

2007

## Interview of Minna F. Weinstein, Ph.D.

Minna F. Weinstein  
*La Salle University*

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## **Interview with Dr. Minna F. Weinstein**

Location: Haverford Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

Date: March 28, 2007

Interviewer: Jon Saltzman

### **Abstract:**

Dr. Minna F. Weinstein was born in 1933 in Baltimore, Maryland. Her parents were both deaf and met at a school for the deaf in Western Maryland. Her father was a major proponent of education, and both she and her brother became teachers. She went on to college and graduate school at the University of Maryland, where she earned her B.A. in History, 1955, an M.A. in History, 1957, and a Ph.D. in History in 1965. During her time in the PhD program, she was a history instructor at Temple University, from 1961 to 1964, becoming an Assistant Professor in 1965. In Spring, 1966, she was hired at LaSalle College for the 1967-68 school year where she became the first full-time woman professor in LaSalle's history. At LaSalle, Dr. Weinstein was promoted from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor in 1970 and to full Professor in 1974. She earned the Lindback Award, for distinguished teaching in 1969. In the Fall of 1972, she

led a successful effort to establish a Women's Center on campus. Later, her colleagues elected her to the Faculty Senate. Dr. Weinstein left LaSalle in 1980 for a position as an Assistant Director at Middle States. She was with that organization until 2000, when she left to begin a consulting practice for schools in the accreditation process. She has one daughter, who she adopted in 1988. Alfia is a freshman at Penn State University. This interview covers her experiences as a teacher and a woman at LaSalle, her perspectives on teaching History in particular, her career at Middle States, her consulting practice, and the adoption of her daughter. Much of her earlier life was covered in an interview conducted a year ago by another graduate student at LaSalle and is in the Archives.

### **Index of Interview conducted March 29, 2007 at 10:00 A.M**

Introduction, permission, consent, birth date and place, current address

1:00

I explain what material I would like to cover in the interview. Since the project covered a lot of background on her in Nate Starr's interview, I would like to cover more on her years at LaSalle, Middle States, her views on the study of History then and now, and her current life.

### **1:53 The Effect of Having Deaf Parents**

Dr. Weinstein brings up issue of her parents both being deaf mutes. They could only ask and answer questions through sign language. It was hard to communicate. Her father pushes teaching, education important; her older brother was a teacher. Her drive came from her father; he was educated at Maryland State School for the Deaf and encouraged by teachers there; met wife at this school; communication with deaf parents leads her to understand how one communicates and teaches through “context;” a “deaf person’s world is much smaller,” and if you really want to understand them, one must “get into that world;” this helped her teaching because it made her careful to find out a student’s context.

### **5:28 Lindbeck Award**

She discusses the Lindbeck Award for distinguished teaching, which she won in 1969; she was popular as a teacher and well known because she was a “dancing ape;” being the only woman made her famous. LaSalle quickly hired more women but she always felt special in that way and was treated like “the first woman.”

### **6:10 Teaching**

One of the characteristics of a good teacher is being careful to understand where students are (context); teaching was different then, old fashioned, about “telling them,” a lecture format; “they participated by listening;” less discussion, and

where there was discussion, she “created it;” she decided what issues would be talked about and never considered doing it differently; she was swept into the system and never felt guilty about it [that style of teaching]; “ I was paid to do everything and they knew damn little.”

#### **7:48 Her View on Teaching Evaluations**

Dr. Weinstein among first to use student evaluations; emphasizes they were not standard then; faculty paid a lot of attention to them, especially when the evaluation process was new; she sometimes altered her teaching as a result of evaluations; the outlier answers were the ones she focused on most; Admits she wanted to change student’s minds; did not want them to be “Nazis,” closed minded with a set of goals already established; knowing more than anyone else; wanted to sway student’s opinion to agree with her; but never to the “exclusion of one’s thoughts or beliefs.”

#### **10:18 The Way it was in 1969**

A radical time at LaSalle; she calls it “wonderful.” Discussed her writing which appeared in *LaSalle Magazine*, Summer 1969, about what a college should be; took courage to write it; LaSalle not a “a hotbed of political liberalism, then or now [article is about the responsibility of teachers because they “affect eternity”]; respected other well constructed viewpoints but generally acted like a “young turk” when she disagreed with someone; she never got old at LaSalle because she left young [she was 47}; then and now, “to begin where they begin” a teacher

must have the ability to “listen hard;” she was a tough teacher who talked a lot and was expected to talk.

### 13:58 **Her Students**

The most opinionated students she had were business students; they insisted on being heard; they fought back when she tried to shut them off; she liked them the best; she loved the Christian Brothers as students and in general because they took a stand for what they believed in; they combined their faith with a profession; they were not well-rewarded for their work with her; she was tough on them.

### 16:39 **Colleagues**

Dr. Rossi was a “wonderful teacher and thoughtful colleague;” faculty exchanged a lot of ideas on teaching but she was sorry that there was not more of an exchange of ideas; the History Department did share a lot of academic ideas on their field.

### 17:38 **History**

All history teachers have “failed; never persuaded people of the importance of it;” made no suggestions of what could be done about it; her role is to help schools get ready for evaluations so she cannot answer; she thought she was doing a great job at the time; her teaching approach is from being Jewish; the “past is always important in our minds;” Why History for her? “Interesting.”

22:35 **Hired by LaSalle**

Undergraduate and Masters Degree at Maryland, also Ph.D.; taught at Temple while doing Doctorate. Temple made it clear to her they would not hire her for tenure track. She saw an ad for LaSalle position and answered it; “grabbed” their offer; She was interviewed at LaSalle by “an old Italian guy; all were startled that he hired a woman. Thought LaSalle was very small after having come from Maryland and Temple; it was 1966, she started in the Fall of 1966; cannot really remember committee that interviewed her

28:50 **Great Story of First Class at LaSalle**

Early Modern English History was first class; walks in and surprises class, it was in Wister Hall; very few ladies rooms on campus.

30:54 **Women on Campus**

She was definitely the first woman full-time professor. There were some women on campus but they were part time, faculty wives, etc.; the next woman, cannot remember who, came into the English Department

32:15 **Historians**

Historians dominate college presidencies; the best skills and knowledge base; context; there is so much in history that it is hard to narrow down; it is hard to

define history and its uses; history is hard to teach; wishes she had done more writing.

### 33:55 **Women at LaSalle**

It was tougher being a woman than Jewish at LaSalle; her being Jewish never came up openly; administration supported her taking Jewish holidays off; she tells a story about how one brother was very gracious to her about a meeting; she felt that people treated her [as a woman however] as we often treat African-Americans, as if she was lucky to get a job; women in other departments quickly formed an alliance as they got to the campus; younger men in her department who had previously studied under women at other schools treated her well.; she remembers Dr. Rossi as being a real friend then; there were very few women on campus then and even less in her classes.

### 38:17 **Teaching at LaSalle**

Teaching load was four classes and it was hard to write while teaching because one also had to teach a wide range of courses at a small school; she was also an honors teacher and remembers Jack Grady as being a “wonderful colleague.”

[Phone call interrupts interview and tape changed to different track on the recorder, which necessitated a second CD]



## Second CD

### : 35 **More on Women at LaSalle**

We discuss the lack of Ladies Rooms at LaSalle in the early days; her office back then was in a temporary building and there being a lot of mud; she says that over her career though, women have really made a lot of strides in higher education; in the twenty years she was at Middle States women appeared in every kind of class and majors, not just traditional fields for women; women faculty did too; by 2000, there were a lot more women on the tenure track; a dramatic change.

### 4:10 **The Women's Program**

She did not do it alone, a lot of faculty helped; Karen Meisel did a lot; it was not an academic program, but a place where women could feel comfortable on campus; women faculty felt if they could be acknowledged, then the environment for women students would improve; it was not a good environment for women students; the school did a lot of marketing to get women to come; the women's Center never really took off; Phyllis Manly was Dean of Women then.

### 7:00 **Student-Faculty Senate**

Her election was an "honor;" she remembers there being only 10-15 faculty members; was it 1969?, she cannot remember; they dealt with a full range of issues in an advisory capacity only; she cannot remember any specific issues, but

remembers that the opinion's of the faculty were respected by the administration; LaSalle saw itself as being a single family; and it was. The faculty freely spoke its collective mind.

#### 8:55 **LaSalle as a Catholic Institution**

She did not feel that LaSalle repressed expression; it was not just a Christian Brothers phenomena, she has a friend who taught at St. Josephs that feels the same way; they did not repress anything.

#### 9:50 **Anti-War Demonstrations**

She remembers a pretty radical campus with a lot of demonstrations; professors did not demonstrate, but did interact with students during them; she says it was "interesting." Professors went to see the students and talk to them; students held a sit in at College Hall and she remembers the women on the faculty going to see the students to see if they needed food or blankets; faculty was divided over these issues.

#### 12:50 **Racial Composition of LaSalle**

There was just one African-American on the faculty, Theo Fair; she liked him but felt his teaching suffered because he did not "respect his conservative colleagues enough to learn from them." She remembers that he was not very political, but he was isolated by race; there we only a "handful" of African-Americans on campus then; women had good support groups and their own place on campus [the Women's Center she helped establish];

**15:15 Personal**

She does not stay in touch with any of her former friends and colleagues at LaSalle; she has never been invited back for any events or reunions.

**15:52 Why She Left LaSalle**

She was a candidate for the Dean of Arts and Science position; she had good recommendations; she was never interviewed for the position; her feelings were hurt; she felt it was a matter of collegial respect; she should have been interviewed at least; it was the only “disrespectful” thing she remembers at LaSalle; it was the only time she felt that something happened there because she was Jewish. A brother, Jimmy Muldoon, became the Dean and she thought he was “a lousy dean, but a very nice guy;” she felt that it was okay to choose a Christian Brother, but they should have respected her enough to interview her; she did not leave because of this, but was now open to leaving for the right offer, which she got from Middle States; she felt like an outsider after this incident.

**20:47 At Middle States**

Dr. Weinstein was there from 1980-2000 as an Associate Director; Middle State’s mission is discussed; She would not discuss any particulars of evaluations; believes LaSalle lives up to its mission; maybe it could be “fine-tuned” however; loved her work there; there is an “unending diversity” of schools; a good school

knows its mission and tries to fulfill it; “it keeps its promises;” she loved the travel which was “unending.”

### 27:20 **Her Daughter, Alfia**

We discussed Alfia who is a freshman at Penn State. She would like to go to law school when she finishes. Alfia came to her at 4 months in 1988, when her birth mother approached Dr. Weinstein; she calls the decision to adopt “carelessly arrived at.” She does not regret it in the least however; she was 54 at the time of the adoption; it was the ‘smartest and happiest thing she ever did;” Alfia is African-American, but the “racial thing” was not hard. A woman who lives next door, and who taught at St. Joseph is Alfia’s Godmother and helped raise her; being a single mom was not too hard; she was already established; Middle States was very supportive; she only had one boss at Middle States, Bob Kirkwood.

### 37:00 **She Leaves Middle States**

She retired from Middle States at age 66. Bob Kirkwood retired and she could not get along with her new boss, a lawyer surrounded by PhDs; she felt too old to go back to teaching and “four preps;” The high point of her career was visiting schools and helping prepare them for self-study; she remembers the time spent with various faculties to be the best. “It was fun [her career at Middle States] until the last day.” She did not part on good terms.

### 45:10 **What She is doing now?**

She does educational consulting to help institutions prepare for the Middle States' evaluation process; helps them with their mission development.

47:25 **Some Random Thoughts at the End of the Interview**

She really enjoyed teaching but left it "long ago;" it is "frozen in time." She does not like how she was treated at LaSalle at the end of her career; Jimmy Muldoon tried to get her to come back after she left; she had taken a leave of absence to see if she liked Middle States; she appreciated his offer, but really loved the work she was doing at Middle States; five hundred people attended her retirement dinner at Middle States; she was very proud of that; it was a "life highlight."

54:00 **The End**

I thanked her and told her how much I enjoyed her interview.

