Looking for Seeds for Our Future in Albuquerque

Dr. Carolyn A. Parker, Assembly Co-Chair

New Mexico is a long way from the roots of Ethical Culture, but it is where the American Ethical Union and its members will be looking for the seeds to grow the future of Ethical Humanism. Our purpose will be to conduct the business of the Union at the same time we renew and expand our relationships with each other as ethical humanists. Our goal will be to leave Albuquerque enlightened and energized to work more effectively together to develop our home Societies, to be sure, but also to look beyond our former horizons to see the pain and suffering that surrounds us because of environmental policies and choices that degrade our communities—with the most severe effects most often falling on those least able to withstand them. We also hope to plant one of those seeds in Albuquerque to help develop a new Ethical Society.

AEU’s 103rd Assembly is, first of all, a meeting of ethical humanists. Every morning will begin with an opportunity to attend colloquy. Before we leave on Sunday, we will hear retired Leader Curt Collier send us on our way with an inspiring platform. We will work together. For those who come early and wish to participate, we will caravan over to the Bosque Forest to help with restoration activities. Afterwards there’s a reception, some singing, and time to meet and greet. We have two special keynote speakers: Roy Speckhardt (American Humanist Association) and Rick Chavolla (American Indian Community House). They will help us frame our thinking about environmental justice, which is the focus of the Assembly’s program. Seven other workshops on environmental justice will help expand our knowledge and assist us in moving toward greater activism—as well as a closer relationship to the Earth.

Assembly is also a time to conduct AEU’s business and to learn to work more effectively in developing our home Societies. Six workshops focus on current issues that face our Societies and our communities. Meetings before and after the educational programs will help keep AEU and its various committees, councils, and interest groups operating smoothly.

With all that work, there is still time to socialize and savor the benefits of doing the work that we do. The Anna Garlin Spencer Award Luncheon and the Elliott-Black Dinner and Award Ceremony are annual highlights. The National Ethical Service luncheon will feature a special guest—Richard Moore, Chair of the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) for the US Environmental Protection Agency. Friday night will bring us a performance by Son of Hwéeldi (be prepared for high energy and deep meaning). A new feature of Assembly is what I’ve been calling the “sticky room” or “The Gathering Place.” The room will be a place for folks to sit and talk, hold a quick meeting in the odd hours we’re not actually doing other things, and even post (using the sticky sheets provided) information about what their local Societies are doing.

As Assembly Planning Committee co-chair with Law’rence (L) Miller, I have been honored to have a chance to see “behind the scenes” how the Assembly is prepared. My fellow committee members have been diligent, adaptable, and congenial, making this a most pleasing experience. We have made central to our work, efforts to reduce our carbon footprint. We have worked toward inclusion in multiple dimensions. The spirit of optimism is captured by this year’s theme, “Seeds for the Future,” and so is the spirit of determination to make that future a good one. I’m excited. I look forward to seeing you in Albuquerque.

Visit event webpage at aeu.org.
Come to the 2018 American Ethical Union Assembly in Albuquerque!

President John McCormick & Executive Director Bart Worden

This June 7-10 the American Ethical Union has an excellent opportunity to expand our reach as a national movement with our 103rd Assembly in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This is the furthest west we have gone for an Assembly, and Albuquerque is a fabulous place to visit (see Attractions tab for ideas on fun activities and sights to add to your Assembly trip).

Why Albuquerque? Here are some good reasons:

The theme for this Assembly, “Seeds for the Future: Environmental Justice and Ethical Culture,” is especially fitting this year as Albuquerque faces a number of environmental justice issues we will learn about together. From uranium to factory farming, climate justice to environmental activism, Albuquerque is leading the charge on national and international environmental concerns in which we must get more involved.

Albuquerque is home to many Native American people, including those from 19 Pueblos in New Mexico. Indigenous people have long borne the brunt of attacks on the environment and have much to discuss with us on what work is needed.

On Friday, June 8, hear live music by Son of Hwéeldi, a Resistance Rock band whose songs focus on the historic persistence and current struggles of the indigenous community: corruption in politics, the Dakota Access Pipeline fight, respect for water, and gratitude for life.

Ethical Culture is a heavily east coast and central US organization so New Mexico offers an opportunity to develop a new Ethical Culture presence in the west. The AEU’s New Society Development Team is already working to establish a new Circle. We also are connecting with local humanist/secular/skeptic groups who will run a workshop (Friday, June 8) titled “Humanism, Skepticism, Atheism, Non-Theism and other Heresies.”

The American Ethical Union is run by and for Ethical Culture members and the Assembly is where we democratically elect representatives, pass resolutions, approve budgets, meet key people throughout the movement, and learn about opportunities for engagement in the Union. This year we’ll be selecting a logo and tagline for the AEU as part of our Branding Project.

Lastly, Assemblies offer opportunities to reconnect with old friends and make new ones as we gather to celebrate life, work on our values, and award dedicated advocates for Ethical Humanism. Discover firsthand that you are an integral part of a much broader Movement with shared values and goals. We are so spread out and busy with our lives that it’s essential that we make time annually to come together, share ideas, recharge batteries, and validate that we are not alone in our work. The more members in attendance, the greater the energy and the more impact this Assembly will have as we strive to grow the Movement.

We’ve extended Early Bird savings to May 11th and offer a variety of registration packages as well as a student discount. Those attending Assembly can easily contribute when you register and enjoy the rewards of a strong and diverse ethical community! If you are still unable to join us at Assembly, please help send others by contributing to the Voices at the Table Fund.

Hoping to see you all in Albuquerque!
Congregations for Justice and Peace  
*Jim White, Leader Emeritus*

With significant Ethical Culture leadership, the Harlem-based, interfaith coalition called Congregations for Justice and Peace (CfJ&P) has taken action on behalf of the lives taken by uniformed US police. The Washington Post estimates that upwards of a thousand people are killed nationally each year. Nearly half are people of color. Fully one-quarter are victims in mental distress.

For almost a year and a half we have focused on the killing of Deborah Danner, an acutely psychotic African-American woman whose Bronx precinct was called to bring her to a hospital for treatment. Within five minutes of his arrival at her apartment, Sgt. Hugh Barry claimed she was about to kill him with a bat and shot her with his service gun instead of trying to subdue her with a taser. Both the NYC mayor and police commissioner decried Barry’s actions as a breach of protocol. He was suspended, indicted, and in February was acquitted of all criminal charges.

Horrified at this result, CfJ&P is working to build a citywide coalition for fundamental reform of the city’s response to calls for help with people in mental distress. For over a year we have been in dialogue with the Police Reform Organizing Project (PROP) led by Robert Gangi, a member of the New York Society for Ethical Culture and a previous recipient of the American Ethical Union Elliott-Black award. We believe that PROP has outlined the most appropriate plan for change in response to calls for help in cases like Ms. Danner’s.

Briefly, PROP’s position is that uniformed, weapon wielding officers are not only largely untrained in de-escalation techniques, but also by their threatening presence provoke a more dangerously polarized situation in which violence and even death are much more likely. Rather, first responders should usually be civilian personnel whose training and mandate can over extended time bring a disturbed person into a more trusting frame of mind conducive to treatment. We are working to develop extensive writing about research explaining and justifying PROP’s proposal, and engaging in extensive outreach for support among community, professional, and religious organizations.
The public outcry was immediate in the aftermath of the tragic gun violence at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida which killed 17 individuals and left another 17 wounded on February 14th of this year. In the days following the incident a number of student spokespeople emerged whose powerful statements and impassioned pleas for reforms generated a groundswell of support. After the students filled the gallery of the Florida state legislature lawmakers passed new gun ownership restrictions—the first such measures to pass in 20 years.

Student organizing led to the March for Our Lives in Washington, DC on March 24th as well as hundreds of solidarity marches across the country and around the world involving over a million marchers. Four students, Emma Gonzalez, David Hogg, Cameron Kasky, and Naomi Wadler were especially prominent and gave engaging and articulate presentations. They stood up to critics and to those who tried to dismiss their demands for gun law reforms and they pressed their case with power and persistence.

The question remains as to the long-term efficacy of the students’ campaign for reform. Certainly the energy post-march is nowhere near what it was in the weeks leading up to it, and if there are more legislative proposals in the works I doubt they will be at the top of lawmakers’ agendas in the near future. We can, however, press ahead and continue to build upon what has been put forward in the past. Ethical Culture founder Felix Adler, in his book “An Ethical Philosophy of Life” encourages getting in touch with our “collective obligation” to address and re-address the conditions that impede societal moral progress. He sees this as an additive process where we build upon the foundations of those who have come before us, contribute what we can, and also lay the foundations for those who will follow us. To do that we need to exhibit what he called a “threelfold reverence” that aims to preserve and expand what is best.

We have an opportunity to put our threelfold reverence to work in the area of gun laws reform. Our predecessors passed a resolution in 1974 that called for strict controls: “the possession of hand guns should be outlawed, with the exception of those used by law enforcement officers and those serving in allied occupations. The possession of firearms for hunting and sports should be strictly licensed.” At the time, this resolution was pretty much in step with public opinion. Even the NRA was in favor of restrictions on gun ownership in its early years and the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King Jr. inspired a number of laws and restrictions.

Since then there has been a significant shift, however, and even though the great majority of people in the United States do not own guns themselves and/or favor restrictions on gun ownership and use, proponents of gun laws face an uphill battle against a well-organized and financed gun rights movement. Our contemporaries have identified a number of common sense measures that are broadly acceptable: restrictions on automatic weapons, restrictions on bullet clips, universal background checks, and “red flag” measures to temporarily take away guns from people deemed by a judge to be dangerous. The popularity of these measures has not translated into widespread political action, however.

And so we hope that those who are following us, the teens and pre-teens who have passionately and eloquently demanded action for gun reform, will add their energy and conviction to the effort and so help tip the balance toward sensible legislation and enforcement. The youth have called for action on the part of elected officials and, if they follow through with their agenda, will be a force to be reckoned with at the polls in years to come.

The American Ethical Union should continue support for sensible gun legislation. We would do well, however, to update the resolution we passed 44 years ago to reflect the challenges of our current situation. There is still time to do that before the Assembly. If you would like to contribute to the effort to develop an updated resolution, send a message to the Ethical Action Committee at eac@aeu.org.
National Leaders Council Gets Existential in Nature

Hugh Taft-Morales, NLC President

A majority of active Leaders met at Murray Grove Retreat Center from March 18-20 for rejuvenation, philosophical discussions, and our business meeting. Rejuvenation was thanks to each other’s company, nature walks, shared poetry, and singing—all helpful in returning to our work in a more grounded and refreshed manner. The National Leaders Council (NLC) expressed deep appreciation to the American Ethical Union Board and the Board of the New York Society for Ethical Culture for their generous grants to help cover costs of renting space for our meetings last fall and this spring.

We discussed two leadership issues: how we can more effectively serve the national movement through the Visiting Leaders Bureau and incorporating different models of professional Leadership. We hope to plan visits, in particular to Societies without professional Leaders, to pay attention to the unique situation of each Ethical Society or Circle. We emphasized how important it was to have substantive discussions prior to visits to determine what services and topics each Ethical Society most needs in order to flourish. We also discussed the idea of a team leadership model where a number of Leaders serve a group of Societies, as with “yoked congregations.” Bart Worden is steering conversations in the AEU to consider offering training in more of an “a la carte” fashion. This might facilitate more people engaging in training without necessarily having to commit to a full Leadership training program.

Some of our conversations were more existential in nature and appropriate for all members of Ethical Culture to consider. The first focused on the fifth volume of our Reflections Journal, which will address Ethical Culture’s unique relationship to environmentalism especially given how humanist groups are often critiqued as being overly “humano-centric.” There are historical Ethical Culture links to the appreciation of nature, including Adler’s tradition of nurturing natural spirituality by summering in the Adirondacks.

We debated whether Ethical Culture should frame this discussion as being about whether nature is an end in itself or is merely instrumental regarding human needs. While there was no consensus, there was great support for stressing human responsibility, as opposed to arguing for humans to claim privileged status as “owners” of nature. At the very least we should be held responsible for the waste we dump on the planet. And, of course, the Leaders will continue to try to minimize the denial and cynicism that can lead to inaction.

Lastly, we discussed the grand existential challenge to process our own mortality. Some expressed their personal faith that the energy of our being remains after our death in some non-personal form, while others see their mortality as representing the end of their being in every sense. There was some agreement that awareness of our mortality can move us to make the most of our limited time, while accepting that our work will always be left unfinished. Many in Ethical Culture speak of “outliving” our own bodily existence by contributing good works to the world that will remain after we die. All of us can help strengthen the organizations that institutionalize justice work. All of us can nurture caring, loving relationships that strengthen the resolve and capacity of the next generation.
Notes from Your AEU Board

Jill Aul, Board Secretary

Your Board of Directors met (virtually) on January 20 and February 17, and in person in New York City on March 10. Here are some of the highlights to share what we have been working on.

The board is very pleased to announce that the New Society Development Committee has just been formed, and will focus solely on creating Ethical Societies in areas where none already exist. Their focus is centering on two new cities where interest is high among local humanists who want to learn more about starting Ethical Societies: Albuquerque and Atlanta. The original Membership Committee is still in existence, but will focus solely on growing and supporting present Societies.

Plans are well underway for this year’s annual Assembly June 7-10 in beautiful Albuquerque, New Mexico. We are excited about the wonderful keynote speakers, workshops, social activities and other opportunities that will be offered, centering around this year’s theme: “Seeds for the Future: Environmental Justice and Ethical Culture” (#ethicalseed2018).

Members of the Board have also been working on ways to include “Members At Large,” who can join our Movement even if they do not live near an Ethical Society. We desire to include everyone who would like to be connected, no matter where they live, and are making accommodations to do so.

We have also spent a great amount of time working on refreshed branding for our Movement. New logos and tag lines will be rolled out to Societies soon and voted on at the Assembly.

One of the projects we are most excited about involves the recent hiring of the Momentum, a public relations firm based in New York City. For the past three years, this firm has been working for the New York Society for Ethical Culture with very positive results. The Board decided to hire Momentum for a trial period of five months, thanks to several generous board members who have donated 70% of the cost. The company is already hard at work bringing national attention to our Movement, by connecting us to “hot topics” covered in large media outlets. These include gun control, women’s rights, and racism. Interviews and inclusion in panels have already been scheduled in several locations around the US. Momentum’s plans will also support our efforts to create new Ethical Societies.

We have learned a great deal about the difference between marketing/advertising and public relations. The focus of this initiative is to bring much greater positive awareness about our Movement to interested people all around the country. By generating interest and sharing information about who we are and what we do, the ultimate hope is that our existing Societies will continue to grow and thrive, and new ones will develop. We hope that once the initial trial period has passed, we will discover that it was successful and should continue. Look for much more information about this exciting new endeavor coming soon!

New AEU Logo and Tag Line Coming Soon

As part of an effort to more effectively share the message of Ethical Culture with the world, the AEU began a process last year to clarify and modernize our branding. Many members have contributed their ideas to this initiative, most recently by submitting logo and tag line suggestions. Within the next two weeks, three candidate logos and three potential tag lines created based on the input we received will be published for your review.

It is our hope that member Societies will discuss the logos and tag lines internally, ensuring that delegates come to the Assembly prepared to vote for the options preferred by their Societies. As a reminder, this initiative is not intended to dictate any changes to the logos and other branding used by member Societies. The new logo and tag line will be used by the AEU, and will be available for member Societies to use as desired.

Please keep an eye out for further information in the coming weeks, and address any questions you may have to logoideas@aeu.org!
Costuming for Humanitas: Dandies Inspired with Africana Twist

The Humanitas film is slowly and surely coming together as the media team and designer Leesa Thompson, hustle for the first film date of May 27th in London. Director Jé Hooper, Ethical Culture leader-in-training and Mossler Fellow, wants nothing less than perfection for costuming. Although Leesa is designing in California while Jé is studying in Ohio, they have been in constant communication and discussion of the function of each character’s outfit. “Leesa was the best designer for the job because of her years in costume design,” said Jé. “I can’t imagine doing a project without her creative genius.”

The concept of the Dandies is native to the modernization of black male apparel evolving in Brooklyn in the early 2000s. Often men are seen with a double-breasted suit, vest, bowties, flowers in the lapel, and maybe also a hat. The outfit is normally slim fit with narrow silhouette to suggest the contours of the figure. Leesa took this suit concept to the next level of design for Adler, DuBois, and other characters in the film. “My inspiration for this project came primarily from the Dandies of the Congo. The look is a blend of very proper, formal suit cuts and bold, modern colors, and prints,” explained Leesa. “I was also inspired by fan art of Anansi for the waiter character. But unlike the others, I decided to make that character’s look more casual and contemporary.”

Leesa Michelle Thompson has had ten years of professional experience in apparel and costume design. After taking an interest in sewing as a teen, she began tailoring and up-cycling her clothing. After high school, she attended Virginia Commonwealth University for Fashion design and developed a passion for costume and cosplay. There she began to blend her practical knowledge with her whimsical passions.

After college, Leesa moved to New York City and began working as a pattern maker for a junior’s brand and then moved to women’s contemporary and men’s sportswear. While in New York, Leesa began freelancing as a seamstress and tailor, and was afforded her first opportunities to apply her creative passion. She later moved across the country to Los Angeles and furthered her career as an independent contractor. Leesa continues to work with designers and artists to make seasonal collections, couture garments, and costumes.
Ethical Action Feature:

Overbrook Youth Environmental Steward Program: Innovation meets Education and Activism

Christian Hayden, Philadelphia Ethical Society

Philadelphia has a storied history of colonial buildings, stunning architecture, and initial national capital status. Philadelphia also has the highest poverty rate of the top ten cities in the US. That along with its tense racial history marks a city divided, proud, and constantly changing. And because of that, Philadelphia’s youth are a key part of its future. The Overbrook Environmental Education Center (OEEC) looks to mobilize that key constituency with its O’YES program (Overbrook Youth Environmental Stewards). The OEEC is nestled along Lancaster Avenue, a uniquely American street that traverses a stark boundary of economical and racial segregation, and approaches the dividing border between city and suburb. It is a stark precipice, sharp line between poverty and wealth, a struggling school system and educational excellence.

Jerome Shabazz spoke at the Philadelphia Ethical Society (PES) of the roots of the program and how it grew to now include 16 youth. In July, Hugh Taft-Morales and I took a tour of the Overbrook Environmental Education Center and we were impressed with the breadth of things it provided and future opportunities it offered. Located on site were a greenhouse and an aquaponics system, which uses fish and microbes produced from their waste to grow produce underwater. There was an educational space, as well as meeting rooms and an operational café.

What is innovative about O’YES is that it is equal parts educational, professional training, and organizing. Embedded in the 16 module program, one that expects a two-year commitment from students, are multiple certification programs, organizing focused activities, and general learning about the environment. One of its foundational stories is how it mobilized youth to clean a Brownfield site where the Overbrook Arts and Environmental Center stands today. The experience gave youth a chance to flex their organizing muscle while at the same time beautifying their community. A few months ago, I wrote an article for the Philadelphia Ethical Society newsletter that underscored the intersection of racial and environmental injustice.

Youth have shown immense political organizing muscle lately around gun violence and the same can indeed be true about the environment.

Jerome Shabazz has big plans for the Overbrook Arts and Environmental Education Center. There is a structure that he hopes to renovate and use to expand programming, perhaps also to host a neighborhood market to sell its produce. The prospective project is cleverly called “The Farmacy.” He also hopes the center and its youth can spur redevelopment for multi-use infrastructure along the corridor that the Overbrook Educational Center sits.

The Philadelphia Ethical Society is honored to support this program and I am honored to serve on the O’YES advisory board. I second the thought of Hugh Taft-Morales in hoping that “these youth share some of their knowledge with PES community, and that more PES members can find ways to support this unique empowerment program right here in Philadelphia.”

In the Grid, a local magazine that focuses on sustainability and innovation, Shabazz states that OEEC, by extension O’YES, immerses students in a “multi-sensory learning environment.”

http://www.gridphilly.com/grid-magazine/2015/9/2/jerome-shabazz-the- visionsary That is an example that fits squarely in the values of Ethical Culture, learning in order to do good.
FES Conference Will Bridge Socio-Political Divide in St Louis

Anya Overmann, Future of Ethical Societies & Ethical Society of St. Louis

Between the Trump administration and movements in support of progress, we’re in the midst of some tense social and political times. At this year’s FES Conference in St Louis, we will workshop our ability to dialogue with those we disagree and effectively do the work to bridge the deep socio-political divide we’re facing in the US.

What to expect:
• Deep discussions with young people
• Dialogue workshop
• Volunteer work with local St. Louis organization
• A platform at the St. Louis Ethical Society
• Fun outings around St. Louis
• New friendships with young, forward-thinking people from across the US

Our conference is open to all people aged 18-35. You need not be a FES Member to attend. Visit https://aeu.org/event/fes-conference-in-st-louis for event details and registration. Send questions to fesconference@gmail.com.

Reach New Heights at Our 2nd Annual Skills Summit

We started planning for our next Skills Summit right after the first one ended so Societies would have more time to make arrangements to attend. Join us Saturday, September 29, 9am-6:30pm at the Washington Ethical Society for a full day of insightful discussion, interactive workshops, and fun collaboration. Together we’ll explore best practices and burning questions on communications, ethical education, membership, and organizational development. Mark your calendars now and check aeu.org in June for more details.

Support American Ethical Union

With your generous support we can learn, share, grow, and make a difference in our Societies and the world.

Donate online, or send a check to the AEU at 2 West 64th St, Ste 406, New York, NY, 10023, or call 212-873-6500 with your credit card information. All contributions to the AEU are tax-deductible.
From United Nations: UN Humanitarian Agencies

Dr. Sylvain Ehrenfeld, IHEU and National Ethical Service representative to the UN

Dr. Reba Goodman, Ethical Culture Society of Bergen County
Special thanks to Charlene Nicole Fulmore


Where is the United Nations when there is famine, hunger, millions of refugees fleeing brutal civil wars, and children dying from preventable and treatable diseases? In fact the UN, via its humanitarian agencies, is there doing the difficult work. The UN is almost invisible and their work is hardly reported.

The UN was founded in 1945. The purpose, as stated in the prologue of the Charter, was “to safeguard peace and security in order to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war” and “to promote social progress and better standard of life.”

The cold war and rivalries between major powers have crippled much UN activity in the political arena. Therefore the UN turned its energy toward humanitarian work to make the world a better place. Let’s briefly look at some of the different agencies.

UNICEF: This agency was founded in 1946 to tend to the millions of children facing hunger and disease in Europe after the Second World War. UNICEF has helped provide nearly 2 billion people with water, immunized 40% of the world’s children, saved 3 million lives a year, and reduced the deaths of children under five by 50% since 1990. It has also attempted to stop child labor, child prostitution, and trafficking. A remarkable achievement!

UNHCR: This refugee agency was founded, ironically, to help displaced Europeans. At the end of the 1940s, millions of people were still trying to find their way home or to find a new home in Europe. For this groundbreaking work, it was awarded a Nobel Peace prize in 1954.

While the current media focus is on the dangerous journey of refugees across the Mediterranean, it is in the vast camps in Africa and the Middle East that UNHCR works with the largest number of people. Developing countries host most of the world’s refugees. There are a staggering 50 million displaced people around the world. UNHCR carries out the difficult and vital work of housing and educating those refugees.

WFP: The world food program was founded in 1962. Within months of its founding it had to deal with an earthquake in Iran and a hurricane in Thailand. On any given day, WFP operates 70 aircraft, 20 ships, and 5,000 trucks delivering food and relief supplies to about 80 million people in 80 countries—and does this every year. In 2014, it helped 42 million people in emergencies.

Some have criticized the WFP delivering food in that it undermines local smallholder farmers. When there is famine, the deliveries are necessary. Where there is a local market, WFP provides cash or vouchers for people to buy food of their choosing and support local markets. This is an amazing agency helping millions of hungry people left destitute after natural or man-made disasters.

All the agencies are funded by voluntary contributions from governments, NGOs, foundations, and private individuals.

There have been conservative voices claiming that humanitarian aid, especially in Africa, doesn’t work and is “money down a rat hole” because the money doesn’t always go to the people who need it. Their claim is based on the prevalence of corruption, and that it promotes dependency and undermines entrepreneurship. Is racism involved here?

A certain amount of corruption certainly exists. Nevertheless, a decade of significant progress in health outcomes and lives saved demonstrates it is very worthwhile. Monitoring is one answer to corruption. Rather than count every dollar, track outcomes. If we have aid that is meant to go to schools, show evidence that kids actually went to school. If we want ARV’s (antiretroviral medication) to treat AIDS, ask: “Are fewer people dying of AIDS?”

The criticism of aid is reminiscent of the discussion of the effectiveness of welfare in the 1960s in the US. Conservatives criticized the war on poverty. President Reagan said: “We fought a war on poverty, and poverty won.” He was wrong. The war on poverty resulted in a significant reduction of poverty. A good example of how government anti-poverty programs can succeed involves the elderly. In 1960, about 35% of older Americans were poor. In 2012, 9% were. It was the result of Social Security (started under F. D. Roosevelt) and Medicare.

If the authors were younger we would seriously consider becoming United Nations Volunteers. Every year, 900 volunteers support UNHCR in 70 countries. They provide critical support to UNHCR to carry out its mandate. There are several ways to volunteer. See the UN website to learn how.
From United Nations: Revisiting Climate Change—Again

We experienced record-breaking climate events in 2017 including some of the highest average surface temperatures ever recorded. Extreme weather events in the US included massive suffering, and caused a total of $306 billion in damage. Unusual events occurred such as sharks freezing in the Atlantic, cold-snapped iguanas falling from trees in Florida, and 106 degrees on September 1 in San Francisco when the average high at that time there is usually about 70 degrees. Southern California experienced its largest wildfire, on the heels of a devastating wildfire in Northern California. Then in rapid succession came monstrous hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, which caused massive destruction in Puerto Rico.

In East Africa there was a humanitarian crisis due to devastating drought. Australia broke many heat and rainfall records and witnessed its warmest winter on record. The extent and rate of Arctic Sea ice decline was unprecedented for the past 1,500 years. The year 2017 experienced the highest level of carbon pollution on record. Scientists found that climate change has threatened almost 1 in 2 mammals and 1 in 4 bird species in at least some part of their range.

Did climate change play a role? Scientists are able to answer that question and increasingly the answer is yes. There is consensus that certainly the intensity of these events was caused by climate change. There is also widespread agreement that human activity played a role.

These events should be a wake up call to us all

The UN is undertaking a major new initiative to combat environmental health risks that claim about an estimated 13 million lives a year. Included are specific actions to air pollution, climate change, and antimicrobial resistance. Our health is directly related to the health of the environment we live in. Climate change affects the earth’s biodiversity and ecosystems, as well as global health.

BIODIVERSITY: A seemingly unending variety of living organisms, genetic diversity, and ecosystems worldwide have been produced by the elements needed to sustain human life: the sunlight, water, and soil that provide the food we eat and air we breathe. Now, life on earth faces an unprecedented challenge from climate change. Among many hazards are pollution, loss of habitat, and deforestation. Current ecological trends contribute to the ongoing rate of species extinction. Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson warns that if current ecological trends continue at the rate they are disappearing right now, half of the earth’s species could be extinct by 2100.

The loss of genetic diversity within species threatens the interdependent ecosystems and complex web of life of which we are a part and which is essential to our wellbeing. Plant and animal species could see dramatic losses as habitats become unsuitable. The collapse of ecosystems would have major economic impacts on agriculture, air quality, and clean water access.

HEALTH CONSEQUENCES:

According to a recent report in Lancet, one of the world’s most prestigious medical journals, climate is already a public health crisis. Heat waves, disease carrying insects, and prolonged allergies are some of the early symptoms. Heat waves over the past two decades were hotter and lasted longer. Warmer temperatures spread insects. Disease carrying insects that thrive in warmer temperatures are increasing.

Two species of mosquito that carry Dengue—a tropical virus that causes high fever, headaches, vomiting, and skin rashes—increased their ability to spread globally. Lyme disease cases in the US have tripled in the past two decades to roughly 300,000 Americans per year as warmer winters expand the area where ticks can survive. Lancet reports that pollution of the air, water, and soil is responsible for an estimated 9 million premature deaths. Climate change and pollution are related. Most air pollution is produced by the same sources that emit carbon dioxide. The same report also presents some hopeful statistics. In places where renewables replaced fossil fuels, particularly coal, mortality decreased.

China is one country where experience of climate change has altered people’s attitudes. The terrible smog that arrives predictably each winter has made air pollution a major concern and people have demanded governmental action. The Chinese government has responded and has announced plans of major cuts in its carbon emission levels. Hopefully they will follow through. Truly, a rare case of people listening to a wake up call. Now when will the US wake up?
NES New Changes
Kay Dundorf, President

National Ethical Service continues to seek ways to raise awareness that each person who is a member of a Society or Circle is also a member of NES. As a non-governmental organization associated with the Department of Information at the United Nations, we will also be preparing information about more ways you can engage with UN events.

We are pleased to be sponsoring the Saturday Luncheon at the 2018 Assembly with NES Secretary Dr. Carolyn A. Parker of the Ethical Society of Austin, as host. Many thanks to Hugh Taft-Morales, who was instrumental in obtaining our luncheon speaker, Richard Moore. Mr. Moore is a widely respected national leader in environmental justice. He will talk about how his work is connected to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030.

While Martha Gallahue resigned from the NES Executive Committee some time ago, in the absence of a replacement, she continued the function of NES Treasurer. Martha has now resigned from that responsibility. NES Vice President, Dr. Kurt Johnson has agreed to a dual role to include that of Treasurer in the interim with the understanding that the President will collaborate with him in handling the responsibilities usually handled by the treasurer. Again we are grateful for Martha’s dedication to NES, which spanned many, many years.

We are pleased to report that Phyllis Sackett, a member of the Ethical Culture Society of Essex County, has joined the NES Executive Committee. We hope you, too, will consider joining the Executive Committee. Our meetings are held via video conferencing, except for the annual meeting held at the Assembly.

Wall of Remembrance
Compiled from Societies’ and newspaper obituaries

Margaret Hirshfield (Bergen) died at the age of 98 on January 20. Margaret was a kind-hearted, very intelligent woman who embraced life with great vigor and curiosity. She was eminently decent and reflected the best of Ethical Culture’s values. Margaret pursued her interests, including being an extensive traveler, well into her 90’s. She had many friends in the Society through the years, attended our platforms and other events, and contributed knitted objects she created to our annual skills auction.

Dick Risk (Northern Virginia) died on December 28. Dick first discovered Ethical Culture at the Ethical Society of St. Louis. He relocated to Northern Virginia and became a founding member of the Northern Virginia Ethical Society in 1983. He served on the NoVES Board, was chair of the finance committee for many years, and served as chair of the Leadership Search Committee in 1996, which recommended hiring Jone Johnson Lewis as our second Leader. He also served the national Ethical Culture Movement, including service for one term as head of the inter-society Non-Governmental Organization at the United Nations, now renamed National Ethical Service.
A Thank You to the American Ethical Union
Hugh Taft-Morales, Ethical Leader

I want to share with you my “thank you” to the American Ethical Union staff for all they do! Operating out of a small office at the New York Society for Ethical Culture at 2 West 64th Street in New York City, Executive Director Bart Worden, Director of Administration Law’rence Miller, and Administrative Assistant Larissa Perez are the hub of the wheel.

Working from remote locations in Boston, St. Louis, and Washington DC are Dean of Leadership Training Susan Rose, Youth of Ethical Societies Coordinator Trish Cowan, Communications Coordinator Emily Newman, and Director of Ethical Education Melissa Sinclair. These folks, many of whom are, on paper, extremely part-time, actually work long hours to help the federation of Ethical Societies in all sorts of ways, ably supported by three volunteers: Eva Yachnes, David Combs, and Rita Wilson!

This group helps coordinate the extensive training and support to our Ethical Culture Leaders. I found my three years of training extremely important in developing my leadership skills and improving my knowledge of Ethical Culture. The AEU staff plans our Annual Assemblies full of keynote speeches, workshops, colloquies, meals, social events, and the AEU business meetings where local societies can shape our national budget and strategy. AEU staff coordinates awards, including the Elliott-Black Award: to individuals or groups sacrificing to advance the values we share in Ethical Culture, the Anna Garlin Spencer Award: for outstanding volunteer contributions to Ethical Societies, and the Mossler Fellowship: for creative work in advancing our Movement.

The AEU staff also coordinate skills summits and national conferences, such as those for our youth (YES) and for young adults (FES). They maintain the AEU’s website and social media platforms so there is a strong Ethical Humanist presence in the media. The AEU also supports the work of National Ethical Service, our very own NGO at the United Nations, and the AHA Center for Education.

I haven’t even touched on the support the staff gives our American Ethical Union Board headed by Philadelphia Ethical Society member John McCormick. The AEU Board, by the way, has just hired Momentum, a public relations firm that will help us become better known. Now more than ever, as our nation and world seem to be leaning toward authoritarian governance and climate collapse, we need to share more widely our unique philosophical worldview and offer our relational approach to problem-solving.

It is the relationships I have with the AEU staff, however, that make me deeply committed to our federating organization. Respect for these relationships is hard to convey to you in a newsletter article. Relationships take time and experience to grow strong. I can’t convey adequately Susan’s mentoring support for me, Emily’s candid advice and efficiency, Trish’s contribution to a youth program that benefited my children, or Melissa’s educational insights offered at three institutions I served: the Northern Virginia Ethical Society, the Washington Ethical Society, and, now, the AEU. All these relationships mean a lot to me, as does the health of our national Movement.

I hope you are willing to get to know the AEU better by visiting their website (aeu.org), attending national and regional meetings, and consider serving on any one of the AEU committees or on the Board. I believe such contribution will both help advance Ethical Humanism as well as reap rewards for your Society!
How Would You Help Spread Ethical Culture?

The Ethical Culture Movement is made up of dedicated and passionate Societies across the US supported by the American Ethical Union (AEU). Do you have a project idea to help us expand the Movement? Apply now for the Mossler Fellowship so we can help you get started.

The Mossler Trust was set up by the estate of Adele S. Mossler, who died in 1984. Mossler was a member of the New York Society for Ethical Culture and Director of the Play Schools Association, which was dedicated to the recreational needs of children. The Mossler endowment provides funding each year to create one or more Fellowships for members to spread the Ethical Culture Movement.

Past Mossler Fellows include:
- **Adam Foldes** – Archiving Ethical Culture documents and preparing their digitalization
- **Elizabeth (Liz) Mulhall Collier** – Researching the needs and wants of young humanists and implementing programs to improve outreach
- **Sandi Sacks** – Growing programs that encourage members to share their stories and their passion for Ethical Culture
- **Christian Hayden** – Developing colloquy structure and content to be used for groups outside of Ethical Culture
- **Jé Hooper** – Producing an independent film that investigates the concepts of social ethics from Adler's Ethical Ideals to DuBois’s reclaiming of humanization for black people

The American Ethical Union's Board of Directors determines Fellowship awards based on the following criteria (in no order of priority):
- A project proposal that would contribute to the spread of the Ethical Culture Movement nationally
- Extent of volunteer efforts on behalf of Ethical Society or AEU
- Recommendation by an Ethical Culture Society member

Mossler Fellowship applications and all supporting documents are due to the AEU by 5:00 PM Monday, May 7. Awards and amounts will be determined at the AEU’s May board meeting. All applicants will be notified of their status by May 28. Applications are available online here.