



# ETHICAL VIEWS

April 2024 Vol. 138, No. 8 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

## SUNDAY PLATFORMS

The public is welcome to join us \*

### Sunday, April 7, 11 AM (in-person) 2 PM (zoom)

#### *Is Politics a Laughing Matter?*

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



The 2024 Presidential election is an existential challenge for democracy. For many, thinking about it generates dread. In times like these, Americans often have sought relief in political satire: from the cartoons of Thomas Nast poking fun at Tammany Hall through *Saturday Night Live's* parade of comedians sending up

Presidents starting with Gerald Ford. Laughter can ease anxiety and lower harmful cortisol levels. Humor also can be a potent political weapon, especially when dealing with what scares us. Nothing disempowers playground bullies as much as being laughed at. Hugh Taft-Morales explores how the deadly serious game of politics can also be a laughing matter.

### Sunday, April 14, 11 AM (zoom only)

#### *Conduct and Consequences of Elections*

**Michael G. Hagen, Associate Professor of  
Political Science, Temple University**



Professor Hagen will speak about his current research on the conduct and consequences of national elections and also elections in our battleground state of Pennsylvania. Hagen founded Temple's Institute for Public Affairs in 2004 and served as its director until 2008. He was formerly director of the Center for Public Interest Polling at the Eagleton Institute of Politics, at Rutgers University, New Brunswick.

### Sunday, April 21, 11 AM (in-person) 2 PM (zoom)

#### *A Celebration of the Earth*

**Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader**

Ethical Culture encourages harmonizing with nature to bring out the best for all life. That philosophy is embodied in the Society's summer program at Camp Linden, where children from low-income neighborhoods experience the natural world while practicing ethical behavior. Located in rural Chester County, the camp offers environmental education and swimming. Hugh reflects on how Ethical Culture's history and values are expressed through this dynamic program. (To learn about Earth Day events following the platform, see Page 5.)

### Sunday, April 28, 11 AM (zoom only)

#### *The Gender Wealth Gap*

**Kelly Sheard, Director,  
Gender Wealth Institute at Women's Way**



In 2022, the Women's Way Gender Wealth Institute launched a large-scale research campaign to identify and address key drivers of gender wealth inequity. The goal: to create the Philadelphia region's first Gender Wealth Index. Sheard will discuss the project, which is designed to drive evidence-based action on policies and practices that enable gender wealth parity. The project takes into account the ongoing effects of the pandemic, which "brought to the forefront the devastating ways in which economic injustice impacts the lives of women," writes Sheard.



### Open Seats:

- President
- Vice President
- 3 Trustees at Large

### Contact our Nominating Committee

Harry Thorn    Doris Dabrowski    Jeffrey Dubb

**By April 28th!**

### \* 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.)

## LETTER FROM THE LEADER

### The Arena Meets a History of Resistance

By Hugh Taft-Morales

Established neighborhoods should take priority over gentrification. Community should trump profiteering. That's why the Ethical Society is working to stop construction of a proposed 76ers arena that would devastate Chinatown.

As Society member Henry Pashkow reported in a June *Ethical Views* article, Philadelphia's Chinatown residents have been battling harmful infrastructure projects for decades. In the '70s, they resisted plans to build the Vine Street Expressway. In the '80s, they fought a commuter tunnel and the Convention Center. In the '90s, the Save Chinatown movement managed to shift the location of a planned federal prison. That enabled construction of Hing Wah Yuen, a mixed-income housing development that opened in 1997.

To learn more about the struggles of our city's Asian American population, I attended, in February, a presentation at the restaurant Bubblefish, in Chinatown. It was part of "Histories and Futures of Resistance," a program created by Asian Americans United (AAU) that includes meals, walking tours, and behind-the-scenes events.

Wei Chen, the AAU's civic engagement director, shared his experience at South Philadelphia High School, where he landed in the late 2000s as a new immigrant from China. There, Wei and other Asian American students were regularly bullied, harassed, and assaulted. Many chose to skip lunch rather than brave the cafeteria, which was particularly dangerous.



The Asian American students turned to teachers and administrators for help. But the adults charged to protect them let them down. The students were ignored. Sometimes mocked. When their appeals went unaddressed, Wei began keeping records of the attacks. He did not know whether he would survive.

In December 2009, after one especially violent episode, Wei and other students organized an eight-day boycott of South Philadelphia High. The AAU supported them, providing a place to gather so that they could stay safe and their families would know where they were. During the boycott, the students kept up with their studies. But they also planned future actions. At the AAU, they learned about community organizing, including the importance of communication, media outreach, and lobbying.

The students brought their new skills to the battle. Thanks to their persistence, a growing list of organizational allies, and daily media coverage, their fight became visible. A march to City Hall made national news. Public pressure intensified.

A federal investigation ensued. At first, school administrators denied attacks had occurred in the school building. When records of the school nurse proved otherwise, they blamed the violence on conflict between Black and Asian American gangs. But the students kept up the pressure. In December 2010, a landmark federal civil rights settlement required the School District of Philadelphia to confront anti-Asian bias, implement an anti-harassment policy, and train employees to prevent conflict.

At the Bubblefish event, Ellen Somekawa, former executive director of the AAU, urged attendees not to let primarily financial interests divide those seeking a culturally rich, diverse Philadelphia. And she discussed how lessons from the South Philadelphia High protests and Chinatown's long history of resistance can inform today's arena opposition, to which she and Wei are dedicated.

Persistence. Willingness to stand up. Belief in dialogue. Love of community. These qualities endure in Chinatown. Once again, they must triumph.

For more information, check out the web site [No Arena in Chinatown Solidarity](#). Also, local activist Debbie Wei has produced a brief [video](#) about Chinatown's history of resistance. To find out about future AAU and other events, sign up for bulletins from the Asian Pacific Islander Political Alliance ([APIPA](#)).

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

## FROM THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE

### The Visual Vitality of the Harlem Renaissance

By Leigh Buchanan

Pre-Internet, writing and music were more easily disseminated than works of visual art. So, it's understandable that most people's knowledge of the Harlem Renaissance—the New York City-based Golden Age of Black culture and political and social ferment—is dominated by the names of authors, musicians, intellectuals, and activists.

That fertile period (1918 to 1937) also produced the first Black-led movement of international modern art. “The Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism,” currently on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, showcases the painters, sculptors and photographers whose work contributed to the forging of a new social consciousness and reclamation of racial pride. These artists' collective vision “centered ordinary people with a blend of admiration and critique that rejected stereotype and oversimplification, defying conventional beliefs,” according to text accompanying the exhibit.

Much of the work on display celebrates the vibrant city life awaiting participants in the Great Migration. In one painting, a butler serves cocktails to fashionable members of the Black upper class. In another, Parisian couples sway to a dance hall band. (Many Harlem Renaissance artists spent extended periods in France.) There are portrayals of luminaries, including Zora Neale Hurston, Paul Robeson, Marion Anderson, and Alain Locke, whose 1925 book, *The New Negro*, laid the intellectual foundation of the movement. Some works reflect the charged engagement with African aesthetic influences. Others depict historical events that shaped a distinct Black worldview. The exhibit's final room is dedicated to photographs of activism and protests.

It's a remarkable exhibit: well worth your time if you happen to be in New York before July 28. I'll turn over the rest of this column to some of the artists represented.

*Leigh Buchanan is a member of the Ending Racism Task Force*

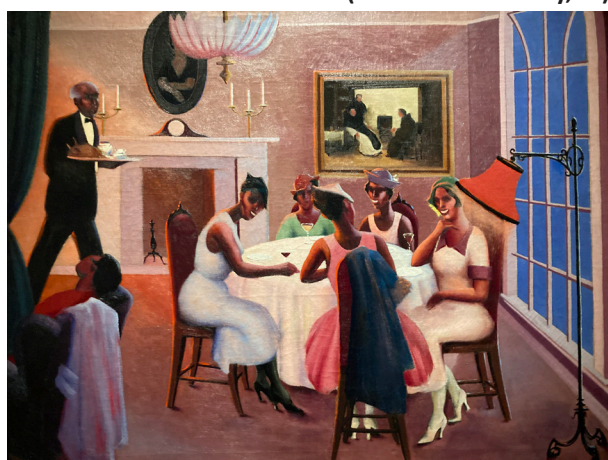


Beale Street Blues (Palmer Hayden)



Triple Self-Portrait (William H. Johnson)

Cocktail Hour (Archibald J. Motley, Jr.)



School's Out (Allan Rohan Crite)



## Goodbye Greg Williams

Last month, people gathered to celebrate Gregory Noel Williams, the Society's Event Facilitator and an invaluable behind-the-scenes facilitator of our congregational life. He passed away on March 10, at age 52.

Born on Christmas Day, in 1971, Greg grew up in North Carolina. The Society hired him in 2014. With unflagging good cheer and a seemingly bottomless wardrobe, Greg became a familiar presence around the building and in Rittenhouse Square, which he loved. If you were a member, a renter, or a neighbor needing help, then Greg was your guy.

A talented comedian and singer, Greg also managed his own event-production company, One Laugh at a Time, under the pseudonym "Cigar" Williams. "Comedy is my ministry," Greg once said. "With laughter, you are able to soften the heart of others. It makes it easier to get the word in."

Last fall, Greg shared stories and hard-won lessons from his early life in a one-man play staged at the Society. "Poor Man's Anthem" chronicled his troubled but ultimately triumphant journey to sobriety. "He understood being grateful and that counting your blessings was how the blessings would multiply," said his daughter, Uniqua Williams, in an email. "His journey was to tell the world."

Greg credited a recovery program for engendering his sense of gratitude, humility, and love for other people. Recovery

was an overarching theme of his life story. Not surprisingly, he was a good friend to the members of Alcoholics Anonymous who regularly meet at the Society building. "He did so much for us and was such a warm, strong presence," said one AA member at the March gathering. "It was cold in the room today. It felt like he wasn't there."

Clustered around a lit candle, members of the Society also shared their memories. Some who had been impressed by Greg's good humor, physical strength, and ability to solve problems, said they'd been surprised to hear of his early struggles. Sharon Wallis first learned about Greg's life while helping him write a resume. She lauded the candor and audience connection of his one-man show. "It's a very inspiring message that someone can successfully turn their life around," she said.

Kate Esposito told several stories about Greg, including one in which she accompanied him to the hospital in an ambulance and later helped him sort out his health care. Another time, he chastised her for walking through the room where an AA group was meeting. "He was happy and charming and lovable," said Kate. "We will always be grateful for all he did to keep this place going. I know it wasn't always easy."

Sally Redlener mentioned Greg's help setting up the annual service auction. On a personal note, she expressed gratitude and admiration for his willingness to discuss with her grandson the consequences of taking drugs. Henry Pashkow talked about his and Greg's shared affection for hats and Greg's (unsuccessful) attempts to help Henry meet a woman.

Nick Sanders, who was unable to attend the gathering, saluted Greg's contribution to the Society's growth "as a place of hospitality and cultural expression." In that regard, Greg "was unique among our live-in custodians, said Nick, who has supervised several people in that position. "He was very special."

A few days after the gathering, Hugh traveled to North Carolina to attend Greg's funeral. Greg's church and family are planning a more formal memorial, in Philadelphia, on April 19. Contact [Hugh](#) for more information.



## Camp Linden Comes to Rittenhouse Square!

Join us after the Sunday platform on Earth Day, April 21, when Camp Linden presents a Celebration of the Earth. We will parade through the park behind an inflated globe, then bounce it on a colorful parachute. Next, we'll return to the building for a demonstration of fun learning activities from the Camp's curriculum. You can pollinate a model flower; view a leaf through a digital microscope; shine a light on a solar-powered flying pig; use a stick to lift denizens of our worm farm; and examine fossils.

During the platform, Camp Linden staff will run a separate program for any children in attendance, designed to inspire appreciation of the natural world. The children will lead our parade!

An optional lunch, inspired by Native American cuisine, will feature "Three Sisters" salad and corn bread. We cultivate corn, beans, and squash—staples of the Native American diet—together in a special Three Sisters bed in the Camp Linden garden.

The recommended contribution for lunch is \$5. Please [email](#) to reserve your spot.



## In Good We Trust

a podcast about being human  
hosted by Hugh Taft-Morales

 PHILADELPHIA ETHICAL SOCIETY

### Have You Heard Hugh's Word?

*In Good We Trust*, a podcast created by our Leader, Hugh Taft-Morales, promotes thoughtful reflection about the challenges of living an ethical life. So far, Hugh has produced more than a dozen 10-minute episodes on subjects ranging from the Deadly Sins to Valentine's Day. If you haven't yet tuned in, then you can catch up [here](#) or from the Philadelphia Ethical Society [home page](#). After you've listened, please take a minute to record a comment on Voice Memos. You could be part of an upcoming podcast!

## NEW MEMBER PROFILE

### Welcome Julia Gokalp!

Julia Gokalp is a two-fer. She recently joined the Society and also is our new communications assistant. For the latter role, Julia will be applying the social media skills she developed at Gettysburg College, from which she graduated in 2022.



#### Where did you grow up? Tell us about your childhood.

I grew up in the Philadelphia suburbs. My mom is an account executive; my dad is an antiques dealer, and I tagged along with him to work. Since childhood, I've had many hobbies. Playing video games fostered my passion for storytelling and introduced me to one of my dearest friends. I was an avid reader who enjoyed math and science. I've always loved music. I was very shy, and singing helped me open up. I sang in various choirs over 12 years, took piano lessons, and played violin in school orchestras. My mother used to dance ballet, and she took me to lessons. After seeing the movie *Happy Feet*, I took up tap and, later, jazz dancing.

#### What did you study at Gettysburg?

My studies were interdisciplinary. I struggled to choose one field. My political science professor noted that the subjects I was choosing from would all teach me invaluable skills—"good reading, good writing, and good thinking"—that were applicable anywhere. I chose philosophy and political science.

#### What happened after college?

I joined an AmeriCorps conservation crew based out of Asheville, North Carolina. We traveled around the east coast doing environmental conservation. We planted trees in Croatan National Forest, cleared storm debris at Mountain Lake Lodge, and culled invasive wisteria at Lake Greenwood State Park, among other projects.

Our project on Cumberland Island in Georgia was my favorite. Amidst 10-hour days clearing trails, I was immersed in a landscape of old ruins, lush vegetation, and wild animals. Spanish moss was draped across the spiraling branches of five-foot-wide southern live oak trees like webbed tapestries. It was almost otherworldly.

During my AmeriCorps term, I met wonderful people from across the country whom I might have never met otherwise.

#### What have you been up to since settling in Philly?

I've wanted to join an a cappella singing group since I saw the movie *Pitch Perfect* over a decade ago. Since then, I've auditioned and been rejected eight times. But I persisted. I'm now a proud member of Reverb, a group within Project Philly.

#### Volunteer work?

I've volunteered at community gardens, and I've done some political volunteering. In 2022, I encountered protesters at a campaign event. I didn't understand why people were so fervently against a candidate who I saw as qualified and principled. I dislike political tribalism, and I'm always curious about the reasons behind people's beliefs. I wanted to reach across the aisle and engage with the protesters as people, not partisans. So, I approached and asked about their views. They were initially wary. But as we talked, I found that we had different information but some of the same hopes.

#### What brought you to the Ethical Society?

During college, my choir went on a tour and sang in churches. One service, in particular, was so lovely and warm. Singing there, my heart felt full. I thought, "If only there were somewhere like this for someone like me" – someone without a religious affiliation. Months later, I saw an Instagram ad for Introduction to Ethical Humanism at the PES. It piqued my interest.

Attending college through the pandemic made me more determined in my search for community: the aspect about college I had missed the most and worried I might never rediscover. I sought a community where I could engage in intellectual discussion and share the hope to make the world a better place. Everyone here has been so kind and welcoming. I've found what I was looking for.

# UPCOMING EVENTS



**Sunday, April 7, 10 AM**  
**Spring Outreach Effort**

Let's introduce the Ethical Society to neighbors and potential friends out enjoying the spring air! For an hour before Sunday platform, members will sit at an information table in front of the Society building or join

Hugh passing out flyers and talking to people in Rittenhouse Square. Please contact [Hugh](#) to volunteer.



**Tuesday, April 9, 12:30 PM (in-person)**

**Lunch with Hugh**

We'll talk about whatever is on your mind. You'll eat whatever is in the bag you bring from home. Meet in the Leader's Office.

**Wednesday, April 10, 1 PM (in-person)**

**Peeling the Onion**



Get to know other Ethical Society members and some of our Philadelphia neighbors through this fun activity. Peeling the Onion lets participants share stories from their lives, creating opportunities for conversations and new friendships. Meet in the Leader's Office. Space is limited, so RSVP to [Woody](#).

**Thursday, April 18, 12:30 PM (zoom)**

**Lunch with Hugh**

We'll talk about whatever is on your mind. You'll eat whatever is in your kitchen.



**Sunday, April 21, 10 AM**  
**Spring Outreach Effort**

See event information for April 7.

**Sunday, April 21, 12 PM**

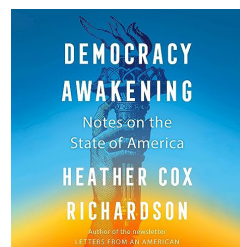
**Camp Linden Comes to Rittenhouse Square**

See page 5 for details.

**Tuesday, April 23, 5:30 PM - 7 PM (in-person)**

**Book Discussion Series: *Democracy Awakening: Notes on the State of America*, by Heather Cox Richardson**

How did we arrive at this moment of political crisis? How do



we find our way out of it? Acclaimed historian Heather Cox Richardson presents a condensed account of modern conservatism and a recap of Donald Trump's Presidency.

She also explains how Americans' enduring commitment to democracy has pushed back when authoritarianism, in the past, has reared its ugly head.

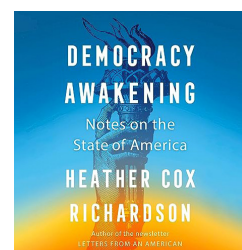
This session will discuss the book's first half (through Chapter 16). We'll reconvene for the second half on May 7. Meet in the Leader's Office.

**Monday, April 29,**

**5:30 PM - 7 PM (zoom)**

**Book Discussion Series: *Democracy Awakening: Notes on the State of America*, by Heather Cox Richardson**

See event information for April 23. We'll reconvene for the second half on May 13.



## Seventh Ward Tribute Tour

Members of the Philadelphia Ethical Society and the First Universalist Church of Philadelphia are invited to participate in a tour of the Seventh Ward, on Saturday, June 1, starting at 10:30 AM. Our guide will be Amy Hillier, an associate professor at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Policy and Practice. Hillier is co-leader of a multimedia program about this historic neighborhood, which once was the heart of Black Philadelphia. In the late 19th century, Penn commissioned W.E.B. Du Bois to document the lives of people living there.

Participants must be able to walk 1.5 miles over 90 minutes. Afterward, we will stop at a restaurant, where everyone can buy their own lunches. (You can opt just to attend the tour.)

Although this event is free, participants are encouraged to donate to the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, which is raising funds to repair the recently vandalized stained glass windows at Mother Bethel AME.

Registration is required. First Unitarian members contact [Amy Hillier](#). Members of the Ethical Society contact [Hugh Taft-Morales](#).





## 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

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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](mailto:office@phillyethics.org).

**Board of Trustees**  
**Michael Black-Smith**  
**Sunday, April 21, 6 PM**

**Building Committee**  
**Michael Black-Smith**  
**Wednesday, April 17, 6 PM**

**Camp Linden Committee**  
**Jeffrey Dubb**  
**Wednesday, April 24, 5 PM**

**Education Committee**  
**Betsy Lightbourn**  
**Wednesday, April 3, 5:30 PM**

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

Ethical Action Committee  
open chair  
next meeting TBA

**Finance Committee**  
**Nick Sanders**  
**Wednesday, April 10, 5 PM**

Media Committee  
Drew Snyder  
no meeting this month

Social Committee  
open chair  
next meeting TBA

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

## A Film with Depth

In February, Hugh presented a platform about his effort, two decades ago, to film Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," as a teaching aid for high school students. Last month, members got a chance to view this bootstrap production, starring Ken Knisely, the host of a public TV show about philosophy. The movie was filmed in a real cave (shadows and all), in Virginia. Attendees at the showing included (back row, left to right) Rollin Wilber, Betsy Lightbourn, Bob Steinfort, and Hugh Taft-Morales; (middle row, left to right) Dan Hoffman, Sally Redlener, and Harry Thorn; and (front row) Richard Brown and Carol Parlett.



## A Play with Buzz

There are good reasons to visit the Azuka Theatre beyond its proximity to our building. Its mission is ethical: "to strengthen the connection and shared humanity among diverse audiences by giving voice to the people whose stories go unheard." Society member Kate Esposito sits on the theater company's board. And Reva Stover, our former Community Life Coordinator, is an artistic director. Reva recently directed *Overwinter*, a play in which an intelligent, liberation-minded bee embodies the threat of human-greed-induced extinction. (Pictured left to right: Kate, Leigh Buchanan, Reva, and Sally Redlener, on the play's closing day.)

