

Executive Summary

Jhatayn “Hasani” Travis –Simba Na Malaika Wachanga Research Memo

In the 1970s Douglas Rhodes, aka Mpatanishi Fundishi, founded Simba Na Malaika Wachanga (Wachanga). Wachanga in its outward appearance was analogous to many other black nationalist organizations that sprang from the late 1960s and specifically the United Slaves movement created by the founder of Kwanzaa, M. Ron Karenga. Wachanga’s official message was a positive one – of fostering pride in African and African American culture and working to improve conditions in the black community.

In contrast to its public image as a benevolent Afrocentric cultural development organization, it was really a highly centralized cult. It encouraged members to sever relationships with their families, to utilize their college experience to recruit new members, and directed members to seek employment in other community organizations to advance SNMW's interests. It closely monitored the activities and travel of rank and file members. It used a system of public punishment, harassment, and intimidation to maintain adherence to the dictates of the cult’s leaders. It threatened former members with bodily harm and death for turning against the cult. At least two of its leaders regularly sexually assaulted female and male members.

Wachanga’s founder Rhodes secured funding for cultural programming and youth work from the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) the social justice arm of the Society of Friends commonly known as the Quakers. AFSC funded Rhodes’s work through African American Community Empowerment Project (AACEP). Rhodes used AACEP as cover and funding for Wachanga’s activities.

Travis, a candidate for state representative, joined the cult in the early 1990s and advanced to position described as the founder’s “right hand person” in Chicago. An investigation undertaken by Kroll International on behalf of the AFSC in 2002 and summarized in affidavits and court opinions squarely places Travis as a party responsible for Wachanga’s abuses. A special federal court order has kept the Kroll report sealed to protect ex-Wachanga members from retribution from then current Wachanga members

Travis’ participation in Wachanga is not detailed in any of her publicly available biographical materials. She has never explained why she became a leader in the cult, if she left the organization, or when. Given her candidacy, the people of the 26th Representative District are owed an explanation for a decade long commitment to a cult. Therefore, Travis’ participation in Wachanga calls into question her character and her motivation for seeking public office.