



ETHICAL VIEWS

May 2023 Vol. 137, No. 9 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

SUNDAY PLATFORMS

The public is welcome to join us *

Sunday, May 7, 11 AM

The Green and Red Roots of May Day

Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader

Philadelphia Ethical Society



May Day brings to mind both maypole dancers and Soviet-era military parades. Most who celebrate May 1 rejoice in nature and the imminence of summer. But others associate the day with the movement for economic justice by socialist and labor organizations. Hugh examines the holiday's dual origins. What lessons for Ethical Culture can we draw from its deep pagan roots and more recent

purpose to honor workers? How can we summon the energy to support both the environment and labor?

Sunday, May 14, 11 AM

Did Communism Liberate Women? Examples from Eastern Europe

Melissa Feinberg

Rutgers University-New Brunswick



Usually equated in the West with tyranny, Communism in Eastern Europe was rife with seeming contradictions. The system censored books but also ended illiteracy. Finding bananas in a store was almost impossible; yet the average person had more to eat than ever. Feinberg, chair of the Rutgers-New Brunswick history department, examines the complicated impact of Communism on women's lives in

Eastern Europe. A specialist in modern East-Central European and women's and gender history, she is the author of *Curtain of Lies: The Battle over Truth in Stalinist Eastern Europe* and *Communism in Eastern Europe*.

Sunday, May 21, 11 AM

Radical Creativity

Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader

The human race is confounded by our stubborn reliance on patterns of behavior that don't work. Doing the same thing over and over while expecting different results is insane. Yet despite the unceasing harm caused by poverty and war, we continue to rely on capitalism to provide for us and militarism to defend us. Similarly, a hidebound Ethical Culture movement needs to adopt radical creativity if it is to thrive. Hugh explores ways we can learn, brainstorm, and think outside the box to grow Ethical Culture and save the world—or, at least, some parts of it. (This platform is Zoom only. The annual members' meeting takes place immediately afterward.)

Sunday, May 28, 11 AM

Muslim Women and the Veil: Where's the Misogyny?

Hibba Abugideiri

Villanova University



Why do Muslim women wear the veil, especially in the United States? Are face veils signs of oppression? Is Islam a misogynistic religion? And why has a 14 X 14 piece of cloth obsessed the West for over a century and endured as a symbol with global resonance? Abugideiri addresses misconceptions by placing veiling—and even unveiling—practices

in their historical contexts. An associate professor of history, she is the former Director of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies at Villanova and the author of *Gender and the Making of Modern Medicine in Colonial Egypt*. Abugideiri is also a senior editor of *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Women*.

* **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 . . .

**Memorializing gun victims through art;
Renewed momentum for the George Floyd Act;
A tribute to the life of Richard Kiniry.**

FROM THE LEADER

Humanizing Gun Victims

By Hugh Taft-Morales

We may never fully know why a troubled 28-year-old killed three children and three adults at a Nashville school in March. But I believe dehumanization was a contributing factor. The combination of our violent culture, a warped interpretation of the Second Amendment, and a growing tendency to see “others” as enemies, allows shooters to take lives they deem without value. For the rest of us, those killed lose their individuality and become faceless victims lost in a rising sea of violence.

In 2013, Baltimore Ethical Society member Kimberly Sheridan channeled her outrage and grief at gun violence into a series of portraits of the victims. To date, her project—Million Gun Victims March—comprises 244 paintings. Kimberly wants the public to “meet people face-to-face.” Her work embodies Ethical Culture’s commitment to honor the unique, irreplaceable, inherent worth of every person.

When possible, Kimberly gifts paintings to her subjects’ families or communities. In the past, it was chiefly individual portraits that “went home.” With the increase in mass shootings, however, organizations now are receiving group portraits. At a reception for a March exhibition of Kimberly’s work at the University of Baltimore, Jews United for Justice received a painting of victims from the Tree of Life synagogue, in Pittsburgh. Representatives from the Sikh Spiritual Center in Rockville, Maryland, accepted a painting of those killed at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin.

The March display was sponsored by the University of Baltimore, the Baltimore Ethical Society, and Moms Demand Action (MDA). MDA advocates for gun-safety legislation; and its efforts have borne fruit. In April, the Gun Safety Act of 2023 passed, strengthening Maryland’s concealed-carry laws and prohibiting guns from such locations as bars, government buildings, schools, and polling places.

The creativity of artists like Kimberly can be a force behind gun-control legislation. So, I am excited that the Philadelphia Ethical Society will host an art show this month, curated by the Souls Shot Portrait Project. Souls Shot Founder and Executive Director Laura Madeleine will join me for a panel discussion at 1906 S. Rittenhouse on the evening of Wednesday, May 24.

The mission of Souls Shot is similar to that of Million Gun Victims March. Like Kimberly, Laura tries to both “bring some joy and peace to the families and friends of victims” and to stimulate political momentum for gun safety. She arranges meetings between artists and families who have lost loved ones to gun violence. Laura hopes the paintings humanize the **1,700 people killed each year**, on average, in Pennsylvania.

To join the battle for gun control and against dehumanization of victims, start by bringing friends to the art show and panel discussion this month. Support [Philadelphia CeaseFire](#), which addresses gun violence as a public-health issue. And join me, Peace Day Philly, and the Philadelphia Police Department as we plan our second annual Footballs Not Firearms march and rally for September. You can also learn more from such resources as the [Gun Violence Archive](#).

Above all, nurture your own commitment to the worth of every person. And don’t forget that gun violence hurts everyone, including first responders and police officers called to murder scenes. Even those troubled shooters are, in a way, victims of a nation awash in guns.

I hope Ethical Culture and art can help us humanize all people harmed by guns. That is pretty much all of us.

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



Remember their faces: Kimberly Sheridan (from left) with a painting of victims of the 2018 attack on *The Capitol* newspaper. Sheridan and Denise Reid, state survivor membership co-lead for MDA, whose son was killed by a bullet. Dr. Rajwant Singh, chairman of the Sikh Council on Religion and Education, with a painting of victims of the Oak Creek, Wisconsin, Sikh temple shooting.

FROM THE PRESIDENT I Learned It Through the Grapevine

By Michael Black-Smith

Gardening in my tiny, South Philadelphia backyard the past few years, I've had some experience nurturing a productive, vigorous grapevine. My concrete "vineyard" only ever produced eight-to-twelve good bunches annually. Still, I've learned a little about this fascinating plant. And, surprisingly, some of those lessons apply to a subject that's been troubling me: the absence for almost a year, of our Ethical Action Committee and, for the past month, of our Social Committee. Fortunately, I have found parallels between viniculture and our congregation to help me put the situation in perspective.

A few years ago, we created an organizational chart to help new and existing members make sense of our Society's myriad committees, subcommittees, and task forces. In this schema, our Board is the metaphorical sun shining down nourishment onto our flowering committees. The Ethical Action and Social Committees are among our brightest blossoms. Unfortunately, we lost those committee heads and, to date, have been unable to recruit new ones. That seemed to leave a big hole in the garden.

What's worse, Ethical Action and Social have traditionally been two of our three mission-advancing committees. (The other is Education.) Seeking justice, seeking community, and seeking knowledge: that's what we do and why people join us. Thank goodness our Ethical Action "offshoots"—Camp Linden and the Ending Racism Task Force—are going strong. But how could it be OK, I fretted, that their parent committee had gone dormant?

Which brings me to grapevines. Most people picture a grapevine as one among hundreds growing in neat rows on a hillside or twining ornately through a pergola. Yet—although they have been cultivated since antiquity—grapevines left to their own devices will develop into tree-like messes of leaves; branches; and tiny, not-very-sweet, grapes. (My own vine came as a clipping from a neighbor's down-the-shore property, where she had been battling it as a weed.)

Such untended, wild, and weedy grapes are comparable to uncultivated passion and energy in our Society. The goal is to apply support and encouragement to produce, in the first case, sweeter fruit and, in the second, more communal, thoughtful, active engagement with one another and with Ethical Culture.

Grape growers traditionally concentrate each year's growth along an established branch. That centralized, organized approach is analogous to channeling our energy and resources through well-defined, longstanding committees, task forces, and projects like Camp Linden.

But there's more than one way to grow a grapevine. An alternative is the cane method, in which the gardener selects a few vigorous shoots each year to form the next year's fruiting branch. Those shoots remind me of the myriad communal and ethical actions organized by

individuals and small groups of members. Gatherings for board games, lunches with Hugh, group events offered through the Service Auction, and our members' work with POWER are just a few of the sprouts budding and flowering outside the formal committee structure. They cultivate community and embody our social-justice mission. They extend and nourish our garden.



(In this extended metaphor, our Finance, Building, and Media Committees are akin to guide wires and posts. They, too, are crucial to the vineyard's success, although you never see them pictured on the label.)

Comforting as I find this vision of our congregational garden, I hold out hope that the Ethical Action and Social Committees will return. You can revive a plant so long as its roots are healthy. Given our members' conviction and dedication, our roots are very healthy.

Michael Black-Smith is president of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

FROM THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE

The George Floyd Act Rejoins the Debate

By John Marshall

When the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act stalled in the Senate in 2021, the blazing anger that had fueled nationwide protests temporarily hit a firewall. In recent months, though, the embers have reignited. In particular, the fatal beating by Memphis police officers of Tyre Nichols, after a January traffic stop, evoked impassioned demands for reform. At Nichols' funeral, Vice President Kamala Harris and Nichols' mother, RowVaughn Wells, both called on Congress to pass the police-reform legislation. "We need to get that bill passed," said Wells. "Because if we don't...the next child that dies, that blood is going to be on their hands."

The George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, which targets racial profiling and excessive force, is intended both to reign in officers' transgressions (for example, by banning choke holds and no-knock warrants) and to increase the consequences when they do transgress. Among other provisions, the Act would end qualified immunity, which protects officers from individual liability for bad behavior; create a national database of serious acts of police misconduct; and lower the criminal intent standard from "willful" to "knowing" or "reckless." An updated version may include a provision—named for Tyre Nichols—that requires officers to intervene when they witness police violence.

In the book *Ten Lives, Ten Demands: Life-and-Death Stories, and a Black Activist's Blueprint for Racial Justice*, author Solomon Jones honors 10 innocent Black lives irrevocably altered or lost because of racist treatment by law enforcement or the legal system. They are just a few of the many whose fates have inspired and shaped a revolution. I found the story of Alton Sterling to be an especially powerful example of the difficulty, under the current system, of prosecuting even flagrant lawbreakers in police departments.

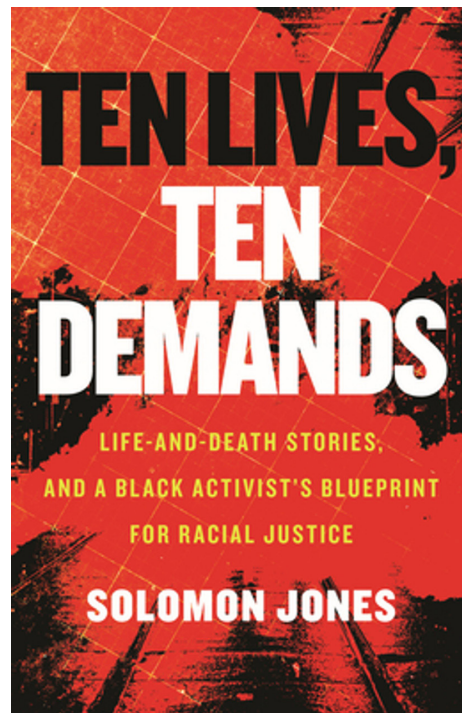
Alton Sterling was a Black man, living in Louisiana, who in 2016 was fatally shot by police in an encounter largely captured on video that raised widespread concerns about the officers' actions.

A caller told a police dispatcher that a Black man selling CDs had threatened him with a gun. Officers arrived, restrained Sterling, then shot him six times. On a bystander's video, a voice can be heard yelling, "He's got a gun!" But the owner of a convenience store who knew Sterling, as well as other bystanders, stated they never saw Sterling reach for a gun.

The officers were suspended during an investigation by the Department of Justice into violations of civil rights laws under Title 18 of the U.S. Code. That statute requires prosecutors

to establish that a police officer acted willfully to deprive someone of a federally protected right. As things are now, prosecutors must, in effect, climb into officers' heads and find out exactly what they were thinking: for example, whether their actions were motivated by racism.

Federal prosecutors found that there was insufficient evidence to charge the officers with violating Sterling's civil rights. They said that neither the witness statements nor the videos show that Sterling was not reaching for a gun. Even with the evidence of videos and witness statements and a policing history of racially motivated brutality, federal prosecutors usually do not convict white police officers in the shooting of Black people. That is systemic racism.



One of the "ten demands" in Jones's title is that the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act be passed. "The federal law governing the prosecution of police officers for civil rights violations must be changed so that the standard for charging officers is reachable, realistic, and relevant," he writes. It's not enough to condemn brutality by law enforcement. We also must stop protecting it.

John Marshall is a member of the Ending Racism Task Force

The Quest to Revive the American Ethical Union

In December, Rachel Pfeffer was named interim executive director of the American Ethical Union (AEU), the federating organization of the Philadelphia Ethical Society. Together with the AEU's board and Society presidents, Rachel is trying to turn around a long-term decline in the organization, which certifies clergy leaders and holds an annual conference, but that many feel should do much more. Pfeffer spoke with Philadelphia Board President Michael Black-Smith and *Ethical Views* Editor Leigh Buchanan.

What is your background?

For 17 years I have been an interim executive director for foundations, universities, and social-justice, religious, and service organizations. I work in the space between an executive director leaving and a new one getting hired. My assignment is to create a healthy, well-run organization with minimal conflict, where the new person can thrive. I think of myself as the Mary Poppins of nonprofits.



Rachel Pfeffer

How do you create those conditions?

For the AEU, I worked with the collective to energize and focus toward the future. I have met with over 100 people, gone to committees, talked to Societies, and reviewed board and historical documents.

What have you discovered?

The AEU lacks the capacity, in terms of people and other resources, to do more for the Societies. Membership has been shrinking for a long time because root-cause problems have not been addressed. Those include an unwillingness to recognize the historical institutional values stemming from a white supremacy culture; underpaid staff and leadership; and lack of accountability. Failure to deal with those issues is a main barrier to turning things around.

What are the options?

I have proposed three scenarios. One is that the AEU takes a 12-month sabbatical during which an organizational consultant would explore its purpose with the Societies. The AEU needs a future focus.

Scenario two is do nothing. Hire another executive director and maintain the status quo until [the AEU] bleeds out and, finally, dies.

Scenario three is to merge with another organization, such as the Unitarian Universalist Humanist Association (UUHA) or the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). Some Ethical Societies already have a relationship with the UUA. Your philosophies are very similar.

As a member of the Philadelphia Ethical Society, that third option seems most appealing. Many things that we don't do or do poorly are because we are so small. The UU national organizations are more competent and robust. Just as a provocation, saying we should merge could stir up strong feelings about how we can maintain independence.

Just the presidents using their agency would be historical. Having them say, "We are going to put forth a resolution at the assembly to explore merging or taking a sabbatical." And the story of a movement from the 19th century being willing to take responsibility, look at its culpability—that would be doing something healthy for the world. People would want to become part of that.

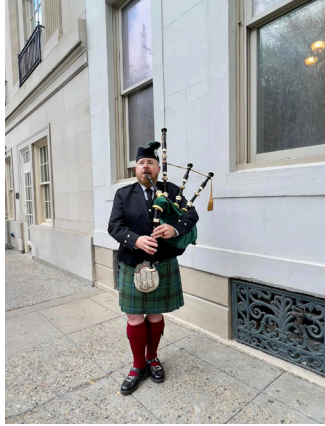
It sometimes seems as though the weight of our history and culture is suffocating vibrancy and energy. Have you seen that in other places?

My first interim assignment was with the oldest peace and justice organization in the country. They were in a similar situation. But they had a great board president who was willing to make big changes. I also worked at All Souls Church in Washington D.C. The day I started, the front page of *The Washington Post* had a story about racism there. For years, they had been working towards being anti-racist. They needed to go further; and they did.

Every organization must be willing to reinvent itself. The AEU needs to rethink the way it creates belonging through involvement with its member Societies and individual members.

A Final, Fond Farewell to Richard Kiniry

A lone bagpiper called folks to the Ethical Society, on April 15, to celebrate the life of our Leader Emeritus Richard Kiniry. The gratifyingly large turnout—about 70 people in the Auditorium and a few dozen more on Zoom—was testament to the singular place Richard held in our organization and in our memories.



The moving program comprised beautiful music, a clip of a talk by Richard, a slide show of his life from childhood through seminary to the Ethical Society, and warm memories shared by members and others about this special man.

Jeffrey Dubb offered an overview of Richard's life, followed by family



In loving memory: Jeffrey and Ruth Ann Dubb, Hugh Taft-Morales, and Kate Esposito were among those celebrating Richard's life.



memories from Richard's niece, Maureen Ciolko. Other speakers included Kate Esposito, Carol Love, Sharon Wallis, Sylvia Metzler, Richard's friend Julia Goodall, and Ethical Culture Leader Randy Best. Temma and Arnold Fishman shared their thoughts on Zoom.

Nine members of Richard's family and some of his friends attended. They expressed gratitude for the celebration—long delayed by Covid—and seemed pleased to get a glimpse of the community Richard so loved, and which loved him.

The formal program ended with a group serenade of "When Irish Eyes are Smiling," followed by refreshments arranged by Ruth Ann Dubb. As the crowd began to thin, those who remained—prompted by the Irish whisky generously provided by Carol and Kate—sang the loving Irish lament "The Parting Glass." "So, fill to me the parting glass," we sang, raising our own glasses. "And drink a health whate'er befalls / Then gently rise and softly call / Good night and joy be to you all."

Thank you, Richard, for all the joy you gave us.

UPCOMING EVENTS



Sunday, May 7, 5 PM-7 PM

Under-40 Social Gathering

Join Hugh Taft-Morales in the Leader's Office for a video, conversation, and appetizers! RSVP to [Hugh](#).

Sunday, May 7, 7 PM

An Introduction to Ethical Humanism

Do you want to know more about Ethical Humanism? Find out what goes on at the Philadelphia Ethical Society. Join Hugh for this informal hybrid gathering in the Leader's Office and on [Zoom](#).



Tuesday, May 9, 12:30 PM

Lunch with Hugh 1

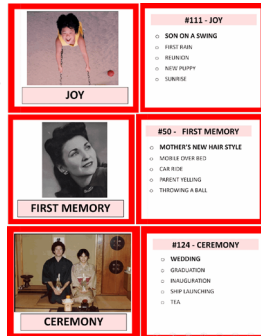
Pack your lunch and join Hugh in the Leader's Office for casual conversation before summer sweeps him away!

Wednesday, May 10, 1 PM - 2:30 PM

Game: Peeling the Onion

Join Hugh, facilitator Redwood Kardon, and members of Friends in the City in the Leader's Office for this get-to-know-you activity. Our lives comprise layers of experiences and stories. Share what you want as we peel those layers together. Great for those new to the Ethical Society!

RSVP to [Hugh](#). Space is limited.



Tuesday, May 16, 12:30 PM

Lunch with Hugh 2

Bring your own (real) lunch for this virtual gathering. Join Hugh and the Baltimore Ethical Society on [Zoom](#).

Sunday, May 21, 12 PM

Annual Members Meeting

All Ethical Society members are invited to attend this meeting immediately after the Sunday platform, on [Zoom](#).



Tuesday, May 23, 12:30 PM

Lunch with Hugh 3

Pack your lunch and join Hugh in the Leader's Office for casual conversation before summer sweeps him away!

Wednesday, May 24, 1 PM-2 PM

Game: Peeling the Onion

A repeat of the program on May 10. See listing above for details. RSVP to [Hugh](#). Space is limited.

Wednesday, May 24 5:30 PM-7 PM

Souls Shot Portrait Project Reception and Panel Discussion

Join Hugh for a discussion of the [Souls Shot Portrait Project](#), which links fine artists with families and friends of victims of gun violence. The goal is to call attention to and memorialize lives lost and tragically altered by this scourge. Hugh hosts the project's founder, Laura Madeleine, and others involved. Work produced by Souls Shot artists will be on view in the Society's Collier Gallery and the Weston Room through May.



Friday, May 26th, 5:15 PM-7:45 PM

Under-40 Museum Trip

If you are under 40, please join Community Life Coordinator Oliver Jane Jorgensen at the Philadelphia Museum of Art during its free-admission hours. We will view and discuss specific pieces and then share snacks and beverages. Feel free to stay until closing. If you plan to attend or just want information, email [Oliver Jane](#).



Saturday, May 27, 2 PM

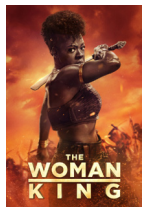
Ending Racism Task Force Potluck

Enjoy casual conversation and exchange ideas with others interested in anti-racism work. Feel free to bring snacks!

Saturday, May 27, 4 PM

Ending Racism Task Force Movie

We will screen "The Woman King." Viola Davis stars as a general who commands female warriors protecting an African kingdom.



The Richard Kiniry Lending Library Is Open!

Dip into the mind of our dear departed Leader Emeritus Richard Kiniry. A collection of his books, donated by his family, is now housed in the Leader's Office. Subjects include art, humanism, religion, social issues, and environmentalism. Those on the top two shelves of the bookcase on the left, as you enter, are available for loan. Please sign out any books you borrow in the notebook on top of the bookshelf.



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 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, May 21, 6 PM

Building Committee
Michael Black-Smith
no meeting this month

Camp Linden Committee
Jeffrey Dubb
Wednesday, May 24, 6 PM

Education Committee
Betsy Lightbourn
Wednesday, May 3, 5:30 PM

Ending Racism Task Force
Sylvia Metzler, Erik Younge
Saturday, May 13, 11 AM

Ethical Action Committee
open chair
next meeting TBA

Finance Committee
Nick Sanders
Wednesday, May 10, 5 PM

Media Committee
Drew Snyder
Wednesday, May 17, 6 PM

Social Committee
open chair
next meeting TBA

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

Outings

Leonard Weeks, Sharon Wallis, Robert Steinfort, Kate Esposito and Hugh Taft-Morales enjoyed a walk along the Schuylkill River Trail in unseasonably brisk spring weather.



Sproutings

Sharon Wallis (center) distributed tomato and pepper seedlings to Barry Dubinsky and Valerie Pry. Members nurtured the plants in their homes before dispatching them to the Camp Linden garden.

