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PASSING SHADOWS:
ILLUMINATING THE VEILED LEGACY OF BELLE DA COSTA GREENE

Stephanie Danette Smith

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Library and Information Science

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative historical reinterpretation examines the life of Belle da Costa Greene, an enigmatic and self-obscured African-American librarian using specific identity theories to promote the need for race studies in librarianship. Primary source documents, biographies, and additional secondary sources contribute to a retrospective retelling of the significance of Greene’s concealed racial background, her resulting library career, and her dual contribution to the field of librarianship. The reinterpretation is theoretically informed by Erik H. Erikson’s psychosocial stages of human development and James E. Marcia’s ego-identity statuses which provide insight into why Greene masked her racial identity. Critical Race Theory (CRT) informs the research and CRT counter-storytelling acts as the narrative method used to retell Greene’s life story.
To Belle Marion Greener and Belle da Costa Greene:

Two noteworthy names, two amazing lives, and two unforgettable legacies—one veiled yet both forever treasured and preserved
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE .............................................................................................................................................i
COPYRIGHT ..................................................................................................................................................ii
ABSTRACT ....................................................................................................................................................iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ............................................................................................................................v
LIST OF FIGURES ....................................................................................................................................viii

CHAPTER 1: Introduction ......................................................................................................................1
  Problem Statement ............................................................................................................................1
  Statement of Purpose .......................................................................................................................2
  Research Questions ..........................................................................................................................2
  Overview of Methodology ................................................................................................................3
  Research Significance ........................................................................................................................3
  Research Rationale ...........................................................................................................................4
  Researcher Assumptions ....................................................................................................................6
  Definition of “passing” .......................................................................................................................7
  Organization of the dissertation .........................................................................................................8

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review .............................................................................................................9
  Introduction ........................................................................................................................................9
  Race Issues and LIS ..........................................................................................................................10
  Critical Race Theory .........................................................................................................................12
  Erikson and Marcia’s Identity Theories .............................................................................................16
  Summary ............................................................................................................................................27

CHAPTER 3: Methodology ....................................................................................................................30
# Table of Contents

[**Introduction**](#) ........................................................................................................................................ 30

[**Data Sources and Collection**](#) ........................................................................................................ 31

[**Primary Sources**](#) .......................................................................................................................... 32

[**Secondary Sources**](#) ........................................................................................................................ 33

[**Data Source Limitations**](#) .................................................................................................................. 34

[**Summary**](#) ......................................................................................................................................... 36

[**CHAPTER 4: Discussion**](#) .................................................................................................................. 37

[**Introduction**](#) ........................................................................................................................................ 37

[**The Greener Side of Life**](#) ................................................................................................................... 40

[**Becoming Belle da Costa Greene**](#) ...................................................................................................... 54

[**Disguised Dignity**](#) .................................................................................................................................. 57

[**A “Passing” Phenomenon**](#) .................................................................................................................. 61

[**An Assured Legacy**](#) ................................................................................................................................ 68

[**A “Passing” Legacy**](#) .......................................................................................................................... 84

[**CHAPTER 5: Conclusion**](#) .................................................................................................................... 95

[**Recommendations**](#) ........................................................................................................................... 98

[**Final Thoughts**](#) .................................................................................................................................... 100

[**REFERENCES**](#) ..................................................................................................................................... 108
LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE

1. Belle da Costa Greene in Egyptian Costume ca. 1910 ........................................ix
Chapter One

Introduction

The purpose and focus of this dissertation is to encourage investigations and discussions of race issues in librarianship by the specific historical reinterpretation and examination of the life and legacy of Belle da Costa Greene using particular theories of identity. The dissertation presents a new approach to historical research as it combines the research with identity and racial theories in order to understand the impact of Belle da Costa Greene’s life to a particular field of social sciences.

This type of historical research is significant because: (1) it reviews the life and successful career of a librarian who was not widely known to be a minority, (2) it offers a prospective analysis of the psychosocial and racial identity of the subject, and (3) it provides an exemplar of the complexities and hardships of minority librarians. Further, this type of research answers the call of previous library and information science (LIS) scholars who addressed the need to acknowledge and illuminate the accomplishments of minority librarians in the field of LIS. Moreover, the dissertation contributes to professional knowledge and practice in LIS because it aids in the awareness of the unique struggles and successes of minority librarians and potentially assists in eliminating racial stereotypes and continued discrimination within the profession.

Problem Statement

Issues of race in librarianship are often discussed in relationship to: the history of library service to minority patrons and communities, race issues within library organizations, segregated libraries, minority recruitment in LIS, and racial discrimination in hiring practices (Du Mont, 1986; Dawson, 2000; Jordan & Josey, 2000; Josey, 1994; Kim & Sei-Ching,
2008; Wheeler, 2005). Many organizations such as the Association of Research Libraries, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the American Library Association have attempted to address these concerns as well as the need to increase diversity within the LIS profession through scholarship, fellowship, and leadership programs (Kim & Sei-Ching, 2008). Yet the study of the specific achievements and struggles of many minority librarians has waned (Dawson, 2000; Kim & Sei-Ching, 2008). In order to promote the need for race studies in LIS and to foster sustained diversity in the field, it is therefore essential to uphold the telling of old and new stories of minority librarians’ hardships and triumphs.¹

**Statement of Purpose**

The major objective of this dissertation is to promote the study of race and race studies in LIS by presenting a retrospective reinterpretation of Belle da Costa Greene’s life and library career. The primary intent of this research is to offer a reinterpretation of the history of race in librarianship by illuminating the life and disguised racial legacy of Belle da Costa Greene, as an African-American librarian and the first Director of the Pierpont Morgan Library, now the Morgan Library and Museum (Morgan Library). The research is guided by primary and secondary sources including a sample of Greene’s business correspondence archived at the Morgan Library and a review and discussion of pertinent biographies and relevant secondary sources.

**Research Questions**

1). How do the life and library career of Belle da Costa Greene promote the need for discussions on the history and impact of race and race studies in LIS?

¹ The most recent book on the life of an African-American librarian, Regina Anderson Andrews was published in 2014. See, Ethlene Whitmire, *Harlem Renaissance Librarian: Regina Anderson Andrews*, University of Illinois Press, 2014. In an email to Ms. Whitmire about her book and a discussion of my proposed dissertation, she noted that there are many minority librarians that are still living that should have their stories told. Whitmire is currently an associate professor of LIS at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.
2). How do Critical Race Theory (CRT), CRT counter-storytelling, Erik H. Erikson’s psychosocial theories of human development, and James E. Marcia’s ego-identity statuses contribute to a new perspective on the existing scholarly literature and history about Belle da Costa Greene?

**Overview of Methodology**

This historical reinterpretation acts as qualitative research because it uses a narrative inquiry research approach. Narrative research varies in its forms and applications and has been used in numerous disciplines (Creswell, 2007; Pickard, 2013). One practice of narrative inquiry occurs by the study of the life of an individual and through the telling of stories (Creswell, 2014). Further, narrative inquiry may assist in the new interpretation of past historical events and provide insight into the life choices of individuals (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) described the process of narrative inquiry as, “studying one or two individuals, gathering data through collecting their stories, reporting individual experience, and chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences” (p. 240).

The data sample was comprised of a wide variety of primary and secondary source material including: selected archival resources, books, articles, and newspapers. Because Greene is a historical figure whose racial identity was concealed, Erikson’s (1968, 1980, 1998) theories of psychosocial development across the life span and Marcia’s (1966, 1993) ego-identity statuses are combined with CRT and CRT counter-storytelling to provide theoretical and conceptual frameworks to discuss this pivotal aspect of Greene’s life through narrative inquiry.

**Research Significance**

On Sunday, March 11, 2012, Kim Janssen reported in the *Chicago Sun-Times* that an
unusual “treasure trove” had been discovered in an abandoned building in the Chicago’s tough south side neighborhood of Englewood (Janssen, 2012). The treasures, hidden in a steamer trunk in the attic of a home scheduled for demolition, were discovered to be the historical papers and records of Richard T. Greener, the first African-American to graduate from Harvard College, now Harvard University. The documents found included Greener’s 1870 Harvard diploma, his law licensed issued by the state of South Carolina, and other paraphernalia related to his presidential Foreign Service appointment in Vladivostok, Russia, as well his relationship to former General and President Ulysses S. Grant (Janssen, 2012).

Janssen’s (2012) article further noted that Greener’s additional achievements included: an appointment as a philosophy professor at the University of South Carolina in 1873, admission to the practice of law by the Supreme Court of South Carolina in 1876, being made Howard University’s law school dean in 1879, and being awarded, in 1902, the Order of the Double Dragon for his services to China in the Russo-Japanese War. Greener had also been the first Black university librarian for the University of South Carolina from May to October 1875 (Harter, 1997). However, Greener would not be the only noteworthy librarian in his family. Thirty years later, his daughter, Belle Marion Greener, would also become a celebrated librarian but for a totally different reason and with the completely transformed name of Belle da Costa Greene.

**Research Rationale**

In 2007, Heidi Ardizzone completed the only known and published full-length biography on Greene. Ardizzone’s biography of Greene received mixed reviews (Couch, 2010; Kernan, 2007; Richardson, 2008; Weber, 2007). Several of the reviews were
frustrated that Ardizzone’s biography did not provide a more detailed treatment of Greene’s library career.

Kernan’s (2007) book review described Ardizzone’s work as failing to “deliver any real idea of Greene’s professional accomplishment” and that more was needed to understand the legacy of “self-invented Belle da Costa Greene, who transformed a rich man’s hobby into a world-class museum and scholarly institution” (p. 51). Richardson (2008) asserted that while “Ardizzone’s research is wide ranging and meticulous . . . it will be up to someone else to tell Greene’s story as it deserves to be told” (p. 4). Weber (2007) concluded that Ardizzone’s research was extremely thorough but that her prose was repetitive and “prevents her from telling Greene’s story in an engaging way” (p. 2). Couch’s (2010) book review depicted Ardizzone’s work as primarily focusing on Greene’s mixed race ancestry and the impact it had on her life. Further, Couch (2010) concluded that Ardizzone’s biography validates that Ardizzone may be an expert on race issues in American culture but “that Greene’s story is still untold, her impact in the world of libraries still unevaluated” (pp. 376-377).

However, Greene was an extremely complex historical figure because of her ancestry, her racial ambiguity, her professional success, and her lifestyle. Ardizzone (2007) noted in the opening chapter of her biography that she primarily sought as a focus to investigate Greene’s social life and experiences as well as her background and the times she inhabited because “Belle lived in a series of social realities, moved in and out of different circles (sometimes permanently), and embraced complicated public identities” (p. 9). Denzin (1989) discussed that biographers can limit how they choose to represent their subject.

When a life is written about, the story that is told may attempt to cover the full sweep of a person’s experiences, or it may be partial, topical, or edited,
focusing only on a particular set of experiences deemed to be of importance. (p. 29)

Thus, Denzin (1989) articulated that biographies could be the foundation for further investigative study and analysis into the lives and stories of others. Ardizzone’s (2007) biography supplied insight into the details surrounding Greene’s racial ambiguity and how it may have ultimately shaped her life and allowed her to have an extraordinary library career. Therefore, Ardizzone’s (2007) biography was a valid starting point to expand the understanding of Greene’s significant accomplishments as a minority librarian.

Although Ardizzone’s (2007) biography of Greene was used a secondary source, the importance of this work was not overlooked and it served as the initial resource to inform this reinterpretation of Greene’s life. According to Ardizzone (2007), Greene “destroyed her personal papers” and thereby eliminated a potentially vast personal source of primary source material for research (p. 466). To account for the loss, this research utilized works such as Ardizzone’s (2007) biography and other secondary sources that have previously reported on personal references to Greene to enhance appreciation of her career legacy as a Black librarian hiding in plain sight.

Researcher Assumptions

Ardizzone’s (2007) biography and other scholarly literature that was used in this reinterpretation presumed that Belle da Costa Greene “passed.” Greene is said to have thus hid her racial identity, living out most of her life as a White woman. This dissertation referenced many secondary sources that discussed the assumed fact that Greene “passed” and never publicly claimed to be Black or of African-American descent (Ardizzone, 2007; Secrest, 1979; Strouse, 1999a). Therefore, the research was conducted under the assumption that Greene chose to conceal her true racial identity based upon secondary source evidence
and inconclusive personal statements by Greene. All of the primary source research obtained was mainly focused on Greene’s work at the Morgan Library and did not confirm or rebut the belief that Greene “passed.”

**Definition of “passing”**

*Passing:*

“‘Passing,’ more particularly, is a study of the dilemma of the ‘Negro’ whose blood is nearly all White, whose appearance is nearly all White, and who is tempted to step over the strict bounds of ‘colored’ society into the freedom of the White world” (“The dilemma of mixed race,” 1929, p. 88).

“Passing . . . was a growing phenomenon at the turn of the twentieth century. But the term ‘passing’ itself reflects nineteenth-century racial definitions, suggesting that people who were really Black were now pretending to be White. . . Historically, however, passing has been experienced and understood in many ways: as a rejection of the fiction of race, as a betrayal of the African American community, as an acceptance of the dominant racial ancestry of a mostly White person, as a form of assimilation, as a cultural adaptation comparable to the Anglicization of European ethnic names, as resistance to the illogic of the one-drop rule” (Ardizzone, 2007, p. 57).

“The genealogy of the term passing in American history associates it with the discourse of racial difference and especially with the assumption of a fraudulent “White” identity by an individual culturally and legally defined as “Negro” or Black by virtue of a percentage of African ancestry. As the term metaphorically implies, such an individual crossed or passed through a racial line or boundary—indeed trespassed—to assume a new identity, escaping the subordination and oppression accompanying one identity and accessing
the privileges and status of the other” (Ginsberg, 1996, pp. 2-3).

**Organization of the dissertation**

The remaining chapters of the dissertation follow accordingly: Chapter 2 presents a literature review of scholarly material pertaining to the relevant issues; Chapter 3 details the methodology chosen to best answer the research questions; Chapter 4 discusses the primary and secondary data sources in relationship to the issues raised from the literature review, the research questions, and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks; and Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation with final statements and thoughts and further recommendations.
Chapter Two

“The peculiar institution of slavery in the US set the tone for racism in America and racism in American librarianship.” (Josey, 1994, p. 533)

Literature Review

Introduction.

This dissertation seeks to enhance the need for more in-depth research into the complex issues surrounding race and the history of minority librarians by examining the life and career of Belle da Costa Greene. In this reinterpretation, Critical Race Theory (CRT) was the chosen theoretical and conceptual framework used to inform the various racial aspects of the research. CRT was used in conjunction with two key theoretical identity frameworks to clarify Greene’s unique identity issues.

The identity theories of Erik H. Erikson and James E. Marcia have not previously been applied in the field of LIS nor have they been applied to specifically address racial passing. However, both Erikson’s theoretical framework of psychosocial human development and Marcia’s ego-identity statuses shape the reinterpretation by reconstructing the development of various aspects of Greene’s psychosocial and racial identity. Further, Erikson and Marcia’s theories on identity and human development provide the foundational basis for a reinterpretation of Greene’s life and career in historical and cultural context.

The identity theories of Erikson and Marcia were combined with CRT to demonstrate how and why Greene’s legacy fits within the larger and more complex issues of racism and exclusion of African-Americans in the history of librarianship. In addition, CRT’s specialized form of storytelling, known as counter-storytelling provided a distinct and

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2 Erikson addressed identity and race with regards to African-Americans in chapter 8 titled, Race and the Wider Identity (or elsewhere as “The Concept of Identity in Race Relations”) in Identity: Youth and Crisis (1968). While Erikson discussed issues of negative identity and the colored races, he did not specifically address racial or Black racial passing.
multifaceted narrative of Greene’s unique personalized racial experience. Also, through the use of historical information, CRT counter-storytelling enhanced the racial paradox of Greene’s life.

**Race Issues and LIS.**

Issues of race and racism are not novel in the field of librarianship. Specifically, the struggles and successes of African-American librarians have been addressed by scholars for several decades (Dawson, 2000; Du Mont, 1986; Jordan & Josey, 2000). The accomplishments and setbacks of African-Americans in the library and information science profession are noteworthy because they provide a telling narrative of racism and the need for diversity in the field. According to Dawson (2000), most scholarly research on African-Americans in librarianship noted Black librarians and their accomplishments, chronicled major studies and themes, and discussed areas that need further research. Many topics are discussed in LIS: library demographics, key figures and biographical sources, professional organizations, library development and services in public, academic, and school libraries, library education, civil rights, segregation, discrimination, and leadership recruitment (Dawson, 2000).

Dawson (2000) acknowledged the benefit of this early record of scholarship but encouraged further investigation in the African-American library experience.

As African-American librarians plan and visualize library and information services for twenty-first century users, the struggles and experiences of early pioneers and visionaries can serve as inspiration, as road maps, as reminders of the cultural and information needs of current and future African-American populations. Those written histories of individuals, organizations, and foundations tell only part of the story and are partially written. The resources appear in various sources, but are accessible only through diligence and through road maps provided by library historians, library educators, and practicing professionals. *These authors demonstrate the need for current African-American professionals to write their stories and experiences to*
This research seeks to answer Dawson’s petition by the reinterpretation of the life, career and racial experience of a veiled African-American librarian by an African-American librarian.

Peterson (1996), however, has posited that investigating broader social constructs of race and racism will do more to the understanding of the relationship between race and librarianship. Peterson (1996) used conflict theory as a framework to evaluate race and racism in LIS as it pertained to African-Americans. Peterson (1996) purported that conflict theory was contact between two or more individuals or groups that choose to cooperate or to have conflict. She recognized that when there is conflict that “power and dominance must be organized and articulated for social control” because race is a “fluid, social construct devised as a form of social control . . . and the categorization of differences can be used as a method of power, dominance, oppression, and social control” (pp. 163-164). Therefore, Peterson (1996) stated that a critical analysis of race and racism in the LIS profession is warranted.

If the profession is serious about understanding race and racism as they relate specifically to librarianship, . . . Race studies would be accorded the respect for intellectual expertise we award to other areas, and not dismissed as a subject area that emanates from personal characteristic and experience. . . . We would infuse our curriculum and research with race, gender, and social class and not leave these as asides and then define the limited work done as that of cranky whiners. We would bring historians, sociologists, and political scientists into our work to provide the content missing from so many of our discussions on race. Until then, library and information science will continue to be caught in the crossfire of racial conflict, for we will have no theory and no history to consult. (pp. 172-173)

A historical reinterpretation of Belle da Costa Greene’s life and library career analyzed within a Critical Race Theory framework represents the type of research that Peterson advocated.
Critical Race Theory.

The 1960s and 70s spawned a flood of writing in the legal field that was concerned with the issues surrounding race, color, and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Many legal scholars and activists sought to rebuke a steady onslaught of continuing racist behavior and laws that were springing up after the civil rights movement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). What resulted was a movement that triggered a scholarly debate about how to “transform the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 3). Thus, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an out-growth of the question of race and racism originally within the context of United States law and legal studies (Crenshaw, Gotunda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995).

CRT has since branched out and scholars entertain its discourse in other disciplines such as education, political science, and courses on ethnic and race studies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). While CRT has not been specifically implemented in the LIS field, CRT has been discussed and reviewed in the archival arena of information studies. Dunbar (2006) argued that “the use of CRT as a set of tools for archival research offer unique possibilities to construct alternative realities for people of color whose stories are usually submerged in collective or institutional memories” (p. 126). Dunbar (2008) would also later propose that the CRT framework could become the catalyst for a new theoretical concept in information studies known as critical race information theory (CRIT).

CRT has roots in other movements as well. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), CRT employed perceptions of radical feminism to continue to understand “the relationship between power and the construction of social roles, as well as the unseen, largely invisible collection of patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other types of
domination” (p. 5). Therefore, the CRT framework is influential in a wide range of academic fields.

There are three basic tenets of CRT: (1) racism is normal; it is the rule not the exception and it is hard to cure, (2) Whiteness as the dominant power structure, “White-over-color” fuels psychic and material purposes, and (3) social construction, “race and races are products of social thought” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 8). The tenet of social construction may prove useful in the understanding of race and racism in librarianship. As Delgado & Stefancic (2012) stated:

People with common origins share certain physical traits, of course, such as skin color, physique, and hair texture. But these constitute only an extremely small portion of their genetic endowment, are dwarfed by that which we have in common, and have little or nothing to do with distinctly human, higher-order traits, such as personality, intelligence, and moral behavior. That society frequently chooses to ignore these scientific facts, creates races, and endows them with pseudo-permanent characteristics is of great interest to critical race theory. (p. 8)

CRT also addresses the concept of intersectionality which recognizes that “everyone has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 10). Intersectionality is important in relationship to the proposed reinterpretation because Greene is Black, female, and a librarian. These aspects of her identity and profession play a unique role in how she handled herself and the choices she made.

Greene’s story will be reinterpreted using a form of CRT storytelling. Storytelling acts as a narrative methodology to express CRT (Dickinson, 2012). CRT storytelling attempts to convey personal racialized experience while combating traditional stereotypes (Treviño, Harris, & Wallace, 2008; Dickinson, 2012). According to Delgado & Stefancic (2012), the basic premise of CRT storytelling is to tell stories that are from the minority’s
perspective because “members of this country’s dominant racial group cannot easily grasp what it is like to be non-White” (p. 45).

Moreover, CRT storytelling provides a means for all readers to engage with the racialized experiences of the subject or subjects (Dickinson, 2012). Delgado & Stefancic (2012) asserted, “the hope is that well told stories describing the reality of Black and brown lives can help readers to bridge the gap between their worlds and those of others as engaging stories can help us understand what life is like for others and invite the reader into a new and unfamiliar world” (pp. 47-48). The usage of CRT storytelling can therefore heighten social concerns outside of the legal world by the performance of phenomenological investigations of the lives of people of color in a variety of disciplines (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT storytelling has its roots in the law but its underlying principle is to showcase the power of stories and to present the tangled issues of race and how it is viewed by minorities in America (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Dickinson, 2012).

Greene’s story will be told by a type of CRT storytelling called counter-storytelling. Counter-storytelling attempts to destroy the long-held misconceptions and stereotypes that dehumanize and marginalize minorities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). According to Solorzano & Yosso (2002), the counter-story is “a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (p. 39). The purpose of counter-stories is to challenge and even displace erroneous beliefs about minorities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Although it is assumed that Greene lived most of her life as a White woman, the use of CRT counter-storytelling provides a narrative method to showcase Greene’s professional capabilities as an African-American librarian and not in spite of her African-American
ancestry and true racial identity. Therefore, counter-storytelling acts to demonstrate that only by hiding her race was Greene afforded the opportunity to achieve professional success. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) corroborated that CRT storytelling and counter-storytelling are essential in fighting racism:

Stories can name a type of discrimination; once named, it can be combated. If race is not real or objective, but constructed, racism and prejudice should be capable of deconstruction; the pernicious beliefs and categories are, after all, our own. Powerfully written stories and narratives may begin a process of correction in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity. (pp. 49-50)

There are few primary sources that actually speak to Greene’s decision to “pass” and how it impacted her life (Ardizzone, 2007; Secrest, 1979; Strouse, 1999a). Most of the documentary sources that indicate that Greene “passed” are primarily confined to her own irreverent statements and other speculative references from people who knew or worked with her (Ardizzone, 2007; Secrest, 1979; Strachey & Samuels, 1983; Strouse, 1999a). Therefore, this reinterpretation will utilize the form of CRT counter-storytelling that enables a third person to tell another’s story or narrative (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

In this form of counter-storytelling, a third person exposes another’s racial experiences and responses by “biographical analysis in a socio-historical context” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 33). Greene destroyed all of her personal papers before she died in 1950 and there remain only inconspicuous references to her struggle with her racial identity in her personal correspondence with art critic Bernard Berenson (Ardizzone, 2007; Strouse, 1999a). Therefore, CRT and the narrative approach of counter-storytelling provide a proper theoretical and conceptual framework to consider how Greene dealt with “passing,” race, and racism in her life and library career.
Erikson and Marcia’s Identity Theories.

Erik H. Erikson is considered a key and leading pioneer in the history of identity development (Baddeley & Singer, 2007; Berger, 2014; Douvan, 1997; Stevens, 2008; “Theoretical frameworks of identity,” 2003). Erikson (1980) is notable for many advances in psychoanalysis including his theory that the process of psychosocial human development could be analyzed through a series of eight psychosocial stages. His eight psychosocial stages span the human life cycle from birth to death with each stage generally represented by an age range and an accompanying “crisis” or a developmental task (Erikson, 1980, 1998).

Erikson (1980) described his eight-stage theory of human growth as “inner and outer conflicts” that “emerge and re-emerge” in a “sequence of stages” (p. 52). He theorized further that there was a “gradual development” and “a progression through time of a differentiation of parts . . . systematically related to all others [that] depends on the proper development in the proper sequence” (Erikson, 1980, p. 54). The 2003 ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report summarized Erikson’s eight stage theory as one of the foundational theories of identity development.

Central to [Erikson’s] theory is the development of ego (that part of the personality that brings order out of our experiences). Our identity is the outward expression of our ego or who we really are. Erikson believed that the ego emerged part by part, as if like a plan (following developmental stages). The process of developing identity involves a linear process in which individuals develop ego ‘strengths’ to successfully complete a developmental task (or stage) to move to the next task. . . . . At the theory’s root is the concept of ego epigenesis, or the belief that a planned sequence of biological and psychosocial phases exists (“Theoretical frameworks of identity,” p. 10)

Erikson (1980) noted that “identity appears as only one concept within a wider conception of the human life cycle which envisages childhood as a gradual unfolding of the personality through phase-specific psychosocial crises” (p. 128). Essentially, an individual leaves each
stage having faced a conflict which results in a “crisis” or an elected point of decision which may or may not be positive (“Theoretical frameworks of identity,” 2003).

It is important to note that Erikson’s term “crisis” referred to an individual’s decision on how to handle a particular challenge and was therefore “not a major trauma but a time to take one road or another” (“Theoretical frameworks of identity,” 2003, p. 10). Erikson (1968) stated that crisis was a “successive step” to be thought of “in a developmental sense to connote not a threat of catastrophe, but a turning point, a crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential” (p. 96). Moreover, Erikson (1980) surmised his phases are not all inclusive:

The sequence of stages thus represents a successive development of the component parts of the psychosocial personality. Each part exists in some form before the time when it becomes ‘phase-specific,’ i.e., when ‘its’ psychosocial crisis is precipitated both by the individual’s readiness and by society’s pressure. But each component comes to ascendance and finds its more or less lasting solution at the conclusion of ‘its’ stage. It is thus systematically related to all the others and all depend on the proper development at the proper time of each; although individual make-up and the nature of society determine the rate of development of each of them, and thus the ratio of all of them. (pp. 128-130)

Erikson’s (1968, 1980, 1998) eight stages of human psychosocial development are considered a pivotal theoretical framework of identity development and represent for the purposes of this reinterpretation a new contribution to understanding the life and legacy of Belle da Costa Greene.

What follows is a concise summary of Erikson’s eight stages of psychosocial development as reported from several of his works: Identity: Youth and Crisis (1968), Identity and the Life Cycle (1980), and The Life Cycle Completed (1998).³ The first stage or

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³ Educator, Kathleen Stassen Berger’s 2014 book, titled The Developing Person through Childhood and Adolescence was also used to streamline this section and supplement my understanding of Erikson’s eight psychosocial stages.
stage one occurs in infancy, generally from birth to the first year of life (Erikson, 1968, 1980). The associated task or crisis at this stage is trust versus mistrust (Erikson, 1968). Trust can mean a “sense of one’s own trustworthiness” (Erikson, 1968, p. 96). Infants also learn whether to trust or mistrust the people around them and consequently others as they continue to age (Berger, 2014; Erikson, 1980). Erikson (1968) ascribed basic trust as a “pervasive attitude toward oneself and the world derived from the experiences of the first year of life” (p. 96).

Stage two begins in early childhood, usually between the ages of one and three, with the crisis being that of autonomy versus shame and doubt (Berger, 2014; Erikson, 1968). Erikson (1968) described this stage as one where, “interpersonal patterns are established which are united in the social modality of taking and holding on to things” (p. 100). Thus in this stage, children discover their ability to be independent and self-sufficient in early life activities, such as walking and toilet training, however, if this task is thwarted they may become shadowed with shame and doubt (Berger, 2014; Erikson, 1980).

Erikson (1968) labeled stage three as the play age with the child “being firmly convinced that he is a person on his own” but still needing to “find out what kind of a person he may become” (p. 115). This stage begins approximately at the age of three or four and presents the crisis of initiative versus guilt (Erikson, 1980). This “play age” examines if a child is able to learn, be adventurous, and adopt proper behavior and roles (Berger, 2014; Erikson, 1968). Erikson (1968) argued that the child “must emerge [from this stage] with a sense of initiative as a basis for a realistic sense of ambition and purpose” (p. 115).

Stage four is the stage termed school age, beginning at the age of six until age eleven (Berger, 2014; Erikson, 1980). Here, the crisis of industry versus inferiority is manifested
(Erikson, 1980). In this stage, a young child learns to appreciate self-discipline and the mastery of skills, and develops a viewpoint of themselves as “industrious or inferior, competent or incompetent” (Berger, 2014, p. 378). Significantly and relevant to this research, Erikson (1968) pointed out that inferiority may also mean more than the child’s “estrangement from himself and from his tasks—the well-known sense of inferiority” but also of societal inferiority (p. 124).

It is at this point that wider society becomes significant to the child by admitting him to roles preparatory to the actuality of technology and economy. Where he finds out immediately, however, that the color of his skin or the background of his parents rather than his wish and will to learn are the factors that decide his worth as a pupil or apprentice, the human propensity for feeling unworthy may be fatefully aggravated as a determinant of character development. (Erikson, 1968, p. 124, emphasis added)

Erikson’s first four stages of psychosocial human development are represented in the early stages of childhood; stages five through eight complete the life cycle (Berger, 2014; Erikson, 1968, 1980, 1998).

The most researched of Erikson’s eight stages is stage five, which commences in adolescence and is the final and concluding stage of childhood (Erikson, 1968, 1980). In this stage, the crisis concerns the formation of identity versus identity diffusion (Erikson, 1980). Berger (2014) related that it is in this stage that an individual asks “Who am I?” and must grapple with the multiple role possibilities to adopt (p. 472). Further, Erikson (1980) discussed that “some adolescents refight many of the crises of earlier years [being] never ready to install lasting idols and ideals as guardians of a final identity” (p. 94). Role models are thus an important aspect of stage five because the adolescent begins to consider the responsibilities of adulthood while questioning the validity of their upbringing (Erikson, 1968).
The adolescent now looks for an opportunity to decide with free assent on one of the available or unavoidable avenues of duty and service, and at the same time is mortally afraid of being forced into activities in which he would feel exposed to ridicule or self-doubt. (Erikson, 1968, p. 129)

Also, in stage five, an individual’s personal identity as it relates to their sexual, political, religious, and vocational self begins to be established (Erikson, 1998; Berger, 2014).

The main goal of adolescence is identity achievement (Erikson, 1968, 1980, 1998). Berger (2014) purported that Erikson found identity achievement to be resolved where an individual “reconsiders the goals and values of their parents and culture, accepting some and discarding others, [and] discerns their own identity” (p. 472). Conversely, identity or role confusion was manifested when there was no adequate role model or if the adolescent chose to adopt multiple characteristics from different models (Erikson, 1980).

Erikson also labeled role confusion as identity diffusion (Erikson, 1980). Elements of identity diffusion are often indicative of certain behaviors such as lack of concentration and “excessive awareness as well as an abhorrence of competitiveness” (Erikson, 1980, p. 138).

In addition, the crisis of adolescence may trigger a psychosocial moratorium. Erikson (1968) described psychosocial moratorium as a period of “free role experimentation” in which an adolescent may discover a distinct niche within society (p. 156). Erikson (1968) elaborated further on the significance of moratorium in identity development:

A moratorium is a period of delay granted to somebody who is not ready to meet an obligation or forced on somebody who should give himself time. By psychosocial moratorium, then, we mean a delay of adult commitments, and yet it is not only a delay. It is a period that is characterized by a selective permissiveness on the part of society and of provocative playfulness on the part of youth, and yet it also often leads to deep, if often transitory, commitment on the part of youth, and ends in a more or less ceremonial confirmation of commitment on the part of society. (p. 157)
James E. Marcia (1966) would later expand on Erikson’s terms of identity achievement, identity diffusion, and moratorium in his own research on identity and adolescence.

Young adulthood comprises stage six and has the associated crisis of whether an individual develops intimate relationships or remains isolated which is also known as intimacy and distantiation versus isolation (Erikson, 1968, 1980). Erikson (1980) termed the “counterpart of intimacy” as “distantiation” or “the readiness to repudiate, to isolate, and if necessary, to destroy those forces and people whose essence seems dangerous to one’s own” (p. 101). Berger (2014) further noted that fear of rejection and disappointment often forms the basis of an individual’s isolation.

Erikson (1968, 1980) argued that adolescents that formed firm identities in stage five are more willing to experience sex and other types of intimate relationships in stage six than those who did not. Youth who have yet to form identities often avoid interpersonal intimacy or engage in ‘promiscuous acts’ of intimacy thereby eluding “true fusion or real self-abandon” (Erikson, 1968, p. 135). According to Erikson (1968), the lack of intimate relationships in late adolescence or early adulthood evidence a desire to “settle for highly stereotyped interpersonal relations” and a “deep sense of isolation” (pp. 135-136). Erikson (1980) acknowledged that identity formation may still be taking place in stage six and in later stages. He stated, “while the end of adolescence is the stage of an overt identity crisis, identity formation neither begins nor ends with adolescence: it is a lifelong development . . .” (Erikson, 1968, p. 122).

Erikson’s seventh stage occurs in adulthood and is characterized by the crisis of generativity versus stagnation (Erikson, 1968, 1980, 1998). Generativity is often depicted through continued contribution to society either by working, raising a family, and other
forms of individual creativity; the opposite of this being stagnation or “boredom, and interpersonal impoverishment” (Berger, 2014; Erikson, 1968, p. 138). According to Erikson (1968), generativity is “primarily the concern for establishing and guiding the next generation” (p. 138). Conversely, Erikson (1980) asserted that “individuals who do not develop generativity often begin to indulge themselves as if they were their own one and only child” (p. 103).

Old age is the final and last stage that completes Erikson’s eight-stage life cycle of human psychosocial development (Erikson, 1968, 1980). The crisis in stage eight is described as integrity versus despair (Erikson, 1980). Erikson (1968) also defined this stage as one indicative of “ego integrity” (p. 139).

In the aging person who has taken care of things and people and has adapted himself to the triumphs and disappointments of being, by necessity, the originator of others and the generator of things and ideas—only in him the fruit of the seven stages gradually ripens. I know no better word for it than integrity. (Erikson, 1968, p. 139)

Ego integrity or feelings of worth emanate from the individual’s assessment and adaptation of life’s successes and failures (Erikson, 1980). If this task is not successfully resolved, the individual is likely to fear death or regret the lack of self-fulfillment. Erikson (1980) described this apathetic behavior as despair, “the feeling that the time is short, too short for the attempt to start another life and to try out alternate roads to integrity” (pp. 104-105). Berger (2014) characterized this stage as one where an individual reviews one’s life as a “meaningful whole” or “despairs at goals never reached” (p. 41).

Erikson’s (1980) eight stages of human psychosocial development and their corresponding crises provide a powerful way to explore the life of an individual as well as their interaction with the social environment across their life span. Therefore in
reinterpreting Greene’s narrative, Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development provide a means to discover how Greene’s identity racial and otherwise may have formed.

In this reinterpretation, age ranges were applied to discern the relevant time frames of Greene’s psychosocial development (Berger, 2014; Erikson, 1968, 1980). The following information allowed for the reinterpretation to properly relate the historical significance of the primary and secondary source data. Stages one through four occurred during 1879-1890 which spanned Belle’s birth until she was eleven years old. Stage five occurred during 1891-1899 when Belle was between twelve and twenty. Stage six occurred during 1900-1914 when Belle was between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five. Stage seven occurred during 1915-1938 when Belle likely entered adulthood at the age of thirty-six until the age of fifty-nine. Stage eight probably began in 1939 when she was sixty and ended when she died at the age of seventy in 1950. Attributing Greene’s age ranges to Erikson’s eight psychosocial stages provided the reinterpretation with a proper understanding of how to discuss the relevant psychosocial and identity concerns that were raised from the research.

Erikson (1975) also addressed how to analyze an individual’s life and its intersection with history through the process of psychohistory and psychobiography. Erikson’s psychobiographies of Gandhi and Martin Luther are considered seminal works in psychoanalytical history (Douvan, 1997; Stevens, 2008). Erikson’s psychobiography of Gandhi, titled *Gandhi’s Truth*, won Erikson the 1970 Pulitzer Prize (Erikson, 1975).

Psychohistory and psychobiography are methods to discover the identity development of historical persons and their corresponding influence at a particular historical moment (Douvan, 1997; Erikson, 1975; Stevens, 2008). Thus, analyzing the relationship between an

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4 The time frames as applied to Belle were based upon Erikson’s references to various ages mentioned in the eight psychosocial stages (Erikson, 1968, 1980). Berger (2014) also discussed the likely age ranges for Erikson’s eight psychosocial stages.
individual’s identity development and the corresponding historical times in which the person lived is invaluable because it enables an understanding of how individuals and society intersect and impact history and cultural development (Douvan, 1997). Further, Kramp (2013) asserted that Erikson also viewed psychobiography as a means to illuminate the failure of society to acknowledge its fault in the “psychological struggles” and strife faced by many historical figures (p. 46). While this reinterpretation of Greene is not a psychobiography per se, Erikson’s method of psychosocial biography lends itself as a potential technique of how to relate Greene’s life story.

Erikson’s contemporaries also explored new theories which expanded Erikson’s process of identity achievement (Marcia, 1966). Scholarly research in identity acquisition is primarily focused on adolescence or stage five of Erikson’s psychosocial stages of human development. James E. Marcia (1966) was one researcher who was inspired by Erikson’s theories of psychosocial development and identity acquisition, specifically the crisis of identity versus identity diffusion. However in Marcia’s (1966) research, he measured identity development not in stages but rather as “four concentration points along a continuum of ego identity achievement” (p. 551).

Marcia (1966) sought to determine an individual’s specific identity status by applying two variables, crisis and commitment to assess ego identity. Marcia (1966) argued that crisis referred to an adolescent’s period of decision between “meaningful alternatives” and commitment as “the degree of personal investment the individual exhibits” (p. 551). The four points of concentration that resulted from his study were: identity achieved, identity diffusion, moratorium, and foreclosure (Marcia, 1966).
These four modes’ definitions are important in understanding the acquisition and process associated with Erikson’s underlying stage five theory of identity versus identity diffusion. Marcia (1993) observed that Erikson’s stage five also presented the difference between an individual’s identity formation and identity construction. According to Marcia (1993), identity formation is the gradual realization by an individual of the separation of oneself from parents, classmates, or other social groups. This formation comprised an individual’s conferred identity in that the individual is made aware of their standing in the world and their own basic characteristics. By contrast, Marcia (1993) defined the constructed identity as a particular process:

Identity begins to be constructed when the individual begins to make decisions about who to be, with which group to affiliate, what beliefs to adopt, what interpersonal values to espouse, and what occupational direction to pursue. Most . . . individuals ‘have’ an identity in the original Eriksonian sense. Only some, however, have a self-constructed identity that is based upon superimposition of a decision-making process on the given or conferred identity. (p. 7)

Marcia’s (1966, 1993) four modes of identity status discussed individuals with identities that are conferred and constructed and their corresponding attributes.

Identity achieved individuals have experienced a crisis period but have made a commitment by “modifying or rejecting some conferred elements” and therefore have constructed identities (Marcia, 1993). According to Marcia (1993), identity achieved individuals tended to have their own “game plans” that were subject to revision and they valued their futures as a continual process of identity creation. Marcia (1993) ultimately described an identity achieved person as one who knows who they are, how they came to be, and made sure that they were integral in their own development. Conversely, individuals that fell in the category of identity diffusion were individuals with “no firm identity” (Marcia,
1993, p. 7). They may or may not have experienced a crisis period and generally failed to commit to any particular path (Marcia, 1966). Marcia (1993) further described those who are identity diffused as “lacking a coherent identity and future sense” being more presently minded with no control over their futures (p. 8).

Marcia’s (1966, 1993) two other intermediate identity statuses were foreclosure and moratorium. Berger (2014) inferred that individuals in identity foreclosure sought to prevent role confusion by adopting traditional values either from their parents or their environment. Marcia (1966) found that individuals in foreclosure have not experienced a crisis but have made a commitment to “become what others have prepared or intended him to become as a child” (p. 552). Thus, foreclosures have conferred identities and often do not explore alternatives (Berger, 2014).

Individuals with this identity status may also choose to “foreclose on an oppositional, negative identity—the direct opposite” of their parents expectations but still without significant thought or consideration (Berger, 2014, p. 472). Erikson (1975) first discussed negative identity as an “unruly part of the total identity” (p. 20).

> Every person and every group harbors a negative identity as the sum of all those identifications and identity fragments which the individual had to submerge in himself as undesirable or irreconcilable or which his group has taught him to perceive as the mark of fatal ‘difference’ in sex role or race, in class or religion. In the event of aggravated crises, an individual (or, indeed, a group) may despair of the ability to contain these negative elements in a positive identity. (p. 20)

He later defined negative identity as “an identity perversely based on all those identifications and roles which, at critical stages of development, had been presented to the individual as most undesirable or dangerous, and yet also as most real” (Erikson, 1980, p. 141). Such
negative identities often dispossessed an individual of constructing a distinct identity (Erikson, 1975).

Marcia’s (1966, 1993) fourth identity status was labeled moratorium. Individuals in moratorium were described as being in a crisis period struggling to make commitments that are likely ambiguous (Marcia, 1966). Berger (2014) asserted that this is often a means to delay making identity achievement decisions. However, Marcia (1993) believed that individuals in moratorium were attempting to construct their identities and were often willing to compromise. He argued that they vacillated between self-preoccupation and past preset standards (Marcia, 1993).

By using Marcia’s (1966, 1993) four ego-identity statuses in combination with Erikson’s eight psychosocial stages of human development, an investigation into Belle da Costa Greene’s identity formation and construction and its corresponding impact on her life and legacy can be performed.

**Summary.**

Various LIS scholars have researched issues of diversity and discrimination and have highlighted the achievements of notable minority librarians in articles, dissertations, and books (Dawson, 2000; Du Mont, 1986; Jordan & Josey, 2000; Josey, 1994; Nelson, 1996; Whitmire, 2007). However, scholars have also determined that there is a gap in the critical analysis of race and race issues in LIS which potentially alienates minority recruitment to the field (Dawson, 2000; Kim & Sei-Ching, 2008; Peterson, 1996; Wheeler, 2005).

This historical reinterpretation of the life and library career of Belle da Costa Greene bridges that gap by presenting an African-American librarian whose racial identity was unknown and uncelebrated. Here, CRT acts as one of the theoretical frameworks to explore
the racial reality of Greene’s life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Moreover, by reviewing Greene’s life and library career using CRT storytelling, the racial undercurrent of her story is emphasized (Treviño, Harris, & Wallace, 2008; Dickinson, 2012). Specifically, CRT counter-storytelling serves as the vehicle to relate, in third person narrative, the Black-White race dichotomy that Greene worked and lived (Dickinson, 2012).

By passing into White society, Greene’s true racial identity remained hidden. The decision to pass may indicate aspects of the early shaping of her individual identity. Therefore, this reinterpretation is unique because it presents the first attempt to examine Erikson (1968, 1980) and Marcia’s (1966, 1993) identity theories in relation to the racial passing of an individual. The review of historical documents and secondary sources provides an insight as to whether she struggled with crises in several of Erikson’s eight psychosocial stages and by what process, using Marcia’s (1966, 1993) four identity statuses, did she acquire her identity. Cutter (1996) observed in her discussion of race passing in Black literature that it oftentimes represented more than what is perceived:

‘Passing’ is more than just a racial strategy: it is a strategy ‘to be a person.’ Yet how can ‘passing’ for what one is not help an individual ‘to be a person’? Only when ‘passing’ becomes a subversive strategy for avoiding the enclosures of a racist, classist, and sexist society does it become truly liberating. (p. 75)

According to scholars and biographers, Greene and some members of her immediate family passed and took advantage of their fair complexions to reinvent themselves as White Americans with European ancestry (Ardizzone, 2007; Mounter, 2002; Secrest, 1979; Strouse, 1999a, 1999b).

Greene allegedly masked her African-American identity by asserting that she was of European and White southern ancestry (Ardizzone, 2007; Return of a birth, 1879; Secrest,
1979; Strouse, 1999b). She credited her middle name of “da Costa” and her unusual or exotic looks to her maternal grandmother, Genevieve da Costa Van Vliet who she said was of Portuguese ancestry. Greene further stated that her mother was from Richmond, Virginia, being a woman of old-fashioned dignity and cultivation (Ardizzone, 2007; James, James, & Paul, 1971; Strouse, 1999b). On her 1916 and 1920 United States passports, Greene swore that she was born in Alexandria, Virginia on November 26, 1887 (NARA, 1916, 1920). Her 1920 passport also reported that she swore that her father’s name was Richard Greene and that he died in England in 1899 (NARA, 1920). Under the guise of a White librarian, she became a force to be reckoned with in the rare books world. She showcased her professional acumen by acquiring numerous illuminated manuscripts, rare books and other ephemera for J. P. Morgan and the Pierpont Morgan Library (The first quarter century, 1949). This retrospective reinterpretation reviews her life and library career with an added emphasis on her identity formation in an effort to stimulate the need for the continued discussion of racial issues and the necessity for race studies in librarianship.

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5 Greene’s maternal grandmother was actually Hermione C. Peters Fleet who was born in Washington, D.C. in the late 1820s (Ardizzone, 2007). I also reviewed federal census records to confirm this information.

6 Greene’s mother was Genevieve Ida Fleet, born in Washington, D.C. to James and Hermione Fleet likely around 1850 (Ardizzone, 2007). Early federal census records confirm this information as well.

7 In April of 2014, I made a FOIA request with the United States Department of Passport Services Office for four additional passport applications for Belle da Costa Greene for the years, 1925, 1928, 1934, and 1936 (passport numbers were referenced on Belle’s passenger arrival records). As of August 8, 2015, the passport applications had not been found.
Chapter Three

Methodology

Introduction.

This is a qualitative historical reinterpretation that utilized narrative inquiry and historical research as its methods. Historical documentary research was performed using compiled primary source material, various secondary sources, and related historical and social critique and commentary. Narrative inquiry was applied to answer the research questions and to illustrate the need for critical discussions of race and race issues in LIS.

According to Pickard (2013), historical research is unavoidably qualitative because it requires interpretation. As a research method, historical research is relevant to all subject disciplines and often provides insight by the reconstruction of past historical events (Pickard, 2013). Data collected in historical research is extant. Pickard (2013) described historical research as “desk research” because “the majority of the data already exists and the task is to identify that data, locate and retrieve it, then analyze it in light of all of the other data that has been collected” (p. 168).

Narrative research is a qualitative design that emerged from the humanities (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2014) defined narrative research “as a design of inquiry from the humanities in which the reader studies the lives of individuals . . . this information is then often retold or restoried by the researcher into a narrative chronology” (pp. 13-14). As a qualitative method, narrative research has also been discussed as a good way to chart the path of an individual’s life story (Baddeley & Singer, 2007).

Erikson’s (1968, 1980) work on identity and psychosocial human development are the foundation that scholars have asserted has spurred the growth of the concept of narrative
identity research (Baddeley & Singer, 2007). Narrative identity research and those that perform this research have similar ideals that share a common thread of “cognitive models of autobiographical memory, a commitment to the study of sociocultural factors in identity, the adoption of a life span developmental perspective, and an openness to multimethod forms of investigation” (Baddeley & Singer, 2007, p. 178). In examining the documentary historical record in narrative research, Baddeley and Singer (2007) affirmed its all-inclusive nature:

Narrative research documents how parents, peers, and intimate partners in combination with societal scripts and templates guide individuals’ life stories in certain normative directions. At the same time, individuals give familiar cultural tales a fresh voice filtered through their idiosyncratic life experience and personal memory . . . One other important theme of the application of narrative methods to the study of identity over the life span is . . . the capacity of individuals to step back and draw inferences and lessons from the stories they tell of their lives. (p. 178)

The pairing of narrative and historical research methods was appropriate and necessary to frame and retell Greene’s life via CRT counter storytelling. Further, these research methods heighten the applicability of the theoretical identity frameworks of Erikson and Marcia in the reinterpretation.

**Data Sources and Collection.**

The data selection process included the preparation of an annotated bibliography to ascertain what data sources were available on Greene and if they were attainable. Most secondary sources were available and accessible in print or digital format; however, there were several archives worldwide that also had original documents that referenced Greene. Only primary source material located at the Morgan Library was utilized due to access constraints. The primary sources used consisted of 27 public records, four books written by Greene that detail the activities, acquisitions and collections of the Morgan Library during
her tenure, and a select sample of over 200 pages of Greene’s business correspondence archived at the Morgan Library in New York.  

**Primary Sources.**

The Morgan Library’s Collections Correspondence was available by research appointment only at the Morgan Library’s reading room in New York. Approval was obtained in advance to research the collections correspondence and the director of the Morgan Library’s reading room provided a 28 page partial list of the Pierpont Morgan Library & Museum, Records of the Director’s Office. The scope and content of this collection indicated the necessity to review this material to understand and appreciate Greene’s library career:

The files document in detail the purchases made by Pierpont Morgan and his successors both for the library and the art collections. They consist primarily of correspondence between Belle Greene . . . , and various art and book dealers, scholars, colleagues, and private collectors, along with invoices for items purchased . . . From 1905 until 1913, the year of Morgan’s death, the bulk of the correspondence is with Belle Greene, Morgan’s librarian, acting as his agent. *(Morgan Collections Correspondence, 2006, p. 2)*

The collection files were in the order originally setup by J. P. Morgan, which Greene later maintained in a “single alphabetical filing sequence” *(Morgan Collections Correspondence, 2006, p. 2).*

The Director’s files, series 1 for Greene spanned the years 1903-1948 and comprised boxes 1363-1373. The Director’s files, series 2 for Greene and the subsequent Pierpont

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8 The public records search was performed to obtain documents such as census, passport, passenger arrival records, birth, marriage, and death records. These records were obtained using Ancestry.com and Family Search.org at the Family History Center and the National Archives at Chicago.

9 The Director of the Morgan Library’s reading room, John Vincler, advised prior to my research appointment that the Morgan Collections Correspondence and the internal records of the Morgan were the most useful resources for my purposes. However, Greene is referenced in other archival collections at the Morgan. I had access to the Morgan Collection Correspondence for 2 full days and then for several hours over the course of 4 additional days in October of 2014.
Morgan Library Director, Frederick B. Adams spanned from the 1920s-1968 and consisted of boxes 1383-1399. Any files that were to be reviewed had to be requested in advance. Thus, the file selection process was straightforward and, while it was not completely random, to prevent the cherry picking of files, five entire boxes were chosen and all files within a box were reviewed for information. In addition, the director of the reading room and two of the Morgan Library’s curators suggested specific files to be reviewed based on the overall scope of the proposed research.

**Secondary Sources.**

Over 100 secondary sources that referenced Greene were initially reviewed. These sources were then appraised to assess data redundancy. Where information and/or references were repetitive, (this was especially the case with newspaper articles and some books), secondary sources were culled. Secondary sources were also not used where the information on Greene was extremely slight, such as with a factual reference to her as J. P. Morgan’s librarian.

A total of 85 secondary sources were used in this study and they consisted mostly of biographies, books, newspapers, book reviews, and articles. The secondary source information was then compiled in an Excel chart for organizational purposes and to track source titles, dates, type of information provided, and whether the information was cited elsewhere. Other secondary data sources, such as historical dissertations, were selected for necessary background information on Greene’s family and for historical context of the time in which Greene lived and worked (1879-1950).

In the fall of 2014, the Morgan Library was the site for the Rare Book School’s week-long course titled, Introduction to Illuminated Manuscripts. The course provided hands on
access to some of the Morgan Library’s vast and treasured illuminated manuscripts, many of which were purchased by Greene. The course was taught by the Curator of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, Roger Wieck.\textsuperscript{10}

This course was invaluable as it complemented the primary source research at the Morgan Library by providing educational and historical context for ascertaining Greene’s professional ability as the director of the institution and as a rare books librarian. The reinterpretation was further informed by participation in this course because it aided in the understanding of the significance of Greene’s work in this field as a minority librarian.

\textbf{Data Source Limitations.}

While there is a plethora of data sources relevant to Greene which spans the globe in various archives, libraries, and museums, the selections of data sources used for the purposes of this study were limited due to access constraints.

The primary source documents used in this study were from a limited and selected sample of Greene’s business correspondence archived at the Morgan Library. Her business correspondence served as excellent primary source material to relate and discuss her business acumen and achievements. Because the reinterpretation is mainly concerned with Greene’s legacy based solely on the work she performed for the Pierpont Morgan Library, this limitation was reasonable.

\textsuperscript{10} Wieck was recently appointed, as of June 23, 2015, Department Head of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, \url{http://www.themorgan.org/sites/default/files/pdf/press/RogerWieckPressRelease.pdf}

Further, Mr. Wieck arranged for me to look at MS M.1160 known as the “Belle Green Hours.” This book of hours was likely owned and notated by Greene to have been illuminated in Rouen, France in the late fifteenth century.

The Rare Book School’s course, Introduction to Illuminated Manuscripts emphasized illumination, and discussed chronological and stylistic development, iconography, nomenclature and other pertinent terminology, and text/picture relationships. The course concentrated on liturgical service books and the lectures dealt with topics such as Medieval Catholic dogma, liturgical practices, calendars and concepts of time, and rubrics (Rare Book School, course description page, \url{http://rarebookschool.org/courses/manuscripts/m50/}).
Greene burned her personal papers before her death (Ardizzone, 2007). However, Greene’s business correspondence is often tinged with references to her personal life and experiences. In addition, she was discussed in the personal correspondence and biographies of many of her contemporaries such as Isabella Stewart Gardner, Mary Berenson, H. P. Kraus and A. S. W. Rosenbach. Therefore, secondary sources were used to provide samples of this available correspondence.

Greene is also mentioned in several noteworthy biographies of her employers, J. P. Morgan and J. P. Morgan Jr., and in the biography of art critic and historian Bernard Berenson (Cohen, 2013; Forbes, 1981; Secrest, 1979; Strouse, 1999a). In addition, the reinterpretation reports on several accessible newspaper articles and other book references that detail and praise Greene’s expertise and prominence in rare books and illuminated manuscripts and some of her own personal experiences (“Big exhibition of pilgrim,” 1920; “Beautiful women of society,” 1913; “The cleverest girl I know,” 1912; Rosenbach, 1927; “Opportunity will come,” 1916). Greene, as the first Director of the Pierpont Morgan Library, also authored several surviving books that review the Pierpont Morgan Library’s acquisitions and offer summaries of her annual reports over numerous years (Greene, 1930, 1937, 1941, 1949). Thus while all available resources were not obtained and accessed, a varied and wide spectrum of sources were acquired and consulted to properly inform the research.

Primary personal data sources relevant to Belle da Costa Greene are limited. Over 600 letters of Greene’s personal correspondence with art critic and historian Bernard Berenson are only available at The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies’ Villa I Tatti in Florence, Italy. Fortunately, many of these letters have been
reproduced in part in several available secondary sources and biographer Heidi Ardizzzone transcribed and related many of these letters in Greene’s biography. In addition, Bernard Berenson, his wife, Mary, and Berenson’s patron, Isabella Stewart Gardner, also discussed Greene in their personal papers. Selected portions of their correspondence have been published and where the content of these letters was needed to inform the study, the appropriate secondary source was consulted and referenced.\textsuperscript{11}

Greene’s primary professional source data was limited solely to her business correspondence archived at the Morgan Library and Museum which is reasonable because the reinterpretation is focused on Greene’s legacy based on her work that she performed for J. P. Morgan and the Pierpont Morgan Library.

\textbf{Summary.}

This qualitative study employed the methods of narrative inquiry and historical research. The rationale for this methodology was suitable to address the proposed research questions. Both primary and secondary sources were chosen after performing due diligence to ascertain source availability, accessibility, and saturation of information. The collection of data was organized to maintain awareness of all sources. Data source limitations were reasonable based on time, cost, and access constraints and the research’s primary focus.

\textsuperscript{11} I attempted to obtain scanned copies of the 616 letters between Bernard Berenson and Greene and eight other letters between Greene and other persons. All of these letters are a part of the Berenson Archive housed at the Biblioteca Berenson, Villa I Tatti-Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies in Florence, Italy. Unfortunately, the cost of obtaining scans of the letters was prohibitive. Heidi Ardizzone transcribed all of the 616 letters and advised me that they refer more to Greene in a social context and that many of them were referenced in her biography. I was fortunate, however, to obtain several unpublished photographs of Greene with the help of I Tatti archivist Ilaria Della Monica.
Chapter Four

“Passing may thus lead to the higher insights of rising above and looking through the 'veil' of the color line, to an experience of revelation, to seeing while not being seen . . . a living reminder of the absurdity of racial divisions.” (Sollors, 1996, p. 2107)

Introduction

On December 28, 1913, *The Caucasian*, a newspaper published in Shreveport, Louisiana, reported on whether brains were catalogued. The reporter, Charles N. Lurie, supported his contention that brains would be more effective, if properly catalogued, by quoting the statement of “one of the best known of women librarians, who has charge of the splendid library collected by the late J. Pierpont Morgan, she is probably the highest salaried woman librarian on earth” (Lurie, 1913). Lurie (1913) recounted that after an Englishman had critiqued the New York Public library catalog, Ms. Belle da Costa Greene suggested that in order for knowledge to be properly organized in the brain it must be subject to mental discipline for proper usage and retrieval. Greene elaborated:

Either you know a thing yourself or you know where you can obtain information concerning it. New York has the finest catalogue in the whole world. So much is given people here that they expect everything. The trouble with people who are not satisfied with the catalogue is that their brains are not properly catalogued. (Lurie, 1913)

It is very telling that during the time when women were fighting for the right of suffrage and to be a recognized presence in America that Belle da Costa Greene was being quoted on the inefficient use of America’s brain power. Belle was not the famous daughter of an aristocrat nor was she descended from a blue-blooded eastern family. She was a rare books librarian and if it had been recognized, so much more.

Most historical records present Belle da Costa Greene as the stylish and formidable private librarian of banking and industrial tycoon John Pierpont Morgan (“Fifty thousand
dollars,” 1912; Pak, 2013; Secrest, 1979; White, 1978). Belle da Costa Greene’s name can now be found in dictionaries, encyclopedias, journals, articles, blogs, and numerous books that discuss both her exotic features and her competency as a rare books and illuminated manuscripts librarian and director of a renowned institution (Canfield, 1974; Couch, 2010; Ferguson, 2010; James, James, & Paul, 1971; Klinkenborg, 1991; Koppelmann, 2008; Louchheim, 1949; Popa, 2003; Rosenberg, 1997; Silver, 1995; Steele, 1999; Towner, 1970). However, none of the early historical sources recognized Greene as being of African-American descent. Nor was she ever acknowledged, prior to 1999, as being the fourth born child and second daughter of Richard T. Greener and Genevieve (Fleet) Greener who were both African-American (Ardizzone, 2007; Harvard College, 1895; Hoogenboom, 2008; Mounter, 2002; Return of a birth, 1879; Strouse, 1999a). Since very little primary source information exists about Belle Greener, research into her family history and upbringing is required to appreciate the life and legacy of this self-obsured Black librarian.

Belle Marion Greener was born in 1879, fourteen years after the end of the Civil War and just after the period known as Reconstruction. Reconstruction had offered a glimpse of the potential for African-American social, political, and emotional enfranchisement subsequent to the abolition of slavery in the United States and the passage of the thirteenth amendment (Logan & Cohen, 1967). The time ushered in the hope of Black equality and the humanization of African-Americans. The question that seemed to linger in the air of Reconstruction was, would racial restrictions and divisions now cease in the post-emancipation world?

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12 Belle’s middle name was spelled Marian by the enumerator of the 1900 federal census and reported as Marion in the The sixth report of the secretary of the class of 1870 of Harvard college (Harvard College, 1895). Most recently published sources use Marion.
Hobbs (2014) noted that while Blacks did not forgo passing during Reconstruction, many who could have passed or who were racially ambiguous held out in the expectation that a “tripartite racial world” would manifest (p. 75). It was during this time of African-American aspiration and expectation that Belle Marion Greener was born and it is ultimately there where her fantastic journey and the development of her future identity began.

In her own review of Belle’s ancestors and early upbringing, Ardizzone (2007) asserted:

Belle’s parents reflect the experiences of many freeborn African Americans in the late nineteenth century. Regardless of how Belle identified herself racially, or how she lived that identity publicly she was their daughter. Their story gives us a deeper understanding of her story: how she was raised, what values, messages, and lessons they would have tried to pass on, and who her earliest role models were for womanhood and for scholarship. Their history also reveals the impact of race on families of mixed ancestry, and how Belle’s understanding of her identity and her connection to Blackness came to diverge from that of her father. (pp. 15-16)

Belle Marion Greener lived her early childhood in the elite Black Washington, D. C. community and her teen years in New York City (Ardizzone, 2007). Her young childhood and teenage experiences, while she was surrounded by Black family and relatives and their ensuing hardships and accomplishments, provide a sense of her early environment and influences. It was in this atmosphere that Belle would have experienced and dealt with Erikson’s (1968) first five stages of psychosocial human development and their accompanying crises.

There is almost no primary source information on Belle that would permit a precise analysis of her development in the first five stages of Erikson’s (1968, 1980) psychosocial human development theory. However, the historical and documentary record of the lives of Belle’s parents prior to, during, and after their marriage, was paramount to the analysis of
how Belle’s identity was formed. By recounting the history and lives of Belle’s parents, the reinterpretation investigates the shaping of Belle’s early identity and its later formation.

**The Greener Side of Life**

Belle da Costa Greene was born Belle Marion Greener in Washington, D.C. on November 26, 1879. Her birth register lists her race as colored (Ardizzone, 2007; Greener, 1879; Harvard College, 1895; NARA, 1880; *Return of a birth*, 1879; Strouse, 1999a, 1999b). Her parents, Richard Theodore Greener and Genevieve Ida Fleet, received their marriage license on Thursday, September 19, 1874 and were married within a week in Washington, D.C. on September 24, 1874 (*Record of marriages*, 1874). Their marriage announcement was published in a Washington, D.C. newspaper titled *The National Republican* (“Married Greener-Fleet,” 1874; “Greener-Fleet,” 1874). Their union celebrated the hopes and expectations of elite and middle class Blacks prior to the turn of the century. Richard and Genevieve represented what many educated Blacks felt was the best example of what the Black race had to offer in individuals and in married partners (Ardizzone, 2007).

Richard was known to have been a young man in New England who associated with noted northern abolitionists, befriended early Black leaders, and later worked with reputable government figures such as Senator Charles Sumner and Civil War General and future President Ulysses S. Grant (Ardizzone, 2007; Mounter, 2002). At the time of their marriage, Richard was a professor at the University of South Carolina and Genevieve had been working as a music teacher (Ardizzone, 2007). The early lifestyles of Richard T. Greener

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13 Special thanks to Jean Strouse for initially providing me a certified copy of Belle’s birth register. The document is actually titled *Return of a birth*. It does not list Belle by name but lists a colored female birth on November 26th, which is often reported as Belle’s birthday on other public documents. It further lists both of her parents’ names and their places of birth, which have been verified by biographers Heidi Ardizzone and Jean Strouse. The birth return has the certificate number 20945 on the top left hand corner and can be viewed and obtained from the Family History Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
and Genevieve Fleet were very different but were the likely catalyst for Belle Marion Greener to become Belle da Costa Greene.

Richard T. Greener was born a free Black in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1844 (Mounter, 2002). Richard’s grandfather, Jacob C. Greener had lived as a free Black in Baltimore in the early 1800s (Mounter, 2002). Jacob had been a strong advocate against colonization societies that hoped to relocate Blacks in Africa and was known to work with abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison (Mounter, 2002). Jacob had two sons, Richard Wesley (Richard Theodore’s father) and Jacob. Both sons worked for Garrison as agents for his anti-slavery newspaper, *The Liberator* (Mounter, 2002).

After Richard Wesley married Mary Ann Le Brune, they moved to Philadelphia and began their family (Mounter, 2002). Richard Wesley now no longer working as Garrison’s agent, served briefly in the Mexican-American war, embarked on a sea faring trade, and finally moved to California during the gold rush (Mounter, 2002). Richard Theodore and his mother often relied on family members in Philadelphia for assistance when his father was away at sea and by the time his father left in 1853 for California, the family had since moved to Boston (Mounter, 2002).

By 1855, Richard T. Greener had only a few years of schooling but his desire for an education was not thwarted. He had been forced to drop out to help support himself and his mother (Mounter, 2002). During this time, Richard also became enthralled with politics and with abolitionists who fought for the end of slavery and civil rights for African-Americans. He was frequently in attendance whenever he could hear Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner speak and he became a regular attendee at Frederick Douglass’ lectures (Mounter, 2002). Richard eventually fulfilled his dreams of furthering his education. He attended
Oberlin College and Phillips Academy before finally becoming the first Black man to graduate from Harvard College in 1870 (Mounter, 2002; Harvard College, 1895).

Richard was in debt to several White benefactors after graduating from Harvard College, so he was forced immediately to find work. Still relatively young (he was only twenty-six), Richard took several jobs in education both in Philadelphia and later in Washington, D.C. (Mounter, 2002). While still in Philadelphia, he clerked for an attorney and worked at the Quaker-run Institute for Colored Youth as an English teacher.

In October 1871, Richard’s friend, who was the African-American principal of the Institute, was shot and killed because he tried to exercise his right to vote (Mounter, 2002). Grief stricken and frustrated with the plight of Blacks after the Civil War, Richard spoke out at various gatherings and led a delegation to meet President Ulysses S. Grant and to support Senator Charles Sumner’s 1872 Civil Rights Bill. The bill was defeated in the Senate but the trip to Washington, D.C. instigated Richard’s decision to move there permanently and make his mark as an aspiring lawyer, educator, and a prominent Black leader.

Richard became quite a well-known personality, frequently writing numerous articles and becoming a co-editor with Frederick Douglass and others for the *Washington New National Era* (Mounter, 2002). Richard T. Greener and Genevieve Fleet were both light-skinned Blacks who had European ancestry. However, Richard T. Greener was considered a prominent Negro intellectual of his time and a loyal race man (Ardizzone, 2007; Blakely, 1974; Mounter, 2002; Stewart & Kahn, 1980; Strouse, 1999a). His courtship of the lovely and fair Genevieve Fleet only enhanced his exposure in the more affluent and elite Black Washington D.C. community (Ardizzone, 2007).
Genevieve Ida Fleet was the eldest child and daughter of Black abolitionist, James H. Fleet and Hermione C. Peters, who was a music teacher (Ardizzone, 2007; Mounter, 2002). The Fleets and Peterses had strong ties to the free Black communities in Georgetown and Washington, D. C. and were known to be professionals and members of the sociable Black elite (“Bachelor’s club,” 1874). Genevieve’s father was a trained physician who also played the violin and her mother worked as a piano teacher (Ardizzone, 2007). The Fleets lived as an extended family with aunts, cousins, and other relatives often living in the household. Therefore, Genevieve was accustomed to familial support, interaction, and a relative sense of comfort (Ardizzone, 2007).

Genevieve had taught school and worked as a music teacher after the death of her father, James (“Colored school examinations,” 1972; “Monthly meeting,” 1873). She was said to be a strict disciplinarian but had been praised for her work with Black children and served as a principal for a short period in the Washington D. C. school district (Ardizzone, 2007; Mounter, 2002; “The colored schools,” 1872). Genevieve Fleet and Richard T. Greener likely crossed paths and began their courtship during their educational work in Washington, D. C. (Ardizzone, 2007; Mounter, 2002).

However, by the fall of 1873, Richard was disenchanted with the educational system of Washington, D. C. after a failed attempt to encourage the integration of the district’s Normal School. He later was removed from his position as principal of the Preparatory High School (Mounter, 2002). He, however, had not grown despondent and there were new prospects on the horizon. He had been studying law and working as a clerk in the office of the United States Attorney for the District of Columbia and he was debating whether to accept a professorship at the University of South Carolina (Mounter, 2002).
After the Civil War, the University of South Carolina had undergone a transformation spurred on by radical Republicans who sought to recruit Black students and leadership. Richard rose to the challenge and at the age of twenty-nine became the first Black faculty member of the institution (Mounter, 2002). The war was over but race hatred and discrimination were not. When the first African-American enrolled in the university’s medical school, the members of the pre-war faculty all resigned. Regardless, the university was now integrated and Richard made the most of it.

On his trips to Washington, D. C. to see Genevieve and confer with Senator Sumner, he also recruited Black students that were attending Howard University to transfer to the University of South Carolina (Mounter, 2002). His efforts were successful and several students transferred; however, the number of total students during Richard’s first year was less than one hundred and fifteen (Mounter, 2002). Richard kept busy, worked on university committees and gave public speeches, but prior to the start of the 1874 fall semester, he left for Washington, D. C. and married Genevieve.

When the Greeners returned to South Carolina, Richard enrolled in the law school and even took on more responsibilities at the university (Mounter, 2002). He had become the temporary university librarian, catalogued over 25,000 books, filed library holding reports, and even completed some building repairs (Mounter, 2002). At home, Genevieve was expecting their first child and suffered from a difficult pregnancy. She also struggled to adjust to her new life without her extended family and with the more outspoken racism in South Carolina (Ardizzone, 2007).

Richard, however, continued to stay abreast of politics and social conditions and gave numerous speeches and travelled frequently. Notably during this time, he submitted a paper
on the University of South Carolina’s rare and curious books to the American Philological Association and, in December of 1876, he graduated from the university’s law school (Mounter, 2002). But 1876 brought the Greeners an extreme loss. When their first child, Horace, died within eight months of his birth in May of 1876, Richard and Genevieve returned to Washington, D. C. during the summer break for a temporary solace.

By the time Belle Marion Greener was born, the country was in the midst of the post-Reconstruction era which saw many Blacks lose considerable rights and privileges that they had gained in the post-Civil War Reconstruction era (Logan & Cohen, 1967). Her father had just moved his burgeoning family, which now included three children, from South Carolina back to Washington D. C. once it was clear that angry southerners intended to prevent further Black progress in the south (Logan & Cohen, 1967). Moreover, Richard’s job at the University of South Carolina had been in jeopardy for some time because of national political change and the lack of funding from the state legislature (Mounter, 2002).

Undaunted, the Greeners moved back to Washington, D. C. and moved in next door to Genevieve’s mother. Richard was later admitted to practice law in the district. Richard worked various jobs in Washington, D. C. and for a short time he served as the Dean of Howard Law School. However, the family’s finances were always precarious and Richard often asked for assistance from family members, especially his cousin Isaiah Wears (Mounter, 2002).

Despite the family’s financial woes, Richard continued to involve himself with issues that plagued African-Americans and he was often away from home. He was adamant to be a vocal spokesman for civil rights because he had felt the sting of racism and had earlier worked with those who fought for justice (Mounter, 2002). He reveled in the opportunity to
champion the Black cause of progression, civil liberties, and independence from White oppression. Genevieve soon realized that she had married a man who was being lauded as one of America’s principal Black leaders. While she was undoubtedly proud of her husband’s achievements, she was often left to care for herself and the children (Ardizzone, 2007; Mounter, 2002).

Richard was content that Genevieve’s family was nearby for support and was not even home with Genevieve gave birth to Belle (Mounter, 2002). At the time, Richard was in the Midwest debating against his friend, Frederick Douglass, on the proposal for Blacks to move west for better opportunities (Mounter, 2002). And only a year after Belle’s birth, he served as assistant counsel in the defense of the West Point expulsion of Black cadet Johnson C. Whittaker (Mounter, 2002; Stewart & Kahn, 1980).

When he was at home, he was writing or preparing articles and speeches. In 1881, ever the political and civil rights activist, Richard wrote to the editor of the *New York Times* to address criticism of one of his speeches and to discuss how he saw his role in the plight of African-Americans. He stated:

My solution of all the political and social problems is the union and co-operation of Blacks and Whites on the basis of manhood and fitness. . . . My work is to look at politics from the Negro’s point of view, to see that his rights are maintained, not cringingly, but manfully, to defend him when attacked, and to answer his defamers with the facts which they usually ignore. . . . The Negro has received so many hard knocks, and experienced so little consideration, charity, or justice from those who criticize him, that he has no quarter to give. For myself, I hope always to be grateful for the great strides that have been made of what the friends of humanity are striving to accomplish against heavy odds, and yet to be as severe [and] honest in my criticisms and as courageous [and] accurate in my defense. (Greener, 1881)
Richard’s political stance on race and racism was steadfast and presented compelling evidence that the Greener family did not pass at least while Richard was home and lived with the family.

Ironically, the United States federal census for Washington, D.C. in 1880 listed the Greener family as White (NARA, 1880). The family at this time consisted of Richard, Genevieve, and their children: Mary Louise, Russell Lowell, and Belle Marion, who was then just six months old. They also had living with them a household servant that is noted in the census as being Black, which would seem to indicate the great disparity in skin color between the Greeners and other African-Americans (NARA, 1880).

It could be construed that since the 1880 federal census listed the entire family as White, that Richard and his wife passed and thus it was a family practice that would be handed down to Belle and her siblings. However, it is more probable that the census enumerator was unaware of the family’s race because they were so fair-skinned. The block the Greeners lived on was also home to other African-American families but the census enumerator described those families as mulatto and/or Black (NARA, 1880). The census also revealed that Genevieve’s mother, Hermione Fleet, and her brother, Mozart Fleet, were still living in the homes immediately next door and were also labeled as White (NARA, 1880). Further, the census notated that at least three other White families lived nearby the Greeners and Fleets (NARA, 1880).

Prewitt (2013) discussed the discrepancy of racial designations in early federal census records as the result of enumerators simply visually determining who was White, Black, or

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14 Belle’s birth register lists her as being the fourth child born to the Greeners. Mounter (2002) noted that the Greeners’ first child, Horace, died on May 11, 1876 of unknown causes.
other. Nobles (2000) noted that as of the 1850 federal census, census enumerators had been

given instructions to ascertain whether individuals were Black or mulatto:

Instructions to census takers were specific, declaring that the mulatto category

should be understood in its generic meaning – that is, to include ‘quadroons,
octoroons, and all persons having any perceptible trace of African blood’ . . .

the 1880 census repeated the categories and the instructions. (p. 56 cited in

Prewitt, 2013)

Therefore, it is likely that Belle had inherited her fair complexion from both of her parents

and that both the Fleets and the Greeners were definitely fair enough to pass and to have their

race misconstrued by a census taker.\footnote{In reviewing the U.S. federal census records from 1870, 1880, 1910, and 1920 for Richard T. Greener, census enumerators always identified him as a white man. I was unable to locate the 1900 federal census for him. However, I did find one Massachusetts state census record from 1865 that listed Richard as Black.}

The 1880s brought Richard T. Greener significant highs and lows. In 1884, he was

asked by Booker T. Washington to give the commencement address at Tuskegee Normal

School in Alabama (Mouter, 2002). Yet in the beginning of 1885, Greener and Robert H.

Terrell, who was also a Harvard College graduate, were both denied acceptance into the

Harvard Club of Washington, D. C. The slight was made even more personal for Richard

when the Black editor of the Washington Bee claimed that Greener and Terrell were both

well-educated fair-skinned Blacks who were attempting to distance themselves from the

Black race (Mouter, 2002).\footnote{Robert H. Terrell is the husband of Mary Church Terrell. The Terrells lived in Washington D. C. and Mrs. Terrell was appointed to the D. C. Board of Education in 1895. She was likely acquainted with Richard T. Greener and his family and was quoted as having stated “I myself could give the names of at least forty families whom I have known as colored, with some of whom I have been intimately associated, who have crossed the Rubicon of prejudice and are going their way rejoicing ‘on the other side’” (Terrell, n.d., p. 64).}

Richard was annoyed and frustrated by the comments but had to turn his attention to finding work to support his family. Oddly, it was the death of former

President Ulysses S. Grant in July 1885 which would unexpectedly provide a job for Richard,
a job that was desperately needed.
The job necessitated that Richard travel to New York City to assist in the organization of the Grant Monument Association. President Grant’s family had decided to have the former president buried in New York City and the city’s mayor wanted to erect a monument in his honor (Mounter, 2002; Stewart & Kahn, 1980). The mayor was eager to have a Black representative as a part of the association and he was aware that Grant and Greener were friends. Richard was appointed as the association’s secretary (Mounter, 2002). In an effort to provide more incentive, the mayor further appointed Greener as a New York civil service board examiner. Richard accepted both positions enthusiastically. He moved to Long Island, New York but Genevieve and now their four children stayed in Washington, D. C. and moved in with her mother (Mounter, 2002).

Richard was glad to be out of Washington, D. C., although he missed his family. He wrote to his cousin, Isaiah Wears, that when he had gone back to Washington, D. C. for Thanksgiving in 1885 that it had been one of the happiest times (Mounter, 2002). The Greeners also welcomed another daughter, Theodore Genevieve, in early 1886. And by this time, Richard had fully adjusted to spending most of his energy working and trying to earn a decent living to support his family back in Washington, D. C. His political interests were now stymied by his frustration with Republican progress for Black civil rights but he still found time to write articles. However, he was firmly focused on raising money for the Grant monument and his duties as secretary to which he was reelected in 1887 (Mounter, 2002).

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17 The Greeners had a third daughter, Ethel Alice, in 1881 (Mounter, 2002).
Richard’s work for the Grant Monument Association also put him in close contact with John Pierpont Morgan, Belle’s future employer who served as the treasurer of the association.\textsuperscript{18}

The Greener household seemed to be rebounding financially but soon suffered a severe blow. In 1888, Genevieve gave birth to a son Charles, who lived only three months (Mounter, 2002). Belle would have been eight or nine when her baby brother died. There is no evidence to indicate how Genevieve handled this child’s death and the impact it had on the family. The Greeners had now lost two sons in infancy and Genevieve who was frustrated and grieving had been basically raising the couple’s five children alone and often without enough money. Genevieve and the children moved to New York after the baby died but soon another death would wreak trouble for the household. Richard’s mother, Mary, died in Cambridge, Massachusetts having never met her daughter-in-law or grandchildren (Mounter, 2002).

Now with the added expenses of caring for his family in New York, Richard was financially unable to pay for his mother’s burial expenses (Mounter, 2002). Genevieve, unknown to Richard, requested a loan from Richard’s cousin, Isaiah Wears. Richard was furious but reluctantly accepted the funds as he had made bad investments and the family had practically nothing to live on (Mounter, 2002). In 1889, Richard was again reelected as secretary of the Grant Monument Association but his financial worries soon increased because he lost his civil service job. He had been dismissed from his post as a civil examiner and was being ostracized by his former Black associates who saw his work for the

\textsuperscript{18} The National Park Service Manhattan Historic Site Archive has digitized documents pertaining to the Grant Monument Association and the General Grant Memorial. A letter dated March 3, 1886 depicts the signatures of all of the trustees of the association including that of J. P. Morgan and Richard T. Greener. http://www.mhsarchive.org/item.aspx?rID=GEGR%20%20%20%20%20%20622.0042&db=objects&dir=CR%20ge gr&collid=GEGR.COLLECT.003&page=0
association as one that caused him to neglect the affairs affecting Blacks (Mounter, 2002). A change in the Grant Monument Association’s leadership and continued calls for the elimination or reduction of his salary precipitated Richard’s resignation in February of 1892.

The Greeners in the early 1890s were living solely off the income Richard produced from tutoring and his small law practice (Mounter, 2002). Friends who knew the family and their dire circumstances attempted to procure work for him. Booker T. Washington received a telling letter from his benefactor, Ellen Collins, inquiring if there was a position at Tuskegee for Greener (Harlan, 1974). Richard’s income did not improve and by 1894, he focused his extra time to writing. He wrote a letter to his cousin, Isaiah, that the children were progressing well despite the financial hardships and particularly that Belle had finished her grammar school training by late April (Mounter, 2002).

Unbeknownst to Richard, Genevieve had become the center of attention. Rumors had begun circulating in Washington, D.C. that she chose to only associate with Whites in New York. In a letter to Booker T. Washington, Thomas Junius Calloway responded to Washington’s inquiries on the Greener family status:

In regard to Prof. Greener’s family I have ascertained that Mrs. Greener is a native of this city—being a Miss Fleet before marriage. She is colored and never passed for anything else while here. It is understood here however that she associates only with Whites in New York. They are poor and in very straightened circumstances. (Harlan, 1974)

Richard too became further estranged from race politics when rumors persisted that he had also passed while living in New York. He spoke out and attempted to have an article published refuting his alleged self-imposed distance from Blacks and the Republican Party (Mounter, 2002). Richard took action and, in 1896, he took a position to campaign in
Chicago for Republican presidential candidate, William McKinley. His cousin Ida Platt lived in Chicago and he felt assured that he could lodge with her during the campaign.\footnote{Richard’s cousin Ida Platt was also well known because she was the first Black female to graduate from an Illinois law school in 1894 and the first Black woman to be admitted to practice law in Illinois (Mounter, 2002).}

Richard’s work for the McKinley Republican presidential campaign proved successful and McKinley won the presidency. He served as a Black campaign worker and had various speaking engagements in the Midwest and the south to promote McKinley to Black voters (Mounter, 2002). However, allegations that he had passed in New York were now pervasive and he was denied membership in 1897 to the American Negro Academy (Mounter, 2002). Nonetheless, Greener was hailed as a Black visionary. W. E. B. DuBois, the prominent Black leader, acknowledged Richard’s contribution to Black empowerment and considered him a member of the race’s “talented tenth” (Mounter, 2002).

According to DuBois, the “talented tenth” shouldered the responsibility to inspire the race because they had advanced educationally and socially and was thereby able to destroy long held Black racial stereotypes (Hillstrom, 2008). Unfortunately, Richard’s relationship with his wife and children would become severely estranged and not as praiseworthy. He had initially disregarded the option of a presidential appointment but by the spring of 1897, he longed for a change and one that would last.

Richard’s frequent separations from his family and the failure to continuously provide financial support caused the irrevocable breakdown of his marriage. The family was in debt as a result of his venture into a gold mining business and his New York law practice had floundered (Ardizzone, 2007; Mounter, 2002). Richard’s work prospects appeared to rally when he was offered a consular post in Bombay, India with the annual salary of $2,000 per year (Mounter, 2002). He returned to New York in 1898 to try and settle his family issues.
but informed his cousin, Isaiah, that ‘he had a ‘very lonely and unsatisfactory life’ and expected to ‘find some way soon, of ending it’ by leaving New York’ (cited in Mounter, 2002, p. 435).

The Greener marriage had become completely irreconcilable. Richard felt that Genevieve was the cause of his damaged reputation in the Black community because of her exclusive association with Whites (Ardizzone, 2007; Mounter, 2002). Genevieve was concerned with the well-being of herself and her children and attempted to prevent Richard’s move to India and enlisted the help of family members back in Washington, D. C. (Mounter, 2002). She may have hoped that Richard would remain in the United States and support his family. However, he had no intentions of being handled by Genevieve or her family and all attempts to amicably resolve their issues failed (Mounter, 2002).

Greener sought out a new political appointment and was assigned by President William McKinley to a position in the Foreign Service eventually as the American commercial agent to Vladivostok, Siberia in May of 1898 (Mounter, 2002; Stewart & Kahn, 1980). By January 1899, he was settled in Vladivostok and desired that the marriage could be legally dissolved. In a response to his cousin, Isaiah, who had inquired about the rest of the family, Richard wrote that he had only received two letters from the eldest child, Mary Louise, and none from anyone else (Mounter, 2002). Further, he wished not to be “bothered or harassed by them” and stated firmly that he would stay abroad “until death relieves one or the other of us” (cited in Mounter, 2002, p. 444). He asserted that he only had a financial responsibility to twelve year old Theodora as all of the older children, including Belle, were or would soon be self-supporting (Mounter, 2002). Relations between Richard and Genevieve had steadily deteriorated because he further said defiantly:
[Genevieve] has shown herself a good enough business woman, when her own interests are concerned, and she has made friends in New York, at my expense, and by disparagement of me, to an extent I can never forgive, and she knows my determination full well; for I told her so, in plain terms at our last interview. (cited in Mounder, 2002, p. 444)

After twenty-five years and the birth of seven children, the union of Richard T. and Genevieve I. Greener was over.

**Becoming Belle da Costa Greene**

Belle Marion Greener was twenty years old in 1899. She grew up both in Washington, D.C. and then in New York, yet her psychosocial development through adolescence was mired in family troubles, deaths, and financial uncertainty. There are no primary source documents that directly speak to how Belle felt about her childhood experiences. Therefore in order to understand how Belle’s identity was shaped in Erikson’s first five stages of psychosocial development, it is necessary to review how it may have been influenced. Marcia (1993) argued the pre-adolescent period has at least six variables that ultimately affect an individual’s identity:

> The choice of a developmental pathway for identity formation may be influenced by a variety of interrelated variables, including: (a) the extent of identification with the parents prior to and during adolescence; (b) the parenting style(s) with which the person has been reared; (c) the availability of model figures perceived as successful; (d) social expectations about identity choices arising within the family, the school, and the peer group; (e) the extent to which the person is exposed to a variety of identity alternatives; and (f) the extent to which the preadolescent personality provides an appropriate foundation for coping with identity concerns. (p. 46)

While Richard T. Greener was an advocate for African-American progress, his frequent absence from the family left a void of his influence. Genevieve essentially raised her children as a single parent and therefore became the stronger presence in the children’s development. There was also a strong maternal influence while the family resided in
Washington, D. C. because Genevieve’s family lived next door to the family and later they all lived together for most of Belle’s young childhood. These were major factors in how Belle Marion Greener would become Belle da Costa Greene.

The recounting of Belle’s early childhood environment and her parents lifestyles offer evidence that Belle identified with her mother and her mother’s family prior to and during her adolescence. Further, Belle’s maternal family was more prominent in her life because of their proximity and the assistance they provided in raising the Greener children. In the early 1880s, when the family was still in Washington, D. C., Genevieve’s mother, Hermione, had taken a job as a clerk to earn extra money for the family (Mounter, 2002). Conversely, Richard’s mother died without ever having met Genevieve or her grandchildren so her impact was non-existent (Mounter, 2002). Thus, Belle entered adolescence with a strong support system from the maternal side of her family.

Applying Marcia’s (1993) six possible variables mentioned above, one can infer the potential causes of how Belle’s identity was shaped and formed. Belle saw very little of her father, Richard T. Greener, during her childhood. She was reared mainly by her mother and her mother’s family. She never met either of her paternal grandparents nor experienced their influence (Mounter, 2002). As a youngster, Belle experienced the death of one of her siblings and because her father was often not home she would have gravitated to her mother for comfort and to comfort her. During Belle’s adolescence, she would have been aware of the tension between her parents before their eventual separation. Belle also likely witnessed and experienced some of the effects that the instability of a lack of regular income had on her and the family.
Further, Belle was probably positively affected by being raised by strong and independent women. Her grandmother, Hermione, who herself was a widower, had returned to work to assist the family and lived until Belle was twenty (Mounter, 2002). Her mother continued to take care of five children despite her husband being frequently away. These examples represented successful models of womanly perseverance for Belle to emulate. Her mother was also said to be a strong disciplinarian and therefore Belle was probably subject to a firm parenting style. And growing up in the elite Washington, D. C. Black community, Belle would have been expected to reflect the community’s standards of etiquette and social mores.

Yet in New York while Belle was an adolescent, she was exposed to alternatives to being racially classified as Black. The family was fair skinned and she and her siblings may have witnessed or participated with her mother in the act of passing for White. Belle may have seen this behavior as acceptable or even profitable for her future aspirations. She was aware of her obvious difference in skin coloring from other Blacks and the family’s early household servant and thus had a reason to look for alternatives to settling on Black or Negro as her designated race.

When Richard T. Greener was at home, he may have shared his knowledge of racial injustice with his children. His possible discussions of race pride, however, may not have been reinforced because of the lack of his constant presence. Whether Richard discussed race politics and the troubles that plagued African-Americans with the family when he was at home is not known. But, there is also no contradictory evidence to suggest that Belle was unaware or had reason not to know that she and the Fleets and Greeners were Black.
Richard was frequently in the papers for his assertions of the dignity and racial pride of Blacks and was widely known in the Washington, D. C. Black community. Genevieve had also been a Washington, D. C. “colored” school teacher and was the daughter of a well-known and close knit Black family (Mounter, 2002). However, Ardizzone (2007) argued there were differences in how Richard and Genevieve viewed their mixed ancestry and fair complexions. Richard was agitated and cognizant of the racial paradox it created while Genevieve viewed it as a buffer to the harshness of racism (Ardizzone, 2007).

By the time her parents’ marriage had ended, Belle and her family coped with their racial identity by passing. There is no record of whether Belle attended a segregated school while in New York and Richard had only once mentioned her education when he told his cousin that she finished her grammar studies (Mounter, 2002). Nonetheless, Belle’s mother, Genevieve provided a constant and consistent model that Belle likely adopted as a young child and into her early adolescence. Therefore, in reviewing Marcia’s (1993) six variables as potential factors in Belle’s early identity formation, it is likely that she entered adolescence in a state of moratorium.

**Disguised Dignity**

Richard T. Greener probably could not have envisioned that his desire to uplift the Black race would cause the breakdown of his marriage and would for some time fracture the link to his most famous daughter, Belle da Costa Greene. By 1900, the United States federal census listed that Genevieve Fleet Greener was someone new, using her middle name of Ida, she had declared she was a widow and was living in New York with her five children (NARA, 1900). Belle was listed by her middle name, Marian; she was now twenty years old and purportedly working as a librarian (NARA, 1900). Richard T. Greener was not dead but
his remaining family had dropped the r in their last names and was now using the last name of Greene (NARA, 1900). According to the 1900 census, the newly created Greenes were considered White and were living in an all-White neighborhood in Manhattan, New York (NARA, 1900).

Thereafter, from the years 1900 through 1940, the Greene household was consistently indicated on United States federal census records to be White (Ardizzone, 2007; NARA, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940; Strouse, 1999a). Genevieve Ida Fleet Greener, who had been born to free Blacks in Washington D.C., is believed to have been more comfortable in the company of Whites, accustomed to more financial stability and familial support and tended to rely on her fair skin to occasionally pass which had aggravated the Greener marriage (Ardizzone, 2007; Strouse, 1999a). Thus, the Greenes utilized their European ancestry and their light complexions to forever leave behind their past and transform themselves. Michael R. Mounter (2002) in his thorough dissertation on Richard T. Greener conceded that the Greenes’ election to pass was inevitable and foreseeable:

Greener could hardly blame Genevieve and their children for passing as Whites in New York City, because he [Richard T. Greener] bore much of the responsibility for that choice. His family’s denial of their heritage was a pragmatic decision, and a commentary on White prejudices in the United States at that time. As a light-skinned African American with many White friends, he was susceptible to accusations of passing himself. He never gave into the temptation to pass for White in New York, but had to know that his life might have been easier had he done so. . . . When he accepted the consular post in Vladivostok and left his family to fend for themselves in New York City, he failed to live up to his responsibilities as a husband and father. Genevieve, who had mixed with White society exclusively since the early 1890s, found it all too easy to switch races and improve her family’s financial and social standing. (p. 507)
Hence, Belle Marion Greener became Belle da Costa Greene and she is never quoted or referenced as ever having publicly admitted that she was Black or that her parents were African-American (Ardizzone, 2007; Strouse, 1999a).

During Greene’s tenure at the Morgan Library, which lasted over forty years, it was privately speculated that Greene was of African-American descent (Ardizzone, 2007; Secrest, 1979; Strouse, 1999a). Meryle Secrest, (1979) in her biography of art critic, Bernard Berenson, recounted that Mrs. Ann Lyon Haight, who planned to pen Greene’s biography, thought it highly likely that Greene and her family had “crossed the color bar” (p. 290).

Haight had been a co-member with Greene in the Hroswitha Club, which was a female bibliophilic organization founded in New York in 1944 to encourage the discussion of books and book collecting (Abraham, 2001). And as early as 1909, Isabella Stewart Gardner, a formidable art collector, wrote in a private letter to Bernard Berenson that Greene, “is a half-breed” (Hadley, 1987; Strouse, 1999a, p. 518). Greene and Berenson had both a professional and a private relationship. They pursued a passionate intimate relationship after meeting at the Morgan Library in 1909 and thereafter they began a voluminous correspondence that was maintained for most of Greene’s life (Ardizzone, 2007; Cohen, 2013; Osborne, 1997; Secrest, 1979; Strouse, 1999a).

Berenson was of Lithuanian Jewish ancestry and at least thirteen years older than Greene when they began their affair (Ardizzone, 2007; Cohen, 2013; Strouse, 1999a). Berenson was already married but was often vocal about his extreme passion for Greene. Berenson’s wife, Mary, feared for her husband’s deep infatuation with Greene and in a letter to Bessie Berenson commented, “he spends at least 2 hours a day writing to Miss Greene, and manages to be so little engaging towards me” (Strachey & Samuels, 1983, p. 172). It is
uncertain whether Greene ever actually confided to Berenson that she was Black or of her African-American ancestry. However, Secrest (1979) noted that Berenson found Greene to be, “handicapped only by her part-Negro inheritance” (p. 294).

In addition, in a few of her letters to Berenson, Greene made pointed racial references about herself. One such letter that Greene sent to Berenson, which included photographs of her, she remarked, “I am sure the ‘Esquimaux-nigger-Burmese’ one will appeal to you” and in another letter she described herself in relation to others at a dinner party, as a “huckleberry in a bowl of milk” (cited in Strouse, 1999a, p. 518).

Greene’s concealment of her true racial identity was rarely openly addressed or discussed but scholars have unearthed references that indicate that she was the subject of gossip because of her “unexpected physical characteristics” (Ferguson, 2010). Strouse (1999a) described Greene as being “small and slender, with dark hair and olive skin dramatically set off by light green eyes” (p. 509). Secrest (1979) reported that Sir Harold Acton, an old friend of Berenson, described Greene as having “a yellowish complexion, with thick lips, and a sensual face and figure” (p. 290).

Stephen Ferguson (2010), Curator of Rare Books at Princeton, where Greene is believed to have first worked in a library position, posted on his blog a 1934 letter from bookseller E. V. Maun to book collector Morris Parrish that unknowingly may reveal Greene’s elaborate charade. Maun described Green with extensive detail:

Miss Bella [sic] da Costa Greene is fortyish with brown hair and wears horn-rimmed spectacles. My first impression of her was that she looked bloated as if she had a touch of dropsy or perhaps drank too much, although she is not overly heavy and still not thin. She has a bulbous nose (perhaps caught from the numerous photographs of her patron, many of which hang, stand and lie about her office) and her skin must be very swarthy, for, she wore White powder which made her look kind of speckled gray, like the Negro you see pouring dusting cement into the mixers on building construction jobs.
In 1934, Greene was fifty-five and had successfully managed to evade for over three decades any direct references to her ancestry despite many lingering rumors and comments about her.

A “Passing” Phenomenon

Scholars have investigated and debated why Blacks have elected to pass for White or European (Ginsberg, 1996; Harris, 1995; Hobbs, 2009; Hobbs, 2014). Passing within the context of this study refers only to the practice of light or fair-skinned Blacks to pass for European or White. The practice of passing and the denouncing of African and/or African-American blood and identity often allowed those that passed to obtain access to public and private societal and economic privileges as well as to thwart White subversive domination (Harris, 1995; Hobbs, 2009; Hobbs, 2014; Smith-Pryor, 2009). Thus, freedom from “Blackness” has so intrigued and frustrated societal norms that several articles in the late 1940s sought to investigate the status of “Negro passing” in the 1930s and 40s (Burma, 1946; Eckard, 1947).

Over the years, passing has been defined by various scholars and laymen to describe the phenomena of Blacks passing for someone of European descent or even simply as “a man or woman of part Negro blood [that] may be sufficiently fair to be mistaken for a person of wholly White descent, and to assimilate purposely is known as ‘passing’” (“Passing,” 1929, p. 1060).

Harris (1995) discussed the significance of White skin privilege to African-Americans as an effort to obtain economic and social stability. In her article, “Whiteness as Property,” Harris (1995) posited that “passing is well known among Black people in the United States; it is a feature of race subordination in all societies structured on White
supremacy” (p. 277). Slavery equated Black people to mere property and this propagated in the Black mind that White skin corresponded with freedom (Harris, 1995; Hobbs, 2009; Hobbs, 2014). Harris (1995) expounded on how slavery spearheaded the necessity of racial passing for Blacks:

Slavery as a system of property facilitated the merger of White identity and property. Because the system of slavery was contingent on and conflated with racial identity, it became crucial to be ‘White,’ to be identified as White, to have the property of being White. Whiteness was the characteristic the attribute, the property of free human beings. (p. 279)

Similarly, Hobbs (2014) contended that Whites also had a legitimate concern of Blacks who were able to pass:

As the system of racialized slavery matured, nineteenth-century Americans underwent a moral panic about the parameters of Whiteness. Perhaps the greatest concern was that if Black could be mistaken or White, then White could just as easily be mistaken for Black. Abolitionists, seeking to bolster antislavery sentiment among Northern audiences, made fears about racial misrecognition more urgent by distributing images of ‘White slaves’ and by arguing that if Southern slave power continued to expand and encroach on freedom and liberty, Whites—and most catastrophically, White children—could easily be stolen into slavery. (p. 42)

The end of the Civil War brought expectations for Black equality that should have lessened the desire for Blacks to pass. Instead, race hatred and discrimination lingered and with time progressed with more fervor in certain areas of the country.

The twelve-year period of Reconstruction from 1865-1877, when Blacks had seeming support from the federal government to alleviate racial discrimination, had ushered in Black sentiment that freedom came with new hope of achievement (Hillstrom, 2008). The United States Constitution had two crucial amendments that would assist Blacks in obtaining equality, the fourteenth amendment which granted citizenship and certain civil rights and the
fifteenth amendment which guaranteed male Blacks the right to vote (Hillstrom, 2008; Logan & Cohen, 1967).

However, the post-Reconstruction era, which began in 1877, saw new racial atrocities against Blacks with the proliferation of White supremacist organizations primarily in the south (Hillstrom, 2008). In addition, Black codes, an early version of Jim Crow laws, were passed in the south to restrict Black rights and mobility. Soon the lives of Blacks nearly resembled that of slavery with the onset of sharecropping as the dominant source of Black employment in the south (Hillstrom, 2008). Moreover by 1896, the infamous Supreme Court decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson* had established that separate but equal facilities were legal and Blacks were essentially relegated to second class citizens (Hillstrom, 2008; Hobbs, 2014).

By the turn of the century, Blacks were both angry and fearful and left the south in droves and migrated north (Hillstrom, 2008; Hobbs, 2014; Logan & Cohen, 1967). Northern cities like New York, Chicago, and Detroit, by 1915, saw an influx of Black migration that more than tripled their previous numbers (Hillstrom, 2008; Hobbs, 2014). Northern racial tensions increased with the migration of Blacks who were now seeking jobs and shelter. Race riots in northern cities therefore became more prevalent (Hillstrom, 2008). World War I further frustrated racial harmony because the United States military enforced racial segregation.

Many Black men felt that they should not fight for a country that had failed to provide them with basic civil liberties and rights and seemed content to treat Blacks unfairly (Hillstrom, 2008). W. E. B. DuBois, however, spoke for many Black Americans that felt
pride for their country despite the lingering hostility and in August of 1918 his article, “A Philosophy in Time of War,” was published in which he asserted:

First, This is Our Country.
We have worked for it, we have suffered for it, we have fought for it; we have made its music, we have tinged its ideals, its poetry, its religion, its dreams; we have reached in this land our highest modern development and nothing, humanly speaking, can prevent us from eventually reaching here the full stature of our manhood. Our country is at war. The war is critical, dangerous and worldwide. If this is OUR country, then this is OUR war. We must fight it with every ounce of blood and treasure. (cited in Hillstrom, 2008, p.15)

Black men did take up arms for America in the First World War but they returned home to continued racism, unemployment, and reduced wages (Hillstrom, 2008). Soon Blacks would find another way to express their frustration and distress with their treatment in America and it was very close to where Belle da Costa Greene called home.

Belle and her family had been living in New York since the late 1880s. During this time they lived in close proximity to the city which became the center of a rising Black artistic awakening. Belle and her family had been passing for over a decade and by that time, the Harlem Renaissance, which celebrated the uniqueness of the Black experience, was in full swing.

Hillstrom (2008) noted that the Harlem Renaissance resulted because of the disparate periods that had preceded it, just after the Civil War. By the end of World War I, the racial makeup of Harlem and its surrounding neighborhoods had begun to change. Soon it became the center of the Black civil rights movement as a result of Harlem-based organizations such as the National Urban League and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Hillstrom, 2008). It was not long before Blacks saw the opportunity to make Harlem a social home for the Black community. Jazz clubs, cabarets, and artists of all sorts fed on the energy that seemed to emanate from the new Black mecca (Hillstrom, 2008).
The Harlem Renaissance or the New Negro Renaissance occurred between roughly 1919 until the late 1930s (Hillstrom, 2008; Hutchinson, 2007; Watson, 1995). Also known as the “New Negro Movement,” the period is seen as one of prolific exploration into the Black literary and musical arts and the Black emotional psyche (Watson, 1995). Black culture thrived during the Harlem Renaissance. The period produced many gifted novelists, playwrights, and artists such as Langston Hughes, Jessie Faucet, Charles W. Chesnutt, Nella Larsen, Regina Anderson Andrews, and Zora Neale Hurston. Theses Black artists often sought to depict the vagaries of Black culture through the arts, including the phenomena of Black racial passing.

One of the major themes of the Harlem Renaissance was found in novels that depicted Blacks crossing the color line and the color consciousness that permeated Black society and culture (Fabi, 2004; Pfeiffer, 2003; Watson, 1995). Steven Watson (1995) noted the fascination of color within the Black community in his discussion of the movement:

> Within the multihued world of Harlem itself, color hierarchies reigned. The fine calibration of degrees on the melanin scale can be seen in novels, where fictional characters are identified by their precise shade, in the fascination with ‘passing’ for White, and in the rich vocabulary . . . developed to describe the skin color. (pp. 86-87)

Ironically, two notable Black female Harlem Renaissance artists who were writing about passing were also librarians. Nella Larsen’s notoriety during the Harlem Renaissance is largely attributed to her two novels, *Passing* and *Quicksand*, which both dealt with the issue of skin color and Black racial passing as their main themes (Watson, 1995). And in Harlem Renaissance drama, Regina Anderson Andrews also broached the subject of Black racial passing in one of several plays she wrote. Andrews’ play, *A Man Who Passed*, was performed by the Harlem Experimental Theater which she started in the 135th Street branch
library basement (Acampora & Cotton, 2007; Roses & Randolph, 1996). Larsen and Andrews both had previously worked as librarians at the 135th Street branch of the New York Public Library and had significant racial admixture that had figured prominently in their lives yet they were unwilling or not fair enough to pass (Hutchinson, 2006; Nelson, 1996; Whitmire, 2007).

Many Black female librarians of the first half of the twentieth century were often limited to public library work and were restricted in the collections they were allowed to handle (Nelson, 1996; Whitmire, 2007). By contrast, the fair skinned Belle da Costa Greene worked for business tycoon J. P. Morgan and that gave her the opportunity to work in the unique field of librarianship dealing primarily with rare books and illuminated manuscripts. Whitmire (2007) recounted the struggle that Regina Anderson Andrews faced because she was Black when she applied for a job at the New York Public Library in 1923:

‘I’m American,’ Regina Anderson wrote in 1923 on her application for a position . . . when asked to give her race. Three or four days after she completed the application at the main branch on 42nd Street . . . Anderson was told, ‘You’re not an American. You’re not White’ . . . The NYPL hired Anderson, but because of her color, her interviewer told her, ‘We’ll have to send you to Harlem.’ (p. 409)

Belle never suffered this form of racism in her career. She had defied blatant racial stereotypes by allowing others to effectively believe she was White. And in so doing, she was able to display her talents to assist in building the extravagant special collection of the Pierpont Morgan Library.

In 1925, Black racial passing became prominent mainstream news. The country was all a flutter with the scandalous and salacious Rhinelander annulment trial that centered on the potential dangers of Blacks passing for Whites (Smith, 2001; Smith-Pryor, 2009). Leonard Rhinelander, the son of a wealthy New York family, and Alice Jones, a domestic
servant, had married in 1924. Shortly thereafter, Rhinelander sought to annul the marriage on the grounds that Jones had represented herself as being a White woman when in fact she was Black (Smith, 2001; Smith-Pryor, 2009).

The trial was also notorious because Jones’ lawyer, in an effort to prove that Rhinelander was aware of her Black ancestry, had Jones partially disrobe to the judge and the all-male White jury (Smith, 2001; Smith-Pryor, 2009). Jones agreed to expose her legs and breasts and submitted to an examination of her breasts in an effort to prove that no White man could rationally conceive, that no matter how fair-skinned Jones was, that she was in-fact Black (Smith, 2001; Smith-Pryor, 2009).

The Rhinelander case sensationalized the concept of race and highlighted both the social, political, and emotional issues concerning racial designations in the United States. It further described the danger of Black racial passing. Therefore, African-Americans like Greene who passed into White society openly flouted the prescribed racial boundaries of who was Black and who was White but at a high possible risk of disclosure.

Smith (2001) stated that the 1920s saw a new awareness of the meaning of race:

The very concept of racial passing assumes that a person who belongs to one racial category can change (actively or passively) their racial identification to another. This belief depends on two understandings of race: one, that racial differences exist and two, that race is a fixed essence that does not have to be visible . . . Passing was not new in the 1920s; accounts of African Americans passing as White stretched back into slavery. Yet the early twentieth century emerged as an especially fertile moment for public discussions of passing . . . accusations of passing for White in New York in the 1920s raised the unsettling possibility that racial difference might not be detectable and that perhaps, no difference between the races really existed. (p. 3)

The practice of passing may have provided some economic stability and sense of safety from overt racism but as a cultural phenomenon, it undoubtedly subverted African-American identity and Black cultural awareness (Acampora & Cotton, 2007; Hobbs, 2014; Wall, 1995;
In addition, Black racial passing weakened an individual’s recognition and identification with African-American culture and distinctiveness.

**An Assured Legacy**

The evolution of Belle Marion Greener to Belle da Costa Greene began at the turn of the century. The African-American Greeners were now by all accounts living as the White Greenes. They had severed any acknowledgement of their previous connection to Richard T. Greener and his legacy. The Greenes’ evolution into White society was not traceable other than in the few remaining public historical documents that linked them to their former Black name and identity.

Belle and her family were totally estranged from Richard T. Greener, who was their most identifiable link to Blackness. At the cusp of young adulthood, Belle compromised her known racial identity and like her mother and siblings constructed a new White identity by passing. Whether this was initially her own decision or her mother’s is not known but Belle lived this change and elected not to live as a Black woman. Her father’s lifestyle and continuous absences as well as the public hardships endured by many Black Americans may have further encouraged how Belle handled her identity crisis in adolescence.

By 1900, Belle had entered into a new stage of her identity development. She was twenty-one and transitioning into young adulthood, Erikson’s sixth stage of human psychosocial development. Her young adulthood had brought tremendous changes as she had joined the work force, changed her name, and was living with a different racial identity. Moreover by this time, she had dealt with elements of the identity crisis that was pivotal in her adolescent development. However, her identity crisis would often resurface in later years evidenced by the many life struggles and decisions she faced in the subsequent stages of
adulthood, middle age, and old age. In adolescence, she had been in a state of moratorium but her young adulthood indicated that she had constructed an identity and was soon on her way to being “identity achieved” (Marcia, 1966, 1993).

In addition, Belle may have also dealt with negative identity issues as it related to her true Black racial identity. In 1895, Richard T. Greener had reported to Harvard College that his daughter Belle Marion was enrolled in Teachers’ College (Harvard College, 1895). This was not the career choice that Belle preferred although her mother and maternal grandmother both were teachers as were many African-American women (Ardizzone, 2007; Mounter, 2002). In a 1916 interview, Belle stated she knew the vocation she wanted to pursue during her adolescence.

I knew definitely by the time I was twelve years old that I wanted to work with rare books. I loved them even then, the sight of them, the wonderful feel of them. Before I was sixteen I had begun my studies, omitting the regular college course that many girls take before they have found out what they want to do. (“Opportunity will come,” 1916; “Spent 10 years studying,” 1916)

In 1894 when she was only fifteen, Belle was given a copy of budding art critic, Bernard Berenson’s book titled The Venetian Painters of the Renaissance (Osborne, 1997; Ardizzone, 2007). From her adolescence onward, Belle’s decisions and lifestyle revealed a self-determined mindset to construct an identity that would allow her to shape her own destiny including a profession free from the constraints based on society, race or sex. Nevertheless, because in her old age she is said to have destroyed all of her personal papers it could be suggested that she continued to struggle with identity issues that she never fully resolved (Ardizzone, 2007; Erikson 1968).

The 1900 federal census reported that Greene was working as a librarian (NARA, 1900). According to a 1901 former student listing, there was a Belle M. Greene that was said
to have taken a course at the Library School of Amherst College in 1900 and to have done
apprentice work in the New York Public Library system (Ardizzone, 2007). However, her
chance to work with rare books and illuminated manuscripts came as a result of her later
work at Princeton University where she met and impressed J. P. Morgan’s nephew, Junius S.
Morgan (Ardizzone, 2007; Strouse, 1999b; White, 1978).

Belle is believed to have begun working at Princeton in 1901 although she is not
mentioned in their archives until 1902 (Ardizzone, 2007). She still lived in New York but
commuted to New Jersey to work at Princeton University and was listed in both states’
censuses for 1905 (Ardizzone, 2007). When she stayed in New Jersey she boarded with
several White Princeton library employees, one of whom was Charlotte Martins. Martins
had worked for over twenty years at the university library, and she took Belle under her wing
and became an early mentor for Belle (Ardizzone, 2007).

While at Princeton, Belle also had the opportunity to work under Ernest Cushing
Richardson, Princeton’s University Librarian, and Junius S. Morgan, who served as
Associate Librarian (Ardizzone, 2007; Rosenberg, 1997). Known as avid bibliophiles,
Junius S. Morgan and his uncle, J. P. Morgan, were members of the Grolier Club, a New
York society and fellowship club that was devoted to books and graphic arts (Ardizzone,
2007). In late 1905, Junius recommended Belle to his uncle to work as his private librarian
with the duties of inventorying and cataloguing his early acquisitions (Ardizzone, 2007;
“Belle of Books,” 1949; Blier, 1988; Strouse, 1999a). She was J. P. Morgan’s private
librarian until she began her official position as the first director of the Pierpont Morgan
Library in 1924.
Under the patronage of J. P. Morgan, Belle’s newly created identity as Belle da Costa Greene was allowed to thrive. She auspiciously had the backing and support of a financial titan in Morgan and accordingly began wielding the assertiveness that garnered. There is no record to suggest that Morgan knew or suspected that Belle was Richard T. Greener’s daughter (Strouse, 1999a, 1999b). By 1905, Greener had lost his appointment in Siberia and was soon to permanently settle in Chicago (Mounter, 2002). It seemed that as her father’s career entered its final decline that Belle’s had begun to ascend to unfathomable heights.

Belle knew her chance had arose to become more than what the world had relegated her to and she began to voraciously further her education. She studied with private tutors and learned several European languages, including Italian, German, and French (Ardizzone, 2007). Morgan also had the foresight to surround Belle with a competent support staff that further enhanced her desire to excel at her duties.

Ada Thurston was a graduate of Vassar College and at least twenty years older than Belle. Thurston had training both as a librarian and a teacher, but what Belle lacked in formal education she made up in personality and charm. Thurston’s educational background supplemented, aided, and complemented Belle’s personality and she soon became Belle’s assistant (Ardizzone, 2007). The two worked together for almost thirty years. The Pierpont Morgan Library’s staff minutes for June 19, 1944 acknowledged their grief at Thurston’s death and noted that she had worked at the library for twenty-nine years having retired in 1935 due to poor health.20 Thurston was just one of many colleagues that came to adore and appreciate Belle as she became in the words of J. P. Morgan, “the cleverest girl I know” (“The Cleverest Girl,” 1912). Under Morgan’s patronage, Belle was allowed freedoms and

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20 Morgan Collections Correspondence, 1887-1948, ARC 1310: Administration, Minutes of Staff Meetings, 1924-1975. Morgan Library and Museum, New York, NY.
afforded luxuries that working women rarely were able to enjoy. She apparently wore her
hair long, shunned glasses, and only donned the latest fashions (“The cleverest girl I know,”
1912).

Belle’s work for J. P. Morgan made her famous because she worked in a field that
was dominated by men. Still in her early twenties and full of aspiration and ingenuity, she
attracted the attention of men both in and out of the art world. In her first years at the library,
she both impressed and riled many of the dealers she worked with and conveyed an authority
that most felt was impudent for a woman working in the province of men (Ardizzone, 2007).

In a series of letters between Belle and Italian based-dealer, Leo Olschki, Belle’s
assertiveness is demonstrated. A letter dated October 23, 1907 described how she directly
challenged Olschki on the price of a manuscript and likely gave him an impression of her that
he would never forget.

In regard to the Cicero 1468, Mr. Morgan agrees with me that the price asked
is absurd . . . It annoys me exceedingly to have Mr. Morgan offered a book
such as this, the rarity of which is doubtful, at so very exorbitant a price.21
(Belle Greene to Leo Olschki, 1907)

Olschki defended himself but had been given ample warning that Belle da Costa Greene was
definitely to be taken seriously. Two months later in January 1908, Belle was still fuming at
Olschki’s brazen attempt to take advantage of her and she asserted:

I have been much annoyed by your letters in regard to the Cicero of 1468 . . . I
told you I considered your price excessive . . . I am most astonished and
annoyed that you should trifle with me in this manner. I will make you a final
proposition as follows . . . You will kindly close this matter by replying ‘yes’
or ‘no’ . . . . 22 (Belle Greene to Leo Olschki, 1908)

21 Morgan Collections Correspondence, 1887-1948, ARC 1310: Olschki, Leo S., Correspondence, File 1 of 3,

22 Morgan Collections Correspondence, 1887-1948, ARC 1310: Olschki, Leo S., Correspondence, File 1 of 3,
Belle and Olschki had other run-ins in the years to follow. She often did not hesitate to chastise him in her letters for his failure to ensure books were packed correctly or that he billed the Morgan Library for items that had already been paid. Fortunately, her relationships with other dealers during her early years as Morgan’s librarian were more amiable. She made her first trip abroad in 1908 with her mother acting as a chaperone (Ardizzone, 2007). This trip enabled Belle to become acquainted with the European world of art, book sellers, and book dealers who would become life-long friends.

Belle formed such a friendship with antiquarian bookseller Abraham Simon Wolf Rosenbach. “Rosie,” as Belle lovingly called him, thought Belle was both learned and clever (Rosenbach, 1927). Later in his book originally published in 1936 titled A Book Hunter’s Holiday, he described her as a mighty woman book hunter and argued that she achieved, “a height in the world of books that no other woman has ever attained” (Rosenbach, 1968, p. 127). Rosenbach’s statement was no doubt a result of Belle’s reputation which she had established years earlier in 1911. It was at that time that the name Belle da Costa Greene had become synonymous with her ability to outbid other more seasoned book dealers and buyers at auctions.

One of her most famous exploits as J. P. Morgan’s librarian was the purchase of Malory’s Morte d’Arthur at the Hoe Auction in the spring of 1911 for $42,700 (“Fifty thousand dollars,” 1911; Strouse, 1999a). The World Magazine, in 1911, issued a full one page spread on Greene’s acquisition of the work and described her as the “foremost authority on rare books among the fair sex” (“Fifty thousand dollars for that book,” 1911). Some

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23 I obtained copies from the National Archives of several of Belle’s passenger arrival records and they documented that she traveled to and from various European cities in the years of 1908, 1925, 1926, 1928, 1931, 1932, 1934, 1935, 1936, and 1938. However, these dates are not all inclusive of her travels.
reports asserted that the price was $42,800 but it was clear that regardless of the exact amount paid that her success had made world-wide news (Ardizzone, 2007; “In the public eye,” 1911; Klinkenborg, 1991; Towner, 1970; “Twenty-five thousand a year,” 1921).

Morgan had authorized Belle to use her discretion regarding the price of the purchase because it was one of only two Caxton bindings on vellum of this particular work (Strouse, 1999a). Belle was also lauded for obtaining seventeen Caxton printed books in an earlier sale of which she reported to have brokered the deal with the owner the night before the auction (“Women who are paid princely,” 1913; “Spending J. P. Morgan’s,” 1912).

The significance and impact of the Hoe sale had a dramatic effect on Belle’s life. Belle was humbled by the experience. On May 5, 1911, she wrote in a letter to her friend, Alfred W. Pollard of the British Museum that she regretted that the Morte d’Arthur had not been acquired by the British Museum.

I received your note of April 13th a few days before the sale of Caxton’s ‘Morte d’Arthur’, and I regretted sincerely at that time that it was impossible for me to do anything for you, as there were two collectors here who seemed determined to get the book at any price. Had it been a question solely between the Museum and Mr. Morgan, I feel sure he would have been glad to meet you in some way, but I felt that the logical place for the book (if you were unable to compete adequately) was in Mr. Morgan’s Library. As it is, without any question, the most important book in the Hoe Collection, I do not consider the price I paid excessive. One hour before the sale there was every indication that it would go to sixty or seventy thousand dollars. I hope you will believe that I would have done all I could in the matter for the Museum, which has been so friendly both to Mr. Morgan and myself.25 (Belle da Costa Greene to Alfred W. Pollard)

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24 William Caxton is believed to be the first English printer and was known to have printed many works in the fifteenth century (Rosenberg, 1994).

25 Morgan Collections Correspondence, 1887-1948, ARC 1310: P Miscellaneous Correspondence, Pi-Pr, Folder 3 of 4, Letter dated May 5, 1911. Morgan Library and Museum, New York, NY.
She understood that while she was heralded in the press for her ability to obtain precious treasures to add to Morgan’s collections, it was the camaraderie of other librarians, curators, and certain book dealers that she most needed to maintain.

Towner (1970) described the world of auctions and how they functioned in his book, *The Elegant Auctioneers*. He described Belle as one who dressed in “festive garb” and who had a troop of “book lords in her wake” (p. 408). She told a *New York Times* reporter who asked her what her title was, that ‘I’m simply a librarian’ (Spending J. P. Morgan’s,” 1912).

Yet Belle ostensibly emanated an aura that could cast a spell over auction rooms, auctioneers, and even reporters (Towner, 1970).

After the Hoe sale, she was interviewed by the *New York Times* and declared that many of the prices paid for the rare books were “perfectly ridiculous” (J. P. Morgan’s librarian,” 1911). There was often strong competition for the rarities sold at such auctions and new buyers were fierce in the desire to acquire the winning bid. The buyer that had so provoked Belle’s wrath at the Hoe sale was Henry E. Huntington, who acting through his agent, purchased many of the auction’s items including a Gutenberg Bible for $50,000.00 (Basbanes, 1992). G. D. Smith served as Huntington’s agent although he was believed to have acted on behalf of himself for some purchases (Towner, 1970). Nonetheless, Smith spent over $1 million dollars on over half of the Hoe sale’s auctioned items (Towner, 1970).

Belle was adamant that bidding that produced high prices for certain books was anathema to the potential study and reference for students and scholars (Basbanes, 1992).
She was not alone in her feelings as other dealers such as Bernard Quaritch agreed with her contention.26

Quaritch asserted that “one or two persons may influence a sale . . . and books that I sold for a dollar or two are bringing ten and twenty times that amount” (“J. P. Morgan’s librarian,” 1911). Belle’s statement indicated an early recognition of the type of legacy that she wanted to create as the Morgan librarian.

My point is that there are certain books which have a standard value and which are necessities to the student for reference. They are not in the class of unique volumes. They are not the most expensive of rare books. Now, when the price of these volumes is raised, you injure the general public. They should be in some libraries where the student may avail himself of them as he chooses. They are essential to the study of literature and history. (“J. P. Morgan’s librarian,” 1911)

Further, her words foreshadowed that the eventual crisis of Erikson’s (1968) seventh stage, generativity versus stagnation or specifically her desire to foster growth in subsequent generations had begun to develop.

Belle’s young adulthood had proved to be full of excitement and adventure but it had also garnered worldwide speculation and interest. The Hoe sale had made her famous and, as J. P. Morgan’s librarian, she intrigued both society and the general public. Her finely crafted new racial identity was now at risk of constant exposure and she related in a 1912 letter to Bernard Berenson her frustration at the probing this newfound notoriety into every aspect of her life had ignited.

I suppose they say everything from calling me the daughter of J. P. a la main gauche, to . . . the mother of triplets—but what difference does it make? . . . I’ve come to the conclusion that I really must be grudgingly admitted the most interesting person in New York, for it’s about all they seem to talk about . . . I don’t want to be ‘in society’ and I do want to really know things—so you see I

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26 Bernard Quaritch was a London based book and antiquities dealer. Belle had worked with him in numerous purchases for Mr. Morgan and for the library (Morgan Collections Correspondence, 1887-1948, ARC 1310: Quaritch, Bernard., Correspondence, 1900-1909; 1910-1919. Morgan Library and Museum, New York, NY.)
don’t need many people in my life. (Belle Greene to Bernard Berenson, January 9, 1912, cited in Strouse, 1999a, p. 520)

Erikson (1980) stated that the crisis of young adulthood or the sixth stage of psychosocial human development was the ability or inability for an individual to develop intimate relationships. Those who did not form such intimate relationships elected to remain isolated.

This period of Belle’s psychosocial development revealed that she wavered in her desire for intimate relationships versus maintaining a need to be private and thereby isolated. She had repudiated her relationship with her father because it was the one relationship that would have potentially been dangerous to her new identity.

However, Belle was in the public spotlight not only because she was the famous Morgan librarian but also because she was considered one of society’s beautiful women (“Beautiful women of society,” 1913). She was frequently asked to pose for pictures and portraits (Ardizzone, 2007). In 1913, she was photographed by Baron de Meyer, who was considered an expert photographer. (“Pictures by Baron de Meyer,” 1913). In Meyer’s showcase of New York celebrities, his photos were displayed privately and then publicly at the Ritz Carlton in New York. The women in Meyer’s photographs were unique as reported by The San Francisco Call:

American women . . . are the best looking women in the world, and . . . they are the most exquisitely gowned . . . Among the well-known women whom baron de Meyer has photographed . . . during the exhibition of his work are Miss Anne Morgan, . . . Mrs. W.K. Vanderbilt, Miss Belle da Costa Greene and Miss Elsie de Wolf. (“Beautiful women of society,” 1913)

Also in 1913, Paul Helleu, a French etcher, made a drawing of Belle that he exclaimed was the example of a “typical American” (“Helleu talks of pictures,” 1913). Belle objected to the drawing because it included her holding a cigarette but Helleu would not budge and argued
that the cigarette completed the picture (“Helleu talks of pictures,” 1913). Belle’s
willingness to be drawn and photographed suggested that she at least to a certain degree
wanted to be seen or because of her newfound fame felt that she could not afford to be aloof.

Even when she was not being depicted in photos and drawings, she was the subject of
reports for her ability to act as Morgan’s agent and for her reported $10,000 to $25,000 salary
(“Women who are paid,” 1913; “In the limelight,” 1915; “These women make,” 1921). On
occasion, Belle would instigate press reports. She wrote a letter to the New York Times about
being misquoted that the British Museum lacked a catalog system (“Miss Greene
misquoted,” 1913). And Belle now knew that she was likely always to be mentioned
whenever the Morgan Library was in the news. She received a large amount of press in
connection with the alleged stolen will that the Morgan Library had in its possession of
Martha Washington, widow of President George Washington (“To make J. Pierpont
Morgan,” 1913; “Virginia would recover,” 1913; “Morgan will be sued,” 1914).27 It was
clear that Belle’s notoriety, name, and reputation were forever linked and attached to her
work as the Morgan librarian.

However, Belle was still forging and shaping her identity in her late twenties and
early thirties. She vacillated in her belief about suffrage for women but she ultimately
decided in its favor and joined several women’s clubs that supported it (“Women’s city
club,” 1918). In 1922, she agreed with the Lucy Stone League that women who marry are
not obligated to take their husband’s name. Belle told the New York Times that she felt it was
“the indisputable right and privilege of every woman to retain the personality of her own
name after marriage if she so desires” (“Lucy Stone league clashes,” 1922).

27 J. P. Morgan had purchased the will in 1905 from the owner for $3,000.00. The will of Martha Washington
was returned by the Morgan Library to the state of Virginia in 1916. Morgan Collections Correspondence,
stage of her young adulthood, Belle she seemed to teeter on the edge of whether to be completely conspicuous and outspoken or to be totally reserved and private.

The potential public disclosure of her family background and ancestry gave her ample reason to want to remain secluded and private. But, she was known to be rather ostentatious in her dress and in her avenues of entertainment which included theater, opera, plays, dancing, partying, smoking drinking, and sexual liaisons (Ardizzone, 2007). As to her appearance, she reportedly stated, “just because I am a librarian doesn’t mean I have to dress like one” (cited in Strouse, 1999a, p. 510).28 However, the acquisition of her identity was once again about to be tested as the one man who had become such a tremendous part of her life would soon be dead.

The bond between Belle and J. P. Morgan had transcended a traditional working relationship. Belle acted as his confidant, assistant, companion, librarian, and friend (Ardizzone, 2007; Canfield, 1974; Strouse, 1999). There was an intimate bond that had formed between the two that even their difference in ages could not extinguish. Morgan valued Belle to the point that he was furious with the thought that Belle might marry and leave him to which he threatened to disinherit her the day she married (Strouse, 1999a).

Belle was disgusted by his threat of disinheritance and told Bernard that she expressed her disgust at how Morgan treated her “as something he had bought and paid for” (cited in Strouse, 1999a, p. 657). Belle later claimed to lose her reverence for Morgan when he would simply and without reason demand her presence despite her own plans (Strouse, 1999a). Yet Morgan had engendered and secured Belle’s undying devotion despite how he

28 Morgan Library curator, William M. Voelkle recounted that this statement was made to photographer, Ernest Walter Histed. Voelkle provided me an early version of his yet unpublished work, “The Crusader Bible: Introduction and Provenance, A Curatorial Perspective.” Voelkle’s work discussed Belle’s purchase of the manuscript for the Morgan Library and also provided additional personal information about her.
may have ultimately angered her (Strouse, 1999a). No matter the emotional upheaval that Belle suffered, J. P. Morgan and Bernard Berenson were the two men that she most intimately loved.

Belle is believed to have had numerous male suitors, received several marriage proposals, and engaged in countless sexual liaisons with men in the rare book arena and in high society (Ardizzone, 2007; Secrest, 1979; Strouse, 1999a). However, she was only truly emotionally attached to Bernard Berenson. Their relationship was built on their love of art, rare books, and ultimately each other (Cohen, 2014; Secrest, 1979; Strouse, 1999a).

Bernard’s attachment to Belle was so intense that he became inconsolable when they were separated and he was often depressed and desperate to see her (Strachey & Samuels, 1983). Bernard’s wife, Mary often wrote to friends and family about his all-consuming passion for Belle. Mary Berenson accepted her husband’s affairs but was thoroughly troubled at the effect that Belle had over Bernard. In 1911, she wrote a detailed letter to her sister-in-law describing Bernard’s anguish.

I wrote to you that B. B. [Bernard Berenson] cabled [to Belle Greene, from whom he had not heard for four months] did I not? It was on Saturday, and on Tuesday morning he came into my room fairly worn out and suicidal from having got no answer. I said it was sure to come, and indeed in half an hour it did. ‘Have been so blue and miserable and so very very tired, had no heart to write, but am writing Mauretania today. Never question my absolute love.’ You would be amazed to see the difference this has made to him . . . He has begun again writing those endless letters. So it has all begun over once more. I cannot but think it a misfortune. He says he would go to America in a second if she wanted him to—but she evidently doesn’t. He asked me to write and invite her here for a ‘Rest Cure’, which I did: but I should be very much surprised if she came. I am afraid it will take him years to get over it. (Mary Berenson to Bessie Berenson, November 23, 1911, cited in Strachey & Samuels, 1983, p. 175)

The tumultuous affair between Bernard Berenson and Belle da Costa Greene displayed that Belle was comfortable to engage in interpersonal intimate relationships. The fact that Belle
did not scorn physically intimate relationships with other men proffered that her indulgence in promiscuous acts also may have prevented her from a full intimate commitment of herself to another (Erikson, 1968).

Bernard expressed his displeasure at her other physical rendezvous and the fact that they troubled him exceedingly (Ardizzone, 2007; Strouse, 1999a). Belle answered him and revealed her own need to avoid true interpersonal intimacy. She reproved him for his rebuke and demonstrated how she struggled at this time with the crisis of intimacy.

You know perfectly well BB . . . that I get ‘hipped’ on some man, regularly every six months and I suppose it will be so until I die—but I get over it all so very quickly that it does not really disturb the actual current of my life at all—And BB . . . these men and this talk and all is so stupidly unimportant and irrelevant—the only time I was really ‘scandalous’ was in your own dear company so if I guarantee that I will be really wicked only with you isn’t it alright? . . . . (Belle Greene to Bernard Berenson, January 9, 1912, cited in Strouse, 1999a, p. 520)

The passionate affair between Belle da Costa Greene and Bernard Berenson was so intense that in almost all references to either of them their relationship is mentioned.

Belle’s biographer concluded that there was even reason to believe that Belle had gotten pregnant by Bernard and aborted the pregnancy, and that this likely caused consternation in their relationship (Ardizzone, 2007). Still, their early love affair played an integral part in Belle’s ability to form true intimate relationships and her continuing psychosocial development.

All of Belle’s relationships were not predicated on sexual intimacy. However, she was said to be a pernicious flirt and had many semi-romantic relationships with many of her library, museum, and artistic contemporaries (Ardizzone, 2007; Canfield, 1974; Strouse, 1999a). She valued the mentorship she received from the bevy of artistic and literary men who were in awe of her and she took advantage of the knowledge they offered (Ardizzone,
2007; Canfield, 1974). Nonetheless, her most prestigious and foremost supporter was John Pierpont Morgan.

Morgan had found her presence and complete loyalty a necessary component of their relationship. Because of Belle’s almost constant proximity to Morgan, she became acquainted with the intimate details of the Morgan family’s personal affairs as well as the financial and political business that comprised Morgan’s banking world (Canfield, 1974; Strouse, 1999a). Fortunately for Belle, over the course of eight years, she had built an intimate relationship with Morgan and he reveled in her taste, knowledge, and good sense. Thus, she became an indispensable asset to the overall functioning of Morgan’s life and he would leave an indelible mark on hers.

When J. P. Morgan, Sr. died on March 31, 1913 while abroad, Belle could only respond in a cable to Bernard that “my heart and life are broken” (cited in Strouse, 1999a, p. 681). Belle was concerned that the identity she had created as the Morgan librarian was now purposeless (Ardizzone, 2007). But Belle and the entire world soon discovered how much Morgan had respected and admired her.

Morgan’s will provided Belle a bequest of $50,000 (Ardizzone, 2007; “She is the leading,” 1913). Morgan’s will also stipulated that Belle was to be kept on as the Morgan librarian and that her salary was not to be reduced (“Morgan’s will a human,” 1913; “Morgan’s millions bequeathed,” 1913). According to the New-York Tribune, in an article published on April 20, 1913, Morgan instructed that Belle should continue in her duties as the librarian. Morgan’s specific bequest read:

Article XVII. I give and bequeath to Miss Belle Da Costa Greene, who has long been my efficient librarian, the sum of $50,000, and . . . I trust that she may be continued as librarian thereof at a salary not less than that which she
shall be receiving at the time of my death. (“Morgan’s will a human document,” p. 6)

Belle had lost her first patron and benefactor but she could be confident that he had appreciated her and that she had a permanent position at the library.

According to Morgan’s will, his personal library and most of all its treasures now belonged to his only son, John Pierpont Morgan Jr., also known as Jack (Ardizzone, 2007; “Morgan’s will a human,” 1913; “Morgan’s millions bequeathed,” 1913; Strouse, 1999a). A little over a decade would pass between the time Jack inherited the library and when he gave it to New York City as a public institution in 1924 (Adams, 1964). During that time, Belle had to adjust to Jack’s temperament and the loss of many of the items that she treasured as they were sold or given away (Ardizzone, 2007; Forbes, 1981; Strouse, 1999a; Wolf & Fleming, 1960).

The death of J. P. Morgan in 1913 brought many changes to Belle’s life. By 1914, she was thirty-five years old and beginning to enter Erikson’s seventh stage of adulthood and middle age. She settled into her role as the librarian for the new Mr. Morgan and saw Europe descend into World War I. Nevertheless, she confidently stated that it was her preparation and loyalty that had empowered her professional success.

Belle was interviewed for The Evening Sun in 1916 and she asserted that it was not a matter of luck that enabled her to become, as the article called her, “the holder of the most important position ever given to a woman” (“Opportunity will come to the prepared,” 1916).

People say to me sometimes that I have had the most wonderful ‘luck’ in the world, but I cannot agree that my connection with the Morgan collections has been a mere matter of luck. It was indeed a rare and beautiful opportunity that came to me, but I do not believe the opportunity would ever have come if I had not been prepared in the first place and if I had not given the utmost loyalty to my employer and to my job afterward. . . and I have a very decided theory that fine opportunities will come to all that are prepared . . . But loyalty
first, last and all the time is as necessary as industry. (“Opportunity will come to the prepared,” 1916)

In essence, Belle had articulated that it was her self-constructed life and identity that she felt prepared her for the job as the Morgan librarian. She persevered and continued to buy items for the library and she even brokered deals to sell some of the library’s items for Jack to settle his father’s estate (Ardizzone, 2007; Strouse, 1999a).

A “Passing” Legacy

Personally, Belle still struggled with aspects of her racial identity. Belle lived for almost three decades as a self-invented woman. She and her family lived separate and apart from Richard T. Greener and by all accounts had no reason to seek him out or acknowledge him. Since 1906, Greener lived in Chicago and by 1914 was permanently settled with cousins in the neighborhood of Hyde Park (Ardizzone, 2007). Unbeknownst to the Greenes, Richard T. Greener and his son Russell had been jointly left a bequest by Greener’s cousin, Isaiah Wears (Ardizzone, 2007; Mounter, 2002). Greener needed either Russell’s release or to prove that he could not be found. Belle’s siblings had also chose to pass and were living as White in various parts of the eastern United States (Ardizzone, 2007; Strouse, 1999a).

Greener told the court that he would place ads in New York and New Jersey in an attempt to locate Russell (Mounter, 2002).

Belle was still romantically involved with Bernard Berenson and she told him that in January of 1914 that she had to go to Chicago on personal business to see someone that she had not seen in almost twenty years (Ardizzone, 2007). Belle was guarded with Bernard as to the identity of the person but conceded that while she “dreaded the trip in one way” she was also “overjoyed to take it in another as it is to bring back into my life someone whom I love
very much and have not seen since” and would “rectify a very grave wrong and injury” (cited in Ardizzone, 2007, p. 311).

It is undetermined whether these comments related to Belle actually having had a reunion of sorts with her father (Ardizzone, 2007). But her remarks to Bernard give some indication that Richard T. Greener was the person she had to meet in Chicago on “important personal business” and more importantly that she understood that he suffered an undeserved injustice in the family’s personal snubbing of him (cited in Ardizzone, 2007, p. 311).

Belle and her family had crossed into a world and lifestyle that Richard T. Greener could have never imagined. All of his married children had selected White spouses, and his youngest unmarried daughter, Theodora, would eventually marry twice both times to White men (Ardizzone, 2007). Regardless of J. P. Morgan’s wish that she would have a lifelong job as the librarian of the Morgan Library, Belle still feared that too much about her racial identity could be exposed and she recognized that her mother and siblings would also be affected. She told Bernard that her trip to Chicago to see someone “would bring disaster to several people if it became known that I had seen this person” (cited in Ardizzone, 2007, p. 311).

However, the possible resurfacing of her father into her life did not deter the prior development of her identity. Belle had constructed her identity beginning in her adolescence and into her young adulthood. By the 1920s, Belle was “identity achieved” because she had formed and acquired her own distinct and separate identity and chose a profession that was a true reflection of her (Marcia, 1966, 1993).

In her young adulthood, Belle previously recognized the need to guide future generations. She had already defended the assertion that in general rare books, manuscripts,
and other ephemera should be available to students and scholars for research purposes. She further contributed to educating the masses by participating and cooperating in public exhibitions as the librarian of the Morgan Library (“Big exhibition of Pilgrims,” 1920).

Belle was also praised and awarded for her services to expanding the appreciation of art in the United States and in foreign countries (Canfield, 1974). Ever humble, she declined an honorary degree from the University of California (Canfield, 1974). But in 1921, the French government bestowed her with the gold palm of officer of public instruction in recognition of her services to French art and culture (Canfield, 1974; “Miss Belle Greene,” 1921; “Viviani honors Morgan,” 1921). Her devotion to the Morgan’s collection of European art, music, and literature was also recognized by various other countries, including Italy and Belgium (Popa, 2003). Therefore, Belle’s work exemplified the generativity that Erikson described as the crisis of his seventh stage of human psychosocial human development.

Belle’s generativity also extended into her personal life. The Greene family would eventually reside in various parts of the country but Genevieve lived with Belle until her death in 1941 (Ardizzone, 2007). Now in her early thirties, Belle was unmarried and childless but she had become an aunt and a type of surrogate mother. Her younger sister, Theodora, had a son, Robert, from her first marriage and a daughter, Belle, from her second marriage (Ardizzone, 2007). Robert was born in Belle’s house on January 24, 1919 (Ardizzone, 2007; James, 1971).

Theodora was severely depressed after her first husband was killed in World War I. Her extreme grief caused Belle to become the legal guardian of her nephew, Robert Mackenzie Leveridge (Ardizzone, 2007). Robert was fair enough in complexion that there
would not have been a question about his race (James, 1971). Belle showered affection on her nephew and later would take him overseas to expand his appreciation for the art world she loved (Ardizzone, 2007). Essentially, Belle had become the head of the Greene family. She cared and looked out for the family both financially and physically. Many of her siblings lived with her and their mother at some point when they were either out of work or sick (Ardizzone, 2007). Belle had professional and familial responsibilities that she carried as a mantle of her success.

The Morgan’s private library collection was overseen by Belle da Costa Greene from 1905 until 1924, when the library was transferred to a Board of Trustees and provided an endowment of $1,500,000 for its maintenance (Adams, 1964). In the same year, the Pierpont Morgan Library was incorporated by a special act of the New York state legislature to become a public reference library, with Belle da Costa Greene becoming the first director (Adams, 1964; Greene, 1930).

Belle served as the director of the Pierpont Morgan Library beginning in 1924 until her resignation in October of 1948 (Adams, 1964). The Pierpont Morgan Library staff minutes revealed that as of January 1, 1924, Belle was named Director and Keeper of the Manuscripts with a salary of $12,500. Ada Thurston, her longtime colleague at the library was named Keeper of the Printed books with a salary of $5,000. Belle’s worth and value to the library even without formal education was demonstrated in the difference between their salaries.

By the 1930s, Belle continued to exhibit Erikson’s (1968) character trait of

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29 Morgan Collections Correspondence, 1887-1948, ARC 1310: Administration, Minutes of Staff Meetings, 1924-1975. Morgan Library and Museum, New York, NY.

30 Morgan Collections Correspondence, 1887-1948, ARC 1310: Administration, Minutes of Staff Meetings, 1924-1975. Morgan Library and Museum, New York, NY.
generativity. She organized graduate studies, exhibitions, and lectures to be held at the Pierpont Morgan library and elsewhere. In 1933, she selected over a hundred and fifty illuminated manuscripts and miniatures, which dated from the ninth to sixteenth centuries, and arranged a joint exhibition to be shown at the New York Public Library (Illuminated manuscripts, 1934; “MSS,” 1933). Belle also oversaw and mounted numerous exhibitions including a significant display of the Pierpont Morgan Library’s collection at the New York’s World Fair in 1939 (Illustrated catalogue, 1939; In august company, 1993). She had served the Morgan family as its private librarian and was also comfortable as the director of the library that honored the Morgan family name.

As the library director, Belle authored four extensive reports that the library published as books which detailed the Pierpont Morgan Library’s growth, development, and activities over the course of her directorship. The books primarily served as Belle’s summaries of the annual reports to the library’s board of trustees. However, they also provided a wealth of information about the collection activities that Belle participated in and supervised.

The first report covered the years 1924 through 1929 and was published in 1930. Belle noted that the following additions had been made to the library’s collection: forty six illuminated or textual manuscripts, nineteen single leaves or miniatures from illuminated manuscripts, thirty-six holograph manuscripts, four hundred ninety-eight holograph or signed letters and documents, four thousand seven hundred and eighty-seven printed books, thirty-one Rembrandt etchings, eleven mezzotints, three single drawings, six volumes of drawings and one Dürer woodblock (Greene, 1930).

The second report covered 1930 through 1935. Belle acknowledged that the library had taken particular interest in “increasing the usefulness of the Library to students and to
this end graduate courses, conducted by recognized scholars in various fields, were inaugurated” (Greene, 1937, p. 1). She also advised the library’s board of trustees of new staff hires and departures (Greene, 1937).

Curt F. Buhler joined the staff in 1934 as a research scholar and cataloguer of early English texts and early printing (Greene, 1937, pp. 12-13). Buhler (1973) later remarked about his experience as Greene’s colleague:

> Any Director of the calibre of Belle da Costa Greene can easily win the total, respectful admiration of every member of her staff. Alas, there have been but few such in the World! It was a wonderful privilege to be for fifteen years on the staff of one who could enjoy the devotion and respect of friends and colleagues without pride, who could greet success with due humility, and who could face heartbreak and pain—alas, all too frequently in later years—with the unflinching courage befitting a man. (p. 517)

Belle further reported that the acquisitions for this period were: twenty-eight illuminated or textual manuscripts, nine single leaves from illuminated manuscripts, seven autograph manuscripts or portions of manuscripts, two hundred eighty-five autograph or signed letters or documents, five thousand three hundred and six printed books, four single drawings, and one volume of drawings, one Rembrandt etching, three mezzotints, two engravings, four steel plates for book illustration, one Dürer woodcut, six bookbindings, two hundred and sixteen French bookbinding ‘finishing’ tools, over ten thousand photographs, and over one thousand lantern slides (Greene, 1937).

Belle’s review of activities between 1936 through 1940 continued to report on the library’s progress and success. It was also noted that Lawrence Counselman Wroth, head of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University, was appointed as the library’s consultant (Greene, 1941). In 1949, Wroth remarked on Belle’s success as the director of the Pierpont Morgan Library.
To the happy task of acquisition Miss Greene has brought two highly individual characteristics—a sense of cultural values which disregards with certitude the unimportant in art or letters and an instinct for the authentic, a feeling for realness, a recognition of quality which can be likened to the possession of ‘absolute pitch’ by a musician. These natural gifts were developed and reinforced by reading and reflection, by observation and study in the libraries and museums of this country and Europe. Her inherent taste was trained and directed through years of association with great men, great books, and great production of artist and craftsman. Her natural gifts, acquired knowledge, and relentless industry have given Miss Greene an eminent position among institutional collectors. The books and manuscripts she bought for the Library were acquired slowly, selectively, and with regard to the relationship of each one to the collection as a whole and to its separate parts. Any item she purchased for the Library must be a fitting addition and it must meet the threefold test imposed by her taste, knowledge, and austerity of purpose. (*The first quarter century*, 1949, pp. 14-15)

By 1939, Belle was sixty years old and had become permanently associated with the historic legacy of the Pierpont Morgan Library. But as the 1940s and Belle’s old age approached, it was clear that it had begun to take a physical toll.

Erikson’s (1968) eighth stage of psychosocial development occurred when Belle was in her sixties. The aging process proved difficult for Belle because she had begun to suffer from stress, anxiety, and nervousness (Ardizzone, 2007). Belle had collapsed after the joint Pierpont Morgan Library and New York Public Library exhibition in 1933 (Ardizzone, 2007; “MSS,” 1933). And her elder sister, Mary Louise Martin, died in the same year (Ardizzone, 2007).

Many of Belle’s friends and co-workers were unaware of her true age and believed her to be roughly eight years younger than she actually was because she had lied on many public documents about her age and year of birth (Ardizzone, 2007; Greener, 1879; NARA, 1916, 1920; Strouse, 1999a). Although Belle’s health had begun to steadily deteriorate, she remained dedicated to her work despite more personal sufferings that soon followed (Ardizzone, 2007).
Belle had raised her nephew, Robert, and had supported him. Regardless, he dropped out of Harvard College in 1938 and enlisted with the Air Corps in 1941 to fight in World War II (Ardizzone, 2007). Already disappointed, Belle’s beloved mother, Genevieve, died on March 22, 1941 (Ardizzone, 2007). And in 1942, the trustees of the Pierpont Morgan Library decided to remove the collections to storage for the duration of the war (Ardizzone, 2007).

Belle discussed the impact of the collection’s removal because of World War II in her final review for the years 1941-1948.

During the first few years covered by this report, the normal routines of the Library were distorted by the necessity of evacuating a large part of the rare and irreplaceable material to safer inland repositories. The paintings, tapestries, art objects, manuscripts (illuminated, textual and autograph), printed books of the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries, the large collections of master drawings and Rembrandt etchings, and the stained glass windows throughout the Main Building were removed . . . the temporary absence of the most important of the Library’s original research material, and the concentration of people in all fields of endeavor on the successful prosecution of the war, inevitably led to the curtailing of some of the Library’s public program. (Greene, 1949, p. 17)

Although, business at the library had slowed, Belle had other work to keep her preoccupied.

In April of 1942, she joined the Library of Congress’ Librarian’s Council and was named chair of the rare books sub-committee.31

Archibald MacLeish, the Librarian of Congress, stated that the Librarian’s Council was comprised of distinguished librarians, scholars, and book collectors whose purpose was to make recommendations to the Librarian of Congress of the conduct of the Library of Congress’ services, the development of its collections, and the initiation and control of

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bibliographical studies. Belle also served on the Executive Committee of the Advisory Council and had previously wasted no time expressing her concerns to Macleish about why such a council was needed.

It will be immensely more helpful to the Library if you appoint an Advisory Committee or Council to advise you on the RBC [Rare Book Collections] than if you confine this office to one person. If you would like to have me be the chairman of this group, I’ll be delighted to do. The Committee should be the most distinguished group of librarians, booksellers, and collectors which can be brought together from all over the country . . . it would be a wicked thing to have this Council – or whatever you decide to call it – be purely ornamental, and I suggest that there be various subcommittees . . . As I understand it, there are four other Divisions so closely allied to the RBC that it would not only be proper but advisable to include them in the activities of the Council . . . Departmentalism is a curse of all large institutions and, apparently, the LC [Library of Congress] is not exempt from it! It is absurd for allied departments to be more or less isolated with the walls between them being built higher and higher. The Council would be an enormous help in bread- ing down this pernicious activity.33 (Belle Greene to Archibald Macleish, January 3, 1941)

The war had changed the nature of Belle’s life long work and it only got worse as shortly thereafter in 1943, Jack, or J. P. Morgan, Jr., Belle’s boss for over thirty years died (Ardizzone, 2007).

Once again, Belle was in mourning for a beloved patron and was needed to assist in the estate valuation. During the summer of 1943, she was kept busy with Jack’s estate affairs but was completely unprepared for news that her nephew, Robert, while still in the service had committed suicide in Europe (Ardizzone, 2007). Belle had lost so many family members and close friends. Belle’s favorite sister, Ethel Alice Oakley, died never having had children in 1945 (Ardizzone, 2007). She was semi-estranged to her youngest sister, Theodora, and


her relationship with her brother, Russel, and his wife was at best tenable (Ardizzone, 2007). And while her old flame Bernard Berenson was still alive, he was in Europe and their long-distance relationship had since cooled having proved futile.

Erikson asserted that the crisis of old age or maturity was whether an individual developed integrity and viewed their life as a successful meaningful whole. Belle had every reason to feel such integrity. The last few years of Belle’s life were still vibrant at least in relation to her love and respect of art, history, and the Pierpont Morgan Library.

Earlier in 1939, Belle was elected as a Fellow of the Mediaeval Academy (Wilkins et al., 1957). And in 1944, she joined the Friends of Monte Cassino, a group of United States sponsors that had advocated for the reconstruction of the abbey after its bombing by the United States earlier that year. (“A star in the darkness,” 1947). She also continued to work at the library even after the announcement of her retirement after forty-three years was published in the newspapers (Ardizzone, 2007).

Belle had assisted the board of trustees in initially selecting a suitable replacement for her but, in October of 1948, the board hired Frederick B. Adams as the new director of the library (Ardizzone, 2007; “Morgan librarian,” 1948). Belle responded in a brief note to Adams of her congratulations of his appointment.

Dear Mr. Adams,
Confidentially (as it will not be announced until after the Trustees meeting) I want to let you know how delighted I am that you have agreed to ‘supplant’ me here. Nothing could be better for the Library – and judging from my million – years experience, little which you would enjoy more.
Sincerely, Belle da Costa Greene.34 (Belle da Costa Greene to Frederick B. Adams, October 11, 1948)

In spite of her losses and the retirement from the job she loved, Belle adapted to the triumphs

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and setbacks of her life as best she could and succeeded at establishing a legacy that was a testament both to her true racial identity and her chosen profession. Miller Lydenberg summed up the significance of Belle’s professional legacy when he stated:

The retirement of Miss Greene marks the end of an era . . . All rejoice at this chance to express their affection and respect for the first Director of the library, to applaud and praise Belle da Costa Greene as a woman, as a librarian, as a bibliographer, as a scholar. (cited in Miner, 1954, pp. 6, 9)

The Pierpont Morgan Library held a retrospective exhibition in honor of Belle da Costa Greene that ran from April until July of 1949 (Louchheim, 1949; The first quarter century, 1949; “The Morgan Library honors,” 1949). A complementary book was also published in 1949 that showcased items she had acquired for the library between 1924 and 1948 (The first quarter century, 1949). Greene’s last purchase was reported to be a fifteenth-century Ethiopian Gospel just one of the many “treasures amassed under her aegis” (Louchheim, 1949). After what was likely several strokes, Belle da Costa Greene succumbed to cancer and died on May 11, 1950 at the age of seventy (Ardizzone, 2007; “Belle D. Greene Morgan Librarian,” 1950). Her veiled African-American heritage appeared to be buried with her. Fortunately, her legacy as a librarian and director of the Pierpont Morgan Library remained completely intact.
Chapter Five

“Race is a bizarre social invention, a public fiction masquerading as physical fact. In a nation where everyone is carefully—if sometimes unconsciously—scrutinized and then classified according to the imprecise dictates of certain visual cues (namely skin color), we all learn to assume that race exists as a public marker of supposedly real social, cultural, and genetic differences . . . But the ‘race problem’ is not about Black Americans: it is about race.” (Guterl, 2001, p. 3)

Conclusion

Belle da Costa Greene has been the subject of a biography. However, her life and library career promote the need for discussions on the history and impact of race and race studies in librarianship because they demonstrate and refute racial stereotypes and the accepted doctrines of racial inferiority. Critical Race Theory and Critical Race Theory counter-storytelling enhanced her narrative by highlighting the relevance of the various complex issues of race in librarianship. The reinterpretation of how she formed and acquired her identity further revealed a new understanding of her complicated legacy as a veiled Black female rare books librarian.

Erikson’s eight stage theory of human psychosocial development and Marcia’s ego-identity statuses contributed a new perspective on the existing scholarly literature on Belle da Costa Greene by relating the factors that pertained to her identity development, formation and acquisition. The use of Erikson as a theoretical framework in this reinterpretation assisted in the understanding of the potential reasons for Belle’s life decisions and her resulting professional success. However, because there was a lack of available primary sources that detailed her early life a thorough analysis of Erikson’s first five stages proved challenging. Yet utilizing the historical record of Belle’s parents enabled an analysis of the early period of Belle’s life and her future identity development. Therefore, the application of Eriksonian identity theories are recommended in other historical studies because the
psychosocial development of individuals may shed light on the shaping of pivotal choices within a person’s life span and are also informative as to their societal impact. Further, Erikson’s identity theories could be applied to the lives of other individuals who have racially passed as a means to explore the dynamics of race from this unique vantage point.  

Belle’s identity was shaped by her early environmental influences, her sex and racial designation, and her choice of profession. The impetus behind Belle’s life choices were illuminated by reviewing the psychosocial development over her life span and the process by which she became “identity achieved” (Marcia, 1966, 1993). The historical narrative of the lives of Belle’s parents and her early environment as a child and adolescent also provided the specific determination that she entered adolescence in a state of moratorium (Marcia, 1966, 1993). In addition, a review of Belle’s library career and a portion of her personal reflections demonstrated that after the brief moratorium period in adolescence, she handled her identity crisis and traversed life with a self-constructed identity (Marcia, 1966, 1993). Finally, Belle had a few meaningful intimate relationships, expressed concern for future generations, and lived with an overall sense of integrity and thus successfully navigated the crises of young adulthood, adulthood, and old age (Erikson, 1968, 1980). However, there is reason to believe that the burning of her personal papers before her death indicated that Belle may have felt some sense of regret or despair at the end of her life.  

Moreover, the retelling of Belle’s life and library career provided a unique perspective of race as told through the historical context of Black racial passing. Belle passed in order to safeguard her physical, financial, and professional security and stability and in so doing her legacy as a librarian and director rejected the fiction of race. Race

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35 Examples of historical studies that could employ Erikson’s identity theories are the lives of literary art critic Anatole Broyard, a Black man that passed for white, and Rachel Dolezal, the head of the Spokane, Washington NAACP, who passed for a Black woman but was later outed by her parents as actually being white.
studies in librarianship are striking especially when they demonstrate how race and racial stereotypes are social constructs that often limit an individual’s ability to flourish. The racial passing of Belle da Costa Greene and her resulting library career was paralleled with the striking racial discrimination of the time in which she lived. Thereby, this reinterpretation evidenced that race studies in librarianship demonstrate how race and racial stereotypes are social constructs that often constrain the progress and success of minorities. *The Times Literary Supplement* gave the most fitting tribute of Greene that transcended any racial designation:

> The prescriptive dignity of her office, her single-minded devotion to the library, her native ability and shrewdness, her uncanny sense of quality in books or manuscripts of any period, and a certain imperious pungency of temperament combined as the years passed to set Miss Greene in a unique position in the library world. (“Morgan librarian,” 1948)

The stories of minority librarians like Belle da Costa Greene are not only informative but they necessarily pave the way for a new generation of librarians to redefine race and contribute their skills and talents in library and information science.

The reexamination of the historical legacy of Belle da Costa Greene and her contribution to library and information science serves both the appeal of Dawson (2000) and Peterson (1996). Belle’s life and library career provides an early and remarkable account of racial struggle in librarianship, as well as emphasizing how the social construction of race can be individually manipulated to deconstruct racial stereotypes. While Belle can be defined by more than her race, it is possible that if her true racial identity had been known and confirmed, her career, and the professional success she achieved, may have taken a different path. Thus, the reinterpretation of the racial ideology by which she found herself
and her decision to undermine it fosters the need to engage in more substantive discussions of race and race studies in library and information science.

**Recommendations**

This historical reinterpretation served the unique purpose to illuminate an untold story of race and its divisiveness. Belle da Costa Greene’s life and legacy revealed, however, that the prescribed limitations of race could be transcended when there was an avenue to mask its effects. Yet this specific reinterpretation was limited in that only a select portion of primary source material related solely with Belle’s business correspondence was used due to access constraints. Moreover, reinterpretations such as this could be expanded where additional primary resources both personal and professional are used and fully exhausted. Finally, because there was a lack of primary source data for Belle’s early childhood other reinterpretations that implement the identity theories of Erikson or Marcia would likely benefit from primary source data that spans an individual’s entire life span.

The world of library and information science has attempted to answer the call to diversify the profession through recruiting, scholarships, and fellowships. This reinterpretation suggests that adding race-based curricula to the LIS academic program may also prove fruitful and warranted. Specifically, this reinterpretation sought to use Belle da Costa Greene’s life as an exemplar of the complex and contrived function of race in society and in librarianship. However, additional studies could be pursued employing CRT to investigate the phenomenological aspects of race and librarianship.

For example, a study of the professional success of early Black female librarians could be compared and contrasted with Greene as a possible subject. There is sufficient evidence suggesting that many early Black female librarians suffered discrimination and
were restrained in their professional progress. A study that researched the implications of this type of discrimination and racism paralleled against Greene’s career success as an assumed White librarian may further enlighten the profession as to the need to promote race studies in LIS. Also, future research regarding race and librarianship should not be limited to studies solely regarding early African-American female librarians. CRT and the identity theories of Erikson and Marcia are equally applicable to the study of the lives and library careers of all minority librarians of all races, both male and female, both historically and presently.

Race-based LIS courses could incorporate aspects such as: the reading and discussion of various histories of minority librarians, issues pertaining to library segregation, lack of libraries in minority communities, funding for libraries in racially segregated communities, and minority recruitment in the field. These courses could be all-inclusive or could be divided into individual classes that focus on one particular race-based topic. Also, the number of minorities interested in the LIS profession could potentially be increased by LIS courses that address race-based dynamics that have affected both minority library users and librarians. Further, race studies in LIS could also encourage discussions of how race and ethnicity are handled in the field worldwide. Countries that have racial caste systems as it pertains to the distribution of information and library services both historically and presently could be discussed and analyzed.

Race and race studies in LIS would also likely serve as the catalyst and platform to magnify other areas that are not yet receiving the necessary attention in the field. This reinterpretation demonstrates that there is a platform for race and race studies in LIS to open the field to the world of biography. Biographies of minority librarians both living and dead
would expand the exposure of LIS beyond the field. Biographies permit an in-depth look at the life of a whole person. Therefore, biographies of minority librarians may inspire new insights into the qualities and characteristics necessary to persevere and achieve success despite trials and hardships.

The field of library and information science does not exist in a vacuum. It intersects with the fields of humanities and social sciences. People either as individuals or in groups are generally at the heart of almost all fields of study and LIS is no exception. LIS can and should incorporate discussions of race and race studies not simply to diversify the field but to be a true reflection of the field.

Final Thoughts

Researching the dual legacies of Belle da Costa Greene has been a privilege. As an African-American woman and librarian, I was astounded to have never heard of her prior to the discovery of her father’s artifacts in Chicago. It was very exciting to discover that a Black female librarian had successfully worked in the rare books field. When I began researching her, I was also amazed that many LIS professionals had never heard of her. The fact that she passed made it easy to overlook her contribution to minority librarianship but that is exactly what drew me to her story. It was because she passed that she was able to demonstrate that she had the capacity to achieve tremendous goals regardless of a racial classification. She pursued her desire to work in the field of librarianship unencumbered by society’s constraints and succeeded. To the chagrin of racial idealists, Belle first acknowledged her right to be a librarian—and to be a damn good one!

I confess that as a Black woman I was initially disappointed that for so many years Belle’s race and African-American parentage was unknown and uncelebrated in the field of
library and information science. But in performing this research, I realized that Black or White Belle da Costa Greene was an accomplished female rare books librarian and that in and of itself was worth illuminating. I can only pray that by retelling stories such as hers that the world will be reminded that we all belong to the one race that truly matters—the human race.
Figure 2. Article describing Belle da Costa Greene’s purchase for J. P. Morgan of sought after items at an auction. The World Magazine, week of May 21, 1911.
Figure 3. Article describing some of Belle da Costa Greene’s purchases for the Pierpont Morgan Library. New York Daily Tribune, May 28, 1911.
Figure 4. Article describing an interview with Belle da Costa Greene and her success as the Morgan librarian. *The Evening Sun*, October 19, 1916.
Figure 5. Article describing Belle da Costa Greene being honored with the gold palm for services to French art and culture. The Evening World, April 22, 1921.
Figure 6. Second and third pages of Belle da Costa Greene’s 1916 passport application.

Image available at the National Archives and Records Administration.
Figure 7. Fourth and fifth pages of Belle da Costa Greene’s 1920 passport application.

Image available at the National Archives and Records Administration.
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