn't have known quite what he meant, or at least not so viscerally as I now do. I married into a black family, the top political family, not as some of my 'friends' back in the UK presumed, a poor but handsome black beach bum, a sexy rasta, reflecting their own unconscious racism. And that was the start of it... Some things are ingrained so deeply it's almost impossible to recognise them let alone rationally examine the irrational racism.
