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Bridges that Carried Us Over Project

Interview Summary

Interviewee:

Acquanetta Warren

Interviewer:

Reginald Young

Interview Date:

May 5, 2015

Interview Location:

Fontana, CA

Interview Summary completed by:

Brenna Moran, 2021

Description:

In this interview, Acquanetta Warren discusses how she first became involved in local politics, in her struggles with the Compton School Board, how the 1992 Rodney King Uprising drove her to move to Fontana, her involvement in Fontana local politics, and her ultimate path to becoming Mayor of Fontana.

Subject Topic:

- Fontana (Calif.)
- Compton (Calif.)
- Rodney King Uprising
- Compton School Board
- Village of Heritage
- Fontana local government
- Ku Klux Klan
- Sundown town

Spatial Coverage:

Name of Site (if relevant)	General Location/Address
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Village of Heritage	Neighborhood in Fontana, CA
Compton, CA	Compton, CA
Jessie Turner Center	Fontana (original demolished, rebuilt at 15556 Summit Ave, Fontana, CA 92336)

Temporal Coverage:

Early 1990s - 2015

Key Events:

- Appointment to Fontana City Council
- Campaign for California State Assembly
- Election to be mayor of Fontana.

Key Organizations:

- City of Fontana

Interview Index:

Media Format	Time (hh:mm:ss)	Topic Discussed
Digital Video	00:00:07	Compton School Board situation
Digital Video	00:12:03	Acquanetta Warren first becoming involved in Fontana politics
Digital Video	00:33:13	Warren's run for mayor of Fontana and time as Mayor

Full interview transcript can be found below.

Interview Transcript

Start of Interview:

[00:00:00]

Reginald Young [00:00:03] Today is May the 5th, 2015

Acquanetta Warren [00:00:07] -is it what happened, people knew I worked in banking when I graduated college, I got a job at the bank and I got up to vice president level. People knew me as somebody that would help them. And so people come to me all the time, ask for advice. Can you help with this? Can you help with that? And I was really involved in the community. I worked on campaigns, you know, coming out of Brownley's camp. That's all you did was work campaigns. I had worked on Walter Tucker's campaign. And I mean, we did a lot and I was involved in everything. So the parents came to me and said, we need you to articulate to the board why we need them to help us. And they turned on us. They turned on me. I mean, these were people, not the parents, the electeds.

Reginald Young [00:00:47] Oh-.

Acquanetta Warren [00:00:47] [inaudible] we help you raise money and help you get elected. And are you ignoring us and our children? And so we really fixed it with them one night we had a stand in where they didn't get to leave until they negotiated with those teachers.

Reginald Young [00:01:01] At the beginning what side were you on? Were you on the elected side or-

Acquanetta Warren [00:01:05] At first I told, I was on the community's side from the jump.

Reginald Young [00:01:09] -from the jump.

Acquanetta Warren [00:01:09] -I mean, when I came, I traveled a lot for banking and I came home. My kids were still at home. I went I asked the lady watching the kids. I said, what's going on around here?

Reginald Young [00:01:20] Yes, OK. It seemed like you have been involved, but the school situation and Compton all seem to mold you.

Acquanetta Warren [00:01:31] It really did.

Reginald Young [00:01:33] Tell me about that meeting that you had.

Acquanetta Warren [00:01:35] We, the parents came to me that evening, said, look, we're going to march on the board because we want the teachers back in the classroom. We want our kids off the street. I mean, kids was getting ran over. It was a mess. And I said, OK, I'll go with you guys because they said, you can talk for a sec now. You tell them those you- they were my buddies, you know?

Reginald Young [00:01:56] You knew them.

Acquanetta Warren [00:01:56] I knew them well.

Reginald Young [00:01:58] Who was some of them?

Acquanetta Warren [00:01:58] Merv Donnelly's daughter, Lynn, there was a Bernese Woods. I mean, the whole group that started in Compton was there.

Reginald Young [00:02:07] The powers that be.

Acquanetta Warren [00:02:08] The powers that be. I called them. So when I got up, I explained to them how crucial it was that our kids get back to school. I had talked to the teacher's union. Those are my friends. They were just asking for a meeting. They just wanted to get some things straight. You know, we don't always agree on everything, but you gotta start somewhere. They wouldn't even meet with them. And one of them pulled me to the side, they go, "No, Merve will get mad at us" and said you guys. This ain't about our politics. This is our kids. So he was scared to say anything. And I'm like, we're not going like that. So I got up there very professional, nice trying to explain to them. And they told me to mind my business, they said this ain't none of your business. Go back to your banking with a big suit on and all that. Yeah, they got crazy on me. I said, I don't think so.

Reginald Young [00:02:48] In your face.

Acquanetta Warren [00:02:49] In my face right there in the meeting. And all the parents was like, see what we, they've been talking us that too. So I was like I said, tell you what, I'll be back. And what I'ma do is that we don't leave because I told the parents to bring their kids because I thought they see the kids, their hearts would soften. Oh, they got worse with them kids in there. So I said I'll tell you what because then I got mad

and that happens. I'm sorry that happens. I said leave all these kids in here. This is their house, and parents, you come out with me. So the security guard actually was related to me, he [inaudible] he said "Girl, you can leave all them kids up in there" I said, why not? This is their building. Let them see what the parents would have to put up with all day long. So I got up there I said "OK, how many of you guys are related to police officers and cops?", a whole bunch of people. I said y'all are going to be in the front because we are not letting them leave until they sit down with these teachers. And we sat out there, ordered food and everything. And about two hours into it, they came out and told me. They said, you know what, we'll meet with them. But they said they're going to get you, they're through with you.

Reginald Young [00:03:54] This is the school board or-

Acquanetta Warren [00:03:55] The school board!

Reginald Young [00:03:55] -or the chamber.

Acquanetta Warren [00:03:56] Yeah, well, we got in front of their cars. You're not leaving. And plus, the kids, one of the security guards came out, it was so funny, had a kid on his waist just crying and carrying on. He said, girl, get these people back and get their kids. I said, no, that's their house. And I said, well, give me this baby. I'll never forget. One of the watch commanders from Compton came over and he said, Acquanetta, girl, they want me to arrest you, girl. You need to get, come on Acq. Because all of us grew up together. I said, look, is your son at home every day? Yeah. I said, you know why? I said, because they playing politics. They don't want the kids because- Compton is not this bad area if I try to make it. Everybody knew everybody. Everybody loved each other. Yeah, we had our gangs. We all ended up in church together on Sunday no matter what happened. And I said I said, so you're going to arrest me. You go right ahead. He said, what you haven't done nothing to break the law and you are right, they oughta to do something with these kids. He's said OK I'ma give you an hour. You betta, you got one hour, Acq. And then I got to come back. I said whatever. So they came out there and talked to me and they were mad and they said, we want all these parents to come get these kids, we'll sit down with the teachers. But we already talked this afternoon and you threw. I said, hey, whatever! You know? I'm really afraid. You know.

Reginald Young [00:05:16] Did they solve the problem after that?

Acquanetta Warren [00:05:18] Yeah, we- they sat down with the teachers and... they wouldn't even sit down with the mediator!

Reginald Young [00:05:22] Wow.

Acquanetta Warren [00:05:23] They would not sit down with the mediator. So they took a couple of days and the union was happy. Everybody's happy. After that I started having all kinds of trouble with my children. I mean, it was bad. I had to take my kids out of the public schools.

Reginald Young [00:05:36] Did that run you out to Fontana?

Acquanetta Warren [00:05:36] No.

Reginald Young [00:05:37] OK, tell me what happened.

Acquanetta Warren [00:05:39] Well, I ran for school board and I lost. Right, because they went and got Omar Bradley and Omar was friends of our family. Omar came around one night and told me and my ex that he had been asked to run against me. And I said, Omar, you always wanted to be the mayor. And the parents asked me to run for school board because we want to change our school board and get our kids educated. And I can't predict it. If we don't do something, we're going to be in receivership and look what happened. Well, I told Omar, Omar I don't stop anybody from running, this is a free country, but they're doing this because you're going to- you and I are in the same zip code, we're going to be fighting like cats and dogs and those same people gonna get right back in office. He said, well, I need the help to be mayor. They said if I stop you, he said no hard feelings. And I mean, he gave me so much trouble, but he gave the whole world trouble, we found out later.

Reginald Young [00:06:29] And he eventually won?

Acquanetta Warren [00:06:30] Yeah he eventually did when after he messed up Patricia Moore [inaudible]. That's a whole series of its own self. But what really got my ex was that last riot. You know, I tell you, I had gotten laid off from the bank and I went for a job interview at the Federal Reserve downtown and I had that job. You know, you walk out knowing God had blessed you and then some. I knew that job was lined. And as soon as I walked on the cement, all I saw was people throwing chairs through windows. I asked the security guard, what happened? He said the verdict came down. The riot started. And I looked around that Federal Reserve building. I said, let me think. The last black person they saw was me. Do you really think you'll get that job now? Probably not. So I had gotten in my car and it was so sad. You can hear on the radio they were having all the mess on Florence.

Reginald Young [00:07:23] This was in '92 when Rodney King-

Acquanetta Warren [00:07:24] Yeah.

Reginald Young [00:07:26] OK.

Acquanetta Warren [00:07:26] But in between being laid off from the bank, I had gotten a consulting job in the city of Upland but I was trying to find something full time. So when I was going down Western or whatever street all that was going on at I couldn't, the truck driver actually flagged me down and I pulled on the side of him and he said, I'm up high. There's fighting down- this on Florence where they had all that mess going on. He said, I'm scared. I don't know how to get out of here. And I said, look, I grew up over there. I'll take you down the alley. And there was two white people behind us. We flagged them down and we told them don't go down there. So people followed me through the alley on the other side to get back on the freeway. And then when I got home, Compton wasn't as impacted. But the next day my husband worked at Northrop. People were getting killed. I mean, it was awful. And I never will forget I was, my baby was only about four months old, if that old. And I had to go get milk for her because they burned down all the stores where we lived. So we went out to Lakewood. Well, when we came back, the National Guard had come in and they pulled us over. They had my husband and my oldest son on the ground. And I remember that look that my husband gave me when we got back in the car. It was awful. He said, I can't. He said, we grew up in the Watts riot. Our kids are going through this riot. He said, I can't do this no more Acq, we gotta get out of here. He said, I know you trying to save everybody down here, but we can't we can't do that to them. He said, I gotta get out of here and I'm not playing. And I thought he forgot about it. But a month after the riot, a relative came in our house talking about, I'll show you Riverside, I'll show you San Bernardino. And I already lived in I already worked in Upland. I said, you know what? This is what I want. I want Rancho Cucamonga quality and I want Fontana prices and-

Reginald Young [00:09:20] Fontana prices.

Acquanetta Warren [00:09:20] Fontana prices. He said, I got just the place. He brought us out in all these beautiful palm trees. Village of Heritage. Come to find out, one of my bestest friends in banking lived out there and we sat at her house for a while. We went and looked at houses. That night driving home, you could tell the difference. When we got off the freeway, the kids had had a great time, green grass. They had played. They were so happy. And then when we got back, I never will forget, my youngest son looked

at me. "Mommy, why can't we live like that? Why can't we?" And it just brought back all those memories growing up, you know?

Reginald Young [00:09:57] What you saw when you-

Acquanetta Warren [00:09:58] When I was when I was bussed, then when I was little, that seemed like our best times beside in our back yard was when we would go back home, to Alabama, to visit my grandmother. She'd tell us, don't go on the road, because she just had a road. It wasn't a street. Just stay here in the yard, which was huge. And if the other kids want you to play with them they need to come over here and they put big old bowls of oranges and stuff on the- it was I mean, I look back thinking about my family in Alabama and all the beautiful things they had. And I just say, you know, that's the way to live. Sitting on the porch, everybody loving everybody, you know, it didn't matter White, black, everybody sitting together.

Reginald Young [00:10:40] So you working in Upland, is it full time?

Acquanetta Warren [00:10:44] Right. I'm part time.

Reginald Young [00:10:45] Oh, you still part time.

Acquanetta Warren [00:10:45] Yeah, I was part time. And once we picked our house every lunch hour, I would go down to Fontana and look at the house being built and I kind of identified the school districts and said, OK, this is going to be good. But the beauty was the night we moved in, we had checked everything, crime, schools. We had everything down about eleven o'clock, the winds started blowing. All five of us was in the same bed, everybody, we had never experienced that! Wow. So my friend that lived there, Lorraine, called me. She said, oops, forgot to mention we get wind out here. I said, you dirty dog, you didn't mention that. Real wind.

Reginald Young [00:11:29] Real.

Acquanetta Warren [00:11:29] So we went through that and it was so great. And I tell you, the life change in my husband leaving. He- just it didn't work for him. He wanted to go back to Compton; he's still there. It just didn't work for him.

Reginald Young [00:11:41] And you stayed.

Acquanetta Warren [00:11:41] And I stayed here with my kids. We struggled and people helped us. I mean, he just left.

Reginald Young [00:11:46] So when you said to yourself, I'm out of maybe the rat race or the environment. Why don't I just sit down, work in Upland and come and sit down, drink a beer in the evening and get, go back to work tomorrow. Why do you do that?

Acquanetta Warren [00:12:03] You know, I promised my ex when we moved here I would be a pew sitter. Because, you know, I was involved in church. I was involved with politics, I was involved with community things. You know, I was helping kids. I was doing whatever I saw that needed. Working at the bank, I jumped on the foundation, helping with the Olympics. I just had it in my blood. But he made it clear when we move out there, you don't get involved in nothing. You got that? I promise. First week we're there, here comes my Lorraine, my friend. She's passing out fliers. I said what happened? "Girl, they getting ready to make our LMD rates go up." I said what is LMD? Landscape Maintenance District. I said, oh, no, I barely qualify for my house are you kidding me? So she said, come to the meeting. I closed the door, because he was in there. I said, Girl, you know, I'm not supposed to get involved in nothing. She said, come to the meeting. He won't even know you over there. So we came to the meeting and Greg Devereaux was the city manager then. Ken Hunt was the finance director. And they did a very compelling argument why they needed to raise the LMD. The vendor, the vendor was literally talking like we needed to report to him. And I'm looking at this going. Last time I checked, you worked for us. This is our area. So it kind of upset me, but I just sat still. So Lorraine kept hitting me with her elbow. You ain't gonna say nothing? I know you know about this stuff. I said, you know, let's see what they gonna do. This young man. But all these kids, I never thought they stop coming after his arm. I mean, Mark Nuaimi got up there and let them have it. He said, we're not paying more. This is not right.

Reginald Young [00:13:32] He was living in the same neighborhood?

Acquanetta Warren [00:13:34] He was living in the same neighborhood. He said, "this is not the way to treat the citizens". I mean, you know, he just let it be known. I looked at him and I said, wow, that is, he's right. And so-.

Reginald Young [00:13:44] Did he have a title or-.

Acquanetta Warren [00:13:44] No, he was just a working man with a family that lived in the neighborhood, the little neighborhood. So when he got up, he came, they gave a recess. And Greg was very fair. He said, you citizens get together and decide what you think you can do. And I, I had known Greg before, so I was sitting in the back kind of hovering down cause I didn't want to be identified. And Lorraine went back there. She

asked me again, she said, "You going to say nothing?" I said, you know, Lorraine, this is a mess and this is not right. That guy right there needs to be let go and a new villain needs to come on board that can work within the price range that the citizens can afford. So Lorraine jumped up and ran back to Mark then because I didn't even get up with them. And she says something to him and the next thing I know he was sitting right next to me. I looked at him, I said, "oh my goodness." He said, "Will you help us?" I said, "excuse me?" "Your friend says you have a banking background. You work for a city. You know about this stuff." I said, "look, I'm staying out of this because I promised my husband, but this is what you ought to say." So I gave him some notes and he had his notes and I said, do not point back here at me. Because I know Greg and I worked with him in other areas and I don't want that drama. So he got up and he spoke and he started talking. The more he said, Greg started doing like this, looking at the audience. And I was peering down, trying to hide. And Greg said, "Fine, I agree with you. We should have a citizens group. But there's just one catch. If we have that citizen group Acquanetta Warren has to be in that group". And everybody turned around, looked at me and I went, I'm dead. So we started the Landscape Maintenance District Citizen Committee-.

Reginald Young [00:15:20] And you were on it-.

Acquanetta Warren [00:15:20] And we took- I was on it for the Village of Heritage.

Reginald Young [00:15:22] At the beginning.

Acquanetta Warren [00:15:23] At the beginning. And we took over our area. Village of Heritage. Thirty-two hundred homes, miles of landscape. And we got rid of that vendor. And I worked with the staff. We found another vendor and in a week we went back to the RFPs when they found the other company. Yes. We'll come in at whatever they charge. We'll do a right good job. I mean, the sprinklers were broken. It was a mess. They had spots. But this other company, the citizens got involved. We used to go walking in the morning with flags in our back pocket and we see a broken sprinkler. We would flag it for the vendor and we would make suggestions. And then we had kids vandalizing and we had a meeting one night. I let them have it. I said all you parents talking about these kids coming from Rialto and Rancho doing all this destruction. That's a lie. It is your own children with your golf clubs, do you mind? It was a funny meeting, but a lot of parents got offended by my words and I let them know. I said I came from an area where people don't care. You don't have this beauty. You have no idea how blessed we are, and I, for one, am not paying my monthly payment every month to have little Johnny tearing up the neighborhood. That ain't happening here. So that stopped. I mean, we really worked as a team. And then Mark said, I want to be a council member.

All of us got behind him because we couldn't get City Hall to listen. He won. And then we started adding more great people to help John Roberts out. And Josie came along and it just really worked out. But then the first time Mark ran for mayor, I told him, I don't think it's time. I think they've made it worse and leave it alone. And he lost. Second time, they came after him so badly with and against John, you know, in John's heart, as big as all get out. And Mark's passion for this community cannot be matched. He loves Fontana. He'd do anything for it. So I really got upset. At that time, my husband had left me. I had drama going on. I mean, it was so bad that I didn't even come to meetings because I didn't have the gas money to even come. I mean, he left me with 13 dollars and left with all of our furniture. My neighbors...that's the reason why I stayed. Because anybody in their right mind would have got their clothes and went back home. But my neighbors came to me the next day and said, don't leave. You've helped us with our gas bills. You've helped us get our kids out of jail. We love you. You stay here in our neighborhood. And I prayed so hard and I know when God turned it around. Before I knew it, my parents came out the next day and my dad and mom, they were so strong, they never stopped smiling. I was all upset- anybody would be, their marriage break up. But my dad never stopped smiling. He said, just tell me how much you need to catch up on all your bills. You were doing everything anyway. You just and he said, you can have this. I said, no, ima pay you back. I went and paid my dad back in three months, my dad and mom stood on the porch. They said "How did you do that?" I said I don't know. But God worked it out and I'm paying you guys back and I'm staying where I'm at because they were happy. Oh, she gonna come home now. I said I'm not dragging my kids back home. We're going to stay at our house. And I did.

Reginald Young [00:18:23] So there was a vacancy on the city council.

Acquanetta Warren [00:18:27] Yeah.

Reginald Young [00:18:27] And there was some conversations around that. Tell me about the conversations.

Acquanetta Warren [00:18:33] Well, it was really funny because here I'm going through all these changes and Mark's running and I kind of got involved in the race at the end and helped out and started walking door to door, particularly in the Villiage of Herritage, where thirty two hundred households, saying "don't listen to these terrible mailings. This man is he's the deal. He's the right person." So after he won, he he emailed me. I never forget asked- I wouldn't go to celebration parties, I wouldn't go to fundraisers. I wouldn't do that. And he asked me to come to his and I said, "no". He said, "Well OK, will you give me a ride after the council meeting because they're gonna have a party at my house and we need to see what's going on". I said, "Well, I'll do that. I'll give you a ride.

But I'm not I'm not going to be a part of that. I just got my own drama right now", but I came to the council meeting right after he had won. He got sworn in. It was great. But hearing the dialog from the dia, how it should be the next person, that's not Democratic, who came in line. And it should be somebody that represents only certain groups. And I was listening to people get up there. I'm like, this is crazy. So after the meeting, when I gave Marc the ride, he said "what do you think?" I said, "You know what, Mark, it needs to be fair. It needs to be unanimous in decision between all you guys because it's not elected. You need to interview people, applications. That's the way it should be". And that's what he had suggested. So he got out the car and he smiled and I smiled. He said "You not going to come in?" I said "It's late. I've got to get back to my kids". So the next day I got called in, about two days later, I was working in Upland. I was full time. That time JP was the mayor and Mike Milhiser was City Manager and they called me in. But I was always getting called in because, you know, I just had a track record of kicking everybody off. So I said, here I go again. I'm trying to figure out what did I do this week? And when I sat down, Mike looked me right in the face, he said, "Don't you think it's time to get off the pews?" And I said, "What are you talking about?" Because I told him about, you know, the pew sitting. And he said, "We think it's time." And I go, "What time for what?" He said, "We think it's time for an African American to be a council person in Fontana." And I said "Well it's been time for that." Didn't even have a clue, I was just like it's been time for that.

Reginald Young [00:20:45] But you didn't know, excuse me, [inaudible]. Did you know the history of Fontana when that was presented to you?

Reginald Young [00:20:50] Not like I know now. I had no clue. My dad made comments, but he said he didn't want to scare me because, see, we didn't tell anybody we was moving out here. There was a big surprise. Every time we'd try to move, everybody will come up with a reason why we should stay where we are. So me and my husband decided we just go find us a house, put it in escrow and we gonna move there and not tell anybody maybe two days before we move out. And when I told my dad when I was moving, he said, "Are you out of your mind? You jumping out the skillet IN the frying pan? What is wrong with you? Do you know about Fontana?" He started telling me about the Klan, I said "Daddy, that was years, years ago, nobody wanna hear all of that." He said, "Acqua that was as early as 1989." I said, "Whatever, you know I got that bat." But when Mike said that to me, I said, "Well, who are you guys thinking about? Because maybe I can help them." They looked at me a second, "We talking about you!" I said, "Are you out of your mind? Have you noticed-"

Reginald Young [00:21:43] To sit on the City Council.

Acquanetta Warren [00:21:43] Right, you know, to even apply for the appointment.

Reginald Young [00:21:45] Oh, okay.

Acquanetta Warren [00:21:46] I said, "Have you guys noticed I'm black and I'm a female? And might I add, I'm Republican." I said "That seems to be a really big deal around here. Even though it's a nonpartisan seat, people seem to really be tripping behind that." They go, "Acquanetta, stop hiding behind things and get off your butt and go and apply." I said "No." Even JP said "I can't believe you." He said "You get things done so good. And there are people who, in Fontana, people all over the region tell her to run for that." I said no. So I left and I had a beauty supply. I had a beauty appointment. It was so funny. And I take my daughter everywhere with me and people calling me and asking me to do that. And I'm like, oh, they're crazy. So we got to the beauty shop, it's right here in Fontana. They have the beauty shop and the barber shop next to each other, you know, and that's the hangout for the community. So when I got in there, I told the girl what I needed. And Aajee was sitting up there on the little stool and they would always comb her hair, too, because, you know, she's a little girl. And everybody was talking about, oh, you see, they got a seat open. And I just kept looking straight ahead. And the barber guys, finally, here comes the barbershop guys. With the Beauty Shop girls. All up in my face with the paper, "Did you see there's a councilor appointment?" I said "I saw it." And they said, "Well, we were thinking." I said, "Thinking what?" "Well, we were thinking, if you would apply for that, we all would come down and get behind you." And I said, "No" I said "You guys. You, half the time I have to get my hair done on credit. Are you crazy? I cannot I can't do that. I said I'm still trying to put us together." So they go, "Well, we think you should do it." I said, "Nope, nope, I'm not interested. But thank you guys for thinking of me." I get in the car, I'm coming down Sierra right by City Hall, and then Aajee, "Mommy, why are you so scared?"

Reginald Young [00:23:38] Your daughter said that?

Acquanetta Warren [00:23:38] My daughter said that. I looked at her. I said "Scared of what?" She said "I was listening. And I think you should do it. I don't think you should be afraid to apply for the council seat." And I said "Aajee we have a lot more to do to get our family back together." And she said, "You always tell us, don't be scared." She said, "You're so afraid, I'm just ashamed." I looked at her. I said "Aajee!"

Reginald Young [00:24:02] Calling you out.

Acquanetta Warren [00:24:03] Yeah. Calling me out, she's only like seven years old. She said, "Well there's City Hall Mommy. Come on, Mommy it's like when we pay the

sewer bill, let's go in there." She used to love to come in here and pay the sewer bill. I said " Aajee, we'll go get the application, but I'm not promising anything." [Phone begins to ring] oh me.

Reginald Young [00:24:19] [inaudible].

Acquanetta Warren [00:24:23] Okay let me get this, if you wanna cut it off, [interview resumes] -Got home and now my neighbors knocking on the door. "Hey, did you read about that opening?" I'm like, "yeah, I read about it." "Are you going to go for it?" I said, "What is wrong with y'all?" "You need to go for it. I was at work, people were talking about you ought to tell Acquanetta to go for that. Acquanetta we need changes. We need people like-" I said, "thank you, but I'm not interested." So me and my daughter fill out the application. And I looked at her, she said, you know, I'll never forget, she's so cute. She said, "You know Ma, I'm going to have to take full charge of this situation." She said, "We got to get ready for this. This is big." And I looked at her. I said, all right [lja]. So the next day I went to Mike Milhiser. I said, "Mike, will you look at the application? I'm going to fill it out and I'ma turn it in." And he looked at me, said, "Nope, I think I need to stay out of that. I did my part and I'm glad that you're moving forward." I said, "Well can't you look at the answers?" He goes, "Nope, because I want this to be, you," he said, "It's you", I said "Okay." So I turned it in, brought it in here and I'll never forget they had a lady working here at the time named Trudy. When I came in, she knew me from the landscape group, because you see I used to just come down here and just raise all kind of Cane with the council. I said "I come tonight as one, you know, I could come in here with a thirty-three hundred people later. So it's up to y'all to decide." [Janice], they would kill me so bad. They said "Stop coming up to the council meeting threatening us." Right. So when I came in and she was smiling, she took the application. I kept saying, "How many people applied?" She took it, she stamped it, she put it in a folder, threw it in the drawer and locked it. I said, "Trudy, how many people applied?" Twenty two. I go "What?" Give me back my application. I was sitting out on the thing over there just busting up. She said "I can't. It's already stamped, it's already in. Goodbye Acquanetta." I said "What?" She said, "Oh by the way you need to come up here Friday. So they had where they were-.

Reginald Young [00:26:14] For what? Interviews?

Acquanetta Warren [00:26:15] Well it wasn't interviews. They were going to decide how they were going to do everything so she you need to be here Friday, so I came in Friday and I hadn't told anybody, none of my neighbors, that I applied and I don't know why I did this. I sat in the front row. I don't know what I was thinking. So I sat in the front row and they were sitting up there in the first thing out of Mark's mouth. We need to

eliminate 11 people because we got too many people. And I'm like, oh, my God, I'm here. I'm embarrassed. Oh, my God, they're going to eliminate right in my face. And there was a few people there that had applied and they did thumbs up, thumbs down. That's why I don't like that. So they did that and we went through 11 and then they said, "Oh, wait a minute, three people ran. We at least should put them in there. So let's eliminate three more people." I was like this. Oh, my God. And then the council members up there wouldn't look at me. You know, I kept "Hi!" You know, they wouldn't even look.

Reginald Young [00:27:03] This is the process.

Acquanetta Warren [00:27:05] The process they went through. So then finally they came up with 11 people and they started naming them. And I was getting my purse. I said, well, I didn't get picked, let me get out of here now. And then when they got to the eighth person Acquanetta Warren, I went, I said this is too much.

Reginald Young [00:27:20] How many blacks were applying?

Acquanetta Warren [00:27:22] It was me and Emory James. That was it. So then they said, OK, we're going to have this event, [inaudible] for the Christmas tree lighting, come and meet with the council members. And then Monday is the interviews. Tuesday we'll do the selection. So I didn't have a lot of money. I dressed Aajee up and I got her out, the car parked right out here. And I said, "Aajee, be a nice little girl. We're going to meet with the council people. You know, I got to go through this process, see if mommy has a chance." "OK, Mommy", we walked around the corner and she saw the snow. She says, "Give me five dollars or I'm going to go play." I said, "Aajee, that is bribery you can't do that to your Mother." So I got really nervous. I said, "Here's five dollars. Please behave!" We got up there, everybody was ignoring me. And finally Josie walked up to me and I didn't know Josie real well. And she and I started talking. And first thing she told Aajee, "Honey, go play in the snow, me and your mother need to chat." Aajee was behind Josie going [makes taunting noise]. I was like, "You're giving me back my five dollars." So Josie and I spent an hour together talking. We had a lot in common, but I knew how strong that democratic hole was. And I said she said, "Look, I tell you what, you pray for me and I'll pray for you." And I kept saying there's no way she'll vote for me. But I really like that lady.

Reginald Young [00:28:40] She was already on the council-

Acquanetta Warren [00:28:42] She was on the council. And we talked about our history that we really found that we had a lot in common. I left there. I said if nothing

else I've gathered knowledge of a great lady and I'm happy. I'm good. Next day, my neighbor came over to my house. They said, "Hey, you're gonna need some help. So-and-so is a speechwriter. So-and-so has access to Stein Mart and can get your outfit. We're taking charge of this. I just already collected all of our support. We're all going to the meeting with you." And I'm like, "You know Aajee remind me not to let you ever go outside and play anymore." So we did all this as a neighborhood. And I came for the interview and Mark made a really bold statement. He said, "If you see somebody you really like during this interview, let us know." And I left there. I did my speech, but it was all about all I want to do is help. I'm not trying to build a dynasty. I'm not trying to be a political warfare. I just want to help where I live. That's all I've ever wanted to do is help. And that's been my thing. I just wanna help.

Reginald Young [00:29:39] And they appointed you.

Acquanetta Warren [00:29:39] They appointed me the next day.

Reginald Young [00:29:41] Was it unanimous?

Acquanetta Warren [00:29:42] It was unanimous, but it was funny because reporters came back. They nobody would let me sit by them. When I came in the City Hall chamber everybody said "this seat's taken." I had to sit way in the back with reporters, I was like, oh, my God, there's a welcome mat. The reporters told me, "Acquanetta, we really believe based on what we saw last night, your speech, we've been talking to people all day around town. They want you." And I said "You gotta be kidding me."

Reginald Young [00:30:06] The reporters are telling you.

Acquanetta Warren [00:30:08] The reporters are telling me, they went all over town, everybody said we want you. They said "what would be the one thing, reason why you wouldn't take this job?" And I said, "I wouldn't take it if it wasn't unanimous." And they go, "are you nuts? Because you've got two people that might not vote for you at all." And I said "no, because I didn't get elected by the people and they did. So it has to be all of them together." So it's so funny. Right before they called my name, the reporter came up he said "You know I'm going to hold you to that." I said whatever. So when they called my name, I was shocked. I'm going to tell you [Inaudible]. Through all my life, nobody could have told me that would have happened.

Reginald Young [00:30:41] So when you were a little girl in kindergarten you're gonna sit down in a chair and say one day, I will be on the city council-

Acquanetta Warren [00:30:47] Never. That would never-.

Reginald Young [00:30:48] That wasn't in your mind?

Acquanetta Warren [00:30:49] -Wasn't on my mind. I always wanted to be a judge or a lawyer. And when I decided against that, I did go to law school about a couple semesters and said, no, I can't do this. But I got into banking and I really loved it. But really, all I ever wanted to do, and that's why I came to work for Upland, is after I got laid off from the bank I said I can finally do something I want to do and that's help people.

Reginald Young [00:31:11] And then you had to run for city council.

Acquanetta Warren [00:31:14] Yeah, that was, boy, that was great. You know, one person ran against me and Janice, but I decided- coming from L.A., you have to raise money, so I raised a ton of money. I raised so much money, that [inaudible] called me and said, "are you running for Congress or council? Stop raising money." But I use my marketing background to talk to people, all people. And I mean, I had people sending me twenty-five dollars, five dollars, businesses, you know, I just really put it out there. And so I won 2004, 2008 I ran again and I won. And then I got mad at the state about taking all our money and decided I didn't really brief with God like I should have and got out there. And that was 18 months of I don't know what went wrong, but I didn't win. But then found out Mark couldn't run.

Reginald Young [00:32:03] This is for-.

Acquanetta Warren [00:32:05] For assembly. I ran for the assembly seat.

Reginald Young [00:32:07] That's when you lost.

Acquanetta Warren [00:32:08] That's when I lost.

Reginald Young [00:32:09] Is that the only elected office you lost?

Acquanetta Warren [00:32:13] Yes.

Reginald Young [00:32:14] You haven't lost any more?

Acquanetta Warren [00:32:15] Well, I lost in Compton for school board, but this is what happens when you run for emotional reasons. And I'll never do that again. You have to think things out and God has to make a path. And I know that that was not the path

now. Although 18 months, I raised a lot of money and I made my presence known, it was so funny when they went to that two, you know the top two race. People actually came to the ballot places upset because they couldn't vote for me because it was based on party. People and some of the people that work in the ballots, they were saying "Oh, my God, you would have won. People were coming up from everywhere." But it was so funny, ABC, the night that they did the first two top two the ABC reporter said, "You know what? This is such a shame, if Acquanetta Warren was running right now, she would have made that top two."

Reginald Young [00:33:07] So you were not the mayor at that time?

Acquanetta Warren [00:33:10] No, I was a council member.

Reginald Young [00:33:11] So what happened then after that-

Acquanetta Warren [00:33:13] Well.

Reginald Young [00:33:14] -And the mayor, and you decided to run for mayor.

Acquanetta Warren [00:33:16] What happened was, Mark had been looking for a job, you know, the city manager, and nobody would hire him if he was mayor. But he didn't say anything to anyone except to our pastor. And so when I lost, they were at the place partyin. And I was like I told my brother, I said "Do they know I just spent 18 months and I lost? Why are they ordering champagne? What's going on here?" Everybody in that whole group was happy. And I'm like, "What is wrong with you guys?" Mark followed me out to my car. I said "Mark, that hurts me. I worked really hard and I lost. And you're up here partying." He said, "Haven't I told you our paths always cross." He said "Acquanetta, you don't know how happy I am." I said, "What? Get in front of my car." I was so mad at him. I'm gonna run over him. So the next day we have our council meeting. He's congratulating Janice, which I was happy for Janice because I just knew she'd make a great supervisor and he said "Acqua you did a good job", he said, "But I got an announcement to make." And started crying, broke out in full crocodile tears. And I was so mad and evil. I was just sitting up there looking at him.

Reginald Young [00:34:16] So why was he crying?

Acquanetta Warren [00:34:18] He was crying. He said, "I want you guys to pray for me because I don't think I can run for mayor again." And I'm saying to myself, yeah, right. And then I look down there and realize he is crying. So I got up and put my hand on his shoulder and I really wanted to choke him but I didn't. He said, "I have to feed my

family. I have to take a job that may not allow me to be mayor anymore. So that's the way it is." So I went and sat down. The meeting was over and everybody was really upset and I was like being evil. I just walked in there and he came past me and I walked. I say, "Mark, I'm really sorry about, you know, the tears and everything. That was a really good act. By the way, Mark." He was serious looking. He did not appreciate that. I said, "But now that I'm not running for assembly, I have time. I will help you find a job and you'll still be mayor. And we got out to the car and I never forget he looked me right in the face he said "Acquanetta, I pushed them." I said "What do you mean you pushed them?" He said "I told Yucca Valley, I'm taking that city manager job." I said, "Mark, that's stupid. You can't be mayor then." I said, "We'll find something." He said, "No Acquanetta, I'm stepping down and you're going to have to step up. I always knew I'd have to leave Fontana one day, but I didn't want to leave til you were ready. I knew from the beginning you were the one that needs to take this. You have my passion."

Reginald Young [00:35:31] So, you were appointed first.

Acquanetta Warren [00:35:33] No, I was appointed first in 2004.

Reginald Young [00:35:36] I'm talking about, to the mayor.

Acquanetta Warren [00:35:37] No, they tried to get me to take Mayor pro-tem and I wouldn't take it.

Reginald Young [00:35:41] OK.

Acquanetta Warren [00:35:42] I said no, we need to be fair and equitable and if I'm going to run. But they had a time getting me to run for mayor. I did not say yes. I told Mark I'm not running for mayor. I'm sit back as council. First he said, "OK, somebody is going to run and win and you're going to hate that they're not doing the right thing." He said, "You need to run." I got home. People were at my house waiting for me. We knew Mark couldn't run, we've been waiting for you to lose. Is that what you're telling me that didn't go over well with-.

Reginald Young [00:36:12] For the assembly?

Acquanetta Warren [00:36:13] Right. But, you know, it was David Lewis, David called me he said, "Look, I know everybody's after you I just wanna talk to you." He says, go to the movies,-.

Reginald Young [00:36:22] David who?

Acquanetta Warren [00:36:22] David Lewis.

Reginald Young [00:36:22] OK.

Acquanetta Warren [00:36:23] He says "Let's go to the movies." David would take me to the movies every year for my birthday. And it wasn't my birthday, it was in June. And we went to the movies and he wanted to see this movie, "The A Team", and I hated that. I said, "I want to see that." He said "no." And so we're in the movies. He's telling me, he said, "Don't you get it? The "The A Team", A Team, Acquanetta team. get it?" And I go, "No, I don't get it." But I did. So we were walking away, you know how they pipe the music in at Victoria Gardens. This song came on by Sam Cooke "Change Has Got to Come" and David used to go to L.A. when my dad was alive with me and my dad would play that song every Saturday night and David would just sit there and listen to all the stories when my dad grew up in the South and he said, you know what, your dad is not here. But don't you think it's ironic we came out of a movie for The A Team and your dad's song "Change Has Got to Come". He said change got to come in Fontana too Acquanetta. So we walked around Victoria Gardens and David wouldn't let me go home 'til I told him I'd run for mayor.

Reginald Young [00:37:26] And you ran.

Acquanetta Warren [00:37:28] And I ran.

Reginald Young [00:37:28] And you won. Now how many people ran.

Acquanetta Warren [00:37:31] At that time, I think we had six.

Reginald Young [00:37:33] Six, came out number one.

Acquanetta Warren [00:37:35] Came out number one.

Reginald Young [00:37:37] Wow that is something.

Acquanetta Warren [00:37:37] Yeah. You know, it was a terrible race, though. They put a lot of race, party, gender. It was just stupid.

Reginald Young [00:37:44] What year was that. How long had-.

Acquanetta Warren [00:37:46] That was in 2010.

Reginald Young [00:37:48] So it was five years later.

Acquanetta Warren [00:37:49] Yeah.

Reginald Young [00:37:51] What is, you think, the most significant thing you have done, one. And then why would blacks be so proud of you?

Acquanetta Warren [00:38:00] Well, I think for me the most significant thing has been trying to put the priorities in place and get people thinking about education, about health, and more importantly, that making sure that city government runs well. And that's what really makes the difference.

Reginald Young [00:38:19] What was significant to black people that you-

Acquanetta Warren [00:38:22] Well, you know, it was funny because I try to discount that again. You know, when I became appointed and then the older seniors in town got me straight real quick. Said this is a big deal. We don't want to hear that, you know, Dorothy Grant got all over me and said, "No, this is a big deal. You don't be discounting that in the paper," you know? But I think for kids to be able to say, you know, anybody, it is possible for people that may not have had those privileges to make it no matter what, and to be in a position of power to decide how a community is thriving. And I've got my own personal ways of figuring that. I think our role is to facilitate an environment where we can get jobs, where we can have our children educated, but more important, where we are all safe. Once you're safe, you can do anything. And that's something I never felt where I grew up at. I didn't feel safe. But here I've worked hard so that people feel safe and the businesses feel safe and things are in line to be good because they feel safe.

Reginald Young [00:39:32] Do you feel safe now in terms of the history of Fontana KKK, and the people who are hateful. You don't feel anything from that?

Acquanetta Warren [00:39:43] No, no. I tell you what really got me when I got appointed. I'll never forget. This gang of guys. They hang out at the liquor store down the street. I stopped and got a soda one day and they said, "Hey, girl." And I said, here we go, because they all look like they just came out the meeting. Right. And they said, you know what we read about you. We like your father's work ethic. He is a Teamster. And he worked at Rocketdyne and he worked at Kaiser and he worked at General Dynamics. And you came from a good line. And we like that. And I looked at them. I said, "thank you."

Acquanetta Warren [00:40:17] [Inaudible].

Reginald Young [00:40:20] Yeah, OK.

Acquanetta Warren [00:40:23] [Inaudible].

Acquanetta Warren [00:40:24] No, they let it be known. They said at first they said, "Our daddies are rolling over their graves. But you know what? We listen to you. You talk like us. You talk like somebody that believes in America. That's all we want is people that believe in America."

Reginald Young [00:40:38] We have a couple more minutes, about four, to be exact. One of the things I wanted to ask you, are you familiar with any incidents of the KKK?

Acquanetta Warren [00:40:51] Oh, yeah.

Reginald Young [00:40:52] -Before you got here.

Acquanetta Warren [00:40:53] Yeah.

Reginald Young [00:40:54] Which is the one that stands out-.

Acquanetta Warren [00:40:55] One that the phone company guy that they shot down.

Reginald Young [00:40:58] That they shot off the pole.

Acquanetta Warren [00:40:59] Right. And then also just listening to Dorothee talk about Jessie Turner. That was major for me. You know, I worked on that and we got Jessie Turner's Center, but, you know, we were not closing that center down in my mind without giving her that name up there. But I had to fight the African American community. They thought I was terrible for taking- I said "Why you guys trying to keep a pool that's full of green fungus, boxes stacked up, roaches and rats running around here?" "It's ours." I got that. But we're taking you to a hundred-twenty-thousand square feet luxury building. And come on, you guys work with me. Oh, they were so mad at me. But then the day that we opened that place up that was my speech. Promises made, promises kept. And Jessie Turner's family walked around there and said, Jessie would love this. She would adore this.

Reginald Young [00:41:51] Now how many buildings in Fontana are named after African Americans, we know, Jessie Turner.

Acquanetta Warren [00:41:56] Jessie. And actually-

Reginald Young [00:41:58] The Dorothy Grant School

Acquanetta Warren [00:41:59] Dorothy Grant School and I believe Booker here, the City Council chamber too, the architect.

Reginald Young [00:42:04] [Inaudible].

Acquanetta Warren [00:42:04] Yeah. When you go out, you'll see his name up there. But you know what? The significance, even more importantly, is that it allows people to have to work with everybody. And that's what's made Fontana different. We have to be one.

Reginald Young [00:42:19] Would Fon- North Fontana was that part of the city when you got in or was it still part-.

Acquanetta Warren [00:42:24] No it was part of the city by then. It had been annexed, but they still had this big separation on Foothill. And I didn't get that, you know, but then the older people told me we weren't allowed in downtown Fontana after dark. And I could see that, you know, just looking at some of the old newspapers and stuff. But Jessie Turner was respected by the community, if she needs, if somebody needed a prescription, she had to come down here and get it.

Reginald Young [00:42:48] So gender, race, it was-.

Acquanetta Warren [00:42:52] Party! They even tried to say I was too young. You know-

Reginald Young [00:42:56] I wanted to say party. Gender, race and party. An outsider.

Acquanetta Warren [00:43:00] Oh, yeah. The four, yeah.

Reginald Young [00:43:01] So they were sort of against you. That was ours.

Acquanetta Warren [00:43:05] Right.

Reginald Young [00:43:07] Because Fontana was always family.

Acquanetta Warren [00:43:09] Right.

Reginald Young [00:43:09] And I know who you are. I know your dad and your mom.

Acquanetta Warren [00:43:12] Right.

Reginald Young [00:43:13] So, that didn't affect you?

Acquanetta Warren [00:43:16] [No], but see I had, I got you know, I was in my church, I had been working with people, you know, back and forth, not realizing those ties might come in handy one day. So I had started getting a reputation as somebody you could come to and ask for assistance. And I didn't care. I would go to whoever's event. It didn't bother me. I didn't know what the big deal was. You know, you have an event, oh I'll come over there and then everybody was like, "What's she doing over here?" But, you know, it's all about learning how to work with each other and that's what we're still doing.

Reginald Young [00:43:46] OK, what's your future plans? Well, I want to know, you're still a baby.

Acquanetta Warren [00:43:53] You know, I just retired from the city of Upland and I made it clear I don't have any other political aspirations. I like being mayor.

Reginald Young [00:44:00] But you said that all that time, I heard the interview in front of me. Yeah, no.

Acquanetta Warren [00:44:04] No, when that, because I think that's why things happen. Because I say no, no, no. But I really am happy right now and I just want to finish the work I started here.

Reginald Young [00:44:14] So you will agree though that your "No"s do not mean no based on your history.

Acquanetta Warren [00:44:19] I know, but now- yeah I know. But as I get older, I'm really trying to say no means no. You know, people bugging me about running for Congress. You ought to do this assembly, supervisor. I mean, all of it. I say, you know, right now, God says, stay here. And that's what I'm gonna do. Now if God shows me a path and says you need to get over there, who gonna argue with God? But right now, everything around me is staying here.

Reginald Young [00:44:44] Well, you know, I've been married since '84 and I've known her since '79. And she has more "no"s than anybody I had ever went with in my whole life. So I'm looking at you. You sound so much like her and it doesn't necessarily mean no. [Inaudible] that's okay. You may be right, but I want to think-

Acquanetta Warren [00:45:14] Eighteen months taught me you better stay in your lane.

Reginald Young [00:45:17] OK. So, so what do you, in closing, what would you say to black girls in particular? Who may see you and you don't see them but, end of the tape, what would you say to them?

Acquanetta Warren [00:45:30] Don't let anybody tell you can't do nothing. Don't. That's the one thing my dad and mom do, they just put that in my heart. I can do whatever I want to do.

Reginald Young [00:45:39] So if you wanted to run for a high office, you could.

Acquanetta Warren [00:45:44] I could do it. I could do it. I did it. That didn't mean I won but I did.

Reginald Young [00:45:52] We're proud of you.

Acquanetta Warren [00:45:53] Oh, thank you.

Reginald Young [00:45:55] Anything that you want to say for that.

Acquanetta Warren [00:45:56] I just want to thank you and [inaudible] for this opportunity, because I, I just I've been blessed and I know our town has been blessed. But, you know, I think the biggest thing that helped Fontana is, the Lord, I really believe that. When those pastors got together, marched down Sierra and say enough is enough, they changed the tide and every challenge this city has ever had, when our faith-based community gets involved, taken care of.

Reginald Young [00:46:24] So do you mean the pastors-.

Acquanetta Warren [00:46:25] Oh, yes, we have a great community policing program for our police department. But outside of that, I have tried to go to every church in Fontana, and I'm still doing that.

Reginald Young [00:46:34] You're still doing that.

Acquanetta Warren [00:46:34] I'm still doing it. We're the Bible Belt of the Inland Empire. We've got churches everywhere. Churches, meaning houses, churches mean garages, churches mean the schools, churches everywhere. So that group is that group that I try to really get to thrive because they make the difference in this community. They do.

Reginald Young [00:46:51] Again, thank you so much for your time. And we'll look at this. Don't be angry if we call you up again-

Acquanetta Warren [00:47:00] No, no problem!

Reginald Young [00:47:01] -To ask you more questions.

Acquanetta Warren [00:47:02] OK, no problem. Let me get down the hallway before they- [audio cuts off]

End of Interview:
[00:47:06]