

[Segal, Judith. "The Library Association of the City Colleges of New York, 1939-1965," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1991 \[Review\]](#)

By: James V. Carmichael, Jr.,

[Carmichael, James V., Jr.](#) (Winter, 1994) Segal, Judith. "The Library Association of the City Colleges of New York, 1939-1965," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1991. *Library and Information Science Research* 16: 80-82. [doi:10.1016/0740-8188\(94\)90050-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0740-8188(94)90050-7)

Made available courtesy of Elsevier: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/07408188>

**\*\*\*Reprinted with permission. No further reproduction is authorized without written permission from Elsevier. This version of the document is not the version of record. Figures and/or pictures may be missing from this format of the document.\*\*\***

Segal, Judith. The Library Association of the City Colleges of New York 1939-1965. Library Association of the City Colleges of New York 1939-1965. D.L. S. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1991. (UMI Order Number 92-02747).

Reviewed by James V. Carmichael, Jr., Department of Library and Information Studies, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, North Carolina 27412-5001.

It may come as a surprise to these who grew up under the shadow of organizations like Students for a Democratic Society, which flourished on *New York City* college campuses, to learn that the original city colleges of New York and the city university system which they spawned were not characterized by relatively enlightened administrations—a belief to which naive regional outsiders like the current reviewer subscribed in the mid 1960s. As Segal makes patently clear in her organizational history of The Library Association of the City Colleges of New York (LACCNY), the city colleges (and their libraries) were encumbered with an exceedingly complex political and financial structure. Although this administrative structure ultimately served for more than 20 years to keep the campuses among the most competitive, heterogeneous, and intellectually stimulating ones in the nation, it also subjected them to archetypical bureaucratic protocols, and city campus personnel were exploited shamelessly.

The city colleges suffered as much or more from most of the social ills that visited other campuses in the three decades following the Great Depression, most notorious of which was the red scare campaign of 1950-1954, which cost at least 57 city college employees their jobs (p. 161). Equally devastating to the original democratic character of the colleges was the middle-class migration to the suburbs, as well as the Board of Higher Education's lifting of the free tuition mandate which posed a threat to the representation in the student body of African Americans from the South and Puerto Ricans—the city's most recent immigrants, who displaced the Jewish and middle European intelligentsia demographically after the 1950s. Segal describes these background socioeconomic factors with considerable panache.

The LACCNY story, which unfolds against this backdrop, makes much tougher going for the reader, and a stronger editorial hand before this dissertation is published (which it should be, for it is extremely important) could eliminate the more obvious infelicities of phrase. Admittedly, detailed documentary analysis does not lend narrative force to historical accounts, and perhaps syntactical grace should not be a primary purpose of historical dissertations. Given the often depressing eventlessness of LACCNY's activities (with apathy heaped upon lack of political power, for example), some dramatic impetus is ultimately needed. Certainly, the power is there in the words of the principals, which the author gathered from both interviews and written accounts. Some LACCNY leaders, like Morris Gelfand, Rice Estes, Rose Z. Sellars, and Barbara Greener, come to life in this

history—people whom Segal, borrowing the sociological model of Albert Meister, labels "militants." Rose Sellars, in particular, seems to have had little use for the narcotic language of briefs, "action" minutes, and office memoranda in fighting for higher wages and rank commensurate with faculty for the city college librarians. At one point, she told the Legislative Conference head that LACCNY had been fighting and losing for so long that "our nostrils are clogged with defeat" (p. 275). Such vivid language speaks for itself but deserves a seamless narrative encapsulation that is its equal.

Aside from the rhetorical awkwardness that sometimes attends Segal's theoretical and documentary analysis—a normal hazard of painstaking work—and infrequent typographical errors, this dissertation could easily become the primal case study in faculty status issues for librarians. The author's knowledge of her sources seems exhaustive, and her use of an appropriate theoretical framework is admirably disciplined and consistently organized.

Segal demonstrates convincingly that LACCNY was largely ineffective in gaining any remuneration, monetary or otherwise, for city college librarians. It is shocking to be reminded that the professor-librarians (i.e., head librarians) did much to undermine the petitions of their colleagues for faculty rank and that LACCNY members on at least two separate occasions lost excellent opportunities to fight and win concessions because of their recalcitrance to be associated with union activities. LACCNY, like so many library associations across the country, was plagued by its politesse, and its placement in one of the most progressive college settings in the country only made its mistakes more emblematic of a general failing of professional self-definition and will.