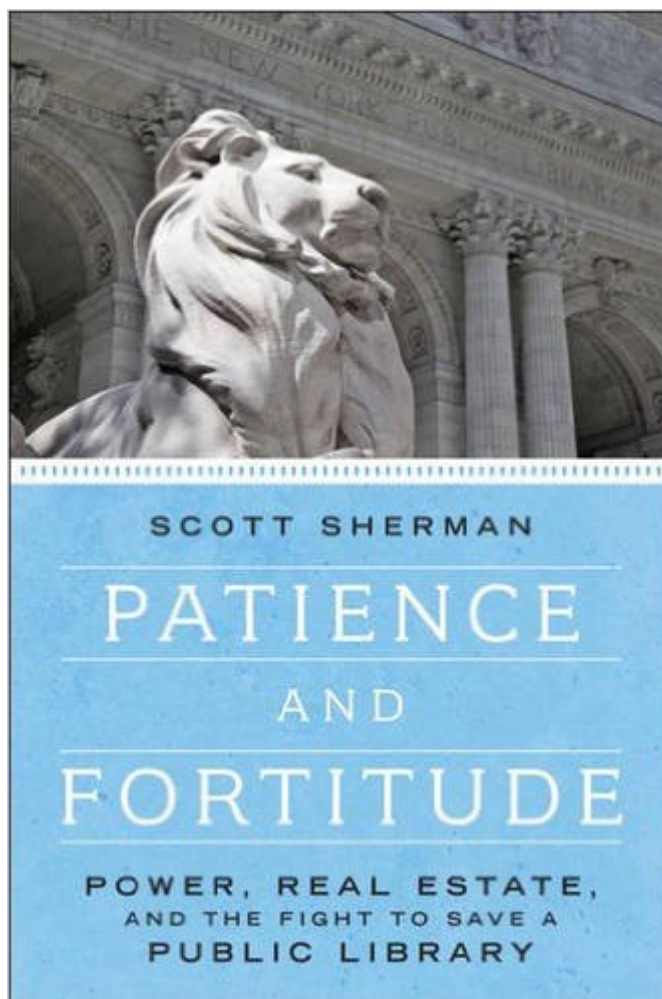


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Patience And Fortitude: Power, Real Estate, And The Fight To Save A Public Library



Synopsis

A riveting investigation of a beloved library caught in the crosshairs of real estate, power, and the people's interests by the reporter who broke the story. In a series of cover stories for The Nation magazine, journalist Scott Sherman uncovered the ways in which Wall Street logic almost took down one of New York City's most beloved and iconic institutions: the New York Public Library. In the years preceding the 2008 financial crisis, the library's leaders forged an audacious plan to sell off multiple branch libraries, mutilate a historic building, and send millions of books to a storage facility in New Jersey. Scholars, researchers, and readers would be out of luck, but real estate developers and New York's Mayor Bloomberg would get what they wanted. But when the story broke, the people fought back, as famous writers, professors, and citizens' groups came together to defend a national treasure. Rich with revealing interviews with key figures, *Patience and Fortitude* is at once a hugely readable history of the library's secret plans, and a stirring account of a rare triumph against the forces of money and power.

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Customer Reviews

What the documents do reveal, with the utmost clarity, is that the Central Library Plan, conceived in the boom years preceding the recession of 2008, was a mystifying combination of austerity and devil-may-care overreach; that it bore the fingerprints of two influential private-sector consulting firms: McKinsey & Company and Booz Allen Hamilton (whose recommendations have

never been made public by the NYPL); and that it was pushed along, in absolute secrecy, not by professional librarians but by a core group of wealthy trustees from the worlds of finance and real estate. -- pp. 73-74

When the shocking details of the NYPL's Central Library Plan finally began to see the light of day in early 2013 a coalition of historic preservationists, scholars, writers, library buffs and community activists joined forces to form the non-profit Committee to Save the New York Public Library. The stakes were incredibly high and the group was committed to use any means at its disposal to stop this plan in its tracks.

Meanwhile the proponents of the plan engaged a high profile public relations firm to help push their project across the finish line. Scott Sherman chronicles the epic battle for the future of the New York Public Library in his highly engaging new book *Patience and Fortitude: Power, Real Estate, and the Fight to Save a Public Library*. The author grabbed my attention in the opening chapter and commanded it the rest of the way. This is a positively fascinating saga.

In the opening chapters of *Patience and Fortitude* Scott Sherman provides his readers with some context by presenting a brief history of the New York Public Library. We then learn that a plan was conceived back in 2007 that would change the face of this venerable institution forever. Essentially, the trustees wanted to close two popular branches and sell the real estate to generate revenue. But there was more to it. The most controversial aspect of the CPL involved the removal of some three million books from the stacks at the library's Main Branch on 42nd Street to a facility in Princeton, NJ. As details of this idea began to leak out over the ensuing years people were outraged and rightly so. One blogger quipped "I halt at the problem of how to reproduce digitally the phenomenon of having a dozen physical books open to different pages at once on my work table. In the future, will I need to buy a dozen iPads?"

The way the opponents of the CPL saw it one of the great research libraries in the world was being gutted, pure and simple.

At the end of the day *Patience and Fortitude: Power, Real Estate, and the Fight to Save a Public Library* is a story of mistakes made and lessons learned. By holding their controversial plans so close to the vest the trustees of the NYPL denied input from just about all of the library's constituencies. This would prove to be an extremely costly mistake on so many levels. And yes there were heroes and villains in this tale. In my view one of the heroes was the author himself who in the December 2011 issue of "The Nation" magazine brought many of these issues to light in an article entitled "Upheaval at the New York Public Library". I commend Scott Sherman for giving us a thoughtful, engrossing and extremely well written book about a very important topic. I simply could not put this one down. Very highly recommended.

Scott Sherman demonstrates that a timely work of nonfiction can indeed be a page turner. He also shows how, in the absence of transparency, real-estate moguls can inflict great damage on a hallowed public institution.

Scott Sherman has written an incisive and thoroughly entertaining book that reads like a thriller...and it's all true! Anyone who cares about the future of our access to treasured books, manuscripts and historical documents should read Mr. Sherman's tightly written investigative book about the secret effort to pillage the New York Public Library for profit.

Patience and Fortitude is a highly readable account of the controversial plan to renovate the iconic NYPL building on 42 Street (known as the Central Library Plan, or the CPL) from 2007 to its demise in 2014. You can read this book in one sitting. It's well told and adeptly summarizes press reports while adding fresh reporting. At the same time, it remains a bit thin in terms of its analysis. This, however, isn't Sherman's fault. It's a recent event and many people still aren't willing to talk. Sherman mentions how much of his research was thwarted. The NYPL, for one, disregarded all of his Freedom of Information requests, and many individuals would not talk to him. NYPL trustees wouldn't even provide copies of their resumes! We can only wish for a book that could more thoroughly document the thinking behind the Central Library Plan. As we have it here, there appears to have been very little thinking, just a lot of plotting for the sake of Doing Something Big, somewhat clueless about what the library is and what it means to New York. It would have been more satisfying if the reader came away with a deeper sense of the plan's appeal to the NYPL Trustees. I'm not entirely convinced that it was all about a group of real estate moguls letting loose their imagination. After all, they had sold the idea to a wide range of scholars and academics -- such as David Remnick, Robert Darnton and Skip Gates -- who aren't real estate moguls. What, one wonders, were they thinking, and how might they have seen the plan? He tells us that Darnton had a change of heart, but it seemed pretty lukewarm to me. I'm sympathetic to Sherman's main argument, and my hunch is that he's right, but the book doesn't provide a full enough case to say that for sure. Many research libraries are undertaking schemes to get rid of their printed books, so it's not just the case that a few bad apples in New York were let loose on an old, revered institution. None of this is to impugn Sherman. I think he's done a very good job with what he had, and to write a deeper, more involved analysis would have inevitably made the book less compulsively readable. I make these comments because I would like to know more than is perhaps knowable about this controversy. In the end, I can't tell if it's just a New York story, or if there are

larger implications. I do, however, have one big bone to pick with Sherman -- or with his publisher. This book lacks references of any sort: no notes, no references, no bibliography. A book in defense of research and scholarship that does not embody those values seems to me a most mixed message!

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