

# Of Race and Lions



PHOTO BY MARLA GREENWAY

AN  
INTERVIEW  
BY  
STEPHEN  
DINAN

**BELVIE ROOKS** is a writer, educator, and executive producer of the film *Watts Up! Demaria's Journey from Watts to Bali to the Frontiers of Consciousness*. She was the writer and producer for the TV series *Courage* and the creator of *Hey! Listen Up*, an innovative educational curriculum for young people. She is currently Vice-President of Project Development for actor Danny Glover's *Carrie Productions*, and serves on the *IONS* Board of Directors, and on the board of *Bioneers*. The following interview with *IONS'* Stephen Dinan took place at the 2004 *Quest for Global Healing* conference in Bali, part of a multi-year series of dialogues on social healing sponsored by the *Fetzer Institute* (page 10). ➔

**STEPHEN:** *Let's start with what brought you to this conference.*

**BELVIE:** I'm here because of the Frontiers of Social Healing journey and the personal journey that began to unfold through it.

**SD:** *One thing I've heard repeatedly about these dialogues is the sense of safety that has been created.*

**BR:** It takes awhile to feel that sense of being in a safe container. Part of what being the so-called "minority" presence means is that you are constantly swimming upstream in a dominant culture reality. The people who inhabit that reality are often not conscious it's their reality or their frame of reference. They aren't conscious of how their reality feeds and impacts your wounds, all of which creates separation and distance.

The nature of wounding for many of us is intergenerational. The challenge is that we're often dealing with people who don't feel any sense of responsibility for what happened, for example, to African-Americans during slavery. The United States as a whole has never been able to really acknowledge, much less apologize for, acts committed during slavery. We've all inherited this shadowy legacy and it's an intergenerational trauma on both sides. Clearly white folks today are not the plantation owners, but there is psychological and emotional damage that remains. So people of color often say, "I'm not using my pain to educate any more white people. It's almost voyeuristic."

**SD:** *Is part of the burden the feeling that you have no choice but to take on this work?*

**BR:** Part of my frustration is that I'm often at the center of a very contentious conversation between two different views of reality. First, I'm an African-American woman, which is significant in one respect, and it's totally insignificant in another. I mean, what does being a so-called White Man really say about who you really are? And I'm also part of these conversations on quantum reality and intergenerational trauma.

All of this relates to the dominant culture/minority culture experience. It often feels as if I'm doing this dance of bridging two worlds that don't understand each other, which requires faith that people can somehow hear the pain and identify with it. At the same time, forty percent of black male youths in California are in some way caught up in the prison system. If these were young white men, the culture would say there is something wrong

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with the system rather than the kids. Until there is understanding of things like that, many people of color don't want to talk about anything else. A friend of mine, for example, wonders about how endangered spotted owls are a more significant part of the environmental dialogue than endangered children in toxic inner cities or endangered African-American males in prison.

**SD:** *What are some of the challenges in getting these subjects addressed in dialogues like we've had here in Bali?*

**BR:** Part of my trepidation in the social healing dialogues was how do I give voice, in a good way, to the anger and alienation of the people in my community? For me, the safety of the conversations allowed me to open up to my



LISA CORINNE DAVIS

tears and anger. I remember a big breakthrough in the dialogue we had in Santa Fe. I was feeling like I was the only African-American there and carrying the burden of not wanting to disrupt or upset the apple cart. I was thinking about all these poor people and mothers who weren't in the conversation. Somehow I just embodied their anger when I finally opened my mouth. I said, "It's very difficult for me to sit here and listen to this conversation about consciousness and love and healing when the reality is that I have a nine-year-old grandson in California who has to face the danger of entering the prison system when he grows up." And I just sat down and started crying and the whole group stopped. They not only let me cry—they really heard. A Native American man named Sequoyah said, "A member of our family is in pain. We have to stop.

We can't go on." That was such a powerful moment for me of being heard, of being seen, of being recognized, of the whole group taking responsibility for what I was carrying.

That moment let me know that however the universe is orchestrated, somehow the role of being a bridge is an important one. Even though I often didn't feel I was up to it, and I was frustrated and angry and judgmental (in other words, *human*), this position of moderating between two conflicting conversations was where I was supposed to be.

That's why, for this conference, I raised a lot of money to bring people who otherwise wouldn't have come. I was tired of going into the "wilderness" without my community. This is a global dialogue, and the nature of the conversation is very much determined by who is able to participate in the conversation. Because of my personal healing in the social healing dialogues, I now felt safe to bring my community to be part of the next steps.

Part of the responsibility of people who are oppressed is that personal healing is part of a larger community of woundedness. That's the difference I find when I talk to Native Americans, Australian Aboriginals, or other activists. For many white people, healing is all personal—a personal journey of transformation. For us, it's about healing a community—the process is more collective.

**SD:** *It reminds me of what you said about embodying the anger of those not present in Santa Fe. One of the things Chris Bache writes about in Dark Night, Early Dawn is that in certain states of consciousness we can go beyond our personal healing process and become conduits for collective healing.*


**BR:** Having gone through the social healing dialogue process, I'm really interested in how it relates to consciousness—and quantum reality. What does quantum reality tell us about racial healing? Every time I hear that something is on the cutting edge of science and spirituality, I'm thinking, "What does it have to do with the history of this country and healing the woundedness? How can cutting-edge science serve that?"

**SD:** *Right now you phrase it as a question, but what are some of your observations?*

**BR:** Well, one thing I want to take on is intergenerational trauma and its relationship to quantum reality and collective fields of consciousness. There's a story that really brought this home for me. I have friends who were making a film in Zimbabwe. And they brought a lion from Hollywood because they had a lion scene. (I guess

he had an agent—he'd been in other films and had some resumé!) They used various tribespeople from Kenya as extras. One of the things my friends noticed quite by accident is that different tribespeople would come by the lion cage and the lion stayed cool. Every time a Masai came by the lion cage, though, the lion would start to cower. At first they thought it was just the individual person, but they brought in a different Masai, then another African, and the lion always had the same response.

Hearing that story, it dawned on me that from time immemorial, the rite of passage for a Masai child had been to kill a lion. Was that experience and relationship part of the consciousness of the lion, even one born in captivity? This Hollywood lion was not born in Africa. I'm not even sure if his parents were born in Africa. And yet, the lion still cowered before a Masai. That whole story raises the question for me about the nature of the fields that both the Masai and the lion were carrying that could communicate across that kind of time and distance. When we apply this to the intergenerational trauma of slavery, what is the nature of the energetic fields that may still be operating?

That's where frontier science can become really practical for my community. When I read Rupert Sheldrake's work, I'm really interested in the energetic fields and the implications for how to heal them. For me, the next step is combining IONS' work with the community work I do. I see the film about the journey of Demaria Perry, a seventeen-year-old from Watts who came to Bali (*see the Shift in Action insert of this magazine*), as an outgrowth of the social healing dialogues and how a personal transformational journey can positively impact the larger community of people who are wounded. But then the next step is healing the larger energetic field, even the planetary field. For me personally, these kinds of questions and their implications are at the frontline of the future work. 

Watts Up! is an IONS-supported project. For more information, call 510-450-2500 ext. 13.



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**WHAT SHAPE** does racial healing take? At the Attitudinal Healing Connection (AHC) of Oakland, California, community dialogue, rhythmic expression, and youth arts come alive as vibrant avenues for social and cultural healing.

Founded by IONS members Aeshah Ababio-Clottey and Kokomon Clottey, AHC seeks to address the ills of racism and oppression directly. After connecting with Dr Gerald Jampolsky—a psychiatrist who founded the process of Attitudinal Healing after working in settings where children with serious illness could express their deepest fears and aspirations—the Clotteys started their center from modest beginnings in 1989. Through doing their own healing work, they realized that racism is itself a life-threatening societal sickness that enslaves both its perpetrators and victims alike, and AHC was formed to

## Healing the

foster social healing through creative programs for nurturing the human spirit. Today, their organization serves the immediate neighborhood in which the center is located, with its community "Forgiveness Garden," and simultaneously serves this diverse city as a whole.

The offerings of the Clottey's center complement and support each other. Members of the public come together in monthly Racial Healing Circles—a safe space where people share the impacts of unconscious and internalized racism in their lives and communities. Based on spiritual principles for unlearning beliefs that feed conflict, and using dialogue, drumming, and storytelling, these circles bring together people of diverse cultures and backgrounds to talk about "unspeakable issues"—knee-jerk attitudes and thoughts about people who appear different. "Racism is such an insidious malady, most people don't even recognize the signs or the symptoms," says Aeshah. "Many times people come to the Circle focusing on what is going on outside that is causing the pain, but the purpose of the Circle is to encourage each participant to look at what is going on inside, because it is only at that level of perception that change can be made."




# Heart of Diversity

AHC also offers “mindful drumming” circles. Originally from West Africa, Kokomon shares some of the wisdom behind AHC’s use of drumming for healing. “*Mishe* (pronounced *me-share*) is a word from the Ga people of Ghana that means ‘happiness.’ It is our natural state that can be restored through rhythm and sound when we are caught in the abyss of fear.”

In 1995, artist and teacher Amana Harris designed ArtEsteem, a youth violence-prevention program to enhance the intellectual and practical skills and the emotional literacy of youngsters ages six to eighteen. Students explore themselves and their environment through structured curriculum of literacy, art, photography, and fashion design. The program touches on the character-building principles of Attitudinal Healing, and stimulates creativity, leadership skills, and imagination while linking the curriculum to state educational standards for visual and language arts.

“Students begin the ArtEsteem after-school program by sitting in a circle,” says Aeshah. “They discuss current events and use their imaginations to envision a better world. One little boy made a profound statement during a circle shortly after September 11, 2001. We had been talking about

the catastrophic attack and the deaths of so many people. He looked up and asked, ‘Will everyone be experiencing drive-by shootings, the way we do?’ We felt the pain of what he was asking. He had linked the destruction in New York City with the senseless violence he experiences every day in his community. The group took extra time to talk about what he was sharing, and came up with a life-affirming way to address violence and fear. The children came up with a project to imagine themselves as ‘Super Heroes’ who would save their communities and the world. All their Super Heroes were solution-oriented, resolving social problems, and none would kill or harm an enemy—they would only transform the person or situation.” —Editors 

*Authors of the book Beyond Fear: Twelve Spiritual Keys To Racial Healing, the Clotteys share their healing work in workshops and presentations around the world. They will be giving a preconference workshop on mindful drumming and a presentation on community building at IONS’ conference in Washington, DC, in July 2005, and will also give an “Unleashing the Human Spirit” retreat on the IONS campus, October 7-9, 2005. Their website is [www.ahc-oakland.org](http://www.ahc-oakland.org).*