Interview with Adrienne Schure BC ’71
Interviewer: Jenna Davis BC ’15
Date: March 19, 2015 at 2 PM
Location: Cafe M in New York, NY

Could you state your name?
**Yes, Adrienne Schure.**

How are you involved with Barnard?
**I graduated from Barnard in 1971. I transferred in at the middle of my sophomore year.**

OK. And where are you from originally?
**I’m from Long Island originally.**

And so had you spent much time in the city before you came to Barnard?
**Yeah. My parents brought us into the city a lot. We went to shows and museums, and so I knew I liked the city.**

Mmm-hm. And so how did you hear about Barnard?
**I don’t know! It was kind of in the air.** (*laughter)*You didn’t have any other siblings that went to Barnard or anything?
**I have an older sister, but she went to George Washington University.**
And so, what school were you at before you transferred to Barnard?
**I was at Albany State. When I was applying to college, my mother wanted me to go to a state school. My mother was widowed -- my dad died when I was 9 -- and so money was an issue. I had a guidance counselor who just kept telling me that I couldn’t get into that school, that I couldn’t get into that school, and that I couldn’t get into the other school. So, I ended up going to Albany State, and I really didn’t like it. I really didn’t like being away from the city. And I was a French major, and they didn’t have a particularly good French department there.**

But, had you heard good things about Barnard’s French Department?
**Yes.**

And I would imagine that the student body would be smaller at Barnard as well.
**Yes, much smaller.**

So, then, you must have entered Barnard as a sophomore in the fall?
**In the spring.**

Oh, in the spring?
**Yes.**

So, was it the Spring of sixty-eight that you entered?
**It was the Spring of sixty-nine. So it was right after [the protests]. So the protests happened in the Spring of sixty-eight, and then there was the fall semester of sixty-eight, and then I came in the Spring of sixty-nine. So right after the big protests.**

So were you involved in any student organizations at Barnard?
**Not formally, no. And at Albany State, I was not involved formally, but I did go to some SDS meetings, and I think it was SDS meetings. I was a little put off by how radical they were. Yeah, I don’t have very vivid memories, but I just remember being very put off.**

And that was at Albany State?
**Yeah, that was at Albany State.**

And what about at Barnard and Columbia? Were you also put off by their [radicalism]?
**No, I wasn’t. But, I didn’t join any organizations, but in the Spring of sixty-nine, I was a sophomore, and there were some protests that I joined. But in the Spring of seventy is when it got really ugly. That was Kent State, [when] those two students were killed, and we just stopped going to class. And, you know, I did end up getting grades and credit for my courses, but after those two kids were killed, we just weren’t going back to school. It was just too awful.**
Right. So, what was your role in the student protests of 1970 then?
**I participated. I wasn’t a leader or anything like that. But, I felt really strongly about it. And we demonstrated on campus and off campus. We went on marches, downtown I remember. And, yeah, it was just something that I felt I needed to state my piece about. And, you know, when I was younger, my parents didn’t go, but I went with a friends and their parents to civil right’s rallies where Peter, Paul, and Mary were there and Phil Ochs, and other protest singers. And that was probably the early sixties.**

And would you say attending those events when you were younger prompted you to, in part, take part in the [student] protests?
**Well, I think it definitely had an effect on my world view, and you know, where I grew up, was a middle class community, and people were kind of, you know, conventional. And I was kind of like that. Although, I was involved with the Student Action Movement in high school. It was kind of a protest organization. But, I do think those early civil rights rallies kind of had an effect on me. I remember when Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman were killed down in Mississippi, when they were signing up blacks to register to vote, that it impacted me deeply. I don’t remember how old I was, but it was well before college. So, all those things, I think, accumulated to make me more active, not super radical. I felt all of these things strongly, and I felt all the injustices strongly. And I felt the wrongness of what we were doing in Vietnam very strongly, and I just wanted to have my say about “this is the wrong thing to do. We should not be doing this.” And I wanted to have an effect that the government should change its direction.**

So it sounds like the protests you were involved in were less focused on any criticism of the university or the administration and more on the war protests?
**Yes, that’s true.**

OK. And so, were there a lot of sit-in’s or conversation groups at Barnard that you participated in?
**I don’t think so. I mean, maybe they existed. If they did then, I wasn’t aware of it. And I guess I was mostly on the Columbia campus, not on the Barnard campus.**

And so, would you say that any of your involvement with those groups was something that you just personally took an interest in, or did you have a lot of friends who were involved with the same activities?
**Yes, and my friends, some of whom were students at Columbia, some of whom were students at Barnard, we all participated together in the marches and the rallies. And it was not against the university. It was against the government policy. And in fact, I’m not sure about Columbia, but the Barnard faculty was very supportive.**

They were?
**In seventy, they were.**

And so, would any of the faculty join the students in any of the off campus demonstrations?
**I don’t remember, but they definitely supported us in our decisions to take part, and to break up class. They may have even called off...some of the teachers even called off classes too.**

So that students could participate?
**Yep. And there were no penalties when we stopped going to class in the Spring of seventy.**

So it sounds like the administration was pretty sympathetic, then?
**Yeah, I think they had come around to seeing what a terrible mistake it was. And then after the kids at Kent State were killed, you know, I think they really were supportive.**

Right. And my understanding is that at the time period there had been some tension between students at Barnard and Columbia, some of whom were more liberal than others. Some supported this radical occupation of buildings, while others were feeling that that type of radicalism was misrepresenting others in the student body. Did you pick up on any of that?
**That was sixty-eight. I don’t think there was any takeover of buildings in seventy. I’m pretty sure there was not. I didn’t feel that tension, but it may have been because we tend to hang around with like-minded people, and the people I was hanging around with were sufficiently upset that they wanted to protest, but that they were not going to be like the Weathermen and go blow up buildings.**

So then, when you did go downtown and participate in some off campus demonstrations, would you say that it was mostly college students that were participating?
**I think there were a variety of people. There were a lot of college students, but there were a lot of people too. And I remember that there was a March on Washington, too in that same spring, and a bunch of us went. It was everybody. It was not just students. It was housewives with their children, and it was mobbed, mobbed, mobbed. There were maybe a couple hundred thousand people there. Maybe, I don’t really know the number.** *(laughter)*So, did you just take a bus down to get down to D.C.? Do you remember?
**I think so. I don’t remember.** (*laughter*) **I’m sixty-six! I can’t remember anything anymore! Somebody may have had a car, and we may have driven, or we may have taken a bus. I don’t remember. I’m sure we went the cheapest possible way**.

Right. So then would you say that after the year of 1970 that the administration tried to meet some of the students’ demands? For example, I know that a lot of students in the 1960’s protests wanted more of a black studies curriculum to be incorporated into the university.
**Well, I don’t remember whether there was that curriculum or not. But, I do remember that we had BOSS at Barnard. Do you still have BOSS?**
Uh, BOSS?
**Barnard Organization of Soul Sisters.**

Yep, that’s still around.
**Yeah, so that started then. But, I don’t remember whether there was an African Studies curriculum. I don’t know. Do you have one now?**
There is. There is an Africana Studies Department and a kind of race and ethnicity minor that students can take.

**OK.**

Did you know anyone in BOSS?
**No, I didn’t.**

I think it was in the early seventies that Barnard really started to actively recruit African American students.
**So this was seventy-one, and I don’t think there was a large group of African American students, but they made their presence felt in a good way. You knew that they were there and looking out for their history.**

How would you say that they made their presence felt?
**I think there were a lot of meetings. There were always a lot of signs around. I mean, that’s what I remember, a lot of signs for meetings, and I loved the name. I thought it was great, so it stuck in my mind.** (*laughter)*I’m just going to switch out the recording.
**Sure.**

So then, how would you say your involvement on campus affected even your future plans after Barnard?
**I think that...I remember taking my graduate school applications and dumping them in the trash in about November of my senior year. And *I know* that it was because I was affected by the protests, and I just couldn’t see going on this traditional route through graduate school. I was sick of school. Sick, sick, sick of school. I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do, but I didn’t just want to do the traditional thing. And when I graduated from Barnard, literally, I went out and lived on a commune in Oregon. And then I moved down to Berkeley, and I lived in Berkeley for a couple of years, and I did end up going to graduate school in Berkeley. And I became a teacher, and I think that that was part of wanting to change how things were. And I taught in...I was luckily enough to study with really smart people who knew child development really well. And so, I ran a very unusual classroom, and a lot of the responsibility was on the kids, and I guided them. Even in the younger grades -- I started out teaching first grade and then I moved up the grades to fifth grade -- but parents were coming to my classroom, and they’d go, “Why are you letting [the students] talk to one another? They shouldn’t be allowed to talk to each other.” And I’d look at them like they were crazy, and I’d say, “Well, they really learn from each other.”  And so, I ran a kind of open classroom. And I’m sure that all came through my experiences in wanting to have an effect on making the world different and better.**
Right. So would you say that most of the students that were involved with political organizing on campus had an idealist view of how they could change things in the larger world?
**I think we had a very idealistic view, yeah. It didn’t all pan out the way we hoped.** (*laughter*) **I do think we were idealistic, in a wonderful way. We set out...a lot of my friends actually did go into education in one form of another. The one person who I’m still very friendly with, who was my roommate, Christine, she’s still teaching.**

In public schools, in New York?
**No, she lives outside of Philadelphia, but she taught in public schools in Massachusetts for a long time. And then she and her husband moved outside of Philadelphia, and she couldn’t get a job in the public schools there, so she taught in private schools.**

And so was she also involved with [the protests]?
**Yep, very much. Yeah, we went to a lot of those together. Every now and then we’ll look at one another and go, “Do you remember when…?”**

Do you have a most vivid memory from any of the experiences that you had at Barnard, or…?
**I have a lot of vivid memories of the professors, some of whom are still teaching there. Professor Gikofsky, in the French Department.**

Hmm, I don’t study French, so I don’t know him.

**I do. I have a very vivid memory of a professor whose name is escaping me, but he...it was American Studies, and we would meet with him weekly in a sort of small seminar, and we would talk about all of these issues, and he was quite radical and also extremely well informed and smart, and that affected me a lot. And he was very proud that we were going out and demonstrating.**
Would all of these discussion be in French?
**Not with him. He was American Studies.**

Oh, right.
**French professors, I gotta say, they weren’t so liberal. Honestly, I don’t know where they stood because they never really expressed it. But, nor did I get penalized, so I have to think they weren’t unsympathetic.**

And penalized in terms of class absences, or…?
**Right, or not turning in papers at the end of the year. But, they weren’t vocally supporting what we did. I do remember Madam Guin, who I believe has passed away, I never could figure out if she was American or French by birth because her French was perfect and her English was perfect. I sort of suspected she was French, but I wasn’t sure. And then I asked her one day, just because I had to know. And she said that she was native French, and that she came here to Wisconsin, the University of Wisconsin, as a graduate student, and she took phonetics lessons privately and that’s why her English was so impeccable. And I’ve since taken French phonetic lessons, thinking of her.**
What was your motivation for studying French?
**I loved it.**

Had you gone abroad in your childhood?
No, no. I went abroad that first summer I was at Barnard. So I came to Barnard in the spring, **and that summer I went abroad. It wasn’t a Barnard connected program, but I learned about it through Barnard. I studied at the Sorbonne, and lived near the Left Bank, and it was great.**

Did you know any other students going into the program, or were you…?
**A friend of mine from Wisconsin did the program with me, but I could already speak French, but she couldn’t really, so we weren’t in the same classes.**
Got it.
**So as I say, at a certain point, my French was elegant, and now I say, it’s no longer elegant, but I can make myself understood, so that counts. I was actually in France on 911. I was in an immersion French class at the Province, and it was the second day that I was there, and there was no getting back, and all I wanted to do was get home. I felt like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz. So I kind of processed the whole thing in French, and I was living with a French family, and they had young children. And I would say, for the twin towers, in French, the noun, of course I’m forgetting whether it’s masculine or feminine, but I would say, *las tours jumelle*s, and the kids didn’t understand what I was saying, and then they would go, “Oh, *les tours jumelles*!” because it was masculine. And I said, “Oh no!”** (*laughter*) **I had six year old’s correcting my French! How humiliating is that!**

Well, that’s great that you did have the opportunity to go abroad while you were at Barnard. I would imagine that, you know, that study abroad programs nowadays are so much more common than they would have been back then.
**Yeah, I went abroad twice, after my sophomore year, after my junior year, and both times, they weren’t Reid Hall, but they were programs that Barnard connected me with.**

Got it.
**Yeah.**

And were you staying in the same city for both of those experiences?
**I stayed...ah, no. The first program was in Paris, and the second program was in the Loire Valley, and it was at a camp. I was working at a camp for little kids, and I was the only English-speaking person there, and my French was elegant at the end of that experience.**

I imagine. It sounds like total immersion.
**Total immersion. No choice!**

So, overall, were you pretty pleased with the academics at Barnard?
**Oh, yes. I got a great education, just great. And, my professors were great, almost without exception. They were really super on it. And, I worked really hard. I think I was really well prepared for college. I went to a very good high school, so you know, I came in well prepared. But, I really became a French speaker at Barnard. And also, I took Shakespeare classes, and I took science classes, history classes, and bible classes. The offerings were incredible, and the teachers were great and very demanding. When I tell people that in order to take the French major when I was at Barnard, I had to pass a three hour written exam and an hour oral exam.**
Oh, wow.
**Yeah, they couldn’t believe it! And we had to talk with the professors for about an hour in French, and they asked us questions. And most of it was about literature, so we had to be knowledgeable about the literature, but we had to be able to speak the language with good facility.**

Right, wow. And did you have to write a thesis at all for your French major?
**I had to write a few. There wasn’t one giant one. There were a few middle-size ones. I wrote one about Apollinaire and his poetry. I might even have that one somewhere. I did a couple of other ones, but I can’t remember. Apollinaire sticks with me.**

And did you also study French in graduate school? (*interruption...coffee spills)*What else can you tell me [about the protests]?**Not having been part of the organizers of everything that went on, I probably wasn’t even aware of who was organizing. I do know there were teach ins, that classes were cancelled, and there were teach ins about the war and about the history of Vietnam, both at Barnard and at Columbia. So Barnard and Columbia were not, you know, unopposed to what we were doing. I never felt like the school was, you know, going to kick me out or even frown upon what I was doing. Not sure I cared either, but Barnard was a good place. My mother used to say “I never should have let you gone to Barnard!”** (*laughter)*Did she know the extent to which you were involved with activities on campus?
**I think so. I do remember having giant fights with her about Vietnam because she sort of swallowed the party line early on. But, then, as everybody realized how insane it was a couple years later, she got on board. I don’t think she liked the idea of me protesting and missing classes, but she didn’t really...we didn’t fight about it. Let me put it that way. She didn’t voice too many objections.**
At least you weren’t one of the students who was actually arrested, so I’m sure that came as good news to her.
**Right. Exactly. But, nothing really bad happened to the students who were arrested, did it?**
I don’t know whether it was waived off of their records or anything, but I think there definitely were a few students who were injured.
**Oh, yeah. There were students who were clubbed in the head. And I do remember this: that both in the spring of sixty-nine and the spring of seventy, when I left my dorm -- I was in 616 -- there were busloads of tactical police forces wearing helmets and sitting in a bus waiting to keep order. I don’t think that it ever came to that, that they needed to. But they were there, and it was scary.**

And what protest was that for?
**That was...I don’t think it was for a specific protest. I think Columbia and Barnard got the reputation of being radicals, and there were lots of protests in the air, and they were just stationed there in case.**
Were students afraid when they would see something like that?
**Oh, yeah. It was scary. But, it didn’t really deter me. There may have been people that it deterred. I don’t know. So that’s mostly what I remember. It was an exciting time. It was a very exciting time. And I learned as much from that as I did in school. Different things, but it was very important to my education as a human being, and I’m glad that I went through college at that time period. And, I’m also glad that I didn’t just go through college to graduate school and to a job. And I remember, there were women at Barnard that were going to work at banks or going to work at insurance companies after they graduated, and I couldn’t believe it! [I just thought] “What are they thinking?”**

Were some students critical of other students that would kind of be following those more traditional career paths?
**I mean, I was judgemental of it. I would never say anything, but internally, I just thought, “How could they do that? How could they be so disinterested in everything that’s going on in the world?” But, I don’t recall there being clashes or big problems or anything at all. So that’s what I can think of.**