



ETHICAL VIEWS

November 2024 Vol. 139, No. 3 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

SUNDAY PLATFORMS

The public is welcome to join us *

Sunday, November 3, 11 AM *The Founding of Ethical Culture* Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader Philadelphia Ethical Society



On the eve of an election whose outcome weighs heavily on us all, Hugh Taft-Morales explores the founding of Ethical Culture. What did Felix Adler regard as the greatest challenges to civilization back in 1876? Why did he think that a new, non-theist congregational movement emphasizing deed over creed could meet those challenges? What grounding did Adler's founding address provide for humanists in today's turbulent times?

Sunday, November 10, 11 AM *Why Racial Equity in School Funding Is So Hard to Achieve* Roseann Liu, Assistant Professor of Educational Studies, Swarthmore College



The challenges facing urban school districts like Philadelphia's often boil down to the need for more money. Through an inside look at the Pennsylvania state legislature and campaigns for fair funding, Liu will demonstrate how those responsible for funding maintain the privileges of majority-white school districts.

Meanwhile, urban districts that serve primarily Black and Brown students are perennially underfunded. Liu is the author of the book *Designed to Fail: Why Racial Equity in School Funding Is So Hard to Achieve*.

Sunday, November 17, 11 AM *Humanist Thanksgiving* Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader

Come celebrate gratitude in this Thanksgiving season. Prepare one sentence to share during our program that expresses who or what—in this moment—you are grateful for. We will celebrate with a light meal. (Check the *Weekly Bulletin* for details.) Please bring food or drink to share and let [Hugh](#) or [Julia](#) know what you are bringing. For this platform, half of our collection plate will be donated to the Metropolitan Area Neighborhood Nutrition Alliance (MANNA), which provides evidence-based nutrition services to thousands of Philadelphians in need.

Sunday, November 24, 11 AM *To Be Announced*

Check your *Weekly Bulletin* for details.

* *Where They'll Be*

The Philadelphia Ethical Society gathers in-person every Sunday. Platforms are delivered simultaneously in the Auditorium and over zoom. When guest speakers appear on zoom, attendees in the Auditorium can view their presentations on a screen while experiencing the rest of the program in real life. Please continue to check your Weekly Bulletins for updates.



Knock Wood: We're lucky to have Bob Steinfort back from Lake George. On October 20, he performed Stevie Wonder's "Superstition" at Hugh's platform about the folly and fun of magical thinking.

Our Ethical Podcast

Back for its second year, Hugh's podcast, *In Good We Trust*, promotes thoughtful reflection about the challenges of living an ethical life. If you haven't yet tuned in, then you can catch up [here](#) or from the Philadelphia Ethical Society [home page](#). Record a comment on Voice Memos for inclusion in future podcasts. Share your thoughts and questions: be part of the conversation.

In Good We Trust

a podcast about being human
hosted by Hugh Taft-Morales



LETTER FROM THE LEADER

Happy Birthday President Carter!

By Hugh Taft-Morales

This month, I kick off a six-part workshop called “Aging Gracefully.” Few people have aged as gracefully as Jimmy Carter, who turned 100 on October 1. President Carter has lived a long and active life: in love with his wife; engaged with his community and the world; and respected for his compassion, intelligence, and integrity.

Of course, seeing President Carter as he is today feels bittersweet. He is frail, sleeps much of the day, and is not always aware of what’s going on. Occasionally, he asks for his dear Rosalynn, who died one year ago, at age 96.



But if the physical man appears diminished, his life and legacy remain powerful, both practically and symbolically. I am uplifted by the love and respect shown by so many who know his character and accomplishments. “His life’s work was working to eliminate racial discrimination, to respect human rights, to build up the lives of the more marginalized people in the world,” said Jason Carter, his grandson. “In my view, this is who he is: someone who understands that every human deserves his love and respect.”

President Carter’s “life’s work” is exactly that: something he pursued, with fervor and commitment, for decades after leaving office. Well into his 90s, he continued to build houses with Habitat for Humanity and advocate for peace through the Carter Center. He never stopped weighing in on current affairs. A longtime professor at Emory University, President Carter was finally granted tenure at age 94.

He also paid attention to his health. A runner until age 80, President Carter swam and biked into his 10th decade. He continued to enjoy hobbies, including woodworking, painting, and birdwatching. His deep love for Rosalynn endured through a 77-year marriage.

In 2011, President Carter shared with Emory students his thoughts about growing older. After being “involuntarily retired” in 1980, he said he followed the advice of Sigmund Freud, who wrote that the two things necessary for a successful retirement are work and love. Clearly, he had plenty of both.

The themes defining President Carter’s later years are among those we’ll discuss at the “Aging Gracefully” workshops. To emulate him, we must both sustain those things which have made our lives meaningful and open ourselves up to new possibilities. In an intriguing [TEDx Talk](#) about “third acts,” Ingrid Bianca Byerly explained that “learning constantly in community, with each other, no matter what your age, is the biggest secret to keeping your mind alive and your personal relationships healthy.”

That challenge—to step up even as we slow down—may sound daunting. But new evidence suggests that, as people age, their thinking can actually become deeper and more creative. Byerly suggests the brain can grow increasingly agile “because you’re constantly building on the neural networks of your cognitive experiences and knowledge.” Perhaps that explains how President Carter managed to produce most of his 32 books after retiring. Even as he aged, his creative and intellectual abilities seemed unbounded.

In September, President Carter downplayed the talk about his turning 100, emphasizing that his birthday mattered much less than the Presidential election. “He said he didn’t care about that,” said his son Chip Carter. “It’s just a birthday. He said he cared about voting for Kamala Harris.”

The determination to vote in a crucial election epitomizes a third requirement—in addition to Freud’s work and love—for successful aging. That is purpose. May we all hold on to our purpose as we age gracefully, together, in community, and with those we love.

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

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

An Rx to Prepare for Trauma

By Michael Black-Smith

As all of you know, Hugh is scheduled to retire in June. I believe that our Ethical Society will emerge from this leadership transition as strong and resilient as ever. Still, it is hard to view the challenges and upheaval we face as anything but an ordeal. How can our community prepare for organizational trauma?

After an unexpected *medical* trauma—an injury or illness—many of us have experienced the benefits of physical therapy as part of our rehabilitation. I, personally, have found a guided program of exercises crucial to returning to my baseline ability following attacks of multiple sclerosis. But, sometimes, trauma can be anticipated, as when a patient has scheduled an elective surgery or preventive treatment. In that case, some of those same exercises—undertaken in advance—may shorten recovery times and increase resilience. The practice is known as prehabilitation, or prehab.

What kind of prehab will help the Ethical Society prepare for our upcoming leadership transplant? One suggestion emerged during the talk-back after Hugh's September 8 platform. There, we discussed renewing and reinvigorating our primary, mission-driving committees: Community, Ethical Action, and Education. Having those in tip-top condition will help us get through any severe organizational challenge.

(Our Finance, Media, and Building Committees also are very important. They keep the bills paid and lights on. But we are who we are because of our primary committees.)

"I know we've got an Education Committee," I hear you say. "But...*what* Community and Ethical Action Committees?" Good question. For the last several years, we've gotten by without two committees that organize many of our social and socially conscious activities. Not just the things we talk about: the things we actually do, together, as a group.

In the absence of a Community Committee, Julia Gokalp, a Society member and our Community Liaison, has worked with others to arrange some programs. The Ending Racism Task Force and Camp Linden Committee—two of our longest-

running and most successful ethical actions—also do some of this. The ERTF organizes ethical actions specific to its mission, as well as monthly potlucks, film screenings, and the occasional picnic. Camp Linden hosts the annual cookout, the camp-in-the-Square platform, and volunteer days.

But those committees are specialized. To return to the medical analogy, it's as though we have a famous brain surgeon and world-class ophthalmologist but no general practitioner. Who will alert us to all the myriad social and environmental ailments that ethical actions are meant to treat? Who will create the varied regimen of relationship-building and communal fun that communities need to stay healthy?

We are fortunate that Betsy Lightbourn and the Education Committee have put in yeowoman's and yeoman's work for many years: scheduling consistent, consistently good speakers for our platforms. But we have a history of relying heavily on individuals and small groups for some of our most important jobs. Only after they've cried "uncle" and stopped do we realize just how hard it is to replace them.

For my part, I have been trying to keep our Platform Team staffed with volunteers each Sunday, so guests are greeted in our lobby, there is a presider for the service, and food and drink at the coffee hour afterward. That fills a gap. But in terms of making our Society a warm and welcoming place, it is not enough.

I enthusiastically welcome your ideas about what this organizational prehab could look like. What will be our resistance bands for boosting Ethical Action strength? Can we improve our Community heart health with some version of 30 minutes on the stationary bike? Is there something akin to deep stretching that will keep our Education mission flexible and strong? We have scheduled in-person and virtual working coffee hours to see what kinds of prescriptions...er, strategies...we can come up with. Check Page 5 for details.

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



FROM THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE

We Need More Black Teachers in Our Classrooms

By Leigh Buchanan

The most effective goodwill ambassador for our city these days is a half-hour sitcom that premiered three years ago on ABC. *Abbott Elementary* chronicles the budgetary, behavioral, bureaucratic, and pedagogical challenges of teachers in a Philadelphia public school. Although not named, its setting resembles West Philly, where creator Quinta Brunson grew up.

Abbott is beloved among teachers, particularly teachers of color. But many temper their praise for its portrayal of dedicated educators with a reminder that this is not what your typical public school looks like. Notably, the teaching staff is largely Black (although two of the main characters are white). In real life, even, a school like *Abbott*, with an almost exclusively Black student body, would be unlikely to employ a comparable proportion of Black teachers.

The shortage of Black teachers began, ironically, with the landmark civil rights case *Brown v Board of Education*, in 1954. As Blacks-only schools closed, tens of thousands of Black teachers were dismissed. Their numbers remain disproportionately low. A study from Teach Plus and the Center for Black Educator Development finds that, nationally, Black teachers account for just 7 percent of that profession. The numbers are better in Philly. Still, in the 2020-2021 school year, our city employed 1,200 fewer Black teachers than it had 20 years earlier.

At less than 2 percent, Black male teachers are in particularly short supply. Many end up relegated to coaching athletics and disciplining problem students. No surprise, then, that educators reserve special praise for the *Abbott* character Gregory Eddie, a thoughtful, sensitive first-grade teacher and founder of the school's gardening club.

Numerous studies demonstrate the favorable effect Black teachers have on Black students. Benefits include higher test scores and increased rates of high-school graduation, college attendance, and enrollment in advanced classes. The influence of even one Black teacher during a Black child's K-to-3 years can make a difference.

Bureaucratic, economic, and cultural obstacles prevent more Black people from becoming teachers and more schools from hiring them. The cost of tuition and certification is high. The pay is low. Black teachers hold much more student debt than white ones. And the tests required to secure a teaching license screen out roughly half of applicants of color each year, according to The National Council on Teacher Quality.



Black teachers receive fewer job offers than white ones. Those that are hired experience greater turnover rates. According to a RAND Corporation study, Black teachers are twice as likely as other educators to say they plan to leave their jobs.

(Much of this is reported in *The Conversation*, the rare generalist publication that thoroughly covers this waterfront.)

Among the most gratifying aspects of life at *Abbott Elementary* is the respect paid to educators. Despite their sitcom-mandated comic foibles, these teachers—Black and white—are portrayed as dedicated, compassionate, intelligent, and innovative. The kids, the parents, the other teachers, and the viewers all recognize and value that.

In real life, Black teachers endure racist comments and microaggressions from colleagues, parents—even students. Last year, for example, a Black teacher sued a school district in Iowa, claiming that students on multiple occasions addressed him with a racial epithet—sometimes in front of staff and administrators—and received no discipline. Laws that restrict teaching about race and racism add to the hostile environment.

Nationwide, efforts have picked up to recruit and retain more Black teachers. At the University of Pittsburgh's Genius Love and Joy Academy, for example, promising students from Pittsburgh public schools—where more than 50% of students are Black—attend a monthlong summer program that promotes careers in education. Participants qualify for an Advancing Educators of Color scholarship.

Erasing racism from education requires changes to funding, discipline, and curriculums. It also requires more Black teachers. We all benefit if one bit of fictional Philly becomes real.

Leigh Buchanan is a member of the Ending Racism Task Force

UPCOMING EVENTS

Unless noted, events take place at the Philadelphia Ethical Society, 1906 Rittenhouse Square.

Sunday, November 3, 1 PM

Community Discussions about Leadership Transition



Let's continue our discussion about how the Philadelphia Ethical Society will move forward after Hugh's retirement. Learn about the formation of a search committee. Talk about President Mike's call for "pre-hab" by revitalizing our Ethical Action, Community, and Education missions. Share your ideas! Step up to help!

Sunday, November 3, 2-3:30 PM

Practical Lessons for Achieving Personal Excellence and Tranquility



Join the Philadelphia Ethical Society and **Philadelphia Stoa** as we continue exploring the connections between Stoicism and Ethical Culture. The series deepens our understanding of these related philosophies and their relevance in

today's world. This month's seminar focuses on the rejection of commercialism; self-realization through ethical action; and universal ethical principles, emphasizing how ethical behavior can inspire the best in others. We also will examine Felix Adler's critique of commercialism and its societal effects.

Sunday, November 3, 5-6:30 PM

Ethical Culture Happy Hour

Come for conversation and a brief presentation about our alternative to traditional religion. Hugh will share his perspective on our humanist history, values, and community. Snacks and beverages—alcoholic and non-alcoholic—will be provided.



Wednesday, November 6, 10:30 AM

Brunch with Hugh: Post-Election Edition

Celebrate or mourn? Analyze or vent? Return to normal life or start packing to leave the country? Whatever we need on this day after the election, we'll deal with it together, over bagels (provided). Bring your own coffee.

Monday, November 18, 5 PM (zoom)

Community Discussions about Leadership Transition

Join us on zoom to continue our discussion about how the Philadelphia Ethical Society will move forward after Hugh's retirement. Learn about the formation of a search committee. Talk about President Mike's call for "pre-hab" by revitalizing our Ethical Action, Community, and Education missions. Share your ideas! Step up to help!



Dietary disaster: A two-part discussion of the book *Fast Food Nation* explored the dark side of our addiction to burgers and fries. Attendees included Lee MacIvor, Erik Younge, Hugh Taft-Morales, Stan Horwitz, and Julia Gokalp.



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. Check with chairs for meeting venues.

Email us to learn more at office@phillyethics.org.

Board of Trustees
Michael Black-Smith
Sunday, Nov 10, 6 PM

Building Committee
Michael Black-Smith
no meeting this month

Camp Linden Committee
Jeffrey Dubb
no meeting this month

Community Committee
open chair
next meeting TBA

Education Committee
Betsy Lightbourn
Wednesday, Nov 6, 5:30 PM

Ending Racism Task Force
Sylvia Metzler, Erik Younge
Saturday, Nov 9, 11 AM

Ethical Action Committee
open chair
next meeting TBA

Finance Committee
Nick Sanders
Wednesday, Nov 13, 5 PM

Media Committee
Drew Snyder
Wednesday, Nov 20, 6 PM

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



How to Beat That Which Divides Us

Among other Peace Day Philly events, a panel discussion at the Society building, on September 18, brought together community activists, nonprofit leaders, and others who shared their successes and struggles working for peace and social justice. Hugh, who moderated the conversation, enjoyed a brief, lighter moment with Kathleen Welch and Alan McGillivray, organizers of Back from the Brink, which aims to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

How to Beat Drums to Unite Us

Talented musicians helped participants balance unity with improvisation during the BuildaBridge Peace Day Drum Circle, held September 19, in our Community Room. Instructors at the event included Robert Kenyatta, a Grammy winner; Bobby Conga, a percussionist for Grover Washington, Jr.; Omomola Iyabunmi, a celebrated shekere instructor; Sam Zolton, an accomplished collaborator; and Tony Flagiello, a teaching artist at BuildaBridge, which helps heal communities through art.

