



# ETHICAL VIEWS



March 2022 Vol. 136, No. 7 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

## SUNDAY PLATFORMS

The public is welcome to join us



**Sunday, March 6, 11 AM**

### ***Forgiveness***

**Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader,  
Philadelphia Ethical Society**

What is forgiveness? How should humanists approach forgiveness so that it elevates our quality of life and strengthens our commitment

to ethical living? Felix Adler wrote that “to forgive is not to forget—quite the contrary. To forgive is to remember the past action, but to remember it as belonging to the past, as the act of one who has since undergone the great change.” Is he right? Hugh explores the process of seeking and giving forgiveness in interpersonal relationships and within oneself.

**Sunday, March 13, 11 AM**

### ***Black Women’s Bodies in the Archive and the Afterlife of Captivity***

**Marisa Fuentes, Rutgers University**

Historical and contemporary records are consistently unreliable for understanding Black lives in precarity. Historian Marisa Fuentes will consider the ethics of historical research into vulnerable subjects by analyzing a document from the Barbados colonial slave archives alongside the police investigation into the killing of Breonna Taylor. She also will offer ethical reading practices for today. Fuentes is Presidential Term Chair in African American History and Associate Professor of History and Women’s and Gender Studies at Rutgers University and the author of *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive*.



**Sunday, March 20, 11 AM**

### ***Dogs, Cats, and Sentientism*** **Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader**

Animals have long supported human life, from their non-consensual role in our diets to their loving place

in our homes. Humans often go to great lengths to care for them: rescuing wild animals in distress or feeding feral ones. Hugh will share two stories—one about dogs and one about cats—that illustrate caring relationships between species. He’ll ask if we should honor those relationships

by helping humanism evolve into *sentientism*: a worldview that extends compassion and ethical consideration to all entities capable of experiencing, flourishing, and suffering.



**Sunday, March 27, 11 AM**

### ***Torn Apart: How the Child Welfare System Destroys Black Families***

**Dorothy Roberts, University of Pennsylvania**

Acclaimed scholar Dorothy Roberts exposes the foundational racism of the child welfare system. Roberts argues it is a “family policing system” designed to put Black families under intense state surveillance and regulation, driving many Black children into juvenile detention and imprisonment. She calls for both dismantling this system and reimagining how to support families and keep children safe. Roberts is the George A. Weiss University Professor of Africana Studies and Law and Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania and author of the forthcoming *Torn Apart: How the Child Welfare System Destroys Black Families—and How Abolition Can Build a Safer World*.



## IN THIS ISSUE . . .

The persuasive power of silly cinema;  
where we stand on Black Reparations: and a  
member’s 40 years of dedication to Nicaragua.

*On the banner: The Harriet Tubman statue, by Wesley Wofford, is on view on the north side of City Hall until the end of March. Tubman had a strong connection to Pennsylvania that is indicated in the statue.*

Join us just prior to each session at [www.tiny.cc/phillyethics](http://www.tiny.cc/phillyethics)

## FROM THE LEADER Silly Cinema: The Making of a Pledge-Drive Film

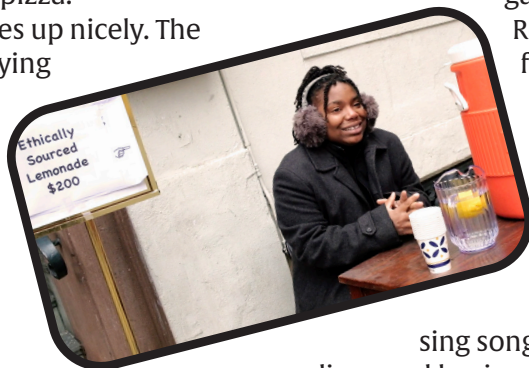
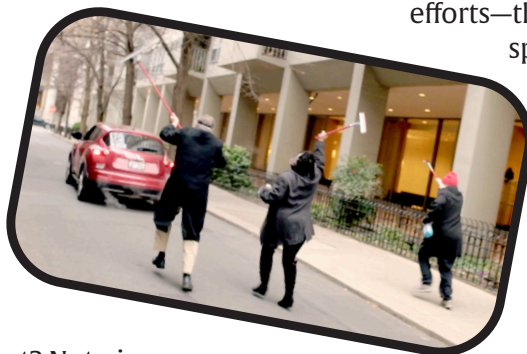
By Hugh Taft-Morales

WHEN IT BECAME APPARENT that Omicron would rule out gathering in-person for our annual Pledge Luncheon, the planning team was concerned. Normally attendance for that event is high because, hey, who doesn't love a free catered lunch? But after a food-free Zoom celebration in 2021, we needed something special to entice folks in 2022.

Michael Black-Smith, Nick Sanders, Vince Russo, Bob Bueding, and I asked ourselves: what do our computer screens deliver best? Not pizza. Not talking heads, which audio serves up nicely. The answer: video. I had already been trying to lure Christian Hayden—the only Society member I know with videography experience—into some film projects. So, we decided to set our community table not with food, but with motion-picture munchies, a cinematic repast, a visual feast!

I did have one reservation. In 2002, my good friend Ken Knisely and I produced *The Cave*, a self-financed, humorous film exploration of Plato's most famous metaphor. The writing, site identification, storyboarding, and crew recruitment were creative and engaging. Our main filming day was among the most exhilarating, exhausting experiences of my life. Unfortunately, the final product was disappointing. I learned the hard way that filmmaking ain't easy.

*Smiling for dollars:* Cheryl Desmond, Kate Esposito, Reva Stover, and Hugh Taft-Morales chased the money, while Christian Hayden filmed the action.



So, I was a bit apprehensive when Christian, Reva Stover, Kate Esposito, and I gathered to brainstorm. (Later, Cheryl Desmond joined us for the fun.) Thankfully, the whole process

was a hoot! Once we had the concept—a series of poorly conceived and executed fundraising efforts—the ideas came fast and furious. To avoid spoilers for those who missed the film, I won't say what made it into the final cut. (You can find that out on our web site's [Members Page](#). To get the password, send me an [email](#).)

But I will share some of the joke efforts that we nixed. Hugh scamming little kids in Rittenhouse Square with the shell game involving three cups and a ball. Reva doing gymnastics (yes, flips!) in front of the building. A date-a-board-member auction. Selling pie on Pi Day (March 14). Selling tickets for a tour of our friendly neighbor Bart Blatstein's grand home without his permission. Stealing a loaf of bread from Metropolitan Bakery. (That one was just an excuse to sing songs from *Les Misérables*.) We even discussed having our president, "Mad Skills Michael," dressed in tights, pole-dance for tips on a street light. I still might want to capture that on film one day!

*The Road to the Pledge Drive* was a great success, in part, because it was silly. It provided chuckles from start to finish. We have too little of that in these days of grim news and dire predictions. As I pursue more creative efforts in my work at the Society, I hope to incorporate regular dashes of silliness.

As for film specifically, it can produce fun and novel perspectives on our communal lives. Hopefully, soon, we can sit together in-person, popcorn in hand, enjoying a film from the same side of the screen!

*Hugh Taft-Morales is the Leader of the Philadelphia Ethical Society.*



## FROM THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE

### Some Good First Steps on Black Reparations

By Erik Michael Younge

THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC HAS AFFECTED JUST ABOUT everything nationally and globally, including the struggle for African-American Reparations. Black Reparations, in the words of attorney and activist Nkechi Taifa, include “a formal acknowledgement of historical wrong and an official unfettered apology;” “recognition that the injury has continued and manifests itself today;” “a commitment to address the harms caused by the wrong;” and “actual compensation in whatever form or forms are negotiated in a settlement agreement with those who were harmed.”

Black Reparations efforts go back to the early 1800s. Black Americans have always fought to get justice and economic restitution for their suffering under slavery, Jim Crow, and other legal forms of discrimination.

A number of U.S. cities have begun to offer reparations plans: among them Amherst, Massachusetts; Providence, Rhode Island; and Asheville, North Carolina. Evanston, Illinois led the way: in 2019 the city council voted for a \$10 million reparations plan introduced by then-Alderman Robin Rue Simmons. In March 2021, the council approved the first phase of that plan: a \$400,000 fund to help Black homeowners address their critical housing needs. In January, the first 16 recipients—residents of the city between 1919 and 1969 called “Ancestors”—were awarded \$25,000 grants for home purchase, improvement, or mortgage assistance. (Descendants of Ancestors and Black residents victimized by housing discrimination also will be eligible.)

Higher-learning institutions such as Harvard, Rutgers, and the University of Virginia also are starting to get onboard. The Virginia Theological Seminary wanted to make amends to the descendants of enslaved African people and Black workers under segregation who labored on its campus for little or no pay between 1823 and 1951. In 2019, the school set aside \$1.7 million for that

purpose. It began disbursing the fund last year.

All of the above are great first steps. But I believe that the U.S. federal government must be the primary force to establish Black Reparations. That case is made by William Darity, a professor at Duke University, and A. Kirsten Mullen, founder of the arts-consulting organization Artefactual. In an article for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, they argue that Black people account for about 12% of the nation’s population but possess only 2% of its wealth. They say the federal government created and maintains the conditions that produced the Black-white wealth gap, “including slavery, legal segregation, white-terrorist massacres, and lynchings leading to seizures of Black-owned property, redlining, discriminatory application of the GI Bill, mass incarceration, and employment bias.”

The Ending Racism Task Force and the Philadelphia Ethical Society support a Congressional hearing on House bill H.R. 40, federal legislation that would establish a commission to study the national legacy of slavery and implementation of reparations. That effort is chaired by Rep. Shelia Jackson Lee. Activists and allies are pushing for the Biden/Harris administration to throw all of its support behind the bill and its passage.

(Some of us are also members of the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N’COBRA), a coalition of individuals and organizations created “for the sole purpose of obtaining reparations for African descendants in the United States.”)

Black Reparations is a struggle for equality on many levels: social, economic, cultural, moral, ethical, and practical. America can never truly heal until this is done. Reparations can help to repair and rebuild this nation and this planet for the good of all. Peace!

*Erik Michael Younge is a member of the Ending Racism Task Force of the Philadelphia Ethical Society*

**Reparations in  
Amherst**

**Reparations in  
Asheville**

**Reparations  
in  
Evanston**

**REPARATIONS  
IN  
PROVIDENCE**

## FROM THE PRESIDENT The Beauty of a “Living” Strategic Plan

by Michael Black-Smith



**L**AST YEAR AS THE BOARD WAS working on a five-year plan to strengthen our community and shore up our organization, I was hit by a wave of anxiety and doubt. We were being helped capably through this process by someone who had spent her career working with larger and more complex

organizations than the Philadelphia Ethical Society. Yet I worried: Who were we, as individuals on a volunteer Board, to produce the be-all, end-all document that would position the Society to be more successful and resilient?

I envisioned our final, perfect product as a carved stone tablet or curled parchment weighted down by official seals. Mounted somewhere at 1906 Rittenhouse, it would authoritatively propel our congregation into the future. Hopefully we had checked for typos!

To my great relief, that misunderstanding was corrected relatively quickly. *Our Path Forward* is not the Rosetta Stone or Magna Carta, to be preserved, gently lit, in a case for reverent study. Rather, it is a “living document” whose utility depends on our willingness to take a sharpie or highlighter to its sections. The measure of success for the (so many!) hours invested in creating the plan is not how precisely we execute it. Rather, it is how well the plan holistically guides our efforts.

Here is the current state of our plan (scribbles and cross-outs included):

**Operations:** This target area is progressing roughly as planned. However, we are sidestepping slightly. Rather than immediately bring in outside auditors, we are investigating how much more we can develop our existing processes and administration as well as leverage the capacity of our current software.



**Building:** Goals for this target area have not changed. But we have slowed down to match the pace of the easement fund, which could help pay for a study to prioritize repairs.



**Membership and Volunteers:** These target areas require the most significant change. Until now, I have viewed them as two sides of the same coin: what we get from and what we give to the Society. The hiring of Reva Stover as our new champion of all-things-community has clarified my thinking. The more logical and effective approach is to combine them into a broader Community target area.



**Camp Linden:** As the Board and I have worked more closely with the Camp Linden Committee, it has become clear that the camp is being run effectively, with an eye on both the present and the future. Its greatest need, at this point, is greater integration into the Society and a concerted effort to increase the visibility of its good work.



As always, I am happy to discuss anything about the inner workings of our Society.

*Michael Black-Smith is the president of the Philadelphia Ethical Society.*

**Turning up the heat:** Society member Kate Esposito (left) joined Frances Upshaw and Paula Paul at the Harriet Tubman statue at City Hall. They were part of the February 3 POWER rally demanding that PGW restore heat to its customers.





## FROM THE EDITOR Apathy and Compassion on the Pavement

By Leigh Buchanan

**M**ANY OF YOU KNOW ABOUT MY RECENT accident. On a morning run (more like a trot), I was heading west on Spring Garden when I encountered a food truck in the middle of the sidewalk. Several unmasked customers milled around on the building side. Anxious about Covid, I swung around the back. My foot encountered four screws sprouting from the pavement. I went flying.

I landed heavily on my right shoulder, then rolled hard onto the left side of my face. My arm was at once in agony and inert. I lay there, in the rain, waiting for the crowd I expected to cluster around me offering assistance and concern. I was, after all, a 60-year-old white woman in running togs sprawled on the ground with blood streaming down her face. Who wouldn't pity me? Who would avoid me out of suspicion or fear?

The view from the pavement is dehumanizing. You are immobile on the ground, looking up. Passersby don't just fail to acknowledge you. They assiduously try not to see you; to discipline their gaze forward, intensify their aura of hurry, appear distracted by their music and podcasts. Beneath their eyeline, you also are beneath their contempt.

The food truck customers could not have missed me, sprawled 10 feet from them. As I visibly struggled to extract my mobile phone, none glanced my way. I thought of calling out to them. But my personal rules of engagement for interacting with people on the street (and don't we all have those?) eschew engagement with anyone who actively tries to attract attention.

For me, that rule generally does not apply to people in distress. Still, hesitation—borne of shame and an unwillingness to impose myself on strangers—prevented me from hailing the two dozen or so people who, over the next 40 minutes, walked by me or stopped at the food truck.

After about 10 minutes a young Black woman, with braids and stylishly ripped jeans, stopped and insisted on calling an ambulance. (By then I had reached my husband and asked him to fetch me in an Uber since



we don't have a car. A patently ridiculous idea.) Then she waited with me, holding her umbrella over my prone form. When I asked for her name, she said it was Alicia, so that is what I called her. I tried to persuade her to call me Leigh. To my discomfort, she would only call me "Miss."

I thought Alicia's presence might make people more likely to offer help: reassure them they would not become solely responsible for whatever chaos I represented. No one did. Thinking back, I realize passersby were less likely to stop once they saw someone else had the situation in hand. (Also, if this had happened in a more bustling area then things probably would have been different. Foot traffic was relatively sparse in that location at that time of day.)

I have yet to wholly unpack this experience. For me, there was a lesson about privilege. Although I instinctively look away from the unhoused (even though I know that eye contact is important) I was shocked when people ignored "someone like me." Yet my sense of worthiness quickly gave way to shame. Bleeding on the ground, I realize I looked scary: a person you'd want to be someone else's problem.

I need to reexamine the rules that govern how I treat people on the street. Fear and aversion, unfortunately, are hard to suppress. But that is no excuse for denying dignity and compassion to everyone.

*Leigh Buchanan is the editor of Ethical Views and a member of the Philadelphia Ethical Society.*

*Photo by Jay Black, License through Wikimedia Commons*

## ADVENTURES IN VOLUNTEERING

### How Nicaragua Became My Second Country

By Sylvia Metzler

I MADE MY FIRST TRIP TO NICARAGUA IN 1984, as a nurse practitioner just out of grad school. We were a delegation of medical professionals who had heard the Sandinista government was trying to do something different in terms of health care and education. The Reagan administration considered the Sandinistas communists and wanted to destroy them. I was among those who wanted to witness what was really happening and to educate people in the United States.

We traveled around the country for two weeks, visiting war zones, hospitals, and health centers. I was blown away by the emphasis on preventive health care. Back in the United States, I joined organizations opposed to our government's fundraising and military support for the Contras, an anti-Sandinista rebel group.

In 1987 I spent a month in Nicaragua studying Spanish, learning about the revolution, and getting more and more furious about the policies of the U.S. government. By now it was a bloody war, with young Nicaraguans being killed fighting the Contras. I thought, why don't I volunteer down here?

I applied to a program run by the Church of the Brethren. The church wasn't there to proselytize: they wanted volunteers to lend their expertise. I wasn't a member or even a Christian. Still, the Brethren accepted me.

In 1989 I moved to Managua to volunteer at a clinic run by the Moravian Church. The pastor there, the Rev. Norman Bent, was a peace and justice activist. He became one of my heroes and mentors.

I spent two years at the clinic, doing the routine work of family medicine. Sometimes we would set up makeshift



medical camps in remote villages to provide vaccinations and health-care services. I was good friends with the nursing director, Juanita Connolly Mendoza. (After Juanita died in 2003, the clinic was renamed for her.) I also became close to the three families I lived with during that period. One woman who loved to travel wanted to show me her country and took me all over.



I sent monthly reports to a friend in Philadelphia about my own activities, as well as political, social, and economic events in Nicaragua. She distributed them to my large network: in that way we got out an accurate account of the situation. Some people formed a nonprofit called Medicines for Nicaragua to support the clinic and provide medications and supplies. For many years I have been that group's co-chair.

We raise money for the clinic: paying salaries to the all-Nicaraguan staff and funding things like a new water tank, an ultrasound machine, and air conditioning. We also support projects like digging wells for potable water.

In Nicaragua I realized you can't get to know a people and a culture from a distance. You have to live among them. In my own country, I knew there was a terrible problem with poverty and racism. So, when I returned in 1991, I moved from the suburbs to North Philadelphia. I've tried to apply to my life here lessons learned there.



#### Faces

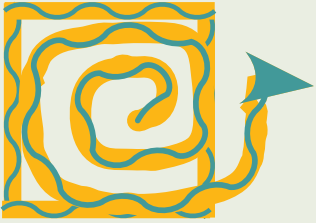
##### from Nicaragua:

*Sylvia with (from top) Mireya Santos, a host in Managua; Dr. Charles Wallace, a board member for Medicines for Nicaragua; and Madlyn West, a psychologist, close friend, and crucial source of lessons about racism in Nicaragua and the United States*

I went back to Nicaragua every year until 2018, visiting friends and checking in with the doctors and nurses to see what they needed. But now, because of my age and health, Covid, and unrest in Nicaragua, I'm not sure I will return. There is a big hole in my heart. Nicaragua is my second country.

*Sylvia Metzler is a member of the Philadelphia Ethical Society.*





## UPCOMING EVENTS

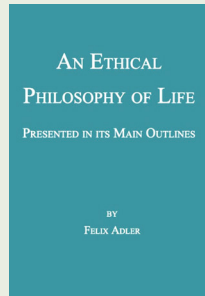
Think outside the box. Meet inside the box.  
Join us for these events on Zoom.



**Sunday, March 6, 7-8:15 PM**

### Introduction to Ethical Humanism

Be part of a small-group conversation about our Ethical Society community, history, and philosophy with Leader Hugh Taft-Morales. This informal Zoom gathering is open to everyone. Tell your friends! It's the best way to spread our shared values.



**Wednesday, March 9 and 23, 12-1:30 PM**

### Sense in the City

Join Hugh Taft-Morales for two final installments of Sense in the City, a series of civic Zoom conversations hosted by the Center City Residents Association. We'll discuss how citizens of Philadelphia can nurture constructive dialogue that respects all people while acknowledging the work we must do to make our society more equitable and inclusive. You'll also get to know your neighbors better!



*Fear and Street Crime:* To get the Zoom link, register for this March 9 event [here](#).

*Climate Justice and Economic Justice:* To get the Zoom link, register for this March 23 event [here](#).

**Sunday, March 20, 12:30 PM**

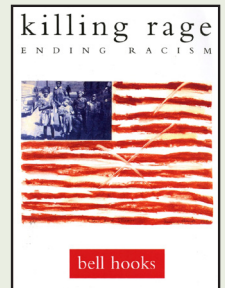
### Women's History Month Film and Fun

Join us after our hybrid platform either at the Society building or on Zoom for a showing of the 2016 movie *Hidden Figures*. We'll watch. We'll talk. We'll eat.

**Monday, March 21, 7 PM**

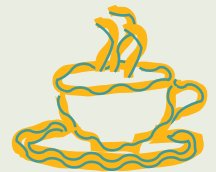
### Book discussion: *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* by bell hooks

Hugh Taft-Morales hosts the second discussion of *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* by bell hooks, a book that galvanized a generation of activists. The four sections we'll cover are *Beyond Black Only: Bonding Beyond Race*; *Keeping a Legacy of Shared Struggle*; *Where is the Love: Political Bonding Between Black and White Women*; and *Beloved Community: A World Without Racism*. Feel free to read the entire book, of course. It may inform your understanding of these sections.



### Tea Circle Anyone?

Please let Hugh know if you'd like to host a "Tea Circle," an informal social Zoom gathering of Society members. Coordinate with Hugh on the date and time and invite a mix of members that you want to get to know or reconnect with. Hugh will handle the Zoom invitations and co-host. You pick the discussion starters!



For links to all Zoom sessions, visit the calendar section of our web site at [phillyethics.org/events](https://phillyethics.org/events)



### Art with a Message

Society member Susan K. D'Alessio's collage series *They Were Us* reflects on the tradeoff between human health and the economy during the pandemic. The cranes represent the thriving economy. The backgrounds comprise lists of the names, ages, and hometowns of the 100,000 people who had died of Covid as of May 24, 2020. Susan's work is on display at **Cerulean Arts, 1355 Ridge Avenue, through March 6.**



## SUNDAY SERVICES

11 AM

*Ethical Views* is published monthly  
except July and August.

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*Copy Editor*, Henry Pashkow  
*Web Master, Copy Editor*, Nick Sanders  
*Layout*, Celeste Hardester  
*Production*, Cheryl Desmond

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## PHILADELPHIA ETHICAL SOCIETY COMMITTEES

Our Society is sustained by all of its volunteers who serve on the many committees that fulfill our purpose and guide our decisions. The following generous members serve as chairs. Committees meet at the times shown. Members and interested others are welcome to attend. Email us to learn more at [office@phillyethics.org](mailto:office@phillyethics.org). Join meetings at [www.tiny.cc/phillyethics](http://www.tiny.cc/phillyethics)

**Board of Trustees**  
Michael Black-Smith  
Sunday, March 20, 6 PM

**Building Committee**  
Michael Black-Smith  
No meeting this month

**Camp Linden Committee**  
Jeffrey Dubb  
Wednesday, March 23, 5 PM

**Communications Committee**  
Drew Snyder  
Wednesday, March 16, 6 PM

**Community Committee**  
Reva Stover  
Sunday, March 6, 12:30 PM

**Education Committee**  
Betsy Lightbourn  
Wednesday, March 2, 3 PM

**Ending Racism Task Force**  
Sylvia Metzler  
Saturday, March 19, 11 AM

**Ethical Action Committee**  
Denise Marx  
Thursday, March 17, 3 PM

**Finance Committee**  
Nick Sanders  
Wednesday, March 9, 5 PM

For suggestions regarding this newsletter, email Leigh Buchanan  
[leighebuchanan@gmail.com](mailto:leighebuchanan@gmail.com)



## Where's That?

Every month we challenge readers to identify a sign, scene, or architectural detail within a three-block radius of the Philadelphia Ethical Society. We'll collect all the right answers and pull one out of a hat. The winner receives a \$10 gift card for the online store of Uncle Bobbie's Coffee & Books, a Black-owned business in Philly. Respond to [leighebuchanan@gmail.com](mailto:leighebuchanan@gmail.com). Lori Broesamle won last month's contest. She identified the entrance to the Church of the Holy Trinity at 19th and Walnut Streets.

## HUMANIST HUMOR

"I have a problem with people who take the Constitution loosely and the Bible literally."

~ Bill Maher, comedian