

FROM THE LIBRARIAN

After more than 200 years — and 13 white men — we finally have our first woman Librarian of Congress! Carla Hayden is not only the first woman but also the first African American to hold the esteemed position. Perhaps most important, Carla Hayden is a *librarian*.

Wait, haven't they all been librarians? Surprisingly, no. They have mostly been academics, lawyers, authors, and businessmen, with only one librarian among them (Herbert Putnam, the eighth Librarian of Congress).

But why is it important that the Librarian of Congress actually be a librarian?

I'm glad you asked.

What do you see when you picture a librarian? An older, frumpy white lady wearing glasses, with her hair in a bun, shushing everyone who walks through the door? Perhaps she pushes a squeaky cart of books to the giant desk, sits down, and starts stamping. Perhaps she shushes again and continues stamping. Shush, push, stamp. Shush, push, stamp.

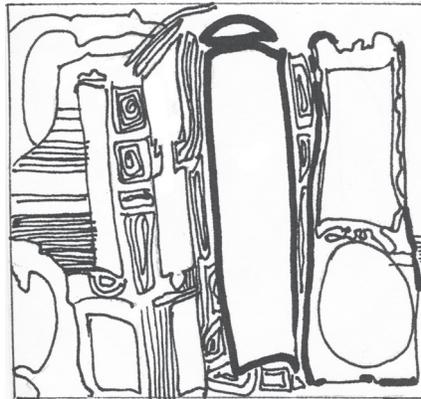
Where does that stereotype even come from? Marian from *The Music Man*? Spinster Mary from *It's a Wonderful Life*? We can do better than this! After all, Batgirl was a librarian. And have you seen *Party Girl*? My librarian friends are more like Parker Posey than the dowdy, cardigan-wearing crones so often portrayed, and librarians have been discussing and deconstructing the stereotypes for years.

(Okay, maybe the part about wearing cardigans is true.)

I'm sure you know a wicked-sharp librarian who is your go-to for all the things you don't know. One of that librarian's superpowers is finding answers to the toughest questions and making it look easy.

But let me tell you more about what librarians do.

We help you figure out the title of "that new book by that woman who wrote that one other book...oh, with the blue cover!" But we can also help



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you find that book on the shelves or download the e-copy to your Kindle. We can help you research anything from aardvarks to Zoroastrianism and teach you how to cite your sources in your paper or presentation.

We're also on the cutting edge of technological advances, like open access, e-learning, and digital archiving,

to name a few. And those "fake news" sites that are all the rage right now? Librarians have been fighting against those forever. It's what we do.

But that's not all. We're on the front lines of upholding democracy, equality, and the First Amendment. We vehemently oppose censorship and believe that unfettered access to information is the cornerstone of a free society. More than just the "punk-ass book jockeys" Leslie Knope derides on *Parks and Recreation* (but I still love you, Leslie), librarians are educators, leaders, researchers, partners, community members, and changemakers. We've largely left behind the myth of neutrality that had us on the wrong side for so long, in favor of a fierce commitment to equity and justice.

Now *more than ever* we need librarians. We need librarians like Carla Hayden, who understand the power of libraries in the maintenance and growth of a free and educated citizenry. We need librarians who will lead the fight to protect privacy, intellectual freedom, and free speech. My hope, and the hope of many of my colleagues and friends, is that Carla Hayden will represent the librarianship we know and love. Despite the certain challenges, I'm confident that, together, librarians and those who love libraries can be the change we want to see in the world.

Karla J. Strand