

## Feature Story

# No room for lions

by Steve Ramirez  
Guest Contributor

I heard the other day that the African lion is going extinct. The report went on to say that in 20 years, African Lions would exist only in parks, reserves, and zoos. A lion in a park is not a lion. Humanity, in its march toward self-annihilation, is managing to destroy all that is free, wild, and honest in this world. In a world of “plastic” people, we live with the anthropomorphic fantasy of the “Lion King” rather than the reality that the king eats his subjects. After all, dead zebras are an inconvenient truth.

Let me explain. I am a former Marine. As such, I am an “Alpha” male. Even though I left “The Corps” some 23 years ago, this remains true. The Marine Corps is the last place I knew where honor and service to a greater good were part of the fabric of life, and where an American “Alpha” male was not looked down upon. In the Corps, we were all lions in every sense of the word. It was accepted. It was expected. Our individual lives were risked to protect the “pride,” and like all lions, we knew that someday our time would come to do so. That was a time when lions were respected in this country.

The Continental Army once stood firm against the oppression of the King, and faced a vastly superior force. The carnage and suffering was great, but in the end, the lions prevailed and a new nation was born. Today, that same great nation finds itself at extinction’s edge. We have lost our way, and no longer seem to know what it is we stand for as a people. Our steadfastness for individual freedom has morphed into a lust for personal greed and narcissism. We still send our few lions forth to fight, suffer and die for causes whether just or ill conceived. We shun the images of the carnage and do not even have to leave our easy chairs to switch our flat screen televisions to something “more pleasant.” While we do, our few remaining lions lay, sleep, bleed and die in the dirt. What has happened to us that we have become a place where our lions are not valued, or even discarded?

The first problem with any democracy is that sometimes the minority is right. The second problem is that it rests upon the premise that we have an educated, informed, ethical, and engaged voting public. That is a false premise. Like juries, our voting public is made up largely of apathetic, self-involved, parochial “citizens,” who make choices based on television sound bites, cultural predispositions and contemporary collective emotions. Emotions betray us often. Unlike values or rational life goals, emotions change from moment to moment and are therefore not a good star from which to navigate. American society today is lost in a sea of collective emotion. We have lost sight of our homeland and the lighthouse sits dark at the waters edge.

Our founding fathers were lions. They knew if they failed, they and their loved ones would pay a terrible price. Still, they stepped forward into an uncertain future. The American Declaration of Independence could just as well have been the death warrant of each signatory – and for many, it was. That was moral courage. That was what lions do. Lions stand up when others stay seated. There are places where everyone stays seated. They are called colonies.

We have replaced leaders with politicians. The two are nothing alike. Politicians focus on self, power, and “winning,” covered in a veneer of righteousness. Leaders focus on vision, mission, service, and moral courage over self-interest. Mixing the two is like making a mule. The offspring looks something like both parents, but isn’t really either ... and is always sterile.

Material wealth has become “god,” and power sits at its right hand. Incestuously, one begets the other. In one manner or another, it has been this way throughout time. “Justice,” can be given but never expected. When injustice becomes commonplace, and then finally intolerable, it is the lion that upends it. These are the words of a lion: “... but when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right,

*it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.”* Then and now, the lions of this great nation knew that our freedom, and our national vision could not be compromised.

Sadly, we have become a country in which the First Amendment to our Constitution belongs only to those who nod toward the “mainstream.” Somehow, we have bought into the myth that we have a constitutional right not to be offended. This myth is detrimental to our democratic principles. Sometimes, the lesser voice is right. During the civil rights battles of the 1960s, the minority was right. The dangers of “group think” are well documented. We must always be a nation of personal freedoms. If our faith, ideas, norms, and values cannot be brought into question and defended against challenge, were they ever really of substance? Instead of being the innovators as we once were, we now are a society of drones and lemmings. Lions are seen as threatening. They are told to be quiet and get in step with the march toward mediocrity. The “don’t rock the boat” and “be a team player” mentality threatens the health of American government and corporations. American lions are at risk in the boardroom. To move forward in tough times, we need lions.

When we changed the name of “The War Department,” to “The Department of Defense,” we may have made the first step toward the edge. When we try to use our military as an incubator of social commentary, we leave open the potential of needlessly endangering our remaining lions, in doing so we bring our nation and our people into peril. This is not to say that warriors shouldn’t be models of enlightened co-existence. It simply acknowledges the fundamental purpose for which they exist.

As Thucydides stated, “a nation who makes a great distinction between its scholars and its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting done by fools.” No one want peace more than a warrior who must directly pay the price for its failure. A true warrior is also a scholar. An American warrior stands ready to fight for the rights of all Americans including those with whom he or she vehemently disagrees.

American lions are at risk while

they patrol our streets. After serving many years as a Peace Officer, I found that most who pledge to “protect and serve” are lions. Sadly, there are also those who never truly understand the sacred trust they hold. The officer or the soldier is no better than the person behind the badge or inside the uniform. Still, many lions pass from the ranks of our military to the ranks of our police and firefighters searching for a new home of honor, often in vain. The average person, perhaps the sane person, dodges the bullets or runs from the fire. A lion runs toward the danger. Lions place themselves in danger so that others may live and prosper. They make decisions in seconds that will later be leisurely analyzed and tortured by lawyers and the media. They risk their lives, trying to save the world from itself. In return, they are often left beaten by a system that cheers fictional characters and jeers the true warriors.

American lions are vanishing as parents. With the disintegration of the American family, many a young boy grows up without a positive male role model. Our prisons are full of men who are loved by their mothers and who do not know their fathers. Young women are growing up without the guidance of a loving yet strong father figure. They have no standard of what a man should be or how a man should act. They may have a man in their lives, but too often, he is a worshiper of self, money, and power. This is not a man; it is not a positive role model. Lions raise children who are healthy physically, mentally, and spiritually. Lions help children understand humility and self-respect. They demonstrate the value of serving something larger than themselves. They stand up for what is right, no matter what the personal cost. Lions do not raise drones or lemmings; they raise citizens.

We must not confuse an Alpha with a Beta; a lion with a sheep. Beta males may show aggression, but they bite out of fear. Betas may seem successful in a world that rewards greed, guile, and mediocrity, but this is not success. America needs to value its lions, lest it becomes a transient and hollow nation.

During a night long ago, I was camping on the edge of the Maasai

Lions continued on pg 5

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**Lions** from pg 4

Mara Plains of Kenya. We had a tent camp along the Mara River. At sunset, I could watch the impala jumping and the giraffes feeding on the distant trees. With nightfall, came a deep silence that lasted for the first few hours of darkness. Sometime before the dawn, I could hear a lion roaring. He called rhythmically to his pride. He never stopped calling to them until the plains were sunlit once again. It was the most terrible - and the most beautiful - sound I have ever heard. It was an ancient sound. It was a sound that struck fear in our predecessors, moving them closer to the fire; a sound that told the pride, "I am here... and you are safe tonight."

No land can sustain too many lions. Each habitat needs to find a balance between the needs of the pride, and the resources of the plains. Still, each pride needs its alpha males, to show the way, to think great thoughts, to take great risks and to step forward when needed. That night long ago, reminds me of a Somali saying, "The first time a man feels fear, is when the lion roars. The second time a man feels fear, is when he sees the lions paw-print. The last time a man feels fear, is when he feels the lions charge." We are a nation founded by lions. We must guard against our weaker inclinations giving way to fear. If we fail to do so, we will cease to be a great nation; but rather, a land where there is no room for lions.

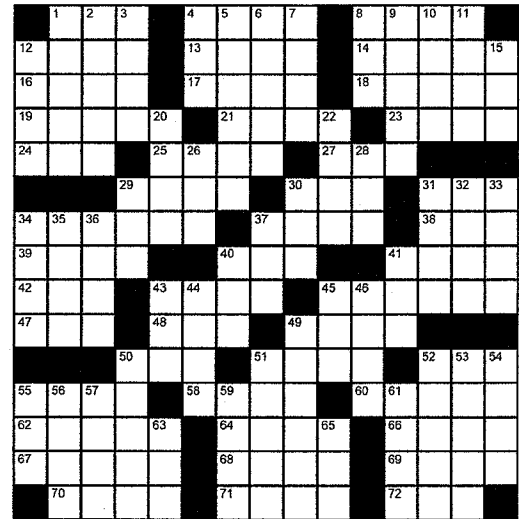
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**Across**

- 1 Soft drink
- 4 Attention getter
- 8 Rear
- 12 Sainly topper
- 13 Dollar bill
- 14 Circumvent
- 16 Contributes
- 17 Highest degrees
- 18 Answer
- 19 Attempts
- 21 Reckless
- 23 Actress Russo
- 24 Envision
- 25 Rel. image
- 27 Increases
- 29 Trudge
- 30 Inventor Whitney
- 31 Distant
- 34 Refuge
- 37 Garden tool
- 38 Beer relative
- 39 Trumpet
- 40 Write down
- 41 Heartthrob
- 42 Singleton
- 43 Knife
- 45 Dairy cow
- 47 Damp
- 48 Haul
- 49 Bogus
- 50 Athletic facility
- 51 Father
- 52 Network inits.
- 55 Beloved
- 58 Warbled
- 60 Gastropod
- 62 Celestial path
- 64 Borrowed money
- 66 Killer whale
- 67 \_\_\_ de Cacao



- 68 Nimbus
- 69 Appear
- 70 Toboggan
- 71 Discontinue
- 72 Second sight
- 11 Oven
- 12 Bonnets
- 15 Coloring agent
- 20 River mud
- 22 Wrecked ship
- 26 Demure
- 28 Pastry
- 29 Corral
- 30 Consume
- 31 Crazes
- 32 Vera starter
- 33 Depend
- 34 Movie
- 35 First-rate
- 36 Worry
- 37 Steal
- 40 Face part
- 41 Anger
- 43 Eye infection
- 44 Gobblers
- 45 Cookie holder
- 46 Augments
- 49 Barber of Seville character
- 50 Filth
- 51 Beak
- 52 Feels concern
- 53 Muscle
- 54 Bridge term
- 55 Elmer to Bugs
- 56 Slips up
- 57 Eve's son
- 59 Regrettably
- 61 Proboscis
- 63 Turner or Williams
- 65 Snooze

**Down**

- 1 San Diego athlete
- 2 Song of yore
- 3 Sit for a picture
- 4 \_\_\_ Arbor
- 5 Fast car
- 6 Hawke or Allen
- 7 Disarray
- 8 Soap measure
- 9 Swears
- 10 Make do

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