

# LYNX: Leather, Kink & BLM - A Perspective

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from Recon News

06 July 2020

In this piece, Lynx AKA member LeathermanLynx speaks about his experiences living as a Black Man, from childhood up through today's climate. He explores the BLM Movement and how being black shapes his interactions within the leather culture.

I remember one of my first jobs as a teenager. I was a pizza cook for a small chain in McComb, Mississippi called Pizza Inn. I was 15 years old. Living in the Deep South, it's expected (but never spoken) that a black boy would be met with racial quips or passive-aggressive attempts to remind him, me, of "my place" in that society. After all, this was Southern Mississippi and not much had changed since the Civil War ended - at least in the area where I lived. But up until my 15th year, I had not been a direct witness to it personally.

There were both active members of the clergy and locally elected politicians in my immediate family, in the house I lived in, actually - that's how immediate they were. Because of that, I grew up with very specific rules on how to behave in public, because we never knew who was watching and how what they saw could affect the family. That all changed with my 1st conscious encounter with racism. Afterwards, it became specific rules on how to behave...to stay alive.

One busy evening, I was asked to take an order out to a car that had been waiting to pick up their pizzas. I took the boxes out to their car and started to make my way back into the restaurant. On the way back in, I heard a voice from a dusted-out Ford Pickup shout a whisper at me, "Hey SPOOK!" Initially, I didn't make out what was said because that's not my name. He said it again, more forcefully this time, "Hey SPOOK, answer me when I talk to you." I looked over in his direction and said, "You talking to me? Sorry, it's really busy inside and I'm just trying to keep up."

What happened next should have scared the shit out of me, but being as naive and sheltered as I was, it didn't hit me until I shared it with my boss, Miss Beverly.

He turned his engine on, flashed what looked like a blade and said, "Get home safe, now."

I went back inside and told Miss Beverly what had just occurred. The look on her face - I can still see it in my mind. She was terrified. She took me into the office, sat me down and called my Mom. She came up to the pizza shop and they asked a million questions, one behind the other. They both explained to me what was really happening in that exchange and my mother - being the mother she is - told Miss Beverly I would not be returning to work. I was livid...but at 15, how could I understand, let alone comprehend her choice to keep me home... 25 years later, I find myself thinking about that moment often. I'm fortunate because I'm alive to tell that story. So many are not.

Right now, the world finds itself in the middle of a global discussion and fevered demand for change. The Black Lives Matter movement has cast a light on what's happening to Black and Brown lives around the world. For some, it's an uncomfortable conversation. It should be. Historically, the "comfort" of Black lives hasn't been at the forefront of human interaction; particularly the 401+ years of systematic racism here in the United States. At the same time, Black and Brown people all over the world are STILL cracking our voices with screams that we're not being treated respectfully. We are saying value our lives as much as anyone else's.

Yes, Black Lives Matter.

There are many perspectives on this discussion - from multiple points of view. I want to narrow the scope a bit in this piece and talk about BLM as it relates to our community and the culture of Leather.

The Leather Community in the United States is broad, varied and multifaceted - but is majorly composed of white people. It's not uncommon for a Black or Brown person to be one of only a handful of people in a Leather Bar or to attend a Leather/KINK Event. That fact alone presents its own kind of anxiety for the people that wish to take space in an

environment that is full of people with like-minded interests, regarding their radical sexuality. Forget the nerves that come with playing with a new partner or with an unfamiliar skillset; just walking into the room can cause us to break out in a sweat.

Incidentally, a huge pitfall of being one of a few Black or Brown Men in a Leather Space is being subjected to the fetishization of our skin color. In other words, being approached - not for who we are or how our minds work in addition to our aesthetic - but for the simple fact that our skin is Black or Brown alone. Let's be clear...That. Feels. Shitty. Being seen as an object and not a living, breathing, existing person strikes a chord at our core. It stings in a way I can't fully explain. Black people are more than our hair, skin color or assumed "BBC." If this is something anyone has difficulty understanding, find a black or brown person and ask them about it...without taking any clothes off.

I'd like to think that the Leather/KINK Community is more "accepting" of the perceived "other" because of its own history. Once upon a time - if we look to 1960's and 1970's America, Leather folk and those with similar radically sexual interests were "the other." Over the passage of time, our culture has broken away from the whispering corners and "dangerous" misconceptions of on-lookers, to take space alongside our "Vanilla" siblings. So much so, that the popularity of Leather Gear and Culture has made its way into mainstream publication - The "Fifty Shades" series of books and movies are a prime example.

It's something to ponder. Leather was once considered to be exclusively full of people viewed as, "the other" so to empathize with anyone who feels like an "other" should be simple work, yet - here we are. Still. It's also worth mentioning that in those days, Black and Brown people weren't allowed access to the Leather Bars that managed to open up for the tribe to celebrate itself. We had to play in dark alleys or under bridge overpasses to get our rocks off, risking arrest or worse, depending on the officers who discovered the acts. Occasionally, one of our white leather brothers or sisters held gatherings in their homes, and if we were known, or very hot (or 'lucky'), we might be invited to attend. This speaks to the idea that individually, yes - there are many, many people in our corner and I believe, I truly believe, they understand.

We are at a significant shift in our global conversation on race relations and it really boils down to a few simple questions. Do you care about us... at all? Where is the action in your caring? When history writes the chapter that includes your life and that story is told, will you be proud of what is said?