



# ETHICAL VIEWS



May 2022 Vol. 136, No. 9 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

## SUNDAY PLATFORMS

The public is welcome to join us



**Sunday, May 1, 11 AM**

***Believe I Am What I Say I Am***  
**Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader,**  
**Philadelphia Ethical Society**

Personal identity is...well...personal. And the person in question can share all or part of what they consider themselves to be. They

may—or may not—identify with different groups based on age, ability, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, or other characteristics. Whatever their choices, why don't we simply respect them? How can we learn to judge less and listen more? Hugh explores our bad human habit of defining *other* people.

**Sunday, May 8, 11 AM**

***Does Ethical Culture***  
***Have a Future?***

**James Croft, Ethical Society**  
**of St. Louis**

We're taking a "virtual road trip" for this one. St. Louis Leader James Croft asks, at a time when so many people are leaving organized religion, why are most Ethical Societies not growing? Our culture faces a crisis of loneliness and disconnection, and many yearn for community. So why is it so difficult to start new Ethical Societies? What does the future of Ethical Humanism look like in a post-COVID, post-religious world? See Events (Page 7) for a related workshop on the same day. ([Online](#))



**Sunday, May 15, 11 AM**

***Celebrating How We Got Here***  
**All-AEU Platform**

Participants will gather from societies across the country to review the major accomplishments of the ethical movement and share personal reflections. There will be an informal interview of five or six members, followed by breakout groups. Musicians in the Ethical Culture movement will perform. ([Zoom](#))

**Sunday, May 22, 11 AM**

***Sharing Ethical Humanism***

**Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader**



For his last platform of the season, Hugh will explore the history and philosophy of humanism, as well as Ethical Culture's place under the humanist tent. Why did Felix Adler, who founded Ethical Culture, reject the label "humanism?" And why, after his death, do so many people refer to our congregational movement as "Ethical Humanism?" How can we create an "elevator speech" about our movement to help us spread awareness of what Ethical Societies have to offer?

**Sunday, May 29, 11 AM**

***Embedded Values: AI, Ethics, and Politics***

**Chloé Bakalar, Temple University**

Engineers are stereotyped as problem-solvers, not philosophers. But philosophy and engineering are deeply intertwined in artificial intelligence, which increasingly powers the world. Philosophy is necessary to understand the values embedded in AI tools and to push for desirable outcomes. Bakalar discusses the challenges of creating a values-based approach to AI and the role of moral philosophy in this space. An assistant professor of political science at Temple, she researches the relationship between communication and liberal democratic citizenship that sits at the intersection between public law and moral and political philosophy.

### ► ***Where They'll Be***

To attend platforms on Zoom, join us just prior to each session at [www.tiny.cc/phillyethics](http://www.tiny.cc/phillyethics). Hugh also plans to deliver his platforms simultaneously for small, vaccinated audiences at 1906 Rittenhouse Square. However, luggage may shift during flight, so check your Weekly Bulletins.

## IN THIS ISSUE . . .

Revelry on the Supreme Court steps; the toll separation takes on civility; two friends discussing racism, and the uncomfortable question of handouts.

*On the banner: St. George's Church in western Ukraine*

## FROM THE LEADER Welcoming Our New Justice with Joy and Go-Go

By Hugh Taft-Morales

“This is history” is how my wife, Maureen, characterized the confirmation of Ketanji Brown Jackson as the first Black woman justice on the Supreme Court. So, at Maureen’s urging, we traveled to the steps of the Court on April 8 for the “Celebrate Justice Jackson” go-go party. Hosted by such groups as the National Organization for Women, the Alliance for Justice, and the National Women’s Law Center, the event was modest in size but overflowing with joy and positivity.

Some of that good energy arose out of our awareness that this was a rare light in dark times. War in Europe, climate change, political polarization, racial tensions, and pandemics have weighed us down. We needed an excuse to dance!

A live band performed go-go: D.C.’s home-grown musical genre created by Black artists. At the band’s encouragement, happy children sang their own songs for the supportive audience. “My Little Pony” and “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” had people bobbing and clapping. Even the children understood when, throughout the event, speakers conveyed the significance of the moment using call and response: “Whose court?” “Our court!”

There were many young Black girls in attendance, and their confidence brought tears of joy to my eyes. Children wore judicial robes that event sponsors gave away to convey the message that each had the potential to become a Supreme Court justice one day.

That message was especially important to Sabriya Williams. Williams is co-founder of [She Will Rise](#), a non-profit promoting equality in America by moving more Black women into positions of judicial power, particularly on the Supreme Court. “It’s such a

wonderful time to be ... a Black woman with a Black daughter,” she said, addressing the crowd. “And even a Black son because ... this is not just a victory for Black women. It’s a victory for everybody.”

That sentiment echoed far beyond the celebration. Writing in *The Washington Post*, Janay Kingsberry pointed to the flood of tweets from parents saying things like, “Another yes-you-can moment for my daughter to see that she can do all things!” and “Can’t wait to add Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson’s book to my kids/grandkids reading collection!”

Those expressions of optimism were a welcome counterpoint to the cynical behavior that preceded the confirmation. Despite Justice Jackson’s 95 personal meetings with 97 Senators, some inexcusably

disrespected her during the 23 hours of questioning at her hearings.

But even that travesty became a teaching moment. In her [article](#) Kingsberry shared a tweet by a man named Myron Clifton who had sent his 17-year-old daughter a picture of Jackson radiating calm confidence during the political theater. “I wanted

to capture that moment to let her know that as a woman, you will be in situations where, even though you deserve to be there, you will not be wanted,” Clifton told his daughter. “In those moments, you will have an opportunity to show why you belong.”

Such reactions reinforce for me the many ways that this historic confirmation resonates beyond the work of the Court. I owe my wife for an experience that I’ll treasure well into the tenure of our newest Supreme Court justice, Ketanji Brown Jackson.

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



**Whose court? Our court: Young girls wore judicial robes as they danced and celebrated on the steps of the Supreme Court.**

Photo by Maureen Taft-Morales



## FROM THE PRESIDENT Are We Talking *to* Each Other or *at* Each Other?

by Michael Black-Smith



In these plague years, our community has experienced both the benefits and the deficits of digital connection. “The Place We Meet...” is often, by necessity, our individual computer screens configured into *Brady Bunch* boxes by Zoom. One pernicious consequence is a kind of shortened

fuse in many of our online interactions and emails. Digital communication makes it easier to talk *at* than to talk *to* or *with* one another.

Sitting in a circle in our Auditorium or Assembly Room, we respond to subtle physical and verbal cues as we slowly, patiently build agreement. Everyone actively listens to and encourages everyone else. Being in each other’s physical presence discourages harangues and speeches. If someone veers into a monologue, often a diplomatic interruption or just the energy in the room will shut it down.

Zoom does, of course, convey facial expressions.

But while helpful, that is just the tip of the iceberg. A musical metaphor comes to mind. Imagine hearing your favorite symphony played with only flutes and clarinets. You would recognize it. But how much more complexity and emotional range are delivered by that same piece performed by all five orchestral sections? Similarly, a conversation on Zoom may communicate information but not feeling. We cannot always tell if the speaker or other participants—some of whom are not on video or may appear on another screen—are frustrated, sad, or hurt.

The migration of conversation onto email presents a different problem. In-person speech is spontaneous and imprecise: qualities that signal flexibility rather than rigidity. The wrong word or infelicitous phrase, the inevitable “ah’s” and “um’s,” remind listeners that the speaker is wrestling with her idea as she talks. That seems like an invitation to respond constructively—to

build on the idea with one’s own imperfectly formed thoughts. In writing, by contrast, ideas can be so carefully honed and spelled out with such deliberation and intent that they seem like—and often become—debate fodder. Even when the debate remains civil, the ongoing exchange of long blocks of text dissecting some controversial point are exhausting and can come across as hostile.

It is unlikely we will soon return to a pre-plague experience of community. Even when we come back en masse to 1906 Rittenhouse, some members may prefer to participate on Zoom, which probably will remain an option for at least some events and platforms. So how can our congregation sidestep the pitfalls of digital communication? How do we avoid

the perception that we are on opposite sides when, in fact, our community agrees on vastly more subjects than it disagrees on?

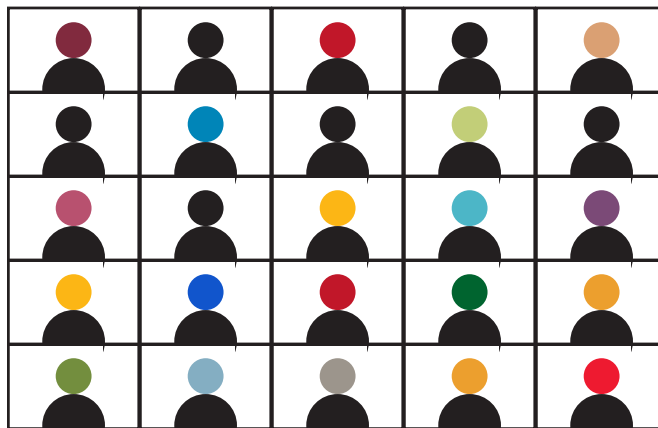
I would join those voices recommending that we reconnect as individuals. Don’t spend 30 minutes composing an email that will take the recipient 60 seconds to read. (Some I’ve seen are as polished as political speeches.) Instead, pick up the phone. If you’re hurt or

upset by something another member said on Zoom, then meet for coffee and talk about it with each other. You’ll both feel better.

And when we do meet in-person, avoid falling back into the habits of digital days. Be aware of how your words affect those around you. Take the temperature of the room when, in fact, a room exists.

Circumstances have made technology a greater force in how we communicate. It has not changed who we are. Yes, our community will have disagreements and, sadly, some will not be reconcilable. But our mutual love and respect—expressed face-to-face, as one human being to another—will keep our congregation strong.

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



## ADVENTURES IN VOLUNTEERING

### I Left My Heart in the Franklin Institute's Heart Bar

By Ruth Dubinsky

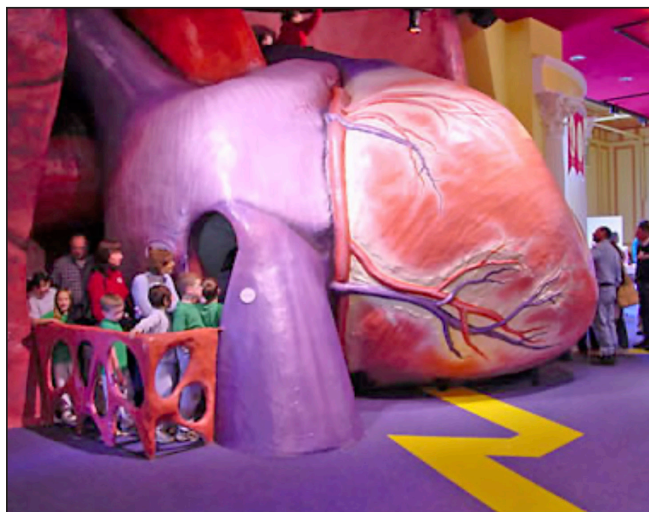
I went straight from high school into an entry-level job at Johnson & Johnson. Twelve years later I was a lab assistant doing research into chemicals to treat disorders of the central nervous system. My boss was a pharmacologist named Barry Dubinsky, whom I married. I spent 33 years at J&J, which paid for multiple college degrees. When I retired in 2006, I had a strong science background.

Barry and I loved visiting the Franklin Institute and had noticed volunteers doing demonstrations there. In 2011, I applied to be a science presenter. When they called and said we want you, I was so excited you would think I had won the Nobel Prize!

There are about 20 exhibit areas at the museum, ranging from Electricity to Your Brain. Presenters were trained in all of them so we could move around, changing stations every 45 minutes. It was better to know a little about everything than a lot about one thing. That way we could keep it simple for the kids.

My favorite station was the Heart Bar. In a locked booth in the Giant Heart room, we kept hearts from a sheep and a horse and a dolphin and a whale. I would take them out and point to somebody and say, "Hey, would you like to see some real hearts?" And the kids would come running. When I had gathered 10 or 12, I'd start doing my spiel. It was like being a carnival barker.

We had to boil down complicated information so children could understand. Instead of talking about oxygen exchange I would explain how the heart is a pump and have them make pumping motions with their hands. We wanted to engage them to the point where they started asking questions. They asked very good questions. My favorites were the 4- and 5-year-olds because their eyes just lit up.



**Pumped up:** The Franklin Institute's Giant Heart room

The kids always wanted to know where we got the hearts. Did we have to kill the horse? At the Brain exhibit we had a human brain with Alzheimer's. I would say, "This is an incredible, special, loving gift that this person provided so you would understand what happened to them." It was an uncomfortable thing to explain, but I think I handled it well.

I tried to get the kids—especially the girls—interested in careers in science. I would say, "There's still so much we don't know about this. But do you know who will find those answers? A woman scientist: just like you when you grow up." I would tell them that being a scientist is like being an explorer. You go where no one has gone before. You answer questions no one else has answered.

I learned so much from the other presenters. Many were retired from the sciences. I got to double up with a former astrophysicist from NASA to demonstrate the telescope. On a day with no clouds, we would put a hydrogen filter on it, and you could actually see little sun flares.

During the week we got a lot of class trips. I liked the weekend better when it was mostly families: parents and grandparents learning along with their kids. I always made a point to reach out to the families of color.

Covid shut down the volunteer program, and they have not brought it back yet. That carved away a piece of my world. I loved the families and the kids and my fellow presenters and the Franklin Institute as an organization. It is so important that people have a place to go where they can see facts. As soon as the program restarts, I will be back.

*Ruth Dubinsky is a member of the Philadelphia Ethical Society.*



## FROM THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE

### Friendship, Conversation, and New Understanding

By Stan Horwitz

White people interacting with Black friends, family members, colleagues, and neighbors typically discuss the subjects that naturally arise from those relationships. Racism, by contrast, is the kind of huge, uncomfortable topic that few engage with in routine conversation. But in my opinion, white people who strive to fight racism can never understand its full impact unless they address it directly with Black people. I've learned a lot just by asking Black friends to share their experiences with me.

One such friend many of you know: Eugene Charrington, who frequently attends Sunday platforms at the Philadelphia Ethical Society. Eugene and I have spent many hours talking about racism, usually at Good Karma Café. Some things he's told me about himself painfully highlight the differences in our lived white and Black experiences.

In the Queens, New York neighborhood where Eugene grew up the population was 99% Black. My Northeast Philadelphia neighborhood was 99% white. Eugene was born in 1950 and I was born in 1961—so, both in an era when landmark desegregation laws had just begun to affect things like housing and education. Consequently, we did similar things but with different outcomes. For example, Eugene told me he had many unpleasant interactions with white people during his childhood. He recalled, in particular, being regarded with suspicion by white people at Coney Island when he visited there with his parents and sister. Nothing like that ever happened to my sister and me the many times our parents took us to the Jersey Shore.

As an adult, Eugene worked a variety of jobs, including driving for a taxi company in New York City for several years. He told me that the white dispatchers would assign white drivers to the newer, better cabs. Eugene and the other Black drivers got stuck with the older vehicles with worn seats, and radios and heaters that didn't work. During his years as a bicycle messenger, Eugene was frisked several times by New York City police officers while simply standing next to his bike drinking hot coffee on a cold winter's day. In the countless hours I have ridden my bike both in New York and Philly, I have never once been stopped by the police.



**Let's talk:**  
Eugene Charrington and Stan Horwitz at Good Karma Café

I gained further insight into Eugene's experience when on March 6, after the Ethical Society platform, we attended the Grannies for Peace rally. I didn't notice anything unusual about the event, which consisted of roughly 200 protesters listening to anti-war speeches. Then Eugene pointed out the complete absence of police guarding the rally in which, not coincidentally, most of the protesters were white. If the protest had been organized by a predominantly Black organization, we believe, a lot of uniformed and plainclothes cops probably would have been on duty.

I challenge both white and Black readers of this column to sit down together and talk, informally, one-on-one, about your personal experiences with racism. Only when we do this can we really begin to understand racism and fight it.

*Stan Horwitz is a member of the Ending Racism Task Force of the Philadelphia Ethical Society.*

## GRAY AREAS Should You Give Handouts?

Every so often we present members with a question on which Ethical Humanists might reasonably differ. This month: should we give money to the unhoused on the streets of Philadelphia?

*I do not carry cash money on me as a rule. I do carry and give out \$5 or \$10 gift cards to Wawa or McDonald's. That helps people have some dignity of food choice. I also carry food bags with me: fruit, water, granola bars, raisins. And I have a list of places that feed, clothe, and provide resources.*

— Erik Young

*I think it's fine to give money to people who are obviously unhoused, especially when the weather is harsh or if they appear particularly in need. While the cash may be used for drugs, cigarettes, or alcohol, the person may buy food or an item he or she truly needs. I'm willing to take that chance in order to make the person's life a little easier and to recognize them as a fellow human being. I also think it's important to look the person directly in the eyes when giving.*

— Temma Fishman

*I understand being wary of giving to unhoused people. But I think we should give when we are reasonably able, regardless of their sobriety or perceived need. People are in need if they are asking for help and living without secure housing. Sobriety does not affect that. We should give because it's a small gesture to us that can make a genuine impact on someone's life. No one tells us how to spend our money or doesn't pay us because we came into work hung over. We should afford that same respect to the unhoused.*

—Reva Stover

*It's a decision I make based on the circumstances. For example, if someone obviously drunk asks me for money, the answer will be no. If it is someone who is sober and seems in genuine need, I might or might not help them out. It depends on if I have the money and if I have previously given money to an unhoused person that day. If they say they are hungry and we're close to a soup kitchen, I will likely direct that person there to eat.*

—Stan Horwitz

*Not all people asking for money are unhoused. I have been asked for subway, bus, or regional rail fares so people can get to their homes. I have also been asked for money to buy a meal. If time permits, I wait to see if the people use the money that I give them for the intended purpose or keep approaching strangers. Some requests appear legit. But others appear to be making a (temporary?) career asking strangers for money. Some long-term panhandlers stand at the same corners or sit on the same park benches day after day, week after week.*

*I am willing to help someone in a tight situation. But those long-term panhandlers need help that I, as an individual, cannot provide. They need help from government agencies and nonprofits, which have trained staff and resources. Donations to such organizations may do more to assist long-term panhandlers than a few dollars on the street.*

—Eric Clausen

### HUMANIST HUMOR

**"There are no atheists in foxholes isn't an argument against atheism. It's an argument against foxholes."**

~ James Morrow, author

**Give if**

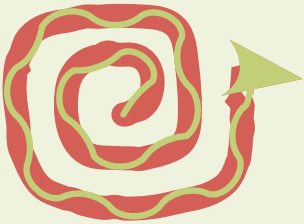
(a) you can afford to while maintaining your other charitable giving

(b) you feel it's a safe opportunity to give, and

(c) you think it's reasonably likely that the money will not harm the person receiving it.

You can never know for certain about b and c. So do the best you can.

— Hugh Taft-Morales



# UPCOMING EVENTS

We're in the building! We're on Zoom! We're volunteering in the community! Go, us!



**Sunday, May 1, 4 PM**

**May Book Discussion: *Unthinkable: Trauma, Truth, and the Trials of American Democracy* by Jamie Raskin.**

We will discuss this important and poignant book by U.S. Representative Jamie Raskin. In *Unthinkable*, Raskin shares his grief over his son's death by suicide and his shock at the January 6 assault on democracy. While enduring heartbreak, he manages to maintain the highest ideals of democracy. This first session covers the Prologue and Part 1. (In-person) Subsequent sessions will cover Part 2 (**May 22, 4 PM**, in-person) and Part 3 (**June 5, 4 PM, Zoom**). If you would like to set up a Zoom conversation for Parts 1 and 2, please contact Hugh.

**Sunday, May 1, 7-8:15 PM**

**Introduction to Ethical Humanism**

Bring your friends to this informal educational session. Leader Hugh Taft-Morales will share his personal Top 10 Things I Love Most About Ethical Humanism. (In-person and **Zoom**)

**Monday, May 2, 5:30 PM**

**Ethical Society Climate Justice Roundtable**

Join Hugh for a brief presentation and discussion on climate justice in Philadelphia. How can we simultaneously battle climate change and raise the standard of living for the most impoverished areas of our city? (In-person and **Zoom**.)

**Sunday, May 8, 3 PM**

**Workshop: *Reimagining the Future of Ethical Culture***

This interactive program will explore the issues raised in the morning's virtual platform. It originates from the Ethical Society of St. Louis where James Croft is Leader. Attendance at the earlier platform is not required. To access the meeting, type this number into the Zoom page: 384 422 5785. (**Zoom**)

**Sunday, May 22, 12:30 PM**

**Annual Meeting**

Society members only are invited to our annual business meeting. On the agenda: electing a president, vice president, and three trustees for the 2022-2024 term; budget discussion; review of committee accomplishments. (In-person)



**Monday, May 23, 7-8:30 PM**

**An Ethical Lens: *Progressive Politics* with Helen Gym**

What are the challenges of pursuing a progressive political platform that focuses on the needs of people and families rather than on corporate interests? City Councilmember At-Large Helen Gym will talk with Hugh Taft-Morales about how her background, experience, and ethical values help sustain her as she tackles issues like fair education, homelessness, and a living wage. Fully vaccinated people are invited to this free event. (In-person. Please wear a mask.) Also, on **June 6**, An Ethical Lens will focus on Constitutional scholar Kim Roosevelt.

**Tuesday, May 24, 12:45-4 PM**

**Volunteering at MANNA**

Up to 12 members will help out in the kitchens of The Metropolitan Area Neighborhood Nutrition Alliance: chopping vegetables, packing meals, filling trays, making sandwiches, and performing other tasks. MANNA, located at 420 N. 20th Street, provides medically appropriate meals to people with life-threatening illnesses. Advance sign-up and proof of vaccination required. Contact **Ruth Dubinsky**.

**Thursday, May 26, 7 PM**

**AEU and AHA Book Discussion: *The Warmth of Other Suns* by Isabel Wilkerson**

Join Hugh Taft-Morales for a discussion of *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*. This event is hosted by the American Ethical Union (AEU) and the American Humanist Association (AHA). The program will be repeated on **June 2, 7 PM**. (Zoom. Register [here](#).) The AEU and AHA will offer three other anti-racism book discussions earlier this month. Each session costs \$25, which goes toward compensating the series' facilitators, staff, and organizers. Students in need may request a scholarship by emailing for a coupon code.

**Where to Find Us**

All links to Zoom sessions appear in the event descriptions on the **calendar section** of our web site.

All in-person events take place at the Philadelphia Ethical Society at 1906 Rittenhouse Square.





## SUNDAY SERVICES

11 AM

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

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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, May 15, 6 PM

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

**Camp Linden Committee**  
Jeffrey Dubb  
Wednesday, May 25, 5 PM

**Community Committee**  
Ruth Dubinsky  
Sunday, May 15, 12:30 PM

**Education Committee**  
Betsy Lightbourn  
Wednesday, May 4, 3 PM

**Ending Racism Task Force**  
Sylvia Metzler  
Saturday, May 21, 11 AM

**Ethical Action Committee**  
Denise Marx  
Thursday, May 19, 3 PM

**Finance Committee**  
Nick Sanders  
Wednesday, May 11, 5 PM

**Media Committee**  
Drew Snyder  
Wednesday, May 18, 6 PM

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



*The price of prison: J. Jondhi Harrell described his journey from serving 25 years in prison to helping other survivors of mass incarceration in the first installment of An Ethical Lens, on April 18. Harrell told Hugh Taft-Morales about the dehumanizing experience of life in prison and the re-entry system that failed him afterward. Inspired by his mentor, the activist Mutulu Shakur, Harrell went on to found TCRC Community Healing Center, which helps individuals and families recover from mass incarceration, and Fresh Start at Your Library, which reconnects returning citizens with their communities at public libraries. "If you build and sustain strong relationships," said Harrell, "that's how you maintain your freedom."*