

**Tomo**  
***Why Are We Here***  
**2024 Texas M/s Contest Weekend Keynote Speech**  
**December 15, 2024**

Good afternoon. Thank you to the Texas Master slave Contest leadership for asking me to speak to you today and to you for listening. First, let's recognize this inaugural Texas Master slave Contest and congratulate and thank our Producers and the new titleholders and first Texas Master and slave.

While I realize and thank this event for opening with a Land and Labor acknowledgement on Friday evening, it is important for me to offer my own, to name and contextualize the history of this country and this land, as a gesture of respect and reparation. While I know I can't actually fix anything, I offer these thoughts because in the words of Maya Angelou, "*when we know better, we do better*".

I am speaking to you from the land of Coahuiltecan, Tonkawa, Jumanos, Comanche and Lipan Apache people. I live on the land of the Miwok and Nisenen people on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada mountains, about halfway between what is known today as Sacramento and Lake Tahoe, California – the area where gold was first "discovered", fueling the theft and colonization of this unceded land from its ancestral stewards.

I grieve this atrocity, as well as the ongoing systematic harm to all the Indigenous cultures of what we now call North America.

The tribal families have yet to recover from the near genocide of their people, and their story continues to be excluded from history. Yet contemporary communities of Indigenous people still work to protect the ecosystem of their ancient homes, care for their tribal members, and ensure the preservation of their cultures.

I also recognize that much the infrastructure and economy of the United States was built at the expense of stolen and forcefully enslaved Black people, and that much of what we identify as "American culture" stems from generations who endured the horror of slavery followed by dehumanization of segregation which brings us to the racist waters that we swim in together today.

Land and Labor Acknowledgements are often seen as performative, and if you only say the words, they are. Please take the time to learn more from, and about, marginalized members of our community, their histories and their cultures; and how you can share your resources in support and solidarity in the fight for equity. Find opportunities to support, uplift and work with BIPOC and other diverse leaders; and proactively seek opportunities to listen when they speak. Don't just say the words, please join me in doing the work together.

The organizers of this event asked me to share a few brief words with you on the topic of why we have these contests. I sat and thought about this question and titled this speech "Why Are We Here."

Prior to November 5<sup>th</sup>, the thoughts I was pondering in my mind were about speaking to you about contests and title systems. That day and each day that followed has changed my focus in life and the words of this speech.

### **Why are we here?**

We are here for each other. Now more than ever, we must stand, we must be seen, and we must work to protect our community as best as we are able. As a leader and event producer, I will continue to do this work and I invite you to join me.

This challenge is not new. We as sexual outlaws, as queers and marginalized people in our community have been persecuted for generations. We know how to come together and now we are called upon to do this work again.

Fear in our community is elevated right now. Community as defined means “a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals.” While we are not a monolith, we are one in community and it is our joy to share with each other and our work to defend each other.

When one in our community suffers, we suffer. We are here to support each other, empower each other, comfort each other and hold each other as we gather and celebrate our way of life.

### **Why are we here?**

We are here because we will not be invisible. We will not go away. We will not be erased.

Leather, BDSM events and contests bring us together. Producers build space for us to gather, to be seen, to be in community, to do all the dirty things we love to do. More than ever, we need to gather in solidarity, be visible and be together.

At this time, our events are more important than they have ever been. We are stronger together than we are alone.

### **But... why contests?**

I believe in contests and titleholders. I see contests as job interviews where people apply for the job of representing us, who we are and how we live our lives.

With regard specifically to the Master slave community, our Titleholders take on the job of ambassadors to the larger Leather, Kink and BDSM communities of which we are a part of. M/s relationships are often misunderstood. We are a mystery to many, and our Titleholders do the

work to unravel the myth, explain how healthy authority exchange in M/s works and the joy that it brings us.

Titleholders stand on stages, speak into microphones, share their vulnerability and represent US. Titleholding is not about glamour, power, or showing off. It is about using your personal resources for long nights of travel, unending days at events finding the energy for just one more conversation, and the vulnerability of standing before audiences to speak about the joy of living as we choose to live.

I'd like to recognize and applaud our new Texas Master slave Titleholders for offering their authentic selves this weekend and their message that Master slave relationships don't have to look any one certain way. I wish you well on your journey and please don't stop speaking up.

I remember when Ms Rhonda and I decided to run for Northwest Master and slave 2015 and then International Master and slave 2016. At that time, we had both already been in the community for over 20 years. We were already established speakers, educators and producers. Running for a title was not a steppingstone for us to enhance our place in community.

So why did we run? We ran because we had a message. Ms Rhonda, being a quiet, introverted Femme Master was not the norm that was typically seen in the Master slave Community as the leader in the M/s relationship.

On the other hand, as a loud, dominant masculine of center slave, I was not what people expected either.

We wanted other Femme Masters to see themselves on stage.

We wanted other powerful slaves to see themselves on stage.

We wanted to speak about our message that Femme is not weak, and it is okay to be powerful and choose to surrender.

It was very apparent to us that our messaging was necessary as we traveled in our title year and on several occasions, when we entered a room, it was assumed that I was the Master. While we often don't like to look at the undercurrent of negative messaging in our community, it is there and as titleholders, we did the work to address and confront it.

If you are considering running for a contest, think about what your message is. What is important to you? We are all unique individuals with experiences to share and wisdom to offer. Bring your thoughts and actions to the stage as a contestant and as a titleholder.

### **Why do we have contests?**

We have contests for titleholders to represent - so that someone who is watching and can't imagine themselves on the stage, can see themselves and feel included and welcome.

Contests began as bar titles and frankly the main purpose was to bring money into the bar. Over the years however, contests have taken on many new meanings. Titleholders are educators, outspoken, producers, and leaders. Contests, while they are not the only path, inspire and grow our next generation of community leaders.

Today, more than ever - we need our leaders. We need our contests, and we need our titleholders.

### **Why are we here?**

We are here for each other.

I am grateful to have gathered with you in community this weekend to help select the next contestants in the line of the International Master slave Contest System. While I call Northern California home, Texas is also my home community, and I thank you for welcoming and embracing me. I look forward to being with you again, living as we live and doing all the things that we love to do.

Thank you.