



ETHICAL VIEWS

November 2023 Vol. 138, No. 3 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

SUNDAY PLATFORMS

The public is welcome to join us *

Sunday, Nov 5, 11 AM (in-person) 2 PM (zoom)

Indigenous Wisdom: Respect and Appropriation

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



Many of our harvest-season traditions have been crafted through selective appropriation of Native American culture. That culture informs how we frame our Thanksgiving holiday and the gratitude we profess—for nature's gifts, in particular. Drawing on Robin Wall Kimmerer's book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Hugh will explore the potential for transcending superficial appropriation and achieving a deeper understanding of relationships, sustainability, and our place in the natural world.

Sunday, Nov 12, 11 AM (zoom only)

Deception and Policing in a Post-Miranda Era

**Donald Tibbs, Professor of Law
Drexel University**



Tibbs, an activist for racial and social justice, will discuss the fraught ethics of contemporary policing, the subject of his forthcoming book, *Unapologetically Black: How Policing Has Reshaped the American Constitution...And Why It Matters to Black America*. Tibbs also is the author of *From Black Power to Prison Power: The Making of Jones V. North Carolina Prisoners Labor*

Union. He is co-editor of *Hip-Hop and the Law*, and has published numerous scholarly articles. In 2018, Tibbs was named the Outstanding Graduate Alumni of the Arizona State University's School of Justice and Social Transformation for his contributions to the pursuit of social justice and civil rights.

Sunday, Nov 19, 11 AM (in-person) 2 PM (zoom)

Humanist Thanksgiving: Growing Gratitude

Come and share poetry, music, and gratitude during our season of Thanksgiving. We will pass our plate to collect donations for Pay It Forward Philly, a new project that encourages local restaurants to provide food in a dignified manner to those in need. For the in-person gathering, unlike the pre-Covid past, we will not serve a full meal. Instead, there will be light refreshments in the Auditorium after the platform. If you'd like to bring something, please contact [Oliver Jane](#) or [Hugh](#). For the zoom gathering, we'll share readings and discuss gratitude.



Sunday, Nov 26, 11 AM (zoom only)

From the Archives: The Ache for Home

Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader

In this video of a platform from 2011, Hugh offers still timely and inspiring reflections on the meaning of home and homelessness.

* Where They'll Be

As a general rule, on Sundays when Hugh is the speaker, the 11 AM platform will be in-person only.

Hugh will offer the address a second time, live, on [zoom](#) only, at 2 PM that afternoon. (This is Hugh's personal zoom link.)

Guest speakers will appear on [zoom](#) only. (This is the Society's zoom link.)

In-person attendees should be up-to-date on vaccinations and remain masked.

Check your emails and our website to make sure you know how to join us.

LETTER FROM THE LEADER

Offering Help in Our Season of Thanksgiving

By Hugh Taft-Morales

The sidewalks near the Ethical Society building are increasingly populated by people in need. Each time I walk to my office, fellow Philadelphians camped out on the cold pavement without access to food, clothing, housing, or health services ask me for a few dollars.

There have always been hungry people in our city of sisterly and brotherly love. Ethical Society members have helped out in the past. Around 2007, when I first arrived in Philly as an intern, Leader Richard Kiniry and Society volunteers were part of a program hosted by Trinity Memorial Church, on Spruce and 22nd Streets. One Sunday a month, we prepared, delivered, and served hot meals to people in need. Unfortunately, it was a challenge to maintain sufficient volunteer energy; so, we stopped participating.

Today, because of budget cuts to social services and the impact of COVID, there are even more hungry people in our neighborhood. Can Society members renew our commitment to hunger reduction? Thankfully, two community programs offer opportunities to make a difference.

The Open Hearts Café, run by the Church of the Holy Trinity at the northwest corner of Rittenhouse Square, opened in 2021. It's a food and clothing ministry, coordinated by the Rev. John Gardner. Open Hearts serves meals and offers gifts of clothing on Sundays and Tuesdays at 4:30 PM. I'm signing up to help serve food in November. The ministry needs men's clothing, particularly jeans, winter coats, underwear, T-shirts, hoodies, and sweatshirts. Contact me if you have donations.

I'm also supporting a brand-new project called Pay It Forward Philly. It is an initiative of The Welcome Church, which partnered with the Office of Homeless Services' food access program and Hart of Catering & Café, at 21st and Sansom Streets. The project's creators characterize Pay It Forward Philly as "Making the shift from feeding people to sharing food."

Here's how it works. When customers buy something at Hart of Catering, they can make a financial donation of any amount. (I'm a regular there because it's near where I stay when I'm in the city.) Those funds pay for food for subsequent patrons. Customers write heart-shaped sticky notes saying what items they have paid for (a sandwich; a coffee and pastry) and affix those notes to a wall. People in need who come in can then choose a note to exchange with the cashier for food and beverages.



Hugh with Hart of Catering co-owners Kevin Hart (center) and Tim Judge

I spoke recently to the Rev. Schaunel Steinnagel, of the Welcome Church, about the potential for this project to reduce food insecurity while supporting local businesses. She hopes it also will restore dignity to folks who are regularly marginalized and treated as invisible. "We're hoping to nurture something more than a relationship between giver and taker," said the Rev. Steinnagel. "We're stressing mutuality. Everyone needs food. We're all at the same table."

So, consider putting your own sticky note on the wall at Hart of Catering. And if you think any of your favorite Center City restaurants might want to get involved with Pay It Forward Philly, then bring it up with them.

The program can be customized to fit the needs of individual restaurants. Interested business owners or managers should contact the [Rev. Steinnagel](#).

Ethical Society members will have the chance to contribute to Pay it Forward Philly when we pass the plate at our Humanist Thanksgiving celebration, on Nov. 19. Bring a few dollars so we can help share food!

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

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

An Anatomy of Antagonism

By Michael Black-Smith

In my column last month, I talked about the American Ethical Union's Annual Assembly and what did—and did not—get accomplished there. No less than the future of our federating organization was at stake. The AEU has lost much of its capacity to support local Societies and act as a national voice for the Ethical Culture movement, which are its intended roles. Quite rightly, that lent a sense of urgency to the meeting.

The failure to arrive at solutions was just one troubling aspect of the proceedings. Underneath the plain text of the agenda, lay a subtext of antagonism and mistrust. In the back-and-forth of refining the proposals under consideration, some attendees were quick to assume hidden, sinister motives. Not knowing the origins of this animus, I was baffled. Why did these seemingly innocuous (in many cases, downright boring) conversations about process and bylaws appear always on the verge of devolving into recrimination and name-calling? Some, in fact, actually did so.

Later, I learned part of the background to this tension. Apparently, mistrust has plagued the AEU board for several years. Board directors are split over priorities. Beyond pragmatic concerns about declining national membership, resources, and relevance, some disagree about our direction and emphasis. They take issue with the AEU's approach to, among other things, institutional racism; unconscious bias; microaggressions; and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. There also is concern about the conduct of some of our leaders, although details are not publicly available.

Two AEU-presidents-ago, the board started down a reform-minded path to begin addressing these issues. Among other actions, it recommended hiring an Interim Executive Director (IED) to study how the AEU operates. However, the board then experienced philosophical whiplash with the election of a new president and several new directors at the 2020 Annual Assembly. This new board leadership discouraged anything that would attract unfavorable attention to the AEU. It preferred to highlight the organization's strengths: its history and traditions.

The new board did not welcome findings in the IED's report that gave credence to the previous board's concerns. Perceiving an attempt to sideline the report, the remaining reform-minded board members essentially wrested control away from the new president's oversight of the IED, in order to bring the report to member Societies.

Who knew a movement dedicated to finding common ground could harbor so much intrigue?



Despite this uncharacteristically toxic context for a “religion of relationships,” our 108th Assembly went off largely without a hitch. We did not adopt any specific plan to guide the AEU. But I am encouraged by three things that came out of this Assembly.

First, I believe the deep and broad consideration of our present and future has clarified the pitfalls and possibilities for individual members and Societies. Second, the sole bylaws change approved at the Assembly—to include one representative from each Society

on the AEU board—should serve as a guardrail, preventing further abrupt reversals in policy or philosophy.

Third, this assembly introduced our movement to Restorative Justice practices as a way to address the lingering mistrust. At well-attended seminars and workshops, many of us learned about Restorative Justice's talking-circle format, which seeks to foster community-building, dialogue, and decision-making. Talking circles are best known for bringing together people who have caused and experienced harm. However, the underlying approach—which establishes shared values and courtesies—also is employed in settings as mundane as a school classroom.

We continue to meet in a monthly community of practice to hone those skills and techniques. We hope to employ them soon to bolster communication and community in our Societies and in the movement more broadly. Please let me know if you'd like to learn more!

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

FROM THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE

Linda Richardson's Black History Walking Tour

By Stan Horwitz

In June 2020, I became curious if anyone had organized a Black history walking tour of Philadelphia. I asked Linda Richardson, a longtime member of the Philadelphia Ethical Society. Linda, who passed away in November 2020, was a devoted community builder and organizer: founder of the Black United Fund and the force behind revitalization of the Uptown Theater. She also was a friend, from whom I learned a lot.

Linda provided me with a copy of the African American Heritage Tour. This map covers Philadelphia's 7th Ward, which in the 19th century was home to the largest freed Black community in the United States and played a vital role in the battle against slavery.

This tour was developed in 2012 by several volunteers, including Linda, for the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission. One day last summer, I spent about two hours walking it. I started at Mother Bethel AME Church, the only site on this tour still fulfilling its original function. The route concluded at Washington Square, which the map explains was once a popular gathering spot for the Black community's funerals and celebrations.

Although the homes of several important Black figures have been preserved in other parts of Philadelphia, a smattering of markers is all that pays tribute to this neighborhood's rich Black history. Still, you can read at least a bit about Ward 7's most notable residents while standing on the sites of their former homes, schools, and places of worship.

Octavius Catto taught at the Institute for Colored Youth and—alongside Frederick Douglass—recruited volunteers for the Union Army. He also registered thousands of Black people to vote. William Still, the owner of a coal business, founded the first Black YMCA and helped desegregate Philadelphia's transit system. James Forten, Sr., founder of a company that made sails, was the first Black American to be granted a U.S. patent. (An exhibit about Forten runs at the Museum of the American Revolution through November 26.)

Many sites commemorate Black achievement. The Benjamin Banneker Institute, named for the astronomer, surveyor, and mathematician, is long gone. But it promoted intellectual pursuits among Black residents. Philly's first Black firefighters served in the Engine 11 Fire Station, now part of the Magic Gardens.

The familiar dark-blue-and-gold historical markers provide very limited information. But if they whet your curiosity, you can do your own research. You may want to learn more about the Lombard Street Riot, a three-day nightmare during which a white mob beat and looted the homes of Black Philadelphians and burned down a local church and abolition meeting place.



Mother Bethel AME

At some sites, though, no markers exist. No signs to acknowledge the lives lived or events that unfolded there. Did you know that what was once the country's largest Black fraternal organization was headquartered in Philadelphia? But there's no indication outside the office building that rises from the site of the order's first lodge in Pennsylvania. The Octavia Hill Association renovated dilapidated rowhouses and made them affordable to impoverished residents. Now, the Association's headquarters is a coin shop.

Similarly, the families enjoying themselves at Starr Garden Playground have no way to know it once was Starr

Park, offering Black and immigrant populations not just recreation but also education, social services, and the only free library in that part of the city.

There is a marker in front of Starr Park indicating that W.E.B. DuBois lived in the College Settlement House while working on *The Philadelphia Negro*, a landmark sociological study of Black urban life. But the building itself has disappeared beneath the park's athletic field. DuBois wanted people to understand the lives and struggles of Black Americans in this city. Walking this tour, in his footsteps, reminds us how much has changed and how far we have to go.

Stan Horwitz is a member of the Ending Racism Task Force

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

It's Native American Heritage Month. Here Are Some Recs

By Leigh Buchanan

Over the pandemic, I finally read *Love Medicine*, Louise Erdrich's stunning novel about life on a Chippewa reservation. Captivated by her descriptions of that world, I sought out additional books (all fiction, because that's me), TV shows, and other media by and about Indigenous people. In honor of National Native American Heritage Month, which is November, I'm sharing a few favorites.

Reservation Dogs (Television)

Bear, Elora, Willie Jack, and Cheese are members of the Muscogee Nation growing up in rural Oklahoma. United by the suicide of a friend, they pursue his unrealized dream by traveling to California. That journey manifests the tension between an outside world full of danger and opportunity and the deep traditions and connections that root the characters in their largely dead-end community.

Intact families are rare on the reservation. One-off episodes reveal the stories of single parents, aunties, and other relatives who worry about and protect the teens. The profound influence of elders on the community and the lives of these young people slowly becomes the series' focus.

And then there are the spirits. A warrior who died at the Battle of Little Big Horn advises Bear on life. Cookie, Elora's dead mother, returns to gossip and play Wahoo with her old gang. The Deer Lady, a figure from Native folklore, wreaks vengeance on wicked men.

The first two seasons are sweet, funny, and generous. Then the good vibes slam to a halt in a flashback set in one of the government-run boarding schools where Indigenous children were abused and stripped of their language and culture. After that episode, we cannot unsee the brutal history that thrums beneath this series' gentle surface. But the finale, which aired in September, movingly balances the promise of individual futures with the enduring influence of the communal past.

Celebration (Novel)

Shattered and lost, Tayo returns from a Japanese prison camp to his home on the Laguna reservation, in New Mexico. The land itself seems cursed. A place of extraordinary beauty, it is parched by drought. Other men back from war have descended into alcoholism and violence. Over all hangs the existential threat of atomic warfare: the ultimate expression of white hegemony.

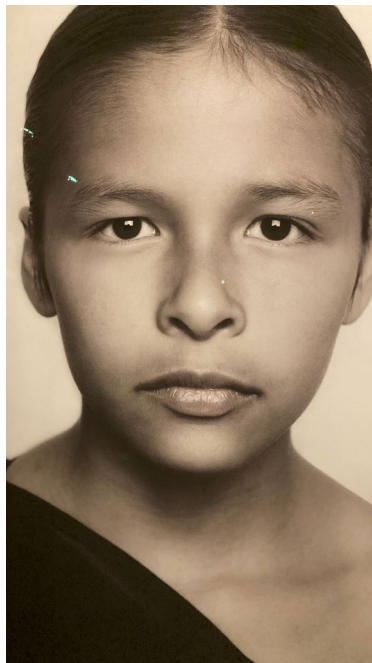
After a traditional Laguna medicine man is unable to cope with his psychic wounds, Tayo seeks out Betonie, a healer who, by virtue of his history, straddles the worlds of ancient spiritual tradition and modern, nihilist horror. Betonie creates a ceremony for Tayo that culminates in a quest for the salvation of himself and of the Pueblo people.

The Laguna Pueblo is also where Tayo's creator—the novelist and poet Leslie Marmon Silko—grew up. A central figure in the Native American Renaissance, Silko, who published *Ceremony* in 1977, approached writing as a continuation of her people's oral tradition. In her novel, hope and guidance emerge from ancient stories of spirits that were inspired by the natural world. Time is circular. The past lives in the present.

Painted: Our Bodies, Hearts, and Village (Art)

I caught this exhibition, which runs through next July, at the art museum on the campus of Colby College, in Waterville, Maine. It pairs works by 20th and 21st century Native American artists with those of Anglo-American artists who were influenced by them. The Pueblo artists innovated in media like ceramics and incorporated traditional stories and symbols into Modernist forms. Landscapes convey the serene geometry of baked earth and endless sky. The eyes of portrait subjects are alive with hurt and hope.

Leigh Buchanan is the Editor of Ethical Views



"Citadel" by Tony Abeyta

"Crickett" by Cara Romero

Will You Help Preserve Our Woods?

By Sharon Wallis and Leonard Weeks

Hardwood regeneration—the production of sufficient seedlings to replace existing trees—is critical for forest sustainability. For several years, we have been aware that Camp Linden’s beautiful hardwood trees were not regenerating. We did not know how to go about addressing this problem. Then, Amy Johnston, our co-program director, arranged for an inspection by John Nissen, the service forester of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources for Chester County. Last March, we accompanied Forester Nissen on a walk through our woodland.

Shortly thereafter, we received his report. Forester Nissen had noticed the presence of invasive species in a large portion of the woods. Japanese Bush Honeysuckle was the primary offender. He called it one of the worst infestations of that species he had ever encountered on a site visit. Other invasives included Japanese Stiltgrass, Privet, and Mile a Minute Vine.

Forester Nissen explained that such invasives inhibit or block the regeneration of hardwood trees. “That is occurring within the wood,” he said. In other words, unless we take action, eventually we will be left with no hardwood trees. Only invasive species. Forester Nissen concluded, “I would strongly encourage Camp Linden to start managing this property for the future health of the forest and for the future generations of visitors, so they can see the benefits of a healthy and sustainable forest.”

After discussing the report, the Camp Linden Committee requested that the Ethical Society board establish a task force to take the necessary steps to restore the woodland. The board approved the recommendation, with the understanding that the task force would not be limited to members of the Society. (One task force member, for example, does not belong to the Society but is on the Camp Linden Committee.) The committee subsequently appointed Leonard to serve as temporary chair.



The initial goals of the task force are:

1. To consider the feasibility of removing some of the invasives with volunteer help.
2. To eventually request funding for professional removal of invasives from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The first step in that process is to interview private foresters who have experience developing such proposals.

If you are interested in serving on the task force, please email [Leonard](#) with your telephone number, and we will be in touch.

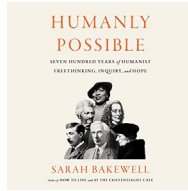
*Leonard Weeks and Sharon Wallis are members
of the Camp Linden Committee of
the Philadelphia Ethical Society*

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, November 4, 10:30 AM - 12 PM (zoom)

Book Discussion Series: *Humanly Possible*

We continue our discussion of *Humanly Possible: Seven Hundred Years of Humanist Freethinking, Inquiry, and Hope*, by Sarah Bakewell. Hugh will lead the discussion of chapters three, four, and five.



Sundays, November 5, 12, 19, 26; 9:15 AM - 10 AM



Chair Yoga and Mindfulness Meditation

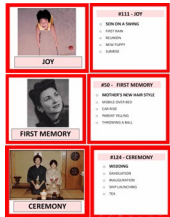
Oliver Jane Jorgensen leads these classes, which are held in the Ethical Society building. Chair yoga is accessible to all ages and abilities. Great for older bodies, stiff bodies, and bodies with limited mobility.



Sunday, November 5, 7 PM

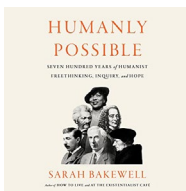
An Introduction to Ethical Humanism

Join Hugh in the Leader's Office for an overview of our unique alternative to traditional religion. Ethical Society members are invited to attend and share their own experiences. In-person only.



Monday, November 6, 1 PM - 2:30 PM
Peeling the Onion

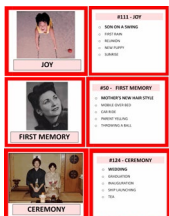
Join Hugh and facilitator Redwood Kardon in the Leader's Office for this get-to-know-you activity. We'll share some of the experiences and stories that shape us. Get to know others in our community in a fun and novel manner. Space is limited. RSVP to [Hugh](#).



Monday, November 6, 5 PM - 6:30 PM

Book Discussion Series: *Humanly Possible* (in-person)

We continue our discussion of *Humanly Possible: Seven Hundred Years of Humanist Freethinking, Inquiry, and Hope*, by Sarah Bakewell. Hugh will lead the discussion of chapters three, four, and five.



Wednesday, November 8, 1 PM - 2:30 PM
Peeling the Onion

Join Hugh and facilitator Redwood Kardon in the Leader's Office for this get-to-know-you activity. We'll share some of the experiences and stories that shape us. Get to know others in our community in a fun and novel manner. Space is limited. RSVP to [Hugh](#).

Friday, November 10, 12:30 PM - 1:45 PM

Lunch with Hugh (zoom)

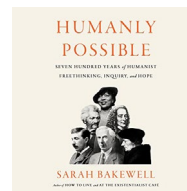
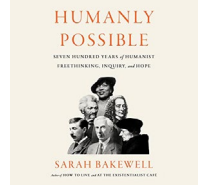
Join us on [zoom](#) for casual conversation about life, ethics, whatever! Bring your lunch.



Saturday, November 18, 10:30 AM - 12 PM (zoom)

Book Discussion Series: *Humanly Possible*

We continue our discussion of *Humanly Possible: Seven Hundred Years of Humanist Freethinking, Inquiry, and Hope*, by Sarah Bakewell. Hugh will lead the discussion of chapters six, seven, and eight.



Monday, November 20, 5 PM - 6:30 PM

Book Discussion Series: *Humanly Possible* (in-person)

We continue our discussion of *Humanly Possible: Seven Hundred Years of Humanist Freethinking, Inquiry, and Hope*, by Sarah Bakewell. Hugh will lead the discussion of chapters six, seven, and eight.



Tuesday, November 21, 12:30 PM - 1:45 PM

Lunch with Hugh (in-person)

Come for casual conversation about life, ethics, whatever! Bring your lunch.



Saturday, November 25, 2 PM - 4 PM

ERTF Potluck Social

Join us at the Ethical Society for food and conversation. Bring something delicious!



Brown baggin' it: Casual conversations over lunch continue this month in the Leader's Office. One recent get-together drew (clockwise from upper left) Hugh Taft-Morales, Henry Pashkow, Julia Gokalp, Jack Schwar, Betsy Lightborn, and John Horkel



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

Philadelphia Ethical Society
1906 South Rittenhouse Square
Philadelphia, PA 19103

Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader

PES Board of Trustees
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Henry Pashkow
Sally Redlener
Drew Snyder

(215) 735 - 3456
office@phillyethics.org

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, Nov 19, 6 PM

Building Committee
Michael Black-Smith
no meeting this month

Camp Linden Committee
Jeffrey Dubb
next meeting TBA

Education Committee
Betsy Lightbourn
Wednesday, Nov 1, 5:30 PM

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

Ethical Action Committee
open chair
next meeting TBA

Finance Committee
Nick Sanders
Wednesday, Nov 8, 5 PM

Media Committee
Drew Snyder
no meeting this month

Social Committee
open chair
next meeting TBA

For suggestions regarding this newsletter, contact
leighebuchanan@gmail.com.

Philadelphians Against Arms

The celebration of Peace Day Philly concluded on Sept. 21 with an event on the North Apron of City Hall. Society members Aissia Richardson (far left) and Sylvia Metzler (far right) were among those who turned out for music, speakers, and to observe a minute of silence for world peace. State Senator Sharif Street (center right) delivered a brief address. And Leader Hugh (center left) led a breathing meditation.



Babe in Arms

The most vocal audience reaction to Hugh's Oct. 1 platform came from Seneca Okocha-Maher (aged five months), who was visiting town with his family. Afterwards, Seneca joined Hugh in Rittenhouse Square, along with his mother, Zia Okocha, a Society member who now lives in suburban Washington D.C. (Not pictured: Zia's husband, Phil Maher; and daughter, Ellison Okocha-Maher, 2, who was napping.)

