

Daryl Davis

Musician, Author, Racial Justice Activist, Compelling Unifier, Klan Whisperer, and Award-Winning Conflict Navigator

Please contact a GDA agent for information.

Topics

- Communication
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Journalism / Literary / Author
- Musicians / Bands
- Racial Issues
- TED-Talks

About Daryl Davis

Daryl Davis is committed to helping people ignite positive change – using conversation to build bridges. His jaw-dropping experiences speak for themselves. For nearly 40 years, he’s engaged leaders of the KKK and White supremacist groups face to face to find the answer to a question: “How can you hate me when you don’t even know me?” That question stemmed from his first encounter with racism at age ten when he was pelted with rocks, bottles, and soda cans by a handful of White spectators while marching in a parade. Seeking to understand, not to change minds, Daryl met their hatred with civility, patience, and listening. Those conversations spawned genuine and lasting friendships with many who changed their *own* minds and disavowed hateful beliefs. Some even gave Daryl their robes and hoods when they did. As a speaker, Daryl is an extraordinary storyteller who inspires and empowers audiences with tools they can use to make better workplaces, communities, and relations with family and friends. Daryl’s work is chronicled in his book *Klan-Destine Relationships* and the documentary *Accidental Courtesy*. Daryl’s TEDx talk has over 12 million views.

Daryl graduated from Howard University with his Bachelor of Music Degree. He also holds an Honorary Doctorate in Humane Letters from Post University for the unique work he has done in the field of race relations. He has performed extensively with Chuck Berry, The Legendary Blues Band (formerly The Muddy Waters Blues Band), and many others. While music is his profession, improving race relations is his obsession. He is known to many as “The Rock’n’Roll Race Reconciliator.”

It started during a break between performances with a band at a bar one night. A man approached Daryl and remarked that this was the first time he had ever seen a Black man play piano like Jerry Lee Lewis. Daryl explained that both he and Lewis were influenced by Black Blues & Boogie-Woogie pianists, from which Rock’n’Roll and Rockabilly evolved. The man did not believe in the Black origin of Daryl’s piano style even after he said that Lewis was a friend who had shared this news with him. The man then shared news with Daryl – he was a member of the Ku Klux Klan.

This meeting, and those that followed, would lead Daryl on a journey all over America, meeting and interviewing leaders and members from KKK, neo-Nazi and Alt-Right groups at both his and their homes as well as their rallies. With his highly acclaimed, nonfiction book, *Klan-Destine Relationships*, Daryl became the first Black author to write a book on the Klan from in-person interviews. The award-winning documentary, *Accidental Courtesy*, details his journey and has been shown frequently on PBS. Daryl, who has been to 57 countries on 6 continents, is often selected by the U.S. State Department as a highly respected expert on race relations and conflict, to present programs in various countries around the world dealing with similar situations.

Daryl has been doing this work since 1983 and has become the recipient of numerous Klan robes & hoods and other racist symbols, given to him by people who once hated him when they didn’t even know him. Now many of them have become his friends and supporters of his work. On the other side of spectrum, for his work in bridging race relations he is the recipient of numerous awards such as the American Ethical Union’s prestigious Elliott-Black Award, Carnegie-Mellon’s Carl Sagan Award & Prize, Tribeca Disruption Innovation Award, MLK Award, Search for Common Ground Award, Washington Ethical Society Bridge-Builder Award, among many others. He is often sought for commentary by CNN, MSNBC, ABC News, *Newsweek*, *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, *People* magazine, and many other media sources.

In Daryl’s words, “Ever since I graduated from college in 1980 with my degree in music, I’ve been a full-time musician, traveling and performing all over America and around the world. What I’ve come to find to be the greatest, most effective, and successful weapon we can use to combat ignorance, racism, hatred, and violence, is also the least expensive weapon – and the one that is least used by Americans. That weapon is called communication.



We can communicate with people in space but many of us have difficulty talking to the person who lives next door because of the color of their skin, their ethnicity, their religion, their orientation, their politics, etc. We are living with 21st century technology in Space Age times, but there are still too many of us with Stone Age minds.”

Daryl has come in closer contact with more members of the Ku Klux Klan than most White people, and certainly most Blacks, short of being on the wrong end of a rope. What's more surprising? He intentionally continues to do so because as he says, “Ignorance breeds fear. If you do not keep that fear in check, that fear will breed hatred. Because we hate those things that frighten us. If you do not keep that hatred in check, that hatred in turn will breed destruction because we want to destroy those things that we hate. Why? Because they frighten us.”

When he speaks, Daryl Davis’s impact on an audience is sobering yet inspirational. More than a few members in every audience remember and ask him about the fictional character in Dave Chappelle’s comedic skit in which he plays a blind Klansman who didn't know he was Black and attends Klan rallies. Daryl shares stories that would be comical, if he weren’t putting his life on the line for a purpose. Truth is indeed stranger than fiction might ever be in Daryl’s case. People will also point out how courageous Daryl was to actually turn up at Klan rallies himself. Inevitably they bring up Spike Lee’s film *BlacKkKlansman*. That film depicts a Black police officer who infiltrated the KKK over the telephone and would send a White subordinate officer to Klan rallies in his place to gather damning intelligence against the Klan. The difference is not lost on the audience. Daryl had his feet on the ground in the lion’s den and tells the story first-hand.

Through his work, Daryl has discovered a successful method of transforming enemies into friends. His stories of his encounters with – and transformations of – White supremacists have inspired people all over the U.S. and abroad. His audiences leave his presentations empowered to:

- Overcome Their Fears
- Confront Their Prejudices
- Recognize Similarities
- Appreciate Differences
- Navigate Diversity
- Improve Relationships with Others
- Better Their Lives While Creating a Positive Impact on Others

In addition to his career as a performing musician, Daryl is the owner of Lyrad Music, a music publishing and licensing business. He is also an actor of stage and screen and has appeared in HBO’s highly acclaimed series *The Wire*.

Select Keynotes

• CONVERSATIONS THAT IGNITE CHANGE

Conversation can build bridges or walls. It’s up to us. Daryl Davis should know. The noted Black musician gained international acclaim by confronting, face to face, leaders of the Ku Klux Klan and other White supremacist groups who hate him simply for the color of his skin. Daryl’s was an effort to understand them, not to change minds, but those civil conversations forged unlikely and genuine friendships. Over time, many of his new friends changed their *own* minds and renounced their old beliefs. **What can we learn from Daryl’s inspiring and jaw-dropping experiences?**

Sample Takeaways:

- Apply universal tools to create positive change wherever conflict or disagreement exists
- Prepare: Understand the other person’s position and reasoning before you engage
- You needn’t respect *what* people say but you must *respect* their right to say it
- Learn to listen, understand, and keep emotions in check, even in incendiary situations
- How to recover/repair a relationship with a colleague, client, friend, or family member

• DIVERSITY LESSONS FROM A BLACK KLAN WHISPERER

“We spend too much time talking *about* the other person, talking *at* the other person, and talking *past* the other person. Amazing things can happen when we spend some time talking *with* the other person.” So says Daryl Davis, whose jaw-dropping experiences engaging KKK and White supremacist leaders hold lessons that inspire audiences to think differently about how they engage others who don’t share their views, backgrounds, religion, etc. The more we talk, the more we understand each other and discover what we have in common. That’s when the possibilities open up and the importance of our differences diminishes.

Sample Takeaways:

- Learn to build bridges and ignite positive change in the workplace, community, and at home
- Everyone wants the same 5 things – learn what they are and how they drive behavior
- Spend 5 minutes together and you will find things in common with even your worst enemy
- A missed opportunity for dialogue is a missed opportunity for conflict resolution
- The power of empathy – put yourself in the other person’s shoes

• WHAT’S DRIVING WHITE SUPREMACY TODAY?

Daryl Davis has been studying and connecting with some of the biggest promulgators of white supremacy for nearly 40 years. He understands their fears and their quest for power. His expert opinion is routinely sought after by leading print, broadcast, and online news organizations. In this presentation, Daryl brings business leaders, law enforcement, policy-makers, educators, and average citizens up to speed by explaining

where things stand right now and what can be done going forward. Daryl is the voice of knowledge, reason, and tranquility in uncertain, racially turbulent times.

Sample Takeaways:

- What is the threat of a race war?
- Understand the fear of “White genocide through miscegenation” and “the browning of America”
- Why the year 2042 is the white supremacists’ Y2K
- White Flight is over – everywhere you go, there’s already someone there who doesn’t look like you
- How to navigate a rapidly changing and more diverse society

• HAIL, HAIL ROCK’N’ROLL – DELIVER ME FROM THE DAYS OF OLD

At its inception, Rock ‘n’ Roll was called “the devil’s music” by its detractors. Some cities banned it altogether. Rooted in Black R&B and Blues, its infectious beat led young people in the South to leap over the rope that segregated Whites from Blacks in the audience. The 1957, Chuck Berry lyric, “Deliver me from the days of old,” in his hit song *School Days*, celebrated the music as a turning point in race relations. Daryl brings that history forward into his own story, using music as a common denominator and proving that musical and racial harmony go hand-in-hand.

Sample Takeaways:

- How musical inspiration differs from musical appropriation
- The Elvis conundrum: How he was crowned King of a genre he didn’t create
- How Country and Blues are the same music, and why society separates them
- How a Black musical genre improved race relations and elected a Black president
- Why music is a cultural necessity and not a luxury

Select Book Titles

- **1997:** *Klan-destine Relationships*

Select Articles

- [‘How Can You Hate Me When You Don’t Even Know Me?’](#)
- [Anti-KKK Activist Daryl Davis Addresses MAGA and Police Racism in New Q&A](#)
- [A black man’s quixotic quest to quell the racism of the KKK, one robe at a time](#)
- [Activist Daryl Davis Reveals How He Led Over 200 White Supremacists And KKK Members To Leave Their Neo-Nazi Groups](#)
- [Musician Daryl Davis Has Converted Hundreds of KKK Members Over 30 Years – Here’s How](#)
- [2008-09 Folklife Apprenticeship Award recipient](#)

Select Testimonials

“Your advice on how to ‘sit down and listen to others’ was very well received. The standing ovation you received was proof positive that the message resonated with everyone.”

– *Managing Director, Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak & Stewart, P.C.*

“Your presentation was riveting. You are such an engaging speaker and your story is powerful. We are humbled and inspired by the lessons you shared with us, and the knowledge that each of us can make a difference.”

– *Office of Congressional Workplace Rights*

“Daryl Davis really connected to our audience in ways that are difficult to measure. The past year we’ve all been living through difficult and trying times and it’s nice to hear someone who can break down barriers and remind all of us of our humanity. Daryl has proven that one person can make a difference and we should all strive to emulate his accomplishments. His message is simple, yet so important at the same time. I would recommend Daryl as a speaker for any audience, at any age.”

– *President & CEO, National Alcohol Beverage Control Association*

My father, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Cowardice asks the question, ‘Is it safe?’ Expediency asks the question, ‘Is it politic?’ Vanity asks the question, ‘Is it popular?’ But, conscience asks the question, ‘Is it right?’ And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither

safe, nor politic, nor popular, but one must take it because one's conscience tells one that it is right." Daryl Davis continues to take a position that is not safe, political, or popular, but is right because it is driven by his conscience and courage. The work that Daryl is doing to bridge the divide, sets an example for our nation and world to follow in light of the current racial tensions. Daryl is truly committed to creating the Beloved Community where hate no longer exists, but love prevails."

— Reverend Dr. Bernice King Daughter of Martin Luther King, Jr & Coretta Scott King CEO The King Center - Atlanta, GA