

## Freedom to Read: A conversation with Dr. Carla Hayden, Librarian of Congress

**Host:** Jacob Hodes

**Guest:** Dr. Carla Hayden, Librarian of Congress

00:00:02 **Ken Stuzin:** Hello. This is Ken Stuzin. I'm a partner at Brown Advisory. Welcome to our NOW 2020 Podcast. NOW stands for Navigating Our World. We are simply trying to understand the world better, to navigate some of the most pressing questions that are shaping our lives, our culture and our investment challenges. We are committed to sharing the views of CEOs and other leaders, so that we can all learn from their perspectives on how to navigate the future.

We would like to hear from you as well. We invite you to leave a review or take a moment to complete the short questionnaire on the NOW website, so that we can learn from your thoughts, questions and feedback. As we look to the future, whether we agree or disagree with each other, the one thing we know for sure is that none of us can figure this out on our own. At Brown Advisory we are focused on raising the future and we hope these NOW conversations will help us do just that.

00:01:04 (MUSIC)

00:01:04 **Jacob Hodes:** When a society is at risk of polarization what helps keep it together, in a word things we share, a common identity, a sense of purpose that we agree on, a collective hope for what our country might be and institutions that advance our values. Our communities depend on social infrastructure; museums, courts, schools. All of them have something important to say about our shared story, but no place I think says more than our libraries. Libraries are, of course, repositories of information. But not only that, they're accelerators of learning and ambition.

They serve as physical and emotional centers in our communities and they help forge our future as well as understand our present and past. I'm Jacob Hodes and I'm a Partner at Brown Advisory. It's my pleasure today to talk with the leader of our country's oldest federal institution and one of its greatest, the Library of Congress. The Librarian of Congress is Dr. Carla Hayden, who I've had the privilege of knowing and working closely with over the past decade.

Dr. Hayden, it's a pleasure to welcome you to the podcast. Thanks so much for joining us. The last time we were together you very graciously welcomed my family to a screening of Cinderella at the Library of Congress. A lot's changed in the world since then, but by design the Library of Congress seeks to be a constant that links the past, present and future. Tell us about the Library and your experience over the past four years serving as the Librarian of Congress.

00:02:47 **Dr. Carla Hayden:** I think it's very important for people to realize when they think about the Library of Congress, which is the world's largest library with treasures untold, that they last time we were together was at a screening of the historic film, Cinderella. And people might say well, how does that relate to the Library of Congress?

And that's because we have so many things that are in different formats and we are really trying to make sure that we connect with more people and part of that is preserving film and sound recordings, as well as manuscripts and books and all of these wonderful treasures. So what people might not realize is that it is more than books and it is universal and it covers so many formats that I'm so pleased to be able to be the Librarian of Congress at this time.

- 00:03:48 **Jacob Hodes:** Well, Dr. Hayden we're going to delve into a lot of those things, the technology side, the collection side. I'd love you just to give a little bit more color on the extent and breadth of the collection. I think I've read millions of pieces, hundreds of miles of bookshelf. Can you talk a little bit about that?
- 00:04:05 **Dr. Carla Hayden:** You did. A hundred and 71 million items. And that includes hair, H-A-I-R, pieces of hair from historic figures to original manuscripts, Mozart, Beethoven, the papers of 23 presidents, from George Washington to Calvin Coolidge, the 32 Supreme Court Justices and their manuscripts as well. So just a variety of all types of formats, over 836 miles of shelving, three buildings on Capitol Hill, storage facilities and also a campus in Culpepper, Virginia that's just dedicated to preserving film and sound recordings you think about all of the different types of things that could be held in a library. The Library of Congress has it.
- 00:05:07 **Jacob Hodes:** I guess the natural question is why does it matter? Is it a mausoleum? Is it a resting place for old artifacts?
- 00:05:13 **Dr. Carla Hayden:** When you said that, if people could see as they're hearing, they would have seen my eyebrows go up and down and everything, because libraries have one of the most endearing stereotypes of any type of institution as well as librarians as a group. And when you think about the world's largest library it is a living archive and source of knowledge and creativity.
- For instance, we just started a program called Citizen DJ. And that's where you can make your own hip hop music using some of the archival audio and moving images from our collections.
- 00:06:02 (MUSIC)
- 00:06:03 **Jacob Hodes:** Speed up a little bit. And I'm going to slowly bring in the jumps.
- 00:06:09 (MUSIC)
- 00:06:17 **Dr. Carla Hayden:** So we wanted to be much more than just a storehouse, this mausoleum, but a working resource for people to create in the future and imagine what would you think 30 years from now should be put into the Library of Congress and you could be a creator of it.
- 00:06:36 (MUSIC)
- 00:06:39 **Jacob Hodes:** Dr. Hayden I'd be remiss if I didn't recognize that you're a very special member of one of the most exclusive clubs. There have been 45 Presidents of the United States, but only 14 Librarians of Congress.
- 00:06:48 **Female Newscaster:** And the first African American to ever be the Librarian of Congress has been sworn in. Dr. Carla Hayden is also the first woman to hold the post. Before taking her new position she was the CEO of Baltimore's Library System.
- 00:07:00 **Jacob Hodes:** What does that mean to you? Frankly what does that mean given the history of the United States?
- 00:07:04 **Dr. Carla Hayden:** When I thought about the fact that librarians are part of what's been called the four feminized professions, that's where at least 85 percent of the workforce is female. And that's social work, education, nursing and librarianship. And the top management of those organizations never really reflected that. So being the first woman to head the largest library from the feminized profession was very significant and my colleagues in the profession were very engaged when I was selected.
- And personally though, being a person of color, and coming from people who were denied in this country, in the United States, the right to read, and there were laws that were enacted to prevent people of color from learning to read and if they did learn to read or they were caught or people were caught teaching them to read, they were punished, by all kinds of pretty drastic ways; amputation, whipping, all of that.
- It was so significant for me, because here is the world's largest library and a person of color is now being asked to lead it into the future.
- 00:08:40 **Jacob Hodes:** Along those lines equity of access has always been a driving principle of your time as a librarian, I think I read a quote that you gave from an intervention back in 2003, you say that libraries are a

cornerstone of democracy, where information is free and equally available to everyone. People tend to take that for granted and they don't realize what is at stake when that is put at risk. I think it's an amazing quote Dr. Hayden. Can you share how you and libraries in general have been on the forefront, looking across all of society?

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**Dr. Carla Hayden:** What a lot of people might not realize is that the United States system of free public libraries came into being about the same time, after World War, the Civil War actually, in 1870s or so, at the same time as public education being supported in this country. And the fact that access to the main vehicle at that time of information, books, should be made freely available, so that people could be part of an informed citizenry, and that was the term that was used quite a bit, and that libraries became in many instances the people's university, you could self-educate yourself, you could be part of this country and move ahead.

The playwright, August Wilson, famously talks about and talked about being a graduate of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. He dropped out of high school and spent every day in the public library there, and the librarians were very forgiving, as we tend to be sometimes, and he educated himself. And years later, when he was a famous playwright of *Two Trains Running*, and all of the wonderful plays, the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, gave him a degree to signify that he graduated from that.

So libraries, public libraries in this country have always been part of the public education effort and anyone can walk in. And that is, you can't define democracy I think more than that.

00:10:55

(MUSIC)

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**Jacob Hodes:** You and I had a chance to work together at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, Baltimore's famous free library system. One of your approaches there, and certainly before when you were in Chicago, and now in Washington, D.C. at the Library of Congress, has been expanding the definition of libraries to include services, family programming and experiential learning. I guess that's why in part you've really made the Library as much about people coming in and touchpoints as it is about books and some of the wonderful artifacts that you mentioned, but can you talk about that evolution as well, across the country?

00:11:28

**Dr. Carla Hayden:** The idea that it's beyond books has been a major part of what libraries have been doing for quite a while. There are libraries that are loaning instruments, musical instruments. There are libraries that are loaning sewing machines. One that's stopped me recently was a library that is loaning traffic cones. I walked into the library and saw traffic cones and I thought that they were under construction. And they said no, think about it, there are people who want to borrow traffic cones to teach their young person to drive. They might have construction, but that what libraries are offering are more things that are not just carried in that vehicle that was the main source of information, a book.

But these are items that they would need to do things. And so the services now that libraries are offering, and have offered are just I think people would be very, very surprised.

00:12:38

**Jacob Hodes:** I remember conversations that we've had over time about the Charter of the Enoch Pratt Library, which is specifically to have a free library open to all citizens regardless of people or property or color. And that was always something that took me, and to your point about being inclusive and having the services, you know, I think it really speaks to one of the crowning moments of our time together in Baltimore and certainly in your career, during the 2015 protests of the death of Freddie Gray, our libraries were at the epicenter of activity.

And I remember you working yourself, rolling up your sleeves alongside your team, to keep libraries open in support of the community. What was your motivation there?

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**Dr. Carla Hayden:** The library in Baltimore was similar to libraries in most challenged communities, and they can be in rural areas, they can be in cities, it was the lifeline. And we knew that during a time that so many other things were closed the library was going to be that place that people would want to gravitate to, go into, to get internet access, to apply for jobs, to get information, a safe place. And sure enough that's what happened, as soon as we said we would be open, the next day people were lined up to get in.

- 00:13:59 **Female Newscaster:** A safe haven for school children, we visit the library that survived Baltimore's violent protest. It's now a place of refuge for the city's most vulnerable.
- 00:14:07 **Male Newscaster:** A Baltimore library kept its doors open. We'll take you there as the staff gets recognized for their terrific work.
- 00:14:15 **Dr. Carla Hayden:** And that's why it's very difficult. I've talked to my public library colleagues during this time about how difficult it is for them to think that when communities are in need that they physically have to be closed. And they're doing so much virtually, there are a lot of drop offs, you know, they're making sure that they're providing materials and even making sure that their Wi-Fi is accessible and their mobile units are going around to communities.
- But it is difficult, because that's where so many people are connected to not only the information, but the people that can help them and other services.
- 00:14:58 **Jacob Hodes:** Well, maybe that is a good segue, like you said to the current Covid-19 pandemic. Libraries are very much viewed as the bastion of education, really the keeper of the future. Right now our educational system's at a crossroads, distancing like you said has caused issues with access, particularly with respect to the inner city schools and rural schools.
- How can you and the Library of Congress support students and provide that equity and that access that you talked about before?
- 00:15:27 **Dr. Carla Hayden:** The Library of Congress has had a program called teaching with primary resources for a number of years where we actually have had teachers, K-12, come in and mind the Library's collections and develop curriculum that could be used. And with our digitization efforts, we have about 61 million items that are digitized, covering a wide range of materials from basic research to scientific literacy to all types of things are up with this curriculum.
- So we've kind of turbo charged our outreach to the education community. One of the interesting parts is that we've also been reaching out to families, because as you probably know, and maybe from personal experience, the parents and caregivers are also part of the education enterprise now too. And that has been something that we've tried to emphasize the more, I'd say more, well, I can say fun parts, like Dav Pilkey, the famous creator of Dog Man and Captain Underpants, is doing things for us in his studio and how to do graphic novels and read-alouds and Jason Reynolds who's our national ambassador for young people's literature has something for middle schoolers, grab the mic, tell your story.
- And then just replaying things from the National Book Festival that's been going on for 20 years and having author talks. So putting as much as we can online that people can use and letting people know about it. That's the main part.
- 00:17:17 (MUSIC)
- 00:17:18 **Jacob Hodes:** While you're talking Dr. Hayden, it strikes me that we at Brown Advisory are always taught to think like investors, and when you invest you always have to focus on your return on investment.
- 00:17:27 **Dr. Carla Hayden:** Yes.
- 00:17:28 **Jacob Hodes:** And you're very much an investor too, particularly with your acceleration of the Library of Congress's collections and the digitization of the collections and really putting resources, allocating resources in that way. How do you think about digitizing the collection, and the process, your goals and how you measure success? Like you said it's so important today as you're trying to provide that equal access to all and really that link to the past so that people can learn for the future.
- 00:17:56 **Dr. Carla Hayden:** And you used the term link. When you have this treasure, collections almost, that you can't even imagine that are coming in, and they're still physical collections. You have a Secretary of State that is working with us on her collection and all of these things are there. Prioritizing and saying what are the things, you can't digitize everything at once, but let's prioritize, let's look at the curriculums and the common core and what's going on in education to make sure that what we're putting up would be relevant to

educators now. Let's look at what our collections are and make sure that we are putting things up that people can use almost immediately.

And that's one of the ways. And then we look at the usage and how we reach out as well as stimulating with the Citizen DJ, things that we think might be helpful for people who want to create, and so what are hearing? We're getting much better at social media and connecting in that way and reaching out. I'm the first Librarian of Congress to tweet. And it started as soon as I stepped down from being installed and I said I'm going on an adventure, come with me, and here we go.

And so we put out things that are relevant to what's happening in the world that relate to our collections, so that people realize when they see the Parkland young people that performed at the Grammy Awards and they sang Seasons of Love, we were able to put up and make sure that people knew we had the Jonathan Larson archive and we had and posted his calculation, 925, you know, in his own hand. And we have a whole part of things in their hand, George Gershwin and all of these wonderful manuscripts, so that when things are happening in the world we look into our collections and that's also something that we make sure that we're able to be responsive as well.

00:20:22 **Jacob Hodes:** You've made it a point, and I know this because I follow you on social media, to bring all sorts of different speakers, artists and celebrities into the Library of Congress as well. Who have you met there, who's really been poignant in terms of your experience so far in terms of thinking through and just seeing interesting things and seeing the creative process come alive?

00:20:44 **Dr. Carla Hayden:** One person that I think we can, a lot of us can relate to, is David McCullough, who started his career in terms of historical writing just doing unrelated research at the Library of Congress and then started writing books and then got to the point where he wrote a book about the Wright Brothers that was almost entirely based on the fact that the Library of Congress has the archive of Wilbur and Orville Wright.

And so talking with him about that original research and discovery in the collections was really something. And Doris Kearns Goodwin was another person who did original research looking through materials and making connections. And then more recently we have had people who have delved into the collections and related the collections to what they're doing. And one is Professor Danielle Allen, who wrote a book about the Declaration of Independence and was so thrilled to see the drafts of the Declaration of Independence that the Library of Congress had, just fascinating.

So to have these people who have produced new knowledge using collections that we want to make sure that people know that you can look at these collections and you might make connections and write a book or just talk about what you found.

00:22:23 **Jacob Hodes:** What's been the most impactful book to you in your life and in your career?

00:22:28 **Dr. Carla Hayden:** Mine's a children's book. And I guess I can just say it and it's called Bright April, and I've talked about it quite a bit, because it was the, well, it was the first book that I learned about library fines, because I checked it out over and over and over and over, and my mom even says, you know, she had to make a deal with me it's either my extra like ice cream money or the fine for this book.

But I loved it so and I still have copies of it, because it was about a little brown girl who was a Brownie, like didn't make Girl Scouts, but I was a Brownie, had pig tails, and it was the first time, I loved books, I was about seven or eight and I loved books and reading, but I'd never seen someone that looked like me in a book. And it meant so much to me to see myself represented in an item that I treasured and knew was important and they had buildings filled with these things, books that I loved.

And then to open one and not just get a window of the world, but a mirror, and see myself, oh, you might be, oh, wow. And that book, even to this day, I treasure it, because I could point and see myself.

00:23:52 **Jacob Hodes:** I think that just dovetails right back to your philosophy behind investing into social infrastructure, providing that social infrastructure, that equity of access, so that people can see themselves and be inspired. You've also talked a little bit about the importance of a literate society and forbidden reading is one of those aspects that the importance of keeping a society inspired and forward looking and open minded to the future. I think that really dovetails well with what you just said in terms of the books that

inspired you.

00:24:25 **Dr. Carla Hayden:** Well, there's one book that I would recommend, and it's online now too, it's called the History of Reading by Alberto Manguel. And he has that chapter on forbidden reading and there's a section where he says at the very beginning, as dictators, slave owners and other elitist holders of power have always known an illiterate crowd is the easiest to rule. And if you cannot prevent people from learning to read, the next best recourse is to limit its scope.

And then he goes on about book burning and all the other attempts to restrict people's access to that important vehicle that was the only vehicle for many years that held information or ideas. And that concept of letting people choose to read what they want to read, in the older times we used to say as librarians let the books battle it out on the shelf, you know, we'd present different viewpoints and you, as a person, can decide if you want to read this view or that view or both views or make up your mind.

But that aspect of freedom to read is important, because that gives the person a chance to make their own decisions.

00:25:55 **Jacob Hodes:** We're very much a nation of communities and so maybe in closing you could just reflect on that, all the stops that you've made, whether it's Chicago, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., what you've learned when listening and talking to the people.

00:26:06 **Dr. Carla Hayden:** Orio Kama (ph.), Washington and in West Virginia and also being in Santa Fe and being in, up in Massachusetts, in Walden, Massachusetts, and the thing that is striking is that you can walk into those libraries and they are community centers, they are places of opportunity and there's a commonality. And that's where you really feel that fabric of having this access. I've been in Native communities and reservations and it's still the same that library in these communities.

And in New York City and everywhere. I've been in Mississippi twice, and it's the same thing, Jackson, Mississippi and in Scarsdale. All over the country. About 22 states now. I'm trying to get to 50. But that connection. And then having those local libraries in communities connect to their national library has been when it's been very rewarding. But there's that commonality.

00:27:20 **Jacob Hodes:** Well, Dr. Hayden, thank you very much for being with us. You've had an extraordinary career. You're an extraordinary leader. And I think the future has so much in store for you and for the rest of the country because of it. Thank you so much for being here and I look forward to seeing you, hopefully in person, again soon.

00:27:34 **Dr. Carla Hayden:** Thank you to Brown too for being interested.

00:27:37 **Jacob Hodes:** Thanks Dr. Hayden.

00:27:37 (MUSIC)

00:27:43 **Ken Stuzin:** Hello again. This is Ken Stuzin. Thank you for joining us as we continue this effort to seek out insights that help us understand our rapidly evolving world. If you enjoyed listening, we encourage you to subscribe to the podcast. We will be back with another episode next week, an engaging conversation with Dr. David Edelman, one of the leading experts on technology's impact on national security, economic policy and the media. Until then, be well and stay safe. (MUSIC)