Conversations with Dorothy

Lived Experiences

PERSONALLY SHARED BY A MOTHER OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, BRINGER OF HOPE, AND AN ORIGINAL ACTIVIST
Dorothy Pitman Hughes, feminist, child-welfare advocate, equal rights activist, African-American change-maker, co-founder Ms. Magazine and author, is now hosting a series of important facilitator led “conversations” utilizing her own history-making journey as a personal and very moving basis through which she shares the history of American activism with the public.

Join Dorothy Pitman Hughes’ dear friend and collaborator, Dr. Judi Herring, on this walk through time and the evolution of America in “Conversations with Dorothy”.

Dorothy has now spent over 30 years as a public speaker on the university circuit. Since 2008, she has partnered with Dr. Judi Herring to empower individuals and organizations to advance social justice, beginning with the powerful act of listening with care, an approach that opens the way for those in need to discover their courage and embrace self-ownership, self-determination and their intrinsic self-worth.

Perhaps at no other point in recent time has it been so critical to hear first-hand from someone known for bringing down hate and replacing ignorance with listening, tolerance, compassion and love.

For more information and booking details, contact: Dr. Judi Herring: judi@judiherring.com

Fine art, books and more are found here: DorothyandGloria.com

Read further for anticipated topics to be covered during “Conversations with Dorothy”.

NOTHING HAS EVER BEEN TOO SMALL OR TOO BIG FOR DOROTHY TO TAKE ON. SHE HELPS ME KNOW THE WAY OF BEHAVING NORMALLY IS BEHAVING AS IF EVERYTHING MATTERS.”
- Gloria Steinem; activist, feminist, co-founder Ms. Magazine
“IT WAS MY MOTHER WHO TAUGHT US TO STAND UP TO OUR PROBLEMS, NOT ONLY IN THE WORLD AROUND US BUT IN OURSELVES.” - Dorothy Pitman Hughes ‘13, Ms. Foundation Awards

Dorothy Pitman Hughes spent her youth in Lumpkin, Georgia immersed in the cultural and legal constraints of Jim Crow laws. She developed a strong activist spirit during long sessions on her porch where she would listen to elder women in her community develop strategies to help their families thrive. She mulled over the ideas she had heard during long hours spent working in cotton fields and shaking peanuts in fields owned by future president Jimmy Carter. When her father was left in a heap by the front door after suffering a brutal beating by members of the Ku Klux Klan, Ms. Hughes vowed to fight racism, a fight that would take her to Harlem in New York City.

Dorothy worked as a domestic and sang in jazz clubs at night. When returning home from gigs, she often noticed children out on the streets, unattended because their parents worked long hours and were unable to afford childcare. She took action on behalf of those families. This marked the beginning of a pattern that would repeat again and again. She started a daycare center in her home, acquiring resources where they were available; discarded furniture left for trash pickup on the streets, donations by individuals she organized to help along the way and money she scraped together from her meager wages. In 1979, she co-founded and organized New York City’s Agency for Child Development, currently providing care for over 250,000 children daily and employing thousands of workers. She organized the first battered women’s shelter in New York City, owned and operated three daycare centers and sponsored a successful youth entrepreneur apprentice project. She was a resourceful and successful entrepreneur, distinguished as the first African American member of the Stationers Association of New York.

Dorothy first teamed up with Gloria Steinem as speaking partners in the early 1970s based on their shared insight that civil rights activism relating to the issues of race and gender are inseparable. Together, they travelled to areas where women showed fear of economic, social and political self-empowerment. They delivered messages of action and self-determination as they fought tirelessly to knock down barriers of sexism, racism and classism, and worked to unite and strengthen the women's movement by organizing the community and creating jobs.
In 1999 Dorothy was honored as a “great mom” on the Oprah Winfrey Show. She resided in Harlem and owned the Harlem Office Supply Company, three daycare centers and a youth development center; she also was one of the original founders of the Women’s Action Alliance. She was involved in the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone and was part of the research team that created the Business Resource and Investment Service Center (BRISC), which focused on the development of small, locally owned businesses in Harlem.

Dorothy lost Harlem Office Supply in the fallout of the gentrification of Harlem, an experience prompting her to write *Wake Up and Smell the Dollars!,* a book shining a light on the contentious road to achieving economic empowerment in inner city communities like Harlem. She was recruited to Jacksonville, Florida to open a bookstore at Edward Waters College. She also opened the Gateway Bookstore in Jacksonville’s low-income Northside neighborhood to bring educational resources, community outreach initiatives, and reading and homework coaching to marginalized young people seeking mentorship and advocacy.

With the support of her longtime friend and co-activist Gloria Steinem and another Jacksonville activist, Judi Herring, Dorothy collaborated with Episcopal Children’s Services to combat poverty by creating community food gardens. As part of that effort, Dorothy and Gloria reunited on stage at the University of North Florida to speak about economic empowerment and leveraging the power of community organizing.

Since arriving in Jacksonville, Dorothy has written *Just Saying...It Looks Like Ethnic Cleansing (The Gentrification of Harlem),* which provides advice to African-American business owners, and a chapter in *When We Were Free to Be,* a collection of essays documenting the rise of non-sexist children’s culture during the 1970s and its relevance to families today. She recently released a collaborative work written with J.R. Schuman, *Ain’t I a Woman Too?*, which offers readers a unique and personal insight into Dorothy’s life and work.

Dorothy Pitman Hughes has received countless letters of commendation and awards from organizations and individuals, including the Mary McLeod Bethune Educational Legacy Foundation, President Jimmy Carter, President Bill Clinton, the late Vice President Hubert Humphrey, the late Senator Jacob Javits, and Congressman Charles B. Rangel. She was honored by Dr. Dorothy Height with a lifetime membership to the National Council of Negro Women; she also received the Ester Award, which was presented by Bishop Snipes on behalf of the Martin Luther King Educational Foundation. In 2001, Gloria Steinem, on behalf of a group of professionals and corporate leaders, presented her with the Women of Valor Award for raising money to support organizations providing services for battered women.
Still Inspiring

CHANGE & EMPOWERMENT IN MODERN DAY AMERICA

ArtPrize, Grand Rapids MI, 2016

Because of Them, We Can campaign, 2014

#poptart, 2017
Various contextual stories to convey the realities of Dorothy’s formative years experienced within the constraints of the Jim Crow legal framework

- Dorothy’s experience as a young listener during countless hours of RAP sessions on her mother’s porch
  - RAP sessions entailed family and community matriarchs discussing news, sharing experiences and developing actionable strategies for overcoming their barriers to success.
- Time spent playing with poor white children in the community
  - The white children lived on the opposite side of the railroad tracks dividing the community into separate white and black neighborhoods.
- Working in the cotton fields and in the peanut fields of Jimmy Carter’s farm
- Attending school with hand-me-down books marked up with racial slurs and insults by white students
- The time the KKK assaulted Dorothy’s father and left him for dead on the front steps of Dorothy’s house
- Dorothy’s response to the assault: her vow to devote her life to working to achieve civil rights for Black Americans
- Dorothy’s time spent with her Aunt Josephine, who traveled to Lumpkin, Georgia from Philadelphia and shared stories of domestic service jobs with favorable wages available in Philly and NYC; Dorothy’s “whupping” by her mother in response to Dorothy’s declaration that she would do anything to pay back her Aunt Josephine if she loaned Dorothy enough money to travel to NYC to secure a domestic job
  - This is an example of one of the many ways that Dorothy’s mother taught her to own herself and value her personhood. Dorothy’s mother scolded her for suggesting that “doing anything” was an option as a means to advancement.
- Dorothy’s confrontation with Miriam Sellers, a childhood playmate of Dorothy’s who later ignored her when they were both adults
Dorothy’s life as a domestic: the hiring process that commoditized Dorothy’s value when the white woman who hired Dorothy received 100 S&H Green Stamps as a bonus for completing the hiring process.

Dorothy’s experience singing in Harlem nightclubs and seeing young kids on the streets during her late night walks home, her inspiration for starting daycare centers and other children’s services.

Community organizing a “squatters hotel” to house the homeless in NYC.

Events surrounding Dorothy’s admission as the first African American person in the Stationers Association of NY.

Dorothy’s contributions as a co-founder of Ms. magazine.

Dorothy’s sale of private stock shares of the Harlem Office Supply Company to black families of Harlem, an educational tool designed to foster economic empowerment.

Confrontation with Elliot Spitzer that led to a poisoned deal on the day that her office supply store was scheduled for its initial public offering on the NY Stock Exchange.
Dorothy’s sale of Harlem Office Supply stock and the subsequent Elliot Spitzer “showdown” as an illustration of a key idea guiding Dorothy’s civil right work, “People are not truly free until they are financially free.” Reporters who covered the Harlem Savoy Ballroom premier of the film, The Associate, drew comparisons between the film’s protagonist and Dorothy Pitman Hughes, and speculated Dorothy’s actions inspired the writing of the film.

Dorothy’s work as a writer – Ain’t I a Woman Too?, Wake Up and Smell the Dollars!: Whose Inner City Is This Anyway!, and I’m Just Saying...It Looks Like Ethnic Cleansing (the Gentrification of Harlem)

Feet-on-the-ground community organizing and civil rights work including shoulder-to-shoulder time spent working with Martin Luther King

Time spent with Malcolm X

Her important, successful and ongoing work creating jobs for youth in Jacksonville

Dorothy’s continued work fostering economic empowerment among African American communities

Dorothy as a relatively obscure “hidden gem” in her local community and an emerging icon nationally in light of the resurgence of the feminist and civil rights movements

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