

# The new librarian of Congress on the value of ‘free information’

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The Library of Congress has a new chief: Carla Hayden. Most of her predecessors in the role have come from scholarly institutions, but Hayden is a librarian through and through. She is also the first woman and the first African American to take charge of the nation's oldest and largest collection. Jeffrey Brown speaks with Hayden about the continuing importance of the library in the digital age.

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### **GWEN IFILL:**

Finally tonight: The 14th librarian of Congress was sworn in last week to lead one of the nation's oldest institutions into its next chapter.

Jeffrey Brown visited Carla Hayden as she began her new position.

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### **JEFFREY BROWN:**

It is the largest library in the world. Founded in 1800. with some 162 million items. the

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the largest library in the world. Located in 1800, with some 12 million items, the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., is a repository of books, yes, but also a storehouse of history and culture, filled with recordings, photographs, maps and manuscripts, charged with preserving national treasures of all kinds.

The new librarian of Congress is Carla Hayden.

Why did you want to take on this job?

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**CARLA HAYDEN, Librarian of Congress:**

It's a librarian's dream.

And in the field, it's seen as a job that really epitomizes what libraries can mean and symbolize. So, this library can really help libraries throughout the country show the worth of a library and a community.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

It's pretty spectacular new digs, though, for you. Right?

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**CARLA HAYDEN:**

Well, it is quite something. It really makes you realize what this library symbolizes, to be at the seat of government.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

While most of the past 13 heads of this historic institution have come from scholarly backgrounds, Carla Hayden is a librarian through and through and a strong advocate

backgrounds, Carla Hayden is a librarian through and through, and a strong advocate for their continuing relevance.

She headed the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore since 1993, and before that worked for the Chicago Public Library, a career coinciding with enormous changes in information technology.

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**CARLA HAYDEN:**

Technology has such an impact on libraries in the last 20 years, and the last 10 years in particular.

The opportunity to make those items available online for everyone is daunting, but also exciting. And it's a pivotal time to think about what could be done with technology.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

This is where the library has been hit with criticism, though, in several independent assessments, that it has fallen behind, has not modernized its technology, has not digitized much of its collection. Is that a fair assessment?

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**CARLA HAYDEN:**

It's an assessment that I believe reflects the fact that, with the largest library in the world, 162 million items, that's a pretty substantial amount of material to digitize.

And there's a lot involved with these rare and unique materials.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

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In the bowels of the library, we were shown part of that effort, a scanner that can photograph 200 pages an hour, here, a delicate Persian history book dating to 1825.

But these are still initial steps to make more accessible a collection said to stretch over 863 miles of bookshelves.

In your life, in your career, you have had to defend libraries, right?

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**CARLA HAYDEN:**

Yes. Yes. I have had...

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

Why should we give you money, right?

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**CARLA HAYDEN:**

Why should you invest in a library, especially a library building, in the time of the digital age?

What we found is a library's place is even more important. There is a hunger in this digital age to hear authors together, to participate in programs, to just be in a place, a community space.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

I asked Carla Hayden if she worries about the privatization of digital media from companies such as Google

companies such as Google.

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**CARLA HAYDEN:**

It can be a public-private partnership, and there's room and space for everyone.

I get excited thinking about those partnerships and the opportunities. There are so many items that are not in the copyright domain. And people might not realize the Library of Congress manages the copyright process for the nation.

And you do have items that are available to be digitized that a partner could help quite a bit.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

You have also been known as a privacy advocate, right? As the president of the American Library Association in 2003, you argued against some aspects of the Patriot Act.

Are you worried still about government surveillance of information, even what's available at libraries, government watching what people read?

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**CARLA HAYDEN:**

Librarians were called during that time feisty fighters for freedom, and we were very proud of that label.

We were just concerned that, at that time, when people were rightfully concerned about national security, that there was a balance with a person's right to know. Just because you're interested in what jihad is doesn't mean you intend to join.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

You don't think Americans need to be worried that, whether they're checking out a book, whether they're going online to search something?

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**CARLA HAYDEN:**

The safeguards are there. There are measures in place that ensure that at least the proper cause for examining records is in place. And that was what we were concerned about, wide sweeps of records with no indication of intent.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

You look at the country today, and much discussion about the divisions, politically, culturally, economically. What can you do about it in your new position?

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**CARLA HAYDEN:**

Make information free for all.

Health information is just about the number one thing that people go into public libraries and connect to public libraries for. They're also looking for information about things that can make their lives better. It's a great equalizer.

So, there's an opportunity for the Library of Congress to supplement what is happening and not happening in many public and school libraries.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

**JEFFREY BROWN:**

You are the first woman to have this job, the first African-American to have this job. Do these things matter, and, if so, how, especially at the Library of Congress, heading it?

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**CARLA HAYDEN:**

I'm really smiling because of Mr. Melvil Dewey, who so many people know as the pioneer in librarianship.

And in about 1876, he decided that it might be good to have women join the profession, because, as he said — and I love this quote — “They can endure pain with fortitude, and they can perform monotonous tasks with patience.”

(LAUGHTER)

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**CARLA HAYDEN:**

But, more seriously, though, being the first African-American really resonates, because, for so many years during slavery, slaves were forbidden to learn how to read, and some of the laws back then, amputating fingers, 40 lashes and more, just to learn to read.

So, to have an African-American head up the largest institution that signifies knowledge and information resonates with me quite a bit.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

Carla Hayden, thank you very much.

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**CARLA HAYDEN:**

Thank you.

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**JEFFREY BROWN:**

And good luck.

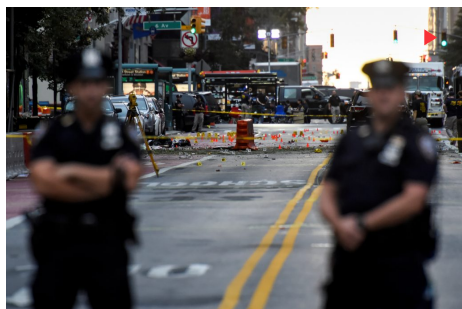
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**GWEN IFILL:**

A footnote to this story: On Wednesday, Hayden, the Library of Congress, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York will present more than 163,000 pages, books, manuscripts, and maps to the government of Afghanistan. It's a digitized archive that goes back to the 1300s.

And online, we have more from Carla Hayden. We asked her to pick the children's book she loves the most. Hear her answer in a bonus video on our Facebook page, [Facebook.com/NewsHour](https://www.facebook.com/NewsHour).

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