

Rising Out of Hatred



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ELI SASLOW

Eli Saslow grew up in a Jewish family in Denver, Colorado and attended Heritage High School in Littleton, Colorado. He then attended Syracuse University, graduating in 2004. He is currently a journalist who has written for *The Washington Post* and *ESPN The Magazine*. He won the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting for his reporting on food stamps, which was collected into a book called *American Hunger*. Saslow was also a finalist for the Pulitzer in 2013, 2016, and 2017. Four of his stories have been published in the anthology *Best American Sports Writing*. He is the author of *Ten Letters: The Stories Americans Tell Their President* and *Rising Out of Hatred: The Awakening of a Former White Nationalist*. Saslow lives with his wife and three children in Portland, Oregon.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Rising Out of Hatred tracks the rise of the white nationalist movement in the United States and its eventual emergence into the political mainstream, particularly in the years between 2008 and 2016. But the book also goes further back in history, exploring white nationalism's origins in the 1960s. Following the civil rights movement and desegregation, many white people felt that they were at risk of losing power and influence. Young activists like Don Black and David Duke, who figure prominently in the book, re-energized the Ku Klux Klan, fearing interracial marriages, multiculturalism, and immigration. A movement for white separatism emerged in the 1980s, and the movement spread more widely with Don Black's invention of Stormfront, a neo-Nazi internet forum and the internet's first major racial hate site in 1990, gaining over 100,000 active users by 2008. The white nationalist movement particularly gained traction following Barack Obama's election in 2008. Then, in 2010, white nationalist Richard B. Spencer launched *The Alternative Right* webzine, and the U.S.'s most divisive debates sprang up around immigration, police brutality, and other racial issues. The book also touches on the 2016 U.S. presidential election, suggesting that Donald Trump ran for president on a subtly white nationalist platform. He was staunchly anti-immigrant and campaigned on a slogan about protecting the "better" version of America that advantaged white people. Trump's victory in the 2016 election further emboldened white nationalists. This culminated in events like the 2017 Charlottesville, Virginia rally, where neo-Nazis, KKK members, and other white supremacists stormed the town with torches and guns. Derek Black wanted to tell his story to warn people about the dangers of this ideology, and to illustrate the

best way to pull people out of extremism.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In the wake of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, many books emerged analyzing the rise of the alt-right and white nationalist movements. *Rising Out of Hatred* is one example. Others include George Hawley's *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, Mike Wendling's *Alt-Right: From 4Chan to the White House*, Thomas J. Main's *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, and David Neiwert's *Alt-America: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump*. Neiwert's earlier book, *The Eliminationists: How Hate Talk Radicalized the Alt-Right*, was published in 2009 and explores the history of the movement, which was well underway before Trump's election. To foster his own understanding of the history of white supremacy, author Eli Saslow relied on *Dark Soul of the South* by Mel Ayton, *Terror in the Night* by Jack Nelson, *Bayou of Pigs* by Stewart Bell, and *Blood and Politics* by Leonard Zeskind. Paralleling Derek Black's story, Christian Picciolini has written two accounts of his own experience as a former neo-Nazi and how he broke away from the movement: *White American Youth* and *Breaking Hate*. In *Rising Out of Hatred*, Saslow also cites the books that Derek reads to counter the white supremacist ideas he grew up with. These include Ta-Nehisi Coates's writings, Edward Said's *Orientalism*, and Ibram Kendi's [Stamped from the Beginning](#).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Rising Out of Hatred*
- **When Written:** 2016–2018
- **Where Written:** Portland, Oregon
- **When Published:** September 18, 2018
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Nonfiction, Investigative Journalism
- **Setting:** West Palm Beach, Florida and Sarasota, Florida in 2010–2017
- **Climax:** Derek disavows white nationalism.
- **Antagonist:** White Nationalism, White Supremacy, Racism
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Happy Ending. Since *Rising Out of Hatred* was published in 2018, Derek has continued to advocate for anti-racism and denounced white supremacy alongside Allison, his girlfriend in the book. The pair married in 2020.



PLOT SUMMARY

Rising Out of Hatred chronicles the true story of Derek Black, a young white nationalist who ultimately renounces the movement. Derek is the son of Don Black, a prominent white nationalist who founded Stormfront, the country's first and largest hate website. Derek's godfather (and his mother, Chloe's, ex-husband) is David Duke, a former KKK Grand Wizard and another leader in the movement. Growing up in West Palm Beach, Florida, Derek learns to hate "outsiders"—essentially, all people of color and Jewish people. When Derek is a teenager, he becomes involved with Stormfront, starts hosting a white nationalist radio show with his father, and attends white supremacist conferences. Don and Duke believe that he is the "heir" to the movement.

At 17, soft-spoken and intelligent Derek relies on logic rather than emotion to make his case for white nationalism. He helps reframe the rhetoric the movement uses, portraying it as a civil rights movement for white people who fear genocide and cultural erasure. Derek also loves history, particularly medieval history.

In 2010, after attending community college for two years and getting straight A's, Derek goes to New College of Florida, the top liberal arts college in the state. Derek's first semester on campus is eye-opening: he connects with a mixed-race student named Juan Elias and an Orthodox Jewish student named Matthew Stevenson. He even befriends and starts dating a girl named Rose, before learning that she is Jewish.

As Derek becomes closer with people he once considered "outsiders," he feels like he is living a double life. He is still dedicated to white nationalism and hosts his radio show every morning. But he also likes spending time with Rose, and he doesn't tell anyone about his beliefs. In the spring, Derek leaves for a semester abroad in Europe, and he privately worries what might happen if students find out who he is.

In April, the student body at New College finds out about Derek's ties to white nationalism. Most people ostracize him, including Rose, who feels confused and betrayed. Some students call for him to be expelled, which only makes Derek angry and want to redouble his commitment to white nationalism. But he hasn't broken any rules, so the school allows him to live off campus to avoid further controversy.

Derek feels completely isolated until Matthew invites Derek over for Shabbat dinner. He hopes that by befriending Derek, he can soften Derek's beliefs about Jewish people and people of color. Gradually, Derek reenters the social life on campus, even as he continues his radio show and hosts a conference for Stormfront users.

Derek also grows close with Matthew's roommate, Allison. The more Derek talks to Allison, trying to clarify his beliefs, the more conflicted he gets about white nationalism. Allison can tell

his views are softening. Allison even attends a Stormfront conference to understand his beliefs better, so that she can actively combat them. However, other students like Matthew are angry that Allison attends the conference, particularly because it doesn't seem like reaching out to Derek has changed his views. Matthew doesn't think that Derek has any incentive to change, even though people like him, Allison, and Juan have been so accepting.

And hearing Derek's arguments, Allison finds research to combat his views and explains how white nationalism has harmful, tangible effects on people's lives. When she questions Derek on how a whites-only U.S. would affect his non-white friends, he begins to look at his opinions about race in a more abstract way.

Confronted with Allison's questions, Derek reconsiders what he truly believes. He logs onto Stormfront less, and he takes weeks-long breaks from hosting the radio show. At the same time, students continue to post on forums saying that Derek isn't welcome. Allison defends him on the forum, and Derek realizes that it's time to clarify what he thinks. He writes a post explaining his beliefs: he no longer believes segregation is necessary, and he doesn't support Nazism or the KKK. He no longer believes some of the white nationalist myths on "Jewish manipulation" or IQ discrepancies between races. Students respond by thanking him, glad to see that he has evolved on some issues.

Later, Allison writes to the SPLC—a civil rights group—and attaches Derek's email, hoping that they can delete his extremist file on their website. Instead, they publish the email publicly. Worried about how his family will react, Derek writes to the SPLC clarifying that what he said is true, but that he still believes in white nationalism. Allison knows that rejecting white nationalism is likely the last step in Derek's transformation, but other students accuse him of sanitizing his beliefs to appease them.

A few weeks after the SPLC story breaks, Derek studies abroad in a language immersion program. He also reads more studies on race in the U.S. and learns how white supremacy hurts people of color. He also acknowledges the racism and anti-Semitism that his friends face. When Derek realizes that other students in the immersion program are ostracizing him, he wonders how many friendships he'll have to sacrifice for this ideology. He tells Allison that he wants to withdraw from white nationalism and disappear from public life.

In Derek's final months at college, he logs out of Stormfront and retires from his radio show. After his graduation, he sends a letter denouncing white nationalism to the. When Derek's family reads the letter, they are shocked and upset. They cut him off financially and barely speak to him. On Stormfront, people threaten Derek, as they feel he has betrayed them and embarrassed the entire movement. Allison, however, is extremely proud of him, and many other students and peers

commend Derek on his bravery. Derek also changes his **name** to distance himself from his former life, switching his first and middle names to become Roland Derek Black.

Though Derek's letter embarrasses the movement, white nationalism is stronger than ever. In 2013, the Supreme Court overturns a key part of the Voting Rights Act, allowing for a new wave of voting restrictions. The Tea Party stalls Obama's attempts to reform immigration, and congressmen are talking about the "war on whites." Anti-refugee sentiments rise during the Syrian crisis, and the Black Lives Matter movement spurs the All Lives Matter and White Lives Matter counter-movements. In 2015, Dylann Roof shoots nine people in a historically Black church after being radicalized on Stormfront. Soon after, Donald Trump announces his candidacy for president with a speech with many white nationalist dog whistles.

Trump becomes quickly popular among disillusioned white people, and in the summer of 2016, just after Derek earns his master's degree, he realizes that he's partially responsible for the growth of the movement, particularly among young people on Stormfront. He starts to share some of his story during the final months of the 2016 presidential election, but Trump's spectacles dwarf his message. Trump wins the presidency, a massive victory for the white nationalist movement, who have now become part of the political establishment rather than a fringe or extremist group.

In the wake of the election, Derek writes an op-ed in *The New York Times* condemning white nationalism and the politicians who are riding the wave of violence and anger to power. At the book's conclusion, Derek rebuilds his relationship with his parents somewhat, even though they feel he's becoming "antiwhite." Still, Derek knows that it's his responsibility to warn people about growing white nationalist sentiment in the political mainstream. He hopes that telling his story will help pull people out of this dangerous ideology.

Sarasota, Florida, where he hides his background while continuing to work for the white nationalist movement. There, Derek befriends an unlikely set of people, including Juan, a mixed-race student from Peru, and Matthew, an Orthodox Jewish student. He even dates a girl named Rose even after discovering that she is Jewish. He increasingly fears students discovering who he is, until at the end of his first year, another student figures out that he is a prominent white nationalist and spreads the word on campus. Most students immediately ostracize Derek, disgusted at his racist beliefs. But students like Matthew and Juan remain friends with him, knowing that their relationships have been genuine and hoping that their influence will cause Derek's views to soften. Derek also starts dating a girl named Allison, who talks to him openly about his views. She gradually pokes holes in the logic of his arguments and gets him to see white nationalism as a flawed and dangerous belief system. Ultimately, Derek ends up denouncing white supremacy, which creates a major break between him and his family. While he attempts to reconcile with them, he also sees the fallout of some of his work. He uses *Rising Out of Hatred* as both a warning about white supremacy and an illustration of what might work for drawing people out of a dangerous ideology.

Allison Gornik – Allison is one of Derek's peers at New College, who eventually becomes his girlfriend. Allison is Matthew's roommate, and when Derek starts attending Matthew's Shabbat dinners after being outed as a white nationalist, Allison is uncomfortable with Derek's presence at dinner and largely avoids him. However, over time, she realizes that he seems quirky, kind, and interesting, and they start to go on adventures together across Florida, exploring different nature preserves or nearby towns. Allison is very conscious of her privilege as a white person, and she takes classes on how non-white people are systemically oppressed and discriminated against. As Derek and Allison's friendship develops, they discuss Derek's politics, and Allison realizes that most of his arguments are illogical and unsupported by facts. So, if she can prove those facts incorrect, she might be able to sway him. After doing extensive research herself, Allison begins to debunk some of Derek's white nationalist myths. She can see that his views are softening—both because of their conversations and because of Derek's friendships with Juan and Matthew—but she is frustrated when he continues to align himself with white nationalism. They also begin a romantic relationship in Derek's final year of school. When Allison gets flak for defending Derek by saying that his views are changing, Derek realizes how much his views *have* changed, and in 2013 he decides to break with white nationalism. Later, Allison also encourages him to continue denouncing white nationalism throughout the 2016 U.S. presidential election, as she knows that he bears a lot of responsibility for spreading the white nationalism that's become somewhat mainstream during this time.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Derek Black – Derek Black is the central figure in *Rising Out of Hatred*. He is Don and Chloe Black's son and David Duke's godson. Derek grows up surrounded by white nationalists and helps his father grow the movement through the Stormfront website and by hosting a radio show. On Stormfront, Derek espouses that Jews are "evil," that Black people are inherently violent, and that white people have higher IQs. He believes that the U.S. was founded as a white nation and that it should return to being one, fearing white genocide and the erasure of white culture due to interracial relationships and multiculturalism. But Derek also has a passion for school, particularly medieval history. So, Derek attends New College, a liberal arts college in

Don Black – Don Black, Derek Black’s father and Chloe Black’s husband, is a prominent white nationalist. Don grows up in the 1960s when schools in the Southern U.S. become desegregated, creating constant turmoil between Black and white students. He discovers a book called *Our Nordic Race*, which states that the only way to solve the “race problem” is to separate the races. From there, Don becomes more and more radicalized, believing that white people are inherently superior to all other races and that others should be deported. He befriends David Duke, another prominent young white nationalist, on the way to a conference, and together they define the white nationalist movement for decades. Don even teams up with other white nationalists to overthrow the government of Dominica and create a white utopia there. The plot fails, and Don spends three years in jail. There, he learns to code and realizes that the internet could be a powerful tool to disseminate the white nationalist message. He creates Stormfront, the first hate website, which grows to 120,000 active users by 2009. Don also marries Chloe, Duke’s ex-wife, in 1988, and she becomes pregnant with Derek soon after. Growing up, Derek is very involved in the white nationalist movement, helping Don create kids’ pages on Stormfront and hosting a radio show with his father. As Don gets older, he’s exhausted after four decades of fighting for a revolution that hasn’t come yet. He sees Derek as his successor in the movement, which is why he’s so devastated when Derek decides to renounce white nationalism. In the three years following Derek’s betrayal, the movement continues to grow. Don and Derek reconcile somewhat, but Don wonders what his work in the movement has amounted to if it means losing his son.

David Duke – David Duke, a prominent white nationalist, is Derek’s godfather, Don’s best friend, Chloe’s ex-husband. Duke and Don meet as teenagers when they carpool to attend a white nationalist conference. Afterward, Duke attends Louisiana State University, where he speaks passionately about white people as a “master race”; he is widely hated on campus for his views. After his junior year at LSU, Duke leaves and rejuvenates the KKK, becoming the Grand Wizard before passing on the position to Don. He also meets and falls in love with Chloe; they marry and have two daughters before getting divorced. Chloe later reconnects with and marries Don, and after Derek is born, they all act as a blended family. Duke then remakes himself into a politician and YouTube personality, positioning the white nationalist movement as a modern civil rights movement for white people. Like Don, he considers Derek to be the “heir” of the movement, and he often acts as a mentor to Derek. He is shocked and angry when Derek denounces white nationalism.

Rose – Rose is one of Derek’s peers at New College. She listens to Derek play music in the courtyard, and they eventually get to know each other and go dancing. They circle around the

possibility of dating when Derek learns that Rose is Jewish. Derek had posted many times on Stormfront about how Jewish people are “possibly evil” and causing the world’s problems, but Rose is sweet and unassuming to him. Growing up largely in the South and Southwest, Rose faced a great deal of anti-Semitism as she was often the only Jewish person that her friends and classmates knew, making her feel like an outcast. Ultimately, Rose and Derek do start to date—but when Derek is outed as a white nationalist, she feels confused and betrayed. She doesn’t know how to reconcile his posts on Stormfront with their relationship. Afterward, she stops talking to him, and Derek realizes how much pain he has caused her.

Matthew Stevenson – Matthew Stevenson is Derek’s peer at New College and the only Orthodox Jewish student on campus. He gets to know Derek when Derek plays guitar in the courtyard, and Matthew often joins in. After Derek is outed as a white nationalist, Matthew invites Derek over for Shabbat dinner in the hopes that he can soften Derek’s views on Jewish people. Matthew is also roommates with Allison, and as she grows closer to Derek, Matthew becomes frustrated because he doesn’t think that their influence is having any effect on Derek. However, by the end of the book, Matthew and the other students’ friendships *do* influence Derek to disavow white nationalism.

Juan Elias – Juan is the first person that Derek meets at New College. Juan is part European, part indigenous, and part Black, and he moved from Peru to Miami when he was 10 years old. He meets Derek when they both get lost on the way to college orientation, and they discover that they have two classes together and live in the same dorm building. They become friends, and when Juan learns that Derek is a white nationalist, Juan is surprised and thinks that Derek might already be changing some of his views. Given this, he, Matthew, and Moshe start inviting Derek to Shabbat dinner in the hopes that remaining friends with Derek will help change his views about minorities. Ultimately, Juan’s friendship does help Derek reconsider his views.

Barack Obama – Barack Obama is the 44th president of the United States. His election in 2008 is a turning point for white nationalists, as they leverage his election to incite anger among white people who feel like their culture is being taken away from them. They paint him as a “radical black activist,” and Donald Trump asserts that Obama isn’t American, beginning the racist “birther” movement. Obama wins reelection in 2012, but he loses the white vote by a 20-point margin (the largest disparity in 30 years), which *Rising Out of Hatred* suggests signals the growth of white nationalist influence on the white vote. His reelection energizes opposition, and Tea Party Republicans stall his attempts at immigration reform. During Donald Trump’s candidacy for president, Don Black discusses how white people want to “take the country back” from Obama.

Donald Trump – Donald Trump is the 45th president of the

United States. A businessman and media personality, Trump rises to fame in politics by repeating the white nationalist lie that Barack Obama isn't American. He amasses a substantial following on the far right, and following Mitt Romney's loss in the 2012 election, he laments that white people are the minority, which *Rising Out of Hatred* suggests is a way of trying to spark anger and fear within the movement. In 2015, Trump announces his candidacy for president. While Derek isn't sure whether Trump actually believes what he espouses, the book suggests that he gains popularity by using racist rhetoric and railing against immigrants. He wins the Republican primary and goes on to win the election, and according to the book, this establishes white nationalism as mainstream rather than a fringe ideology.

Mitt Romney – Mitt Romney is the Republican candidate for president in the 2012 election, running against Barack Obama. Romney advocates for a policy of “self-deportation,” making life so miserable for immigrants that they decide to leave on their own. After Romney loses, Derek is secretly glad that Romney's immigration policies won't affect his friends who are immigrants. But Don is optimistic about Romney's loss, believing that white nationalism is starting to take hold in the Republican Party—Romney won the white vote by a 20 percent margin, the largest in 30 years.

Moshe Ash – Moshe is a student at New College. He and Matthew are two of the few Jewish students on campus, and each Friday night they host Shabbat dinner. Moshe grew up in an Orthodox Jewish household as the grandson of a Holocaust survivor. Gradually, Moshe pulled away from Jewish Orthodoxy but remained closely aligned with his Jewish heritage. After Derek is outed as a white nationalist, he and Matthew invite Derek to Shabbat dinner in hopes that their friendship will help change his views on Jewish people. Ultimately, their friendships do help Derek change his views.

James Birmingham – James Birmingham is a New College alumnus who works in the student affairs office. He is half Chinese and a staunch advocate for students of color. When Derek is outed as a white nationalist, James is disgusted when he reads Derek's posts on Stormfront. He's frustrated with students who want to defend and reach out to Derek, thinking that they will never be able to change Derek's views. He starts a campaign to have Derek ostracized on campus, which largely succeeds.

Richard B. Spencer – Richard B. Spencer is a prominent white nationalist and one of the leaders of the alt-right movement. At the time of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Spencer is 38. After Derek denounces white nationalism, many people (including Don) look to Spencer as the future of the movement. Two weeks after the election, he hosts a white nationalist conference in Washington, D.C. When members of the audience give a Nazi salute, it becomes one of the defining images of the election season.

Joseph Paul Franklin – Joseph Paul Franklin is a white nationalist who meets Don Black and David Duke when he is young. Together, they define the white supremacy movement for decades. When they meet, Franklin is a high school dropout who delights in using racial slurs and wants to spark a race war. Franklin eventually bombs three synagogues and shoots Black and interracial couples in the Southern U.S. After killing 15 people and wounding 12 others, he is finally caught, convicted, and executed.

Chloe Black – Chloe is Derek's mother, Don's wife, and David Duke's ex-wife. She and Duke have two daughters together, and so they all operate as a blended family, with Don caring for Duke's daughters and Duke caring for Derek as well. Chloe is also a white nationalist and an ardent supporter of Donald Trump during his candidacy. When Derek breaks with white nationalism, she is just as devastated as Don, refusing to speak to their son.

Blair Sapp – Blair is a student at New College. After Derek is outed as a white nationalist, Blair doesn't speak to Derek until he sees Derek almost get beaten up at a party. Blair is the first person to ask Derek directly about his beliefs, and he quickly realizes that Derek has no doubts about his ideology. They have a civil discussion before they part ways.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Hillary Clinton – Hillary Clinton is the Democratic candidate in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Clinton warns about how Donald Trump, the Republican candidate, has built a campaign on paranoia and prejudice, allowing white nationalists to enter and influence the Republican establishment. She ultimately loses the 2016 election to Donald Trump.

Mike Long – Mike Long is the student body president at New College. He continues to socialize with Derek after Derek is outed as a white nationalist.

Julie Allison Gornik's mother.

TERMS

White Nationalism – White nationalism is a belief system and movement centered around the idea that white people are a race, and that white people should maintain a distinct racial identity. Many white nationalists support some form of racial segregation as well as the development of an all-white nation, or “ethnostate.” Though white nationalists like **Derek** and his family generally distance themselves from the term “white supremacy” (the idea that white people are superior to other races), many of the movement's tenets do overlap with white supremacy and white separatism.

Alt-Right – The alt-right is a far-right political movement that is largely based online. The term loosely describes a variety of

other groups, including white supremacy, white nationalism, and right-wing populism. Many people and groups who fall under the “alt-right” classification espouse racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, homophobia, and Islamophobia. **Richard B. Spencer** began the movement when he launched a website called *The Alternative Right*, and the movement gained popularity throughout the 2016 U.S. election cycle.

Black Lives Matter – The Black Lives Matter movement is a 21st-century political and social cause protesting racially motivated violence—particularly police brutality—against Black people. The movement began following George Zimmerman’s acquittal after he shot and killed Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager, in 2012 because Martin “looked suspicious.” The movement grew in 2014 following the police killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. Black Lives Matter has also led to countermovements called “All Lives Matter” and “White Lives Matter.”

Dog Whistle – A dog whistle is language that signals alignment with a specific group, but that’s subtly coded so as not to provoke opposition from people outside of that group. According to *Rising Out of Hatred*, **Donald Trump** used dog whistles for the white nationalist movement during his 2016 presidential campaign. For instance, he said that he was qualified to be president in part because of his “beautiful, terrific genes,” or that he was going to “take America back,” which could be interpreted as subtle nods to white supremacy and white separatism.

Ku Klux Klan (KKK) – The Ku Klux Klan is a white supremacist hate group that was first founded in 1865 and was responsible for lynchings, bombings, and other acts of violence against Black people. After becoming inactive in the 1870s, the Klan was revived in 1915 and again in 1946. **David Duke** and **Don Black** helped rejuvenate the KKK in the 1960s, and Duke eventually became Grand Wizard and then passed on the title to Don.

Neo-Nazism – Neo-Nazism is a political movement that seeks to reinstate Nazi ideology. Neo-Nazis often promote white supremacy, white nationalism, and violence against racial and ethnic minorities. Regularly displaying Nazi symbols, neo-Nazis also borrow other elements from Nazism like anti-Semitism, ableism, and homophobia.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) – The Southern Poverty Law Center is a civil rights advocacy organization. It is known for its legal cases against white supremacist groups and its classification of hate groups.

Stormfront – Stormfront is a neo-Nazi internet forum and the first major racial hate site. **Don Black** began Stormfront as an online bulletin board system before it became a website in 1996. His son, **Derek**, helped maintain Stormfront; growing up, he even set up a children’s page to expand its reach. Many mass shooters, including Dylann Roof, have been radicalized by

Stormfront and admitted that they were motivated by white supremacist rhetoric they found there.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



OSTRACISM VS. OPEN DIALOGUE

Rising Out of Hatred centers on Derek Black, a former white nationalist who’s considered the “rising star” of the movement before he renounces his ideology. When Derek’s peers at the New College of Florida discover his background after his first semester there, a debate springs up about whether to completely ostracize him to protest his racist opinions and activism, or whether to accept him and remain friends with him in hopes of eventually changing his beliefs. Alienating Derek makes him feel very isolated and does cause him to start doubting his beliefs. But in the end, the reason Derek renounces white nationalism is because a few students are willing to stay friends with him and openly discuss and debate his ideology. Thus, the book suggests that while ostracizing a person can cause them to question their ideas, tolerance and open dialogue are usually more effective at changing a person’s mind and reforming their behavior.

When Derek is outed as a white nationalist, other students’ ostracism provides a starting point for Derek to question his ideas, but it doesn’t fully change his mind. When a peer discovers that Derek is a prominent white nationalist, students spark a debate on an email forum: “Was it better to shame and demonize Derek? Or was it more effective to somehow reach out to him?” Ultimately, most of them choose to ostracize Derek, completely avoiding him on campus. This is effective to a certain degree: when Derek’s Jewish girlfriend, Rose, stops talking to him, he sees the pain and sadness he has caused her because of his views. Thus, ostracism does give Derek a starting point in questioning the morality of his beliefs. Later, students even protest Derek’s views by dropping classes that he’s enrolled in the following semester. While Derek at first dismisses his rejection on campus as “an overreaction from hysterical classmates,” he begins “to consider if there [is] truth to what they sa[y].” In experiencing ostracism, Derek realizes that his views might be harmful. Though Derek feels completely isolated and rejected, this isn’t enough to change his beliefs overnight—in fact, he initially gets defensive and doubles down on his racist beliefs. He does, however, try to find ways to reenter the social life on campus, which is why he opens himself up to conversations about his politics. In this way,

the book makes clear that ostracism is only a starting point—it alone won't be enough to change someone's mind. It is only a piece of making someone realize that their views are socially unacceptable.

Tolerance, on the other hand, is the key to helping Derek see the people around him as human beings and not as "others." Before Derek is outed as a white nationalist, he befriends people he would normally consider "enemies" due to their ethnicity—Juan Elías, a mixed-race student from Peru, and Matthew Stevenson, an Orthodox Jewish student. After Derek's background becomes clear, Matthew still invites Derek to Shabbat dinner alongside Juan and another Jewish student named Moshe. Their goal is for Derek to "to learn what the enemy was actually like," knowing that "there is no better way to make sure Derek keeps [his] abhorrent views than if [they] all exclude him." In this sense, Matthew, Juan, and Moshe recognize that building relationships is more effective than exclusion. Even though the friends don't talk about politics, these relationships prove effective, as Derek changes his views in part because he builds genuine friendships with Matthew, Moshe, and Juan. He begins to "like and accept Jews," and he no longer understands why white nationalists view them as such a problem. He thinks that "maybe every minority [doesn't] need to be his ideological enemy." This shows that friendships—even without the goal of trying to change people's views—can make someone like Derek reassess their prejudices.

In addition to these friendships, Derek's political conversations with Matthew's roommate Allison—and her willingness to engage with his ideas—are what help him see white nationalism as a flawed ideology. At first, Allison ostracizes Derek like most other people on campus do. But when she realizes that Derek is a kind and interesting person despite his white nationalist beliefs, she wonders about befriending him and trying to change his views. She thinks, "Even if I could have some direct, positive impact, I'm not sure it is morally okay to befriend someone like this." While she weighs the moral implications of fostering a friendship, she also realizes that she can only hope to change Derek by talking with him. Allison decides to openly engage with Derek's ideology by learning what he thinks—she even listens to his radio show and attends a white supremacist conference with him. In doing so, Allison can fully understand his views and find evidence to counteract them. Ultimately, she succeeds: the research she sends him helps him disavow the white nationalist beliefs that he's held all his life. Through this process, the book suggests that openly engaging with a person and finding middle ground with them may be the best way to change a person's beliefs.

However, *Rising Out of Hatred* does offer an important concession on why engaging might not *always* be the easiest or best strategy: it acknowledges that one of the reasons Derek and Allison's relationship is so effective is because Allison is white. Therefore, she isn't threatened by Derek's beliefs, and

she can approach the conversation as a "confused and curious friend" rather than an "enemy armed for battle." Thus, there are circumstances where ostracism seems like the only option, especially for people who feel that Derek's prejudice is directly targeting them. But even Derek himself states, "Through many talks with devoted and diverse people there—people who chose to invite me into their dorms and conversations rather than ostracize me—I began to realize the damage I had done." Thus, while ostracism can serve a purpose, the best way to change a person's mind is often through respect, tolerance, and conversation.



WHITE SUPREMACY AND RACISM

Throughout Derek Black's early life, he is considered the "heir" of the white nationalist movement, the goal of which is to promote a white racial identity and form an all-white nation, or "ethnstate." He does, however, try to distinguish his ideology from neo-Nazism and other forms of violent extremism. While Derek thinks that white people are better off living separately from non-white people, he doesn't believe in violence or outright discrimination against other groups, and he's polite to everyone he meets regardless of their race. However, *Rising Out of Hatred* shows that even Derek's relatively nonthreatening white nationalism still has harmful effects, as his prejudice makes his friends and classmates feel hated, dehumanized, and even unsafe on their college campus. Moreover, Derek implicitly condones more extreme forms of white supremacy by associating with groups that support violence and promoting his ideology to the mainstream: he hosts a white nationalist radio show, attends the same conferences as neo-Nazis and the KKK, and even runs for political office on a white nationalist platform. Thus, the book suggests that no form of white supremacy is harmless. The same racist beliefs underpin all white supremacist movements—from the mildest to the most extreme—and the book suggests that these various ideologies often play off one another and can put people on a dangerous path to radicalization.

At first, Derek makes a point to distinguish his ideology as relatively harmless, portraying himself as non-threatening compared to other groups. Derek often clarifies that he is a white nationalist and not a white supremacist or a member of the KKK. His core beliefs are that the U.S. would be better off as a whites-only country, and that white genocide and the erasure of white culture are real threats. This framing enables him to try and distinguish himself from various hate groups that promote violence and overt discrimination against minorities. Derek claims that white nationalism is particularly different from other groups because he doesn't advocate for violence and thinks that "overt prejudice can be really bad." Again, this is a way that Derek tries to separate himself from the other groups, attempting to argue that he is not involved in white

supremacy or violent extremism. Derek even tries to show that he doesn't base his beliefs on emotion or bias, but "what he believe[s] to be the facts of racial science, immigration, and a declining white middle class." By positioning white nationalism as an emotionless, nonviolent, logical creed, Derek tries to create a contrast between him and others who base their ideology on anger and hate.

However, it becomes clear that Derek's beliefs *are* harmful to others, and that his associations with people in the other movements make the boundaries between them almost irrelevant. While Derek tries to argue that his ideology isn't based on prejudice, he writes on Stormfront that Jewish people are "possibly evil." He also argues that Black people are more aggressive because of higher testosterone levels, and that white people have bigger brains and higher IQs. Not only are these studies and beliefs false and racist, but they are the same kinds of arguments that people in all different sects of the white supremacist movement make. This becomes clear to Derek when he learns that his peers are afraid of him and feel unsafe on campus with Derek there. Thus, Derek's ideology isn't as harmless or as he purports. In addition, Derek's friend Allison teaches him that the prejudice that underpins white nationalism causes deep harm—it's not just a "modern civil rights movement for whites," as Derek argues. She shows him studies proving that non-white victims of prejudice are more likely to suffer from health risks like high blood pressure and suppressed immunity, experience housing discrimination, and face police brutality. Thus, even technically nonviolent white nationalism can physically and mentally hurt people.

Additionally, Derek has many friends and family members who are white supremacists, KKK Klansmen, or neo-Nazis. So even though Derek asserts that he's not a white supremacist, his association with them indicates his implicit approval of their attitudes. Many of these groups band together into the "alt-right" movement and host rallies—like the one that took place in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017, where attendees carried torches and guns and displayed antisemitic and racist slogans and symbols. This reinforces that ideologies can bleed into one another and feed broader, more dangerous movements, and that all variations of white supremacy can be harmful.

Lastly, the book illustrates how white nationalism, even if it appears more benign than other ideologies, can lead to extremism and radicalization. Derek's father Don, for example, reads a white nationalist book called *Our Nordic Race*, which advocates for separating white people from people of color. After reading this, Don finds more white nationalist literature from the same publisher, ends up reading a newspaper called *White Power*, and then starts attending white nationalist conferences. Ultimately, he gets involved with other white nationalists who try to overthrow the government of Dominica so that they can form an all-white ethnostate. Thus, even "separationist" ideology that advocates for voluntary (rather

than forced) separation between races can lead people down a dangerous rabbit hole to violence and extremism. This is also true of Joseph Paul Franklin, another young white nationalist whom Don meets at a conference. He finds white nationalism through reading Hitler's *Mein Kampf* at the library. Then, through his involvement in white nationalism, he gradually becomes more extreme in his beliefs and decides to spark a "race war" by bombing synagogues and shooting people of color. Again, even though white nationalism itself doesn't explicitly advocate for this violence, it still feeds extremist fires. This is particularly true on Stormfront, the hate website that Don creates and that Derek also posts on. At least six murderers are linked to Stormfront, and Don calls these connections "a series of very unfortunate coincidences." However, it's clear that white nationalist and white supremacist ideology motivated them to perpetrate this violence. Through these various examples, the book emphasizes that racist ideology, no matter its form, is harmful and can easily lead to violence.



FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND VALUES

Derek Black comes from a white supremacist legacy: his father, Don Black, founded Stormfront (a popular white pride website), and Derek's godfather, David Duke, was once the Grand Wizard of the KKK. Derek believes in white nationalism largely because he was indoctrinated into the ideology from a young age and was never exposed to different ideas. And when Derek eventually goes to college, befriends people of different backgrounds, and denounces white supremacy, this inevitably strains his relationships with many of his family members and friends. Although Derek knows that he's making the right decision, being alienated from his close circle is painful. Through his experience, the book illustrates that communities and families tend to be built around shared values—and that one of the reasons it can be so difficult to change one's beliefs is because it often means splitting with one's community.

Derek's upbringing demonstrates how his family, friends, and communities are built around sharing white nationalist values. Derek grows up entrenched in white nationalism, thanks in large part to Don. Don helps decorate Derek's childhood bedroom with a Confederate flag and gets Derek involved in building the children's page on Stormfront, and they ultimately share a radio show together. A great deal of Don's pride in his son is based on how Derek believes—which are "a direct inheritance from Don"—are making him a rising star of the white nationalist movement. In this way, the shared values that they cultivate become the strongest bond in their relationship. Derek's bond with David Duke—who essentially acts as his second father—is also predicated on their shared white nationalism. After Derek is outed as a white nationalist, causing an uproar at New College, Duke visits him while Derek is

studying abroad in Germany. They find comfort in talking about history and their ideology, and they visit a town square where Hitler organized marches for the Nazi Party. Duke gives Derek advice about how other people's ostracism and protest of Duke's own ideas at school fueled his devotion to "the cause of our racial survival." In this way, their shared values and experiences with white nationalism bring them closer together and create a mentor-mentee dynamic. Growing up inside white nationalism, Derek has many relationships of the kind he has with Don and Duke. This is one of the reasons why his friends at New College, like Allison, understand why it's difficult to sway Derek from his ideology. When Allison attends a Stormfront conference with Derek, she sees that it's also an opportunity for family and friends to see each other. After Derek speaks, they applaud him as the leader of the "next generation." To them, white nationalism isn't just a political strategy or movement—it's a part of their family values and traditions. Derek's participation in the community is built on his involvement with white nationalism, making it difficult for him to break away.

Eventually, Derek's disavowal of white nationalism leads to a falling out with his family, illustrating how changing one's values can be difficult because it means breaking with a community. After Allison helps Derek recognize white nationalism as a flawed and destructive ideology, he publicly denounces his former beliefs. This breaks his family members' hearts, and they refuse to speak to him. Don even says that "it would have been better for their family if Derek hadn't been born," though he calls back later and rescinds this statement. Just as shared values built a bond, losing those shared values breaks or weakens that bond—even one as strong as a parent-child relationship. Even when Derek tries to reconcile with his family, few of them are willing to do so. Duke is angry at the pain Derek has caused in the movement, and other relatives stop communicating with him. Don wants to speak with Derek at his 60th birthday party, but the rest of the family makes the pair leave the party in order to speak. Derek's mother, Chloe, and his sisters say nothing to Derek when he arrives. In this way, Derek's decision to separate himself from his values separates him from his loved ones as well. This is also true on Stormfront: where Derek was once beloved on the website, now users call him a "traitor" and physically threaten him in posts. Derek's rejection of values not only separates him from his family, but from the friendships and communities he's been a part of for years.

Yet while Derek loses his community for disavowing white nationalism, he also gains a great deal of support from newfound friends at New College now that he shares their values. After Derek disavows white nationalism, he grows even closer to Allison, who tells him that she is proud of him and that she loves him. Additionally, Derek receives many congratulatory notes and voicemails from other students, and

he no longer feels like he must sacrifice potential friendships with people because of white nationalism. This offers another perspective on how shared values help build community bonds; indeed, Derek's new values help him find a new place to belong. This reinforces the book's overall suggestion that familial relationships and friendships are based largely on shared values, and that not sharing those values can make it impossible to fully take part in a community.



REDEMPTION

Derek Black spends much of his early life making significant contributions to the white nationalist movement, like crafting websites and making suggestions for how to frame arguments about race. But with the help of his peers, and Derek's efforts to educate himself, Derek formally denounces his former white nationalist beliefs and receives many notes of thanks and congratulations from other students. Afterwards, though, he realizes that he's still ashamed and guilty about his involvement, as the white nationalist movement continues to use his contributions even after Derek is no longer a part of it. Derek then realizes that it's up to him to continue the work that so many of his peers helped him through: persuading people away from white nationalism and continuing to denounce it as a flawed and harmful ideology. The book thus suggests that redemption can be possible for anyone, but it requires people to admit their mistakes, confront their past, and try to rectify the damage they've done.

The first important step in Derek's redemption after committing to white nationalism for so long is opening himself up to his peers' perspectives and admitting his own mistakes. When Derek befriends people whom he doesn't necessarily agree with, like Juan, Moshe, and Matthew, he realizes that he doesn't have to think of all ethnic and racial minorities as the "enemy." They, in turn, appreciate that he's actually a kind and intelligent person. In being open to their perspectives, Derek can take the first step toward redemption in their eyes and remain friends with them. Over time, Derek listens to another student, Allison's, research on racism and systemic oppression. While he used to dismiss other students' reactions to his beliefs as "hysterical," learning more about others' perspectives makes him realize that his classmates are "valid in their criticism and righteous in their anger." He then stops participating in white pride websites and the white nationalist radio program he hosts with his father, Don. Thus, an important first step for Derek's redemption is to acknowledge his mistaken thinking and to stop perpetuating those beliefs.

Yet the book emphasizes that it's not enough for Derek to disappear from the white nationalist movement after recognizing that he is wrong—he must also formally disavow white nationalism to confront his past mistakes. As Derek extricates himself from the white nationalist movement, Allison explains that he has to write a public statement denouncing

white nationalism because he contributed to the movement so greatly. Allison makes Derek consider, “How many had he radicalized? How many had he turned into activists? And how many millions of other people had his rhetoric offended or oppressed?” In this way, Derek acknowledges the consequences of his actions and understands that a key part of making amends for them is to address his actions directly. So, Derek does just that, disavowing white nationalism in a letter he sends to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and apologizing for the damage caused by his actions. He also reaches out individually to people he hurt, like Juan, Matthew, and another Jewish student named Rose. In return, they thank him, and many other students (even those he’s rarely talked to) send him notes of congratulations and thanks. In this way, he acknowledges his responsibility to apologize for his past, and the other students’ reactions suggest that this was necessary for Derek’s redemption.

The final, key step in Derek’s redemption is to try to undo the damage of his mistakes by being a vocal advocate for anti-racism and against white nationalism. Over time—particularly as the 2016 U.S. presidential election heats up, and Derek sees the white nationalist movement become more and more mainstream—Derek understands that the list of his victims is “incalculably long.” It is like he “helped feed a monster that won’t go back into the cage.” It’s not enough, he knows, to publicly admit to past mistakes—he must also find a way to counterbalance the damage that the “monster” he fed has caused. To do so, Derek continues to educate himself and becomes an unlikely advocate for anti-racism. After Donald Trump wins the 2016 election, Derek gets an urge to do something. Allison helps him realize that “by spending a decade at the forefront of white nationalism, he had built up a massive public debt to society and particularly to people of color, and he want[s] to pay some of it back.” He then writes op-eds for *The New York Times*, gives interviews about his transformation, and thinks about writing a book about his experiences. In this way, Derek shows his understanding that the only way he can truly redeem himself from his white nationalist past is to change his views, to apologize for his mistakes, and to offset the damage he has done at every possible opportunity.



RHETORIC AND LANGUAGE

Rising Out of Hatred shows how powerful of a tool language can be: from the different arguments that Derek uses to convince others to join his white

nationalist cause, to the dog whistles that politicians use to implicitly signal that they endorse white supremacy, to the racist stereotypes that white nationalists perpetuate. This is because language often leads to action. For instance, even though Derek and his father Don (who’s also a white nationalist) disavow violence, mass shooters and other violent extremists often report that they are motivated by white

nationalist rhetoric. So, even if racist language isn’t violent in and of itself, it can directly cause racially motivated violence and discrimination. The book shows that especially in the context of white supremacy, words can hurt people, as rhetoric can be used to manipulate others and cause tangible damage.

Rhetoric has the power to lure people into believing an ideology or signaling support for one, particularly because it can use implicit rather than explicit language. Derek recognizes the power of rhetoric early on in his involvement in the white nationalist movement, when he runs for a local office in Florida as a teenager. He talks about “highway signs in Spanish, urban crime, outsourced middle-class jobs, a collapsing economy, and a societal insistence on political correctness.” Using this kind of coded language, Derek beats a Cuban American incumbent and wins with 60 percent of the vote despite having no political experience. This illustrates the power in using veiled rhetoric, because Derek can allude to racial issues without making explicitly racist statements to gain support.

Derek broadens this idea to the white nationalist movement as a whole. He and Don describe white nationalism as a “modern civil rights movement for whites,” reframing the language to insist that “white people were the victims—not the perpetrators—of structural racism.” By portraying the movement in this way, white people feel more permission to air their grievances and join the movement than they did when the movement’s language centered more on hatred and violence toward non-white people. This demonstrates again how language can be a powerful tool for manipulating people. Politicians also co-opt this strategy to signal their support for the white nationalist movement, doing so in a way that makes it harder to criticize and easier for people to support because it’s vague. The book notes that Donald Trump did this when he ran for president in 2016. He said that he was the “law and order” candidate, that he was qualified to be president because of his “beautiful, terrific genes,” that American cities were overrun by “gangs and thugs,” and that he wanted to “take America back.” Thus, even if Trump wasn’t necessarily a white nationalist, he was alluding to enough of their aims to gain their support without using explicitly racist language.

Language isn’t only used to manipulate people into offering political support or signaling beliefs—it can also have tangible consequences by influencing people to hurt others. For a long time, Derek doesn’t understand how prejudiced and racist language can be harmful. But Derek’s friend Allison illustrates how his words—his statements that racial and ethnic minorities don’t deserve to be full members of society—impact people. She shows him studies proving that racist discrimination and stereotyping negatively impact people’s health, their poverty levels, their ability to be promoted at work, how often they are arrested, the prices they pay at car dealerships or grocery stores, and more. Even if words don’t have a physical impact, they lead to biases that do. Language becomes very salient for

Dylann Roof, a Stormfront user who murdered nine people in a historically Black church in 2015. Roof's attorney later stated that "every bit of [Roof's] motivation came from things he saw on the internet," and that "he is simply regurgitating, in whole paragraphs, slogans, and facts—bits and pieces of facts that he downloaded from the internet directly into his brain." This is another example of how rhetoric can lead people to violent action. Similarly, a man named James Jackson had watched YouTube videos posted by alt-right leader Richard Spencer and white nationalist David Duke, which convinced him "that the white race is being eroded." This idea led him to board a bus from Baltimore to New York City with a sword and two knives. Jackson followed a 66-year-old Black trash collector named Timothy Caughman into a dark alleyway in Times Square and stabbed him to death. Duke and Spencer's words, therefore, had fatal consequences.

When Derek ultimately disavows white nationalism, he understands that the only way to counteract the harmful language he has used in the past is to reveal the danger and manipulation within it. After Trump wins the 2016 presidential election, Derek tries to "sound a warning to the biggest national audience he could find," writing an op-ed in *The New York Times* to explicitly condemn "the wave of violence and vile language that has risen since the election." Derek knows the power of his voice as a former white nationalist, and he hopes that he can show the danger in that wave of "vile language" that he helped foster. The only way to fight harmful rhetoric is to combat it with his own words, showing his manipulation for what it was. The book itself shows another way in which words have power: in the final passage, Derek says that he's trying to "warn people" about the dangers of white nationalism and the rhetoric it has spawned in mainstream politics. Through *Rising Out of Hatred*, he and author Eli Saslow are doing just that: revealing the harmful language that Derek used, how it shaped American politics and manipulated people, and how it ultimately damaged society.

army. In this way, his two names encapsulate the white nationalist ideal: Europeans militantly opposing people they perceive as outsiders.

When Derek decides to renounce white nationalism, he also changes his name, reversing his first and middle name to become Roland Derek Black. He does this for practical reasons, as he no longer wants to be haunted by his white nationalist past. But the reversal of his names represents his own reversal, as he has completely backtracked on all his white nationalist beliefs.

By the end of the book, however, Derek realizes that he can't completely escape his past—he also has a responsibility to own up to it. And so, when he starts publishing stories denouncing white nationalism, he does so under the name "R. Derek Black." In this way, Derek is still underlining the symbolic shift that he has made. But he's also acknowledging the harm he did under his own name as a white nationalist and trying to rectify it, rather than simply trying to make it disappear.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Anchor edition of *Rising Out of Hatred* published in 2019.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☛ No family had done more to help white nationalism bully its way back into mainstream politics, and Derek was the next step in that evolution. He was precocious, thoughtful, and polite, sometimes delivering handwritten thank-you notes to conference volunteers. He never used racist slurs. He didn't advocate for outright violence or breaking the law. His core beliefs were the same as those of most white nationalists: that America would be better off as a whites-only country, and that all minorities should eventually be forced to leave. But instead of basing his public arguments on emotion or explicit prejudice, he spoke mostly about what he believed to be the facts of racial science, immigration, and a declining white middle class.

Related Characters: Derek Black, Don Black

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

This passage provides some background both Derek and his family's involvement in the white nationalist movement. First, the passage tries to make a distinction between Derek's beliefs and actions and other people who attend



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



DEREK'S NAME

Derek's name symbolizes his association with white nationalism and his journey to renounce and then disavow his former identity. When Derek is born, his parents, Don and Chloe, name him Derek Roland Black. "Derek" comes from Theodoric the Great, a ruler who restored the Roman Empire to glory in the late fifth century. Roland comes from *The Song of Roland*, a fictional French poem about a soldier who dies as a martyr when fighting Spanish Muslims for Charlemagne's

conferences based around Stormfront, Derek's father's white pride website. For example, Derek views himself as a white nationalist rather than a white supremacist because he argues *for* white rights rather than *against* non-white people. Derek doesn't use racist slurs or advocate for violence, in contrast to people in the neo-Nazi movement or the KKK. By portraying white nationalism as an emotionless, nonviolent, logical creed, Derek tries to create a contrast between him and others who base their ideology on anger and hate.

And yet, at the same time, the passage implies that white nationalism is still based on prejudice, as the implied reasoning behind a "whites-only country" is that white people are superior to others, and therefore that non-white people should leave the U.S. or should not be considered full members of society. In this way, white nationalism is still based in white supremacy and is still a harmful ideology. In addition, the passage suggests that Derek's ability to frame white nationalism in this way has made Derek vital to the movement and has contributed to the bond he shares with family, as "no family had done more to help white nationalism" emerge into the political mainstream.

●● Under his watch, Stormfront grew into a gigantic, international community of message boards and chat rooms that offered everything from academic research on racial differences, to daily Nazi news links, to dating profiles rife with racial slurs. A few of Stormfront's frequent users went on to bomb synagogues or murder minorities; the Southern Poverty Law Center, a hate-watch group, published a report connecting Stormfront to more than a hundred murders. Don discouraged violence in his own messages on the site, but he also managed the website with the language of a wartime commander, writing about "enemies" and "comrades," in the "fight for our future."

Related Characters: Don Black

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

Here, the book provides some background on the creation of the white pride website Stormfront, which Derek's father, Don, grew from a simple digital bulletin board to an enormous community. This is an example of how communities form around shared values, as people structure their social lives and even romantic lives around

the forums on Stormfront. Derek himself is also socialized on Stormfront from a young age.

This also illustrates how white nationalism can bleed into other types of white supremacy. Even if Derek claims that he is not personally prejudiced and that he doesn't condone violence, his communities are built around sites that propagate both racism and violence, and that kind of online bubble can radicalize people. For instance, some users bombed synagogues, and later, Dylann Roof, is radicalized by what he finds on Stormfront and commits a mass murder at a Black church. In this way, the passage also suggests that manipulative rhetoric can be dangerous because of the kind of action it may incite.

●● As Derek explained it to his listeners, white nationalists were not fighting *against* minority rights but fighting *for* rights of their own. As the white population in the United States continued to drop, Derek and other activists were "simply trying to protect and preserve an endangered heritage and culture," he said. They were trying to save whites from an "inevitable genocide by mass immigration and forced assimilation." Theirs was the righteous cause. *They* were the social justice warriors. "What's happening right now is a genocide of our people, plain and simple," Derek said. "We are Europeans. We have a right to exist. We will not be replaced in our own country."

Related Characters: Derek Black (speaker), Allison Gornik

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

After winning a local election in Florida, the Republican establishment prevents Derek from taking the seat because of his white nationalist views, and so Derek instead starts a radio show to broaden support for those views. Here, the book provides a key insight into Derek and the power of rhetoric. Derek reframes white nationalist arguments so that people don't associate his movement with more violent white supremacist groups like the KKK or neo-Nazis. He argues that white people are experiencing "inevitable genocide" and are trying to "preserve an endangered heritage." By portraying white people as victims rather than racist aggressors against minority rights, Derek knows that he can garner more sympathy and support from white people who similarly view themselves as victims.

Yet it's worth noting that many of Derek's arguments are

based in lies and exaggerations, as well as racist rhetoric and history. As Allison points out later in the book, Derek's argument that white people are experiencing genocide is demeaning to Jewish people, Rwandans, Armenians, and other groups who have actually experienced real, targeted genocide. In addition, she and other students note the illogic of Derek's argument that the United States belongs to white people, since North American land initially belonged to Native Americans.

Lastly, even though Derek doesn't condone violence, he works closely with many people who do, including members of his own family. In this way, his language here is quite dangerous, because it's closely tied to more extremist forms of white supremacy, and because it implies a kind of call to arms, that white people must fight not to be "replaced." As such, the book suggests that Derek's words have far-reaching consequences and create a great deal of harm, even if he can't yet see this.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☛☛ And then there was Derek, the white nationalist prodigy living anonymously in his dorm room, helping to moderate the world's largest white pride website and calling in to his own political radio show five mornings each week. On the air, he repeatedly theorized about "the criminal nature of blacks" and the "inferior natural intelligence of blacks and Hispanics." He said President Obama was "anti-white culture," "a radical black activist," and "inherently un-American." There was nothing micro about Derek's aggressions. He knew that if his views were discovered at New College, he would be vilified on the forum and ostracized on campus. So he decided that semester to be a white activist on the radio and an anonymous college student in Sarasota.

Related Characters: Derek Black (speaker), Barack Obama, Don Black

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

At New College, Derek quickly recognizes that his values are very different from those of his peers; they discuss white privilege and racism, while he has a very different vocabulary. First and foremost, this passage illustrates how racist and damaging Derek's rhetoric is. Even though he sometimes tries to downplay the severity of his words to others, it's clear that he holds deep prejudices. And because Derek publicly espouses his prejudiced views, he has


(whether intentionally or not) led other people to commit hate crimes and bolstered problems like systemic oppression (in which institutions discriminate against people based on race, sex, or other characteristics). In this way, the book emphasizes that words can be powerful because of the tangible impact that they have. Additionally, this language shows that all forms of white supremacy can be damaging—even movements that purport to be nonviolent.

This passage also highlights Derek's acknowledgement that it is difficult to have values that clash with a majority of people in a community, because it often means that a person can't be fully involved in that community. And so, part of Derek's decision to hide his white nationalist background implies that he does like being involved with New College students—even Jewish students or students of color who his beliefs directly target. This implies that Derek is already starting to soften in his beliefs simply by interacting with a diverse group of people. But it also suggests that ostracism would likely be ineffective at changing Derek's beliefs, because he wants to participate in New College life but deeply fears what would happen if he were outed as a white nationalist. Being cut off from that community would not only be upsetting to Derek, but it would cut him off from forming the relationships that will prove necessary to change his views.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☛☛ But what became most evident at New College during those first overnight hours was the beginnings of an ideological rift, a divide that would widen over the next few years on campus. Ultimately, similar debates at campuses all over the country would convulse, splitting America's liberal Left. What was the appropriate response to the most intolerant kinds of free speech? Exclusion or inclusion? Was it better to shame and demonize Derek? Or was it more effective to somehow reach out to him?

Related Characters: Derek Black

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 49-50

Explanation and Analysis

When a New College student outs Derek's white nationalist background on a campus-wide student email forum, the information sends the students into a flurry, wondering what to do about Derek. The debate that ensues shakes not only New College but also the country. In many circles,

people believe that the only way to shut down extremist ideology is to not tolerate it whatsoever, so that it doesn't get any credence. In some ways, the book supports this, noting how people can become radicalized simply by hate speech, like many people were by Stormfront or other white pride publications. Thus, it's important to give these ideas as little legitimacy as possible.

But even the book's framing of this idea as a question suggests that there isn't a concrete answer—that there are a variety of perspectives on the issue and that there may not be only one correct strategy. The book does go on to suggest that ostracism doesn't tend to be as effective as open dialogue in most situations, since the former may push a person further into their ideology. Instead, reaching out and engaging in conversation exposes people to new ideas and may therefore be a better path to changing people's minds.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☛☛ But nonjudgmental inclusion—Matthew believed that tactic had potential, and the more he researched Derek, the more convinced he became. On Stormfront, Matthew learned Derek had been homeschooled by his white nationalist family and therefore spent little time with people of color or Jews. By listening to snippets of Derek's radio show, Matthew came to understand that Derek was sharp, rational, and good at making arguments with outsiders. He could deflect anonymous callers who belittled him and questioned his ideology. He had spent the last decade practicing—and teaching—the verbal tactics of debate against the enemy. So what information could Matthew provide during the course of one Shabbat dinner that would reorder Derek's worldview? There was nothing. So instead of trying to build a case, Matthew began working to build a relationship in which Derek might be able to learn what the enemy was actually like. “The goal was really just to make Jews more human for him,” Matthew said.

Related Characters: Matthew Stevenson (speaker), Moshe Ash, Derek Black, Allison Gornik

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

After Derek is outed as a white nationalist on campus, a Jewish student named Matthew Stevenson invites Derek over to the Shabbat dinner that he hosts with his friend Moshe. Matthew's invitation is a turning point for Derek, as

up until this point, most of his peers have decided to ostracize him for his views. But Matthew's gesture suggests an alternate approach: exposing Derek to a diverse group of people whose views are different from his own. As Matthew notes, because Derek has spent his life entrenched in white nationalist views, he now views outsiders to his community as the “enemy.”

Matthew hopes that fostering relationships with Jewish or non-white students will give Derek a different perspective, allowing him to see people who are different from him as “more human,” as Matthew states. This suggests that simply being friends with a diverse group of people can help change views, particularly those of white nationalists, whose ideology is based on remaining separate from other races and religions.

Later, Allison takes this a step further. While Matthew believes that they have no way of actually changing Derek's mind, Allison understands that having open dialogue—particularly about race—can be critical. Only in doing so is she able to understand Derek's arguments and then point out why his thinking is flawed.

☛☛ Because there was nothing else to do that day—and nowhere else to go with classes canceled—Derek wandered by the event on his way to lunch and stopped at the edge of the quad to listen. In front of him he saw a few of his professors, Matthew, Moshe, and at least two hundred other students. For a brief moment, he wondered: If this many smart people were so affronted by his beliefs, could they all be wrong? He listened to a succession of minority speakers tell stories about the ways in which racism affected their feelings of safety and self-worth. All this time, Derek had dismissed his rejection on campus as an overreaction from hysterical classmates, but now he began to consider if there was truth to what they said. The moment felt significant to him, so he took out his phone and snapped a photo of the crowded quad.

Related Characters: Derek Black, Matthew Stevenson, Moshe Ash, Juan Elias

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

One day at New College, students ask for classes to be cancelled so that they can run events and host speakers to discuss racism on campus, inviting people from the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) to speak. Because

there is nothing else to do, Derek wanders the campus as the events are running, and his thoughts here provide insight into what sort of strategy will be successful in changing Derek's mind.



Up until this point, most of the students have ostracized Derek, with the exception of Matthew, Moshe, and Juan. This feeling that Derek has—that he has nothing else to do and no one else to be with—is due to the way the students are ostracizing him. Derek feels he has no choice but to make friends with the people who are left; here, he must listen to the SPLC members' perspectives. In both cases, even though they aren't explicitly trying to change his mind, simply being exposed to them can help Derek shift his own thinking.

This episode, and Derek's thoughts in response, reflect the idea that both ostracism and open dialogue have a place in reforming behavior. Ostracism can provide a starting point for assessing one's own views—in this case, it forces Derek to understand that he might be thinking incorrectly about structural racism and systemic oppression. But then, open dialogue is what allows him to consider exactly how his views might be flawed. Ostracism alone, as Derek notes, enables him to dismiss his peers as "hysterical." But because he's become friends with Matthew and Moshe, he takes their perspective seriously. Derek even acknowledges that this is an important moment for him, as he wants to capture its significance by taking a picture. Even admitting the possibility that he could be wrong is a key step to his transformation and ultimate redemption.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☛☛ The new status quo in the late 1960s was constant turmoil, so Don started searching the library for possible solutions until one day he found a slight paperback titled *Our Nordic Race*, written by a Virginia preacher named Richard Hoskins. "Today the entire world is seething with unrest," the introduction read. "The line of conflict is found wherever our civilization comes into contact with the belligerent and aggressive nations of the colored world. It is a critical problem which will be solved not by emotion but only by the cold processes of intellect."

Related Characters: Don Black

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis


Don comes of age in the late 1960s, when the end of legalized segregation threw society into "constant turmoil" as described here, particularly in Don's school. This leads him to the library, where finding the book *Our Nordic Race* becomes a key part of Don's introduction to white nationalism. It shows how manipulative rhetoric can be, painting people of color (particularly Black people) as "belligerent and aggressive," while suggesting that white people's response in contrast is marked by the "cold process of intellect." Notably, Hoskins does not acknowledge the bias or racism in framing society as "our world," suggesting that the United States somehow belongs to white people.

Yet Don immediately latches onto these words, later reading every book by the same publisher as well as a magazine called *White Power*. He then starts distributing this magazine, gets on a distribution list for white nationalists, and attends a white nationalist conference—and his ongoing involvement in white nationalism leads him to try to overthrow the government of Dominica. This illustrates how easy it is to progress from relatively mild views to more violent extremism. In this way, the book implies that the boundaries between different forms of white supremacy can be ambiguous and in some ways meaningless, because it's so easy to be radicalized by language over time.

☛☛ "Derek Roland Black," Don said, lingering on each syllable years later, on Derek's twenty-first birthday, as they reminisced together on their joint radio show. Derek in honor of Theodoric, the great Aryan leader. Roland in remembrance of a white martyr who died speaking out for his cause. "There's something about that name I really liked," Don said. "It's the name of a Viking in many ways, a real fighter. Solid and unshakable. When you say it, you can almost hear the sound of clashing steel!"

Related Characters: Don Black (speaker), Derek Black

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

As Don is recounting Derek's birth, he explains the history behind Derek's name. Derek's first name comes from Theodoric the Great, a fifth-century ruler who brought glory back to the Roman Empire. His middle name, Roland,

comes from a French lyric poem called *The Song of Roland*, in which a soldier named Roland dies as a martyr when fighting the Spanish Muslims for Charlemagne's army. Both of Derek's names tie him directly to a heritage of white nationalism and its ideals: militant Europeans fighting for glory, and power.

As Don also notes, the names come with undertones of violence: these are both people willing to sacrifice themselves for the cause, evoking sounds of "clashing steel" and images of a "real fighter." This is the legacy that Don himself has tried to live up to, often sacrificing his own safety to dedicate himself to the white nationalist cause. This is the same core value that he's passed down to Derek, who has struggled at New College and sacrificed many friendships because of his white nationalist beliefs. Even though Derek and Don constantly assert that white nationalism is nonviolent, the language they use around white nationalism often suggests militant dedication, and that is what Don expects from Derek.

These ideas will be particularly significant later, when Derek chooses to renounce white nationalism and live more anonymously by reversing his first and middle name. This reflects Derek's own ideological reversal and his desire to distance himself from the white nationalism that's intrinsic to his family and his former community.

importance of having an open dialogue; it is a critical part of any deep friendship, and it's imperative for Allison to understand Derek's beliefs better so that she can then counteract them. Without that understanding, there is no real way for her to talk to him or persuade him.


But here the book makes an important concession, noting why open dialogue may not always work. Allison feels comfortable talking to Derek because she's white and therefore not a direct target of his white nationalist beliefs. By contrast, it may be harder for someone who feels personally threatened or oppressed by Derek's views to do the same. And Derek, in turn, finds it relatively easy to engage with Allison, whereas he might not feel as comfortable engaging with students who aren't white.


The passage's references to fighting connect to Derek's name, which is symbolic of the militant European ideal that's central to white nationalism. At this point, Derek is willing to fight the "enemy" (anyone who opposes him) to adhere to what he believes in. But seeing Allison as a "confused and curious friend" rather than an "enemy armed for battle" allows him to view the conversation as nonthreatening. In this way, the book suggests that for some students, open dialogue may not be possible. But for people like Allison who do feel comfortable doing so, it's important to take on the burden of fostering open conversation, because only she can truly get through to Derek.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☛☛ Their conversation on the roof had remained mostly civil and productive, largely because Allison also had the advantage of being white. Derek didn't feel implicitly challenged by her racial identity; Allison didn't feel personally threatened by his beliefs. Because she wasn't the one he hoped to oppress or deport, she could also engage with him in discussions that were less emotional than logical. She could present herself not as an enemy armed for battle but as a confused and curious friend who hoped to better understand Derek's racial conclusions.

Related Characters: Allison Gornik, Derek Black

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

As Allison and Derek are developing their friendship, Allison feels that it's important to talk to Derek about his background and clarify his beliefs. This speaks to the

Chapter 7 Quotes

☛☛ Derek's talk ended with a long ovation, and then Don offered a toast to what he called "the next generation." Allison listened as the applause built around her and wondered, even if she could somehow convince Derek of the flaws in his ideology, how could she ever compel him to give up all of this? His parents were glowing. A line of admirers had begun to form near his chair, a dozen people waiting to compliment Derek on his talk. "They really loved and cared about him," Allison said. "Derek was so much more at the center of everything than I'd realized."

Related Characters: Derek Black, Allison Gornik

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

When Allison accompanies Derek to a Stormfront conference, she listens to him speak and sees how important he is to the white nationalist movement. As Don


makes a toast to the “next generation,” it is clear that Derek is the leader of that next wave of white nationalists. Derek is the “heir,” those in the movement sometimes call him—not just in terms of his family, but of the legacy that they have built in the white nationalist movement. Their love for him and pride in him is inextricably tied to his involvement in the movement.

Allison recognizes this, and she knows that this will make it much harder for her to sway Derek away from his beliefs. Politics is inextricable from his interactions with his family; their conferences are structured around not just swapping strategy in the movement but also in seeing one another and catching up, spending quality time together. This hints at one of the most difficult aspects of trying to pull someone away from any ideology: that it often means pulling them away from their family and community as well.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☝☝ But sometimes Allison wanted their conversations about race to be emotionally charged. White nationalism wasn't just some academic thought experiment. It was a caustic, harmful ideology that was causing real damage to people's lives, so Allison began to send Derek links about that, too. She emailed him medical research from Harvard about how psychologists considered racism a chronic stressor with the power to alter brain chemistry. Derek clicked through Allison's links and read about how minority victims of prejudice were more likely to suffer from high blood pressure, elevated heart rate, suppressed immunity, depression, and heart disease. White people in those same studies did not show any physical response to prejudice, which made Derek begin to wonder if in fact he had been wrong in his theory that actually it was white people who were discriminated against.

Related Characters: Allison Gornik, Derek Black

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

As Allison and Derek engage more directly with Derek's white nationalist ideology, Allison starts to have some effect on his thinking. Because they have built a foundation of friendship, respect, and open dialogue, Derek is more willing to listen to and believe the studies that Allison cites. He recognizes that Allison isn't simply being “hysterical” or exaggerating—criticisms that he's leveled in the past at other peers. Instead, he is genuinely willing to listen, which illustrates the importance of the open dialogue in

transforming a person's beliefs.

Allison makes important points that counteract some of Derek's white nationalist arguments and that illustrate that white nationalism isn't as benign as Derek purports it to be. Derek often tries to distinguish white nationalism from other extremist groups or ideologies that explicitly advocate for violence. He suggests that white nationalism isn't about oppressing minority groups but is instead about fighting for white people's rights. However, Allison's studies show that racism, which is intrinsic to white nationalism, *does* have harmful effects, particularly on people of color's health. These studies thus illustrate that white supremacy is harmful in all its forms, not just in those that explicitly advocate for violence.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☝☝ James posted an image of a kickboxer pummeling a Nazi, and hours later Allison saw it on the forum and decided to write a public response. She had spent the last year sitting with Derek, Matthew, Moshe, and others at polite dinner parties. And even if the result wasn't exactly revolutionary, she believed those conversations had opened Derek's mind and begun to change his thinking. What she worried now was that the forum would undo that goodwill and push Derek back into a corner, where he would again see the campus as his liberal enemy.

Related Characters: James Birmingham, Allison Gornik, Derek Black, Matthew Stevenson, Moshe Ash, Richard B. Spencer, David Duke

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 195-196

Explanation and Analysis

After Derek affirms his commitment to white nationalism to the SPLC (even after clarifying that some of his views are softening), another post circulates on the student email forum declaring that Derek isn't welcome on campus. Allison grows frustrated because she knows that attacking and belittling Derek will undermine what she's been able to achieve through their friendship. Through conflicts like these, the book implies that ostracism is only effective up to a point, or in certain situations, in making a person reconsider their ideology. Attacks foster the opposite, as the book demonstrates when showing how white supremacists like David Duke and Richard Spencer react to their opposers. In both of their cases, the violence they experience only makes them angrier and more willing to

lean into their ideology because they know that people outside the white nationalist community already hate them. Instead, as Allison emphasizes here, engaging with a person can be immensely helpful in changing their mind. Derek's dinners with Matthew, Moshe, and Juan have helped Derek realize that not all non-white or Jewish people have to be his "enemy." As Allison notes, the types of conversations they're having are hardly "revolutionary," but they are starting to soften Derek's perspective. Additionally, Allison is taking the time to engage with Derek on the particulars of his ideology, which is also helping him make a gradual change, even though other students can't yet see this. This emphasizes the importance of open dialogue, while ostracism would likely only "push Derek back" into his white nationalist views and cause him to paint everyone else as the "liberal enemy."

☛ By the time he arrived in Bordeaux, France, in the first days of 2013 for his French-immersion class, Derek felt increasingly detached from his white nationalist views. "The ideology is flawed, and I've moved away from it," he told Allison, and when they traded New Year's resolutions, he told her he wanted to "be more mindful of other people and concerned with what they say." Then he started his French classes and befriended a handful of other American college students who were studying abroad. Eventually one of those students searched Derek's name on Google, and soon the group was uninviting him to parties and talking about him loudly in the school. "His name is Black and he doesn't like black people," Derek overheard one of them say. He closed the door of his room and vented online to Allison. She asked him: How many more potential friendships was he willing to sacrifice for an ideology he no longer really believed in? How many more opportunities would he allow himself to lose?

Related Characters: Derek Black, Allison Gornik

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 203

Explanation and Analysis

In the winter of Derek's senior year, he attends a French immersion program in Bordeaux and quickly realizes that his reputation as a white nationalist has followed him to France and is affecting the relationships he can build with other students. Derek's thoughts demonstrate that Allison's tactics of open dialogue have already gone a long way in convincing Derek that white nationalism is "flawed." The more Derek has been able to listen to new

perspectives—not only Allison's views, but also the studies she sends him and the views of the non-white and Jewish students he's befriended—the more Derek realizes the harm in white nationalism. Recognizing this makes him want to be even more "mindful" of others and "concerned" about their lives, not just his own. The empathy he has found is only possible because other students were willing to talk to him about their perspectives.

This passage also provides another example of how difficult it is for Derek to engage in a community when that community believes his values are incongruous with theirs. Just as Derek experienced when he was first outed as a white nationalist at New College, the students here are largely unwilling to remain friends with him because of his beliefs. Not only does this reinforce how communities are often built on shared values—and therefore Derek can't fully participate in the social life at the school—but it also shows the personal cost Derek faces because he continues to adhere to white nationalism. As Allison points out, Derek has to sacrifice a lot of relationships and opportunities in order to maintain his ties to the ideology. In this way, ostracism can also play a part in helping a person reevaluate their beliefs, in addition to open dialogue.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☛ On their long drive back to Sarasota the next day, she began to remind him of the public archive he had built within white nationalism: A website for "white children of the globe." Thousands of public Stormfront posts. Several hundred radio shows. Dozens of interviews, speeches, and a conference now going into its third year. No matter how much Derek wanted to disappear, that legacy wasn't going to disappear with him. In the car, Allison asked Derek how many people he had influenced during his time as a white nationalist. How many had he radicalized? How many had he turned into activists? And how many millions of other people had his rhetoric offended or oppressed?

Related Characters: Derek Black, Allison Gornik

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 205-206

Explanation and Analysis

As Derek starts to withdraw from the white nationalist movement—logging out of Stormfront and leaving his radio show—Allison reminds him that simply moving away from white nationalism is only a piece of his redemption. Acknowledging that his beliefs have changed and no longer

spreading a hateful ideology are key first steps, because they show that Derek understands how manipulative his rhetoric was and how it likely radicalized many people. But in addition, it's important for Derek to publicly take responsibility for the harm that he perpetuated and acknowledge his mistakes. By encouraging him to publicly renounce white nationalism, Allison recognizes that the only way to offset the harm that he's done as a public figure is to draw attention to that harm as a public figure as well. Questioning how far his reach was suggests that they will never know exactly how much damage Derek has done—only that it is widespread and likely incalculable, and therefore Derek must do more than simply “disappear” to make amends.

Ultimately, Derek will disassociate from white nationalism, but he will also take this a step further by actively advocating for anti-racism and calling out white nationalism for its harm at every opportunity. In doing so, he's able to truly offset the damage that he has done and begin to repair the hatred and prejudice he promoted throughout his early life.

community feels that their values don't align. Don's reaction here, however, is one of the most extreme. Portraying Derek's betrayal as the worst experience of his life—and that “it would have been better for their family if Derek hadn't been born”—suggests that what Derek has done is unforgivable and even equivalent to a kind of death.


Using this extreme language shows that Derek's ties to his family were inextricable from his involvement in the white nationalist movement. In many ways, the broader white nationalist community was also like an extended family to him. Just as white nationalist values built a shared bond among them, losing those shared values destroys the bond, even though Derek and his father were always extremely close. This is a major turning point in Derek's relationship with his family, as they're never completely comfortable with each other again.

☞ She told him she was proud of his courage, and as the news continued to spread on Facebook and through the mainstream media, so were many others. Derek's message inbox filled with congratulatory notes and voice mails, many of them from people who had never spoken with him directly about white nationalism. Rose, whom Derek had dated for a few weeks during his first year at New College, wrote that she was “happy/proud, and I know it can't be easy.” Juan said he had always believed Derek was “smart and kind enough to find his own way out.” Moshe said it was “pretty damn brave.” Matthew thought Derek had shown “uncommon courage.”

Chapter 11 Quotes

☞ Don dialed Derek late that night, and Derek thought this time his father sounded more measured—practically calm. Don said he'd been reflecting on his life, thinking back on the lowest moments. He had been shot in the stomach as a teenager. He'd spent years in federal prison. He'd suffered a stroke and fought off depression and seen many of his closest friends die. But this, Don told Derek, was by far the worst experience of his life. Don said he had weighed out the pros and cons, and he had concluded that it would have been better for their family if Derek hadn't been born. Derek sat in stunned silence as Don hung up. Then Don called back a few moments later, his voice once again shaky, to tell Derek that of course that wasn't true, and to apologize.

Related Characters: Derek Black, Don Black

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 223

Explanation and Analysis

After Derek publishes a letter through the SPLC renouncing his white nationalist beliefs, Don and the rest of Derek's family are in complete shock, reacting with anger and grief. Their collective reaction illustrates how difficult it is for someone to take part in a family or community when the

Related Characters: Rose, Juan Elias, Moshe Ash, Matthew Stevenson (speaker), Derek Black, Allison Gornik

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 224

Explanation and Analysis

After Derek renounces his white nationalist beliefs, he receives a huge outpouring of support from the other students at New College. This contrasts with the reaction that Derek receives from his family, who are heartbroken that he has disavowed white nationalism and who essentially choose to disown him from the family. Because Derek now aligns with the New College students' shared values, they are much more willing to accept him. On the other hand, because he no longer shares white nationalist values with his family, they are much less accepting of him, and he can no longer fully participate in that community. This is one of the reasons that the other students

acknowledge it was so hard for Derek to leave white nationalism, because they recognize that it meant breaking with his closest family members and friends.

Additionally, the outpouring of support confirms that this was a key step in Derek making amends for the damage that he caused as a part of the white nationalist movement. It wasn't enough for him to simply stop spreading this harmful ideology, although that was a big piece of his transformation. In addition, it was also vital that he publicly denounce white nationalism, because for so long he disseminated its message and won people over to the movement.

“People who disagreed with me were critical in this process,” he wrote. “Especially those who were my friends regardless, but who let me know when we talked about it that they thought my beliefs were wrong and took the time to provide evidence and civil arguments. I didn't always agree with their ideas, but I listened to them and they listened to me.

“Furthermore, a critical juncture was when I'd realize that a friend was considered an outsider by the philosophy I supported. It's a huge contradiction to share your summer plans with someone whom you completely respect, only to then realize that your ideology doesn't consider them a full member of society. I couldn't resolve that.”

Related Characters: Derek Black (speaker), Allison Gornik, Moshe Ash, Matthew Stevenson, Juan Elias

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 225

Explanation and Analysis

After publishing his letter disavowing white nationalism, Derek speaks with an interviewer to discuss the factors that helped him escape the white nationalist movement. In this statement, Derek emphasizes how important open dialogue was with the other students at New College. The first paragraph in this quote alludes to Allison, who was Derek's “friend[] regardless” of his white nationalist beliefs, but who wasn't shy about disagreeing with him. His statement also sheds light on the fact that even though he didn't always agree with her, simply having conversations was crucial to Derek gaining new perspectives on issues, which then led him to change his views because of all the new information he absorbed.

The second paragraph refers to friendships he had with

people like Matthew, Moshe, and Juan. These friends didn't even try to change Derek's mind on political issues. Instead, they knew that simply fostering relationships with Derek would help him reconsider whom he considered “enemies.” White nationalism doesn't consider Jewish people or people of color to be “full member[s] of society,” but because of the genuine friendships these young men formed with Derek, Derek was forced to reconsider that perspective, as he notes here. In this way, both of these passages emphasize how important open dialogue was to reforming Derek's views. Without those perspectives and friendships—if everyone at New College had ostracized him—Derek would never have been able to escape from the white nationalist movement, becoming even more entrenched in the ideology.

For a decade, white nationalism had rallied around Derek as if he were the movement's lovable mascot: young and smart, with a funny hat and bright red hair. Everyone felt as if they knew him, and so his rejection also seemed personal.

“Anger and disappointment,” one poster wrote. “Then again, we don't need weaklings in our cause.”

“Derek's now an open enemy to the survival of the white face.”

“He's a traitor without hope or redemption. Should WN's ever seize power, his name should figure prominently on the ‘Hunt Down List.’”

“Brass knuckles to the face and groin. Then water boarding.”

Related Characters: Derek Black, Don Black

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 228-229

Explanation and Analysis

After Derek renounces white nationalism, messages start popping up on Stormfront about what many users view as Derek's betrayal of the movement. The quotes provided here from various users illustrate that it isn't just Derek's family who find that Derek's values no longer align with their own. Because Derek no longer adheres to white nationalist values, they cut him out of the community completely. Not only do they withdraw their support for him, but they also become actively antagonistic toward him, labeling him an “enemy” in the way they label non-white people as “enemies.” This reiterates how Derek's political values have formed the basis of his participation in the white nationalist community, and so giving up those values



now means giving up that community as well.


This parallels a passage earlier in the book when people who disagreed with Don and Derek started threatening them over the phone. Though frightening, this bonded them together because they saw themselves as martyrs defending a righteous cause. Now, however, the threats are coming from a community Derek once loved, and the fact that they are now willing to threaten him with violence—“brass knuckles” and “water boarding,” or putting him on the “Hunt Down List”—highlights again how dangerous, radical, and violent the white nationalist movement is. This contradicts Derek’s former attempts to portray the movement as a nonviolent.

☛ For the last decade he had been one person in public, and now he was another. All of the stereotypes he had promoted, all of the misinformation he’d helped spread, all of the hurtful and racist things he had believed and then said—it was all behind him now. That was Derek. This was Roland. He told Allison he never wanted to log on to Stormfront or watch cable news or so much as think about white nationalism or white supremacy ever again.

“It’s all over and done with,” he told her. Except at that very moment, at a white nationalist conference in Tennessee and beyond, the ideas he’d been promoting were continuing to spread.

Related Characters: Derek Black (speaker), Allison Gornik

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 235

Explanation and Analysis

Soon after denouncing white nationalism, Derek decides to legally change his name to Roland Derek Black (switching his first and middle names) in an effort to live a less public life going forward. This is a major symbolic shift for Derek, as it shows that he’s willing to break with the white nationalist legacy that his parents gave him. Derek’s first and middle names both drew on the white nationalist ideal of the militant European fighting for power and glory. So, reversing those names reflects Derek’s reversal in ideology. Derek walks out as a new person, both literally in taking on a new name, and metaphorically in taking on new values and a new public persona. This is a key part of Derek’s redemption, as he acknowledges all of the “hurtful and

racist things he had believed and then said.” This is his attempt to separate himself from that harm.

However, the book implies that while this is an important step, this is not Derek’s *final* step in redeeming himself. Even though he’s denounced white nationalism, he has not yet tried to rectify the damage he did in spreading his ideology and making it more palatable in mainstream politics. While Derek believes that he’s done with the movement completely, the book foreshadows that Derek has more work to do to rectify his past.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☛ In June 2015, Roof scouted out a historically black church in Charleston, South Carolina, and traveled there alone with a handgun. He went to a Bible study attended by black and mostly elderly congregants and waited until they stood up to pray. Then he opened fire and killed nine people, firing off dozens of rounds as he shouted about wanting to “start a race war.”

“A crazy kid latching onto portions of our cause” was how Don later explained it to the media, as the shooting brought Stormfront back onto the front page of *The New York Times*. “If the movement has a leading edge, it is Stormfront,” the Times wrote, and later in court Roof’s defense attorney attempted to blame the “racist internet” for Roof’s massacre. “Every bit of motivation came from things he saw on the internet,” his attorney David Bruck said. “He is simply regurgitating, in whole paragraphs, slogans, and facts—bits and pieces of facts that he downloaded from the internet directly into his brain.”

Related Characters: Don Black, Derek Black

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 246-247

Explanation and Analysis

While Derek is at grad school, focusing on his studies and living happily outside the white nationalist bubble, Dylann Roof commits a mass shooting at a historically Black church after spending months on Stormfront (Derek’s father’s white pride website). This is one of several examples of extreme violence prompted by white nationalist rhetoric that the book brings up, and it illustrates why manipulative language can be so dangerous.

Even though Don dismisses the incident as a “crazy kid latching onto portions of our cause,” that doesn’t excuse the fact that Roof would likely not have committed that kind of

mass violence had he not been exposed to the rhetoric on racist sites. He chose to act according to the militaristic language that people like Don have often used. Don has often spoken in excitement about a “race war” in the United States; Roof was simply acting on that rhetoric, to the point that his lawyers use this idea as a defense for Roof in court. Thus, Roof’s case is a prime example of how rhetoric can lead to violent action.

Moreover, this passage also illustrates the problem with trying to distinguish white nationalism from more extremist forms of white supremacy. Because even if Roof simply began with Derek’s same ideas that white people and people of color should live separately, white nationalist resources like the Stormfront website provided a gateway to more radical groups and aspects of the movement. In this way, the book emphasizes that the boundaries between these different forms of white supremacy are essentially meaningless because they all bleed into one another and cause a great deal of harm in all of their forms.

☝ What Trump said during those next months was that he wanted to ban Muslims from entering the United States. He said he was the “law and order candidate” in the age of Black Lives Matter. He said he was qualified to be president in large part because of his “beautiful, terrific genes—a wonderful inheritance.” He said his primary goal was to erase the legacy of Barack Obama, the country’s first black president, who Trump continued to insinuate was a foreign-born Muslim. He said America’s inner cities were overrun by “gangs and thugs,” and “right now, if you walk down the street, you get shot”—and then to prove that point he re-tweeted a crime statistic suggesting that 81 percent of white murder victims were killed by blacks. A few days later, after criminologists told Trump that his number was wildly off base—that in fact it was only 14 percent—Trump said, “What? Am I gonna check every statistic?”

Related Characters: Donald Trump (speaker), Barack Obama

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 250

Explanation and Analysis

In the summer of 2015, Donald Trump announces his candidacy for the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Trump quickly becomes popular using racist “dog whistles”—code language that signals to the white nationalist movement that he supports them. Politicians use this kind of language to make it easier for certain groups to support them while

also making it more difficult for others to criticize their language, which in turn allows politicians to manipulate people for more power.

For example, saying that he is the “law and order candidate” puts Trump directly at odds with Black Lives Matter, a movement protesting police brutality against Black people. Trump’s statement that he has “terrific genes” and a “wonderful inheritance” also signals his whiteness, particularly when he places this fact in contrast to Obama, whom he again insinuates is not American. Thus, even if Trump doesn’t necessarily identify as white nationalist, he signals his support for enough of their views to earn their endorsement without using explicitly racist language.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☝☝ The wave of violence and vile language that has risen since the election is only one immediate piece of evidence that this campaign’s reckless assertion of white identity comes at a huge cost. More and more people are being forced to recognize now what I learned early: Our country is susceptible to some of our worst instincts when the message is packaged correctly.


No checks and balances can redeem what we’ve unleashed. The reality is that half of the voters chose white supremacy..

It’s now our job to argue constantly that what voters did in elevating this man to the White House constitutes the greatest assault on our own people in a generation, and to offer another option...

Those of us on the other side need to be clear that Mr. Trump’s callous disregard for people outside his demographic is intolerable, and will be destructive to the entire nation.

Related Characters: Derek Black (speaker), Donald Trump

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 267-268

Explanation and Analysis

After Donald Trump wins the presidential election, Derek feels guilty because he helped make the white nationalist movement more mainstream, which the book suggests played a role in getting Trump elected. Writing an opinion piece for *The New York Times* under the name R. Derek Black, Derek illustrates not only his desire to make amends for the harm he caused, but also to warn about the dangers of white nationalism.

First, the fact that Derek writes the opinion piece at all is significant. By this point, Derek has withdrawn from white nationalism and publicly disavowed it. But here, he takes this process a step further by trying to persuade people away from white nationalism. The fact that he does so under the name “R. Derek Black” is particularly significant. Earlier, Derek wanted to completely escape the person he was under the name Derek Black, which is why he reversed his first and middle names to become Roland Derek Black. Now, he understands that to fully redeem himself, he has to own up to the legacy of what he has done as Derek Black and try to rectify it.

Derek tries to make amends by identifying the many dangers of white nationalism. He illustrates that it is white supremacy simply by another name, “packaged correctly” using manipulative rhetoric in order to win people over. He alludes to the U.S. Constitution, noting that the “checks and balances” within it will not withstand the amount of support that white nationalism has gained now that half the people in the country have voted for someone who the book suggests uses racist rhetoric. Derek’s warning puts into stark terms how “destructive” white nationalism is to the country.

Chapter 14 Quotes

●● During the coming months, Don and Derek would watch as white nationalism continued to explode into mainstream politics. There would be fights over the destruction of Confederate monuments, followed by a succession of marches and rallies led by white nationalists throughout the South. One of those marches would arrive in downtown Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017, where Richard Spencer, David Duke, and hundreds of neo-Nazis would carry guns and torches into downtown, threatening counterprotesters with chants of “White lives matter” and “You will not replace us,” until one neo-Nazi rammed his car into a crowd, killing one counterprotester and injuring nineteen others. Trump would go on national TV to explain away the violence by blaming “both sides”—what he called the “alt-left” and also “the good people” on the “alt-right”—creating a moral equivalency between racists and antiracists. Don would call Trump’s comments “the high point” of white nationalism during his lifetime. Derek would write another opinion piece for *The New York Times* to say that Trump’s “frightening statement” had “legitimized” a racist ideology. Don would watch Stormfront’s traffic triple overnight, spiking to 300,000 daily page views, signifying what he called the “full awakening of our people.”

Related Characters: Don Black, Derek Black, Richard B. Spencer, David Duke, Donald Trump

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 282

Explanation and Analysis

In the spring of 2017, Derek visits Don for the first time in months. As they talk in the final pages of the book, the narration looks forward at the challenges that will face the country in the ensuing year—particularly the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. The fact that this is a flash forward brings an ominous tone to the passage, and neither Derek nor Don know the extent of the harm that will stem from the white nationalist movement. However, this rally clearly reinforces how dangerous white nationalist ideology has become. Here, the white nationalist movement bleeds into and joins with other dangerous groups, like neo-Nazis and the KKK, to feed an even more powerful movement (often captured under the umbrella term “alt-right”). This emphasizes that one of the most harmful aspects of white nationalism is that at its heart, it shares the same goals as more extreme white supremacist groups, and these groups can do major damage when joined together.

This passage also illustrates how rhetoric and language can be very dangerous. The book suggests that Donald Trump has legitimized white nationalism, emboldening people to support it openly. The scene of chaos, violence, and hatred in this passage is implied to stem directly from the white nationalist movement that Trump has helped make more mainstream. Creating an equivalency between racists who drive their cars into crowds and anti-racist counterprotests only further justifies violence and white supremacy, normalizing the idea that extremists are “good people.” All the while, Derek understands the power of this language and his responsibility to continue denouncing white nationalism and the people who support it. Don’s statement even suggests that the problem may grow worse, predicting a “full awakening” of the movement sometime in the future.

So, not only does Derek continue to write op-eds to counter this manipulative language, but as the book concludes, it becomes clear that *Rising Out of Hatred* is part of his desire to warn people about white nationalism. With the book, Derek and author Eli Saslow both aim to demonstrate the movement’s growing power and violence and to provide guidance for how to interrupt it on an individual level.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

INTRODUCTION

When author Eli Saslow first sought out Derek Black, he couldn't find Derek anywhere. In 2013, having spent his life up until that point as the future leader of white nationalism in the United States, Derek disavowed his beliefs, apologized for supporting the movement, and disappeared. A few years later, when Derek was in graduate school, Saslow reached out to him for an interview. But Derek wasn't interested in being contacted or connecting his past life to his current one.

However, in the next months, white supremacy and white nationalism became part of the political mainstream surrounding debates about immigrants, refugees, police shootings, and the rise of Donald Trump's presidential campaign. Derek's godfather, David Duke—a former KKK Grand Wizard—ran for the Senate. Stormfront, a hate website that Derek's father Don Black founded, gained much more traffic. Each week, Derek heard echoes of language he popularized on his former radio show, like “white genocide” and “reverse racism.”

In the summer of 2016, then, Derek reached out to Saslow, explaining that he sometimes felt guilty for what was happening. He asked to meet, noting that his privacy felt less important in the wake of rising white nationalism. He and Saslow subsequently spent hundreds of hours together over several years to write this book. Saslow interviewed Derek's family and friends, and Derek's commitment never wavered. He may have instigated some of the country's racial resentment, but his story might also point to a way forward.

Saslow's introduction sets up Derek's story as a journey to make amends for his white nationalist beliefs as well as his participation in the white nationalist movement throughout his early life. When Saslow first reaches out to Derek, Derek has taken the step of admitting his mistakes and to apologizing for the damage he has caused—which the book will go on to show are two key steps in finding that redemption.



As Saslow gives more background on Derek, it becomes evident that white nationalism wasn't just a belief system for Derek—white nationalists and white supremacists constituted his primary community, as his father and godfather were also heavily involved in shaping these movements. And as Derek reflects on the language that he helped popularize on his radio show, the book hints at how language can be a powerful tool to manipulate people into believing that they're being victimized.



Derek's decision to reach back out to Saslow suggests that disassociating himself from white nationalism, admitting his mistakes, and apologizing for the damage he has caused are only part of his redemption process. In addition, he recognizes that he must try to actively rectify some of the damage that he has caused in growing white nationalism's popularity. This involves both pointing out how white nationalism is dangerous and demonstrating how someone might escape that ideology in the same way he has.



CHAPTER 1

In fall 2008, 150 of the world's most prominent white nationalists, Klansmen, and neo-Nazis arrive for a meeting in Memphis. Despite attempts by local governments to stop the meeting, it is held in a nondescript hotel conference room. Their goal is to “restore White America,” particularly following Barack Obama's election four days earlier. President-Elect Obama is receiving an average of 30 death threats each day, and gun sales have skyrocketed, but the Department of Homeland Security considers this meeting to be a top threat. They know that it could recruit many new members to the racist movement.

David Duke is organizing the conference. At 58, he has spent his life working to push the movement from the fringes to the far conservative right. He's rebranded himself from a KKK Grand Wizard to a “racial realist” politician giving rants on YouTube. At the conference, he hands over the keynote address to “the leading light” of the movement: Derek.

Nineteen-year-old Derek gets up from his laptop, where he is running a live radio broadcast on a station that he started himself. He is young, but he is already well-known: he's started a website for “white children of the globe” and a radio network, and he's won a local election as a Republican in Florida. He is a prodigy in the movement and a product of it—his father, Don Black, led the Klan for nearly a decade and created Stormfront, the internet's first and largest white pride website. Duke sometimes refers to Derek as “the heir.”

Derek is thoughtful, polite, and never uses racist slurs. He doesn't advocate for outright violence: his core beliefs are that the U.S. would be better off as an all-white country. On his radio show, he couches this belief in speeches about racial science, immigration, and a declining white middle class. The first half of his show is often innocuous, until he begins talking about “the survival and continued dominance of the great white race.”

Flashing back to 2008, the book establishes some of the white nationalist movement's recent growth, particularly in response to Barack Obama's election. This passage suggests that even while there may be some distinctions between white nationalists, Klansmen, and neo-Nazis, the differences between them largely disappear because they're all pursuing goals based on bigotry and white racial dominance. The passage also implies how dangerous they can be as a group, such that the Department of Homeland Security views them as a major threat—suggesting that white supremacy in all its forms can be dangerous.



Duke's transformation from KKK Grand Wizard to YouTube personality underscores a broader shift in the movement: downplaying the violence in it and focusing the discussion on ideas of being “realistic” about race. The same people are essentially espousing the same ideas—but they're able to gain more support simply by shifting their language, which shows how persuasive rhetoric can be.



This passage highlights how much Derek has been immersed in white nationalism even from a young age: he grew up with these values because his father instilled them in him. Derek is not just the “heir” to the movement, but also to the work that his father specifically has built; the movement and Derek's family are inherently tied together. Additionally, the work cited here shows the impact that Derek has already had—even on children—and hints at how part of his transformation process will lie in making amends for that work.



Here, the book expands on some of Derek's beliefs. Just as Derek himself often does, the passage attempts to clarify how Derek is different from the more violent extremists or explicit bigots around him. At the same time, Derek's statements about wanting to maintain the “continued dominance of the great white race” demonstrate that his beliefs are still very much rooted in racism and white supremacy, both of which are harmful.



Derek tells the audience about his campaign in Florida, when he heard about all the reasons white Republican neighbors felt their culture was under threat: highway signs in Spanish, urban crime, outsourced middle-class jobs, and political correctness. Derek explains that white people are becoming a minority, and they're eager for white candidates to talk about these issues so that they can go to the polls as a voting bloc. Even though Derek campaigned with no experience and no diploma, he beat a Cuban American incumbent with 60 percent of the vote. Derek tells the crowd that the Republican Party can become the "White Party," and people start to applaud his desire to "save white people."

Don Black, 55, then joins Derek onstage for a Q&A. He is tall, with thick gray hair and blue eyes. He recently had a stroke and now walks with a cane to steady himself. He relies on Derek more than ever—not only physically, but to help manage Stormfront's growing business. Derek grew up with a Confederate flag in his bedroom and spent time on Stormfront in private chat rooms, and now Don marvels at the adult his son is becoming—the direct inheritor of Don's own beliefs.

When Derek was 10, Don and his wife Chloe pulled Derek out of school, believing it was being overrun by Haitians and Hispanics. Derek wrote on his own webpage, "It's a shame how many white minds are wasted in that system." Derek then stayed home during the day while working on a curriculum of his own creation, teaching himself coding and building the Stormfront children's website. He started joining Don on interviews with outlets like *USA Today*, Nickelodeon, and NBC.

Don, for his own part, was shot in the chest in high school while stealing a mailing list on behalf of a white power organization. In college, he joined the KKK and rose through the ranks. The FBI later caught him when he tried to overthrow the government of Dominica, hoping to turn it into a white utopia. He launched Stormfront in the late 1990s, which fostered violent attacks against minorities, synagogues, and hate-watch groups.

Derek recognizes the power of rhetoric and manipulating language to suit one's purposes. So, rather than calling out race specifically, he positions white people as victims (who need to be "saved") and uses coded language (like highway signs in Spanish or urban crime) to talk about white people's frustrations with other races without having to explicitly align himself with racism or white supremacy. In doing so, he knows, the Republican Party can co-opt these ideas into the mainstream to gain white support broadly.



To Derek, white nationalism is not only his political ideology, but it also reflects values that his family shares, and having those same values is part of what makes Don so proud of Derek. This implies that Derek didn't necessarily make a conscious choice to become a white nationalist—rather, he was indoctrinated into the movement by his family and community.



This passage illustrates how deeply Derek is immersed in white nationalism despite his young age. At 10 years old, he already believes that white children's minds are being "wasted" by interacting with non-white children—a racist notion that again undermines Derek's assertion that white nationalism shouldn't be based on prejudice. Derek clearly learns these ideas from his parents, who espouse similar beliefs, illustrating how families are often built around shared values.



Don's involvement in white nationalism underscores the fact that Derek was brought up by a prominent white nationalist and that it is a major part of his family life and values. Additionally, this passage shows how white nationalism often feeds into other white supremacist groups and leads to radicalization and violence, like Don's attempt to overthrow the government of Dominica.



Derek, on the other hand, is studious and quiet. He learned world history from a 1914 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* because Don thought it reflected their values. As a teenager, Derek thought white nationalism could become more popular if it distanced itself from a history of violence—not fighting *against* minorities but *for* white rights. Gradually, the movement spread, and it grew even more when they imposed new rules on Stormfront banning slurs, Nazi insignia, and threats of violence. After this, Don realized that Derek represented the future of the “white revolution.”

Sparking this revolution came with challenges: when Republicans learned about Derek’s racial views, they tried to prevent him from taking his elected seat by stating that he failed to sign a mandatory loyalty oath to the Republican Party. Derek stated that he was being discriminated against as a “pro-white” activist, noting that the Republican committee chairman, Sid Dinerstein, was Jewish. They continued to spar in the press, and Stormfront became filled with hate speech against Dinerstein.

People started calling into radio stations defending Derek’s position. Don recorded these calls, asserting that white nationalism wasn’t a fringe ideology but the “natural impulse” for most white people in the U.S.—they held prejudices even if they didn’t identify as racist. Don thought this might be the time when people were most susceptible to joining the movement.

The day before the first committee meeting, when Derek said that he would be there to claim his seat, Don and Derek started getting death threats, which was nothing new for their family. They had lived in West Palm Beach, Florida for 25 years to be close to Chloe’s family and job, and they surrounded their home with thick bushes and trees, only letting family and a few white nationalist friends visit. But now, Don was also getting messages from people who said they had guns trained on the house. After some consideration, Don called the police and told them about the messages, wondering if he should tell Derek to stay home from the meeting.

Derek recognizes the importance of language and aims to distance himself from other forms of white supremacy. Positioning the white nationalist movement as a civil rights movement for white people is a key way in which Derek tries to distinguish his movement from the KKK or neo-Nazis, and it’s what ultimately allows him to help shepherd white nationalist beliefs into the mainstream. Yet even Don’s thought that Derek will help lead the white “revolution” suggests that white nationalism still carries the same potential for violence as other forms of white supremacy.



Again, even if Derek doesn’t personally use anti-Semitic language, his association with Stormfront illustrates that he is closely connected to anti-Semites. He also tacitly accepts people who are more than willing to espouse prejudice, making the boundaries between these movements unclear. And again, Derek tries to harness language to paint himself as victimized for being a “pro-white” activist, when in reality, he is the one whose beliefs are intolerant and discriminatory.



While Derek tries to portray his beliefs as not based in racism or white supremacy, Don makes it clear that white nationalism is rooted in taking advantage of people’s “natural impulse” toward prejudice, even if they don’t want to identify as racist. This makes it evident that white nationalism is similarly based on racist beliefs, and that all types of white supremacist groups are harmful.



The death threats that Don and Derek receive as a result of their white nationalist beliefs reinforce their ability to portray themselves as victims. This also illustrates how ostracism and attacks are ineffective ways of fighting against harmful beliefs. This only makes Don and Derek closer and more entrenched in their belief system, as they feel as though they’re part of a community that sticks together and keeps its members safe from outsiders.



Derek, on the other hand, wasn't worried about death threats. The only thing on his mind was failing and "having the white race collapse." The day of the committee meeting, Derek went through a side entrance of the building. Security officers asked him to leave, and Derek said that he planned to file a lawsuit. Later, Don wrote on Stormfront that "Republican Jews are particularly vile," but that Derek is planning on coming back.

Many months later, after failing to retake his seat on the committee, Derek parlays his notoriety into his own regular morning radio show. He speaks about his ideology, though he claims he's not a hateful person. He explains that racial diversity causes a lot of problems, recommends writings from Holocaust deniers, and talks about KKK ceremonies. Derek also uses the show to interview other white nationalists about their experiences, always framing themselves as victims of a genocidal government and anti-white discrimination.

The radio show becomes so popular that Derek starts hosting five days a week with Don's help. Don and Chloe are so encouraging that they push him to enroll in a community college, then to transfer to a four-year school after he gets straight A's. He is accepted to the New College of Florida in 2010, a liberal arts school in Sarasota with 800 students total. His parents tell him they'll pay his full tuition, considering it a good investment in Derek and in their cause.

New College is more than 80 percent white, but it is also listed in college guides as the most liberal school in Florida. One day, a caller on the radio show asks Don if he is worried about his son moving away from home to live "among the enemy in a hotbed of multiculturalism." Don isn't worried—Derek is a non-conformist, and if anyone will be influenced there, it'll be other students.

CHAPTER 2

Derek drives himself to college with everything stuffed into his car. But on his way, he gets lost, and then he can't find the building where orientation is being held. Then, he sees another student—Juan Elias—who is also looking for the orientation. Like Derek, he is a community college transfer student, so they agree to find the orientation together.

Again, while Derek portrays himself as being concerned about white people, there are people in the white nationalist movement (like his father) whose beliefs are centered on denigrating and discriminating against other groups of people. This illustrates how even comparatively mild views like Derek's can still be harmful, because they're closely associated with (and may even encourage) more extreme white supremacist beliefs.



Derek tries to separate his ideology from other groups in arguing that he's not a hateful person. But Derek nevertheless references extremist movements like neo-Nazism and the KKK, potentially encouraging his radio show listeners to adopt the violent extremism that these groups promote. He also understands how to package his talking points in order to make listeners more sympathetic to the white nationalist movement, illustrating how manipulative rhetoric can be.



Don and Chloe's thoughts here continue to tie together family and shared values. To them, investing in Derek also represents an investment in the future of the white nationalist movement. They believe Derek will take up both the mantle of their family and the mantle of their ideology, intrinsically binding the two together.



The caller recognizes that communities are built around shared values—and in this case, New College's community is a "hotbed of multiculturalism" where Derek might not necessarily mesh well with the "enemy." This hints at the social conflict Derek will encounter when he and many of his classmates do not share the same worldview.



Already, Derek's white nationalist views are incongruous with his new environment and the relationships he is building (it's possible that Juan isn't white, given that he has a Spanish first name). Even though Derek believes that white people would be better off separate from minorities, he immediately relates to Juan as they find the orientation together.



Juan is from Miami, which Derek once referred to as “the front lines of the third-world invasion.” Juan moved to Miami from Peru when he was 10 and attended a high school made up of 94 percent Hispanic students. Derek doesn’t mention anything about his background and remains polite; both have rarely spent time with people outside their races. They find the orientation together and realize that they share two classes and live in the same dormitory. They sit in the dorm, with Derek playing guitar and Juan listening to his country songs.

Juan was born amid a communist uprising in the late 1980s in Peru; a few years later, men murdered his uncle as punishment for working as a community organizer. As a result, Juan’s mother left him with his grandmother and traveled to the U.S. on a legal visa, saving money for Juan to join her three years later. Juan was traumatized by the move, and he spoke little English. But he managed to learn the language, Americanize his wardrobe, and get into honors classes. Still, he’s never felt like he truly belongs, and he hopes that New College will be the first place that feels like home.

The first night the boys are on campus, Juan and Derek explore the school, and they see some older students streaking to the swimming pool, which is closed. The students are “men and women, straight and gay, white and brown,” but all of them unselfconsciously leap in. Juan takes off his shirt and jumps into the pool, but Derek walks away in his clothes and goes back to his dorm.

Derek quickly discovers that not everyone thinks like him. A student-driven email forum often talks about white privilege, racism, micro-aggressions, and trigger warnings. They discuss the right to self-expression, universal equality, gender and sexuality, and ableism. Derek, by contrast, helps moderate the world’s largest white pride website, theorizes about the “criminal nature of blacks,” and asserts that President Obama is a “radical black activist.” He knows that if his views are discovered at New College, he will be vilified on the forum. So, he decides to continue his work without telling anyone.

At college, Derek spends much of his time outside. He often sits in the courtyard doing homework with Juan and playing guitar. One day, an Orthodox Jewish student named Matthew Stevenson sits next to Derek, singing along to his music. Derek once wrote “Jews are NOT white” on Stormfront, but he quickly gets to know Matthew, who is funny and bright and likes medieval history just like Derek does.

Again, the friendship that Derek is already building with Juan implicitly challenges the ideology that Derek has expressed in the past. This suggests that simply being exposed to a diverse group of people and building personal relationships can be helpful in changing people’s minds, particularly when they find things in common rather than focusing on differences.



Juan’s backstory humanizes him, counterbalancing the dehumanizing language that Derek uses to describe minorities. It also illustrates that Juan is trying to find a community that shares his values and feels like home to him, which is ironic given that (unbeknownst to him) his first friend on campus is prejudiced toward immigrants like himself.



The description of the students jumping in the pool together emphasizes New College’s diversity. But while this makes Juan feel as though he belongs, this type of camaraderie does not align with Derek’s values. This suggests a tension in Derek’s life: he has to sacrifice participating in the community at New College due to his values and the fact that the other students don’t share them.



In contrast with Derek’s white nationalist values and the racist language that he uses, the book also explores some of the more progressive and socially conscious language that’s common at New College. Derek fears what might happen if people discover his background because he acknowledges the fact that his values don’t align with the other students’. Because of that, he is in danger of not being accepted by the community or being fully able to participate in it, providing another example of how communities tend to be built on shared values.



Just like Derek’s friendship with Juan, simply being exposed to Matthew, who is Jewish, makes Derek start to reevaluate his beliefs. While his white nationalist ideology would hold that he and Matthew shouldn’t interact, by sharing conversation, interests, and friendship, Derek grows more open to a different perspective.



Over time, Derek realizes how much he likes the students around him, and he starts actively disguising his beliefs. When a classmate randomly brings up Stormfront one day, Derek pretends not to know what it is. He is beginning to feel at home. He gets to know another student named Rose, who often stops by the courtyard to listen to him play. They get to know each other and go dancing, and he thinks that she is smart, thoughtful, and kind. After several weeks, they circle around the possibility of dating—until Derek learns that Rose is Jewish.

Derek has spent many hours online debating “the Jewish Question”—whether Jewish people should be considered white. The white nationalist movement has a long history of anti-Semitism, and Derek made his own position clear in his teens. He explained that “Jews are the cause of all the world’s strife” and promoted this idea on Stormfront. Derek wrote that Jewish people were smart, “possibly evil,” and were orchestrating a plot to weaken the white race by promoting multiculturalism and taking over the media and government.

And yet, Rose is sweet and unassuming. Derek has never spent so much time with someone Jewish and has learned a lot about her. She lived in Texas, Minneapolis, Mexico, and Arkansas. She belonged to a Reform congregation whose services were interfaith. The goal of the congregation was to serve as a focal point of Jewish life, despite the Jewish population having dropped dramatically in Arkansas. Judaism was Rose’s primary identifier to others—her nickname at school was “the Jew.” She needed a note from her rabbi to explain to the school that Yom Kippur was a real holiday, and kids often teased her for killing Jesus.

While Rose often felt like an outcast in her hometown, Derek doesn’t make her feel that way. He points out sexist stereotypes about men being better at math and uses correct “they” pronouns with one of Rose’s transgender friends. Rose thinks he is confident and mature, but she sometimes feels he is distant or pulling away from her.

The more Derek gets to know the other students at New College, the more he grows to like them and feel like a part of that community. But, knowing as he does that any community is built on shared values, he starts to disguise his own because they are incongruous with his friends’. Simply being exposed to people like Rose, Matthew, and Juan helps Derek reconsider his understanding of people he always considered “enemies,” which begins to show the importance of open conversation in changing people’s beliefs.



Even though Derek claims that he doesn’t hold explicit prejudice, the background the book provides here illustrates that Derek does hold deep prejudices about Jewish people—believing them to be “the cause of all the world’s strife” or “possibly evil.” The passage also emphasizes that he has been instrumental in spreading that prejudice on forums across Stormfront, countering the idea that Derek’s ideology isn’t about being prejudiced against others.



This passage illustrates how the open dialogue and friendship that Derek has fostered with Rose has helped to counter some of the prejudices that he held about Jewish people. Moreover, hearing about Rose’s background illustrates how harmful that kind of prejudiced rhetoric can be, because it made Rose feel targeted among her peers and dehumanized. In this way, language can have tangible damage, and the book implies that Derek has perpetuated that sort of damage through Stormfront and his radio show.



One compelling and complicated aspect of Derek’s story is that it often portrays him as respectful and kind, even toward people he might usually see as outsiders. The reader already knows that Derek will eventually renounce white supremacy, and it’s likely that beginning from a place of mutual respect will help change his mind and find common ground with people who are different from him. It is not just that other students have to be open to dialogue—Derek has to show that he’s open to it, too.



Derek, for his own part, is trying to back away. Dating Rose feels like a double betrayal—to his own beliefs and to Rose, who has no idea about his history. He has written that race mixing is a “traitorous act” on Stormfront forums and advised other people to break off interracial relationships. It was easy to be certain and firm when the enemy was impersonal, but he likes and trusts Rose. She isn’t like the outsiders he had warned about. As the fall semester ends, he suggests that they date—but only for a few weeks before he goes abroad in the spring. Internally, he treats it as an experiment, and Rose agrees.

During the next month, Derek feels like he is living two lives: he goes out with Rose and her friends for breakfast and then has Thanksgiving dinner with Don and Chloe. He has late-night talks with his girlfriend and then laughs as his co-host on the radio show mocks a Jewish person whining about Israel. Once, he even calls into his radio show and makes small talk with his audience while Rose is in the car, unaware. She thinks he’s simply talking to his family.

Derek had long cultivated two identities: as a child, he liked typical things like Spider-Man and also created racist games and songs for children. Now, at New College, it seems as if two different sides of his identity are growing—and conflicting. Either his friends will find out who he really is and shun him, or white nationalists will discover his new relationships, and he will discredit his family and his cause.

Whenever Derek needs a reminder of his core beliefs, he finds it in a biography of Thomas Jefferson that he brought with him to college. Though Jefferson is credited with the statement “all men are created equal,” he also espoused that white and Black people could not live in the same government and that Black slaves should be deported. Abraham Lincoln similarly stated that there was a physical difference between races, that white people were superior, and that the groups could not live together. Derek believes, therefore, that white nationalism underpins U.S. history, and that if the culture is threatened, the U.S. will continue to define itself as white. However, at New College, he’s less certain about that.

Gradually, Derek wants people to find out about him—he can’t stand the anxiety of waiting to be exposed. One day, at the end of his first semester of college in 2010, he sets a 2009 issue of *Details* magazine, with a two-page profile on him, in a magazine rack at the gym. It has the potential to expose him on campus.

Simply by getting to know and like Rose, Derek is already grappling with how to reconcile his interactions with the fact that he previously wrote interracial relationships were unacceptable and even “traitorous acts.” It illustrates how this relationship—even without the goal of changing Derek’s view—is forcing him to reevaluate his ideology.



The fact that Derek is going to such lengths to hide his “double life” from those around him is an important shift from what his life has been like so far. It suggests that Derek now knows the language he is using is harmful to people he cares about, like Rose, because he understands that she would be extremely hurt if she found out about his white nationalist beliefs.



Derek acknowledges here that he will likely be ostracized from one community or another because he can’t fully share in two opposed sets of values. This internal conflict hints at the question of what values Derek truly holds and whether they might be changing because of his new relationships—whether he feels more aligned with his family or his new friends.



This passage provides some background on Derek’s white nationalist beliefs, particularly as they underpin U.S. history. Derek seems to believe that because white nationalism was a part of the U.S.’s founders’ beliefs, he is justified in believing the same things. But what Derek doesn’t yet understand is that these beliefs aren’t harmless to non-white people—though his uncertainty here hints that his new relationships are beginning to shift his perspective.



Derek’s choice to put out a magazine that could potentially expose him shows that he is already struggling with the values he holds. They are causing so much tension in his life that a part of him would rather be outed and ostracized on campus than to continue pretending as though he fits into New College’s progressive community.



For a few months, no one notices. Derek wonders if someone threw out the magazine. During his spring semester abroad in Europe, Derek returns to his double life. He publicizes polling data on white people experiencing racism while also writing to Rose every few days about his time in Ireland and Germany. He ends his letters with song lyrics, which seem to convey Derek's uncertainty and inner conflict.

Derek continues to write to Rose about the different places he visits as he perfects his German. But one night in April, Derek gets a flurry of messages. At the top of the email thread, a senior sent a message to all New College students, asking if anyone had seen Derek. The email has a picture of him and notes that he is a white supremacist and a radio host.

The song lyrics that Derek writes to Rose illustrates that he's already undergone a certain degree of transformation at school. He's no longer fully entrenched in and certain about white nationalism; having open dialogue with other students instead makes him feel conflicted about his beliefs. This highlights the effectiveness of open dialogue in providing people with alternate perspectives.



Derek's identity reveal is a major turning point in both his social life at college and his life in general. The book creates suspense by leaving it uncertain as to how the rest of the students will react to this information, and whether Derek can truly remain part of the community on campus given his incongruous values.



CHAPTER 3

Tom McKay is in his final month at New College and is finishing up his senior thesis on domestic extremism, a topic that required hours of research on Stormfront and on website of the Southern Poverty Law Center website, one of the country's largest civil rights groups. At the time, the SPLC is talking about how the "Patriot movement" has doubled in size and come to define mainstream politics. It also discusses Donald Trump, who has started parroting white nationalist language and insinuating that Obama is inherently "un-American."

Tom's research leads him to discover a picture of a smiling teenager with long red hair whose name is familiar: Derek Black. Tom checks the student directory and finds Derek before confirming with other people that Derek attends the school. He considers calling the admissions office, the campus police, or writing to Derek directly. Instead, he decides to post on the student email forum at 1:56 a.m.

Within hours, the thread has become the biggest in the college's history. Some students are afraid about Derek being on campus, and they wonder what to do in response to intolerant hate speech. Should they embarrass and demonize him? Or is it more effective to reach out to him? Some students of color are hesitant to have a one-on-one conversation with him. Some students say he has the right to his opinions like anyone else, while some call for him to be expelled, thinking it's silly to believe he can be changed and that others are defending a Nazi.

Defining a collective of extremist groups that hold white nationalist beliefs as the "Patriot movement" is another rhetorical tactic that these groups use to soften their image and message. Using such a traditionally positive word like "patriotic" to label their group makes it difficult for people to understand or call attention to the harm they cause. In addition, the passage foreshadows Donald Trump's rise in politics and points out his use of coded language like "un-American," which suggests that Obama isn't American because he isn't white.



Tom's decision to post on the forum is a crucial one, because it means that everyone on campus finds out at the same time about Derek being a white nationalist. This, in turn, means that they all have to grapple with how to treat Derek, just as Tom grapples with the best way to go about confronting this issue. In the end, he decides that open dialogue is the best way.



The students consider the best way to treat Derek—and whether Derek's beliefs or behavior can be changed at all. They pose the debate as ostracizing him—even removing him from campus entirely—versus trying to initiate a conversation with him. But the passage does present an important argument against reaching out to him: that some students who are targeted by Derek's views don't feel comfortable or safe talking to him, and so ostracism may sometimes be the only option for those students.



Derek has been receiving hate mail for more than a decade, making him nearly impervious to it. He recalls an interview he did when he was 10 years old on a talk show segment called “How to Confront a Racist.” The crowd booed and shouted at him as he came out, and that was how Derek learned to “depersonalize the enemy.” But now, he’s getting hate mail from peers whom he knows and respects.

Derek writes back to individual messages from friends, trying to remain indifferent. But in reality, he reads every post for three days. He mourns all the relationships he’s lost; there are smart people calling him an “idiot,” a “Hitler,” and a “fraud.” The next morning, Rose writes to him, unsure of what exactly to say. They set up a time to meet on Skype that evening, and when Derek calls, he sees a few friends with her. Rose asks if Derek is just using her for cover—she spent the day reading through Derek’s forum posts and trying to reconcile his ideology with their relationship.

Derek fumbles through apologies and tries to explain his ideology to Rose, which he has rarely done. He says he believes all races are equal but that there are biological differences between them, and that white people are better served by living apart from others—he fears white genocide. None of this makes any sense to Rose, who becomes angry and cries. They finish the call, and Derek writes to her apologizing for lying to her. She doesn’t write back. He tries to reach out a few more times, but he realizes how much damage he has done to her.

A few days later, David Duke visits Derek in Munich. Duke is currently living in Austria and has spent much of the previous 10 years in Europe trying to grow white nationalism. He has been banned from many countries and cities for racist actions, but he risks leaving Austria to see Derek.

Duke is Derek’s mentor and godfather—he’s like a second dad. Duke and Don Black met as teenagers in the late 1960s. Soon after, Duke went to Louisiana State, where he fell in love with a classmate named Chloe Hardin. Duke and Chloe married and had two daughters before getting divorced, and several years later, Chloe reconnected with Duke’s best friend—Don. They married in the late 1980s, and Derek was born a year later. They have operated as a blended family since, with Don helping to raise Duke’s two daughters and vice versa.

Ostracizing and disrespecting Derek only entrenches him further in his attitudes. When people on a TV show bullied him, it enabled him to “depersonalize the enemy,” thereby reinforcing that they were “the enemy” and preventing Derek from thinking of those he disagrees with as human beings.



This passage highlights how ostracism can provide a starting point for changing people’s views—Derek notices that many people he respects and considers intelligent are completely outraged at his views and his deception. Derek isn’t indifferent to this, as he’s devastated at losing so many relationships—including Rose. This provides some starting point for Derek in realizing how upsetting his views are to other people. Still, this only goes so far, as calling him an “idiot” or comparing him to Hitler only provides evidence to Derek that they are just overreacting or emotional.



Again, Derek tries to justify his beliefs by distinguishing them from other ideologies. Yet even though he says that he believes the races are equal, his posts on Stormfront do not align with this statement. And again, Derek starts to realize how hurtful his ideology is to someone like Rose, who liked and trusted him but who feels demeaned by things he has said in the past.



Derek’s association with David Duke—whose actions have been extreme enough to ban him from many European cities and countries—illustrates that the boundaries between the different white supremacist groups are fluid because of the relationships that people build across groups. Even if Derek’s views aren’t as extreme, his relationship with Duke is an implicit endorsement of extremists.



Duke isn’t just a family friend—he is essentially Derek’s second father and helped to raise him. Thus, even though Derek doesn’t identify with the KKK or neo-Nazism, his association with white supremacists indicates his implicit approval of them.



Together, Duke and Derek tour Munich, talking about history and ideology as they stop to see Odeonsplatz, where Hitler organized marches in 1923 for his Nazi party. Derek tells Duke about the forum thread, but he leaves out details about Rose. Duke explains that he went through something similar in college: students could often step onto a soap box outside the Student Union and speak passionately about their interests. Once, Duke started talking about white people as the “master race.” Over time, more and more people gathered—some in support, but most in protest. One Jewish woman attacked him onstage until police came. Classmates slipped death threats under his door, and students proposed shutting down the soap box to prevent him from speaking.

Duke found some freedom in being hated—it allowed him to be his true self, hanging Nazi photos and symbols in his dorm. He started the White Youth Alliance with more than 200 people, and later he left LSU after his junior year and revitalized the Klan, ultimately remaking himself into a politician and spending four decades as a notorious racial zealot. Maybe, he thinks, this will be Derek’s path, too.

When Duke leaves, part of Derek wants to redouble his commitment to white nationalism in the same way Duke did. He returns home and reads through the forum again, getting angrier and angrier. He makes plans to return to New College in the fall, hoping to invite white nationalist speakers there. He also wants to turn the forum thread into a lesson that will benefit white nationalists, planning to organize a conference like the one Don hosted in Tennessee. They book a dozen keynote speakers, and Derek goes back to the United States.

Derek returns to campus and avoids everyone he can. He quickly finds an apartment far away from campus on Craigslist. The administration has investigated Derek’s background and decided against disciplinary action, wanting to encourage free speech. Derek hasn’t broken any laws or student conduct, and he has a strong academic record. So, they let him live off campus to protect both Derek and the other students.

Yet the students are more divided than ever. Juan reads Derek’s posts on Stormfront, but he also knows that he and Derek shared a genuine friendship and that perhaps Derek is already in the process of changing his views. But most other students want nothing to do with him—even dropping classes he is enrolled in or vandalizing a car they mistake for Derek’s. The students again debate shunning him completely or trying to reach out to him.

Even though Derek doesn’t identify as a neo-Nazi or white supremacist, the activities and discussions that he and Duke bond over suggest that they find a lot of common ground on viewpoints like white people being a “master race.” In this way, white nationalism and ideologies like white supremacy or neo-Nazism are perhaps not as distinct as Derek would like to believe. Derek and Duke’s closeness is also based on the fact that they have undergone similar experiences in college, suggesting that Derek may also go down the path to further radicalization, just like Duke did.



Duke’s radicalization suggests that being ostracized and hated by the other students at his school only cemented his ideology, leading him to become even more extreme both during school and afterward. In this way, the book implies that this kind of reaction to extreme views may not actually change people’s minds.



Like Duke, Derek starts to double down on his own viewpoint as a result of the harsh reaction that he gets on the forum. As such, the book underscores the same idea here as in its discussion of Duke’s life: that reacting harshly to Derek, calling him names, or completely cutting him out of the New College social life will only push him further into the white nationalist community. This is very clear when Derek realizes that he wants to host a conference, showing how their reaction is pushing him to retreat to his own community.



Derek’s feeling that he has to move off campus as a result of his views illustrates that it’s hard for a person to fully take part in a community when they don’t share that community’s values. Because of Derek’s white nationalist beliefs, he can’t live or interact with the other students.



While most students shun Derek or react strongly against him, other students like Juan recognize the value of finding common ground—particularly because Juan knows that his and Derek’s friendship helped Derek see that not every non-white student has to be an “enemy.” Simply being able to interact with people who are not white helps humanize them in Derek’s mind.



One voice begins to stand out on the forum: James Birmingham, who has already graduated from the College but stayed in Sarasota to work in the student affairs office. He is half Chinese and a staunch advocate for students of color. He has studied anthropology and knows what most experts believe about race: that it is a fluid, social idea and not a scientific fact. There is no clear genetic boundary between races, and the concept of race didn't appear until the 16th century, when colonialists needed to differentiate themselves from slaves. It was a tool of oppression and exploitation that then became ingrained in every part of society.

With the school year about to begin, James keeps reading on the forum about Derek and is disgusted by the idea that Derek thinks he's "oppressed and victimized by a lifetime of anti-white discrimination." James is frustrated with students who want to defend and reach out to Derek, believing them naïve. At 22, Derek is an adult, and he is indoctrinating others after an adolescence spent demeaning and excluding racial minorities. Why should classmates be so worried about including him? Instead, James says they should make him uncomfortable and irrelevant—they should not acknowledge him at all.

Gradually, James's movement works. Rose ignores Derek, while the German Club and the Pluralism Committee ask him not to come back. Students flip Derek the middle finger in the library and dining hall. He avoids trips to campus and goes home on weekends. He stays in his apartment, feeling lonely and isolated, until one day he can't take it anymore and decides to go to a party. There, a group of students—self-described anarchists and anti-fascists—start heckling and circling him, until another student, Blair Sapp, leads Derek away.

Blair, who had a history class with Derek, hadn't spoken to Derek since he was outed on the forum, but he doesn't want Derek to get beaten up. Outside the party, Derek seems visibly shaken. Blair is active in politics and is working up the courage to come out as gay to parts of his conservative family, and he knows the struggle of community pressure and fear of rejection. He wonders if Derek has doubts about his own identity.

James's researched understanding of race counters Derek's beliefs and shows that Derek's thoughts on racism are rooted in white supremacy and colonialism. As James notes here, white colonialists constructed the idea of race and then used it to justify their brutal treatment of slaves and indigenous people, reassuring themselves that non-white people were naturally inferior and therefore deserved this treatment. So, again, even if Derek believes that he isn't an extremist or a violent white supremacist, his beliefs are nevertheless harmful because they enable oppression and discrimination against racial and religious minorities.



James comes down firmly on the side of ostracizing Derek, arguing that Derek's views are so intolerant and abhorrent that they shouldn't be given credence at all. This is particularly based on the idea that James doesn't think anyone's mind can be changed. But the book has already noted that Derek does eventually have a change of heart, so James's decision to ostracize Derek is perhaps overly pessimistic.



This episode further illustrates how people who do not share values with a given community are often forced out of that community completely. The other students ostracize Derek, and any attempt to ingratiate himself is met with frustration or even threats of violence. This reinforces how communities—like the group of anarchists and anti-fascists—are largely built on shared beliefs.



Blair's thoughts here reflect his understanding that communities and families are often centered around shared values. One of the hardest aspects of letting go of one's beliefs is the fact that it might come with rejection from one's closest communities, as Blair knows that distancing himself from conservatism and coming out as gay may cause his family to disown him. In this way, the book creates a parallel between Blair and Derek, even though the two young men are very different in their views and experiences.



Blair sits down with Derek and starts discussing Derek's beliefs. Derek believes white advantages in the U.S. are due to genetic superiority, and that white privilege is a conspiracy theory to make white people feel guilty about their success. Blair is surprised about how informed on history and compelling Derek is, and how practiced and measured his responses are. Blair realizes that Derek has no self-doubt about his views, and that he could do real damage on campus and bring more people to his side. At the end of the night, they shake hands and part ways.

A few weeks later, in the late summer of 2011, Derek drives to Tennessee for his first Stormfront conference. The mood is triumphant, particularly given the current political landscape. There is widespread dissatisfaction among white people that often leads to support for white nationalism. Many white people believe the U.S. is slipping away from them, Tea Party supporters are growing into the millions, and Donald Trump has amassed a massive following on the far right.

Derek tells the conference that it's time to adopt a strategy to take the moral high ground. Each speaker discusses changing white nationalist rhetoric to reframe the discussion. They assert that white people are the ones facing genocide and oppression from the "antiwhites." Don speaks last, complimenting Derek's work and saying how productive the conference has been.

When Derek returns to New College, he again steels himself for criticism and targeting. But he receives a text message on his phone from two Jewish students—one of which is Matthew Stevenson, who sometimes sat in the courtyard of his dorm and sang with him. They host a few friends each Friday night for Shabbat dinner, and this week they invite Derek along.

Blair understands just how much damage someone like Derek could do—hinting at how much damage Derek likely already has done in bringing other people to his side. But Blair is nonetheless willing to listen to Derek's ideas and afford him respect, as he seems to sense that having an open dialogue is probably the most effective way to change Derek's mind. It's possible that Blair is able to empathize with Derek because he, too, feels ostracized—in his case, because he's a gay man in a conservative family.



The Tea Party was a subgroup of Republican politicians that focused primarily on fiscal conservatism. It grew as a movement largely in response to President Obama's election in 2008 and was viewed as anti-establishment because of its focus on lowering taxes. Some political thinkers have theorized that Tea Party supporters opposed Obama primarily because of his race rather than his policies, which is likely what the book is alluding to here. The other examples cited here—like Donald Trump's growing following—can also be traced back to rhetoric that targeted Obama, often with racially coded language. This set of conditions suggests that the white nationalist movement can often grow without people truly seeing it for what it is, which can be harmful because people may not recognize the racism underpinning the movement.



This passage demonstrates Derek's direct role in shaping the white nationalist movement's rhetoric. He understands the power of that rhetoric to help win people over to his point of view, because it's easier for people to believe that they are victims than to acknowledge their own complicity in racism.



Matthew's gesture of inviting Derek to Shabbat dinner is in direct contrast to the way so many of Derek's classmates have tried to ostracize him. With this invitation, Matthew seems to acknowledge that his friendship with Derek was genuine. Inviting him over for Shabbat dinner on Friday nights (a weekly ritual that begins the Jewish day of rest) signals to Derek that Matthew is willing to have open dialogue as long as Derek is also willing to do so.



CHAPTER 4

Matthew Stevenson has hosted Shabbat ever since his first few months on campus. He was the only Orthodox Jew at the school, and he got together with another Jewish student named Moshe to have dinner together. Gradually, the Shabbat dinner became a social circle all its own, including Christians, atheists, and students of color. They had recently been spending a lot of time talking about Derek after he was outed on the forum.

Matthew had visited the Stormfront website years before, hoping to better understand anti-Semitic prejudice. Because he wore a yarmulke regularly, he was often harassed on the street. When he discovered Derek's posts, he wrote to Moshe about how horrifying the hate speech was. But he reflected on his own faith and wondered if he could transform Derek's thinking—after all, Matthew had undergone his own radical transformation.

Matthew was baptized Presbyterian; he came from a family of Protestants with ancestors in Scotland and Ireland. When he was young, his mother had gone into treatment for alcoholism, and he started feeling acute physical pain that no doctor could figure out. They treated him with drugs before insisting that his problem was likely psychological. He started to explore different spiritual treatments, and he and his father Michael enrolled in classes at the Kabbalah center, a Jewish tradition popularized as a method of self-improvement. Matthew's pain began to ebb, and he grew more interested in Kabbalah and Judaism.

Matthew gradually converted to Judaism, wearing a yarmulke, eating kosher, and teaching himself Hebrew. When he got into New College, he worried about putting distance between himself and the Kabbalah Centre. But his father and rabbis encouraged him to go; the purpose of Kabbalah is to put his faith to practical use. They told him to set an example on campus by respecting human dignity and always seeking out the best in himself and others. And so, Matthew does so by inviting Derek over—and Derek accepts his invitation to dinner that Friday.

The students' Shabbat dinner is another example of how communities are built on shared values—not only Jewish religious beliefs, but the desire to maintain cultural traditions and form meaningful relationships. Matthew at first builds a two-person community with Moshe before expanding it to include many other students from a diverse array of backgrounds.



Matthew recognizes, in reading Derek's posts on Stormfront, that white nationalism isn't harmless in the way that Derek might want people to believe. In reality, Derek's writing has a massive impact on people—particularly the people his prejudice targets, who feel demonized and belittled for their beliefs or identities.



Matthew's background provides an example of how people can undergo radical transformations in their thinking, as he alludes to in the previous passage. Matthew was simply exposed to Kabbalah practices, and because they helped him psychologically, he gradually became more interested in and open to Judaism. This suggests that transformation in behavior and thinking cannot come out of one conversation; instead, it takes a series of dialogues and a willingness to want to change.



In his own values, Matthew recognizes the importance of treating all people with respect, even someone who does not fundamentally treat him the same way. Being able to do so is key to fostering open dialogue, in contrast to James's strategy, which is to ostracize Derek and make him feel lesser because of his beliefs. Matthew understands that only by genuinely engaging and extending friendship can Derek, in turn, come to recognize Matthew and other students as equals.



That Shabbat, only Matthew, Moshe, and Derek's friend Juan are there. They want to ask him about his views, particularly on racial purity (as Juan is part European, part indigenous, and part Black) and the Holocaust (as Moshe's grandfather narrowly survived the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp). They don't feel uncomfortable talking to Derek in private like this, since there is less risk that classmates will accuse them of sympathizing with Derek or condoning his behavior. Several of their friends decide not to attend the dinner at the last minute. Matthew is angered by their small-mindedness, believing exclusion only reinforced divides. Matthew understood this acutely, as he is a political conservative among a largely liberal population on campus.

Matthew knows there is very little he can say to Derek to change his mind after growing up inside the white nationalist movement. So instead, Matthew simply wants to build a relationship that could teach him about Jewish people and people of color. At the dinner, they talk little about Derek or his background, instead talking about history. At the end, they have mutual respect, and Derek agrees to come back, feeling very lonely after months of isolation. There seems to be an implicit agreement: they will pretend to be oblivious about his white nationalist convictions, and Derek will keep his beliefs to himself. He decides that maybe every minority didn't need to be his enemy, and the next day, Matthew tells Moshe that he thinks they made progress.

In between dinners, Derek spends much of his time at his rental house and gets to know the landlord, Maynard Hiss, who knows nothing about Derek's background. Maynard likes Derek's earnestness, friendliness, and humility. He thinks that Derek is well-raised, but he does wonder why Derek seems so lonely. So, when Maynard is leaving one evening for a community contra dance (like square dancing), he invites Derek along, and Derek agrees to go. They later start kayaking together as well.

A few weeks later, however, Maynard learns about Derek's background from another New College student, who warns that Derek might be dangerous. When Maynard confronts Derek, Derek admits that he is a white nationalist and that he still hosts his radio show. He apologizes to Maynard, who says he needs to consider things. But as Maynard tries to square the idea of a bigoted radical with the Derek he knows, he becomes convinced that Derek isn't really hateful, as he so openly engages with people unlike him.

Again, Matthew emphasizes that in order to get through to Derek and change some of his thinking, they must first understand that thinking. It's rare that Derek has to justify his beliefs to the people whom he is directly targeting, and so confronting his impersonal view of the "enemy" with students who are inviting him into their home is a new experience. And ostracizing him, as Matthew points out, will only push Derek further into white nationalism—therefore, reaching out is the only way to truly get through to him.



Ostracism provided a starting point for Derek, as it made him feel so isolated as to want to reconnect with people like Matthew and Juan, forcing him to socialize with the very people his white nationalist beliefs target. At the same time, this strategy only works when it is followed by open dialogue and friendship like the kind that Matthew and Derek are able to build, because it allows Derek to recognize people that he normally thinks of as the "enemy" are, in fact, kind, considerate people who might not actually be as threatening to him as he believes.



While the book doesn't excuse Derek's racist beliefs, it does show an alternate side to Derek. People like Maynard, who don't know about Derek's beliefs, see him as a genuine, friendly, and humble person. In this way, even people who hold hateful beliefs can have redeemable qualities.



Maynard's shock at finding out who Derek is—and his statement that he needs to consider whether to keep Derek as a tenant—emphasizes how offensive and threatening Derek's beliefs are for outsiders to the white nationalist movement. However, Maynard's thoughts also reflect the idea that Derek has already begun to shift his thinking simply by being exposed to new people and perspectives, and that he is capable of growth and redemption.



Later that fall, Derek signs up for the New College talent show after making a tentative reentry into social life on campus. He walks onstage to a smattering of boos, but when he starts to play a folk song called “Adrian” by Mason Jennings, the crowd quiets—he is very good. Derek loves the song, which he thinks is about the Wild West and an unjust execution. He finishes to some applause and a second-place prize.

The next day, however, some classmates send Derek a note. The song, “Adrian,” was inspired by Toni Morrison’s [Beloved](#), a book about the psychological effects of slavery. The song is about a lynching, and Mason Jennings sang it at civil rights rallies. They thought Derek was “trolling” them, and he writes back explaining himself. To him, the song is the story of a person who’s condemned unjustly and made an example of by a crowd; he views it as a song about himself.

One student, Bárbara Suárez, replies, telling Derek that *he* endorses cruelty and inhumanity; he is not a victim of it. Derek replies that he doesn’t want to ignore human suffering, and she responds that he ignores anything that might point to his privilege. In addition, he dodges his real stance on race.

Derek is starting to hear other people’s views, which are very different from his own. He enrolls in a German poetry class and listens to Jewish poems about the Holocaust. A Haitian immigrant stops him on campus and tells him about the impact of stop and frisk. Another student emails him asking why the U.S. shouldn’t belong to Native Americans, the original majority. After hearing so many perspectives, Derek begins to question his assumptions. But he sticks to his talking points about white privilege and race, and other students begin to feel they are talking to a robot.

That winter, students want to protest what they feel are increasingly hostile aggressions and micro-aggressions on campus, even beyond Derek. Students are hanging Confederate flags and writing slurs on posters in the café. The student activists decide to try and close the school for a day and force their classmates to listen to their concerns on racism. Five students speak at a staff meeting, asking permission for this shutdown and to hold events about prejudice and discrimination. Ultimately, they convince the faculty to agree, and the students arrange for someone from the SPLC to lead the event.

Derek’s song choice—and his interpretation of it—illustrate how much his values and ideology have shaped his worldview. The book hints at the idea that Derek’s interpretation might be a skewed one that aligns with his white nationalist beliefs in thinking of himself as a persecuted individualist and revolutionary.



The true meaning behind the song, which references Toni Morrison’s classic [Beloved](#), could not be further from Derek’s interpretation. While the other students assume that Derek is trying to make fun of them, Derek’s explanation makes it clear that he didn’t choose the song maliciously. This suggests that many of his beliefs come from ignorance—not knowing the full picture of a given situation or realizing how it affects others.



Bárbara points out that Derek’s beliefs are truly harming people, and that he is unwilling to acknowledge that harm. This hints at how a key part of Derek’s transformation going forward will require acknowledgement of the mistakes that he has made and attempts to rectify that damage.



Stop and frisk was a decades-long policy in New York City whereby a police officer could stop and search any person they deemed suspicious. This policy led to discrimination against people of color, who were stopped and searched at much higher rates than white people. Derek’s exposure to these different lived experiences and arguments helps him shift his own perspective—he questions his assumptions even though he’s not yet ready to outwardly concede in arguments.



As the students at New College discuss the racism and oppression that they experience on campus, it becomes clear that white supremacy takes on many forms. It’s not just found in overt violence or discriminatory policies, but in words and symbols that can make students feel unwelcome or unsafe on campus.



Derek grows nervous hearing the SPLC is involved, as the SPLC has long kept an extremist file on his family. Don often called the SPLC “vile predators” and “Jewish supremacists.” Derek complains to the student organization that the SPLC uses personal attacks to defame people, but few people care about his complaints. At one of the events on the lawn, the SPLC reads anonymous statements from students, talking about transphobic comments and examples of racism on campus. One comment says that they left a class because Derek was in it and they didn’t feel safe, and the student asks why Derek’s free speech is more important than their education.

Seeing his professors, Matthew, and Moshe gathered to listen to the speakers from the SPLC, Derek wonders how so many smart people could all be wrong. He hears non-white speakers talk about how racism makes them feel unsafe and diminishes their self-worth, and he considers that there might be truth in what they are saying. At the same time, activists on campus wonder whether Derek might actually be listening to their message.

A few days later, Matthew hosts a birthday party for Derek. Real friendships have returned to his life—Derek has even hosted Matthew at his home, making sure all his ingredients were kosher. Derek has continued to attend Shabbat dinner, and many of Matthew’s friends returned. After the dinners, Derek stays with Matthew (who can’t work, drive, write, or use his phone on Shabbat), and they talk and play games together.

Some people start to worry about Matthew getting so close to a white nationalist; they wonder if Derek might be using Matthew. Matthew knows that people naturally divide themselves, but he doesn’t want to do that; he wants to treat Derek with respect. Other students quote Derek’s latest anti-Semitic radio talking points to Matthew. Still, Matthew is resolute—he thinks Derek is already softening.

This passage emphasizes how Derek’s presence on campus and the statements that he has made in the past have overtly harmed people—even preventing them from getting the kind of education they want. Derek’s complaint about the SPLC defaming people is ironic given the fact that Don calls them “vile predators” and “Jewish supremacists,” using hate speech himself to attack the SPLC.



Being ostracized by so many people has provided a starting point for Derek to understand that his actions and words are tangibly harmful to people. But ostracism is only part of what begins Derek’s transformation. Now, Derek has to be willing to have open dialogue with people—or to at least listen to others’ perspectives—in order to then reform his own thinking, and he begins to do so here. But at this point, he doesn’t open himself up fully to other students, so they’re unsure if he’s really listening to what they have to say.



Derek’s friendship with Matthew shows that his beliefs about Jewish people have shifted at least when dealing with people interpersonally. Derek respects Matthew and takes care to respect his religious beliefs as well, showing how open dialogue between the two friends has begun to change Derek’s attitudes.



The fact that Derek still hosts a white nationalist radio show and denigrates Jewish people suggests that he still has a long way to go in completely reforming his behavior—and this passage shows how his words hurt Matthew. Nevertheless, the genuine friendship between them suggests that Derek’s views may continue to change if the two men remain friends and continue to have productive conversations.



CHAPTER 5

Derek's civility and intellectual curiosity have always made Don believe that Derek is the future of the white nationalist movement, leading it beyond its violent history and into the cultural mainstream. Derek's tactics of talking about cultural erosion and white genocide have become popular. Andrew Breitbart manipulated a tape of a speech from Obama-appointed Shirley Sherrod to make her sound prejudiced against white people. Rush Limbaugh warns listeners about "Obama's America," in which Black kids beat up white kids. Lou Dobbs rails on CNN about "rampant illegal aliens," and Glenn Beck tells viewers on Fox News about Obama's "deep-seated hatred of white people."

Don has largely stopped speaking in public, instead hosting his radio show and monitoring Stormfront. He spends most of his time alone at home, growing more and more depressed about his disability following his stroke. He's also discouraged by the fact that even after 40 years dedicated to a revolutionary movement, its revolution has not yet come. Don is still firm about his ideology, but he regrets not taking a softer, less confrontational approach, working within the system rather than escaping from it. He wants to gradually move people in his direction rather than shocking or scaring them.

Growing up, the first people Don shocked and scared were his parents, who were quiet, steady conservatives. Just as Don began his junior year of high school, the school was desegregated, creating constant turmoil between Black and white students. He then found a paperback called *Our Nordic Race* by preacher Richard Hoskins, which stated that the only way to solve the "critical problem" was to separate the races. Don sought out more books from the same publisher and ultimately found the National Socialist White People's Party and a newspaper called *White Power*. He started handing out copies of this paper until one day, he came home to find an FBI agent and a sheriff waiting for him.

Don's parents didn't disagree with his opinions on desegregation, but the agent and sheriff warned him about hate speech and spreading racial unrest. This only pushed Don further toward segregationism, though, as he felt he was being monitored. He wanted to be a nuclear physicist; now he knew that dream was dead. So, he continued mailing newsletters to his classmates and organized a conference for a gathering of young Nazis in Arlington, Virginia.

Here, the book illustrates the harm that Derek's rhetorical strategies have caused. Mainstream media pundits have taken up many white nationalist talking points to gain support. They not only portray white people as victims of Black people's violence or hatred, but in doing so, they also promote harmful stereotypes, which in turn reinforces racism among white people. Again, though Derek distinguishes the white nationalism from more violent extremism, the movement still has tangible, harmful effects on people of color.



Ironically, what Don describes again shows how effective open dialogue can be, but from an alternate perspective. Trying to shock or scare people—through violence, for example—only puts them off of the white nationalist movement.



*Don's introduction to white nationalism also illustrates how powerful rhetoric can be, and how white nationalist ideology can lead people down a rabbit hole to more radical beliefs. Simply reading *Our Nordic Race* was enough to convince Don that the only way to solve the "critical problem" of race in the United States was to separate people of different races entirely. He then got so invested in the movement that he started to actively spread it, more than just subscribing to it, showing that part of white nationalism's harm lies in the fact that it can lead people to extremism.*



This incident illustrates how people can quickly become isolated in their ideologies. Because getting involved in the white nationalist movement has now ruined Don's dream of being a physicist, he secludes himself even further in the white nationalist community. This supports the book's broader suggestion that being ostracized or isolated from others tends to reinforce the ideas one already has; ostracism may not change a person's mind or pull them out of a movement.



On the way to his conference, Don met two other young white nationalists to carpool together. They were David Duke and Joseph Paul Franklin, and together they would come to define the white supremacy movement for the next several decades. Don thought Duke could be preachy; he often gave monologues about racial science. Franklin, meanwhile, was a high school dropout who delighted in using racial slurs. The three of them quickly became allies, trading book recommendations and always returning to what they agreed on: that white people were biologically superior to other races, and that their superiority was being threatened by desegregation, immigration, and Jewish political influence.

The conference convinced Don to jump into the movement, Duke would go back to LSU and continue to make speeches, and Franklin would privately plan efforts to “spark a race war.” Franklin eventually bombed three synagogues and shot Black and interracial couples in the South. He was finally caught, convicted, and executed after killing 15 people and wounding 12 others. Don, meanwhile, continued to study *Our Nordic Race* and other texts to convince others of his ideology.

A few months later, Don went down to Georgia between his junior and senior years of high school volunteering for J.B. Stoner’s campaign. Stoner was a segregationist and a KKK member once convicted of bombing a Black church. One of Don’s tasks was to break into the office of a rival white power organization and steal its mailing list—but Jerry Ray (the brother of James Earl Ray, Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassin) stopped Don and shot him in the stomach. The hospital notified his parents as he recovered; he turned 17 in the hospital.

By 19, Don was distributing white power pamphlets at the University of Alabama. At 22, Duke initiated him into the Knights of the KKK. By 24, Don was running for mayor of Birmingham as the city’s most famous white nationalist in an election that would result in the city’s first Black mayor. It seemed to Don that white people were always losing, bit by bit. However, Don continued to assert that the tide was turning that would allow white people to regain power. Don eventually became Grand Wizard, taking over for Duke, but he realized how difficult it was to convert people when they associated Don’s group with other Klan organizations that were violent and militant.

This passage illustrates how white supremacy in all its forms can be harmful, especially because it can lead people to form alliances that do major damage. Even though Duke, Franklin, and Don don’t share all aspects of their beliefs, they still reinforce one another’s core racist values and spur one another to become more involved in their respective movements. Their dynamic also reinforces the idea that communities are built around shared values.



Franklin’s eventual violence shows that even though white nationalism doesn’t necessarily advocate for or condone violent action, it can still lead people to extremism. This is also why language can be dangerous, because it can easily manipulate people and cause tangible harm. When white nationalists use violent language—like the need to “spark a race war,” it leads people like Franklin to take this statement literally by hurting and killing people.



This incident reinforces how violent white supremacist organizations can be—so much so that even people who are theoretically working toward the same goals will hurt one another. So, although Derek tries to separate himself from violence, it’s clear why students at New College are nervous about his presence there, because he and his family associate with so many extremists.



Don recognizes that the problem with the movement is that people associate it with violence. Notably, though, he seems to imply that that’s the only thing wrong with the violence—that it prevents other people from wanting to join the movement, rather than noting that violence is inherently wrong. In this way, it’s possible that Don might not be personally opposed to violence, and that he’s simply trying to use language to get broader support and manipulate people involved in mainstream politics.



Leaving the Klan, Don joined with other white nationalists in Operation Red Dog, a plot to overthrow the island nation of Dominica and reclaim it for white people. Their army consisted of only 10 men, and their plan depended on teaming up with a group of local Black mercenaries, who had no intention of turning over control of the country to white nationalists. Only a few miles into their boat trip to Dominica, federal agents surrounded and arrested the men, who were carrying a Nazi flag, dynamite, tear gas, shotguns, handguns, and automatic rifles.

A few days later, many of the men disavowed their white supremacist ideologies and got lesser sentences by testifying against one another—but not Don. He remained loyal and viewed the jury as another audience to convert. They found him guilty of violating the Neutrality Act of 1794, which makes it illegal for Americans to wage war against countries that are at peace with the U.S. Don was sentenced to three years in prison.

During Don's tenure in prison, he continued to reflect on how to grow the white nationalist movement. Don learned to moderate his language in the prison to protect himself from attacks, as the guards feared a race riot. His cellmate had made five-figure political donations in Texas and became an honorary member of the Department of Public Safety, though he wasn't an open white supremacist. From this, Don learned that if he wanted political power, it might be best to maneuver through back channels.

With this idea in mind, Don started learning about computers and coding on an early-model TRS-80 microcomputer. He realized he could disseminate information much more quickly with this machine, and by the time he was released from prison in 1984, he was feeling optimistic about the movement. He and Duke recalibrated: their goal was now to reposition white nationalism as a modern civil rights movement for white people. At the same time, Don reconnected with Duke's ex-wife, Chloe. They married in 1988, and she became pregnant a few months later, as Duke launched his first run for the Louisiana state legislature.

Again, white nationalism, even though it might appear more benign than other ideologies, can lead to radicalization and extremism. Don simply started out by reading about segregation, but by this point, he has been Grand Wizard of the KKK and has tried to overthrow the government of Dominica to form an all-white nation. This underscores once more that white supremacy in all its forms is harmful because of the way it can serve as a gateway to extremism and violent action.



Don's time in jail affirms his commitment to white nationalism: he is willing to sacrifice years of his life in dedication to it. Being so thoroughly devoted to the ideology means that Don is less likely to change his views. Don passes this dedication down to Derek, who has thus far been willing to sacrifice relationships for their shared values.



This is another example of how rhetoric can be a powerful tool, as Don learns how to use language to make his views seem more innocent than they actually are, thereby manipulate others. Moreover, this illustrates again how harmful white nationalism can be, because it often represents extremist views that are couched in more benign language, so that extremists can gain political power of the kind that Don describes here.



Don reinforces the power of manipulating language to make white people more comfortable with joining the white nationalist movement—portraying them as victims whose rights need to be defended. He also understands the power of getting out a message on a broad scale, which is why the computer becomes an important tool for him.



For the next six months, Don split time between Florida and Louisiana, helping Chloe with their new baby and Duke with his campaign. They decided not to make race a talking point but instead to make it subtext, talking about crime, affirmative action, and welfare. It was a relatively small race, but Duke's history with the Klan made it visible. President George Bush and former president Ronald Reagan denounced him, but Duke received thousands of letters thanking him for representing "politically-incorrect white Americans."

Three days before Duke won the election, Chloe went into labor. Don rushed out of the office, but before he crossed into Florida, Chloe called again, saying that the baby was born. They named him Derek in honor of Theodoric the Great, a ruler who restored the Roman Empire in the fifth century. His middle **name**, Roland, came from [The Song of Roland](#), in which the main character dies as a martyr fighting Muslims in Spain for King Charlemagne's army. Don said that it was the name of a fighter.

CHAPTER 6

In April 2012, Mike Long—the popular student body president—stops Derek as he's walking out of the library. Mike is in a golf cart and instructs Derek to get on, and Derek can't think of an excuse not to. He and Mike were friends before Derek was outed as a white nationalist. Mike is very charismatic, works hard, and cares little what other people think. Mike takes Derek out on a sailboat along with a half-dozen other students.

One of the students is Allison, Matthew's roommate, who avoided Derek for some time when he joined for Shabbat dinner. Slowly, though, she had acclimated to his presence. On the boat, they talk about their mutual friends and their mutual interest in ecology. At the end of the trip, Derek gives Allison his phone number and offers to teach her how to sail. Allison thinks that he seems quirky, gentle, and interesting—not at all what she expected. She is always fascinated by people's motivations, behaviors, and beliefs. She wonders how there can be such a chasm between how he acts and what he believes.

A few weeks later, Derek invites Allison to a contra dance along with a few other friends, and she enjoys it. When they rotate around to become partners, Derek helps her work through the moves, and she trusts him to lead, even closing her eyes. But later, she wonders if she can actually trust Derek.

Don is able to signal to his supporters that he is talking about race without using explicitly racist language. This makes it harder for critics to be aware of or call out the racist ideology baked into Don's language. Even the people thanking him for representing "politically-incorrect white Americans" are signaling that they understand he is using racially coded language and speaking to their concerns without having to explicitly bring up racism.



A person's name is an important part of their identity, Derek's name represents how connected he and his family are to white nationalism. Don has named Derek after two people who represent the white nationalist ideal of a militant European in search of glory. This is a heritage that will be hard for Derek to escape because of how ingrained those values are in his family and his broader community.



This is a key moment for Derek, who is surprised but grateful to be invited out on the sailboat. Again, not sharing values with many of the students at New College has prevented him from forming bonds with them, particularly as most of the student body has ostracized him.



Initially, Allison's reaction to Derek is to ostracize him, just as most other people do. But here, she starts to soften and reaches out to Derek. Unlike the people who immediately write Derek off because of his beliefs, Allison wants to understand how he can hold beliefs that are seemingly in contrast with his actions.



This experience illustrates how difficult it is for Allison to let herself fully trust Derek. She knows the kind of harm that white nationalist ideology can have, and even if she doesn't personally feel threatened, she knows that Derek poses a threat to non-white people.



Allison begins doing research on Derek's posts on Stormfront, which included discussing the trial of a Norwegian right-wing terrorist named Breivik who massacred 77 people to attract attention to white genocide. Derek and Don both publicly condemned Breivik's massacre, but they also sympathize with his assertion that the Norwegian government was at fault for not keeping the races more separate.

Allison herself was shaped by subdued versions of the same racial beliefs. Her mother, Julie, grew up in an impoverished neighborhood in Cleveland that was half white and half Black. Racial tensions erupted in high schools like Collinwood, where 400 white students threw rocks at the building while 200 Black students huddled inside in 1970. With this danger everywhere, Julie ran home every day from school. She also worked so that she could propel her family into the middle class and not worry about this kind of violence. Thus, Allison grew up in one of the whitest suburbs in Ohio. Julie taught her that everyone had equal rights and equal opportunities and that hard work was the primary determinant of success.

Julie provided Allison with a safe childhood, but when Allison went to college, she learned about "privilege, systematic oppression, and structural bias"—essentially, how white people were unfairly advantaged and how the U.S. was not a meritocracy. Returning home, Allison helped Julie recognize her own prejudices. Now, she wonders if she could foster the same transformation in Derek—but she's unsure if it's morally right to befriend him to do so. A close friend counsels her that if she likes spending time with him, and because she's in no danger of becoming a white nationalist herself, her influence can only do him good.

Allison and Derek's friendship grows, and they go on spontaneous adventures together, exploring nearby parts of Florida. Over this time, Allison is planning to earn a doctorate in clinical psychology. Derek sometimes still wants to be the leader of white nationalism, but sometimes he wants to give it all up to get a doctorate in medieval history or work as a scuba-diving instructor. Most of the time he does what seems interesting or fun, and he invites Allison on spontaneous road trips he takes.

Again, even though Derek and Don don't condone violence, their decision to justify this massacre shows that they have more sympathy for the person perpetrating violence than they do for the victims—they identify with his cause.



Allison understands that white supremacy shapes society even in subtle ways, and that even seemingly harmless myths about race can be detrimental. For example, in Julie's case, perpetuating the idea that everyone has equal rights and equal opportunities is harmful because this isn't always true—a person's race, among other factors, can dictate how they're treated and what they do and don't have access to.



Arguing that the United States is a true meritocracy leads to the false belief that people of color simply don't work as hard, because if they did, they would be as successful as white people. But Allison learns that in reality, there are many barriers that white supremacy creates in society. Being able to have open and honest dialogue with her mom helps Allison better understand the harmful beliefs that uphold white supremacy, and Allison recognizes that engaging with Derek in the same way is the only way for her to change his thinking.



While Derek doesn't explicitly say that his views are moving away from white nationalism, the fact that he is considering leaving it behind is a significant step. It suggests that white nationalism is starting to feel like a burden to Derek, because it's caused him to lose friendships, and because he is gaining new friends who counter his beliefs.



Together, Allison and Derek continue to go on adventures, but Allison realizes that the more time she spends with Derek, the more other people drift away from her. They warn her about enabling a white supremacist. But she likes him, though she refuses to let their relationship become romantic. Meanwhile, Derek is infatuated with Allison, and it seems to him that she understands him. They never talk about his background, but he feels increasingly conflicted about white nationalism.

Allison has built trust and intimacy with many classmates by discussing issues rather than avoiding them. So, one night just before summer vacation, she decides to talk to Derek about his beliefs. Derek finds that he has virtually no practice talking about white nationalism with people who explicitly disagree with his ideology. Instead, he has spent most of his life convincing white people who naturally gravitated toward it. Derek's tendency is also to avoid conflict, and he dreads a confrontation with Allison. But alone on her dorm roof, he agrees to talk—secretly hoping he can learn more about how to hone his views with people who disagree with him.

Allison discovers that Derek believes in the Holocaust to some degree but would never have a mixed-race marriage or biracial children. He doesn't use any slurs and respects all people, and he has begun to like and accept Jewish people, now considering them white. He says he isn't a white supremacist because he no longer believes that white people are necessarily better—just that races are better when separate and that the white race needs protecting. Allison can see that his views are already softening from the ones he used to espouse on Stormfront.

Derek continues, saying that there are differences between the races, like white people having a slightly higher average IQ or Black people having higher levels of testosterone, which he thinks leads to a greater propensity for violence. He is afraid of white genocide, and he bases his prejudice not on gut feeling but on logical theory. Allison realizes that if she can show him the illogic of his beliefs, she can convince him otherwise. Their conversation remains civil and productive, largely because Allison is also white; she presents herself as a confused and curious friend. Derek agrees to talk more, admitting that he's never talked about this with anyone like Allison, and that he has conflicting feelings about the ideology.

Allison and Derek's friendship creates some tension in both of their lives. For Derek, the open dialogue that they share makes him more and more conflicted about white nationalism. At the same time, associating with a white nationalist makes Allison's friends question her values, and other students start to ostracize her as well. This again underscores the idea that communities are built on shared values, and so the perception that Allison might not share those values makes it harder for her to participate in the community on campus.



Matthew and Moshe hope that they can change Derek's mind simply by being friends with Derek, exposing him to people whom he might not have interacted with otherwise. But Allison takes her friendship with Derek a step further by actively engaging with his ideas, knowing that this is the only way she can learn to counteract them. The irony in this is that this is exactly what Derek is trying to do—engage in open dialogue so as to try and persuade Allison and others to his perspective.



This passage shows that Matthew and Moshe's strategy has worked, to some extent. Derek now likes and accepts Jewish people—a major shift from his earlier belief that they were “possibly evil” and the statements he used to make on Stormfront. With this change, the book suggests that open dialogue has been able to make a difference in Derek's thinking.



Allison knows that the more she can learn about Derek's beliefs, the better she can refute them. However, the book provides an important caveat about why open dialogue may not always work: people who are directly targeted by Derek's oppressive beliefs may not feel comfortable engaging with him in that kind of dialogue.



Over the summer, Allison and Derek continue their conversation over phone calls and instant messages, getting to know each other better. They send each other music, short stories, and pictures of the ocean, and they plot out adventures for the next school year. But Allison also starts to listen to his radio show; when Derek realizes this, he often calls in sick or offers only filler while Don speaks. Allison also reads up on the history of racism and parses through posts on Stormfront, which usually make her angry that Derek could associate with such reprehensible beliefs. She grows particularly upset when a man targets a Sikh temple in Wisconsin, radicalized by the message board on Stormfront.

Stormfront has spawned at least half a dozen murderers, which Don writes off as coincidences. But instead of empathizing with the victims of these shootings—like five men and one woman who were killed in the Sikh temple, Don rationalizes the shooter’s motives, saying that “third-world immigrants belong back in their own countries instead of here.” They say that if Punjab was being overrun with tens of millions of non-Indians, the Sikhs likely would have snapped, too.

A student sends a message to Allison about these justifications, and Allison then emails Derek telling him to be careful of what he says. Derek explains that he hasn’t said anything about the situation, but that he doesn’t disagree with anything his dad said. He wonders why she puts up with being his friend when so many people at the school are pitting her against him. She replies that he’s never clarified his views, and so it only makes sense that other students associate him with racist beliefs. He thinks about how he can clarify his views further and invites her to an upcoming white nationalism conference, where he is leading one of the seminars.

CHAPTER 7

The Stormfront conference is in the Smoky Mountains in Tennessee, up several miles of unmarked roads so that outsiders can’t find them. The attendees will all be dedicated Stormfront users wearing nametags displaying their Stormfront IDs—all except Allison. For weeks, she and Derek have been talking, but she still doesn’t fully understand his beliefs. He says that “overt prejudice can be really bad,” and that he “respect[s] women,” even though Allison points out that racists are usually also sexist. Allison wonders if Derek is trying to water down his beliefs to remain friends with her. She wants to see how he talks to people who sympathize with him so that she can dismantle his beliefs.

Again, the book emphasizes that open dialogue has to come from a place of genuine mutual respect, and Allison and Derek achieve that by building a friendship alongside their conversations. In doing so, Allison is starting to move Derek away from white nationalism, because he respects her and knows how much she disagrees with his beliefs. Separately, however, Allison remains conflicted because she knows how harmful Derek’s ideology is to other people—and how his rhetoric can spur extremists to violent action.



Even though Don and Derek try to distinguish white nationalism from other forms of extremism, it’s clear that they’re all interrelated—their ideology, for instance, can spur people to adopt more violent forms of white supremacy. Their racist rhetoric about “third-world immigrants” and their justifications for the mass shooter in this case can have fatal consequences, because their implicit argument is that the murderers’ motivations were reasonable.



Here, Allison points out that it’s difficult for students to truly engage with Derek about his ideas because he never fully clarifies what he believes. This also shows the importance of open dialogue, because it forces people to actually articulate their views so that others can understand, discuss, and even disprove them.



Again, even though Derek states that “overt prejudice can be really bad,” many of his posts on Stormfront have been subtly or explicitly racist. Despite Derek’s determination that white nationalism only focuses on white people’s rights, this suggests that all different forms of white supremacy can be harmful because in practice, they lead to prejudice against people of color. Nevertheless, Allison illustrates her willingness to engage openly with Derek’s ideas, knowing that this is the only way to dismantle them.



The more Allison reads about the conference, the more hesitant she is to go—particularly because racial hate crimes in the U.S. are at historic highs, just two months away from the 2012 election. The Republican primary has become a race to the conservative right, particularly on immigration. Even Mitt Romney has moved away from his centrist roots, suggesting an immigration policy of “self-deportation”: making life so difficult for immigrants that they would become miserable and leave on their own. The party has essentially decided to forfeit the minority vote, becoming an overwhelmingly white party.

Meanwhile, the Stormfront gathering becomes a major news story, with news outlets reporting that conference-goers will include neo-Nazis and Klansmen. Still, despite her growing anxiety, Allison trusts that Derek will not put her at risk, and she approaches the conference with the meticulousness of a research project. She will tell her close friend and her mother where she is, but that’s it. She doesn’t know what she’ll say if they ask her whether she’s a white nationalist, or about her relationship to Derek.

A few weeks earlier, Derek finally asked Allison out over text. She admits it had crossed her mind, but she’s conflicted—while she enjoys spending time with him, she fears what her classmates would think. She rejects his offer kindly, saying that the friendship they already have is nice, and Derek quickly agrees. Now, over Instant Messenger, Allison suggests that she’ll attend as a “curious friend” and tell people she’s “processing.” Even though she’s venturing into his territory, they have also become co-conspirators in Allison’s infiltration into the conference.

Don and Chloe drive up for the conference together from Florida. Don has attended more than 130 conferences, mixing them with vacations and time with his friends. Derek has attended many of the conferences too; even as a young child, Derek liked listening to the speakers. He also liked seeing the popular, energetic version of Don come alive at the conferences, whereas at home he was often tired and pessimistic. The only time Derek acted out was when Don threatened to go to a conference without him; they became fixtures there, like part of an extended family. Don trusts Derek more than anyone else in the movement, and he thinks of Derek as his partner and eventual successor.

The book’s discussion of the 2012 U.S. presidential election illustrates another reason that white nationalism can be extremely harmful. Because the ideology is moving into mainstream politics, now even previously moderate candidates like Mitt Romney are advocating for policies based on racist ideology and attempting to campaign solely to white Americans rather than all Americans.



Even though Derek asserts that he’s not a white supremacist, his association with neo-Nazis and KKK Klansmen suggests that he implicitly approves of their ideology—particularly as he is leading a part of the conference that they are all attending.



Derek asking Allison out affirms how close they’ve gotten despite their differences in ideology. The fact that Derek has become a “co-conspirator” in getting Allison into the conference suggests that he is aligning himself more with her than he is with the other attendees, and that their friendship has softened him to her perspective.



The conference returns to the idea that families and communities are built around shared values. The conferences are not simply places to exchange political strategy, but they are also gatherings for families and friend groups that happen to be built around a white nationalist cause. This is what makes pulling a person out of a certain ideology or value system so difficult, because it often means having to break them away from their community.



When Allison arrives, she meets a lot of Derek's family, including his older half-sisters, who pull Allison aside to brag about his accomplishments in the movement. Their cabin is enormous, and they play games in the living room and drink beers on the porch. Allison quickly realizes that Derek is famous, and that people genuinely love and adore him. Most people, meanwhile, assume that Allison is a white nationalist. Everything about their conversations disgusts her, but she promised not to cause a scene with his family, so she just smiles and nods.

At the conference the next day, Allison avoids being photographed and jots down questions—about the Holocaust denial, the militant terminology, and the dog whistles about “their kind,” “infiltrators,” and “enemies.” She listens to Don and Duke speak ill of interracial dating, insulting groups that they believe are causing white genocide. During the coffee breaks, Allison frequently excuses herself to the bathroom to avoid the conversation, feeling sick to her stomach.

Then, Derek begins his speech—the first time he has felt dread doing so. After months of conversation with Allison, he is becoming less secure in his beliefs. When he glances at her, he is reminded that his words are hurtful, alienating, and oppressive. Still, he makes his speech, focusing on the demographic decline of white people in the U.S. and talking about how to take the offensive in conversations with “anti-whites.”

Allison thinks Derek's speech is absurd and upsetting, but it's consistent with what he's been telling her in private in the last several weeks. She now knows that at least he's been honest with her, but he still has so many beliefs that are fundamentally different from hers. Derek's talk ends with a long ovation, and Allison wonders—even if she can convince Derek of the flaws in his argument, how can she convince him to give up so much of his life, his family, and his friends?

When Allison and Derek leave the conference the next day, she is relieved to get back to her normal life. But a few days later, Matthew notices Allison's name tag from the event, and she tells him about going to the conference with Derek. Matthew is confused and upset that Allison lied to him about where she went (she told him she was visiting friends in Jacksonville). He tells her that it was reckless to do it, and later he and Moshe look up information about the conference and see that Derek's views haven't changed at all.

Allison realizes how difficult it will be to break Derek out of white nationalism completely because it is such a dominant part of his family life. So much of the love that Derek's family has for him is based on his involvement in white nationalism and the fact that people see him as the future of the movement.



Allison experiences firsthand the harmful rhetoric and racist ideology that white nationalists and other white supremacists at the conference espouse. Again, this illustrates how harmful all forms of white supremacy are, because this common thread—of feeling threatened as white people—enables them to band together to oppress other groups.



As Derek takes the stage, it's clear that his conversations with Allison have had an effect on him, particularly as she's emphasized how harmful his ideology is to minorities. Seeing his own ideology through Allison's eyes is transformative, as getting another person's perspective (particularly the perspective of someone Derek loves and respects) makes Derek see a new, destructive side of his ideology.



Allison recognizes the value in having come to the conference, because being open to Derek's ideas and genuinely understanding them can, in turn, help her show Derek a different perspective. Still, she recognizes that it will be difficult to break Derek away from white nationalism because it is so tied to his family and their values.



Though Allison recognizes the value in having gone to the conference, other students like Matthew don't approve of engaging with Derek's ideology on this level. Even if Derek's transformation is taking place internally, he still hasn't changed his views outwardly, and that's a crucial piece of Derek's redemption process.



Moshe is angry—his identity has been built on the very history that white nationalists are trying to erase. His grandfather Chaim came from Hungary, where more than three quarters of Hungarian Jews were killed in the Holocaust. Chaim—a baby at the time—and his mother were sent to Bergen-Belsen, a work camp where Nazi guards would shoot people at random. Disease killed 35,000 prisoners in the first few months of 1945, several hundred prisoners starved each week, and 12,000 prisoners died after liberation—but Chaim survived. He and his mother and siblings were sent to a refugee camp in Italy and then on to New York and Miami. Most of Moshe’s childhood was built on honoring family history and adhering to Jewish traditions.

Chaim spoke little about the Holocaust when Moshe was growing up, and so Moshe did research himself in high school and traveled to Bergen-Belson at 17 with his brother. He also read up on modern-day anti-Semitism, Stormfront, and Don Black and David Duke, who argued that the Holocaust was greatly exaggerated and used as the “pillar of Zionist aggression.” They stated that Hitler was a great leader and Nazi Germany an ideal country. Moshe brought all of that knowledge with him to New College, where he met Derek and had been sitting with him around a dinner table for a full year—even at the cost of losing some of his friends. And now, reading about this conference, he wonders why he’s doing it—Derek is still basically a Nazi.

Moshe at first thought Derek could change because he was smart, kind, and had a diverse group of friends. Moshe himself had broken away from his Orthodox Judaism early in his teens as he began to learn more about science, and he knew how hard it could be to break away from a community essential to his family. But by this time, Derek has spent years away from his parents yet has continued to spread the same ideology. He had no incentive to change, particularly with friends who remained accepting. Matthew wonders if Derek is the one who’s been doing the persuading all along.

CHAPTER 8

Allison grew up learning how to debate; Julie encouraged her to think critically about rules. Now, Allison feels more prepared than ever to begin debating Derek in earnest, with science and theory. She enrolls in a course called Stigma and Prejudice that fall, a class that addresses how stereotypes can be assessed and changed. As part of the class’s introduction, the professor shows a 2000 HBO documentary called *Hate.Com*, which is about the rise of bigotry on the internet. Derek and Don appear early in the documentary.

Moshe’s backstory provides another perspective on how harmful white nationalist ideology can be. Hitler’s Nazi Party was based in white supremacist ideology; a major party platform was the idea that the Aryans (a certain subset of fair-skinned, blue-eyed Europeans) were a “master race,” and that Jewish people and other marginalized groups needed to be removed from society. This led to the Holocaust, one of the most devastating genocides in history. Neo-Nazis want to revive this ideology in the present, and Derek’s association with them under the banner of white nationalism and white supremacy suggests Derek’s implicit approval of their ideology.



Again, the book illustrates how white nationalists and white supremacists use manipulative rhetoric to make their case. Rather than acknowledging the Holocaust’s horrors, they use the Holocaust to justify anti-Semitic statements about “Zionist aggression,” which reframes themselves as victims and Jewish people as aggressors rather than the other way around. And again, Moshe concludes that although Derek tries to claim he’s not a neo-Nazi, the boundaries between him and people like Don and Duke are fluid, rendering them essentially the same because they are largely working toward the same goals.



Moshe points out one of the limits of accepting people and having open dialogue with them, conceding that being accepting of people might disincentivize them from actually changing their beliefs. However, there is some dramatic irony here, as Derek’s beliefs are changing because of his friendships with Matthew, Moshe, and Allison, even though he hasn’t expressed that outwardly yet. And so, despite the concerns Moshe has, the book suggests that open dialogue can be very successful, especially in contrast to ostracism, which tends to push people further away.



Because Allison now understands Derek’s beliefs more fully, she is able to start dismantling them—even taking a class to help her do so. This is only possible because she has taken the time to get to know Derek and to have open dialogue about his beliefs.

Meanwhile, the fact that Derek and Don appear in a documentary about bigotry on the internet shows just how impactful they have been in promoting racist rhetoric online.



Allison takes copious notes in the class, arming herself for her next conversation with Derek. They've been spending more time than ever together, both thinking that they are most comfortable with each other. And the more they spend time together, the more Allison thinks that Derek can make a full transformation. They argue online as she questions what he's so afraid of about the changing demographics in the U.S. When he explains that he's afraid white people will become a minority, she states that in the future, people will be more accepting of differences because there will be more diversity. Derek counters that "diversity typically means strife."

Allison also explains that race is a modern concept that is impossible to define, citing myriad studies. When Derek asserts that white people generally have higher IQ tests, Allison sends him research about the shortcomings of IQ tests and more recent studies based on better data. These studies show that nominal differences in IQ can be explained by cultural bias in IQ tests and outside factors like educational and health discrepancies, which are more likely to affect non-white people. She sends Derek information on systemic oppression—how non-white people face more obstacles and have fewer opportunities.

Derek counters that white people are oppressed by policies like immigration and affirmative action, but Allison shows that the opposite is true: white people are overrepresented in government and are more likely to be promoted over similarly qualified non-white candidates. White people enjoy advantages ranging from lower prices at car dealerships to better fruit in grocery stores. Even if Derek rarely agrees with her points, she's glad he's reading her links.

While Allison and Derek usually stick to logic, sometimes Allison wants their conversations to be emotionally charged. White nationalism isn't just a thought experiment: it's also a harmful ideology that causes real damage to people's lives. Non-white victims of prejudice are more likely to suffer from heart disease, depression, and suppressed immunity. White people in the same studies did not show a physical response to prejudice, which starts to make Derek wonder if he is wrong about white people experiencing prejudice. He starts to do research on his own.

Allison continues to make progress with changing Derek's beliefs, knowing that the more she questions his ideas, the more Derek might question them, too. She points out the flaws in some of his deep-seated beliefs, engaging with him in good-faith arguments while still respecting his fears. Even though Derek believes that "diversity typically means strife," the irony in this is that the "strife" Derek refers to has historically stemmed from white supremacists resisting diversity.



Allison not only makes her cases by teasing out Derek's arguments, but she also does research in order to counter some of Derek's points. Again, this is only possible because she actually gets to know the details of Derek's thoughts—like his belief that white people generally have higher IQs. Here, she points out that white supremacy is a contributing factor that has made it more difficult for non-white people to access opportunities, which allows white supremacists to further justify their own arguments.



Notably, that Allison doesn't expect Derek to agree with her right away. What's more important, she finds, is that they are actually having a conversation and that Derek is absorbing the arguments and facts she is presenting. This reinforces why ostracism doesn't always work, because it leaves no room for people to make a gradual transformation. This mirrors the way in which people become radicalized through a gradual process, becoming further and further entrenched in certain circles and ideologies.



Even though Derek asserts that he's not trying to hurt people like other white supremacists do, and that racism is bad, Allison illustrates how white nationalism is harming people. Words can have tangible repercussions because they reinforce prejudices that then lead to health problems, as Allison notes here, as well as other concrete forms of discrimination. All of Allison's arguments cumulatively seem to be working, as Derek starts to question his own beliefs and do research on his own. Open dialogue thus gives Derek a starting point to at least reconsider his ideology.



Allison brings up Juan, Moshe, and Matthew, asking about how they would fit into Derek's idea of an all-white society. She asks about how he would feel if the situation were reversed—if people didn't think he should be a full member of society. Derek explains that he doesn't want white nationalism to hurt people he knows, and that he doesn't actually expect the U.S. to become an all-white country. When Allison presses him, however, he gets vague about what he truly means or wants.

Allison and Derek's conversation often ends in frustration or tears, especially because their friendship has gradually evolved into a romantic relationship—and a serious one. Allison cares deeply about Derek, and she tries to explain to her mother that he's kind, that they enjoy doing things together, that he's supportive, and that she feels comfortable with him. Allison is happy—except for the glaring disagreements at the core of who they are as people. Sometimes Allison can forget about Derek's white nationalism, until she's reminded and becomes resentful of him and herself for liking him.

Once, late in the fall, Derek and Allison are driving back from a trip when Allison posits what would happen if he ended up having a child with a Black woman—why that would be so wrong. He says that the child would be cursed to a life of a confused identity, but Allison counters that they have several multiracial friends on campus who do not seem unhappy or confused. She tells him that people are afraid of him because he promotes an ideology predicated on deporting Africans, Jews, and Indians, uprooting their lives. He says that he doesn't believe in forced deportation, but maybe gradual self-deportation—eventually, in concept. Allison says that if he doesn't want people to be afraid of what he advocates, then he shouldn't be advocating it.

Don, on the other hand, is starting to realize that Derek's behavior *is* changing. Derek logs onto Stormfront less, despite the 2012 election heating up. Don created Stormfront in 1995 and watched it and Derek grow side by side. He watched the site's message spread and relied on Derek to keep it going. He always assumed that Derek would take it over, but he realizes that Derek might be going through a phase of fatigue with the movement—especially when he avoids coming onto the radio show for weeks at a time. Don makes excuses on the show, saying that Derek is just busy with school.

Simply having friendships with a diverse group of people becomes crucial to changing Derek's ideology. Becoming friends with Juan, Moshe, and Matthew means that Derek can no longer depersonalize the "enemy"; now, his ideology now targets people he genuinely cares about. And, as is clear here, that makes Derek reconsider whether he actually thinks the U.S. can or should be an all-white country.



Allison's internal conflict of being in a relationship with Derek connects back to the fact that she doesn't know if it's morally right to befriend someone with hateful beliefs. This acknowledges that while she is trying to be open and accepting of Derek so that she can change his beliefs, Derek still has a long way to go in making amends for spreading a harmful ideology.



Allison again reinforces the idea that Derek's ideas aren't as innocent as he argues—that people on campus feel genuinely unsafe because they believe that Derek wants to remove them from society. All forms of white supremacy, even in concept, can be damaging in this way.



Don's perspective in this passage illustrates that Allison's tactics are, in fact, working—even if she doesn't realize it yet. Her conversations with Derek have made Derek less and less comfortable with the movement, to the point that he's distancing himself from Stormfront and even from his father to a degree. This is a key first step in Derek's redemption: to stop perpetuating his beliefs on a large scale.



Derek, meanwhile, is wondering what he truly believes and wants to do. He's digesting research that suggests white nationalism is dangerous and flawed. And if he returns to the radio show, his friends will be parsing every word. He and Allison take a trip with his family to Key West for three nights. Allison has fun exploring with Derek during the day. But in the evening, they get dinner with Don, Chloe, and a family friend, a noted white nationalist named Sam Dickson. Derek grew up admiring Dickson's speeches, but because of Allison, he now realizes that Dickson's views are cruel and extreme. Allison, meanwhile, sits in silence, disgusted. Later, Derek agrees that parts of what Dickson said were "borderline crazy."

Allison later travels with Derek's family during Thanksgiving, just after Romney's defeat in the presidential election. Despite this loss, Don thinks that white nationalism is taking hold. Romney gets the white vote by a 20 percent margin, the largest white support for a single candidate in almost 30 years—a sign that the country is segregating. Meanwhile, Donald Trump and Bill O'Reilly lament that white people are now the minority, trying to drum up anger over this development.

At Thanksgiving dinner, Don and Chloe ask Derek about what he thinks of the election. Part of Derek still thinks the U.S. is slipping into an abyss, but another part is personally relieved that Romney's immigration policies won't unravel the lives of his friends on campus. His sister asks if he's even a white nationalist anymore. At the same time, another forum post goes around discussing Derek and saying that he's still not welcome on campus. Derek is hurt, while Allison is both protective of him and angry with him for sticking to white nationalism.

The next morning, Allison sits in a coffee shop and reads through the thread, deciding that she wants to write a public response. She knows that Derek is reconsidering at least some of his views, and she worries that the thread will simply hold those views in place. She lists some of the things that Derek has been doing: hanging out with Jewish and Hispanic friends, not posting on Stormfront or getting on the radio. And, she notes, he's never fought back, and attacking him isn't productive. What is productive is meaningful dialogue about how to change oppressive structures, but not in a hostile or violent way.

Again, Derek's conversations with Allison have proved crucial to adjusting his beliefs. Really listening to her arguments and being open to others' perspectives on white nationalism has enabled Derek to hear his father and Dickson's discussion through a new lens. He now understands how harmful it is, to the point that he is actually siding with Allison and disagreeing with some of Dickson's opinions—an important reversal. However, this again reinforces the idea that one of the most difficult parts of changing one's values is detaching from one's community.



This passage illustrates another damaging aspect of white nationalism: political polarization, particularly based on race. Politicians and other commentators like Donald Trump and Fox News's Bill O'Reilly use white nationalist rhetoric to further inspire fear and gain power by dividing people based on race, speaking only to white people.



Again, the book underscores how Derek's views are starting to change. Because he is now friends with non-white and Jewish people who have not ostracized him, Derek has been exposed to their perspectives and can understand how immigration policies informed by white nationalism could be very harmful to them. Additionally, this passage suggests that Derek is in a difficult intermediary position. As his views are changing, he isn't able to fully participate in either of his communities. His family now wonders if he's still as dedicated to white nationalism, while the students at New College continue to view him as a threat to their values.



Here, Allison makes the important point that dismissing people out of hand, attacking them, or ostracizing them isn't a productive way to change people's minds. The only way to do so—and the way that she's been able to get Derek to start questioning his beliefs—is to have open, meaningful conversations while also fighting harmful ideologies on a structural level.



Later, Derek thanks Allison for defending him, but he feels guilty about dragging her into things. Some people support Allison, but others simply add to the original thread, calling Derek “disgusting” and “pure hate.” The moderator announces that he is closing the thread, but before he does, Derek decides to finally speak up. He realizes, after reading Allison’s research and his own, that he no longer believes the white nationalist myths about “Jewish manipulation,” “testosterone-fueled black aggression,” or the theory about IQ discrepancies. He no longer thinks that segregation is necessary, though he’s still concerned about the demographic decline of white Americans. He doesn’t support neo-Nazism, nor is he a part of the KKK. He doesn’t outline all of his beliefs, but he hopes it helps slightly.

After Derek sends his message, he starts to worry about it getting onto Stormfront. But privately, students start to write to him, commending him, thanking him, and apologizing. Rose writes to him for the first time in months, saying that she thought his post was good. Meanwhile, Allison contacts the SPLC anonymously, hoping that they will delete his “extremist file” on their website. She attaches the full email, and they reply saying that they want to publish the email. Allison panics and says no, but it is too late. Several days later, the SPLC contacts Derek, explaining that they are planning to write a story about his “changing ideology” and asks if he’d like to comment—they’re posting something that day.

Here, Derek both recognizes and proves the value of open dialogue. In contrast to the people who are dismissing Derek outright, Derek writes a thoughtful response that outlines his beliefs so that people can actually engage with him on his ideas. Moreover, he shows that because of the conversations he’s had with Allison and others, he has concretely shifted his beliefs. He is also distancing himself more and more from white supremacist communities—a key step to disentangling himself from their values.



Derek’s acknowledges his changing values and no longer spreads harmful parts of his ideology, both of which are key steps in making amends. This is why people at New College react so warmly to him. Even Rose, whom he hurt deeply, is able to appreciate his willingness to admit his mistakes. But again, this passage illustrates that Derek is still stuck between two communities: he fears rejection from his white nationalist community for his “changing ideology” while he also begins to enjoy more acceptance on campus. The SPLC’s desire to publish a story about Derek’s experiences foreshadows more conflict in Derek’s life, as publicly admitting to his “changing ideology” will likely create even more tension with his family and his white nationalist community.



CHAPTER 9

By the time Derek receives the SPLC’s email, he is on his way to David Duke’s apartment in the Alps, where he plans to celebrate Christmas break. He writes to Allison, torn about how to deal with it. He doesn’t know what to do, realizing that hedging against his white nationalist beliefs while sitting on Duke’s couch is terrifying. Derek recently took the GRE and scored in the 97th percentile for verbal reasoning. His professors regard him as a promising historian and talented linguist. He applies for several graduate schools and imagines the possibilities of an anonymous life removed from white nationalism.

Derek’s fears illustrate his worries about losing some of his closest relationships because of his desire to move away from white nationalism. This again underscores why it can be so hard for people to renounce their former beliefs, because it can mean losing the community that shares those beliefs. At the same time, Derek’s desire to put white nationalism aside suggests his acknowledgement that it has done damage not just broadly in the world, but also in his personal life and academic career.



But at the same time, Derek considers the ambitions he always had, the way he emulated Duke growing up, and how he was the face of the young white nationalist movement for more than a decade. Now, at Duke's apartment, Duke continues to instruct Derek on how to embody the European ideal. He has a new radio show and a YouTube channel, and the movement seems energized by Obama's reelection. They are trying to co-opt the Tea Party movement by making it more explicitly racial, cashing in on white grievance and resentment. He believes that many Tea Partiers identify with white nationalism, and so he announces a tour aimed at connecting the two groups.

Duke's new certainty about the movement reminds Derek of some of his own former certainty about white genocide. Derek also realizes again how many friends and family he risks losing if he turns away from white nationalism. He thinks of this as he responds to the SPLC. He writes that his forum post and racial ideology are not mutually exclusive. He writes, "everything I said is true, and I also believe in White Nationalism."

With this response, Derek seems to have appeased both groups in his life. Allison is disappointed in his commitment to white nationalism, but she knows rejecting the label will probably be the last and most difficult part of his transformation. Allison also confesses that she was the one who emailed the SPLC, saying that she wanted to protect him. Derek is surprised, but he doesn't feel betrayed; he also knows that her intentions were good and that his views *are* softening.

Over the next weeks, Allison is in Australia for a winter internship, while Derek is attending a three-week language school in Europe. Meanwhile, classmates finally start to argue about his quote in the SPLC story. People begin to accuse Derek of sanitizing his ideology to appease them. Allison writes to Derek, saying how angry this makes her. Usually, she feels he's safe and supportive, but not when things like this happen. She knows that he makes her laugh and smile, but when they have to deal with white nationalism and racism it makes her sick and want to cry. Derek replies that he doesn't want to cause her pain. She responds that she wishes he weren't involved in white nationalism.

Allison tries to put what's happening aside, but her conscience nags at him. If Derek were a men's rights activist, she'd probably never speak to him; she hates that sexism is a dealbreaker for her, while racism doesn't seem to be. She reads the forum again, where dozens of people are ridiculing Derek.

Derek reiterates that one of the most difficult parts of moving away from the white nationalist movement lies in the fact that it also means moving away from the family, friends, and legacy to which he's been connected for so long. This is true not only because Derek cares about the community, but also because he knows that they have expectations that he will continue their work—especially as the white nationalist movement is gaining ground in national politics in the wake of Obama's reelection.



Derek's response to the SPLC illustrates how difficult it is for him to renounce white nationalism. This is particularly true because he risks losing the community he grew up in by rejecting the values that they once shared.



Again, Allison shows her patience in understanding that rejecting the community will likely be Derek's last step, because it means openly denouncing and likely embarrassing his friends and family. Her patience has thus far been rewarded, as Derek acknowledges that her willingness to engage with him has helped him gain new perspective, affirming once more that open dialogue has been critical to reforming his views.



The book underscores how difficult it is to engage with a community when a person's values don't necessarily align with that community. Derek continues to be rejected by New College students because they believe that he isn't being genuine about his beliefs. Similarly, Allison doesn't always feel that she can accept Derek because of the fundamental difference in their views, providing a major obstacle in their relationship.



Again, the book acknowledges that sometimes ostracism can be the only solution when a person feels threatened by someone else's beliefs. But even though Allison feels guilty that racism doesn't seem to be a dealbreaker for her, this very fact is what makes it critical that someone like her (who doesn't feel threatened by Derek's beliefs) talk to him to try and reform him.



James, the organizer, has been writing on the forum, feeling vindicated. Despite all the suggestions for open-mindedness and inclusion, Derek is still a white nationalist. James knows that people who are systematically oppressed often bear the brunt of educating others and always have to work harder to get their ideas heard. He knows that “civil discourse” is rarely the way to change minds. He doesn’t advocate for violent tactics, but he simply thinks that calm arguments rarely lead to radical change.

Allison replies, however, explaining that she thinks Derek’s dinners with Matthew and Moshe have begun to change his mind. She repeats that it’s more important to fight oppressive structures than to attack a single person, which won’t help anyone—and which Allison privately knows will likely push Derek back into a corner, more rigidly set in his beliefs.

Derek reads the forum posts alone in a hotel in Belgrade. He’s extremely hurt. He took the risk of posting about his ideology to his classmates, and now their rejection is more personal. He wonders if his ideology is worth so much exclusion, and he wonders if his classmates’ criticism and anger is valid. If he’s not a white supremacist, neo-Nazi, racist, or a bigot, what is he? When he falls back to talking about white genocide and oppression, Allison points out how the people in control of the government and the wealthiest segment of the U.S. are all overwhelmingly white.

Derek realizes how callous and ill-conceived his points start to sound, and he wonders if there’s really anything holding him to white nationalism beyond loyalty. He messages Allison, frustrated that he opened up to explain his intellectual ideas to the other students and that now they’re using his vulnerability against him. Allison notes that what he believes in are not simply “intellectual ideas”—they are abhorrent and dangerous, and he’s spreading this ideology with radio shows and Stormfront threads. He’s a public figure and not a victim, and she agrees with the things the students are saying.

James provides an alternate perspective to Allison’s, illustrating that students from marginalized groups have a much harder time trying to engage with someone like Derek, which is why “civil discourse” can be so difficult. Yet the book implies that this is precisely what makes it important for Allison to engage with Derek, because he is more willing to listen to her arguments. Without that dialogue, Derek has no path to change his beliefs.



Again, Allison emphasizes that open dialogue is the only way to change a person’s beliefs on an individual level. Ostracism and personal attacks, by contrast, will only make Derek less willing to engage and less likely to change.



Even though open dialogue is certainly the most effective avenue for changing Derek’s beliefs, this passage also suggests that in certain circumstances, ostracism can play a role in making a person question their beliefs. Because Derek has not been able to fully participate in communities at New College, it makes him wonder whether he’s actually willing to sacrifice those potential relationships for an ideology he’s becoming increasingly uncertain about.



While Derek grows frustrated with other students for overreacting or using his ideas against him, Allison points out the real damage that his beliefs have done, and how he has been an active part of spreading that ideology to a wide audience. So, while Derek again tries to position himself as a victim, just like in his white nationalist rhetoric, Allison points out that Derek isn’t really a victim, and that his language is false and manipulative.



Derek continues his trek through Europe as he thinks about how he's changed. White nationalism is embedded in all of his childhood memories, his sense of self, and most of his relationships. But if loyalty is holding his identity in place, his thoughts are moving in a new direction. For example, he came to New College to study medieval history, which he chose because white nationalist mythology centered on the Middle Ages and the Europeans' conquering spirit. Now, his classes made him question that idea. If white Europeans are really a genetically superior race, why had Europe lagged behind Islamic culture in technology, art, and science in the Middle Ages? And if races were better off segregated, why was one of the greatest territories Al-Andalus in Spain, where Muslims, Jews, and Christians lived together?

Derek also realizes on his trip that he can't trace back the modern concepts of whiteness: European warriors didn't even think of themselves as white. They thought skin color was not a hard biological fact but a condition that changed over time and geography. They fought not for race but for religion, culture, power, and money. The fact that white people conquered the world wasn't proof of fate but a fluke of history, he realized. And if he had been wrong about history, he could be wrong about so much else.

Derek reads more studies on race in the U.S., realizing that white people have advantages in how much wealth they accumulate, in whether they own their homes, in their health, and in the ability to gain top management jobs. Derek sees that white supremacy remains very much in place; they are not oppressed but advantaged. He also more fully starts to recognize and appreciate his friends' experiences: the anti-Semitism and racism they and their families have faced, particularly in comparison to him, a straight white man with his tuition fully paid for.

At the beginning of 2013, Derek feels more and more disconnected from white nationalism. And as he starts a French-immersion class, other American students figure out who he is and uninvite him to parties, talking about him loudly in school. He realizes how many potential friendships he's sacrificing for an ideology he no longer really believes in. He wishes he could spend the rest of his life anonymously, but he knows that's impossible. So, he tells Allison he wants to withdraw from white nationalism and disappear from public life.

As Derek travels through Europe, he continues to struggle with the tension between his white nationalist community and his evolving ideas. Hearing new perspectives and facts from Allison has enabled him to think independently and critically as he learns more about the Middle Ages—something that he's been interested in for so long but that he always viewed through a white nationalist lens. In this way, even when Allison isn't actively trying to convince Derek of her perspective, simply getting a different viewpoint allows Derek to apply that viewpoint to other aspects of his life—another benefit of the open dialogue between them.



Again, Derek's discussions with Allison have fostered his willingness to listen to new perspectives. As this passage illustrates, those new ideas then prompt Derek to consider that his other beliefs might be mistaken. It's a gradual process, but one that is pushing him toward acknowledging and making amends for the harm he's caused.



As Derek does more research, he recognizes that white supremacy isn't just a belief system that informs his white nationalism, but it is built into U.S. society. This is part of what makes it such a harmful ideology: it's often invisible, but it greatly affects marginalized people's day to day experiences.



This is a major turning point for Derek. With Allison's help, he now understands how harmful his white nationalist ideology is. And on a more personal level, Derek realizes that white nationalism is cutting him off from different communities that he wants to be a part of.



CHAPTER 10

Back on campus, Derek logs out of Stormfront for good. He tells Don he wants to retire from the radio show but doesn't tell him about withdrawing from white nationalism; he wants to recede quietly. He and Allison happily spend their final months at school together, now with little ideology left to debate. Derek plans to go to the medieval studies graduate program at Western Michigan University, while Allison has one more year left at New College. They agree to visit each other every few months and live together in Florida during the summer and winter breaks.

Before the end of school, Allison and Derek take a trip to Disney and then to New Orleans. They stay for a night with one of Derek's old white nationalist family friends. When the man is talking about his ideology, Allison excuses herself from the room, done with listening to it. On their drive back to Florida the next day, she reminds Derek of the infrastructure he built for the movement and how many people he influenced. She tells him that he has an obligation to publicly denounce white nationalism.

Derek hesitates at this request; this would mean hurting his family. But Derek is increasingly ashamed when he thinks about white nationalism. This escalates after President Obama tries to pass immigration reform in the first months of 2013, and then in April 2013 when two Muslim immigrants carry out a terrorist attack at the Boston Marathon. The ensuing wave of Islamophobia is fostered by white nationalists like John Tanton, who in turn influences several lawmakers like Ted Cruz, Jeff Sessions, and Steve King. Derek feels like he helped feed a monster, and Allison affirms that he's caused too much damage not to talk about the issue in public.

Derek quietly dreads his graduation ceremony, worried about what will happen when he accepts his diploma. But Chloe and his grandmother are coming, and there is no way to get out of walking in the ceremony. Don, on the other hand, will not come—he and Derek agreed this was for the best, fearing a student revolt at his presence. Don explains it as “one more sacrifice to the cause,” but this sacrifice hurts them both. Still, Don thinks that he's won out against the liberal arts school—that Derek is still a committed white nationalist.

Logging out of Stormfront and giving up the radio show are big changes for Derek. He acknowledges that the first step for him to rectify the damage he's done is to stop actively spreading hateful white nationalist messages across these platforms. And while he knows that this will likely strain his relationship with Don, these gestures also strengthen his relationship with Allison, because they now share core values.



Even as Derek withdraws from white nationalism, Allison points out that this isn't enough for Derek to make amends for the damage he's caused in propagating the white nationalist movement. Another key part is publicly admitting his mistakes and denouncing white nationalism—he must address his actions directly.



Separating himself from white nationalism publicly is an extremely difficult prospect for Derek, because it would also mean separating himself from the family and friends with whom he shared those values. At the same time, he recognizes the tangible harm that white nationalism is causing, and that it is infiltrating the political mainstream more and more. Rectifying the damage he has caused, therefore, means directly counteracting the messages that he used to spread on Stormfront and his radio show.



Don and Derek both recognize the sacrifices that they have made for white nationalism, but Don's choice to skip Derek's graduation indicates that the father and son no longer share the same values or goals. Derek is separating from his family and former community in order to participate in a community whose values he now shares.



At the ceremony, Matthew introduces himself to Derek's family, but they cut the conversation short when they see his yarmulke. They listen to the commencement speaker: a Florida judge named Charles Williams, one of the first Black men on the Florida civil court. He has made documentaries about civil rights and been given awards by the NAACP. He gives a speech about the importance of fighting oppression and promoting fairness and inclusion.

After the speech, the students start to receive their degrees, and Derek grows very nervous that the others will boo and glare when he takes the stage. Only Allison understands how much New College has changed him in the last few years. Derek wonders why he hasn't just given a statement disavowing his white nationalism. As he walks to the stage, he sees James Birmingham standing in an anti-Nazi T-shirt. Derek steps onto the stage, and he hears one yell of "racist," and then nothing. A few of his friends clap, but most sit in silence. He had arrived as a white nationalist and would be leaving as a white nationalist.

A month later, Derek is still living in Sarasota for the summer. He starts a letter about his beliefs, but he is having trouble knowing how to begin. He wants to apologize for the damage he caused and condemn racism. He wants to change his **name** so he can begin anew. But he knows that his family will be upset and might never speak to him again—they would consider him a "traitor to the cause." Still, Allison warns that if he doesn't do it soon, the problem will follow him to graduate school. She reminds him of some of the horrific things he's said and how he has to take responsibility for the damage he's caused. She assures him that despite what his family does, she loves him, and she will still be there for him regardless.

In July 2013, Derek visits his parents at home. If he's going to break their hearts, he wants to do it in person. Chloe greets him with a hug, and they spend time building new windows together for the house; Don takes him to buy a new cell phone battery while happily talking about the verdict in the George Zimmerman trial. The jury ruled that Zimmerman acted in self-defense in 2012 when he killed Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager. He thought Martin "looked suspicious" wandering around a gated Florida neighborhood, and so he followed Martin to within 70 feet of Martin's apartment and shot him during a confrontation.

These events at graduation give both individualized and generalized examples of how harmful white nationalism is. Derek's family doesn't see Matthew as a person worthy of interacting with, despite his close friendship with Derek. This moment is even more poignant when paired with Charles Williams's commencement address, which speaks to the broader issues of systemic oppression and inclusion, ideas that are directly at odds with white nationalism.



As Derek graduates, he recognizes that adhering to white nationalism for so long cost him full inclusion into the community at New College. The tragedy is that Derek's values have shifted, thanks to Allison and other friends who took the time to reach out to him. It is this contrast—between what he believes and what others think he believes—that spurs him to want to publicly disavow white nationalism. He knows that's a necessary part of making up for some of the harm he's done on campus, particularly when he no longer believes in the ideology that caused that harm.



Derek grapples with the idea that publicly disavowing white nationalism will be painful, particularly because it will cut him off from so many of his communities—to the point that they would consider him a "traitor." Changing his name is a key part of that transformation, because it means relinquishing his name's symbolic ties to white nationalism and moving away from his family heritage. At the same time, Derek recognizes the importance of doing so from a moral perspective, to try to rectify some of the damage he's done in spreading a flawed and oppressive ideology.



This is another example of how white nationalism—and white supremacy in all its forms—can be an extremely harmful. Spreading false and discriminatory stereotypes about Black people—like Derek's earlier false assertion that they are naturally more aggressive—actually causes more violence against Black people simply for "looking suspicious," as in the case of Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman.



The verdict prompts another divisive argument about race. According to one poll in *The Washington Post*, 90 percent of minorities considered the shooting “unjustified,” compared with only 30 percent of white people. White nationalist talking points about Black aggression and Black-on-white crime resurface. Donald Trump weighs in, saying that Black and Hispanic people commit an overwhelming amount of violent crime in major cities. Traffic surges on Stormfront.

Listening to Don talk about the trial, Derek grows frustrated. His father’s reasoning sounds uninformed and cruel. Derek helped instill fear about Black people being violent, and now Derek knows the theory was utter nonsense. Young Black men are the victims of both structural and interpersonal prejudice. Derek can’t listen to any more, and he steers the conversation away from politics. When they get home, he declares that he has to leave. Derek knows his father’s points horrify him—but so does the memory of his former self. He knows he must renounce white nationalism.

Derek drives immediately to a nearby bar and takes out his laptop, drafting his letter. In it, he writes that he is disavowing white nationalism. He has harmed people of color, people of Jewish descent, and many others, and he does not want to contribute to that harm any longer. White nationalism is not a positive identity that asserts cultural values, but an antagonistic creed that detracts from other groups who have been historically disadvantaged. Oppression against white people does not exist. Derek explains that although this change seems abrupt, his awakening has been gradual. He can’t support an oppressive movement any longer.

Derek sends the letter to Allison, who expresses how proud she is of him for writing it. She also knows his family will be angry, but even though Derek acknowledges this, he insists he has to send it immediately or he’ll lose his nerve. He attaches it to an email to the SPLC, asking them to publish it in full.

CHAPTER 11

The next day, Don is at his computer when a headline about Derek pops up on his screen: “Activist Son of Key Racist Leader Renounces White Nationalism.” Don quickly reads the letter, which asserts that Derek is separating from white nationalism and thoroughly critiques the ideology. Don assumes the SPLC is trying to smear his family again and calls Derek to warn him that someone broke into his email. Derek explains that the letter is real and apologizes for not telling Don directly.

Here, the book illustrates how white nationalism and white supremacy are dividing the country as a whole. By using white nationalist rhetoric, politicians and pundits can take advantage of the fear and anger white Americans feel at the idea that they might lose power. This, the book suggests, is what gives public figures like Donald Trump such influence.



Derek underscores the harm in his former beliefs, especially since he now knows that they were built on false arguments and facts. But he also recognizes that he has to make amends for his role in spreading that ideology, knowing that he converted many people to the movement. This is the next step in Derek’s redemption: owning up to his mistakes and trying to counteract them.



In Derek’s letter, he tries to counteract some of the rhetoric and arguments that he made when he was still trying to win people over to the white nationalist movement. Derek argues explicitly that white nationalists are not victims working for their own rights, but instead that their ideology is built on oppression and violence.



Sending the letter to the SPLC is another symbolic shift in Derek’s thinking and in the communities he associates with. While Derek’s family hates the SPLC, and Derek once feared the organization as well, now he aligns himself with a civil rights group and breaks with his family’s ideology.



Shifting to Don’s perspective in this moment illustrates that while Derek’s transformation has been gradual and consistent, it has also been largely internal. Don still doesn’t recognize that Derek no longer shares many of his values, to the point that he doesn’t even believe that Derek wrote the letter. This again suggests that white nationalism is so intrinsic to Don’s idea of Derek and their relationship that he can’t imagine Derek renouncing the ideology.



Don hangs up in disbelief. When Derek calls back, Chloe is in tears and Don is in shock. Derek confirms that he wrote the letter, and it reflects what he thinks. Over the next few hours, Derek receives many messages from family, saying that he has thrown away years of work and that he isn't the person they thought they knew. They feel angry, grieved, and abandoned, and they wonder if he has a "mental disorder."

Don calls Derek that night and says it would have been better for the family if Derek hadn't been born, which stuns Derek. Don calls back again a few moments later to tell Derek that what he said wasn't true. The next afternoon, Derek's sister shows up saying that he can no longer spend time with his teenage niece; he is a bad influence trying to brainwash her daughter into his ideology. Derek thinks that this outcome is much worse than he imagined, and he tells Allison that he thinks he's getting disowned. She assures him that this will pass and that he did the right thing.

Allison isn't the only one who's proud of Derek. He receives messages from many people congratulating and thanking him for his courage, including Rose, Moshe, and Juan, knowing it couldn't have been easy to publish the letter. The SPLC also removes Derek's extremist file. Derek declines interview requests, but he writes a response to an interview Don gave about his disappointment. The interviewer speculated that Derek's education helped change his thinking, and Derek also notes that the influence of New College students was the biggest piece—particularly the people who disagreed with him and the people he once considered "outsiders."

The news also makes its way onto Stormfront, where Don decides he has no choice but to respond to Derek's letter. He feels "depressed and basically paralyzed." Don looks for clues he might have missed about Derek's transformation, but nothing helps him understand. He wonders if he'd been wrong about Derek's intelligence and rationality—or maybe he had been wrong about white nationalism. He doesn't want to consider either possibility. He wonders instead if this is Derek's way to rebel against his family, or if he's suffering from a kind of Stockholm syndrome.

This passage illustrates how difficult it can be to change one's values, because it often means falling out with one's community. Derek's denunciation is so shocking that his family even suggests he isn't the person that they know and love. In this way, their acceptance of him is conditional—it depends on his adherence to white supremacy.



Derek continues to experience the difficulty of breaking with his family because of his changing values. Don's statement that it would be better if Derek hadn't been born is particularly startling. Just as shared values built a bond between father and son, losing those shared values weakens that bond (or breaks it entirely). The same is true of Derek's sister, as Derek is now essentially exiled from his family.



In contrast to Derek's family, who are now shunning him because they feel his values no longer align with theirs, the opposite is happening with Derek's peers at New College. Now that Derek is making an effort to rectify the damage he did within the white nationalist movement, his classmates acknowledge that his values now align with their own. As such, they welcome him into the community. Additionally, Derek emphasizes the importance of his friendships with people like Juan, Moshe, Matthew, and Allison, noting that conversing with them was the most important influence in getting him to reconsider his perspectives.



Don's depression in response to Derek denouncing white nationalism again illustrates how much of their bond was predicated on Derek taking up the white nationalist mantle. In the wake of Derek's transformation, Don feels like Derek has completely betrayed the family. Yet Don's thoughts here illustrate why Derek's public renunciation of white nationalism is so important: it makes even a staunch supporter of white nationalism wonder if he might be wrong about the ideology, too.



Don also considers whether it's time for him to withdraw from public life as a white nationalist. Everything now reminds him of Derek's renunciation, and Don doesn't have the heart for any of it. People on Stormfront wonder if Derek was paid off, is secretly gay, or had a Black girlfriend. They wonder if Don's thinking could evolve, too. Don vents about Derek on the website, saying that Derek thought family ties could be separate from politics. Hundreds of posts quickly follow: sympathy, anger, and reminders of how embarrassing the situation is for the whole movement. Derek's rejection seems personal for all of them.

The messages grow violent, threatening Derek, and Don doesn't know which side he himself is on. So, he shuts down the message thread and spends more and more time in bed. His 60th birthday is only a few days away, and Don realizes how much he wants Derek to come to the party. Chloe isn't ready to talk to Derek again, but Don insists. He sends Derek a note saying that he wants to see his son.

The next morning, Derek moves out of Sarasota for the last time. He was planning to pick up Allison in Virginia and drive to Ohio to visit her family before going to Michigan, but now he adds an extra stop at his grandmother's house, where the party is. Derek doesn't know what to expect. Don and Chloe have completely cut him off financially, even threatening to call the police to make him return his car to them.

When Derek arrives, Chloe hugs him but says nothing; his half-sisters refuse to talk to him. Don takes him aside and they drive to one of their favorite spots in Palm Beach before going to dinner at a local bar. They talk about politics, and Derek asserts that he believes what he said in the letter. He knows that he can't convince Don, but he goes through the research he did to conclude that white nationalism is a flawed and dangerous ideology. When they return to the party, they are no closer to an understanding.

Don and Derek bid each other goodbye, and Derek continues the drive. Don reflects that it's like Derek isn't thinking straight anymore. Don feels that he's "pretty sure" he's right about race, especially after making the same arguments for 40 years. But now, he's arguing with the person he loves most. He starts to wonder what he's doing with his life, and whether it's worth it.

This passage illustrates that it's not just Derek's family who now feel like Derek no longer aligns with their values. The community at large feels betrayed, to the point that they revoke their support for him completely. Additionally, while Derek expresses his hope that family ties could be separate from politics, the book has highlighted several times how Derek's political values have been foundational to his familial relationships.



Derek finds that his rejection of white nationalist values not only separates him from his family and a community he's been a part of for years but also turns him into a target. This again highlights the radical and dangerous nature of the white nationalist movement, in that they're willing to target anyone who disagrees with or embarrasses them.



The fact that Don and Chloe have cut Derek off financially and have threatened to call the police on him underscores how deeply his transformation and rejection of their values has affected them. This situation cements the idea that shared values are often necessary to maintain a relationship.



Derek's decision to separate himself from his loved ones manifests physically here, as the only way Don can talk to Derek is by leaving his own birthday party. Additionally, Derek knows it's unlikely that he'll ever get Don to reconsider white nationalism, but he also wants to open up the same dialogue that Allison opened with him, knowing that this is the only way he might be able to change Don's views.



Even though Don doesn't necessarily reveal these thoughts to Derek in the moment, it's clear that Derek's own transformation might be shaking Don's faith in the movement. Don's is only "pretty sure" of his ideas about race, which hints that he might be reconsidering his own ideology—or at least losing some of his militant conviction.



Derek returns to Florida a few weeks later to change his **name**, staying at his parents' house while they attend a Stormfront conference. He has submitted to a background check and paid \$400. He's switching his names, to Roland Derek Black, out of respect to his parents, but he hopes this will offer him more anonymity. The judge signs off on the paperwork, and Derek walks out as a new person. He thinks that it is over and done with—except, at that very moment, his former ideology is spreading at the conference.

Derek's decision to change his name is a symbolic one. Reversing his first name and his middle name reflects his own ideological reversal, moving away from the white nationalist heritage that his name represented. Derek understands this; he is walking out as a "new person" both literally in his name and metaphorically in his new ideals.



CHAPTER 12

At the Derek Black Memorial conference, Don is now the sole director—his first time in years leading one without Derek. Don's friends sense that Don needs some inspiring, and Duke in particular is angry at the pain that Derek caused Don. Duke assures Don that the movement is still strong in its numbers, and that being positive can help advance their cause and win the fight to make white nationalism mainstream. Duke expresses his admiration for Don, and Don feels a bit better.

Duke's reaction to Derek's renunciation of white nationalism illustrates how Derek has pushed away not only his father, but another close figure who mentored him throughout his life. Just like Don, Duke views Derek's change of heart as a major betrayal of the values that they have always shared and a criticism of the family.



Indeed, it appears that white nationalists are finding unlikely allies. A few weeks earlier, the Supreme Court overturned a key part of the Voting Rights Act, allowing for a new wave of voting restrictions throughout the South and erasing one of Martin Luther King Jr.'s signature achievements. The Tea Party Caucus stalled Obama's attempts at immigration reform, and congressmen were talking about the "war on whites." By the end of the conference, Don feels reassured about the future of white nationalism, particularly as the attendees are younger than ever before.

Even though Derek has turned away from white nationalism, the movement is far from going away, as what was once white nationalist rhetoric is now becoming policy. For example, voting restrictions have historically been framed as protecting against voter fraud (though voter fraud was and remains incredibly rare), but they also disenfranchise many voters, especially people of color.



One such person is Matthew Heimbach, who graduated just months before, like Derek. He went from a Mitt Romney supporter to a Tea Party organizer and then a registered Stormfront user. At college, he found promising new leaders on the radical right, many of whom traced their views back to Stormfront. An entire generation of white power advocates came of age listening to Derek's interviews and playing his white pride video game on Stormfront's children's page. He tells Don that they are "primed for revolution" after Stormfront "planted the seeds in his mind."

Matthew Heimbach's story highlights how significant of an impact Derek had on the white nationalist movement. The material he posted on Stormfront has now indoctrinated a generation of people. Michael's language of being "primed for revolution" also suggests that he has also been radicalized and has a tendency toward violence, once again confirming how dangerous these movements can be even when they don't advocate for violence outright.



Meanwhile, Derek is uprooting those seeds, trying to prevent himself from interpreting the world through the lens of white nationalism, like distrusting the government, ignoring sports, and avoiding most music and movies. He feels like he is just starting to find his way into American culture. In many ways, it feels liberating to start over—to be free from his history, to trust people, and to act without prejudice or judgment.

Derek spends his first year in Michigan engaging with American multiculturalism: movies, music, and *The New York Times*, for example. He studies a little Arabic and explores Muslim neighborhoods, briefly tutoring an Iraqi immigrant in English. He finds himself liking President Obama and trusting the U.S. government. He drinks tap water for the first time (Don always feared possible contaminants).

Derek saves money for trips with Allison, and they travel to Nicaragua, the Caribbean, and Morocco. He thinks about how connected the world is, and he is again ashamed of how he acted. He apologizes to close friends, but he doesn't know how to make amends for the damage he did. At the same time, he completely cuts himself off from anyone associated with white nationalism, not wanting to be drawn in again.

Derek does try to reconnect with Don and Chloe, sending them money to repair their roof; in return, they send Allison a gift certificate for her birthday. Meanwhile, Don messages Derek with little taunts about the rise of white nationalism as race becomes the center of the country's most divisive debates. Anti-refugee sentiment rises during the Syrian crisis, and the Black Lives Matter movement spurs the All Lives Matter and White Lives Matter countermovements. Don thinks that the U.S. isn't far from a racial civil war.

Derek mostly ignores these kinds of messages, disagreeing with Don wholeheartedly now. He confides his guilt to Allison, who visits him every few months. A year into Derek's graduate program, Allison graduates from New College and starts a doctoral program in Lansing, Michigan, less than two hours away from Derek. They spend every weekend together, happy and solid in their relationship.

On a personal level, Derek understands how white nationalism has colored the way he views many aspects of life and cut him off from communities built around things like art or sports as a result.

Describing his new phase of life as "liberating" suggests that white supremacist movements don't just hurt the people they target—such movements also hurt their members by limiting what they can experience and who they can form relationships with.



As Derek explores new aspects of culture, new neighborhoods, and new political leanings, his discoveries confirm how entrenched in white supremacy conspiracies he was at a young age, and how much this prevented him from engaging with the world. Removing himself from the white nationalist community enables him to change his values even more, again showing how communities are often built around shared values.



Derek tries to rectify some of the damage he's done by reaching out to specific people to apologize. This is another important step in his redemption, because he knows he needs to admit his mistakes and confront the past in order to make amends for the harm his beliefs caused others.



Though Derek tries to repair his relationship with his parents, it's clear that white nationalism continues to be a major dividing point in their relationship; not having shared values still creates major conflict in their family. Alongside this, the book provides different examples of how white nationalist ideology is creating social conflict in the U.S.



Whereas Derek and his family members' different ideologies divide them, Derek feels more and more solid in his relationship with Allison because of their shared values. This illustrates that although it can be difficult to leave behind an ideology because it means leaving a community, at the same time, adopting new beliefs can open the door to new relationship.



Derek is doing well at Western Michigan, focusing his energy on schoolwork rather than white nationalism. But no matter how hard he tries, there is no way for him to avoid it. In summer 2015, Dylann Roof becomes radicalized by white nationalism on Stormfront. He signed up in spring 2015 under the name “LilAryan” and became frustrated that people only seemed to be talking and not acting. So, in June 2015, he attends a Bible study at a historically Black church in Charleston, South Carolina, before pulling out a handgun and killing nine people.

The shooting brings Stormfront back into the news, and later, Roof’s defense attorney blames the “racist internet” for radicalizing him and causing the shooting. Derek wonders if anything he posted or said had led Roof to extremism and violence, but Derek tries to distance himself from the incident.

During the same week, however, another story breaks: Donald Trump has just announced his candidacy for president of the United States. Derek thinks that Trump has always been driven more by his desire for popularity than actual beliefs, but he knows that Trump could back the establishment into a corner. In 2011, he claimed that Obama was not born in the United States until Obama had to release his birth certificate. Now, listening to Trump’s announcement, it seems like something directly out of his white nationalist past.

Trump becomes popular by using racist rhetoric and railing against immigrants. Don hears echoes of things he and Duke used to say about securing the border so they can protect the U.S.’s culture and economy. He knows that Trump is banking on support from white people who are fed up and angry. Trump wants to ban Muslims from entering the U.S., and he positions himself as the “law and order candidate” in the age of Black Lives Matter. He cites statistics about crime that prove to be blatantly false, but people ignore the fact-checking and instead see the appeal in his call to make the U.S. “great again” by reinforcing structures of white supremacy.

Don is amazed: this is the first time a U.S. presidential candidate is actively using white nationalist dog whistles and sharing messages on Twitter from a white nationalist account called @WhiteGenocide. When people commit violence in Trump’s name, he calls it “unfortunate” but then justifies it. He refuses to condemn David Duke until finally consenting to do so. Regardless of whether Trump believes in his own rhetoric, Don becomes convinced that it is mutually beneficial. Chloe attends rallies and sees the size and energy of the crowds, and the rage and passion that they have. Trump is accelerating the movement.

Dylann Roof’s mass shooting again demonstrates how the boundaries between white nationalism and more extreme forms of white supremacy are often blurry, as one can often feed into another. Roof was radicalized on Stormfront, so even though Don and Derek didn’t explicitly condone violence, their forum still influenced Roof to commit murder.



The fact that Roof’s attorney blames the “racist internet” for what happened illustrates how damaging the white nationalist rhetoric on Stormfront can be, as it leads people like Roof to violent action.



The book suggests that Donald Trump also uses white nationalist rhetoric to manipulate people. Implying that Obama was not born in the United States is a racist tactic used to drum up white people’s anxiety, as it’s implied that the reason Obama is not American is because he is half Black. This rhetoric was effective at manipulating people, as this rumor was so widespread that Obama had to prove that he was American.



Trump’s painting himself as a “law and order candidate” alludes to being against Black Lives Matter; he also plays up xenophobia and anti-immigrant prejudice. Even his slogan, “make America great again,” suggests that the U.S. was in a better position in some bygone era, though life was far worse for non-white people prior to the mid-20th century before overt forms of racial segregation and discrimination were outlawed. In this way, the book suggests that Trump’s rhetoric signals his commitment to white nationalist issues, even if he doesn’t identify as a white nationalist himself.



Trump continues to use “dog whistles” (coded language) to signal his support for the white nationalist movement. As Chloe sees when she attends his rallies, white nationalists are willing to give that support because of those signals, while people who don’t necessarily want to identify with the movement are more willing to take up its ideas when those ideas are couched in coded language.



Don laments that Derek isn't there to share in the energy, knowing it could have been an opportunity of a lifetime for him. Young white nationalist leaders have a giant media circus around them, including Richard Spencer, a 38-year-old academic who wrote about IQ differentials, white genocide, and a future white ethno-state. Don thinks that Spencer could fill the role that Derek left behind, and he reaches out to Spencer in the summer of 2016.

That summer, in 2016, Derek has just earned his master's degree and has three months before starting as a doctoral student at the University of Chicago. He spends more time with Allison and watches the election unfold across Michigan, which has become a crucial swing state. Meanwhile, Derek reads up on the white supremacy underpinning American society, which he now views as a fundamental flaw. He reads Ta-Nehisi Coates, Edward Said, and Ibram Kendi. His own political identity is unclear, but he quickly realizes that he aligns much more with Hillary Clinton than Trump. He plans to cast a ballot in Michigan to increase its impact, because even though polls show Clinton reliably ahead, Derek still thinks Trump has a chance to win.

Don talks to Derek on the phone, explaining that white people feel threatened, and a "silent army of white believers" want to "take the country back" from Obama, even though they have a disproportionate share of wealth and power. Derek can sense a storm building, and it terrifies him. Meanwhile, Hillary Clinton speaks about how Trump has built his campaign on prejudice and paranoia, allowing white nationalists to take over the Republican Party.

Derek feels implicated in what is going on, knowing how he helped spread the movement. He talks to Allison about his guilt, and she explains that he needs to publicly refute white nationalism at every opportunity. Derek knows Allison is right, and he begins to share parts of his story during the final months of the election.

However, whatever effect Derek has is dwarfed by Trump and white identity politics. On election night, Derek watches as the results begin coming in. Trump wins Ohio, North Carolina, Florida, and Michigan is trending that way as well. After midnight, Trump gives a victory speech. Derek turns off the TV, feeling antsy and obligated to do something. For two decades he pushed to bring about this moment, and now he wants to sound a warning bell.

Spencer represents a parallel to Derek, providing an alternate view into what Derek might have become if he had continued with the movement. Don reaching out to Spencer again reinforces the idea that communities are built around shared beliefs; Don wants to build a bond with someone who shares his values.



Derek starts to learn even more about how white supremacy lies beneath many of the U.S.'s institutions, and he understands now how prejudice and systemic racism are harmful in all their forms. This is part of why Derek has moved so strongly away from Trump, who the book suggests has eagerly taken up white nationalist rhetoric and policies. This is another key part of Derek's transformation and realizing his past mistakes, as he becomes more educated on racial injustice and understands how his previous ideology was flawed.



Again, Don's rhetoric hints at the white nationalist movement's militancy. Even if Don's (and Trump's) language seems theoretically harmless, it is being used to manipulate people. Derek and Clinton both hint at how that manipulation could translate to actual political power via the presidential election.



With Allison's help, Derek realizes that denouncing white nationalism is only part of finding redemption from the damage he has done. He also needs to actively warn people away from the movement to try and make up for the large number of people that he has attracted to the ideology.



With Trump's election, Derek recognizes the power of rhetoric and the white nationalist movement more broadly. In wanting to sound the warning bell, Derek recognizes that he, too, can use language in order to sway people away from that movement. This is, perhaps, why he ultimately agreed to be the subject of Saslow's book.



CHAPTER 13

Don has been predicting Trump's victory for weeks, but when it happens, he is nevertheless stunned. He has always steered himself for disappointment, assuming history would remember him as a loser and a bigot. But now he feels that the movement has prevailed. Neo-Nazis wear T-shirts showing Trump and Hitler walking side by side. Trump is appointing a cabinet filled with people who are very sympathetic to white nationalist views. Don no longer thinks of Washington, D.C. as "enemy territory"—now he feels like he wants to go there.

Two weeks after the election, Richard Spencer hosts a white nationalist conference in the Ronald Reagan building. Spencer speaks eloquently, talking about how white nationalists willed Trump into office. He considers himself a "racial identitarian," and his white power think tank is called the "National Policy Institute." He makes use of theatrical flair, hammering his fist against a lectern and staring into TV cameras that are there, explaining that the U.S. is white people's creation and their inheritance. Several people in the crowd give the Nazi salute, and it becomes one of the symbolic moments of the 2016 election. Spencer tells them that this is just the beginning.

A few days later, an opinion piece appears in the *New York Times* under the name R. Derek Black, entitled "Why I Left White Nationalism." He discusses how he was once the future of the white nationalist movement. Through many talks with devoted people at New College who invited him into their dorms rather than ostracizing him, he began to realize the damage he'd done. He denounces the people who used a wave of white anger to take the White House.

Derek writes that the wave of violence and anger has only risen. More and more people are being forced to recognize that the country is susceptible to its worst instincts when the message is packaged correctly. No checks and balances can redeem what has been unleashed. This is "the greatest assault on our own people in a generation," and white nationalists need to be clear that Donald Trump's "callous disregard for people outside his demographic is [...] destructive."

The wake of the 2016 U.S. presidential election illustrates how powerful the white nationalist movement is, particularly when it joins with other white supremacist groups like neo-Nazis or the KKK. But it also shows how dangerous those movements can be, in that together they have now become a part of mainstream politics and are normalizing hateful ideologies.



Spencer again illustrates the importance of using implicit rather than explicit language, using "racial identitarian" as an identifier rather than calling out his ideology as racist, or using the "National Policy Institute" as a name for something entrenched in the white power movement. Using words like this makes his message easier for the public to accept and more difficult to call out as racist, which manipulates the white nationalist movement's image. At the same time, it invites more extremism into the mainstream, as with these attendees who give the Nazi salute in a prominent D.C. building on national television.



Taking up the moniker of "R. Derek Black" is another symbolic gesture Derek makes through his name. Even though he has changed his name officially, Derek also acknowledges the harm he did under his own name as a white nationalist and doesn't want to shy away from that.



Denouncing white nationalism and Donald Trump's use of the movement to gain political power while sowing divides in the country is yet another key step in Derek's redemption. It is not enough for him to stop spreading ideology and admit his mistakes. Part of truly making amends for the damage he has caused means becoming actively anti-racist and vocally opposed to the white nationalist movement at every opportunity, and Derek's language shows that he is trying to do that in no uncertain terms.



Don reads Derek's op-ed and clicks over on Stormfront. There, they call it "Treasonous," and "liberal dribble." Don wonders why Derek is actively opposing them now—maybe he wants to be an "anti-white activist." Derek doesn't know if he wants to be an activist, but Allison helps him realize that he had built up a massive debt to society—particularly to people of color—in fueling the white nationalist movement. He starts speaking at different colleges and gives occasional interviews about his transformation.

Meanwhile, Richard Spencer has just arrived in Alexandria, Virginia, six miles from the White House. He wants to have a presence in Washington, D.C. since white nationalists are "basically becoming a part of the establishment." He starts to receive tons of media requests after his conference speech. He is considering a run for the U.S. House of Representatives out of Montana and launches a new website for the alt-right, speaking to an audience that has suddenly become rapt.

Spencer likes Alexandria for its "historic southern charm," with its Jefferson Davis statue. But the city is diverse and liberal, and he starts wearing a hat to conceal his identity. Many people ignore or glare at him in public, and many former friends have disavowed him. He wants to inoculate himself from this by building a headquarters for the alt-right with a media staff and security guards. Meanwhile, he sees flyers with his face on them under the notice "MISSING DOG," explaining that Spencer is a neo-Nazi and must be "shunned and humiliated."

Soon, white nationalist flyers circulate through Alexandria and beyond in response. Spencer didn't make them, but they are the product of the racist movement he inspired. Meanwhile, people also protest outside Spencer's apartment each weekend morning, and twice Spencer is punched in the face. He starts to pretend not to be Richard Spencer in public out of self-defense.

A few months later, in spring 2017, Don flies into Washington and goes to dinner with Spencer. Spencer wonders if he'd gone too far with his speech; being tied to an extremist movement may have quashed his political career. But, like David Duke, Don thinks that it can provide Spencer with opportunity. It fuels the undercurrent of anger and turns his campaigns into spectacles that people want to be a part of.

Derek's statements opposing the white nationalist movement further alienated him from his former community, because it reflects that he not only has given up their values, but he has become actively opposed to the values he once held. Again, Allison helps Derek understand that this is a necessary part of making amends for attracting people to the white nationalist movement.



The "alt-right" is a blanket term for a conservative movement that's based mostly online and has roots in white supremacy and white nationalism. Spencer's speech demonstrates why these white supremacist movements are harmful in all their forms, because together, they have gained enough power to become part of the political "establishment" and effect real change based on racist ideology.



Based on Derek's experience thus far, the book suggests that the kind of ostracism and attacks that Spencer is experiencing only push him to be further entrenched in the white nationalist movement. Instead of "shunn[ing] and humiliat[ing]" Spencer or treating him like a dog, it might be more effective to engage with his ideas, as this is the strategy that ultimately changed Derek's mind.



Again, the book suggests that attacking people like Spencer will only make them angrier and more committed to the movement. While some may believe that trying to change Spencer's ideology after so many years is naïve, the book affirms at least that attacking people on an individual level is completely ineffective.



Don's thought process demonstrates why white nationalism can be dangerous, because it can be a gateway into making people even more extreme and violent. Once people have already bought into Spencer's beliefs, it is easy for them to follow Spencer into more and more extremist views, as they're attracted to the ability to vent their anger or be a part of a spectacle.



As the night goes on, Don talks to Spencer about Derek, and Don later texts his son. Derek is happy to hear from Don, but their relationship has been very estranged. His parents haven't visited him since he left Florida. In their eyes, Chicago is an unsafe place with gangs and racial minorities. Derek wants to find a way to bridge the divides between them, and so he books a flight home.

Now that Derek is actively opposed to white nationalism and attempting to counteract it at every turn, it has created an almost unbridgeable divide between Derek and his parents. Now, Don finds it easier to talk to someone outside his family who shares his values rather than his own son.



CHAPTER 14

Derek spends his first morning in Florida at a coffee shop catching up on schoolwork while Don is doing the radio show. One of his first big assignments is to write a 50-page research paper, and he chooses his subject because of parallels with his own life. He is writing about a ninth-century religious leader named Bodo, “a rising star in the Carolingian Empire and the Christian church.” Historians thought Bodo was destined to become a Frankish politician until he abandoned his life with little warning, converted to Judaism, changed his name, and married a Jewish woman. There is very little record of the reckoning that led him to this decision.

*The book creates a parallel between Bodo and Derek, who was also a “rising star” in the white nationalist movement before completely changing his beliefs. But in contrast to Bodo, whose thought process is largely undocumented, *Rising Out of Hatred* is an attempt to track how Derek reckoned with his ideology and came out the other side. Through this book, Saslow and Derek are trying to use language to give the reader guidance on how best to get through to people and change their ideologies.*



When Don is finished with the show, he and Derek go out to a restaurant together. While Derek steers the conversation away from politics, Don continues to make jabs at Derek about his new liberal identity. Don and Derek then return home, where his parents have the news on all the time. To Don's delight, he thinks the multicultural U.S. is unraveling. He watches a story about a man named James Jackson, who watched Spencer and Duke's videos, boarded a bus from Baltimore to New York, and stabbed a 66-year-old Black trash collector to death in Times Square.

Jackson's story represents yet another example of how language can be harmful because it can potentially lead people to violent action. Listening to Spencer and Duke's white nationalist rhetoric, Jackson was then spurred to this violent act, which had fatal consequences.



Then Don, Chloe, and Derek watch Tucker Carlson, a new hero among the alt-right. Carlson talks about “alien immigrants” and “cultural erosion.” The SPLC has named his show the most racist news program on cable TV, with a nightly audience of over three million. He talks about the threats immigrants pose to “real Americans,” asking why they would want to live in a bilingual country. Later, Derek goes to stay at his grandmother's house for the night, and as his parents drive him, they echo Carlson's language and say that Derek is becoming an antiwhite activist. Finally, though, they tell him that they miss and love him.

Here, the book argues that pundits—not just politicians—are using white nationalist rhetoric to their advantage. Carlson, the book suggests, is capitalizing on the rising white nationalist sentiment among white people and again using dog whistles to make racist points in a more socially acceptable way. His language demonizes “alien immigrants” and suggests that white people—the “real Americans”—are victims of “cultural erosion” in the same way that Derek portrayed white people as victims of a cultural genocide.



The next morning, Don and Derek meet up again and go to the beach. There, Don tries to convince Derek to come on the radio again, or to see his old friends at this year's conference. Don laments that Derek says things that are so exaggerated about race and immigration. Derek confirms that he thinks immigration and diversity are good things, and that they were all wrong about the issues. And even if they were right about keeping the races apart, putting that into practice would be a massive human rights violation. Don says there will be a horrible reckoning either way.

In the coming months, Don and Derek will watch as white nationalism continues to explode: for example, in fights over destruction of Confederate monuments and a white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia with neo-Nazis carrying guns and torches. Trump explains the violence by blaming "both sides," creating a moral equivalency between racists and anti-racists. Derek writes another op-ed to say that Trump's statement legitimized a racist ideology, while Stormfront's traffic triples overnight. But now, at the restaurant, Don asks what happened to Derek—everything he advocated for is finally beginning to catch on. Derek agrees, and he states that that's why he's trying to warn people.

Don and Derek try to have an open dialogue, and Don's belief that Derek is now an extremist illustrates just how much Derek has transformed his thinking. Notably, even though it seems like the divide between father and son is insurmountable, so did the divide between Derek and his classmates at the beginning of the book. This perhaps provides some hope that other white nationalists, like Don, could follow a similar journey if people like Derek continue to reach out.



*The "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville further reinforces how ideologies can bleed into one another and more dangerous movements. The book suggests that such movements have gained legitimacy because of the white nationalist ideology espoused by people like Donald Trump. In the wake of this danger, Derek recognizes his continued responsibility to advocate against white nationalism, and *Rising Out of Hatred* is an important piece of the warning Derek alludes to in the book's final passage. The book attempts to counter the rhetoric Derek spent his early life spreading, and it also provides a guide on how to help people escape radicalization and extremist movements.*





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