

Dr. Dorothy F. Cotton

Public Speaker – Lecturer – Activist – Workshop Facilitator



From 1960 to 1968, *[Dr. Dorothy Cotton](#) was the Education Director for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). In that capacity, she worked closely with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders, directing the Citizenship Education Program (CEP). The now famous CEP was designed to train and empower disenfranchised citizens while developing local leadership in the Deep South and promoting nonviolent social change. Later, Dr. Cotton served as the Vice President for Field Operations for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, Georgia where she was a leader and senior trainer for the Center in areas nonviolence and empowerment for leadership. Under the Carter Administration, Dr. Cotton served as the Southeastern Regional Director of ACTION, the Federal Government's agency for volunteer programs from 1978 to 1981. From 1982 to May 1991, Dr. Cotton was the Director of Student Activities at Cornell University.

Dr. Cotton continues to work consultant to many organizations, schools and businesses, providing inspiration and guidance on a range of topics, including multiculturalism and diversity, human relations, race relations, nonviolent change, women's issues and the paths to personal and spiritual growth. “Nonviolence as a System for Social Change” and “Challenging Emerging Leaders” is special topic areas for Dr. Cotton. While at Cornell, Dr. Cotton co-wrote a white paper entitled "The New Citizenship" which presented the thesis that “government” cannot be reinvented without first refocusing and reinventing the concept of “citizenship”. This special paper received broad acclaim and resulted in two White House meetings to explore strategies for Government/Citizen partnership in the ongoing quest to reinvent government.

In 1964, Dr. Cotton came to St. Augustine, Florida with SCLC. While there, she participated in the rallies and wade-ins. During a wade-in at St. Augustine Beach, she was beaten along with several other young ladies as they tried to integrate the “All White” beach. One of the young ladies with her, Cynthia Mitchell, nose was broken during the melee by some segregationists trying to prevent them from entering the water. Dr. Cotton said this about St. Augustine, “...*this was one of the roughest cities we’ve had...in church every night...sang every night to get our courage...Klan always waiting for us...with the chains, and bricks, and bats, and things...Hoss Manucy and his gang...after we were attacked...we’d come back to the church...bleeding...singing, I love everybody...it was hard.*”



A powerful motivating speaker, teacher and workshop facilitator, Dr. Cotton often uses the "Songs of the Movement" to help her tell the story of America's struggle for civil rights. She accompanied Dr. King when he received the Nobel Prize for Peace in Norway. Since that time she has traveled extensively throughout the world, including visits to the former Soviet Union, The People's Republic of China, Switzerland, Africa, Vietnam, and Europe while participating in international workshops and discussions on a broad range of current social and humanitarian issues. Among the many honors received for her public work, Dr. Cotton has been awarded an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree at the University of New England in 1982 at which time she gave the commencement address. On May 16, 1999 Dr. Cotton received the Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Spellman College in Atlanta, GA and in 1999 received the Honorary Doctorate Degree from the University of New Rochelle while also delivering the commencement address. Dr. Cotton is currently a freelance motivational speaker and trainer and is writing her first book on focusing on the major lessons of the Citizenship Education Training Program of the 1960s and applying those lessons to guide thought and action in today's world.

*Dr. Dorothy Cotton spoke at the 5th Annual ACCORD Freedom Trail Luncheon: 47th Anniversary of the Signing of the Landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, which honors the Heroes and Sheroes of the St. Augustine Civil Rights Movement led by Drs. Robert B. Hayling and Martin Luther King, Jr., and SCLC.