



# MOVE WHEN THE SPIRIT SAYS MOVE: The Legacy of Dorothy Foreman Cotton

## Synopsis:

Dorothy Foreman Cotton was a bold and highly effective civil rights leader, who educated thousands in their citizenship rights and inspired generations of activists with her powerful freedom songs. The only woman on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s executive staff, Dorothy was a charismatic, courageous and consistently overlooked key player in the Civil Rights Movement, whose freedom schools, freedom songs and inspiring messages of the power within us all are profoundly needed today.

Produced by PhotoSynthesis Productions  
and  
The Dorothy Cotton Institute



[Press Images](#)

[Trailer](#)



THE DOROTHY COTTON  
INSTITUTE

## DIRECTORS' STATEMENT



There was just something special about Dorothy Cotton. She sparkled with a spirit of freedom and a message of empowerment. She inspired people wherever she went, and that includes in our small town of Ithaca, New York, where she spent the last 25 years of her life. Hearing her stories, hearing her

break out into song, inspired us to produce this film to help carry her work forward. It felt particularly urgent to make this film—about this trailblazing woman—at this moment in history.

First, in her work as Education Director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)'s Citizenship Education Program, Dorothy moved thousands of people from a mindset of victim to that of fully engaged citizen—empowering Black people not only to exercise their right to vote, but to take hold of their full range of rights and responsibilities as citizens. This sort of education is so deeply needed today.

Second, as filmmakers we were moved by the need to redress the under-recognized contribution and sorely neglected role of women in the Civil Rights Movement. Dorothy Cotton was not the only woman whose contributions have been overlooked, ignored, or upstaged. MOVE traces a powerful line from Dorothy's work to the work of Black women leaders and activists today. We are honored to bring Dorothy's story to the forefront as an inspiration, in particular to women, to understand their rights and their power to bring about change.

**PhotoSynthesis Productions** has been making documentary films with a focus on social justice and education for 40 years. Our work has won hundreds of media awards and screened at festivals and theaters worldwide. Recent work has centered on climate change, civic engagement and participation in American democracy.

**The Dorothy Cotton Institute** was founded by Dorothy and her colleagues in 2007 to continue and expand her legacy. Dorothy wanted DCI's work to be relevant to contemporary issues and to bring visibility to 21st century efforts for justice and freedom, civic engagement, and social transformation. She encouraged us to believe in ourselves, speak up, and stop waiting for somebody else to make things better.

## DIRECTORS



Ry Ferro is a graduate of the Park School of Communications at Ithaca College and has been shooting and editing award-winning documentary films since 2004. Her films have screened at a wide range of festivals and been broadcast internationally.

Ry is an activist filmmaker with a focus on human rights and civic engagement. *THERE'S YOUR READY GIRL*, her short film about Dorothy F. Cotton, won numerous awards and received

significant praise for its timely and critical message. Ry's work includes: *THERE'S YOUR READY GIRL* (2020), *RE:THINKING* (2016), *TELL ME THE DAY BACKWARDS* (2013), *PRIZEFIGHTER* (2012), and *TRANSLATE* (2005). Her current project, *Youth to Power* explores the evolution of youth organizing from the civil rights movement to the present day. She lives in Ithaca, NY, with her partner and their two children.



**DEBORAH C. HOARD**

Deborah C. Hoard is the long-time President of PhotoSynthesisProductions. Her films have screened at a wide range of festivals and been broadcast worldwide, and have won more than 200 film & media awards. Her documentary *THEY CALL IT MYANMAR* premiered at the International Documentary Film Festival in Amsterdam and was called "a thing of beauty . . . one of the top 12 documentaries of 2012" by Roger Ebert. Her documentary *RE:THINKING* explores education in America and asks the question, "What if we

taught our students how to think instead of what to think?" Her narrative film *CIVIL WARRIORS* brings to life the true story of 26 Black men who enlisted in the US Colored Troops and fought in the Civil War. The film and accompanying curriculum are used in high schools nationwide. She greatly enjoys working with a talented and deeply engaged team at PhotoSynthesis and meeting people from all over the world who graciously share their thoughts and experiences with us.

# **THE DOROTHY COTTON** **INSTITUTE**



**LAURA BRANCA**

**Executive Producer**

Laura Branca is a co-founder and Senior Fellow of the Dorothy Cotton Institute (DCI). As DCI's Project Director, Laura worked to secure major funding and donations to fulfill DCI's role as Executive Producer. Laura met Dorothy Cotton at Cornell in 1985 and helped design and facilitate DCI's human rights and citizenship education workshops.

Laura has 37 years' experience as an organization development trainer and consultant, has designed and led numerous workshops and intensives on anti-oppression and the dynamics of systems of exclusion, cultural competence, DEI, conflict resolution, effective communication and leadership development.



**MARGO HITTLEMAN**

**Senior Advisor**

Margo is a co-founder and senior fellow at the Dorothy Cotton Institute (DCI). Margo has worked with people to strengthen their capacities to build strong, inclusive, sustainable organizations and communities for nearly 40 years. She has designed and led numerous highly acclaimed diversity, equity, inclusion & justice (DEIJ) and leadership development programs related to liberatory adult education, inclusive leadership, civic engagement and community-building; collective impact, participatory decision-making; transformative accountability; authentic alliance-building; participatory action research; and more.



Kirby Edmonds was a co-founder and Senior Fellow of the Dorothy Cotton Institute (DCI). Kirby was instrumental in catalyzing the process of producing this documentary. He passed away unexpectedly in 2020, just as production was beginning to get underway.



**Dorothy with members of the Dorothy Cotton Institute  
Steering Committee**



Directors: Ry Ferro and Deborah C. Hoard

Story/Writer: Ry Ferro

Producer: Deborah C. Hoard

Executive Producer: Laura Branca

Advisors: Laura Branca, Margo Hittleman, Clayborne Carson, and the Dorothy Cotton Institute Steering Committee

Editor: Ry Ferro

Photographers: Peter Carroll, David Kossack, Ry Ferro, Jeff Hodges

Illustration: Camilo Nascimento

Motion Graphics: Alec Simmons

Sound Design/Sound Mixer: Norm Scott

Music performed by: Michael Stark, Zaun Marshburn, Elbonee Trece McLaurin, and the Dorothy Cotton Jubilee Singers

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Filmmaker website: <https://www.pspny.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MoveWhenTheSpirit-SaysMove>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/spiritsaysmove>

Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/move\\_when\\_the\\_spirit\\_says\\_move/](https://www.instagram.com/move_when_the_spirit_says_move/)



**“I love this movie. . . It’s beautifully shot, it’s compelling, it’s got humor and heart and heartbreak. It has a clear, intersectional analysis. It is inherently optimistic, while also liberatory and radical.”**

**~ Che Broadnax, Filmmaker and Community Activist, Brooklyn, NY**