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Ron Stallworth is the author of "BlackKlansman."

The original Black Klansman

Ron Stallworth, the African-American detective who infiltrated the KKK in 1978, discusses white supremacy, then and now

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In October 1978, Detective Ron Stallworth infiltrated the Colorado Springs chapter of the Ku Klux Klan, making him the first black Klansman.

At the time, the Klan's Grand Wizard, David Duke, was attempting to rebrand the organization. Publicly, Duke said his Knights of the KKK were a non-violent group focused on white heritage. Yet behind the scenes, Duke and other white supremacists spewed racial epithets, planned cross burnings and wanted armed vigilante Klansmen to guard the Rio Grande border, Stallworth said.



Ron Stallworth

In private, Duke threw the N-word around all the time, Stallworth said of his conversations with the notorious leader. "In public, he never used it at all."

Stallworth, who detailed his undercover efforts in his 2014 memoir, "Black Klansman," helped prevent several cross burnings the group had planned for the area and unmasked two Klansmen who had top-security-level status at the North American Aerospace Defense Command. While the Klan did not take root in Colorado Springs, Duke was able to successfully take his brand of white nationalism mainstream in the decades that followed, Stallworth said.

"It's the norm now for white supremacists to claim their views in a political guise, and that political guise is in sync with that of conservative Republicans," Stallworth said. "The two are united, and one gives cover to the other."

Stallworth said he discovered that the Klan was looking to establish itself in Colorado Springs when he saw they had placed an ad in a local newspaper, and he decided to respond.

"I was an intelligence detective," Stallworth said. "Monitoring subversive groups was part of my job, and the Klan is a subversive group, so I simply did my job."

Stallworth, who used his real name when he responded to the ad, said he thought he would receive literature, pamphlets or a copy of the Klan newspaper in response. Instead, he received a phone call from the head of the chapter, and the investigation began.

For more than seven months, Stallworth pretended to be a white supremacist and spoke with the chapter leader and other Klan members over the phone, while a white detective met with them in person.

Despite the complexities of the investigations, Stallworth said, he was never concerned that the Klan members would discover that there were two Ron Stallworths.

"I was a trained undercover cop," Stallworth said. "We don't get nervous; we do our job."

He called the operation a "typical police investigation."

"I had no agenda in mind when I started an investigation," Stallworth said. "We weren't hoping to do anything other than to gather the information that was out there on the KKK and its impact on Colorado Springs."

When the Klan invited him to participate in two of the cross burnings it was planning,

Stallworth said, he alerted police dispatch, so the area would be saturated if they followed through with their plans.

"They chickened out as a result of that," Stallworth said.

"Cross burnings always unnerve a community," Stallworth said. "That's been the history of it."

The Klan was not able to execute any of its planned cross burnings during his investigation, which Stallworth said "felt good."

Stallworth also reached out to the Klan's national hotline. He was surprised when Duke answered the phone.

"It was supposed to be a recorded message," Stallworth said.

Duke was pleasant on the phone and a nice conversationalist, Stallworth said, "but he couldn't go five minutes, if that long, without talking about race and genetic superiority of whites over minorities."

Duke was also very different from the public persona he had crafted, Stallworth said.

"On the phone, he revealed himself," Stallworth said. "In public, he concealed a lot."

The two eventually met when Duke visited Colorado Springs, and Stallworth was assigned to protect him. During his visit, Stallworth asked if they could take a



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