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Steve McKinzie

Catawba College, smckinzi@catawba.edu

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Op Ed — Carla Hayden, the American Library Association and Where We Go from Here

by **Steve McKinzie** (Library Director, Catawba College, 2300 W. Innes Street, Salisbury, NC 28144; Phone: 704-637-4449) <smckinzi@catawba.edu>

Whatever may be your thinking about **Carla Hayden** as the new Librarian of Congress, one has to admire her achievement. She became the first woman, the first professional librarian, and the first African-American to hold the office. She was also the first former President of the **American Librarian Association** to be appointed Librarian of Congress. **Carla Hayden** is remarkable, and she deserves credit as a trail blazer and a solid leader.

But with all that being said, her appointment causes me a good many misgivings. No, I don't mean about **Hayden** per se. I suspect she will do a superb job. What bothers me about her appointment, however, is that her selection as the Librarian of Congress could establish an especially dangerous precedent. I frankly fear that after **Hayden's** tenure (which is due to span ten years), a good many of us in the professional library world will begin to insist that only an **ALA**-accredited librarian has the prerequisite credentials and consummate expertise to manage the complexities of the nation's most important library.

Of course, such a contention from among us would be altogether self-serving, but it would also be wrong. To be sure, the Librarian of Congress must have consummate management skills, a large measure of integrity, and the ability to deal wisely with a host of digital, copyright and intellectual property issues. But, the Librarian of Congress doesn't have to hold **ALA**-accredited librarian degrees any more than we require that our country's President hold a law degree or that a company's CEO has to have a doctorate in economics. Such credentials can in some instances be helpful, but they are never prerequisites. In fact, several of our most outstanding Librarians of Congress never held library degrees.

From the beginning of the twentieth century and just prior to **Carla Hayden's** confirmation, six people have held the position — an interesting, accomplished, and diverse lot to be sure. Two, **Herbert Putnam** (1899-1939), one of the longest serving, and **Quincy Mumford** (1954-1974) were both librarians in the technical sense and served as public librarians prior to their appointment. **Archibald MacLeish** (1939-1944), of course, was a gifted poet, literary figure and famous expatriate. The other three, who despite their differences came to their appointment as outstanding scholars and accomplished academics:

Luther Evans (Librarian of Congress from 1945-1953) earned a doctorate from **Stanford** in 1927, taught at the university level and became part of **Franklin Roosevelt's** "Brain Trust," in the mid-thirties. **Daniel Boorstin** (Librarian of Congress from 1975-1987) was an outstanding American historian and writer. **James Billington** (Librarian of Congress from 1987-2015) had an **Oxford** PhD and taught at both **Harvard** and **Princeton**, prior to his tenure as the Librarian of Congress.

It should also be noted that these latter three, whom were both writers and researchers, brought an interesting dimension to their appointment. As an old colleague of mine with a **Vanderbilt** PhD in history and a published scholar himself recently remarked about the three former scholar Librarians of Congress, "all three had actually used libraries — and used them extensively — in their work as professional academics." He contended that, as active library researchers and serious patrons of the collections, such individuals would bring the insights and perspective of the user to their position as the Librarian of Congress. They wouldn't be wearing those professional blinders that so many of us as librarians obtain in the course of our training. On the contrary, they would be approaching their work outside the normal framework of public or technical services. They would be thinking outside of the box. Intuitively, they would understand the frustrations of the normal library patron — the challenges of the regular researcher, and the trials of the average scholar.

Also all three of these scholar Librarians of Congress had little or no managerial training, nor had they labored extensively as librarians prior to their appointment. Yet within their various tenures, they all achieved an extraordinary level of success. They exemplified, I suspect, to an amazing degree the **Peter Drucker** principal that "Management is doing things right. Leadership is doing the right things." Somehow they were leaders who did the right things.

Also, as librarians, we need to remind ourselves that such leadership doesn't always emerge from the ranks of the places one might expect. In the world outside of libraries, you don't necessarily choose your best surgeon to run the hospital, the finest teacher to direct the university or

your most skilled craftsmen to manage the trade union. One can never bestow leadership by special training or specific accreditation.

Consequently, I applaud **Carla Hayden's** current appointment as the new Librarian of Congress, and

I commend her career as a librarian. But all of us who share her professional expertise — all of us who carry with us the essential **ALA**-accredited **MLS** union card — need to jettison the notion that may follow her tenure — the predictable contention that henceforth only a professional **ALA**-accredited Librarian should serve as Librarians of Congress. That idea has to go. Whenever **Dr. Hayden** completes her tenure and steps down from her position, we need to get the best person for the job — whoever that may be and with whatever credentials they have. 🐾



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The awesomely energetic **Roger Schonfeld** and **Ithaca S+R** have just released the 2016 **Ithaca S+R US Library Survey**. I have to wonder if **Roger** ever sleeps! At last count, he had three kids and a wife and an incredibly demanding travel schedule. Plus he takes time out for Twitter! **Ithaca S+R's** 2016 library survey queries library deans and directors about strategy and leadership issues. There is evidence across the survey that library directors feel increasingly less

valued by, involved with, and aligned strategically with their supervisors and other senior academic leadership. Compared with the previous survey cycle in 2013, fewer library directors perceive that they are a part of their institution's senior academic leadership and that they share the same vision for the library with their direct supervisor. Only about 20% of respondents agreed that the budget allocations they receive from their institution demonstrates recognition of the value of the library. The entire report must be read and digested! DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.303066>

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