

## PROJECT - Library for Banned Books



*Archival photo Walt Whitman Library architect Rudolph I. Dass 1908*

Revitalizing the community library is an activist mechanism.

Re-envision the library as a forum for education, free speech and the exchange of ideas.

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

As cultural values shift in the United States, groups looking to affirm their power and authority have historically sought to prohibit the representation of other values by banning the works of creative expression - especially through banning books. The explicit reason for banning a particular book may be due to the book's representations of race or sexuality, but the implicit reasons for banned books are often far more complex.

In 2022, responding to a sudden increase in banned books nationwide, the Brooklyn Public Library created their "[Books Unbanned](#)" program to promote what the American Library Association calls "[The Freedom to Read](#)". The mission of public libraries is to increase access to books and information - regardless of topics specific groups might find sensitive or objectionable.

## PROJECT BRIEF

In this project, students will re-imagine an existing branch of the Brooklyn Public Library in the Fort Greene neighborhood of Brooklyn at 93 Saint Edwards Street. In addition to serving the needs of this Brooklyn neighborhood, the specific focus of this branch will be centered around the subject of "banned books" and the freedom to read.

This new library could include programming one might expect in a typical public library but will also include **spaces for the instruction of information literacy, galleries for the exhibition of banned books** and "banned" subject matter, **public and private spaces for discussion/debate** of these topics. It is then up to the student to **develop a program that is innovative and pertinent to the Banned Book question.**

Students are expected to challenge the archaic notion of a quiet, text-based library. An important part of this assignment is to develop new types of interactive/engaging programming and spatial typologies that facilitate access to digital and physical information, create environments to share ideas, to help library patrons make informed decisions regarding a variety of subject matter, and to provide a project that could support the community.

This library will be a space where the dynamics of human interaction and information access acknowledge not only the physical and spatial constraints that define "accessibility" but the social forces that influence accessibility as well.



*Walt Whitman interior view*

# PROCESS

Students will begin with the **research and analysis of a Banned Book** that will subsequently expand to include **case studies libraries, relevant research, site analysis, concepts + programming, design development in plan and section,** and the **representation of design concepts in 3-dimensions.**

## 1. Case Studies

Visit local libraries (Brooklyn Heights Library and Adams Street Library):

- Using issued plans take notes as desired and photograph and sketch areas and features of interest
- Case Study team to present orthographic drawings, images and analysis of one of these projects

## 2. Research

In teams present concise text and images for the following:

- A brief history of public (Carnegie) libraries in the USA
- A brief history of banned books in the USA
- A brief explanation of “information literacy” and the possible associated spaces and program
- A brief case study analysis of the Brooklyn Heights Library or the Adams Street Library

The Walt Whitman of the Brooklyn Public Library is referred to as a “Carnegie Library” because it is just one of hundreds of libraries that were built in the early 20th century with funding from the philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie Libraries were built across the United States and became the foundation for the public library systems we enjoy today. At the time they were built, the Carnegie Libraries were referred to as “temples of knowledge.” General information about Carnegie Libraries can be found at various websites including:

- NPR, “How Andrew Carnegie Turned His Fortune into a Library Legacy” (August 2013)  
<https://www.npr.org/2013/08/01/207272849/how-andrew-carnegie-turned-his-fortune-into-a-library-legacy>
- NPS, “Carnegie Libraries: The Future Made Bright”  
<https://www.nps.gov/articles/carnegie-libraries-the-future-made-bright-teaching-with-historic-places.htm>

## 3. Site Analysis

In teams generate an analysis of the site to formulate an understanding and generate questions related to the building and neighborhood in order to develop a clear understanding of contextual forces that might inform design strategies. Note that you have already begun this process for the Stonewall House. You are invited to re-use this information. Make sure that it has been revised and is graphically clear.

The “site” and context of this project include not only an existing historic library building but also the diverse Brooklyn community this library serves and the surrounding urban environment. Site analysis deliverables are outlined below.

Visits the Walt Whitman Branch Library to see the site in person and consult online resources with a critical (think about what you are sourcing and selecting – don’t just copy paste) use of googlemaps, google streetview, google earth and other sources. Note that the library is closed for renovation so you will have to visit the outside of the building.

- Walt Whitman, Brooklyn Public Library website  
<https://www.bklynlibrary.org/locations/walt-whitman>
- Brooklyn Public Library, Digital Collections  
<https://www.bklynlibrary.org/digitalcollections/items?search=arlington%20branch>
- NYC Historic Districts Council  
<https://hdc.org/buildings/carnegie-library-arlington-branch/>

### Site Analysis Deliverables:

- Building 93 Saint Edwards Street  
Describe building typology, neo-classical influences, its origins and cultural implications  
Describe/illustrate the building’s structure, materiality and decoration (interior and exterior)
- Diagram Organizational Diagram – main floor  
Guidelines Diagram – main floor  
Other Diagram

- The Site Context neighborhood and community
  - Daylight Diagram
  - Acoustics Diagram
  - Vehicular and Pedestrian Traffic Diagram (10-block radius)
  - Map libraries and community facilities (10-block radius) – describe program and users
  - Map community demographics; race, ethnicity, income, education, etc.

#### 4. Concepts

- Form and present three (3) minimum concepts about the relevance/importance of 21<sup>st</sup> century libraries
- Form and present three (3) minimum concepts about the relevance/importance of protecting banned books

#### 5. Programming

- Traditional Library Program
  - Entry Sequence
  - Reference Desk
  - Re-shelving Area
  - Stacks (bookshelves or other storage for books, digital, other media)
  - Reading Tables
  - Public Bathrooms
  - Offices and Staff Rooms
  - Storage and Maintenance
- Banned book library program
  - Display Galleries for Banned Books & Banned Subject Matter
  - Dedicated Areas for Banned Book Collections
- Program to support the free exchange of ideas
  - Two (2) Information Literacy Classrooms
  - One (1) Open and one (1) Closed Presentation/Seminar Spaces
- Innovative Program

*Provide a brief description and characteristics for each program type:*

Public or Private | Active or Static | Noisy or Quiet | Bright or Dark | Adaptable or Dedicated  
 Open or Closed | Mezzanine or Street or Basement | Other Atmospheres & Moods | Materials & Colors | Adjacency Requirements

*Guestimate percentages of space desired for each piece of program*

*Guestimate who and how many users or staff could be necessary for each piece of program*

#### 6. Designing a Library for Banned Books

The goal of this project is to develop interior concepts for a library renovation generated by a study of banned books. Through an understanding of past and present contexts, the design will engage an historical building to accommodate a practical and inventive new library program. The design will also address the exchange of information in general while it examines the issue of book banning in specific through the representation of interior space, form, light, materials and color.

##### Design Deliverables:

- Edited Case Studies / Research / Site Analysis
- Concept Statement
- Diagrams – Cartoon Diagram / Program Diagram / Analytical Diagrams
- Furnished Floor Plans (black and white) – Lower Level, Main Level, Mezzanine Level
- Section / Elevations – Primary Longitudinal and Primary Transverse
- Reflected Ceiling Plan – Main Level
- Perspectives (black, white & gray or line drawings)
- Rendered Perspectives (include representation of materials, palette, light, figures)
- Materiality and Color Palette
- Selected Furniture
- Process Drawings and Study Models
- Extra Credit – Surface Design / Lighting Strategy / Detail Drawing or Model / Approved Other