

Khalid El-Bey: Educator, Activist...and the Wearer of the Crown

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“Whenever you find yourself doubting how far you can go, just remember how far you have come. Remember everything you have faced, all the battles you have won, and all the fears you have overcome.” Unknown

Needless to say, this credo, this maxim has much, much more than a ring of truth to it. These words of wisdom and inspiration are espoused by **Mr. Khalid El-Bey**, the ***Leatherman of Color (LOC) 2016***.

El-Bey also is full brother of ***ONYX Mid-Atlantic (MIDLANT)*** and the current regional assistant pledge master. As well, he was last year’s secretary of ***ONYX MIDLANT***.

A safer sex educator and activist, **El-Bey** has many accomplishments under his belt. Notable ones include facilitating a workshop entitled, “Don’t Yuck My Yum” at the *4th Annual ManDate Health & Wellness Conference for Black Gay Men* in November 2015 at the *Human Rights Campaign (HRC)* in Washington, DC. The main focus of the workshop was *Bondage, Discipline, and Sadoomasochism (BDSM)*, and included terminology, relationships, safe wording, impact play, aftercare, and a discussion on how interested persons can become involved in local community events. A “Service Sir,” **El-Bey** has volunteered at regional and national sex positive conferences over the last couple of years.

During Labor Day Weekend 2015, **El-Bey** moderated a panel that explored the issues that people of color (POC) who practice BDSM are confronted with during a power exchange conference in Rockville, Maryland. And last April, he co-facilitated a safer sex and kinky training for more than 20 volunteers at *HIPS (Helping Individual People Survive)*. Visit:www.hips.org.

El-Bey has a *Master’s degree in Health Services Administration* and a *Bachelor of Science Degree in International Business*. And, he’s a U.S. Navy vet.

Recently, I sat down with the **Leatherman of Color 2016** for an engaging and illuminating chat.

EVANS: Khalid, welcome to **WYATTEVANS.COM**. It’s a “dee-light” to have ya!

EL-BEY: It’s my pleasure, Wyatt. (He flashes one helluva infectious smile.)

EVANS: Congrats on being **Leatherman of Color (LOC) 2016!** You hold the title until September 19, 2016. What are your duties, responsibilities?

EL-BEY: Thanks, Wyatt. Originally the **LOC** title was established by *Mufasa Ali (Mr. World 2008)* to address the lack of participation of Men of Color in the Leather title arena, specifically at the *International Mr. Leather (IML)* competition. Outside of competing in IML, I really don’t have official duties and responsibilities other than promoting the title, and representing it with the highest of honor and integrity.

EVANS: Khalid, a little later, I’m going to dig deeper into your role of **Leatherman of Color 2016**. Now though, I want to talk about your participation in ONYX, which was established in Chicago in 1995. It’s an organization formed and operated by Men of Color who enjoy the leather and fetish lifestyle. So, what’s ONYX’s mission and vision?

EL-BEY: ONYX’s mission is to be an informational and social organization that addresses issues specific to people of color who choose to project the positive aspects of the leather lifestyle, and support our community and economic initiatives. Our motto is: *Educate, Explore, and Empower[MW1]*.

EVANS: What about ONYX first attracted you? When/why did it happen?

EL-BEY: Ironically, ONYX was founded the same year I graduated high school; but it would be many years after that I would be become a full brother. I've been kinky pretty much all my life, but ONYX first attracted me once I moved out of the Washington, DC region at the beginning of the recession in 2006. Years prior to that, as a college student, I'd been experimenting very heavily into my own kinks and fetishes by moonlighting as a masseur and bodyworker. Many of my client's began to offer more money if I helped them live out their kinks or fetishes.

It was after I'd left the DC region that I began to see promotions for events from the only ONYX Southeast and Midwest Chapters. Upon moving back to the DC regions some four years later, *I made it a personal goal* to become acquainted with the Men of ONYX now established in the Mid-Atlantic Region as of 2007.

EVANS: What qualities must one possess to be the right fit for ONYX? What attributes or/and characteristics make for the ideal ONYX brother—if there is such?

EL-BEY: I feel that the most important attributes or characteristics that make for the ideal ONYX brother are understanding what brotherhood is about, a wiliness to further one's leather journey, and a serviceable heart.

EVANS: Must one have a “burning desire” to be part of the brotherhood?

EL-BEY: Yes, we're an organization with not only national recognition but now international notoriety.

EVANS: Would you consider ONYX to be a lifestyle? What makes you so committed to it?

EL-BEY: *ONYX is more than just a lifestyle—it is a brotherhood.* I'm committed to ONYX because these men tend to not only look like me most of the time, but have very similar—if not the same experiences—within life and the leather/kink community. Many of us are professionals with military, college, and/or entrepreneurial backgrounds which lends itself to be just a plain good network of friends and family.

EVANS: What are the three levels of membership?

EL-BEY: The three levels of membership are: *Full Brother*, *Associate*, and *Pledges*. All who are willing to support our causes, fellowship in brotherhood, and continue on their leather journey may have an opportunity to join ONYX.

EVANS: Describe the pledge process.

EL-BEY: The pledge process for the different chapters varies somewhat according to region. For ONYX Mid-Atlantic, there is a “Meet and Greet.” From that, we open the online application. From there, potential pledges are invited to an interview. Interviews are conducted by Full Brothers. Once interviews are complete there is a vote. Actual pledge time frames vary from three to six months or more, according to the chapter.

EVANS: Explain the *Leather Daddy/Sir and Leather Boy relationship*.

EL-BEY: A *leather relationship* is a celebration of inequality. *Daddy/boy* relationships have endless forms, and definitions are varied.

EVANS: Explain how one becomes either, and the responsibilities there of.

EL-BEY: It is a consensual exchange of power between a senior or dominant partner and a junior submissive partner.

EVANS: What does being a Leather Daddy/Sir mean to you?

EL-BEY: I’ve considered myself a Service Sir for quite some time; but now as I progress through my leather journey, I’m learning how to play as a Daddy. My understanding of being a Daddy is feeling like you are one in every sense. As a Daddy, I would be expected to be nurturing yet sadistic—and always a disciplinarian.

EVANS: Over the years, how has ONYX evolved?

EL-BEY: The first chapter, ONYX Midwest, centered in Chicago, IL. There are now five chapters (including ONYX Midwest). They are ONYX Northeast, ONYX Mid-Atlantic, ONYX Southeast, ONYX SoCal/Southwest with one other forming in Northern California.

EVANS: What have been/are some of ONYX’s significant accomplishments, milestones?

EL-BEY: ONYX has had a long standing reputation within the Leather Community with members nationwide and internationally. We are the longest- existing leather club for people of color (POC), and are known for our hospitality and infamous annual *ONYX Leather Dance at International Mr. Leather Weekend* in Chicago and our *Cocktail Party at Mid Atlantic Leather* in Washington, DC.

ONYX has consistently contributed back to the Leather, GLBT and people of color communities, HIV prevention and care organizations and those that empower and aid youth.

EVANS: Khalid, let’s get back to you as the reigning *Leatherman of Color*. Explain to us what that really means to you.

EL-BEY: Being the *Leatherman of Color* allows me a once in a lifetime platform as to sharing who I am, educating others on the leather lifestyle, and just plain showing up, showing out and as a result having something to show for it. I'm more than humbled to have this title and the opportunity, and I take everything I do with it seriously.

EVANS: What's your definition of the *Premier, the Ultimate LOC?*

EL-BEY: I hope I'm embodying just that! In my title year, I have a few firsts and have a goal of making this title more visible than it has been before. I'm aiming to place very well at *International Mr. Leather* in Chicago.

EVANS: Share with us some of the highlights of your tenure.

EL-BEY: Thus far, it has been wonderful! This year, I've hosted my *LOC fundraiser bar night* prior to *Mid-Atlantic Leather Weekend 2016*, sponsored the *2nd Drummer North America Fetish Weekend 2016 in Las Vegas, NV*, and been a part of *Mr. DC Eagle 2016 Contest Weekend* and *Mr. Maryland Leather 2016/COMMAND MC Weekend*.

Some highlights from last year include the *2015 Us Helping Us "A Passion for Living" annual fundraiser*; the *Whitman Walker Health 2015 Gala*; and the *4th Annual ManDate Health & Wellness Conference for Black Gay Men*. Also, I co-emceed a fundraising event in Bethlehem, PA that raised nearly \$4,000, which went to offsetting bills for a local leather woman in a later stage of cancer.



EVANS: Amazing achievements! (Pause.) *Now, let's get personal—if you don't mind.* (I'm smiling.) Are you in a committed relationship?

EL-BEY: Not at this time.

EVANS: You're a safer sex educator. How do you define "*safer sex?*"

EL-BEY: *My definition of safer sex is by way of becoming educated not only about the potential risks associated with the act(s), but also taking responsible roles within sexual functionality.* For example, someone might seek out prophylaxis barriers with the intention of lessening the chances of transmitting a sexual transmitted infection. Another example might be a sexually active person who seeks out of Truvada as PrEP because they truthfully acknowledge their own levels of risks, and might not be as prone to use prophylaxis as their primary barrier as a tool of lessening exposure to the infection.

EVANS: Let's talk more about your activism. What motivates you? Is it your "food for the soul," if you will?

EL-BEY: I'm motivated by what my (our) ancestors went through just to get us to this point in history in this country. My grandparents instilled in me a sense of pride that goes beyond my title/title year. I love history (the good and the bad), sharing what I know, and helping others—even when it isn't always convenient.

EVANS: Do you believe that POC feel that BDSM is "taboo?"

EL-BEY: I find that *people in general* consider BDSM to be taboo. Fortunately (for not only black men, people of color, and etc.,) leather clubs and fraternities exist such as the Men of ONYX that not only dispel fact from fiction, but seek to help educate people on BDSM so that they feel empowered in order to explore BDSM.

Some issues that people of color who practice BDSM are confronted with are at times not feeling welcome in spaces, whereas the majority of people in a play space might not look like them and/or be as welcoming of them and vice versa. Speaking as a man of color of African descent, I might not be as willing to want to relinquish my power to a Caucasian person because of the history of chattel slavery.

On the opposite side of that coin, I might encounter a potential player who feels that I exist only to fulfill their darkest fantasy in the most dominant ways, when maybe I might want to be more submissive. Lastly, there are always those homosexual POC with conservative religious views that do not align with their desires.

EVANS: **Khalid**, as you're aware, I extensively research/write about and speak on the issue of *Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse (IPV/A)*, what we refer to as domestic violence and abuse within the LGBTQ Community. *I find that some individuals confuse BDSM and IPV/A.* What's your take?

EL-BEY: *Simply put, BDSM is consensual power exchange, whereas abuse takes away from another person's power and destroys trust. Both BDSM players are equal.* BDSM should encourage open communication that includes negotiation and engagement between the players instead of the opposite. BDSM players should never fear the other, and there should never be any cruelty and/or violence.

EVANS: Well put. Now, as *Leatherman of Color 2016*, what do you have on tap for the remainder of your tenure?

EL-BEY: Before I took the *LOC* title, I was a volunteer outreach/harm reduction, outreach/peer support counselor, and syringe exchanger. I plan to continue this.

In April, I'll be attending events at the *2016 Los Angeles Leather Pride*. Also next month, I've been confirmed as a co-presenter at *Cleveland (Ohio) Leather Awareness Weekend (CLAW2016)*, alongside my title grand dad, ONYX Mid-Atlantic pledge master and producer.

During this Memorial Day Weekend, I'll be competing in the *International Mr. Leather Contest 2016* in Chicago. In June and July, I'll be participating in *Pride* parades in cities including DC, NYC, and Chicago. Also in July, I'll be at the *Up Your Alley Fair* in San Francisco.

In August 2016, I'll be the first *LOC* to take the sash internationally as *ONYX Invades/Toronto Leather Pride*. And in the same month, I've been invited to present at the *Southeast Leather Fest* in Duluth, GA.

In September, I'll be at San Francisco's *Folsom Street Fair*. And in October in DC, I'll be participating in the *LOC2017 Contest*.

EVANS: **Khalid**, how can people connect with and follow you?

EL-BEY: Facebook: *Khalid El-Bey*. Twitter: *@SelfLawONYX*. Instagram: *SelfLawONYX*. Email: khalidloc2016@gmail.com Website: www.loc2016.com . (www.onyxma.com).

EVANS: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

EL-BEY: I'm only the eighth eligible *LOC* to compete in *The International Mr. Leather Contest*, www.imrl.com (May 2016). You can help ease the financial burden of my title year and by contributing to my travel fund at <https://www.gofundme.com/loc2016fund>, which can also be found on my web page at www.loc2016.com. Please do not hesitate to shoot me an email at: khalidloc2016@gmail.com. I'm always eager for additional opportunities to present sex positive workshops, and educate people about *D/s (dominance/submissive)* relationships.

EVANS: **Khalid**, thanks for spending time with me here at **WYATTEVANS.COM!** It's much appreciated.

EL-BEY: Thanks for having me, Wyatt.