

BESpeak

MARCH 2013

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Waves of Activism— The Gun Safety Tsunami

by Hugh Taft-Morales, BES Leader

Like you, besides being shocked and saddened by the Newtown tragedy of December 14, I was angry. I was angry at many things – angry about what people do to each other; angry at the political power of the National Rifle Association; angry at America’s addiction to violent hobbies, games, and movies. In the days that followed the Sandy Hook massacre, I was angry at a press that seemed only interested in ratings and advertising dollars. After having its elementary school attacked by a crazed gunman, Newtown was assaulted with a media feeding frenzy that took over the grieving community.

Upon reflection, though, it wasn’t so much the reporters and news industry that angered me. After all, it is we consumers who reward them with our viewing habits. What got to me was the **pattern** we all fall into, myself included: we enjoy a period of relative calm, are shocked into action by a tragedy, and before too long we forget about it until the next tragedy strikes. Wave after wave of activism swells, crests, and dissolves into the sands of time and other distractions. This is due to our flawed human nature and the fact that there are a thousand good causes toward which we could put our energies. Nevertheless, this pattern drains me.

To help refuel, my wife Maureen and I marched on January 26th for sensible gun safety laws. The march – organized by first-time rally organizer Molly Smith, the artistic director of Washington’s Arena Stage, and financed by \$50,000 in contributions from *One Million Moms for Gun Control*, the Washington National Cathedral, two other churches, and many private citizens – drew a few thousand people to the national mall. Smith’s hope was to start a movement: “I’d like to have a march every month.”

It does seem that there is a growing public outrage over the disproportionate power of the NRA and a small group of gun rights and extremists. The question is, will this outrage build to tsunami size sufficient to alter the political landscape



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SUNDAY PLATFORMS

10:30 a.m.

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FREE AND OPEN TO ALL!

MARCH 3

“Building the Temple
of the Future: Fulfilling the
Promise of Humanism”

James Croft

Research and Education Fellow,
Humanist Community at Harvard

MARCH 10

“Powerful Presidents
and Ethical Questions”

Hugh Taft-Morales

Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society

MARCH 17

“Realizing the Potential of
Refugee Resettlement”

Kevin Meadowcroft

Community Integration Program
Manager, Int. Rescue Committee

MARCH 24

“A Reconsideration
of the History of
American Medicine”

Elaine G. Breslaw

Author, Historian, and BES Member

MARCH 31

“The Challenge
of Integration in
Fractured Communities”

Fabio Lomelino

Project Director, Community
Conversations, Lutheran Immigration
and Refugee Service

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Hugh Taft-Morales *Leader*
Fritz Williams *Leader Emeritus*

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On the web at bmorethical.org

Time To Help Refugees

by *Emil Volcheck, BES President*



As a member of the Baltimore Ethical Society, I take pride in our work to advance human dignity and to build a more ethical culture in Baltimore. The diversity of our city continues to amaze me. A few years ago I learned that Baltimore is home to communities of refugees, particularly Iraqis and ethnic Bhutanese from Nepal, who fled war and injustice to make a new life in the United States. Thousands have received help at the Baltimore Resettlement Center on Eastern Avenue. The Center houses offices of two organizations that have done impressive work to help these refugees. This month we have invited speakers from both: Kevin Meadowcroft from the International Rescue Committee Baltimore (IRC) and Fabio Lomelino from the Lutheran Refugee and Immigration Service (LIRS).

The IRC provides care and support for refugees designated to arrive in Baltimore by the State Department. The IRC meets them at the airport, assigns them a caseworker who organizes social services, helps them find housing, and offers classes and seminars on basic living skills, including cultural awareness, language skills, and even how to shop. LIRS helps the refugees find jobs through their employment service “Higher.” Additionally, LIRS’s Community Conversations project builds community for refugees and raises awareness of their needs. I hope you will hear both speakers inspire us with the work of their organizations.

BES has a bit over sixty members with rather modest means at our disposal to bring about positive social change. We make a difference where we can. We advocate for criminal justice reform, LGBTQ rights, the Equal Rights Amendment, abolishment of the death penalty, and responsible gun control. With all that we do, can we take on yet another cause – that of helping refugees in Baltimore? I think we can, if we go about it the right way. For any organization, the time of its members and volunteers is a scarce but renewable resource. When you pursue a cause, you spend that time. It slowly replenishes. However, time banking provides a way to help certain causes so that when you spend some time, an equal amount comes back.

Time banking is a system through which individuals give and receive services to one other; their efforts are accounted for in hours rather than dollars. My February column told the story of how BES members became active in the Baltimore TimeBank, inspired by the example of Partners in Care. Refugees have a combination of needs and skills that is particularly well-suited for a time bank. They need help with basic tasks such as language and driving lessons that many others can help with. The IRC “family mentoring” program assigns volunteer mentors to visit a refugee family and help them adapt and integrate into the community. Many refugees, who may not yet have the opportunity to apply their skills through paid employment, are professionals—journalists, engineers, or doctors—with skills to offer.

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A Story Few Know

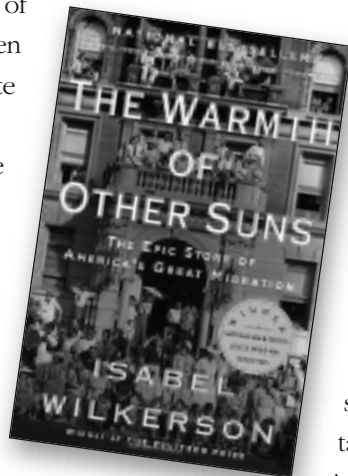
A book review by Stephen Meskin

The *Warmth of Other Suns* tells an underappreciated historic American story that has had significant effects on the shape of our lives, our cities, and our country. The story is less than 100 years old, but few people know much about it. It is the story of the 1915 to 1970 migration of about six million American men, women, and children from the Deep South into cities throughout the West, Midwest, and Northeast. Those who migrated from these states of the former confederacy had been living under the South's separate but equal regime.

Isabel Wilkerson, whose parents were among those who took part in the Great Migration, tells this story of what some called the third of four great black U.S. migrations. She spent 15 years researching original documents and interviewing over 1200 people. Her book interweaves the larger historical narrative with the life stories of three individuals: Ida Mae, a sharecropper, who moved from Mississippi to Chicago in 1937; George, a college drop-out and fruit picker, who moved from Florida to New York City in 1945; and Robert, a doctor, who moved from Louisiana to Los Angeles in 1953. In their new hometowns, they initially felt joy in a new sense of freedom, had to learn to deal with subtle discrimination, and ultimately improved their lot over what it would have been had they not migrated.

Reading the story one appreciates the extraordinary bravery and drive of those who migrated. As the author

puts it: *Their migration was a response to an economic and social structure not of their making. They did what humans have done for centuries when life became untenable—what the pilgrims did under the tyranny of British rule...what the Irish did when there was nothing to eat, what the European Jews did during the spread of Nazism...They did what human beings looking for freedom, throughout history have often done. They left. Yet*



one realizes how ordinary their lives had to be for them to survive. They needed support of family and friends in the strange new part of the country; they needed to learn strange new ways of talking, eating, cooking, and getting to work; they needed to find work, a place to live, and companionship. These are common chores of all migrants and immigrants.

The book has been reviewed favorably and won a number of awards, including the 2010 National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction and the NAACP Image Award for best literary debut. No matter how well they like it, many reviewers and readers criticize its repetitiousness. The repetition is off-putting, though mitigated by considering that the author is a Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaper reporter and sections of the book seem to be written so that they could stand

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ETHICAL HUMANIST SUNDAY SCHOOL

WITH LINDA JOY BURKE

Every Sunday
10:30 a.m. – Noon

Children of all ages are welcomed.

For those between the ages of one and three, separate supervised activities are offered.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Potluck Dinner and Family Game Night

Saturday, March 2, 6:15 p.m.

Poetry Group

Sunday, March 3, 9:30 a.m.

BES Eatery Social (B.E.S.)

Sunday, March 3, 1:00 p.m.

Mindfulness Meditation

Sunday, March 10, 9:30 a.m.

Board Meeting

Sunday, March 10, 12:30 p.m.

Baking Night at Moveable Feast

Thursday, March 14, 5:45 p.m.

Ethical Action Meeting

Sunday, March 17, 9:00 a.m.

BES Ironweed Film Club

Wednesday, March 27, 7:30 p.m.

Newcomers Meeting

Sunday, March 31, 12:30 p.m.

SUNDAY SNACK SCHEDULE

All are invited to bring snacks for our coffee hour following platform. Snacks are especially welcome from those whose last names start with:

A to F	March 3
G to L	March 10
M to R	March 17
S to Z	March 24
Anyone!	March 31

MARCH 3

“Building the Temple of the Future: Fulfilling the Promise of Humanism”

James Croft

*Research and Education Fellow,
Humanist Community at Harvard*

Humanists have high moral principles and lofty goals: a true Humanist vision would lead to nothing less than the transformation of the world. And yet, in the decades since Humanism became a well-defined creed, we have not had the political and cultural impact we might wish for. If we are to build what Ingersoll and Adler called the Temple of the Future, we need to work harder, smarter, and with greater conviction than ever before. In this talk Croft will draw on history, culture, science and his experience as an activist to show Humanists how they can come together, build community, and begin to fulfill the promise of their beliefs.

James Croft is the Research and Education Fellow at the Humanist Community at Harvard, where he works primarily on the Humanist Community Project – an initiative to aid the growth and development of local Humanist communities around the world. He is a fifth-year doctoral candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where he studies the philosophy of education. He is a singer and gay rights activist – and increasingly works with other activists to ignite their passion and bring their message to life. An Ethical Culture Leader in Training, Croft was raised on Shakespeare, Sagan, and Star Trek.

Note: Croft will be our special guest at the Potluck Family and Game Night, March 2 at 6:15 p.m. (sign up to bring a dish or a game @ <http://ur1.ca/ctulz>) and also at our luncheon social on March 3. Please consider attending both.

MARCH 10

“Powerful Presidents and Ethical Questions”

Hugh Taft-Morales

Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society

As Obama begins his second term, renewed ethical questions arise concerning extreme executive authority. Arthur Schlesinger’s warnings about “the imperial presidency” have taken on new urgency since 2000 as presidents Bush and

Obama swing a big stick regarding issues of “national security.” As we honor our executives with another Presidents’ Day holiday, Taft-Morales explores preemptive war, extrajudicial detention, rendition, and drone attacks – and wonders about the ethical and constitutional status of America’s commander-in-chief. Consider the words of Daniel Webster speaking in the 1834 Senate: “Executive power has been regarded as a lion which must be caged.... [I]t has been dreaded, uniformly, always dreaded, as the great source of its danger.” Should we beware today?

Hugh Taft-Morales joined the Baltimore Ethical Society as its professional leader in 2010, the same year he was certified by the American Ethical Union as an Ethical Culture Leader. He taught philosophy and history for twenty-five years, after earning a Masters in philosophy from University of Kent at Canterbury, England (1986) and graduating from Yale University (1979). In 2009 he completed a leadership certification program with the Humanist Institute. His presence in Ethical Culture has been termed “invigorating.” In addition to having been active in the Washington Ethical Society, he has also been engaged in American Ethical Union work, serving on the AEU planning committee, as co-coordinator for the Presidents’ Council AEU, and as secretary of the AEU National Leaders Council. He also serves as Leader of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia.

MARCH 17

“Realizing the Potential of Refugee Resettlement in Baltimore”

Kevin Meadowcroft

*Community Integration Program Manager,
International Rescue Committee*

Up until about the 1920s, Baltimore’s shores saw the arrival of tens of thousands immigrants, including many Jewish refugees fleeing czarist pogroms in Russia. Over the past decade, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has renewed that tradition by resettling thousands of refugees in Baltimore City and the surrounding areas. Those refugees, fleeing war and persecution in their home countries, are eager to start anew here and in turn offer vast potential for the future of Baltimore City. Meadowcroft will discuss the services the IRC provides refugees and talk about the efforts being made to integrate them into the civic and economic life of the City.

Kevin Meadowcroft has spent more than a decade working with refugee and immigrant populations in Baltimore. Before joining the IRC as Community Integration Program Manager in July of last year, he oversaw an education program serving more than 1,100 refugees a year. Among his accomplishments was the creation of a literacy program for adult refugees who had no previous formal education. As part of the IRC, he provides strategic leadership that links refugees, community actors and partners for long-term safe and secure refugee integration. He holds a bachelor's degree in English and Textual Studies from Syracuse University and an MA in International Education Policy from the University of Maryland.

MARCH 24

“A Reconsideration of the History of American Medicine”

Elaine G. Breslaw

Author, Historian, and BES Member

For most American doctors and in the eyes of the general public, medical science in this country has a long history. It follows then, according to this belief, that the United States has been in the forefront of medical discoveries and innovations during its early history. That unfortunately is not true. Elaine Breslaw offers a reconsideration of both popular beliefs as she describes some of the health problems faced by early Americans. Although her focus will be the nature of medical care in early America, she also will consider the role of lay practitioners such as midwives, obeahs, herb doctors as well as other non-orthodox remedies. She additionally will trace the declining stature of the medical profession itself during the nineteenth century, a decline partly due to the inadequate education of medical personnel but also a result of underlying social, economic, and ethical values of the time that promoted commercialization and encouraged the nationalistic ideal of American exceptionalism. Those conditions led to an anti-intellectual climate among doctors that denied the scientific discoveries in Europe, discoveries that were leading to the real breakthroughs in medicine. America thus was left behind in the first truly scientific examination of traditional medical therapies and theories that took place in the mid-nineteenth century and, Breslaw will suggest, did not begin to take a lead until a century later.

Elaine G. Breslaw retired as professor of history from Morgan State University in Baltimore after 29 years and has taught

on an adjunct basis at Johns Hopkins University, Goucher College, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and as a Fulbright Senior Fellow at the University of the West Indies in Barbados. She is the author of *Tituba, Reluctant Witch of Salem: Devilish Indians and Puritan Fantasies* (NYU Press 1995), *Witches of the Atlantic World: An Historical Reader and Primary Sourcebook* (NYU Press, 2000), and *Dr. Alexander Hamilton and Provincial America: Expanding the Orbit of Scottish Culture* (LSU Press, 2008). Today's talk explores some aspects of her most recent book, *Lotions, Potions, Pills, and Magic: Health Care in Early America* (NYU, 2012). A member of the Baltimore Ethical Society for many years, Breslaw presently lives in Knoxville, Tennessee.

MARCH 31

“The Challenge of Integration in Fractured Communities”

Fabio Lomelino

Project Director, Community Conversations, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

For the past year Lomelino has been traveling to several communities across the US hosting community conversations around the question: “What creates a sense of belonging for newcomers?” He will share what he has learned and provoke us to re-think the issue of integration in an age of fractured community structures. With the country reaching historically high levels of foreign-born residents and historically low levels of social cohesion, a challenge emerges to the traditional notion of receiving communities welcoming newcomers. The talk will encourage exploration of the difficult question: “Who is an alien in the face of widespread social alienation?”

Fabio Lomelino is a “reverse migrant.” He was born and raised in Sao Paulo, Brazil and moved to Baltimore less than a decade ago. Baltimore is his great-grandfather's childhood home. Lomelino attended St. John's College in Annapolis, where he fell in love with philosophy, the liberal arts, and good conversation. He joined Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) in 2010 to help the organization work toward its vision of creating welcoming communities for migrants and refugees. He specializes in hosting facilitated dialogue, crafting strategic communications, and asking provocative questions. You can follow him on Twitter (@lomelinofh) for more.

IRONWEED

Film

CLUB

Wed., March 27, 7:30 p.m.

View two short films made by Baltimore youth: in "At Risk" students, adults, and politicians ponder the meaning of the label "at-risk;" in "Growing Hope in East Baltimore," students explore the Rose Street Center, learning how work by a dedicated local-leaders' group is healing the community.

Ask Emil about free club membership (volcheck@acm.org).

BES EATERY SOCIAL (B.E.S.)

Sunday, March 3, 1:00 p.m.

An informal luncheon social takes place on the first Sunday of each month. Members and friends are invited to come together after the Sunday platform and snacks. Please join us this month for lunch with our special guest speaker James Croft. The restaurant and location will be announced that morning during platform. We encourage you to wear your BES shirts or other items of visibility to help promote our organization. If you have any questions, please contact Paul Furth at pdqblues@aol.com.

SIGN UP FOR

Fun with Western Philosophy

March 10, March 31, April 14, and April 28, 4:00–6:00 p.m.

BES members & all interested are invited to join with our friends from the Free School and Red Emma's for Hugh's newest class, **Fun with Western Philosophy!** Leader Hugh Taft-Morales will explore reality, mind, and meaning during a rigorous but rollicking exploration of Plato, Rene Descartes, Bishop Berkeley, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, F.H. Bradley, William James, Henri Bergson, J.P. Sartre, and Albert Camus. Depending on the level of interest, a companion reading can be made available at cost. This series is a Baltimore Free School offering. **Please register with the Free School and sign up for the free class on-line at freeschool.redemmas.org.** Have questions? Email Hugh at leader@bmorethical.org.

We the People

CONSTITUTION SERIES CONTINUES

Monday, March 25, 7:00–8:30 p.m.

The Constitution Series resumes in March with a discussion of **Presidential Power**. Questions to be addressed include: What are the constitutional limits to executive power, particularly regarding the so-called "war on terror"? How do legislative and judicial branches offer effective oversight regarding detention or killing of terrorist suspects, methods interrogation and torture, drone use overseas, and withholding of information from the public? Topics to be addressed in April and May are **Capital Punishment** and **Reproductive Rights**.

EAC STARTS 2013 WITH A BANG!

Kate LaClair, Ethical Action Committee (EAC) Chair, reports that over the past few months, we have become engaged in several ongoing action projects both in Baltimore and at the national level. Among those projects, we have joined the Affirmative Youth Opportunities coalition, dedicated to stopping a new youth jail from being built. In addition, we are supporting passage of the Equal Rights Amendment long overdue as a guarantee for equal pay and protection from discrimination in the workplace, supporting repeal of the Death Penalty in the state of Maryland, making BES a TimeBank hub, and supporting a Maryland Transgender Equality Bill.

We are looking for people who are enthusiastic about these and other issues to help us move forward and make the Baltimore Ethical Society a larger presence in the city and the state.

WANT TO JOIN OUR LEADERSHIP TEAM?

The society is looking for candidates to serve as officers and members-at-large of the Executive Board for the 2013-2014 term. Are you interested in learning more? Then please speak to any member of the Nominating Committee: Ken Brenneman, Argentine Craig, Karen Helm, Kate LaClair, Stephen Meskin, and Kirk Mullen. Nominations will be announced in late March. Election ballots will be sent out in early April, and election results will be announced at the annual membership meeting on April 28th.

Time To Help Refugees

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The reciprocal nature of time banking means that every contribution of time to help an IRC client is an opportunity for the recipient to return that help, thus being empowered to make connections. Baltimore TimeBank leaders Tam Kelley and Michael Marks and I have met with IRC staff three times. We believe that time banking is likely to help their clients. In January,

IRC staff facilitated a visit by our member Darlene Cook to meet clients who needed resume help. I'm going to continue to encourage individual BES members to become involved with the Baltimore TimeBank. Eventually, I'd like to see BES become a Baltimore TimeBank hub. This is a smart and sustainable way for us to help refugees – and to help them help themselves.

A Story Few Know

(continued from page 3)

alone as separate newspaper pieces, where some repetition is required. The repetition can prove helpful to the reader who needs to read this 545-page book in snatches.

Editor's Note: John Stauffer, Chair of the History of American Civilization program at Harvard, reviewing *The Warmth of Other Suns* for *The Wall Street Journal* captured eloquently the book's importance: *In many respects Ms. Wilkerson does for the Great Migration what John Steinbeck did for the Okies in his fiction masterpiece, "The Grapes of Wrath"; she humanizes history, giving it emotional and psychological depth. She is especially good at capturing the experiential sense of*

life in the poor South and of the migration itself...She gets inside the heads [of] the people she's writing about and gives readers a penetrating sense of what it felt like to be a part of the vast move north.

Event Note: On May 2, 2013 from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. the Miller Branch of the Howard County Library located in Ellicott City will be hosting Isabel Wilkerson with Korva Coleman, newscaster for NPR, in what is billed as "A Meet the Author" free event. Registration is required and may be done online, in person at any one of the Howard County Library System's six branches, or by calling 410-313-1950 after February 19.

Waves of Activism— The Gun Safety Tsunami

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so long so favorable to gun manufacturers?

I hope so, and I am sure so too do the 100 residents of Newtown who traveled to the national mall for the rally. Will their hopes be lifted by a swelling tide of public opinion demanding assault weapon bans, limits on ammunition magazines, and universal background checks? These were the demands scrawled on signs and shouted in speeches. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan shared the emotion of having to attend funerals for school children on average every two weeks when he was head of Chicago's public schools. D.C.'s non-voting representative in Congress, Eleanor Holmes Norton charged that, "Only an outraged public can end the gun violence that has enveloped our country." Are we sufficiently outraged?

Since I would prefer to be thankful rather than angry, I will conclude by thanking Governor O'Malley and the state legislators who support Senate Bill 281 restricting assault weapons, detachable magazine sizes, and sale of firearms to those with criminal records or addictions. Thanks to our BES Ethical Action Committee for its interest in this cause. Thanks to activist Vinny DeMarco for creating Marylanders To Prevent Gun Violence. And thanks to the American Ethical Union for making it onto the NRA's "enemies list" for our support of gun control! Together let's continue to generate a tsunami of activism for sensible gun policy.

BESpeak

BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

306 W. Franklin Street, Suite 102, Baltimore, MD 21201-4661

NEWSLETTER

Please do not delay!

TIME VALUE

POTLUCK DINNER & FAMILY GAME NIGHT

Saturday, March 2, 6:15 p.m.

Share a meal and board games with family and friends. This event – one in a series of family game nights – is organized jointly with the Baltimore Parenting Beyond Belief Meetup. James Croft of the Harvard Humanist Chaplaincy will join us as our special guest. Sign up to bring a dish or a game @ <http://ur1.ca/ctulz>.

NEWCOMERS MEETING

Sunday, March 31, 12:30 p.m.

New to the Society and interested in learning more? Come to the Newcomers Meeting and learn more about Ethical Culture and about our Society. See Karen Elliott or Hugh Taft-Morales for more information.

MINDFULNESS

meditation

Sunday, March 10, 9:30 a.m.

Mindfulness is a tool we can use in our daily lives to act in a more ethical way. We practice mindfulness meditation so that it comes naturally in stressful times. Join us as we sit (on chairs) and breathe (just the way it comes naturally) and listen to the words of Thich Nhat Hanh, one of the world's best-known teachers of mindfulness.

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