

BESpeak

JUNE–AUGUST 2015

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Rebuilding the Inner City: What's It Going to Take?

by Hugh Taft-Morales, BES Leader

What's it going to take to rebuild crumbling neighborhoods in places like Baltimore and Philadelphia? Serving as an Ethical Culture Leader in both cities, I inherit a tradition of urban activism from our founding forward. Felix Adler, mesmerized by the teeming life of New York City, strove to help address many challenges confronting the urban poor: inadequate housing, poor access to health care, substandard schools, underemployment, and the class and ethnic prejudices that prevent us from working together. He did so through ethical relationships with both the movers and shakers, and the disempowered men, women, and children of our cities.

Twenty years after the founding of Ethical Culture, when progressive politicians began using government to address the systemic economic issues crippling the disempowered, the modern middle class began to grow in America. From Teddy Roosevelt through FDR to Johnson's Great Society, the federal government took the lead. Today, there are signs that national initiatives need to be strengthened.

At a May 6th press conference, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, Secretary of Labor Thomas Perez, Representative Elijah Cummings, and others addressed federal interventions as responses to the root causes of urban civic unrest like we saw in Baltimore. Being a fan of the New Deal, I was heartened to hear Sec. Perez speak in sweeping terms: "We at the Department of Labor, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, what we are really are the departments of opportunity. ... We have come from the federal government making sure we can make a difference in Baltimore. ... Money is not enough. The development of a holistic plan that reflects the values of the community of Baltimore is indispensable."

I can hear critics of big government moan at such talk. Many blame the bureaucracy for the problems we face. Pouring money into a bad system doesn't work, they insist. After all, Baltimore has received monies from Maryland's \$250 million Race to the Top grant fund supporting comprehensive education redesign without dra-



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SUMMER SUNDAYS

10:30–11:30 a.m.

Informal discussions on topics related to social, spiritual, and philosophical issues – or just a little bit of fun.

(details on pages 4–5)

JUNE 7

“Cognitive Enhancement: The Promise and Peril of Programmable People”

Nathan Whitmore

JUNE 14

“Interactions and Reflections: Anthropological Encounters with Religion”

Stefan Goodwin

JUNE 21

“Report on the 2015 AHA Conference”

Kathleen Wilsbach
and Emil Volcheck

JUNE 28

“A Life Reclaimed”

Mr. Saleem
(introduced by Uta Allers)

JULY 5

“American Paganism: What It Means to Me”

Mav Vaughan

JULY 12

“AEU Assembly Report”

Karen Elliott, Stephen Meskin,
Emil Volcheck, Kathleen Wilsbach

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END OF SUMMER READING BOOK DISCUSSION

Near the end of August Hugh Taft-Morales will lead a discussion of *The Road to Character* by *New York Times* journalist David Brooks. Known as a sophisticated Republican willing to “engage with” the liberal agenda, Brooks was praised as writing “a pitch-perfect clarion call, issued not with preachy hubris but from a deep place of humility, for awakening to the greatest rewards of living.” Come share your reactions.

AEU ASSEMBLY

Thursday, June 25, through
Sunday, June 28
Stamford, Connecticut

This year’s theme is “Creating a Sustainable Future: Ethics and Advocacy.” Come meet other Ethical Humanists, celebrate our 100th Assembly, and help plan Ethical Culture’s future! Go to aeu.org to register.

SUMMER SUNDAYS

(continued from page 1)

JULY 19

“Nutrition and Health”

Dr. Joe Adams

JULY 26

“The Militarization of the Police”

Jessica Katzenstein
(introduced by Laura Griffin)

AUGUST 2

“The Humanist Service Corps”

Conor Robinson

AUGUST 9

“Understanding Anarchism”

Greg Corbitt

AUGUST 16

“Raising the Minimum Wage”

Brian England

AUGUST 23

“Asian, American, and Asian American Issues”

Tevis Tsai

AUGUST 30

“Progress Report: From Talk to Action”

BES Ethical Action Committee

SEPTEMBER 6

“What is Addiction?”

Thomas Higdon

OTHER ACTIVITIES

AEU Assembly

June 25–28, Stamford, Connecticut

Poetry Group

June 7, July 5, Aug. 2, 9:30 a.m.

Baking Night at Moveable Feast

June 11, July 9, Aug. 13, 5:45 p.m.

Mindfulness Meditation

June 14, July 12, Aug. 9, 9:30 a.m.

Board Meeting

June 14, July 12, Aug. 9, 12:30 p.m.

Volunteer at Real Food Farm

June 20, July 18, Aug. 15, 9:15 a.m.

Ethical Action Meeting

June 21, July 19, Aug. 16, 9:15 a.m.

BES Eatery Social

June 21, July 19, Aug. 16, 12:30 p.m.

Family Board and Card Games Party

June 21, July 19, Aug. 16, 3:00 p.m.

Charm City Film Series

June 24, July 22, Aug. 26, 6:30 p.m.

Newcomers Meeting

June 28, July 26, Aug. 30, 12:30 p.m.

Sunday Assembly Baltimore

June 28, July 26, Aug. 23, 2:00 p.m.

End of Summer Reading Book Discussion

Date and time TBD

ETHICAL ACTION VOLUNTEER OUTINGS

Baking Night at Moveable Feast

Thursday, June 11, July 9, August 13, 5:45–8:00 p.m.,
901 N. Milton Ave., Baltimore

Join BES members and others for this enjoyable outing at a great organization – check out their website at www.mfeast.org. Park in front of building and enter through the door closest to Ashland Street. Let Karen Elliott know if you are coming (KarenSElliott@aol.com) and, if you’d like to carpool, she’ll try to match you up with another BES participant.

Volunteer Day at Real Food Farm

Saturday, June 20, July 18, August 15,
9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m., 2801 St. Lo Dr., Baltimore

We are volunteering with Real Food Farm throughout the year, contributing to a self-sustaining community and to the elimination of food deserts and food insecurity in Baltimore. All ages welcome! Be sure to dress for the weather, wear sturdy shoes, and bring water and a snack. We will help out, rain or shine!

JUNE 7

“Cognitive Enhancement: The Promise and Peril of Programmable People”

Nathan Whitmore

BES member Nathan Whitmore will address ethical issues regarding cognitive enhancement. He will briefly outline some of the technologies involved and the issues that come with them, such as ensuring safety, how to regulate such technology, distributive justice, and coercion. He will explain how open source and citizen science projects are trying to address these issues and then offer an alternative model for developing cognitive enhancement technology.

JUNE 14

“Interactions & Reflections: Anthro- pological Encounters with Religion”

Stefan Goodwin

An anthropologist discusses riddles, fascinations, and challenges of religion in his life and work. Stefan Goodwin is a professor emeritus of Anthropology at Morgan State University and a former BES president.

JUNE 21

“Report on the 2015 AHA Conference”

Kathleen Wilsbach and Emil Volcheck

Kathleen and Emil report on the 2015 American Humanist Association (AHA) Annual Conference held in Denver, Colorado, May 7–10. Hear highlights from the largest annual conference in Humanist movement. The conference featured two powerful events on race and justice, the annual meeting of the AHA Feminist Caucus, inspiring award winners such as 19-year-old Isaiah Smith, a scholarly talk on anti-atheist prejudice, an activist for education in Nepal, an offshoot of Sunday Assembly called “THRIVE”, and much more. June 21st is World Humanist Day, so please join us to celebrate!

JUNE 28

“A Life Reclaimed”

Mr. Saleem (introduced by Uta Allers)

BES member Uta Allers met Mr. Saleem while volunteering at Second Chance. She was inspired by his life story. After over 40 years of incarceration, he found employment with

Second Chance and is grateful for the opportunity to serve the community. He will share his inspiring story.

JULY 5

“American Paganism: What It Means to Me”

Mav Vaughan

BES member Mav Vaughan is a co-coordinator of Turning Circle, an Earth-based spirituality group that meets in Columbia, MD. She has been active in the Pagan community for about 20 years. She has also been an atheist that entire time. Mav will provide context about American Paganism in general, then talk about her path through it: the ideas she flirted with, the people she met, and why she disagrees with 99% of them, and what she gets out of her participation in the Pagan community today.

JULY 12

“AEU Assembly Report”

Karen Elliott, Stephen Meskin,
Emil Volcheck, Kathleen Wilsbach

BES members Karen Elliott, Stephen Meskin, Emil Volcheck, and Kathleen Wilsbach will report on the 100th Assembly of the American Ethical Union that took place June 25-28. The theme of the conference was “Creating a Sustainable Future: Ethics and Advocacy.” Hear the latest news and inspiring stories of action from across the Ethical Culture movement!

JULY 19

“Nutrition and Health”

Dr. Joe Adams

BES member Dr. Joe Adams will speak about the health benefits of a whole-food, plant-based diet vs. the S.A.D. (Standard American Diet).

JULY 26

“The Militarization of the Police”

Jessica Katzenstein (introduced by Laura Griffin)

BES member Laura Griffin will introduce Ms. Jessica Katzenstein, who will speak about her research into the militarization of the police. Katzenstein is a Ph.D. candidate in Anthropology at Brown University. She is conducting field research in Baltimore this summer.

AUGUST 2

“The Humanist Service Corps”

Conor Robinson

The Humanist Service Corps (HSC) is a project of the Foundation Beyond Belief. Conor Robinson launched the HSC in 2014. He previously founded the Yale Humanist Society and won the 2014 Humanist Visionary Award. He will speak about the HSC and their upcoming work in Africa. He is leading a group of volunteers that will depart for Ghana from Baltimore a few days after this talk.

AUGUST 9

“Understanding Anarchism”

Greg Corbitt

What is anarchism? Is it chaos? Is it disorder and rebellion? Is it violence and darkness? The answer to these questions is a simple “NO”. It is, in fact, quite the opposite. Anarchism is not some teenage dream of living with no rules and doing whatever you want with no consequences. Anarchism is the idea that responsibility for your own actions is the only way to have a truly free society. Anarchism is the idea that no man or woman should be able to decide what you do with your life.

AUGUST 16

“Raising the Minimum Wage”

Brian England

Brian England will tell the story of how he joined the coalition “Business For a Fair Minimum Wage” to lobby for increasing the minimum wage at the national level. The road took him to the White House (he’ll show photos) and to a meeting in Harry Reid’s office, where they discussed national strategy for raising the minimum wage. (www.businessforafairminimumwage.org)

AUGUST 23

“Asian, American, and Asian American Issues”

Tevis Tsai

BES member Tevis Tsai will offer an introduction to some of the common challenges faced by Asian Americans, ranging from their historical roots to their modern manifestations. He will discuss some of the problems with terminology and identity as they pertain to Asian Americans, as well as points

of contention both internal and external to the Asian American community. He will address the persistence of the “fresh off the boat” stereotype, the model minority myth, and the use of Asian Americans as the “wedge minority.”

AUGUST 30

“Progress Report: From Talk to Action”

BES Ethical Action Committee

Kate LaClair and the Ethical Action Committee will present a progress report on implementing action plans from the May 3rd event “From Talk To Action” with Diamonte Brown.

SEPTEMBER 6

“What is Addiction?”

Thomas Higdon

Thomas Higdon is a group facilitator for SMART Recovery, an evidence-based peer support group for people struggling with addictive behavior, which meets every Saturday at 10 am at BES. He will briefly summarize the models of addiction (e.g. moral, medical, and biopsychosocial) and discuss how our choice of model guides our public policy, treatment programs, and the way we treat people struggling with addiction.

FAMILY BOARD AND CARD GAMES PARTY

**Sunday, June 21, July 19, Aug. 16, 3:00-6:45 p.m.
at the home of Marjeta Cedilnic**

Join members of the Baltimore Parenting Beyond Belief Meetup for a board and card games party at the home of Marjeta Cedilnic in Howard County. Feel free to bring a game or play one of the many there. Please bring a snack or drink to share (or a small monetary contribution for the host instead). Come when you can, while the party lasts. Ms. Cedilnic is the lead organizer of the Maryland Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Address and directions provided when you RSVP.

For questions, please call her at 301-642-1065. Join the Meetups at <http://meetup.com/BaltimorePBB>.

CHARM CITY

film

SERIES

Wednesday, June 24, July 22,
August 26, 6:30 p.m.

In June, we will screen *Taxi to the Dark Side*. The film provides an in-depth look at the torture practices of the United States in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Guantanamo Bay, focusing on an innocent taxi driver in Afghanistan who was tortured and killed in 2002.

In July, we will screen *5 Broken Cameras*. An extraordinary work of both cinematic and political activism, *5 Broken Cameras* is a deeply personal, first-hand account of non-violent resistance in a West Bank village threatened by encroaching Israeli settlements.

In August, we will screen *Dirty Wars*, which follows investigative reporter Jeremy Scahill, author of the international bestseller *Blackwater*, into the hidden world of America's covert wars, from Afghanistan to Yemen, Somalia, and beyond.

The Charm City Film Series is free and open to the public. Donations are suggested. Complimentary refreshments are provided, and films are followed by discussion led by a local expert on the issue.

SUNDAY ASSEMBLY BALTIMORE

Sunday, June 28, July 26, August 23, 2:00 p.m.

Sunday Assembly services consist of songs (pop songs mainly) sung by the congregation, a reading (usually a poet), an interesting talk (that fits into live better, help often, or wonder more), a moment of reflection and an address, which sums up the day and hopefully gives a take-home message. Afterwards we encourage people to stay and mingle with one another. Visit us on Facebook at fb.com/sundayassemblybaltimore.

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BES EATERY SOCIAL

Sunday, June 21, July 19, August 16, 12:30 p.m.

Members and friends are invited to go out together for lunch. We'll gather in the lobby at about 12:15 p.m. to decide what restaurant to visit. Everyone is encouraged to wear their BES shirts or other items to help promote the society. If you have any questions, please contact Nathan Whitmore at nww10@hampshire.edu.

Summer Children's Program

Beginning on June 7th and every Sunday throughout the summer, BES will offer parent-led and member-led activities for children (ages 6-12), to include childcare for those under the age of 5.

Activities, games, and outings will be fun-planned, enjoyable, and focused on the core values of ethical culture; namely (in part):

- Every person is important and unique.
- Every person deserves to be treated fairly and kindly.
- I can learn from everyone.
- I am part of this Earth.
- I learn from the world around me by using my senses, mind, and feeling.
- I am a member of the world community, which depends upon the cooperation of all people for peace and justice.

- I can learn from the past to build on the future.
- I am free to question.
- I am free to choose what I believe.
- I accept responsibility for my choices and actions.
- I strive to live my values.
- Ethics is my belief.

Engaged in the Summer's Ethical Experience for Kids (SEEK) will be members of the Ethical Education Committee (EEC): Ben Busby, Argentine Craig, Brian Dorsey, Susan Henley, Rosemary Klein, Monique Stins and other BES members: Cheryl Pavlovsky (who will lead/conduct sessions on Astronomy on June 14 and 21), Ruth Schoonover, and Mav Vaughan.

We need other volunteers. If interested and available for a Summer Sunday or two, please email the EEC Chairperson (ascraig@comcast.net).

Rebuilding the Inner City

(continued from page 1)

matic results. My reply to such critics is to admit that money, by itself, is not enough. But it's a start.

An important missing ingredient is the network of ethical relationships that make these programs effective in the long term – relationships between poor communities and the police that patrol them, between Baltimore's bastions of privilege and the neighborhoods where desperation reigns. In my work with an interfaith organization called Philadelphians Organized to Witness, Empower, and Rebuild (POWER), those relationships are growing. People of good faith – religious leaders from traditional faith communities who embrace humanist allies dedicated to the cause – are welcoming members of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia into an effective and rewarding network.

Now, with a hot Baltimore summer and contentious legal proceedings over the death of Freddie Gray ahead of us, such relationships are even more important. The Baltimore Ethical Society has been nurturing a number of connections that might help us contribute to the healing. We've been involved in a number of programs focusing on race and disempowerment in the inner city. They've drawn on the expertise of Diamonte Brown of Out for Justice, Farajii Muhammad, the Youth Empowerment Coordinator of the American Friends Service Committee, and, thanks to Rev. Olson of First Unitarian, Paula Cole Jones, founder of A Dialogue on Race and Ethnicity (ADORE).

These connections will help members of Ethical Societies move beyond dialogue into action. While actions can

include pushing for systemic reform on the federal, state, or municipal levels, they can also be random acts of kindness. They can be about changing our lives in profoundly personal ways as well.

I would like to end this column with some reflections about a recent conversation that is stuck in my head. It was with a Baltimore couple brave enough to reach out into the lives of an inner-city family facing seemingly insurmountable obstacles. About six months before the violence in Baltimore was broadcast nationally, Josh and Nicole witnessed a less dramatic but equally as corrosive form of violence. Driving one day in Baltimore, they passed a woman cadging change in the median caught up in desperation and drug addiction. By her side was a 3-year-old girl.

As the light changed and they began to drive away, Nicole suddenly insisted they turn the car around and return to the mother and child. Their lives took a dramatic, wonderful, challenging turn. After inviting the mother and girl to lunch, their relationship grew. After some time of figuring out where to go from there, Josh and Nicole became unofficial guardians for the 3 year old, as well as her sisters (12 and 15 years old.) Their mother, HIV positive and hobbled by addiction and past jail time, has grown to trust Nicole and Josh. The girls, the oldest and youngest living with them some of the time, with access to better nutrition, health care, and the loving support of two new mentors, are doing better in school.

As Josh told me the story, however, I kept asking myself if I could take on such a remarkable commitment.

Would I be brave enough to make a similar commitment out of the blue? I might not be as lucky as Nicole and Josh, who have found the experience meaningful and often joyful. Josh even said that stepping into the lives of these three girls was "easy" in the sense that it continues to be deeply rewarding. Nicole and Josh are now trying to support the schools where the girls attend, while seeking boarding school educational opportunities where they might flourish.

Clearly the most important contribution Nicole and Josh made was of their time, care, and concern. So many young people in poor urban environments are without consistent academic and interpersonal support. Ethical relationships – the bread and butter of Ethical Culture – are hard to come by when simple survival is a daily challenge.

As I look to the future of my work in Baltimore and Philadelphia, I hope to continue nurturing ethical relationships with the Ethical Societies, and between our small group and the broader society. Anyone of us could make the choice Josh and Nicole made. Most of us today could reach out to one person, one family, to connect and support them. We can also support federal, state, and local mentoring initiatives. President Obama's My Brother's Keeper Initiative, for example, is aimed at improving outcomes for African-American male youth.

Such approaches, whether from the top down or bottom up, have to replace the impersonal retributive approach to urban discontent. The points of light in the darkness of Baltimore's violence come from many sources. Today we need all the light we can get. Let's work on as many levels as possible to turn our country around.



BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

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

NEWSLETTER

Please do not delay!

TIME VALUE

ETHICAL ACTION MEETING

Sunday, June 21, July 19, August 16, 9:15 a.m.

Come help plan the Ethical Action strategy for the Baltimore Ethical Society!

NEWCOMERS MEETING

Sunday, June 28, July 26, August 30, 12:30 p.m.

New to the Society and interested in learning more? Attended a meeting or two? Thinking about joining? Come to the Newcomers Meeting, held following the last platform of every month, and learn more about Ethical Culture and about our Society - its history, its philosophy, and its organization. Meetings last about one hour and attendance is recommended before becoming a member. See Wayne Laufert or Janey Solwold for more information.

MINDFULNESS

meditation

Sunday, June 14, July 12, August 9, 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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