

Carla Hayden was sworn in as the 14th Librarian of Congress on September 14, 2016. Hayden, the first woman and the first African American to lead the national library, was nominated to the position by President Barack Obama on February 24, 2016, and her

nomination was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on July 13<sup>1</sup>.

Below is an excerpt from a transcript of a Washington Post interview with Dr. Hayden during black history month 2021. Dr. Hayden was asked about a quote from Frederick Douglass, "Once you learn to read, you will be forever free."

This is her response: And you can see, I get animated when I hear that quote again, and just what prompted Frederick Douglass to say that, because there were laws in almost every state that forbid or forbade slaves from learning to read. And why was that? Because once you learned to read, you can read about people being freed in the Bible. That was a big conflict. Okay, they wanted slaves to learn to read, to read the Bible so they could learn about the afterlife so that their conditions where they are now, don't worry, you'll go to heaven. But then they found that, wow, they could read about let my people go. So maybe we'll have a Bible that is a condensed version for colored people, as they were called. There's a wonderful quote in the book *The History of Reading* by Alberto Manguel and it's in a chapter called "Forbidden Reading." And the photograph, starting at the chapter, has a woman who's outside of a shack. You can tell she probably was a former slave, and she has a book. And what he says is that as dictators, slaveholders, and other illicit owners of power have 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 censorship and all of these things. So, reading--and that has been a gateway for me and so many other people, to open up windows to other places, times, to give you an opportunity to go beyond your current conditions, and to find hope in history. That's one of my favorite things that I hold dear, that there's hope in history.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.loc.gov/about/about-the-librarian/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/washington-post-live/2021/03/24/transcript-race-america-history-matters-with-librarian-congress-carla-hayden/>

