



ETHICAL VIEWS



December 2022 Vol. 137, No. 4 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

SUNDAY PLATFORMS

The public is welcome to join us *



Sunday, December 4, 11 AM
Open Minds: Gift a Banned Book this Holiday Season

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

The recent surge in book bans is troubling. During the last academic year, school districts in 32 states announced 2,500 such actions. But thanks to human curiosity and opposition to censorship, banning books backfires. Book stores even create displays to capitalize on demand for this forbidden fruit. Hugh suggests we help everyone maintain open minds by purchasing, donating, and sharing banned books. After the platform, Freethought Society president Margaret Downey will create book ornaments to hang on the Tree of Knowledge in our lobby. If you want to make a decoration, bring two copies of the cover of a book that opened your mind.



Sunday, December 11, 11 AM
From Religion to History: How Our Culture Wars Have Changed
**Jonathan Zimmerman,
University of Pennsylvania**

Americans have long debated how public schools should address religion and faith. Now we're arguing about our conceptions of America, which have become quasi-religious beliefs in their own right. Can we present diverse views of this country rather than teach a single story? Zimmerman, professor of history of education and a former Peace Corps volunteer and high school teacher, is the author of nine books, including *Free Speech and Why You Should Give a Damn* and *Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools*.

Sunday, December 18, 11 AM

Winter Solstice Ceremony

Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader

Need some light in these dark times? Come celebrate community as we gather to light candles and kindle hope for brighter days ahead. Please contact [Hugh](#) to recommend readings or volunteer to be a reader.



Sunday, December 25 and January 1

No platforms on the holidays.

Enjoy the time with family and friends.

Seasonal Stroll, Anyone?

Do you have a favorite route for viewing holiday displays and decorated trees? If so, would you care to take Ethical Society

members and friends on a tour? Let [Hugh](#) know, and we'll schedule a late-afternoon or early-evening stroll on either Monday, December 19 or Tuesday, December 20, depending on your schedule and the weather.



Holiday Lights in Rittenhouse Square, Photo by [michaelwm25](#)

On the Banner: Snowy Owl, Photo by [Magnus Manske](#)

* Where They'll Be

As a general rule, we'll run hybrid platforms when Hugh is the speaker. Platforms with guest speakers will remain on [Zoom](#). In-person attendees should be up-to-date on vaccinations, wear masks, and maintain six feet of separation. Please, read your emails and check the website before you come.

IN THIS ISSUE . . .

Cure the vote and cure the system; the intersection of racism and ableism; how members celebrate the holidays ethically.

FROM THE LEADER Voting as Vaccine

By Hugh Taft-Morales

IF OUR AILING DEMOCRACY WERE A PATIENT, WHAT would the attending physician prescribe? How about a period of detoxification to purge our system of distortion and lies? Or a diet of truth-telling to build up our strength and stamina? I would argue that the most important thing we can do to regain our health as a democratic republic is to inoculate ourselves with the vaccine of voting. Only by supporting every citizen's right to vote can we protect our civic vitality.

I'm thinking in medical metaphors because of a fairly recent addition to the electoral lexicon: the term "ballot curing." In close to half the states, officials notify voters who made mistakes on their ballots—for example, signing in the wrong place or forgetting to add the date—so they can correct their errors and have their voices count.

When the news broke that, in Philadelphia, more than 3,000 mail-in ballots had been rejected due to technicalities, POWER Interfaith summoned clergy to City Hall to support people arriving for the cure. I spent part of Election Day there, where I was able to catch up with the ever-inspirational Rabbi Julie Greenberg, Casey Butcher of POWER, and Bishop Dwayne Royster.

I also ran into Ethical Society member Leigh Buchanan, who had come for the cure after dating her mail-in ballot on the wrong line. Leigh was gratified and a little overwhelmed to find herself on the receiving end of a massive outreach to prevent her disenfranchisement. Since the list of cancelled ballots had appeared, she'd received three voice messages from the Pennsylvania Department of State (in English, Spanish, and—she thinks—Chinese), an email notification, and texts from POWER and Unite Here. The Democratic Senatorial

Campaign Committee even delivered a written notification to her home.

Leigh and I joked that vegans might resist curing ballots, given the word's association with meat. I showed her a photo of myself in the drop-box costume I'd been wearing to promote voting. (The costume

was created by [Spiral Q](#), a wonderfully creative arts and advocacy group dedicated to justice and equality here in Philly.)

Such humor cheers us up. But those reaching out to people with flawed ballots, or working the polls, or engaged for weeks and months in get-out-the-vote efforts, have a serious goal. They want to destroy the toxic combination of disincentives to voting—disinformation, manipulation, cynicism, and apathy—that have landed democracy in critical care.

The storm we feared on November 8 did not happen. Yet we are far from safe. Vindictive, fossil-fuel-pushing, voter-repressing politicians remain a threat, even though election deniers, thankfully, lost most of their statewide contests in the midterms.

I believe our system will survive. But we have a lot more work to do. Thank you to the many members of our congregation who poured their lives into turning out voters and protecting their rights. Let's work together to ensure a healthier, more effective system of governance.

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



Many happy returns: Hugh the Human Drop Box

THIS IS US Remembering Maureen and Arthur



WITH MUSIC, MEMORIES, AND MEMENTOS, ETHICAL Society members on November 6 celebrated the lives of Arthur and Maureen Pielli. The couple, dear friends of many in the congregation, died within a day of one another in August.

Hugh recounted Arthur and Maureen's enduring love story: a 58-year marriage that was born at a high school dance and produced six children over 13 years. The couple raised a socially conscious, intellectually curious brood while pursuing their individual professions and passions. "To our benefit, they also both loved the slogan 'deed before creed,' so they found their way here," said Hugh.

Hospitality was among the Piellis' abiding virtues, as Betsy Lightbourn and Kate Esposito testified. It was Betsy who introduced them to the Society after meeting Maureen at the Penn Center House Book Club. Betsy recalled visiting the couple in their



Art by Arthur: *Arthur was a prolific artist and art educator. His work was on display.*

Sylvia Metzler and Erik Younge paid tribute on behalf of the Ending Racism Task Force. The Piellis were members and regular attendees at the ERTF's monthly potlucks. Sylvia touched on the diversity of the couple's large extended family. For the Piellis, racial justice held personal as well as societal resonance.

The music reflected Maureen's Irish and Arthur's Italian heritages and also included the Rodgers and Hart standard "Manhattan," a nod to the city where they met and fell in love. At one time, Maureen had served as a shop steward. Fittingly, a rousing singalong of "Union Maid" concluded the program.



To lives well lived: *Kate and Betsy raised a toast to the Piellis, in whose home they never went hungry or thirsty.*

apartment after platforms, where "they shared stories about their lives...full of adventure, resourcefulness, and creativity."

Wearing a knit FDNY hat—a gift from Arthur—Kate segued into Italian to describe the governing ethos of her friends' lives: eat well, laugh often, love much. "I'd always leave with a bottle of wine, an umbrella if it was raining, and a hat if it was cold," said Kate.



Justice fighters: *Sylvia Metzler and Erik Younge commemorated the Piellis' contributions to the Ending Racism Task Force.*

FROM THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE

Ableism and Racism: Roots of the Same (Sick) Tree

By Michael Black-Smith and Erik Younge

IN AUGUST, THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE HOSTED A Sunday program on being “woke.” To launch the discussion, several members read poems from Mahogany L. Browne’s book *Woke: A Young Poet’s Call to Justice*. One poem, “The Ability to Be,” addressed discrimination against people with disabilities. As a Black man and a man living with a disability, the two of us found personal resonance in the reading. Together, we began exploring the intersection of racism and ableism

Racism and ableism are “roots of the same tree,” according to Rebecca Cokley, founding director of the Disability Justice Initiative at the Center for American Progress. Those roots stretch back to slavery. In 1851, a physician named Samuel Cartwright suggested that enslaved people who tried to escape suffered from an acute mental illness called “drapetomania,” characterized by “rude and ungovernable behavior.” To flee was irrational, Cartwright posited, because enslaved people were treated so well. Black slaves dissatisfied with their condition must therefore have disabilities.

Both racism and ableism are embedded in a broad, society-wide framework of experience, participation, and expectation. A doorway that’s too narrow or the presence of a few steps are obvious and explicit manifestations of ableism. Similarly, such microaggressions as a storeowner following around a person of color clearly are racist. But those harmful examples of prejudice are just the tip of the iceberg.

Disability activists Talila Lewis and Dustin Gibson define ableism as “a system that places value on people’s bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence, excellence, and productivity.” Such false norms are leveraged to attack people of color as well as people with disabilities.

Consider the recent midterm campaigns. *The New York Times* reported on Republican ads portraying Black candidates as “different” and “dangerous.”

Lieutenant Governor John Fetterman suffered a stroke in May that affected his auditory processing and verbal communication, though not his intelligence and executive functioning. Still, opponents dismissed him as unfit for office because he did not meet an ableist standard of debate performance.

All people in the disabled community experience exclusion from full participation in an ableist society. But people of color with disabilities suffer more frequent and severe harm. Children of color have less access to health care and, consequently, are more likely to experience health issues that result in disability. Students of color are more likely to be segregated into special-education classes than their white peers, who often receive in-class accommodations. A 2021 Bureau of Labor Statistics study shows that people of color with disabilities are less likely to be employed than white people with disabilities.

Perhaps most troubling, people of color with disabilities are likely to have more frequent and lethal encounters with law enforcement, according to a Ruderman Family Foundation report. In North Carolina in 2016, police shot Keith Lamont Scott even after his wife screamed that he had a traumatic brain injury. Freddie Gray, who died after a “rough ride” administered by Baltimore police, had a developmental disability. The autopsy report on George Floyd led many to think that he died from “underlying conditions” rather than police violence. Black people with disabilities also are more likely to be put to death for a crime, reports the Death Penalty Information Center.

“As a society, we are uncomfortable with disabled people and too often cast our irrational prejudices onto Black bodies,” wrote Nick Winges-Yanez, a professor at the Texas Center for Disability Studies, in an article for *The Hill*. “Recognizing ableism is the only way we can ever ensure that Black lives matter. Or, as disability rights advocates remind us, that nobody is disposable.”

Erik Younge and Michael Black-Smith are members of the Ending Racism Task Force.

**... opponents
dismissed him [Fetterman]
as unfit for office because
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standard of debate
performance**



BEHIND THE SCENES Let's Dance! (And Sing!)

by Cheryl Desmond

A FASCINATING VARIETY OF SOCIAL-DANCE GROUPS swing, sway, and salsa around Philadelphia. Every week, you will find some of them dancing (or gathering) in the large open rooms of our building.

Powerhouse Blues hosts parties and classes in which couples dance to blues music with live bands. It meets here some Monday evenings. In November, we added **Philly Outdoor Bachata & Salsa**. After dancing at FDR Park all summer, the group moved its Wednesday evening dances to 1906 Rittenhouse for the winter.

Jazz Attack, a Lindy Hop and swing-dance group, has hosted Thursday dances since 2018, continuing in the spirit of a Lindy group that was here some years ago. They offer lessons from 8 PM to 9 PM and live music once a month. For five years, **Dance Medicine Philly**, whose slogan is "come as you are; move as you please," has presented ecstatic dance that incorporates elements of yoga, healing sound, and free-form dance.



A chorus line: Members of Rittenhouse Sound raise their voices in our Auditorium.

They are with us on Friday or Sunday evenings, usually twice a month.

I couldn't leave out Tuesdays. That's when **Rittenhouse Sound**, an a cappella men's chorus, is in residence. New singers are always welcome.

In fact, all these groups welcome newcomers, and you don't have to be an experienced dancer. If you would like to explore Philly's dance scene further, visit this [resource page](#) for participatory dance in all genres.

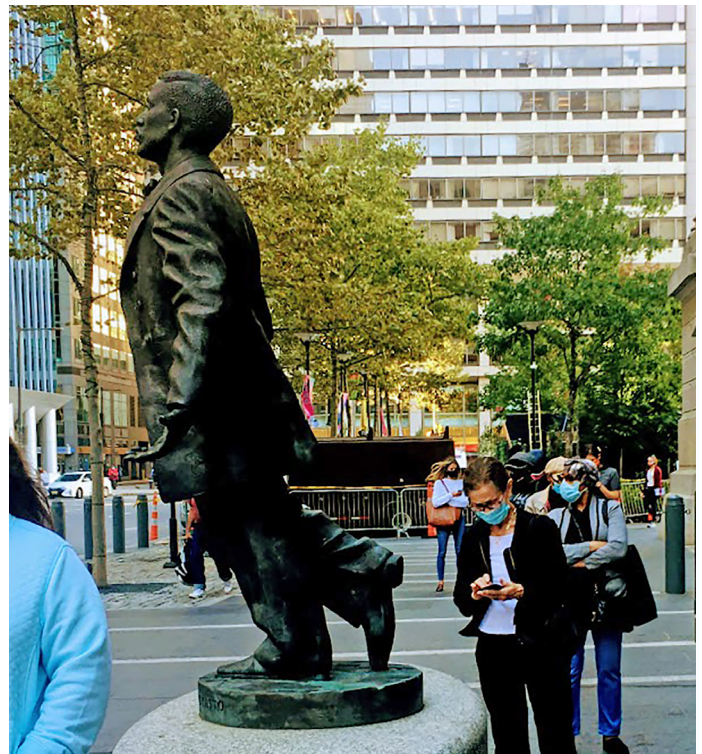
*Cheryl Desmond is the office administrator
for the Philadelphia Ethical Society.*

VOTING IN CATTO'S FOOTSTEPS

AT THE HEIGHT OF COVID, I VOTED BY MAIL FOR THE FIRST time and started a tradition. Every election I return my ballot to the drop box on the south side of City Hall, just beyond the statue of martyred Black activist and civil rights leader Octavius Catto. In 2020, the line began on the west side of the statue and snaked past the memorial highlighting Catto's political efforts in the city, including the desegregation of Philadelphia's public trolley cars and the integration of baseball. Back then, as I waited, I wondered how many in that line were aware of Catto's contributions as a civil rights leader and educator. Did they know he was assassinated on October 10, 1871: the first Election Day after passage of the 15th Amendment?

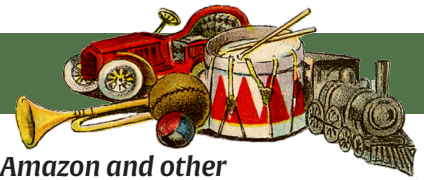
As I approached the drop box on October 29 this year, the scene was awash in signs like "Stop the Racists: Vote Nov. 8" and "Defend Choice: Vote Democrat." But the area was deserted. In front of Catto's statue I paused, once more, to shake his outstretched hand.

—Betsy Lightbourn



While Catto watched: In 2020, a long line of voters snaked past the statue.

IT'S THE MOST ETHICAL TIME OF THE YEAR



During the holidays, temptations abound to over-buy, over-eat, and over-rely on Amazon and other consumer behemoths that throttle small businesses and treat employees like Ebenezer Scrooge. Ethical humanists determined to stick to their values can minimize waste and maximize meaning by patronizing local stores, especially those owned by **people of color** or with **sustainable offerings**. Myriad opportunities exist to donate in another person's name to charities that person supports. When shopping for big meals, think free-range and organic, if not the whole plant-based enchilada.

We asked Society members to share their own experiences staying ethical during the holidays.

I wish I could say that I donate to charities instead of propping up the economy by buying a bunch of stuff. I donate as well as, not instead of. Our local Community Cupboard has an "adopt a family" event each year, and I usually do that. At some point I'm going to stop with the holiday cards or at least cut back dramatically. I'd like to say that's to save a tree or two. But the whole truth is, cards are just too much work.

—Ruth Dubinsky

Christmas caroling around the organ + cocktails + food is my favorite way to connect with friends through music. Christmas carols are among the few songs familiar to most people. Unfortunately, Covid put a damper on the Dec. 25 caroling party at my house.

True confession: I hate to shop for anything other than food. My gift-wrapping skills are poor. The music and food party capitalizes on my strengths

— Doris Dabrowski

Years ago, I stood up on the Sunday prior to our humanist Thanksgiving and asked, "Anyone like Tofurkey?" No replies! So, I continued to come in at 6 AM and cook two turkeys.

Now I like Tofurkey!

—Carol Love

Thanksgiving is a day of thanks for our lives so far and to come. The Native Americans were in this country before colonization. I think of that while I donate to schools and rights for indigenous people.

Christmas is a social holiday. I give gifts to our Australian grandsons and step-granddaughter. Jack gives gifts to each daughter's whole family. We eat vegetarian because I am cooking. If we have guests, then I will prepare what they like. But plant-based is my preference.

—Lori Broesamle

During our 20-plus years in the Boston suburbs we bought a tree every Christmas. When we moved to a no-trees-allowed building in Philly, I consoled myself that the artificial version—which my visiting daughter lugged home for us from Target—at least was more sustainable. Wrong! Fake trees are made of plastic and metal (of course), often ship from China (naturally), and are generally not recyclable (well, d'uh). I guess the most ethical thing we can do at this point is never throw the thing away.

— Leigh Buchanan

An Ethical Culture home tradition that my family has practiced involves making and giving coupons for tasks like cooking and doing the laundry, or for taking a walk or seeing a movie together. Among my favorites: one child once gave me a coupon for a home-baked blueberry pie.

— Hugh Taft-Morales



UPCOMING EVENTS



'Tis the season to check your Weekly Bulletins and emails to make sure what's in the building, on Zoom, or both.

Sunday, December 4, 7 PM

Introduction to Ethical Humanism

Hugh welcomes everyone—especially those not familiar with Ethical Humanism—to this casual in-person and [Zoom](#) discussion. We'll also explore how humanists can navigate the holiday season.

Monday, December 5, 5:30 PM and/or

Sunday, December 18, 1 PM

Ethical Party Games

Got Scruples? Hugh does. Which is to say he's got the 1980s party game of that name. Members had a blast playing last month. Now there are two more chances for some lighthearted fun. On December 5, participants can contribute \$8 for pizza or bring salad or drinks to share. December 18 is a bring-your-own-bag-lunch affair. This is an in-person event limited to 10 fully vaccinated people. RSVP to [Hugh](#).



celebrates reason, compassion, and hope. People from around the world come together to say goodbye to the old year and greet the new one. The program includes toasts, candle-lighting, performances, music, and breakout-room discussions. Register [here](#) for this Zoom presentation.

Thursday, December 29, 5:30PM

Weird News Quiz

Join Leigh Buchanan and Hugh Taft-Morales on [Zoom](#) for our annual end-of-the-year "weird news" quiz and other fun! If you've been conscientiously keeping up with world events... it won't do you one bit of good in this game. Come for good-natured competition and some laughs! Feel free to invite friends or family you are with over the holidays.



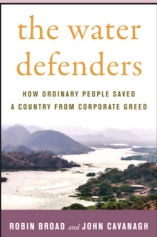
AND COMING IN 2023:

Service Auction

The Social Committee is happy to announce the return of our Service Auction! The official kickoff is on Darwin Day (February 12). But you should start thinking now about what activity, skill, or event you can offer. Past contributions have included dinners prepared by members, outings to museums, and pet care. The Service Auction is a wonderful way for members to get to know one another while generating income for the Society. More details will follow.



Discussion Series: Women in U. S. History, Activism, and Law Hugh will host a book-discussion series about women's roles in major American movements and events. We'll start with *American Women's History: A Very Short Introduction*, by Susan Ware. Contact [Hugh](#) if you are interested: we'll schedule these based on people's availability. Also let Hugh know if you can recommend relevant titles and are willing to co-host discussions of them later in the year.



Saturday, December 10, 11 AM Discussion with the Authors of *The Water Defenders*

Robin Broad and/or John Cavanagh will discuss on Zoom the dramatic story of grassroots environmentalism recounted in their book, *The Water*

Defenders: How Ordinary People Saved a Country from Corporate Greed. If you want to review the story, email [Hugh](#) for a study guide. Or [Zoom](#) in at 10:30 AM when we will go over the book before the authors join us.

Sunday, December 11, 5 PM

A Very Special Celebration of Volunteers

We want to thank the members and friends who do so much for the Ethical Society and their communities. So, we've arranged a very special Zoom treat featuring a performance by a surprise entertainer! RSVP ASAP to [Ruth Dubinsky](#) and she will send you the Zoom link. All are welcome!

Saturday, December 17, 4 PM

HumanLight Ceremony

[HumanLight](#) is a secular holiday, organized by a coalition of humanist and freethought groups, that





SUNDAY SERVICES

11 AM

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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 of the committees, which meet at the times shown. Members and interested others are welcome to attend. Email us to learn more at office@phillyethics.org.

Board of Trustees

Michael Black-Smith

Sunday, Dec. 18, 6 PM

Building Committee

Michael Black-Smith

Wednesday, Dec. 21, 6 PM

Camp Linden Committee

Jeffrey Dubb

No meeting this month

Education Committee

Betsy Lighbourn

Wednesday, Dec. 7, 5:30 PM

Ending Racism Task Force

Sylvia Metzler/Erik Younge

Saturday, Dec. 17, 11 AM

Ethical Action Committee

Open chair

Next meeting TBA

Finance Committee

Nick Sanders

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 5 PM

Media Committee

Drew Snyder

No meeting this month

Social Committee

Ruth Dubinsky

Sunday, Dec. 11, 12:30 PM

For suggestions regarding this newsletter, email Leigh Buchanan
leighbuchanan@gmail.com

FUN IN OUR LIVES

Hugh's office—usually the setting for earnest, educational, and intellectually stimulating discussions—hosted some lighthearted activities recently as a welcome distraction from election anxieties. Just before the midterms, members gathered for a happy hour, with Hugh mixing cocktails. On another day, members and visitors explored ethical dilemmas and revealed surprising sides of themselves via the 1980s card game *Scruples*. (We won't say which member is willing to do a nude scene in a film.)



The game's afoot: *Scruples* players included (from left) Ravi Ajji, Tara Swartz, Kate Esposito, Hugh Taft-Morales, Ruth Dubinsky, Valerie Pry, and Barry Dubinsky.



Cheers! Among those unwinding with drinks were (from left) Irene Putzer, Hugh Taft-Morales, Ravi Ajji, Christian Hayden, Erik Younge, and Vince Russo