



# ETHICAL VIEWS

January 2025 Vol. 139, No. 5 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

## SUNDAY PLATFORMS

The public is welcome to join us \*

### Sunday, January 5, 11 AM

#### **Memorial Sunday**

On the first Sunday of each year, we gather to remember those who have died. Attendees are invited to share reflections about family members, friends, and famous people who have passed. What lessons or gifts did they leave behind that help us lead more meaningful and ethical lives?

### Sunday, January 12, 11 AM

#### **Colonialism, Citizenship, and Crisis in Puerto Rico** **Lorin Thomas, Professor of History** **Rutgers University, Camden**



In 2017, Puerto Ricans marked one hundred years as U.S. citizens. It was an anniversary complicated not just by two historic hurricanes but also by the burdens of a century of colonial rule. Thomas, whose research explores rights and equality in the 20th century Americas, will discuss the human costs and political impact of constraints on Puerto Rico's sovereignty. She is the

author of *History and Political Identity in Twentieth Century New York City* and *Rethinking the Struggle for Puerto Rican Rights*, co-authored with Aldo Lauria Santiago.

### Sunday, January 19, 11 AM

#### **Coretta Scott King: Activist, Not Symbol** **Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader** **Philadelphia Ethical Society**



In the shadow of her famous husband's life and death, Coretta Scott King often felt unseen and unheard. But as her daughter Dr. Bernice King pointed out, "Before she was a King, my mother was a civil rights activist, a member of the NAACP and the Race Relations and Civil Liberties Committees at Antioch College." After Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, Coretta Scott spent nearly four decades working for social

justice. Hugh Taft-Morales explores how this remarkable person overcame the intersectional oppression experienced by women in leadership positions.

### Sunday, January 26, 11 AM

#### **Drawing the Living World:** **The Illustrated Books of Allen Crawford** **Allen Crawford, Illustrator**

Crawford, winner of multiple awards for illustration, will share and discuss his two most recent books, both devotionals to the natural world. *Whitman Illuminated: Song of Myself* is an



illustrated, hand-lettered edition of Walt Whitman's landmark pantheistic poem, "Song of Myself." *A Wild Promise* celebrates the Endangered Species Act. Crawford's work is on permanent display at the American Museum of Natural History. A lifelong naturalist and conservationist, he also is a trail steward for the New Jersey Park Service.



### \* Where They'll Be

The Philadelphia Ethical Society gathers in-person every Sunday, at 1906 Rittenhouse Square. 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.

## LETTER FROM THE LEADER

### Defend the Press!

By Hugh Taft-Morales

*“Freedom of the press is not just important to democracy, it is democracy.” – Walter Cronkite.*

When I was young, CBS anchorman Walter Cronkite was a hero. He offered the kind of balanced, thoughtful news coverage necessary for the world’s greatest democracy to flourish. Decades of corporate takeovers in the media have threatened independent reporting. Now, more than ever, we must defend freedom of the press.

The incoming President has joked about shooters targeting reporters, adding that he doesn’t “mind that so much.” He claimed this chilling statement was a joke. But it’s no joke that Trump promises to use the federal government to punish journalists he sees as enemies. “Trump will make good on these anti-press threats to try to destroy any news outlet, journalist, or whistleblower who criticizes or opposes him,” writes Seth Stern, director of advocacy at Freedom of the Press Foundation.

That’s why it’s so important to support passage of the Press Act, which would limit federal surveillance of journalists and protect sources. Passed by the House in January 2024, at the time of this writing it is languishing in the Senate Judiciary Committee. The Press Act would “greatly strengthen the meaning of the constitutional promise of press freedom,” according to Rep. Jamie Raskin, a co-sponsor. Such measures are popular. The [Pew Center](#) reports that 73% of adults in the United States say freedom of the press is extremely or very important. An additional 18% call it somewhat important.

Despite public opinion, after the election, Trump demanded that Republicans oppose this legislation. “REPUBLICANS MUST KILL THIS BILL!” he recently tweeted. In addition, the President-elect is poised to repeal internal Justice Department protections—enacted by the Biden administration—that restrict the ability of prosecutors to seek information or records from journalists.

Investigative journalist Bob Woodward, who helped take down an earlier corrupt regime, popularized the term “Democracy dies in darkness,” which became the *Washington Post’s* official slogan during the first Trump administration. Now that phrase seems eerily foreboding, as media moguls like Jeff Bezos, who owns the *Post*, appear cowed by the bully-in-chief. Perhaps the *Post* should have chosen one of the more aggressive alternatives suggested by *The Late Show’s* Stephen Colbert, such as “Come at Me, Bro” or “We Took Down Nixon—Who Wants Next?”

There may be hope for the Press Act. Writing in *USA Today*, Kathy Kiely, a professor at the Missouri School of Journalism, suggests that Trump should realize an independent press can be his “best friend.” For example, had investigative reporters not uncovered dirt on ex-attorney-general-designee Matt Gaetz, then the incoming administration might have been mired in an ugly confirmation hearing. That reporting did Trump “a huge and I mean yuuuge favor,” Kiely writes. She adds that Trump will likely be more successful if someone is willing to tell him uncomfortable truths.

And this is not a partisan issue. Republicans have long defended a free press. Many assert that conservative outlets are disproportionately the target of government censorship, with some still steaming about the Obama administration’s 2013 surveillance of Fox News journalist James Rosen. In fact, Republicans and GOP-leaning independents express concerns about press freedom more than Democrats, according to Pew Center data. Republican Senators Mike Lee and Lindsey Graham co-sponsored the Press Act this year.

Constitutional originalists, who usually share Republican beliefs, also should demand a media shield law. The Press Act applies not just to the First Amendment but also to the Fourth Amendment’s protection “against unreasonable search and seizures” of documents and other information.

Last month, I encouraged Society members to support organizations representing vulnerable constituencies under a second Trump administration. The [Freedom of the Press Foundation](#) was among them. I repeat that suggestion now. Encourage widespread support for the Press Act or its future manifestations in the new Congress. Let’s not let democracy die in darkness.

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



## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

### A Little Help from Our Friends

By Michael Black-Smith

In my November column, I explored the importance of doing some intra-community “calisthenics” to get our Society as hale and hearty as possible. That work—conversations and commitments among members to strengthen our core activities—can and should progress alongside the important work of our Leadership Search Committee. We must tend to the congregational body by effectively supporting one another: learning and engaging in social justice. The head of that body will be the leader or leaders who emerge from our search efforts. The head and the body, acting as one, will create a bright future for us.

It is tempting to take all this work upon ourselves: as though the Society can enact dramatic change from inside a cocoon and then burst forth into the world, robust and reinvigorated. However, I think such an insular approach would be a mistake. We are the *Philadelphia Ethical Society*, after all. Who we are, how we act, and what we do is influenced by where we live. The individuals and groups that are our neighbors—and with whom we may share projects, space, and a mission—also shape our organization. Any significant transformation requires an understanding of our role in the larger community. How can we make our impact there deeper?

Over January and February, we will hold four Community Envisioning Conversations, two in-person and two on zoom. We extend invitations to all our stakeholders: members, long-term and regular renters, residents of our Rittenhouse neighborhood, and allied organizations, including Power Interfaith, Peace Day Philly, The Freethought Society, and Philadelphia Stoa.

The January conversation will explore our Society’s relationships with these stakeholders and the needs we currently meet. In February, we will envision the future of those relationships. We also will consider where our twin goals—supporting one another within the Society and supporting the larger community—intersect.



In these endeavors, we may have help from an unexpected source. As the culmination of their degree program, students of the Fels Institute of Government, at the University of Pennsylvania, must perform a capstone project in which they apply what they’ve learned in the classroom to a real-world nonprofit. Our trustee Sharon Wallis applied to become a site for one such project.

As a result, a Penn graduate student will help us carry out Sharon’s proposal, which is titled “Forum for Arts and Ideas.” Together, we will develop a plan to “promote and publicize artistic, educational, and issue-oriented programming presented in the Ethical Society building.” Our prime location and reasonable rents have long attracted organizations involved in cultural, philosophical, intellectual, and social justice-related pursuits. Imagine the benefits a focused collaboration with such groups would bring.

Please consider attending our Community Envisioning Conversations. And, if you are as intrigued as I am about the Ethical Society becoming a forum for arts and ideas, contact [Sharon](#) to find out more!

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

## FROM THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE

### Good Riddance Taney. Welcome LeCount!

By Stan Horwitz

In 1858, Philadelphia's City Council renamed Minor Street to Taney Street in honor of Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger Taney, author of the Dred Scott Decision. In that notorious case, an enslaved Black man—who had lived for some time in Illinois and the Wisconsin Territory, where slavery was outlawed—sought his freedom. The Court decided that Black people were not American citizens and, so, could not sue in federal court. The Dred Scott Decision declared the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional and upheld slavery.

Taney Street is four miles long. It runs between the Strawberry Mansion and Fittler Square neighborhoods. But it has some gaps, including where it abuts my building on the 2600 block of Aspen Street, in Fairmount. Four years ago, I received an email asking me to support an effort to rename Taney Street to stop venerating this racist man.

The Rename Taney Street organization was established to do what its name implies. Volunteers, including me, knocked on doors along Taney Street and asked residents to sign a petition. Almost 3,000 did so.

In October, a renaming bill finally came before City Council. I received an email inviting people who live on or near the street to testify in support. I was the last person to do so at the hearing. While I was waiting my turn, I heard the testimony of others, including two of Roger Taney's descendants, who said they were ashamed of their ancestor's legacy.

I also listened to testimony by several historians about local freedom fighter Caroline LeCount, whom I had never heard of. Respondents in an online poll had chosen to honor her in Taney's place. LeCount (1846-1923) was Philadelphia's own Rosa Parks. Nearly a century before Parks sparked the modern civil rights movement, LeCount was involved in integrating the city's street cars, from which she and others were forcibly removed as they tried to deliver supplies to Union troops.

Civil-rights activist Octavius Catto also practiced civil disobedience on the street cars and, together with abolitionist William Still and others, fought the battle in Harrisburg. As a result, in 1867, Pennsylvania desegregated its street cars and railroads. LeCount and Catto were engaged but, sadly, never married because Catto was shot to death by a white man at the intersection of Ninth and South streets. He was on his way to vote.



On November 14, City Council unanimously voted to rename Taney Street to LeCount Street, thus repairing an egregious mistake made more than 160 years ago. Over the next few months, the city will replace street signs and notify residents of Taney Street, who will need to change their driver's licenses (when they expire) and some other information accordingly.

For far too long, the name Taney Street stood as a testament to Philadelphia's racist past. Aside from new signage, LeCount Street probably won't look much different. But it will remind everyone who lives and walks along it of this city's important role in racial progress and assure them that things can and do change for the better.

*Stan Horwitz 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, Jan 5, 2 PM - 3:30 PM**

## What Did the Stoics Say about Gender Equality?



This series, in collaboration with Philadelphia Stoa, offers practical strategies for addressing life's challenges. In this session, we will focus on Musonius Rufus, a 1st century Roman Stoic philosopher who championed gender equality. Musonius argued that women, like men, are endowed with reason and virtue and, so, are equally capable of embodying justice, courage, and wisdom. His teachings resonate with modern feminist principles, advocating for equal education and rights for all.



**Sunday, Jan 5, 5 PM - 6:30 PM**

## Ethical Culture Happy Hour!

Hugh Taft-Morales hosts this informal conversation about our alternative to traditional religion. After we get to know one other, attendees can pose questions about humanist history, values, and community. Snacks and beverages—alcoholic and non-alcoholic—are provided.

**Monday, Jan 6, 1 PM - 2:30 PM**

## Peeling the Onion



Get to know other Ethical Society members and our neighbors from Friends in the City through this fun activity. Peeling the Onion lets participants share stories from their lives, creating opportunities for conversations and new friendships. Come alone or bring a friend! Meet in the Leader's Office. Space is limited, so RSVP to [Hugh](#).



**Tuesday, Jan 7, 11 AM - 12:15 PM**

## Coffee with Hugh

Bring your cup o' joe or other hot beverage to the Leader's office for casual conversation. Hugh will provide the pastries. Share your hopes, fears, and resolutions for 2025.

**Tuesday, Jan 14, 12:30 PM - 1:45 PM (zoom)**

## Virtual Lunch with Hugh

Join Hugh and members of the Baltimore Ethical Society on [zoom](#) for casual conversation. Bring your own real-life sandwich.



**Sunday, Jan 19, 2 PM - 3:30 PM**

## Beyond Stoicism: A Guide to the Good Life—



## Ancient Philosophies for Modern Times

This series, in collaboration with Philadelphia Stoa, offers practical strategies for addressing life's challenges. In this session, Dr. Amjol Shrestha, of Rowan University, leads an exploration of life's existential questions: fostering community while presenting compelling biographies and enduring insights. Discover how ancient wisdom remains profoundly relevant in the modern world. Copies of *Beyond Stoicism: A Guide to the Good Life with Stoics, Sceptics, Epicureans, and Other Ancient Philosophers* can be purchased at the event or [in advance](#).

**Monday, Jan 20, 8:30 AM**

## Martin Luther King Day Volunteering

Any early-morning busy bees out there? Join Hugh for volunteer work at the Community Education Center (3500 Lancaster Avenue). Among the ways we may contribute: picking up trash outside; organizing a supply closet; mopping; cleaning bathrooms; and cleaning and painting windowsills or gym risers. For the really early (and hungry) risers, we have reserved a table for four at 7:30 AM at the Co-Op Restaurant and Bar (20 S. 33rd Street). Let [Hugh](#) know ASAP if you want to register for the volunteer work and if you want to join him for breakfast, Dutch treat.



*Cheryl Desmond has long worked behind the scenes to keep this Society operationally thrumming. As our tireless office administrator departed for a well-earned retirement, Mike Black-Smith presented her with a painting of 1906 Rittenhouse, where for eight years she tended to the needs of the building, the renters, and the members, many of whom have become her friends. We miss you, Cheryl!*



## 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  
Michael Black-Smith, President  
Kate Esposito, Vice President  
Daniel Hoffman, Secretary  
Nick Sanders, Treasurer  
Trustees-at-Large

Stan Horwitz  
Sylvia Metzler  
Henry Pashkow  
Sharon Wallis  
Drew Snyder

(215) 735 - 3456  
[office@phillyethics.org](mailto: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. Check with chairs for meeting venues.

Email us to learn more at [office@phillyethics.org](mailto:office@phillyethics.org).

**Board of Trustees**  
**Michael Black-Smith**  
**Sunday, Jan 19, 6 PM**

Building Committee  
Michael Black-Smith  
no meeting this month

**Camp Linden Committee**  
**Jeffrey Dubb**  
**Wednesday, Jan 22, 5 PM**

Community Committee  
open chair  
next meeting TBA

**Education Committee**  
**Betsy Lightbourn**  
**Wednesday, Jan 8, 3:30 PM**

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

Ethical Action Committee  
open chair  
next meeting TBA

**Finance Committee**  
**Nick Sanders**  
**Wednesday, Jan 8, 5 PM**

**Media Committee**  
**Drew Snyder**  
**Wednesday, Jan 8, 5 PM**

For suggestions regarding this newsletter, contact [leighebuchanan@gmail.com](mailto:leighebuchanan@gmail.com).



### Deck the Hall

At our annual Winter Solstice ceremony, members and visitors shared the gift of light as they touched candle to candle around the Auditorium, dispelling shadows and invoking community. Yet Leader Hugh reminded us that there is beauty, too, in darkness. The room was festive with green garlands and silver snowflakes, set up the previous afternoon by (left to right) Mike Black-Smith, Harry Thorn, John Horkel, Denise Marx, and Henry Pashkow. (Not pictured: Kate Esposito and Leigh Buchanan.)



### Boughs of Books

Leader Hugh alluded to the long history of “libricide”—the ideologically motivated destruction of books—as he kicked off our decoration of the Tree of Knowledge. Created by the Freethought Society, the tree found a home here following conflict at its original Chester County site. Each year, members hang the laminated covers of banned books from its boughs. Hugh placed a copy of the Constitution amongst the topmost branches. Diego Granera and Julia Gokalp (pictured) were among those who followed.