

## More than a Banner: Working to make Black Lives Matter

The Philadelphia Ethical Society (PES) has a history of working to confront and eliminate systemic and individual racism. In response to the Black Lives Matter movement, which dates back to 2013, our Board in 2016 voted to place a Black Lives Matter banner in the front window of our building. The banner acknowledges the enduring existence of white supremacy that marginalizes communities of Black people. The criminal justice system is particularly racist: devastating communities and incarcerating a generation of young black men.



As an expression of PES's on-going commitment to racial justice, the banner is important. More important is the work we do to support the ideal it represents. At PES, we are always asking ourselves what practical steps we can take to help transform our nation into a racially just society. Although we at PES have a long way to go, here are some of the things we have done and continue to do:

**When we at the Ethical Society say, "Black Lives Matter," we have done more than just display a banner. For example, we have done the following:**

- Promote lifelong education about anti-racism efforts, particularly by reading and discussing Black authors and by inviting Black people to offer talks and programs at the Ethical Society.
- Organize and fund, over decades, Camp Linden, a summer day camp on the Brandywine River for underserved children. The campers are primarily Black children from Philadelphia.
- Participate since 2014 in actions of POWER INTERFAITH, a grassroots coalition of congregations that promotes—through activism and advocacy—adequate education funding, non-racist criminal justice, a living wage, and other issues disproportionately affecting people of color.
- Organized a contingent of about a dozen Society members to participate in three trips to the state capitol to demonstrate for fair share of funding for public schools.
- Devote time at every monthly Ethical Action Committee meetings to inform each other about members' work on racial justice issues.

- Formed the Ending Racism Task Force (ERTF), which meets monthly to educate the Society and the public about what we all can do to counter racism. In fall of 2020 the ERTF conducted a survey to assess the best approaches to anti-racism work. We are implementing recommendations drawn from the results.
- Publish a column from the ERTF in every issue of our Society newsletter and maintain a library of those columns on our website.
- Include in our Sunday morning services and monthly newsletter statements that reenforce and renew our dedication to anti-racism work.
- Present talks on historical and contemporary aspects of anti-racism. Leader Hugh Taft-Morales often speaks on this subject, including the following talks (available on YouTube): Lift Every Voice; The Joy and Perseverance of John Lewis; Just Mercy; Somebodyness and Inherent Worth; Racism, Peace, and Climate Justice; Learning from Frederick Douglass; and The Weight of History.
- Support member's attendance at *Whites Confronting Racism* workshop series, followed by ongoing study, organized by POWER.
- Organized and facilitated discussions of articles, books, and other media relating to racism and white privilege. Representative subjects include articles by Ta-Nehisi Coates and videos by Tim Wise.
- Hosted in 2016 *#RacismIsASickness*, an anti-racism art installation and community-engagement project created by Tieshka K. Smith, a Philadelphia-based photographer, blogger, and community activist.
- Hosted in 2014 work from *Art for Justice*, a non-profit that supports and exhibits the creations of incarcerated artists. The organization is dedicated to promoting public dialog on ways to prevent crime; reducing levels of incarceration; and finding ways to make the criminal-justice system more effective and humane.
- Organized a Criminal Justice Reform Summit in 2014 that drew more than 150 people. Participants included Jill McCorkel of the Philadelphia Justice Project for Women and Girls; Reuben Jones of Frontline Dads and Focused Deterrence; Tyrone Werts, who was named a Soros Justice Fellow for his work on issues of incarceration following the commutation of his own life sentence; J. Jondhi Harrell of The Center for Returning Citizens; Pamela Schwartzman of the Pennsylvania Prison Society; and Harold Wilson, who became a death-penalty activist following his own release from death row.
- Organized a public workshop on Multicultural Fluency and Anti-Racist Activism.
- Sent speakers to numerous issues-of-race workshops, sponsored by organizations including the Unitarian Society of Germantown.
- Added a new banner to our Rittenhouse Square window in response to false claims of educational indoctrination through Critical Race Theory. Our new banner reads: Black History Matters.