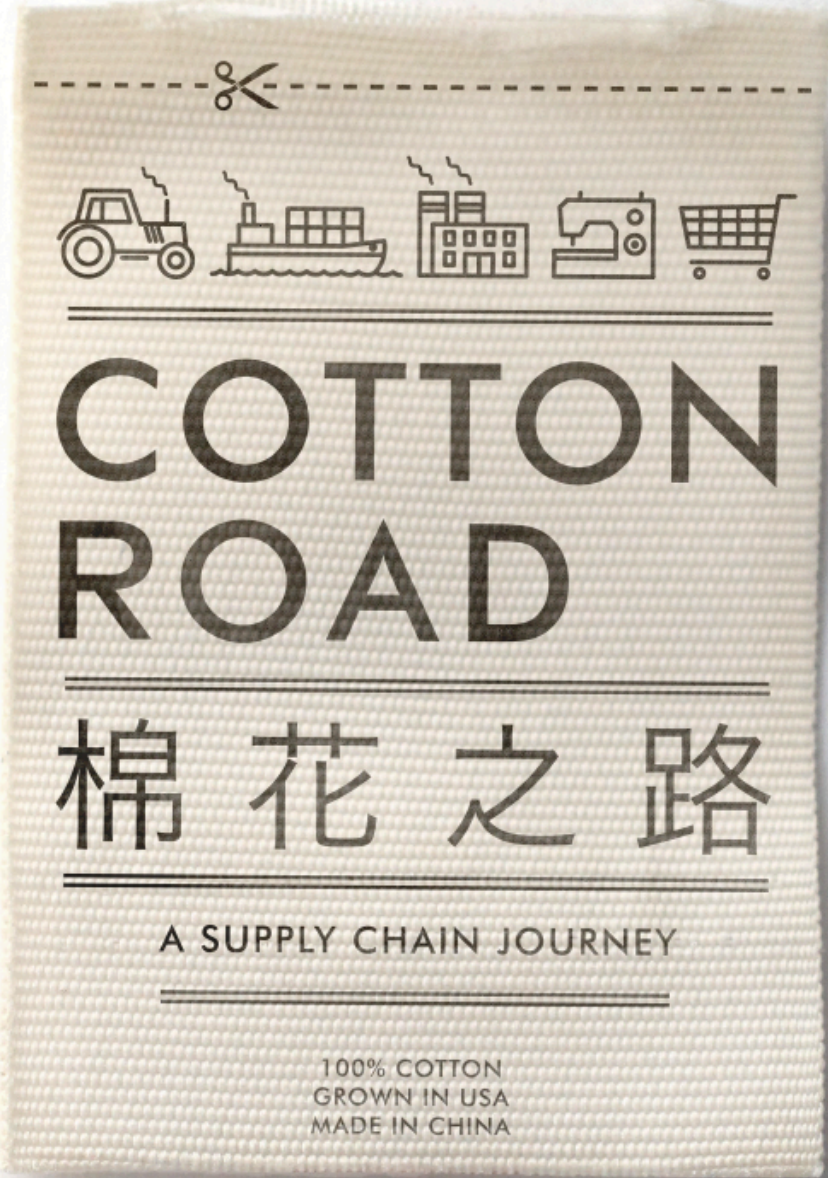


COTTON ROAD press kit

DIRECTED BY LAURA KISSEL PRODUCED BY LI ZHEN AND LAURA KISSEL



CONTACT INFORMATION:

Laura Kissel
Director/Producer/Cinematographer/Editor & currently the distributor!
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803.553.0789 mobile
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official film website: www.cottonroadmovie.com

downloadable stills for press/promotion: <http://www.cottonroadmovie.com/press/>

Run time: 72 minutes
Format: HD (multiple exhibition format available)
Subtitles: English and Chinese

KEY WORDS:

Cotton, environment, supply chains, worker's rights, consumerism

Target disciplines and subject areas:

Anthropology, Women's and Gender Studies, History, Economics, Business, Environmental Humanities and Sustainability Studies, Asian Studies



cottonroadmovie.com

twitter.com/CottonRoadMovie

facebook.com/cotton.road

instagram.com/cottonroadmovie

explore Cotton Road on Sourcemap:

free.sourcemap.com/view/2283

free.sourcemap.com/view/4733

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BEST DOCUMENTARY, Beaufort International Film Festival 2015

JURY'S CHOICE AWARD / FIRST PLACE, Black Maria Film Festival 2015

BEST DOCUMENTARY FEATURE, Santa Monica Independent Film Festival 2014

Honorable Mention, Rural Route Film Festival 2014

The festival did not screen *Cotton Road*, but recognized it in their program as a work of distinction.

Honorable Mention, University Film and Video Association 2014



photographs courtesy Beaufort International Film Festival



JUST blog – [Cotton Road: The Human Story Behind Cotton Supply Chains](#)
January 22, 2015

EcoSalon – [Follow the Cotton Road, The Fashion Industry's Unflattering Supply Chain](#)
January 12, 2015

Fashion Times – [Documentary Cotton Road Provides Consumers Insight Into How Their Clothing Is Made](#)
January 8, 2015

Ecouterre – [Watch Cotton Road, a Film About How Our Clothes Are Made](#)
January 5, 2015

The Hub – [South Carolina Arts Commission newsletter](#)
December 15, 2014

UofSC Today – [University of South Carolina publication](#)
December 9, 2014

WCAI The Point, Cape Cod - [radio interview](#)
July 2014 (Cotton Road is about 30 min. into the program)



SHORT DESCRIPTIONS

Americans consume nearly 20 billion new items of clothing each year. Yet few of us know how our clothes are made, much less who produces them. *Cotton Road* follows the commodity of cotton from South Carolina farms to Chinese factories to illuminate the work and industrial processes in a global supply chain.

Cotton Road follows the commodity of cotton from farm to factory, across industrial landscapes, to illuminate the human experiences within a global supply chain.

Americans consume 20 billion new items of clothing each year, much of it produced overseas. *Cotton Road* follows the commodity of cotton from farm to factory, across industrial landscapes, to illuminate the human experiences behind its transformation from plant to garment.



LONGER DESCRIPTION

What does a rural town in South Carolina have to do with China? Americans consume nearly twenty billion new items of clothing each year, and at least one billion of them are made in China. *Cotton Road* uncovers the transnational movement of cotton and tells the stories of workers lives in a conventional cotton supply chain. From rural farms in South Carolina to factory cities in China, we span the globe to encounter the industrial processes behind our rapacious consumption of cheap clothing and textile products. Are we connected to one another through the things we consume? *Cotton Road* explores a contemporary landscape of globalized labor through human stories and provides an opportunity to reflect on the ways our consumption impacts others and drives a global economy.



TREATMENT

From a seed in the ground to a product on a store shelf, *Cotton Road* introduces audiences to the people and industrial processes in a conventional cotton clothing supply chain. Who are the workers that make your clothing? What are the impacts of the global cotton trade on the lives of workers and the environment? As the cotton commodity changes hands, workers along its route raise individual and collective questions about the value of labor and the real human costs of globalized production—costs which are rarely reflected in a product’s final price.

The story begins in 2008 in Aiken, South Carolina with third generation farmer Carl Brown who struggles to pay his crop expenses when cotton commodity prices fall from a high of 90 cents to an all-time low of 39 cents a pound. As the world financial crisis unfolds, petroleum he uses every day almost triples in price. At harvest time, seasonal Latino workers operate the cotton gin in Cameron, South Carolina for 16 hours a day, transforming the raw material of cotton into mass produced bales. Ninety bales at a time, cotton is moved by truck drivers from the interior of South Carolina to the coast, loaded onto container ships at the Port of Savannah and transported overseas. Arriving at Yangshan Deepwater Port outside of Shanghai, one of the largest ports in the world, cotton passes through the hands of workers at warehouses in the Wai Gao Qiao Free Trade Zone before it is on the road again, this time to Changzhou—one of China’s textile cities.

Along the way we meet 19 year old Liu Chengfeng in Changzhou, who weaves a heddle loom in the Shen You textile factory for twelve hours a day to manufacture fabric that will become the clothing sold by Western retailers. She left home at 16 and has already worked in two different factories. Chengfeng hopes to obtain new skills and earn enough money to pay down her parents’ debt. Meanwhile, other workers at the factory accept longer shifts or agree to take time off; their work fluctuates with the changing demands of a global marketplace.

Following the thread and fabric from Changzhou, we encounter Ms. Jiang who owns and runs a small clothing factory in Shanghai, the Shanghai Yuan Tian Clothing Company. She struggles to meet the low prices offered by international behemoths like Wal-mart and smaller retail companies. Ms. Jiang asks her workers to sew day and night in order to keep up with the increasing demands of Western companies for fast delivery and a cheaper price—demands made worse by the economic crisis of 2008.

As the film concludes, we see the American consumption of textile products made in China, a familiar act recontextualized for the viewer through the stories of workers’ lives and struggles within the global flows of commodity production. We learn that Americans consume twenty billion items of new clothing each year and throw away an average of 68 pounds of textiles per person each year. The final scene in *Cotton Road* is of large, colorful bales of used clothing, bound together by wire. These discarded clothes are pressed together by workers in a thrift store in Columbia, South Carolina. The road cotton travels continues, this time across the ocean to nations in Africa and the developing world.



A constant, global circulation of commodities and the things made from them connects us to one another around the world, but few of us give this fact much consideration. Increasingly complex supply chains conceal the labor and environmental impacts behind most of the things we consume, causing us to become even further estranged from the processes of production and the people who make our things. *Cotton Road* explores **the idea of transparency** in global supply chains by telling a story about the people and processes behind a typical cotton product. I believe that greater transparency and awareness of the issues that arise from globalized labor and production can enable citizens to better understand, and connect more deeply to, the complex economic, environmental, and social issues of our time.

Mass consumer culture makes it all too easy not to reflect critically on the stories behind our everyday acts of consumption, but growing trends suggest a deep need for serious attention to the way our things are made. *Cotton Road* addresses this need by tracing the global flow of cotton, from fields in South Carolina, to ports in Savannah and Shanghai and to textile factories in China. Evocatively capturing, connecting and moving the viewer between these places, *Cotton Road* foregrounds the people and work beyond our view, from farm laborers in the southeastern U.S. to millions of Chinese migrant workers driving that country's manufacturing economy.

Cotton Road makes visible the lived realities of global consumer culture that we typically never see. *Cotton Road's* stories about the labor behind our "Made In" labels shows audiences the complex and consequential chain of labors and lives involved in any cotton product we purchase, making it possible to identify the larger social and political frameworks within which we live and participate as producers or consumers. As a documentary film it invites audiences to encounter and then reflect upon their roll in this process. And as an educational tool, *Cotton Road* offers teachers a sophisticated and engaging way of expanding upon a range of conversations that twenty-first century students need to be having, about consumer culture, global economies, and the impact of these on everyday lives most everywhere, from Bennettsville, South Carolina to Shanghai, China.

Cotton is the main subject of the film that unites a range of people and industrial landscapes in the global marketplace, and therefore it is the primary image around which people and actions pivot. Rather than a film structure that situates the story around a crisis moment, *Cotton Road* instead reveals an economic story that is constantly in motion, and one which we rarely give attention to: the continuous flow of commodities and goods, and our subsequent participation in that circulation as producers and/or consumers. It is what drives our economies, and even organizes our relationships to one another across the world. The story structure of *Cotton Road* is linear and focused on industrial processes such as planting and harvest, shipping, production of yarn, fabric and clothing, and consumption—but the film foregrounds the cotton commodity and its global movement to convey its constant circulation.

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The idea, or theme, that guided me through the film's production is *transparency*. *Cotton Road* lifts the veil on a typical cotton product supply chain and allows audiences to see the labor behind the manufacturing of a cotton product. Mundane acts of consumption are something that each of us performs every day, whether it's through the food we eat or something material we purchase out of desire or need. While traditionally few consumers have reflected critically on the stories behind these acts of consumption, there are growing trends that suggest a deeper need for human connection to the process of production behind the things we consume.

In addition to the film itself, audiences can connect to elements of the film's story on [our interactive supply chain map](#), created in partnership with the company [SOURCEMAP](#), the social network for supply chain transparency. LINK: [Cotton Road Sourcemap](#)

Cotton Road is driven by an ethics of engagement, i.e., an awareness of the larger forces at work in the complex network that makes up our political, economic, social, and cultural lives. Each worker in the film speaks to a unique personal experience, defined in part by their class, gender, education, age, culture, and geography. *Cotton Road* does not impose a singular voice (i.e., argument) about globalization that audiences are expected to adopt. Rather, it leaves room for audiences to reflect on their viewing experience and move forward with a deeper sensitivity and curiosity about their position in our global economy. The point of view of the film is that each of us should reflect upon the realities wrought by our rapacious consumption, which includes poor conditions for workers, pollution that other people have to live in, and meager wages. As the owner of the clothing factory in Shanghai, Mrs. Jiang, expresses in the film, this state of affairs is driven by American and European desire to consume cheap products, and by companies who push her to deliver each order faster and cheaper than the last one. The characters in *Cotton Road* all speak to this, through their personal experience.

Finally, the documentary's visual style strikes a balance between intimacy and observation. The camera is close to people and the physicality of their work, yet it moves constantly between micro and macro views to illuminate the largeness of our global economic systems and the small, private and personal contexts it hides. Intimate scenes with workers along cotton's path are punctuated by visual segments in long take that reveal the massiveness of industrial environments; the machinery of globalization overwhelms our senses and dwarfs the workers who labor within it.

A brief note on audience

The target audience for *Cotton Road* includes students (who historically have been the catalyst for various social movements), individuals working within the textile industry and socially conscious consumers who want to know what's behind the products they buy. Greater awareness and even empathy can prompt an individual to make better choices and, as histories of consumer activism point out, awareness leads to social action of all kinds. Consumers who want to consider the lives of workers may begin to demand ethically produced and environmentally sensitive products. Consumers may put pressure on governments to enforce labor laws. They might choose to pay more for ethically and sustainably sourced products. The biggest argument *Cotton Road* makes is for *transparency* and *greater awareness*. It asks audiences to witness a particular story about globalization and consider the relationship between our desire to consume and the invisible world of workers whose lives are deeply impacted by the global circulation of cheap cotton products.

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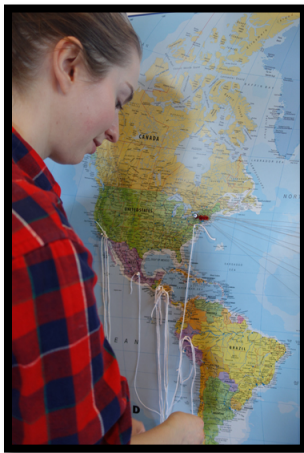


ACADEMIC AND ART MUSEUM INVITATIONS

Johnson Museum of Art, Ithaca, New York April 12, 2014

Spring Into Action – part of Beyond Earth Art: Contemporary Artists and the Environment

Cotton Road was screened and after the Q&A audience members were invited to tag a map showing the location where their clothing was made.



Union College, Schenectady, New York April 23, 2014

Following the Cotton Road...



A worker meticulously repairs textiles by hand in a manufacturing plant in China. (left)

Cotton ready for processing (above)

From South Carolina to China
What does a rural town in South Carolina have to do with China? Americans now consume one billion items of clothing made in China each year. *Cotton Road* uncovers the transnational movement of cotton and tells the stories of workers lives in a conventional cotton supply chain. From rural farms in South Carolina to factory cities in China, we span the globe to encounter the industrial processes behind our rapacious consumption of cheap clothing and textile products. Are we connected to

one another through the things we consume? *Cotton Road* explores a contemporary landscape of globalized labor through human stories and provides an opportunity to reflect on the ways our consumption impacts others and drives a global economy. **Where are your clothes made?** From a seed in the ground to a product on a store shelf, *Cotton Road* introduces audiences to the people and industrial processes in a conventional cotton clothing supply chain. Who are the workers that make

your clothing? What are the impacts of the global cotton trade on the lives of workers and the environment? As the cotton commodity changes hands, workers along its route raise individual and collective questions about the value of labor and the real human costs of globalized production—costs which are rarely reflected in a product's final price.

Screening at Union College!
Please let your students know about this exciting documentary.
Wed. April 23 at 5pm.

Union College advertisement for April 23 screening

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[Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute](#), Troy, NY April 24, 2014

[Wake Forest University](#), Winston-Salem, NC November 3, 2014

[University Film and Video Associate Conference](#), Montana State University, August 2014

[Brooklyn Fashion and Design Accelerator](#), Pratt Institute, [Winter Film Series](#), January 7, 2015

Emory University, Atlanta, GA TBA spring 2015



Finger Lakes Environmental Film Festival, Ithaca, New York – World Premiere April 5, 2014

Woods Hole Film Festival 2014

Wine Country Film Festival 2014

Kansas International Film Festival 2014

Louisville International Film Festival 2014

Kuala Lumpur Eco Film Festival, Malaysia 2014

Dallas Video Fest 2014

LA Femme Film Festival 2014

Santa Monica Independent Film Festival 2014

Cucalorus Film Festival 2014

Beaufort International Film Festival 2015

Environmental Film Festival Washington, D.C. 2015

Black Maria Film Festival 2015

Greentopia Film Festival, Rochester, NY 2015

Sebastopol Documentary Film Festival, Sebastopol, CA 2015



Brooklyn Fashion + Design Accelerator (Pratt Institute), Brooklyn, NY

[Winter Film Series](#)

Sponsored by: BF+DA and [Ecouterre](#)

January 7, 2015

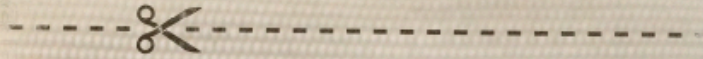
Sea Island Indigo, Charleston, SC

[Community film screening](#)

September 20, 2014

ADD YOUR EVENT HERE! CONTACT: laura@cottonroadmovie.com

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AMERICANS CONSUME NEARLY 20 BILLION
NEW ITEMS OF CLOTHING EACH YEAR. YET
FEW OF US KNOW HOW OUR CLOTHES ARE
MADE, MUCH LESS WHO PRODUCES THEM.
COTTON ROAD FOLLOWS THE COMMODITY
OF COTTON FROM SOUTH CAROLINA FARMS
TO CHINESE FACTORIES TO ILLUMINATE THE
WORK AND INDUSTRIAL PROCESSES IN A
GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN.

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