



ETHICAL VIEWS

March 2023 Vol. 137, No. 7 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

SUNDAY PLATFORMS

The public is welcome to join us *



Sunday, March 5, 11 AM

What Is a Leader?

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

Traditional patriarchal narratives portray leaders as drum majors, out in front, leading the parade. Felix Adler hesitated before settling on "Leader" as the title for clergy in Ethical Culture. He worried that loyalty to the drum major would dominate. He wanted everyone to become a leader. How should Ethical Culture help us all become leaders? Join Ethical Culture "Leader" Hugh Taft-Morales as he explores contemporary and collaborative perspectives on leaders.

Sunday, March 12, 11 AM

To Be Announced. (Because what is life without surprises?) Check your Weekly Bulletin.



**Contact our
Nominating Committee**

Harry Thorn Doris Dabrowski Jeffrey Dubb

By March 21st!

Sunday, March 19, 11 AM

Spring Festival

Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader

To welcome spring, let's celebrate rebirth both in nature and in the human spirit. Share your favorite poem about spring, renewal, and awakening. Please let [Hugh](#) know by March 12 if you'd like to participate in this program.

Sunday, March 26, 11 AM

***Her Own Troubles: Women's Laments in the Iliad*
Shelia Murnaghan, University of Pennsylvania**

Homer's *Iliad* primarily celebrates male heroism on the battlefield. However, the poem also raises women's voices, especially through the genre of lament. Sheila Murnaghan, the Allen Memorial Professor of Greek, at Penn, explores the distinctive perspectives of the *Iliad*'s women on heroic values and gender relations in wartime. Murnaghan's research focuses on ancient Greek poetry. Her recent publications include a book on the classics and children's literature, co-authored with Deborah Roberts; and a translation of Euripides' *Medea*.



* 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 . . .

A more complete, accurate perspective on history; beautifying our building; lessons from anti-racism training.

FROM THE LEADER

Repainting History

By Hugh Taft-Morales

As the historical culture wars rage, I want to mark Women's History Month by sharing some wisdom from a few women historians about the need to overhaul the historical record. We don't have to erase what we've painstakingly gathered through research. But, in the words of historian Linda Gordon, we cannot "simply add women to the picture we already have of the past, like painting additional figures into the spaces of an already completed canvas."

That's how it was done when I was in high school. My history textbook maintained a relatively traditional (read: white male) narrative, sprinkled with sidebars about women and Black and indigenous people. Since then, we have become more aware, as Gordon writes, that what is required is "repainting the earlier pictures, because some of what was previously on the canvas was inaccurate, and most of it was misleading."

For most of our nation's existence, historical understanding was limited by the exclusion of diverse voices. This certainly is understood by Jone Johnson Lewis, Leader of the Riverdale-Yonkers Society for Ethical Culture. Jone is one of my go-to sources for historical insight into our humanist alternative to traditional religion, as well as history in general. (Check out her websites, [Women's History Guide](#) and [ThoughtCo.](#)) Jone writes, "When we look at the history of any nation, culture, or movement from the perspective of the women or other historically marginalized group, we see a more complete picture of the history."

That's what we all want, isn't it? A more complete picture? I'm still working on repainting Ethical Culture's history, which was first offered to me as a parade of men: Felix Adler, John Lovejoy Elliott, and others. Learning about and appreciating women like Josephine Clara Goldmark [pictured] is a part of that. Goldmark was a sister-in-law of both Adler, Ethical Culture's

founder, and Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis. As a researcher and writer for the National Consumers League, she prepared a brief, in 1908, that contributed to the ruling in *Muller v. Oregon*, which upheld a law limiting the hours of women factory workers. That ruling helped "humanize justice," writes Jone.

Goldmark's expression of "feminism through the lens of protecting the rights of working women" would have repercussions for others oppressed because of their gender, race, or poverty.

Goldmark was ahead of many reformers in her appreciation of the **intersectionality** of feminism. Thanks to scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined that term, today we better understand the overlapping systems of oppression based on gender, race, class, and other factors.

This is why, for Women's History Month, I will be hosting discussions of Kerri Greenidge's new book, *The Grimkes: The Legacy of Slavery in an American Family*. Many Americans know Sarah and Angelina Grimke as ardent abolitionists. But few realize that they were raised with privileges enabled by the enslavement of Black people. Or that they had three Black nephews, Archie, Frank and John, who bore the weight of the family's legacy. As Michael Jeffries, a professor of American studies at Wellesley College, **wrote** last year in *The New York Times*, "The lives they built and their relationships with Black relatives were poisoned by the profits, violence, and shame of white supremacy."

I hope you'll join me for discussions of Greenidge's intriguing and important work. Repainting this part of our past will enrich us and enlarge our understanding. That's a good way to celebrate Women's History Month.



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

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Let's Bring Our Modest Walls to Life!

By Michael Black-Smith

I grew up attending a plain but handsome Congregational church in Massachusetts. The Congregationalists trace their history back to the Puritan colonists of New England, and their chosen aesthetic was usually one of pragmatic simplicity. Their spaces for gathering and worship typically have whitewashed walls, durable wood panels, and clear or colored window glass. Coming from this background, I found the fine though simply detailed spaces of the Ethical Society building familiar and comfortable.

The Puritan and Congregational motivation for aesthetic severity was to discourage distraction from the serious business of contemplating and worshipping God. Ethical Culture's and our own Society's *de facto* simplicity, as far as I can tell, is plainness by default. We don't have any prohibition against decoration handed down to us from "on high." It's just that we prioritize other aspects of our congregational life. We're adornment agnostics.



Ethical Culture is a tiny and relatively young organized movement. I sometimes wish we had the artistic, cultural, and architectural language that a community like ours develops over centuries of telling and refining and re-telling its story. I'd like to think that in just a short couple of centuries—if our movement is still alive and kicking—we will create our own equivalent of Notre Dame de Paris' South Rose Window. Or, if we're around a few more centuries beyond that, maybe we'll see the Ethical Humanist version of the impossibly monumental Buddhas of Bamiyan.

The New York Society's 1910 meeting house has the stirrings of an artistic and cultural narrative in its Art Nouveau windows, spaces, and statuary. The Saint Louis Society's 1964 meeting house evinces a more abstract and ephemeral language, relying on a Modernist use of light and space.

Back in Philadelphia, our beautiful though blank walls and elegantly simple spaces do not reflect a lack of richness in our community's values or beliefs. Though painted in almost apologetically low-contrast lettering, our motto, "The Place Where We Meet To Seek The Highest Is Holy Ground," is emblazoned proudly above our Auditorium stage. Our current aesthetic does make our building eminently useful. Groups that share or rent our spaces don't need to set up their events around extraneous statues or cover up vivid murals to suit their needs.

In 2030, the Philadelphia Ethical Society will celebrate 100 years in our current building. As we approach the start of our second century at 1906 Rittenhouse Square,

perhaps we should consider a new direction. We might use our spaces as exuberant canvases to express who we are and what we value. Perhaps we could hang banners that beautifully declare our "search for the best in ourselves, the best

in each other, and the best for all of life." We might display arresting artwork that speaks to our goal of "treating each person so as to bring out their best and thus the best in ourselves." Maybe a modern frieze that represents how we value relationships above all else.

Any conversation about how our small community spends its limited resources must be grounded in pragmatism. I am not suggesting that tomorrow we commission a timeless or priceless masterpiece, no matter how compellingly it might communicate our identity. However, there is much beauty in our movement. I think we would benefit from exploring how best to let our spaces reflect that.

*Michael Black-Smith is the
President of the Philadelphia Ethical Society*

FROM THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE

What We Are Learning about Being Anti-Racist

Last month, nine members of the Ethical Society participated in a three-day workshop produced by the organization White People Confronting Racism. We wanted to develop our skills challenging racism both around us and within us. Here is some of what we learned.

Speak up: When anyone makes a racially offensive statement, it is our responsibility to speak up. It doesn't matter whether the insult was intentional. Often, white people recognize offensive statements made in private conversations or public settings. But we hesitate to say something for fear of conflict or rejection. We must recognize and overcome our personal obstacles to action.

We can lower the temperature on such exchanges by "calling in" rather than "calling out" the speaker. Calling out, which can be counter-productive, means bringing attention to harmful words by publicly shaming the speaker. Calling in means framing our objections as concerned inquiries into the speaker's motivation and meaning in the interest of promoting understanding. It can be done in the moment or privately, depending on the circumstances.

Recognize privilege: Remember that sometimes white people's experience is not the same as Black people's. Things white people do without a second thought—driving a car, wearing a particular shirt—can put some Black people at risk of everything from condemnation to violence.

Also, when white and Black people gather, white people often unconsciously assert privilege. We take the best seats. We dominate the proceedings. If we are aware of these behaviors, then we can modify them.

Accept that we've been hurtful: If we have unintentionally said something racist and been called in, we must not get defensive. It's no excuse that we were unaware that a word or reference could hurt someone. It did hurt someone. Apologize. Thank the person who pointed it out. Don't do it again.

The same goes for insults meant to be considerate. A well-meaning white person might think that asking a person of color where she is from shows polite curiosity. Instead, it may make that person feel like an outsider. Calling oneself "color-blind" may sound like a declaration of virtue. In fact, it implies a lack of recognition of or interest in the identity, culture, and history of people of color.

Believe Black people's experiences: Sometimes, white people push back against reports of racist acts. For example, when a Black motorist is stopped and beaten by police officers, a white person might suggest he was not cooperating or cite irrelevant crime statistics. We must stop trying to raise doubts about or mitigate the severity of discriminatory behavior.

Purge the pejoratives: Sometimes, white people use racial slurs when quoting someone else, in discussions of the words themselves, or in other circumstances where the intent is not to convey hate. Those words always convey hate. Never use them.

Practice humility: White people should get involved in racial-justice work because we sincerely are trying to eliminate racism. Not so we can post photos of ourselves at a demonstration on Facebook. So don't virtue-signal. Don't proclaim yourself an "ally." Just do the work.

Hold one another accountable: White people must make ourselves answerable to someone—a friend, a family member, an organization like the ERTF—for fulfilling our commitments to anti-racism work.

Anti-racism work is difficult. White people have resisted for so long. Well-meaning actions have unintended consequences that we must strive, with compassion, to correct. We have been challenged to make a difference.



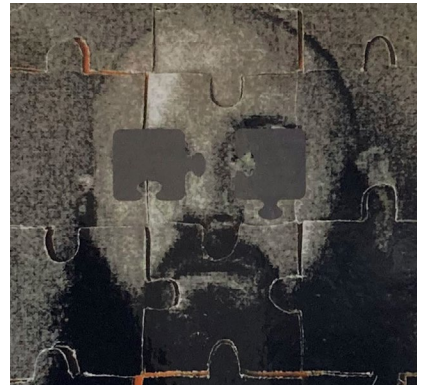
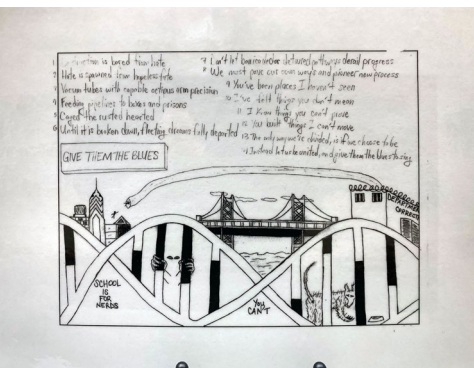
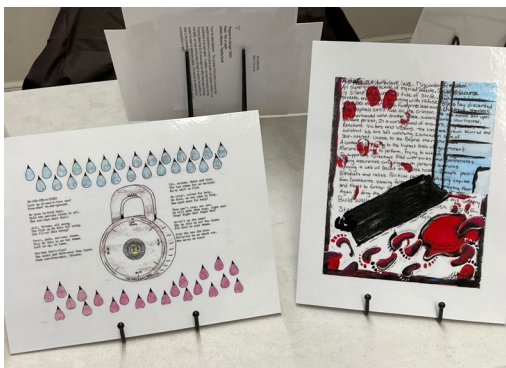
Anti-racism students: Ethical Society members participating in White People Confronting Racism (left-to-right): Tara Swartz, John Marshall, Henry Pashkow, Stan Horwitz, Sylvia Metzler, and Nick Sanders.
Not pictured: Barry Dubinsky, Ruth Dubinsky, and Hugh Taft-Morales.

ABSENT, BUT PRESENT IN THEIR ART

There were 27 chairs, draped with 27 short-sleeved brown shirts anointed with words like "MOM," "ART" and "PRAY." They represented the 27 incarcerated artists whose work was on display in the Society's Collier Room last month as part of "Celebrating Higher Education Behind Bars," a weeklong production of Eastern University's Prison Education Program.

The artists' work, a collection of poetry and artwork on paper, reflected themes of social justice, resilience, pain, love, and longing. The artists' names were disguised behind self-selected pseudonyms (JKool, Caveman, Nothing2NoOne). But each piece included a personal statement testifying to the creator's personal or political passions.

"The prison-industrial complex has mastered the art of dehumanization," Hugh said at the opening reception. "They get out their spirit, creativity, ideas, and vision through art."



Clockwise from top right:

1. Tieshka Smith, a local photographer who taught the class
2. "The Christ Road Is Joyful" by Tito DeLaCalle
3. "The Puzzle" by Caveman
4. "Give Them the Blues" by ERB
5. "Cry a Name, Die a Number" by Ozar and "Shadow Vision" by Nothing2NoOne
6. Shirts representing the absent artists
7. "Justice" by Wingz-22



BEHIND THE SCENES

A Next Chapter for Ethical Views

It is with some reluctance that I leave *Ethical Views*, where I have been the designer since 2016, when I first learned about the position through my partner, Rollin Wilber. You don't see me often; but I regularly see many of you through the articles and photographs that come my way. I've enjoyed being part of your community: reading about what you do and care about. I will miss that. But all things come to an end.

I leave *Ethical Views* to lighten my load a bit. I am a designer and creator of books, and very active as a civic volunteer. (I also work part-time managing zoning reviews.) In addition, Rollin and I have aspirations for things to do together. I am grateful for the opportunity the newsletter gave me to enhance my design skills and inventive problem-solving.

More important, I am grateful for the relationships I have had along the way. Former editor Henry Pashkow widened my perspectives and provided humor. Cheryl Desmond is a strong contributor, with good ideas and great attitude. I've greatly admired what Hugh does, the challenges he takes on, and the care and thoughtfulness he brings to bear. I appreciate the many people who contribute

time and talent to the cause, especially those whose names appear in the masthead and in bylines. And I am grateful for my last chapter working with Leigh Buchanan, the editor. She is a true professional with great humor and judgement.

I am around if you need me. The former designer, Janice Moore, said the same thing. As it turned out, I took the ball and ran with it. I hope my successor will have the same good experience and enjoy it as I have.

—Celeste Hardester

Editor's Note: Celeste has been a joy to work with, and I already miss her. You'll notice that the newsletter looks a little different this month. Lacking good options, I prevailed upon my husband to take over the designer role. He has zero experience but is working for free. And while he is not a member of the Ethical Society, he points out—correctly—that he is more ethical than I am.

If anyone with actual graphic-design experience is interested in this freelance position, please reach out to me at leighebuchanan@gmail.com.

Chairs to you! Community Life Coordinator Oliver Jane Jorgensen will teach chair yoga at the Society on Tuesdays from 6:45 PM to 7:45 PM. The classes are accessible to all ages and abilities. Great for older bodies, stiff bodies, bodies with limited mobility, and bodies that spend hours each day behind desks. Free for PES members; \$20 for non-members; \$10 for students and over-60s, with half the fee going to different charities. (March recipient: The North Philadelphia Peace Park.) Venmo, check, or cash accepted. Vaccination required.





UPCOMING EVENTS

Find us in the building. Look for us on Zoom.
Be sure to check the listings. Or risk an empty room.

Sunday, March 5, 12:30 PM

Women's History Month Art Opening:

Window on Sills

Join Carol Love and Hugh in the Society's Collier Room for the opening of *Window on Sills*, a collection of works by Joyce Sills. Sills, the first tenured woman in Rutgers' art department, was a prominent artist in the '60s. After developing severe fibromyalgia/chronic fatigue syndrome, she departed New York for Florida, leaving her life's work in storage. Carol will discuss the artist's talent and Jewish ancestry. Many of Sills' small, framed drawings will be available for purchase, with proceeds supporting Camp Linden.



"Beatrice": portrait of the artist's mother

Sunday, March 5, 7 PM

An Introduction to Ethical Humanism

Join Hugh in-person and on [Zoom](#) for this overview of Ethical Humanism's history, philosophy, and current community in Philadelphia.

Monday, March 6, 7 PM

Losing My Religion:

Where Do I Turn When Doubts Surface?

Join Hugh for a presentation on [Zoom](#), followed by a Q&A, with Anthony Dominello, a volunteer agent and ambassador with Recovering from Religion. This non-profit provides hope, healing, and support to people struggling with doubts about religion and supports those harmed by it who seek new paths—secular or religious—to meaningful, healthy lives.

Tuesday, March 7, 12:30 PM

Lunch with Hugh

Join Hugh in his office for a brown-bag lunch and casual conversation about the news, life, and the advent of spring.



Sunday, March 19, 12:30 PM

Spring Eve Wander

Join Hugh for a wander down to the banks of the Schuylkill River. Bring a lunch. We'll meet at the Society building, then find a spot by the river to sit and eat (weather permitting). We'll wander back by 2 PM. Simple as that!

Sunday, March 19, 4 PM

Women's History Month Book Discussion:

The Grimkes

You will have three opportunities (additional dates below) to join Hugh for a discussion of *The Grimkes: The Legacy of Slavery in An American Family*, by Kerri Greenidge. It's a fascinating exploration of a family renowned for abolitionist activism struggling with its complex connections to slavery, privilege, and denial.

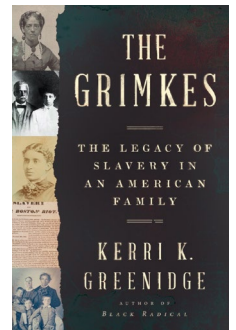
Here's a [review](#) from *The New York Times*.

The first meeting is in Hugh's office.

Additional meetings (attend as many as you wish):

Monday, March 20, 5:30 PM in Hugh's office.

Monday, March 27, 5:30 PM on [Zoom](#).



Saturday, March 25, 2 PM-4 PM

ERTF Potluck

Join members of the Ending Racism Task Force for their monthly in-person potluck. Bring something delicious.

Saturday, March 25, 4 PM

ERTF Movie: *Akeelah & The Bee*

Following the potluck, the Ending Racism Task Force will screen this story of an 11-year-old Black girl who competes in the Scripps National Spelling Bee.



Wednesday, March 29, 12:30 PM

Lunch with Hugh

Join Hugh and members of the Baltimore Ethical Society on [Zoom](#) for a virtual lunch. We'll share our favorite springtime activities before general conversation.





SUNDAY SERVICES

11 am

Ethical Views is published monthly except July and August.

Executive Editor: Leigh Buchanan
Proofreaders: Betsy Lightbourn,
Henry Pashkow, Nick Sanders,
Hugh Taft-Morales

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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, March 19, 6 PM

Building Committee
Michael Black-Smith
no meeting this month

Camp Linden Committee
Jeffrey Dubb
Wednesday, March 29, 6 PM

Education Committee
Betsy Lightbourn
no meeting this month

Ending Racism Task Force
Sylvia Metzler/Erik Younge
Saturday, March 11, 11 AM

Ethical Action Committee
open chair
next meeting TBA

Finance Committee
Nick Sanders
Wednesday, March 8, 5 PM

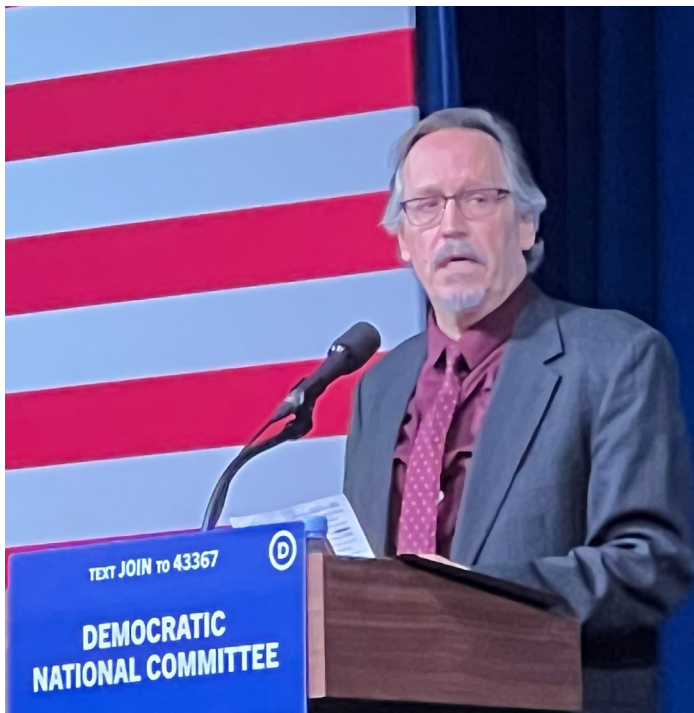
Media Committee
Drew Snyder
Wednesday, March 15, 6 PM

Social Committee
Ruth Dubinsky
no meeting this month

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

Introspection and inspiration:

Hugh Taft-Morales was honored to offer the closing benediction at the winter meeting of the Democratic National Committee, in Philadelphia, on February 4.



Outrage and disappointment:

Sylvia Metzler was among those protesting the Union League's honoring of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, on January 25. Erik Younge and Denise Marx also were present.

