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Bridges that Carried Us Over Project

Interview Summary

Interviewee:

Lois Carson

Interviewers:

Jennifer Tilton and Romaine Washington

Interview Date:

July 7, 2021

Interview Location:

San Bernardino, CA

Interview Summary completed by:

Jennifer Tilton

Description:

Lois Carson moved to San Bernardino in 1951 when she was transferred to Norton Air Force Base, where she worked on early computers. She discusses housing segregation in San Bernardino, and shares stories of activism to stop blockbusting in the Rialto bench in 1966. Lois Carson discusses her work in War on Poverty in San Bernardino, observations of the city's active community action groups, as well as her leadership in the Riverside Community Action Agency where she helped set up the fair housing council, ran Upward Bound, energy programs and other programs to empower and serve poor people. She remembers the vibrant business district on Mount Vernon and discusses how the 215 freeway cut off resources and businesses, causing stores and people of color to relocate. She talks about parent organizing in Rialto to address racism in schools and by police, as well as their effort to create Black history class in the schools. She talks about how the Martin Luther King Jr. statue was built in the city. She ends the interview reflecting about the Black Lives Matter movement and the importance of visiting Africa for African Americans

Keywords:

- Housing segregation
- Westside San Bernardino
- Valley Truck Farm
- Blockbusting
- Rialto Bench
- Racism in schools
- Eisenhower
- School Desegregation
- Martin Luther King Statue
- Norton Airforce Base
- Colonel Paul Green
- Colonel Robert Franklin
- Colonel Rufus Billups

- War on Poverty
- Community Action Agencies
- Upward Bound
- Job Corps
- Francis Grice
- Civil Rights Movement
- Mayor Holcomb
- Mayor Al Ballard
- African connections to African Americans

Spatial Coverage:

Name of Site (if relevant)	General Location/Address
KKK House	19th & Medical Center Drive
Black community displaced by Development	South D & Arrowhead
Former Base Housing	3rd St, Waterman Ave
Eisenhower School Rialto	
Public Housing on westside	9th St San Bernardino
Community Health Clinic	Valley Boulevard in Bloomington
Perris Hill Park Pool	
Westside Pool on 5th Street (by late 60s)	5th street San Bernardino
The Rialto Bench	San Bernardino
MLK Statue	City Call 290 N D St, San Bernardino

Temporal Coverage:

- 1951-present

Key Events:

- Building MLK Statue
- NCNW Trips to Africa and Mexico

Key Organizations:

- Les Jeunes Amies
- National Council of Negro Women (NCNW)
- Wright Patterson Air Force Base
- Norton Airforce Base
- Westside Action Group
- San Bernardino Valley College Board of Trustees
- Affirmative Action Committee at San Bernardino Valley College
- Community Relations Committee

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Digital Video	00:06:34	Businesses on west side
Digital Video	00:07:46	Kids integrating Eisenhower & struggles with racism in Rialto
Digital Video	00:11:00	Les Jeunes Amies and transition to NCNW
Digital Video	00:15:21	Sororities
Digital Video	00:16:15	Civil Rights Activism, CORE, League of Community Mothers and confronting racism in San Bernardino
Digital Video	0:25:08	Art Townsend
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Digital Video	01:20:29	NCNW visits to Africa Importance of Visiting Africa for African Americans

Related Materials:

There are two additional interviews with Lois Carson, one focused on NCNW and the other on Black Future Leaders

Full interview transcript can be found below.

Interview Transcript

Start of Interview:

[00:00:00]

Jennifer Tilton [00:00:01] All right, and we are here today at the home of Lois Carson to interview her for All right, and we are here today at the home of Lois Carson to interview her for the Bridges That Carried Us Over archive. And I'm here, I'm Jennifer Tilton and here with Romaine Washington to ask her some questions about the civil rights movement and her memories of San Bernardino. So to get started first, maybe, can you tell us some about some of your early memories when you first moved to San Bernardino? What do you remember about the community when you first moved here?. And I'm here, I'm Jennifer Tilton and here with Romaine Washington to ask her some questions about the civil rights movement and her memories of San Bernardino. So to get started first, maybe, can you tell us some about some of your early memories when you first moved to San Bernardino? What do you remember about the community when you first moved here?

Lois Carson [00:00:30] Well, I'll start with I was working. I went to college in Ohio, got a job at Wright Patterson Air Force Base. And as I said, I was part of the first group that worked on machines for technology as opposed to human computers. You read the book, Hidden Figures. Well, I didn't realize that in 1950 when I got that job, we were the first group of people to work on machines as opposed to human computers. And I was one of 50 people, only two females in the group that got hired in that way. That job transferred me to Norton and that's how I came to California. We, I brought my grandmother with me because my son back there was a year old and she watched him while I worked cause I didn't realize I was gonna be transferred. Anyway, we lived in some housing that had been military housing out on 3rd near Waterman.

And from there we moved to the West Side. And this is the second home I've had on the west side of San Bernardino. This is San Bernardino. The next street over is Rialto. And what I remember most is that there were the only professional people that I got to know when I first came were Dorothy Ingram and her brother, who was a doctor. Everybody else had, you know, worked in menial labor and a couple of other people who were transferred when I was here were the next kind of professional people to come in to the area. There was a lot of discrimination in those days, we're talking 1952, in the early 50s, and most of the blacks lived out in the Valley Truck Farm, way out east on the other side of Waterman, where Hospitality Lane and all that is now that used to all be blacks and people farmed and all of that out there then. There was an all black school, Dorothy Ingram was the principal. And since it was not part of the San Bernardino Unified School District, they made her one little school district and she became the superintendent of a one school district. The state, finally realized that that was open discrimination. So they put it in the San Bernardino Unified and she became an assistant superintendent.

Romaine Washington [00:03:19] OK.

Lois Carson [00:03:21] No they didn't make her superintendent. They busted her back to the principal of that one school that was now in the in the district. So those are some of my early memories.

Jennifer Tilton [00:03:33] Where did you first move on the west side and what was the West Side community like then?

Lois Carson [00:03:36] I moved on Sixteenth Street and we integrated that street because I'm Catholic and I started going to St. Anthony Church there. So we saw a house for sale and it was close to the church. Seemed like a really good idea. So we talked to the lady who was selling them into selling us the home and the little kids next door told my kids, "The dog didn't even like black people."

Romaine Washington [00:04:05] Wow.

Lois Carson [00:04:05] But we made it out, we became friends with the neighbors. But in time, you know, it turned black.

Jennifer Tilton [00:04:12] Do you remember more about that process? Kind of. How fast was the process of kind of white flight out of the neighborhood?

Lois Carson [00:04:17] Well, block busting. Realtors came in, scared the white people who lived there and then lured black people into moving. And they didn't know they were part of a blockbusting campaign. So that's how it happens everywhere.

Jennifer Tilton [00:04:33] Yeah, yeah. And that's how it.

Lois Carson [00:04:35] But it didn't really matter that much to me then. I wanted to be near the church, so.

Jennifer Tilton [00:04:39] So that worked. Right.

Lois Carson [00:04:41] And I didn't really understand blockbusting till I came here cause we moved here. It was in the process of being blockbusted and a white woman from Sixth Street came here and sat down with me and said, "You, we already have two black families on this street. Can we sell you one that looks like this on another street?" I said, "lady, when I'm spending this kind of money, nobody shops for me and I'm staying right here." And, uh, but we really fought... She and I started working together with other people in the community to try to reverse the black blockbusting that was going on. But we lost that battle.

Jennifer Tilton [00:05:25] Now what year did you move out here?

Lois Carson [00:05:27] Nineteen sixty six. I've been here over 60 years. Yeah.

Jennifer Tilton [00:05:33] Do you remember any of the kind of real estate agents who were involved in that process and

Lois Carson [00:05:39] I probably got that her name on the paperwork?

Lois Carson [00:05:42] I'd have to look that up because I got it, got all the paperwork from the sale of buying this house. Yeah.

Jennifer Tilton [00:05:48] So when you first moved to 16th, did you get to know kind of the rest of the black community on the west side as well?

Lois Carson [00:05:54] Well as it, as it grew into a black community, yes. And then they built new housing near the church. And all of that was sold to black people and everything west of what is now Medical Center Drive, that was all farmland. Yeah cause the kids used

to go up to the farm and the man would chase them out. Yeah but they love going there, it was like adventure, you know.

Jennifer Tilton [00:06:21] Are there any sort of neighborhood businesses you remembered from that early time in the 50s over on the West Side, or anything about, you know, like where the Ingrams lived and the two churches were on kind of 6th and Harris? That area seemed to be like an early center.

Lois Carson [00:06:34] That's south of Baseline. I was north of Baseline, so I didn't really go down there a lot. But the west side when we when we were raising the kids there, had a bank, had a Safeway market. My kids had Christmas savings at the bank. They had their own little savings account. There were businesses along Mt. Vernon. It was a very viable street at that time. And we watched all of that go away. There were a few black businesses. I remember Geri's Velvet Lounge. Very nice nightclub environment, and NCNW and Les Jeunes Amies used to have activities there and uh. But that went by the wayside, and up on Highland. This guy had another nice lounge. Can't think of his name right now, but it was a very nice place too. That my, the name might come to me.

Jennifer Tilton [00:07:35] Great. Great. OK, great, great. And when you first moved here, who were some of the older community leaders who you came to get to know?

Lois Carson [00:07:46] Oh. Well, we spent a lot of time working against blockbusting, Ella Honeycut was the woman who wanted me to move somewhere else so this street would retain only two... black families. But there weren't a lot of leaders in the early days because people were moving in. Everybody had small children and that was the priority. And my leadership with others in the community started in working with the school district cause there, again, we had to fight against prejudice in the school. My son was at, they were in Catholic school first, and when we moved here, he went to Aquinas, but I put all the kids in the Rialto schools and I...we had him there for a year because he ran into prejudice there. And I thought, why should I pay for prejudice? I can get that free at Eisenhower.

So I took him I put him in Eisenhower and we really ran into a lot of it because they just weren't used to black kids. The police would stop him every day walking home from school. You know, past a certain street, I think it was Pepper. Then they started harassing any black kids and most of them came from this area that was being blockbusted. He had a teacher who was a member of the John Birch Society. When my husband and I went to sit down and talk with him about Harry in the class, he took out his John Birch Society little statue or something, set it right on the desk in front of us. So the next day I got Harry out of that class. But that's the kind of things that we ran into. But Carry, Lorna Carry and her husband, who was an officer at Norton, they became part of the group working against any kind of racism in the Rialto School District. But most of my civil rights stuff was done in the San Bernardino area.

Jennifer Tilton [00:09:59] Yeah. How'd you get involved in that in San Bernardino? What kind of brought you into those networks to start doing that work?

Lois Carson [00:10:05] Well, it was just my mother was a person that was active in community and it was so obvious. And then, Martin Luther King that got me started, I went into L.A. to see him at the First AME Church and came back and we got started with it and we had lots of marches. And I had all my children, two in the stroller, two hanging on to my, to the sides of my stroller, and my older son. And this woman said, "Why are you out

here with all these little children?" I said, "Well I want them to know that their parents were in the struggle."

Romaine Washington [00:10:41] Now, were you part of the NAACP at that time also?

Lois Carson [00:10:47] There was no NAACP yet that came a little later. Oh, that came after the Community League of Mothers and the West Side Action Group of West Side Action Group was founded by Bob Parker.

Romaine Washington [00:11:08] I want to go back a little bit to the Les Jeunes Amies. Where did you guys come up with that?

Lois Carson [00:11:14] Well, when I was in high school, Catholic school in Memphis, Tennessee, that's where I grew up. I started a little club and I called it the Naivette Debs. I didn't know that word was naive. I had seen it in a book and it sounded good. So when we, I proposed that we have a little social organization cause there weren't many organizations to join. Here, we called Les Jeunes Amies, the young friends. And when we were all around 34, 35, the NCNW came in, a woman came out from Pasadena and talked with a bunch of us about the NCNW. And we kind of voted to disband Les Jeunes Amies and join this new organization, which was national. And we started our own section here. So our section here is about 53 years old.

Jennifer Tilton [00:12:10] Can you tell us more about Les Jeunes Amies and kind of who else was involved in that early on that you remember and what you all did?

Lois Carson [00:12:17] Well, the only person that is still around is Faye Porter, who is on the Foundation for Valley College now. She was a member umm. Natalin Brown now lives in uh, Santa Clarita and they're the only two that's, that I still have connections to. The others, some of them were military wives, so they left because of that. And Penny Cole, she passed away. A number of them have passed away.

Jennifer Tilton [00:12:57] Penny Cole was Richard Cole's wife. Is that right?

Lois Carson [00:12:59] That's right, Penny Cole and... trying to think of some of the others, if I had the picture and there is one picture down at NCNW because of the movement disbanding that group could go to NCNW, that's part of NCNW's history as well. So there's a picture of the group that's in the NCNW office down there.

Romaine Washington [00:13:24] And you decided on French because it sounded good?

Lois Carson [00:13:27] Yeah, you know, I was young and I just picked up where I left off in high school once I found out how to speak a little French.

Jennifer Tilton [00:13:40] And so what are some of the activities you all did with Les Jeunes Amies.

Lois Carson [00:13:42] Every year we had a Cotton Ball. We gave a scholarship. I'm trying to think of Dolores Key, was one of our queens of cotton ball, and Clark, what was her name? There were a number, we had a queen every year in the cotton ball and we did community work a lot of community stuff.

Jennifer Tilton [00:14:10] So what was a cotton ball like since we can't go back? We weren't there. Can you describe what it was like?

Lois Carson [00:14:15] People came dressed up, it was formal. And we had the contests and activities for the girls who ran. And we had to identify a young man who would escort them, similar to a Debutante Ball.

Romaine Washington I was gonna say it sounds like a Debutante Ball.

Lois Carson People came dressed up. It was formal and we had the contests and activities for the girls who ran. And we had to identify a young man who would escort them in similar to a democratic. But it was, yeah, but we called it the cotton ball. And that that was an idea that came from Memphis. Yeah, yeah. Well, my mother had been involved with something like that.

Jennifer Tilton [00:14:43] Yeah. And so you talked about some early other organizations that or people who started to get together to work against the blockbusting and work in the schools. Tell us a little bit more about how you all got together and what organizations kind of came up with you on that.

Lois Carson [00:15:00] There was no other organization that joined in the blockbusting activity. They were all people who lived here on the Bench. But there were other organizations at that time, the Gay Anns that was a group of women called themselves the Gay Anns.

Jennifer Tilton [00:15:18] Henry Hooks has a beautiful picture of them

Lois Carson [00:15:21] That right? Later on, sororities came in.] Yeah, I'm an AKA, that came in '61 and the Deltas Ann Shirelles was a Delta. I don't remember exactly when they started, but they go back to those, I would say 60s, back to the 60s. There was a time I believe your aunt was a Zeta.

Romaine Washington [00:15:54] Oh, I did not.

Lois Carson [00:15:55] I believe Mary was a member of the Zetas. I think she and Betty Anderson.

Romaine Washington [00:16:00] Yes, I'm yeah. Oh no.

Lois Carson [00:16:03] Betty Anderson was a City Council woman.

Romaine Washington [00:16:06] Yeah, yeah, it's.

Lois Carson Yes, she's still alive.

Jennifer Tilton [00:16:15] So lots of questions. You mentioned there were a lot of protests that you remember taking your kids to protests. What are what are some of those early protests you remember?

Lois Carson [00:16:28] Mostly against school districts. Um, none of them were about housing. Some of them were protests to be visible so that the majority and the power structure would know that we're here and we're not gonna just be silent, you know, and

they were that kind of protest in union with things that were going on nationally or statewide or if they were going on in Los Angeles. We used to replicate a lot of things out this way.

Jennifer Tilton [00:17:00] Do you remember how CORE first developed out here? Because I see that sort of by 1963 or so there's a CORE chapter.

Lois Carson [00:17:08] Richard Cole's brother started CORE. My husband might have been a little involved with CORE, but I don't remember a lot about it. I just know that they were there and they definitely were focused on civil rights. That was their only reason for existence.

Jennifer Tilton [00:17:29] Yeah, exactly. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. And so, you know, you talked about some of the school activism on the west side that the Mothers were involved in. What are some of your memories of those?

Lois Carson [00:17:40] Now they were involved in housing, in housing segregation, school segregation, any kind of segregation. And they were confrontational. And, you know, my husband was right there with them and we just decided, as I said, I would watch the children because they were so confrontational they could get arrested. And so I did not go to any of those. One of us had to be here.

Jennifer Tilton [00:18:08] What did he tell you about some of those protests that he went to at the school board?

Lois Carson [00:18:12] Oh, what people would say to them, the name calling and dragging people off when they wouldn't move. And but fortunately, he came close, but they never took him to jail.

Romaine Washington [00:18:27] I have a question about Woolworth's. Did anything happen at Woolworth's as far as protest or because I remember Cheryl Brown mentioned that.

Lois Carson [00:18:39] Something did, but I can't remember exactly. It seems that there had been an incident that occurred there and I don't remember what it was, but they decided to pickett it. Yeah, yeah. But I don't remember what the incident was. And there was a judge who was very interested in civil rights, he used to be a part of any group that was fighting prejudice and segregation. Judge? Oh, it almost came to me. But he was a very wealthy man, lived out on the north end of San Bernardino. Yeah, it would come it would come to me. But he was very involved with that. So it was nice to have white support. Yeah. And a judge at that.

Romaine Washington [00:19:29] Yeah, yeah.

Lois Carson [00:19:30] And Erna Schuiling and Walt Schuiling and he was a teacher at Valley College. They were both, she was head of the League of Women Voters and that's how I got involved with League. I've been a member of it since. But she and Walt were involved. Oh, Walter actually went down to Mississippi to work in the Mississippi project. Wow. Yeah. And so integrated groups, that's what the judge and Walt and black folk were involved in. And then when the school district decided after all of the protests, they had a vacancy. So they named John Woods to the vacancy thinking that he would do what they wanted. We met at Hardy Brown's house, and we decided we're going to support him and

we're going to take him back from them and we're going to support him and make him our representative. That's exactly what happened.

Romaine Washington [00:20:27] That that was wise I think that was a good start.

Lois Carson [00:20:29] That's the kind of political stuff we delve into all of that. We were always scheming. What can we do in talking about that?

Romaine Washington [00:20:40] And talking about that, the presence of the KKK that would pop up periodically..

Lois Carson [00:20:45] Founded in Fontana?

Romaine Washington [00:20:47] I know. Yeah. Do you have any memories of that?

Lois Carson [00:20:50] I never I never had any interaction with. I know they had a house up on, where community hospital is now that house is on the corner of 19th and they used to be there and then it went to the motorcycle group Hells Angels, Hells Angels.

Jennifer Tilton [00:21:09] So right there in San Bernardino, the KKK on the house

Lois Carson [00:21:12] I don't know if they owned, but they were in that house before the Hells Angels. Yeah, yeah. But there were so many whites, from here from Oklahoma and Texas, they brought all of that with them. And the swimming pool, at that time, there was no pool on the west side. So everybody went to Perris Hill Park and there was always a problem until they built the one on Fifth Street.

Jennifer Tilton [00:21:38] Yeah. When did they build the one on Fifth Street?

Lois Carson [00:21:42] I don't remember the exact year, but I would say my oldest son was probably about eight or 10 or something like that when they did it from the late 60s. So I would say it was mid 60s somewhere and I'm not sure.

Jennifer Tilton [00:21:59]] So what kind of problems would happen up at Perris Hill? Fights or name calling?

Lois Carson [00:22:04] Not so much fights, but name calling and just the tension of knowing that something could happen or that they would call your children names. But I always went with my kids, so, you know, keep them safe.

Jennifer Tilton [00:22:18] Yeah, yeah, yeah. You wouldn't send them by themselves. And that actually raises a little bit of a question. That pool was first integrated, I understand, in the late 40s, I think, because of Mexican-American mobilization. And I sort of wondered if there were any collaborations between Mexican-American West Side organizers against racism and African-American networks?

Lois Carson [00:22:43] Well they never really collaborated, that I can recall for political purposes that I recall until much later. But they were always integrated in the neighborhood because my best friends were, and being Catholic, they were a lot of them in my church. But on 16th Street, I had all Mexican neighbors on both sides across the street and I taught them how to make sweet potato pie. They let me make tamales and

somebody visited from Mexico and wanted the recipe for the sweet potato pie. And it was just a lot of fun. And I learned to make enchiladas.

Jennifer Tilton [00:23:26] But in terms of like the political networks they weren't.

Lois Carson [00:23:29] Not at that point. At that point, they were not as awake as we were. That came later, later when they saw the success we were having in achieving goals. And they did work closely, but not to the extent that they were working together in another places. And we supported the Cesar Chavez movement and all of that because it was in our interest to work together.

Jennifer Tilton [00:23:53] Absolutely. Yeah. Can you share any other memories of someone like Francis Grice or Valerie Pope or Bonnie right? Bonnie Johnson?

Lois Carson [00:24:02] Bonnie Johnson was one of the League of Mothers.

Jennifer Tilton [00:24:04] So the League of Mothers, they're all gone. So we are sort of hoping that you could share stories.

Lois Carson [00:24:09] Yeah, there was some tension because Frances particularly did not like college bred women. She felt very intimidated. And I tried to be a bridge for her to work with the women. But she hated the idea of working with women who had college degrees. Valerie not so much. And Bonnie had a business, so she did not feel, and she had grown up here. So she was different. But Frances was clearly the leader and where what she objected to made others object. And I had a meeting here at my house to bring some of these college educated women together with Francis and some of her ladies. And it began to break down at that point. Yeah, that was her own personal nemesis. And it wasn't anything that anybody had done to her.

Jennifer Tilton [00:25:08] Yeah, yeah. And what about art Townsend? What do you remember about him?

Lois Carson [00:25:14] I wrote for Art Townsends first paper, the precinct reporter, and in my column was Carson's candor. He wanted me to write about social stuff. I wanted to write about civic stuff. And eventually that's what I did. And I actually got a letter from Allen, Congressman Allen, what was his name from San Francisco. I can't remember right now, but in anyway, that showed Art Townsend that I was on the right track. But I wrote for them for a long time and until I got elected to the College Board and because I wanted the College Board to do business with the paper, I stopped writing for the paper. I didn't want any conflict of interest discussion.

Jennifer Tilton [00:26:07] So what was our Townsend like as a man, as a leader in the community?

Lois Carson [00:26:13] He was. Male dominance was, I would say, was part of his character. He always was pretty reasonable with me and he told me what he wanted and I told him what I wanted. And I won. And he was, Respected by some people, but others not so much. And a lot of that had to do with I knew his first wife and he had two wives and two sets of children, two boys and a girl in both of them, Brian and Mary. I mean, his his daughter, Yolanda and Michael on one side, Roslyn and Gregory and the other boys on the other side. And Mitzi, his first wife was was my neighbor and my friend. Yeah. But all of that took care of itself all the time, you know.

Jennifer Tilton [00:27:20] So why? What were some, besides the marriage.

Lois Carson [00:27:23] When he ran against Norris Gregory that showed what side people were on. Right. I did not necessarily choose a side, but I could see he was not going to win against Norris because there was something in the community. And I think it had to do with the two wives. That kind of defeated him. But otherwise, he did a lot of good stuff in the community. I remember he urged my husband and me to buy some property in Perris. Blacks were buying property in Perris at that time, but with six children, we didn't think we had enough money to do that. I wish I had now, but that's the kind of relationship that we had.

Jennifer Tilton [00:28:11] Yeah. You mentioned the sort of male dominated. What were the sort of gender relations in local politics like? Is that one of the reasons you just kind of started NCNW?

Lois Carson [00:28:23] Oh, I ran into that a lot because I was always pushing the envelope when I decided to run for the college board. I went to talk to the West Side Action Group and they said, Well, Mrs. Carson, it should be a man running. I said, Well, where is he? I'm here and there is no man. And they finally turned around, but they were not happy with me running.

And the reason I did it, my son was a student out there and they wanted to start a tutorial program and I helped them with that. And one of the guys was a popular football player. So they came and we started...and I helped him start the tutorial program. Then they came to me with another problem, there was a chemistry professor, black professor, who they didn't want to grant tenure to because he would have become the first black in that department. They wanted to know what they could do. I said, well, let's go look at the state regulations and see if they did everything according to (??) and they hadn't. So I told them to urge him to have asked for an open hearing at the board meeting, and he won because they had not followed the right rules and protocol. And from that, when I read in the paper that they were seeking candidates, I decided "I'm going to run for that." And I didn't even tell my husband, I just went down and signed up. And the first time there were about 13 candidates. I came in behind the man that got the seat and I thought, gee, if I did that well, now, a black woman, if I work hard enough, I can get that. So for the next round, I studied the state's master plan for higher education. I had answers to questions they didn't even ask, and people were so impressed with my knowledge. I got elected and I was the first black male or female to go on the board and serve twenty four years.

Jennifer Tilton [00:30:40] Long time.

Lois Carson [00:30:41] Yeah, they tried to do a lot of good stuff. Got them to establish an affirmative action committee, fought the nursing program, which didn't want to take any blacks in. And they had a spot where they try to kill off a lot of students. At that point, if they made it to another point, they had some more strategies there. So we were able to break all of that down. And I had nurses come to the board meeting black and white, supporting each other. And from there, they had to change some of the policies. They still had some problems, but broke that down, and the affirmative action committee came as a result of that fight.

Romaine Washington [00:31:22] I have question, the sorority as far as you know, you being involved in the fight, did they help support and NCNW help support you in what you were?

Lois Carson [00:31:35] Yeah, a lot of the women were in the same things. Yeah, they didn't do it if they were partisan efforts. Both organizations couldn't do it if they were partisan, but if they were nonpartisan efforts, they could and they could as individual women, just don't use the name of the organization.

Jennifer Tilton [00:31:54] Um, so you...I'm kind of shifting gears a little bit, but you worked at Norton for a while.

Lois Carson [00:32:00] Well, that's a job that that's the job to transfer me.

Jennifer Tilton [00:32:03] Right in the beginning. So in the 50s, what was what was kind of racial dynamics at Norton like in terms of discrimination? Did you have to fight to overcome barriers there?

Lois Carson [00:32:12] Yes, remember we were...they were not only transferring the people, but they were transferring the operation. This was the IBM machines that they used punch cards for and all of that. So we were trained at Wright Patterson. We were told to go out there and train others at these other places. So I come to Norton. I'm 21 years old and I have three people working under me who are way older than me. One woman was over 40. A big, red haired, Viking looking man was in his 30s. And I was the boss because I was training then. That was not easy, but I... I won them over. Yeah, little story, one of them. I used to take my Jet and Ebony magazines to work with me to read. They'd grab them before I could. This one... She read in there that a woman in Memphis, Tennessee, when the city told her she had to put in showers in her apartment, she said black folks didn't take showers. So this young white lady, that works for me, they say, "Is that right, Lois? Black people don't take showers?" I said, "Oh, yeah, we just lick ourselves like cats." And after that, she knew she had done something. But, yeah, I ran into and I quit when I got pregnant with my third child, I decided to come home and be at home for a while.

Jennifer Tilton [00:33:46] Mm-Hmm. How do you think Norton sort of shaped the development of the black community here in San Bernardino over the years?

Lois Carson [00:33:54] Well, a lot of black people had jobs there. And my husband, when he came home from the Korean War, he got a job there. He was a purchaser, ended up being a purchaser, he worked his way up to that and it was good. And when they closed down, it hit the black community disproportionately. Yeah. John Hobbs was an airman in the Air Force. He became a city councilman when I first came here. And when he got out, that's when he started his civilian work. But he was one of the blacks that I remember from those early days. And Harry Rheubottom worked out there as well.

Romaine Washington [00:34:35] Mm hmm.

Lois Carson [00:34:36] So those are the only two blacks that I recall from where I was working. And I came in fifty two. I quit in fifty five to come home and kind of take care of kids. But Norton definitely had an influence. And as I said, we invited the wives of Air Force personnel to join Les Jeunes Amies and NCNW so that they would have something to belong to away from home. And today, General Stacy Harris, who is...a...was an Air

Force pilot for United Airlines, asked by George Bush to fly Air Force One. But and now she's the first black woman to be appointed to the board of directors of Boeing. She was stationed out here and a member of our...yeah...I invited her to join and she joined. But at that time, she was a lieutenant and worked under the Marion Black. You know, give her to Marion Black.

Romaine Washington [00:35:42] Oh yeah.

Lois Carson [00:35:43] You know, you've heard of Marion Black? Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jennifer Tilton [00:35:47] And when were there events out there, like did Jeunes Amies hold events at the officer's?

Lois Carson [00:35:52] We used to use the NCO club for a number of things. A couple of times we use the officer's club for things because there were a couple of black officers out there by this time. And I'm trying to think of the one who was so well known black officer he was. He was here at Norton for a while.

Romaine Washington [00:36:13] I know my dad was an officer. Mac Lawrence Carter. But I don't think.

Lois Carson [00:36:20] Yeah. No, I don't remember him because it

Romaine Washington [00:36:22] was early 60s.

Lois Carson [00:36:23] But General Green was..., No, Colonel Green; He was very active in community. And if you ever see any history of black officers in the military, this guy I can't think of is in there. He was at Norton for a long time.

Romaine Washington [00:36:45] Mm hmm.

Jennifer Tilton [00:36:49] And do you think it affected black politics in any way in the city, the connection to Norton? I sort of ask because some people have mentioned sort of that people who were in the military felt like they couldn't be involved in politics. Some other people have mentioned maybe Hardy Brown mentioned something about how the kind of red scare played out locally. So I just wondered if you had any insight.

Lois Carson [00:37:10] I think a lot of the military didn't get involved in politics because they knew they'd be leaving soon or it wasn't a priority. But Colonel Green was involved in community stuff, not so much the politics, because that could affect his status as an officer, but is very involved in your community. And they were very involved in social life of the community as well.

Jennifer Tilton [00:37:36] Yeah, yeah. Um I wonder, now your kids didn't go to public school, but do you remember the kind of, you know, in the moment of the community mothers organizing there was the sort of high point of the Freedom Schools being created. Do you remember anything about that moment when the freedom schools were happening and any memories of that?

Lois Carson [00:37:55] I don't think we had one here. I remember they were in other place, but we never got that far here.

Jennifer Tilton [00:38:01] Yeah, I think I think there were. I can't remember, maybe sixty five in San Bernardino. There were some freedom schools. There was like a boycott of the schools. It may not have affected you because your kids weren't in the public school so much.

Lois Carson [00:38:11] Early on. They were. But we.... I always believed in public education because I knew that.... That was a promise of America from the Constitution, that because democracy required an educated electorate, education was going to be a priority. And so I believe that that made a lot of sense. And even though I was and I went to private school, I had my kids and I always supported public education. And I think it's threatened today. I really do. But I can't recall, if it was it was a small operation and it didn't last long.

Jennifer Tilton [00:38:52] Yeah, I had a question a little bit about your husband that you might know the story. Francis Grace mentioned this organization called the Deacons, which kind of then that he was a part of. I think not a big organization, a little group.

Lois Carson [00:39:06] Now my husband was active with the Westside Action Group. But I don't remember the Deacons...

Jennifer Tilton [00:39:11] Deacons or the FBI, they called themselves or the... The Black Fathers Incorporated.

Lois Carson [00:39:16] Well, the Black Fathers preceded the Westside Action group. Yeah mhm, Bob Parker organized both, and they transition from one to the other.

Jennifer Tilton [00:39:28] I see.

Lois Carson [00:39:29] My husband joined when they were the black fathers.

Jennifer Tilton [00:39:32] Do you remember anything about kind of what the black father's group did.

Lois Carson [00:39:35] The same thing, kinds of things that the Westside action group did. It was mostly for... To fight discrimination and political purposes and trying to get people in key positions because there was absolutely no power in the black community.

Jennifer Tilton [00:39:53] Yeah, And sort of in that kind of effort to build more power. Do you remember any of the other big fights we've talked a little bit about education?

Lois Carson [00:39:59] Well, when the poverty program came into town, there was a lot of... Because it was like this is power, because it required them to have low income people involved. They had to go to black communities to do assessments. And it was like, we want this by the bushel barrelful, this is power. And they would go to the meetings and the meetings would last till one in the morning fighting back and forth. And Ayala, Senator Ayala decided, after the federal government allowed cities and counties jurisdiction to take over community action agencies, if they were in trouble, Ayala jumped at that and made it up...made it a part of the county. At that time I used to go to those meetings and they were wild and wooly. And I never thought at that time that I would end up working in that field because I thought, I don't want to have anything to do with this, but it was part of the body politic. So I would go to the meeting and I remember this woman, Ms. Turner. She took

over the desk of the executive director and wouldn't move. They had to come and physically move her from there.

Jennifer Tilton [00:41:27] Was she from Fontana?

Lois Carson [00:41:30] Not that she was from the Moscoy area. I think, OK, now you're thinking of Jesse Turner. Turner, this is another woman.

Jennifer Tilton [00:41:39] OK.

Lois Carson [00:41:41] I was trying to.... And the guy who was director, he left and went to Seattle, became director of some kind of federal program up there. And his wife was one of the founders of the Links, the Links here.

Jennifer Tilton [00:41:59] Yeah, yeah. So what were some of those fights about sort of in those early years when you were going to the CAP meetings in San Bernardino?

Lois Carson [00:42:07] Over what kind of programs they would have and just actually it came down to who's got more power and it kind of became a little unreasonable. But what the county did was even worse than what these groups who were learning how to compromise, how to lead programs, how to be community about programs. And I was working at UCR when a woman asked me to apply for a job with community action. And I said, " the Poverty program?" Actually Upward Bound was part of the poverty program. I didn't realize that until I got into it. But this woman asked me to apply and I said, well, I'd have to think about that because I'm thinking about those meetings. But I did go and I met with the director. I applied and I said, well, I'm going to Hawaii, so I'll have to see you when I get back, you know? And he waited and hired me. And that's how I got into it. And I spent three years here at San Bernardino. And then I went to Riverside 30 years earlier.

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Romaine Washington [00:43:24] there. Yeah. So you said Upward Bound was part of it. What do you remember? What other?

Lois Carson [00:43:30] Oh yeah. Job Corps, OK. Community Health Clinics. Head start

Romaine Washington [00:43:36] Yes.

Lois Carson [00:43:37] Oh, there were a whole bunch of like a suite of programs that covered every aspect of American life that were part of the poverty program. It was called the Economic Opportunity Act. At that time.

Jennifer Tilton [00:43:53] And what are some of the early programs and organizations that were involved here in San Bernardino?

Lois Carson [00:43:57] And there's still a lot of them involved. Job Corps still here. Head Start is still here. Community Health Clinic, the only one of the survivors down on Valley Boulevard in Bloomington. Community Health Clinic, the only one that survives is down on Valley Boulevard in Bloomington, Community Health Clinic.

Jennifer Tilton [00:44:15] Oh, and so did the CAP helped start all those different programs here locally?

Lois Carson [00:44:19] Yes. And in San Bernardino, when Ayala took over the CAP, they moved Head Start out and it became a separate deal.

Romaine Washington [00:44:30] Mm hmm. Why did they decide to do? I'm sorry.

Lois Carson [00:44:34] I think they wanted to give it to the schools, but the community thought that because schools weren't doing a good job with the kids, they had. So why start early at age 5? And so they made it a separate organization, but they took it from the gap.

Jennifer Tilton [00:44:53] But why did he... Maybe tell us a little bit more about why he wanted to take it over and have it run by the county instead of run by the community?

Lois Carson [00:45:01] Because of the money. They wanted all the money to come. And it was always about the money. It wasn't about the program it was mostly about the money. And even in Riverside, that's the one thing I had to fight a lot, because when I first went there, they wanted to take the first funding that... I was the first director there, and they wanted to take that and buy computers for the county. And I said... I threw the book at him. I said, "you can't do this". And I called San Bernardino and said, "I might be coming back because they may fire me after this." But they didn't. They. they listen to the rules and didn't do that.

Jennifer Tilton [00:45:37] That is not a poverty program.

Lois Carson [00:45:40] No, this money is supposed to go to poor people in the community. Yeah, but it was a lot of things that I had to. But I always use the regulation; chapter and verse to fight. And I remember McCandless, who was Al McCandless from the desert, who was chairman of the board. He said, I don't like this program it's pork barrel boondoggle. And his jaw just shook because I think it's a more bad thing to say. I said sir, I'm going to change your mind. Well It has ended up he went to Congress and became one of our biggest supporters there. But you had to do things right and according to the rules. And once you lay the rules on them. I mean, these are the people there, educated people, they know when I would tell them gently and it was not, you know, boorish, they listen. And I would do something to prove that I could do this job.

Jennifer Tilton [00:46:48] In some of the CAPS in other cities and counties that I know of, a lot of sort of civil rights activism would come out of the CAPs.

Lois Carson [00:46:56] Oh, yes. Civil Rights Movement was a twin of legislation, along with the EOA, The Economic Opportunity Act, and the Civil Rights Act were twin actions under Lyndon Baines Johnson. So it's definitely tied to the civil rights side said you do

advocacy. Some people thought that advocacy was politicking, but there's a difference. And advocacy wasn't in the law itself.

Jennifer Tilton [00:47:24] And so in in those early days, both in Riverside and San Bernardino, what were some of the local advocacy groups that kind of came out of that, you know, mix out of those giant meetings where people were fighting for power? Do you remember any of that kind of, were there any local groups that sort of came out of that group?

Lois Carson [00:47:44] In San Bernardino there weren't a lot who.. there were individuals who were involved with community action and civil rights, but I don't remember any organization. Well, I guess the black fathers and WAG. But I can tell you, NCNW did not come from that perspective. The sororities and fraternities, no. But in Riverside, there were a few who well, NAACP, by this time it had come into existence. So they were always about that. But in Riverside, they had groups and people and this guy got elected to the city council in Riverside, his son is now an attorney with Best Best and Kreger. I'm having a hard time with with names, but when they come to me, I'll write them down for you so I can get back to you. But Riverside was a little bit, we were more active over here, but Riverside was a little bit more organized over there, right? Yeah. So fair housing came about as a result of community action. I read the regulations for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and it said wherever you had federal funds coming in, you had to have a fair housing council. Riverside County didn't have one. So I took it to the Board of Supervisors because I wanted the public to hear me say this. And I said to the board here, the regs, it says we should have a fair housing council. And Community Action is proposing that you let us run a fair housing council. Well the guy from CDBG, he didn't like that, and he was determined that if we got to do that, you're not going to get it. So they put it with the housing authority didn't work out there. So they made it a separate, complete organization. And Rose Mays's director of it over there now. But that came about as a result of community action, advocating for it.

Jennifer Tilton [00:50:01] And as a result of you reading the regulations carefully.

Lois Carson [00:50:05] And this is what you supposed to do!

Jennifer Tilton [00:50:08] How did you see sort of CAP change over the years that you worked in it both in Riverside, but also you probably observed-

Lois Carson [00:50:14] It became more professional and less grassroots because I tell you, and those people did a great job. They had no training, some were not even, well they weren't highly educated because they were very grassroots people. But they could see that there was a promise in this program somehow and so today you got more MBAs and folks like that. And we have our internal training program to bring people up through the ranks. You may start down here, but we got a pathway for you to go up because we still have a requirement to hire the poor wherever we can. And a lot of agencies weren't doing that. But in Riverside, we tried to do that. But that's how I see the difference. And the energy program that you see today, weatherization and all of those kinds of things, that came out of CAP. Those were ideas that CAP proposed when they found that the Northeast people were choosing heating over eating and they didn't have enough money to do both. That's why we came up with the program to weatherize homes. So there are a lot of programs that today exist because of community action actually.

Romaine Washington [00:51:39] Oh. Well, I was going to ask about, gosh, this is so fascinating. All of the building up and everything that happened. And then Norton closed down and

Lois Carson [00:51:52] And March partially closed down. Both of them have an adverse effect on the black community.

Romaine Washington [00:51:58] And I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about that. My heart breaks when I think about that because the effect was so drastic.

Lois Carson [00:52:10] Well, back in Washington, they decided to downsize the military throughout the country. They looked around the country. And saw which ones would be less traumatic. Well, no, I didn't put it that way. Which one would encounter less opposition? Because there were certain states and jurisdictions, that they weren't going to touch anything because it was so powerful. So they went looking for the vulnerable areas where they could shut down things without encountering a lot of opposition. That's why March is still around. But I would say, 50 percent reduced, right? Norton was closed entirely. Because there weren't as much- there was power here, but for some reason, I think it was different than in Riverside because San Bernardino has always been more political than Riverside but it didn't seem to work the same way. And having worked for Riverside County and living in this county, I was able to kind of compare the way things worked in the two counties because they used to never speak to each other. I mean, they did. Riverside thought they were much more sophisticated and high brow and these were just mud on the boots kind of people.

Jennifer Tilton [00:53:37] Well, there are a lot of big changes, economic changes, physical changes in the city of San Bernardino, particularly over the years. I wonder how you saw things like the building of the freeways and the redevelopment of the city affecting the community?

Lois Carson [00:53:53] Oh, that was definitely tied to discrimination.

Jennifer Tilton [00:53:55] Yeah. Tell me.

Lois Carson [00:53:56] That freeway cut the west side off from the rest of the city. And I can remember when they put the freeway in it, there was a lot of protest about that and it really affected the West Side economically. [Tape Paused for interruption]

Jennifer Tilton [00:54:15] So you were telling us what you remember when the freeway cut through

Lois Carson [00:54:20] It cut off businesses because people on the other side, on F and G, they used to come over to this area. There were certain businesses. There was the boys club. There were things that they came for that just shut down. And it was after that that the banks left. Safeway left. Safeway had a lot of black and Hispanic workers. The bank had blacks working at the bank. I can remember, Ada Sims was her name, worked at the bank. So you could see yourself in these different places. So it had a really adverse effect.

Jennifer Tilton [00:55:12] And how about the other kind of redevelopment efforts? I know there were some efforts to redevelop the West Side, but also to redevelop downtown; tear down old buildings, build new ones.

Lois Carson [00:55:22] The redevelopment, there were a lot of blacks that used to live down south D street and Arrowhead. Bonnie Johnson was raised in that area down there. When they built the Central City Mall, they put all these people out and moved them out to the west side on California Gardens into California Gardens. Yeah, that's when they built California Gardens to take all those people who were coming from downtown San Bernardino and moved them over there. They didn't get the kind of money they should have gotten for their property. That's just as if we're going to be downtown now. And these houses were not up to snuff, really. So, yeah, that was another bold act of discrimination and power. Warner Hotchkin was very involved in all of that. All of that.

Jennifer Tilton [00:56:23] Who was?

Lois Carson [00:56:24] Warner Hotchkin, the one built that golf course up on. Not Arrowhead but the other golf course in San Bernardino, he was a very wealthy man and he was involved with the downtown redevelopment.

Jennifer Tilton [00:56:36] And did a lot of those folks like Bonnie Johnson's family own their own homes down there?

Lois Carson [00:56:40] Oh, yeah. All the people from the Valley Truck Farm that I was telling you about into that area in South San Bernardino, all of people owned their homes. They weren't renters. The only renter... they they didn't even build any of public housing in that area. They built the first public housing down on 9th Street in San Bernardino.

Jennifer Tilton [00:57:07] 9th and what?

Lois Carson [00:57:08] 9th and Mount Vernon.

Jennifer Tilton [00:57:10] Was that was the first one?

Lois Carson [00:57:12] No. 9th and, not Vernon. Muscott. What was Muscott. Now, Medical Center drive? Yeah that was the first public housing built, and Waterman Gardens.

Jennifer Tilton [00:57:25] Yeah. Yeah. Right. And do you remember when those were built?

Lois Carson [00:57:29] No, they were here when I came.

Jennifer Tilton [00:57:32] they were here when you came. And then California Gardens was built more in the fifties.

Lois Carson [00:57:36] California Gardens came along with redevelopment. That was after 1964. All of those programs, CDBG, community action, all of that. And yeah, redevelopment was part of CDBG

Jennifer Tilton [00:57:53] and was CAP part of that kind of- organize any protests around that or?

Lois Carson [00:57:59] Oh no CAP didn't organize any protests around that. See when San Bernardino got it, it went to the city and to the county. Those funds went to the city

and county and CAP had nothing to do with that. They were busy trying to keep what they had in the Economic Opportunity Act.

Romaine Washington [00:58:24] I have a question about blacks and Latinos, because I remember you said when you used to live close to St. Anthony's, there were Latino families but they moved and it became-

Lois Carson [00:58:36] No, it's all Mexican now. Yeah but pretty much.

Romaine Washington [00:58:40] Wasn't it all black at one point? Then they moved back? Or it just-

Lois Carson [00:58:47] The houses west of Western Avenue, there were more blacks that bought into that. But on the east side of Western Avenue where I live, there were more Mexicans in that area. There were some blacks on Trinton. There were more blacks. It was just a really mixed neighborhood. And I enjoyed living there. I only moved because we needed a bigger house with six children.

Romaine Washington [00:59:18] And so now though it's predominantly all, even where I grew up, it's all Latino.

Lois Carson [00:59:23] The population as a whole is more Latinos even than whites.

Romaine Washington [00:59:29] Yeah, that's true.

Jennifer Tilton [00:59:30] But that's also another big shift as sort of as some sort of successful desegregation of housing opened up in Rialto. And, you know, community is sort of those boundaries where it is hard. The black community on the west side began moving to different places. How I sort of seen how is that affected the community on the west side that you remember and the politics and, you know, the community organizing?

Lois Carson [00:59:56] It all kind of looks back about the same because it was just so natural for blacks on that side of the wash to move this way. But at this point, you got a whole bunch of blacks on the east side in Highland, in North Redlands Del Rosa area that I think is probably more integrated. But the population is primarily Hispanic. On my block, that house is black, that House is Mexican. This house is Mexican. That house is black. That house is black. Next house is Mexican. Yeah, it's mixed up, right?

Jennifer Tilton [01:00:50] But not a lot of white folks.

Lois Carson [01:00:52] Oh. So there's some near the Terrace over there. And they've been there a long time.

Jennifer Tilton [01:00:59] Yeah, yeah. So that pattern of white flight kind of continued through Rialto.

Lois Carson [01:01:06] Yeah. Rialto is Rialto had the distinction in the 70s or 80s of having the most affluent blacks, one of the cities having the most affluent black in America

Romaine Washington [01:01:20] Interesting. Oh.

Lois Carson [01:01:22] At one time. Mm hmm. Yeah. But I'm not in Rialto, right?

Jennifer Tilton [01:01:29] But your kids went to the Rialto School.

Lois Carson [01:01:31] We're in a Rialto school district. Yeah, but in the city of San Bernardino that's called conflicting jurisdictions. Gerrymandering is what it was. When they built these houses. These kids would have had to go down to Franklin High School. So they put them in the Rialto School district.

Romaine Washington [01:01:47] OK.

Lois Carson [01:01:48] Yeah. So that was gerrymandering,

Jennifer Tilton [01:01:51] Racial gerrymandering.

Lois Carson [01:01:52] Racial gerrymandering. And that's exactly what it was.

Jennifer Tilton [01:01:55] Interesting. You were talking a little bit earlier about your son's experiences at Eisenhower. So they were in a kind of first wave of African-American kids and Eisenhower.

Lois Carson [01:02:09] Oh, yeah. And but they prevailed. He was in Madrigals and played sports there. The next son became student body president and joined the ski club. And he was probably the first black in this area to know how to ski. And my youngest daughter, when she was at Meyers, she was we used to talk when I'd comb her hair in my bathroom and she'd tell me things she was telling me about this book that they were reading in her first grade class called Nicodemus and Friends and that.

Jennifer Tilton Yeah, what is that?

I said, well, you bring that book on, don't tell your teacher, just don't bother. I didn't bring it on home so Mommy can see it. It was classic discrimination. Nicodemus and his friend, they ate watermelon and then they had to take a nap in the fly of the book it said, this book should be right up there in the window of the pet store. It was awful. I went to the school and I went to the principal and I said, that book should not be- We're in the civil rights era and no book like this should be in schools nowadays. He agreed. Not only did he take it out of Myers, got him to take it out of every school in the Rialto School District. So we had a lot of stuff like that. So then we organize parents to go to the school and demand black history be taught. And they came to me and asked me to be the leader. I said I when get hot and heavy. I don't want you coming back shooting at me. But remember, you asked me to do this. Well, we did. And we asked for a black history class and a black person to teach it. And we went to the school board meeting several meetings. And as one woman said, there's no such thing as black history. You read one book and that's it. And that was so ignorant, I couldn't even answer that. But anyway, we won. We got the class, we got the teacher, wrong teacher. And we told them, don't hire that man. And he came to his interview fly dress, and he identified too much with the students, turned a whole bunch of students into people they should not have been. Violated rules had dances when they told him not to do those kinds of things. He didn't listen to the parents. And, you know, it didn't that didn't work out. We saved the program and we finally got rid of him. Yeah, but they didn't let us be a part of the final interview and selection. If they had, we wouldn't have had that problem. Yeah, but they thought they were giving us too much power. They let us do that.

Jennifer Tilton [01:05:16] Right, right. And do they still have black history courses?

Lois Carson [01:05:21] Oh yeah. They probably still do. My kids been out of school a long time. Oh I'm sure they have something now. They're fighting over the all the black history stuff that's coming out now. Critical race theory

Jennifer Tilton [01:05:40] So I guess I'm going to ask just, we've talked about a lot of campaigns and kind of struggles against discrimination that you were involved in. Are there any sort of big struggles we haven't talked about that you think are really important, maybe for jobs or for any campaigns around the police or the firefighters that you remember? That you have any stories about.

Lois Carson [01:06:13] No, and nothing that big other than the kinds of things that I've told you about. A couple of achievements in both Riverside and San Bernardino is the direction of the statues of Dr. Martin Luther King. Reverend Wetzel was a name that had the vision of seeing a statue of King in front of City Hall in San Bernardino. And she called me to ask if I would help with them. And they were doing spaghetti dinners every Friday night. That wasn't going to cut it. So I went to Mayor Holcomb and said she came to the city council. You approved her building a statue there, but you did tell her she didn't you weren't going to put any money into the city. Well, and but they're not going to make it selling spaghetti dinners. So I said you need to name a committee of some prestigious people to help her do this. And they will raise the money and the city won't have to do that. Be careful what you suggest, because he named me as a co-chair of that committee and the president of the Santa Fe Federal Bank as the other co-chair. And that's when we started to raise the money to build the statue. We raised enough to maintain the statue for 15 years beyond its erection. Frances Grice was in charge of the group that refurbished the statue 15 years later when money ran out. Well, as a result of that, Rose Mays, who is over the Fair Housing Council, came to me and said, we want to build a statue of King, too. So I just was adviser to the group. And that statue in front of City Hall has two children with Dr. King on it. So I thought those were real achievements in cities like Riverside and San Bernardino. And our statue here and I visited everywhere they got a statue of King in the United States. None of them has captured the features like ours does, none of them. We found the sculpture in Mexico and I'm thinking Mexico? I'm seeing big pots sitting on the corners. But that man turned out to be maestro. He had done statues of Benito Juarez, of the head of Nicaragua, and he had stuff in the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. I said, oh, we have definitely got. And he did it for us at a discount because he loved Dr. King.

Jennifer Tilton [01:09:06] And that was lovely. Yeah.

Lois Carson [01:09:08] And when they brought it and it was laying down on the city yard and I looked at him and I thought, oh, wow. But then when they hoisted it into place- Good grief, this is beautiful. And it was really something. And the next day, somebody threw paint on it and they had to clean that up before we had the dedication. But we didn't have any major kinds of things.

Jennifer Tilton [01:09:41] You mentioned Holcomb. It sounds like when I start to read the history a little bit, that Holcomb had a very different relationship with black community activist than Ballard did before him.

Lois Carson [01:09:52] Oh Ballard was the pits. His wife always wore the same dress to black events. We called it a color folks dress. Ballard put the guys on top of the building with guns.

Jennifer Tilton [01:10:06] Yeah. Tell us about that

Lois Carson [01:10:07] During the riots and the building. I remember the building, that Medical center Drive and Baseline, those little businesses. And then he put police with guns on top of those to quell anything that he thought was going to happen in the black community. But Holcomb was just the opposite. Holcomb was a very good mayor. He could have been mayor for life. And he was the one that started a committee of whites and blacks to try to resolve some of the and to get to know one another. And I remember telling them, you have one faction of the white community that's not in this group and you need to have a really poor white folk. They're the ones who are upset and you need and they were upset because you don't pay them any attention until you need them to vote against something black. That's the only time they have any value to you. And they listened and we had a pretty good committee. That's where I met Hardy Brown. He was appointed to that committee as well.

Jennifer Tilton [01:11:20] Can you tell us a little bit more about what that committee was and what it did

Lois Carson [01:11:23] It was to promote conversation between black and white, answer the questions that you've always had and never ask, do it in a spirit of goodwill. Try not to become defensive. Try not to insult each other, but just keep the dialog going. And it was pretty good. We had people from different organizations and individuals, League of Women Voters. I remember they were there Rotary Kiwanis representatives of those organizations and black organizations, Hispanic organizations. And it lasted as long as Holcomb lasted. And I can't remember the man that followed Holcolmb.

Jennifer Tilton [01:12:15] What was it called? That group, do you remember?

Lois Carson [01:12:19] It was. I think it was, Community Relations Committee, that's what it was called, community relations, but its purpose was dialog between the different factions.

Romaine Washington [01:12:32] And Ballard putting people up on the buildings. Was that during the uprising?

Lois Carson [01:12:39] Yeah, it was the Watts riots had occurred. And that's that was his response to making sure nothing like that happened out here.

Jennifer Tilton [01:12:49] And how did the community respond to that? What kinds of

Lois Carson [01:12:52] Just blew up. Didn't like it, told them to get them down and he did. That would have caused more problems.

Jennifer Tilton [01:13:01] We also heard stories about guns on the fire trucks at some point. Was that at the same time period?

Lois Carson [01:13:07] Probably was. But I can't recall that personally. I don't

Romaine Washington [01:13:15] Yeah, it probably was probably downtown.

Lois Carson [01:13:18] Yeah, maybe. But that was the only big confrontational thing I remember from that time.

Jennifer Tilton [01:13:26] We're living through a moment of Black Lives Matter protests and people again kind of raising the question about whether we have achieved racial justice. What's it like for you to be living through this moment? What is you thinking and feeling as you live through this moment, having also been involved in all these struggles?

Lois Carson [01:13:48] Here we go again. And the same kind of reaction. I don't know what it's going to take for whites to get over their fear. It's fear that makes them react like that. And they could take a lesson from South Africa. Yeah, South Africa is way ahead. And they had apartheid. They were just as bad or worse as slavery was. Those people were enslaved in their own land. But because Mandela had this forgiveness thing, we discussed the community dialogs right after. Before positions hardened, they were able to make a lot of progress. Now they have a problems like any community, but they are much farther along in terms of race relations because they face what they had done, admitted to what they had done. White America never admit it, right?

Romaine Washington [01:14:53] And now critical race theory [cross talk].

Lois Carson [01:14:56] They want to make a fairy tale out of history. It wasn't a fairy tale. It was an awful experience, you know, and slavery is America's original sin. It's in the Constitution. Blacks are three fifths of a person. Five takes five blacks to make one person or three blacks can make one person. And maybe it's just and till we can get past that and the longer we wait 200 years and we still and I don't know that will really ever get over it. Maybe it's terminal. And a lot of what we're going through now where democracy is threatened, I don't know.

Lois Carson [01:15:41] What? Yeah, well, I'm sorry, [Son off mic - Colonel Billips and Robert Friends].

Jennifer Tilton [01:15:52] Colonel Billips?

Lois Carson [01:15:55] Colonel Billups and Robert's Friend, they were officers at Norton. And I was trying to of think of that other one, he had a nickname like Hap or something like that, but I can't think of it. But anyway, Colonel Robert Franklin and Rufus Billips were officers and both of them became both became a general. He had been a Tuskegee airman to start with. Yeah.

Jennifer Tilton [01:16:26] What sort of lessons would you want to give to generations, younger generations of activists working today, kind of as you have worked much of your life? Any lessons you would give to them?

Lois Carson [01:16:43] Well, I work with Black Future Leaders, and the whole idea was to have the students, of course, do their best but discover themselves and their best and what comes naturally and what you have to nurture along and learn to achieve, not by chance, but by choice. And those are the kinds of things that we did. And it's been very successful. The predominance of those students have gone on to college and they have to do community service so that they learn to give back, learn what the problems are in the community. We would have activities when we brought them to college to live on campus

for a little while, and we would expose them to government, theater, all kinds of different experiences, because whether they came from almost middle class black families or impoverished families, they pretty much all had the same experience of not doing a lot of the stuff that we provided to them. And they, the choice chance thing was prevalent in both groups. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Because the middle, almost middle class families were so busy working and taking care of things, they didn't have time for a lot of stuff. So we provided that and we made the fees low enough so low income people could preserve their dignity and maybe pay. And if they couldn't, then we paid for the students. Yeah, but that's been a pretty successful program and we have never had any paid staff. Is totally volunteer. Yeah.

Jennifer Tilton [01:18:30] Yeah. Hmm. Any last question?

Romaine Washington [01:18:34] I'm so full of everything you shared. This is what I did, part of what I've been looking for is I've been in, you know, company the interviews and I've just I'm not a part of.

Jennifer Tilton Yeah, you are.

Romaine Washington But I'm doing it for the book, the poetry book that I'm writing about growing up in San Bernardino. And after my mom passed, I started trying to collect memories and some of my memories, like renaming the library. It's like the Bethune library I said, I got some research to do. Yeah, we met because I was looking for a book that would help me.

Lois Carson [01:19:18] Well, Mary McCleod MacLeod founded the National Council of Negro Women. She was the first woman to advise four presidents, black woman four presidents, starting with Roosevelt. Yeah, she founded Bethune Cookman College and I went down there for the 100th anniversary of the college because she was the founder of NCNW and just an amazing woman. Yeah, I mean, born into slavery and.

Romaine Washington [01:19:54] I knew her life story, and for some reason, I don't know if her picture was in that library. I used to walk over to that library all the time, and I just renamed it because I must have heard my mom talking about it and so when I renamed it unclear], I said I got a lot of research to fill in.

Jennifer Tilton [01:20:20] I think that's beautiful because it's sort of like a kid sort of doing the renaming thing.

Lois Carson [01:20:26] Right

Jennifer Tilton [01:20:26] I'm going to make this the person who I'm looking up to.

Lois Carson [01:20:29] Well, the National Council of Negro Women has been one of the highlights of my life and being a member of that, and I'm so glad that disbanded Les Jeunes Amies to do this. I served on the national board for years. I was the first vice president, went to Africa with the National Council of Negro Women. Oh, we we went to Egypt. Oh, we went to, um, West Africa, and as NCNW and I was first vice president. We went there and we were hosted by the president of Senegal. And I got to go and see what women organizations were doing there. And I have a dress that the Senegalese women made for all of us for our final night together. Then we went to Egypt and we were hosted by Egyptian women and we left the section in both of these places. After we left, they formed a sect we don't call them chapter. We call all the sections we form. And I got to

introduce Mrs Mubarak at our opening session in Egypt. She was the wife of the president. Yes. When the government put a car at our disposal with flying the flags of Egypt and America and we drove up to Alexandria. It was just amazing.

Jennifer Tilton [01:21:58] Were there other people from the chapters here who went along with you?

Lois Carson [01:22:01] Oh, yeah. Amina was on the meeting with them. I mean, it was on that trip. And a couple of other people from the Inland Empire, Mildred Tyler who worked at UCR, there were quite a few. And in Senegal when we went that year, that was just people who were selected. Well, first of all, when we went to make you remember the United Nations Decade for women, oh, we went to Mexico. That was the very first one. Nineteen seventy five. Wow. We met African women who told us they never get to meet black women when they come to the United States because it's white women that host them. And they never. So Dr. Height said, well, we'll fix that. Right. And we wrote a grant to the State Department and asked them to help us bring women. And they brought women from Togo and Senegal West Africa. Dr. Height sent out a notice to local section saying, write up what you would do if these people came to visit you in your area. I wrote up the proposal for us and we got selected and I had Cal State and Valley College translate everything we had into French. Both of those countries are French speaker and I got selected to reciprocate the visit. That's how I get to go with them. And the government of Senegal put a plane at our disposal to fly us to the Kazimierz region where these women had this farm project that they wanted us to see and we visited other things while we were there. But in the end, it's really been an experience

Romaine Washington [01:23:43] And you more than, cause Amina talked to me about joining NCNW and I said I'm going to do it. And hearing you talk about it, I'm definitely going to do it as soon as I get home. Oh, my goodness. My goodness. And I wish I had known this, you know, earlier this year.

Lois Carson [01:24:01] Well, it's not too late to join. We're still very active. And they got one in Pomona, one in San Gabriel. These are sections.

Jennifer Tilton [01:24:10] And when the women came from Senegal and Togo, you said, So what did you do with them here?

Lois Carson [01:24:18] What we took we showed them Community Action. We took them to various events. And they we had a big party for them. And Nan Clapton's house in Rialto. Took them to colleges so that they could see that. I was wearing a natural, big natural at that time. And one of the women from Senegal liked my natural, I took her to my barber, Lady Barber, who cut her hair the same way. And we talked about how we could have a beauty shop over in Senegal that could do that. It was just just great. I've been to Africa nine times.

Romaine Washington [01:25:01] What countries? Oh, I'm sorry.

Lois Carson [01:25:06] Senegal two or three times The Gambia. We went up to the place where Alex Haley found his ancestors up. The Gambia River to Gambia. Yeah, Nigeria. Yeah, Ghana. Yeah, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, South Africa, Zimbabwe. Now, some of them have gone to more than once. That's what makes them. But those for every black American should go to Africa. Absolutely.

Romaine Washington [01:25:37] I want to go to Ghana?

Jennifer Tilton [01:25:38] Will you tell us a little more? Why? I mean, so why is it important?

Lois Carson [01:25:43] That's the source of it. You know, you you learn so much. I watch the people in their mannerisms and their behaviors. And I remember standing in my hotel room looking out these men down on the street level. And I said, yeah, these are my people. Yeah, man, really. The women fall out laughing just like we do and it's just really something. And then you study a lot. And I have had my ancestry done two or three times. Yeah. So I know.

Romaine Washington From what regions.

Lois Carson It's the the largest percentage is Ghanian. That's what I but other other parts there's, there's even Native American. I was surprised about that little bit of European and that would be from my dad's side and it was just, just amazing. I learned that certain words and foods and things that we I remember. Oh Egypt got to tell you about when we were, Not Egypt, Kenya, we were in Nairobi, another Decade for women conference. And I was coming back from the university to my hotel. And the driver we were I was talking with my driver and I, we passed a field of corn and I said, what do you call that? He said, maize. I said, well, we call it corn. And I said, how do you, you know, prepare it? And he started describing ways and he said, Ugali. And I said, Oh, that sounds like corn bread. We do that. And then he said, Uji, these are Swahili word there was grits. And then he said, we like to eat Ugali with Sukhumi Wiki. And he described Sukhumi and that sounded like greens. So when I got back to my hotel, I raced down to the market. I said, Show me Scooby Wiki was collard greens. We eat that same food and a lot of the things that they have and peanuts.

Romaine Washington Oh, definitely that.

Lois Carson And the word in Wolof, in Senegal for Peanut is Guba. We say Guber here, but Guba is what they call it there. Bubba is a boy child in Wolof and everybody is Bubba over here. I had a younger brother we called Bubba. So you learn that some of these things have come. And we always thought that there was nothing African. That was the one thing they I'm glad they didn't bring you here was sitting around this big bowl everybody eating out of that bowl with their hands.

Romaine Washington [01:28:27]] In Atlanta when I lived in Georgia. And I would visit and we would still do that.

Lois Carson [01:28:37] Ethiopians do that, too, but in Senegal, it's a it's a national law that children have to be taught in these orphanages run by a Westerner. They have to be taught to eat communally like that. It's in the law. You have to teach the children to eat like that.

Romaine Washington [01:28:55] It's almost like, you know, in the Catholic Church, we have communion there. It's, you know, the community that communal eating and making sure that

Lois Carson [01:29:04] Right. And I was determined I was going to get into one of these huts to see what they looked like inside. We went out to the countryside just as. They

were, just like our houses. Some were clean messy, some was somewhat spectacular rugs on the floor, furniture. And I never thought that that's what I would see one of those. But they had a cooking hut where all the pots were up top so the animals wouldn't get to the pots and they cooked as a group and everybody eats together.

Romaine Washington [01:29:37] Yes, okra understand.

Lois Carson [01:29:40] Oh yeah, that's an African word. Yeah.

Romaine Washington [01:29:42] Mm hmm.

Jennifer Tilton [01:29:45] Well, this is

Lois Carson [01:29:46] Oh. And and ninny. You ever heard the word ninny and ninny jug? Down south they call the breast is the ninny jug and the ninny is the milk. Oh that's that's a Wolof word. Yeah. And people down south you that. Oh yes. I grew up with that.

Jennifer Tilton [01:30:06] Well this is so great. We could probably talk all day. But maybe we should stop and say thank you so much for sharing stories with us. It's been really, really lovely.

Lois Carson You certainly welcome.

End of Interview:

[01:30:18]