



**SIMBA WACHANGA AND THE CONSTANT SOLDIER:  
LESSONS FROM YOUNG AND AGELESS LIONS**

*Los Angeles Sentinel, 09-29-22, p. C1*

**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**T**HIS COLUMN, ON THIS OUR 57<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY and in this the 228<sup>th</sup> exacting season of our organization Us' righteous and relentless struggle, is dedicated to Ngao (Shield of the Nation) Damu, our first commander of the Simba Wachanga and all the other constant soldiers of Us, men and women, who would not walk away from the battlefield until the struggle is won. Below is an excerpt from an unpublished edited transcript of a lecture I gave in 1967. I had prepared it for publication, but the crisis years of 1969-1975 interrupted this intention. In this time of the rising struggle of young people all over the world against oppression, I'm reminded of the Young Lions of Us and also of the ageless lions who aged in years, but not in the will to constantly wage and eventually win our liberation struggle.

We cannot fantasize about a chariot coming to carry us to freedom; we must fight our way all the way to this essential goal and human good as our honored teacher Min. Malcolm X taught us. There is no alternative, Frantz Fanon says, to a people taking responsibility for its own life, its own liberation, its own way forward. And he states, it is our responsibility as leaders, activists, teachers and organizers to get the masses to see and accept that "everything depends on them; that if we stagnate, it is their responsibility and that if we go forward, it is due to them also." This, Fanon says, is at the heart of any real political education of the masses for a liberation struggle.

The year 1965 was the year of the Revolt; 1966 was the year of Black Power; but this year, 1967, is the year of the Simba Wachanga (The Young Lions). This is the year that young people boldly showed their continued commitment to struggle, to revolt,

to rebel. It is young people especially who made the Revolt here in 1965 in Los Angeles, and in 1967 in Detroit and Newark. It was young people, like the majority of Us members, who stood up, and stepped forward in the Watts Revolt, the Detroit Revolt and the Newark Revolt. It is especially young people here and those there that rushed into the streets to confront the police who are seen and confronted as an occupying army. It is they who cried out "arm yourself or you will harm yourself." It is they who set the cities on fire, burned the buildings, shut down the streets, and demanded a new way for whites to relate to us, demanded that they respect us as a people, that they respect our rights, our human rights as our honored teacher Malcolm taught us.

We of Us recognize the role youth must play and would play in the struggle if they are mobilized, educated and organized. So, when we decided to celebrate Malcolm's birthday, which we called *Kuzaliwa*, we called on Black people to stay home from work and school to honor this saint and sacred hero. Actually, we called it a religious holiday to reaffirm our right to define our own faith, our own saints, saviors and liberators and our own holy days or holidays. But we knew people at work would be reluctant to do this for several reasons. So, we focused on calling students out of school, passing out leaflets, going to the schools and talking with them as they went in and came out. We assigned Simba inside the different schools the task of talking with them about the issues and urging them to come and walk out with them, and using phone-trees and personal contacts to build the celebration rally which was held here at Us headquarters in our outdoor space.

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When we notified the media we were going to do this, honor Malcolm and call on the community to do this with us, they didn't respond. But when the students and members of the community came out in large numbers, they showed up with their cameras and questions. As always, we did not depend on the white media to announce us, spread our message or aid us in the work we must ultimately do ourselves. In the end, we must always go to the people themselves as Osagyefo Nkrumah taught, speak to them, work with them and serve them and they will join us in the good things we do and that they see benefit them in their daily lives. And again, it was the students, the young people who, like us, dared to defy the rules, to go against policy, to dismiss the unjust laws that would prevent their celebration of their saint and sacred hero, Min. Malcolm X. They were not afraid to lose their jobs, or to get arrested or to confront the authorities who tried to counsel them against it and to stop them from leaving.

This is why we of Us teach that it is especially when you are young that you must act for the good of your people, that you must join the struggle and dare to confront and defeat the enemy and oppressor. It is at this time of life, you are most free of fear and apprehension about self, about the loss of freedom through arrest, the loss of jobs which most likely you don't have or the loss of things important to older married and settled people and parents. In fact, it is your parents who give you things you need that provide the opportunity for you to not be worried about losing them. So, you are to do what they might cannot do, join the struggle for freedom fully and without fear or apprehension of loss on any level.

Malcolm praised young people and their contributions to liberation struggles, seeing them as those who help form the vanguard in the struggles for a new world and a new future. He praises the students and young

people as those who bring about radical and revolutionary change all over the world. He pointed out that many of the guerillas, freedom fighters or revolutionaries in the Congo, Vietnam and other places in Africa, Asia and Latin America are young people. In fact, he especially referred to our namesake, the Simba in the Congo and also the Vietnamese youthful revolutionaries saying, "I think our young people can find a powerful example in the young *Simba* in the Congo and the young fighters in South Vietnam." And we of Us took up this challenge and organized the Simba Wachanga, the Young Lions, whose ideological grounding, martial arts training, discipline, dedication and revolutionary commitment to our people and the liberation struggle are second to none.

Now, it is important for me to point out that not all students or young people will be radical or revolutionary or participate in radical and revolutionary action. But this is the best and most likely time for them to act. For as they become older and possessors of things, things begin to possess them. And many will not want to risk losing these things. Also, it is important for me to say that not all older people will sit on the side, guarding their gains and possessions. In our own organization Us, we have older people who are as radical and revolutionary as we younger people are. And like our first Simba commander, Ngao Damu and others, they have made a commitment with all of us to wage this struggle for radical and revolutionary change regardless.

As Malcolm taught again, it is not age in itself that determines whether you will be revolutionary or not; it is your will to act. It is for Malcolm your readiness and willingness to act in revolutionary ways that determines whether you are young. Therefore, youthfulness is determined not by *how many years* you have, but *how much heart* you have. For if you don't have the heart, the

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heart to struggle, to serve our people, and to defy and defeat our oppressor, you are for Malcolm and Us, already old. That's why Malcolm says, "If you're ready for some action you're not old. I don't care how old you are. But if you're not ready for some action, I don't care how young you are, you're old (and) some of us get too old while we're still in our teens." Therefore, we of Us, following Malcolm, call for and need the young at heart, the young in mind, willing to learn, to work, to serve, to build and to struggle for a new community, a new people and a new world.

**S**O, WE COUNTED ON OUR YOUNG PEOPLE, and the young people did not let us down or disappoint us. And all these young people you see here we need to say *asante* (thanks) and *halala* (congratulations and praise) to them, for it is they and those like

them who are pushing our program forward. Again, it takes a young mind and heart to push the Us program: to educate, mobilize and organize our people into a self-conscious fighting force, to defend the people and work with them to better their lives and liberate themselves. And it takes a young mind and heart to be a Simba, a soldier of Us, a servant of the people, a builder among millions of others in motion – building, strengthening and liberating our nation, our people who, as Min. Malcolm said, are "a nation within a nation." Indeed, we are a nation, a people striving and struggling to liberate ourselves, to live a good life and enjoy the full respect and "rights of a human being in this society, on this earth, in this day," to be achieved by any means necessary, i.e., any means the struggle demands and requires of us.▲

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