WOMEN'S FORUM

Sharing Wisdom

Dear Ladies,

"Reinvention" is a concept that has become very popular in our culture. At our previous event we witnessed how Ralph Lauren was in the process of reinventing himself right from childhood and would eventually create a style which is uniquely American and universally coveted and copied.

Over the years, other pop culture icons have self-created before our eyes. Celebrated wonders such as Madonna and Lady Gaga have gone to great heights as self-invented personas. In their case, talent was a lot more than being able to sing a song.

Google defines reinvention as "…the action or process through which something is changed so much that it appears to be entirely new". It's everywhere, with shelves full of self-help books, online programming and ubiquitous advertising encouraging us to become better versions of ourselves.

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Our topic for the month of October 2024 is a story that is at once uplifting but with some pretty sad undertones. We will learn about a formidable woman, playing in the big leagues of affluence and culture, extraordinarily successful on many fronts, all the while harboring a secret that could have toppled her world and that of her family.

Belle Greener, with the help of a good education, intelligent and sophisticated parents, a comfortable address of origin in Washington DC among the "Colored Elite" of the day, would be (through a decision made solely by her mother) reinvented into Belle da Costa Greene - *a white woman*. Miss Greene was beautiful, elegant and savvy and in the right place at the right time. It was the combination of these factors that led to the job interview that would change her life.

Enter JP Morgan. With her brilliance and moxie Belle helped the Titan of the Gilded Age achieve his dream of becoming the most renowned patron of art in the world. As his personal librarian she was responsible for amassing a great library of incunabula and a priceless collection of art which would reside at the Morgan Library and immortalize JP Morgan on yet another

level. Belle became a highly respected figure in the international art community and a fixture of prominence in NY society. *All this while passing for white because as a woman of color, she wouldn't have stood a chance.*

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One wonders, which is the more important story? Belle's accomplishment of creating the JP Morgan Library as we know it now? Or Belle's accomplishment to breathe and triumph in the rarified air that would surely have been denied her (had she not been reinvented) at that time and place in history?

At our luncheon on October 10, we'll discuss this question in a program with our own *Literary Maven*, Nancy Harms. Many of us have read the popular historical novel *The Personal Librarian* and were intrigued by Belle's story. Nancy has researched far beyond this telling, reaching deeper into the fundamentals (background and history) of this extraordinary woman's life.

Luncheon with Belle, Thursday, October 10 at noon. Dillon Library, Bedminster NJ. Admission 20. To
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register see below.

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For our second event in October, we'll be traveling to the Morgan Library in NYC for an exhibit dedicated to Belle da Costa Greene and for an opportunity to visit the magnificent collection of treasures of art and literature she acquired and curated for JP Morgan as his personal librarian.

Trip to the Morgan Library, Thursday October 24, leaving Dillon Library in Bedminster NJ at 9am. Return pickup at the Morgan 3pm.

Admission 45. Does not include entry to the library/museum. To register see below.

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Upcoming dates for WF programs: November 7 & 21.

To register contact us at womensforumusa@gmail.com or at dillonlibrary.org.

Wishing you a beautiful, beguiling and bewitching October!

Evelyn