### Joining Forces for the 2017 Skills Summit

**Melissa Sinclair, National Director of Ethical Education**

One thing that has become abundantly apparent, especially as technology and social media has entered all areas of our lives, is that we benefit from and need to work in teams across different areas of expertise in Ethical Culture. The Membership people need to work with the Communications people and the Communications people need help from the Ethical Education people who need help from the membership people and so on. And all of these areas need to work seamlessly together to make a well-functioning Society.

As we continue to work more in teams within the American Ethical Union, we are joining more areas of specialties in a combined Skills Summit—with Communications, Ethical Education and Membership teams joining forces to gain skills together and separately.

This October 14th at the Philadelphia Ethical Society we will have an all-day Saturday event from early morning (check-in at 9am) through early evening. There will be some informal gatherings on Friday evening and Sunday morning for those arriving early and staying late. There will be some home hospitality arrangements possible, as well as recommendations for hotels (hotel arrangements will need to be made by attendees). More information will be forthcoming, as we get closer to the event.

How will this Skills Summit work? We will have some joint sessions together and workshop sessions for us to attend based on your Society roles or interests. There will be a Communications tract, an Ethical Education tract and a Membership tract. There will be time over catered meals to mingle with the other members attending to share what we have learned.

Having it combined gives more people an opportunity to bring back to the Society what they heard at the same time. It also allows for people to carpool and share hotel expenses if needed. As was announced at Assembly, if you are interested in sharing news and ideas about Ethical Culture, if you are interested in attracting and keeping new members, and if you want to see more children raised in your Societies, then this Skills Summit is for you.

Agenda items are being created for the conference now. If there are topics of special interest to you, contact one of the Team leaders for the Conference, Emily Newman, Communications (enewman@aeu.org), Melissa Sinclair, Ethical Education (msinclair@aeu.org), and Richard Koral, Membership (rkoral@aeu.org).
It was a great honor to have been elected President of the American Ethical Union Board at our 102nd AEU Assembly. A number of members stopped to offer me their congratulations and support. I was particularly struck when someone widely known and respected in the Movement said “I look forward to your leadership”. In a few words, she was able to couple a warm compliment with a gentle admonition. This job comes with real responsibilities and expectations. I promise to do my best not to let you down.

I want to recognize my immediate predecessor, Andra Miller. I didn’t know Andra until she became Board President in June 2016, but now I consider her a friend and mentor who taught leadership by example. It was a loss to Ethical Culture when family circumstances made it necessary for her to resign this past May. I will continue to seek her advice and counsel going forward.

Our recent well-attended Assembly in Baltimore inspires us all to do more. Kudos to the Assembly Committee, dedicated AEU staff, and presenters who made it possible, and thanks to all who joined us. Some of the many highlights that stood out to me were these:

• Keynote speakers Congressman Jamie Raskin [below left] and Adam Jackson [below center] of Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle;
• Elliott-Black honorees, the Baltimore youth group Free Your Voice [below right];
• Certification of a new Leader, Richard Koral, and the introduction of two new leaders-in-training – Jé Hooper and Laura Buzek;
• Welcome input from our new Circles in Chicago and Susquehanna Valley;
• Platform that included singing by our Ethical Chorus (led by Washington Ethical Society Chorus) and address by Hugh Taft Morales, Leader of Baltimore Ethical Society;
• And of course the terrific workshops, many of which were focused on the central theme of “Communities Confronting Systemic Racism”.

So what are the Board priorities for the coming year? The central theme of the Assembly served to emphasize the lack of Board diversity that must and will be addressed. Improving communications is high on the list as are sharing more resources and networking opportunities with Societies, rejuvenating Lay Leadership Summer School, reworking “members-at-large” options, and expanding fundraising.

How can you pitch in to help? Start locally by volunteering to serve on committees and expressing your interest in serving on the board of your own Society. Let us know what your Society is doing and let your Society know what we are doing so we can all help each other. Consider serving on an AEU committee or, better yet, run for the AEU Board. Chances are you might just find the work a source of joy and satisfaction, as I do. Stay in touch with the AEU through email, visiting aeu.org, and attending more wonderful events (both in person and virtually). I’ll see you again soon.
News from the National Leaders Council
(NLC Officers: Hugh Taft-Morales, President; Randy Best, Vice-President; Kate Lovelady, Secretary; Richard Koral, Treasurer; Martha Gallahue)

The National Leaders Council met this past June 6-8 at the Baltimore Holiday Inn Inner Harbor prior to the AEU Assembly. Seventeen Leaders attended all or part of three days of meetings during which we spent much time preparing for the AEU Assembly “Bmoreethical2017.”

The Leaders paid particular attention to preparing for the discussion of, and vote on, “Toward Repairing the Harm.” This NLC-submitted resolution encourages Ethical Societies and committees to learn about, and support, reparations for harm done by slavery and systemic racism in the United States. Led by Leaders Jone Johnson Lewis, interested Assembly attendees recommended some clarifying amendments. The healthy discussion and work session helped the resolution pass by consensus at the final AEU Business meeting. Now the real work starts—turning the resolution into action.

The NLC also welcomed two new Leaders-in-Training, Jé Hooper and Laura Buzek. We spent time brainstorming the contents of a new NLC orientation document to help make it more transparent to, and inclusive of, new members. This orientation document will offer information about the history and purpose of the NLC, the focus of seasonal meetings, our governance structure and by-laws, our relation to the AEU, the culture of the NLC at retreats, and more.

With the infusion of new perspectives a perennial question arose: How can Leaders make the best use of time together during our face-to-face meetings. We hope to explore that in more detail leading up to our fall NLC meeting scheduled for October 22-25.

The NLC also began planning for the 2018 Assembly in Albuquerque centered on the social justice theme for 2017-2018 of environmental justice. Given the current administration’s irresponsible dismissal of climate change, and the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on marginalized communities, this focus is particularly important. The Leaders look forward to working with members from around the country to craft another wonderful Assembly program!

Save These Dates
For details visit www.aeu.org

AEU Board Meetings
Individual members of Societies are welcome to attend. (Usually held at New York Society for Ethical Culture)
Sat. November 18 – NYSEC
Sat. January 20 – conf call
Sat. March 10 – NYSEC
Sat. April 28 – NYSEC
Thu. June 7 & Sun. June 10 – Assembly in Albuquerque

AEU Skills Summit
Sat. Oct 14, 9am-6pm (Fri & Sun optional)
Philadelphia, PA

Youth of Ethical Societies Conference
Theme TBA
Fri. Nov 10 - Sun. Nov 12
New York

Future of Ethical Societies Conference
Theme TBA
Fri. May 25 - Sun. May 28
St. Louis, MO

AEU 103rd Annual Assembly on Climate Justice
Thu. June 7 - Sun. June 10
Albuquerque, NM

Special United Nations Days
(Click here for details)
Aug 19 - World Humanitarian Day
Sep 21 - International Day of Peace
Oct 24 - United Nations Day
This year’s Annual Assembly was remarkable in many ways: we had a large turnout, strong keynotes, interesting workshops, and amazing performances, plus the diversity of our participants was wider than ever. There was a lot of positive energy around our challenging theme “Communities Confronting Systemic Racism,” exposing us to many rich opportunities to learn, be inspired, and increase our commitment to undoing racism.

I especially appreciated the message of our 2nd Keynote Speaker, Adam Jackson, CEO of Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle. Mr. Jackson deftly unpacked how funding for nonprofit organizations in Baltimore has been funneled through a nonprofit industrial complex that works against collective Black empowerment. He noted that the boards of many of the nonprofits in Baltimore that serve Black people are composed of people who are beholden to the corporate sector and are mostly white, as is the social network of those who make funding decisions.

Jackson’s points hit close to home. As a longtime social worker who has been part of administration for many years I know all too well that the leadership of “successful” nonprofits in my own communities is predominantly white, as are those in charge of the government offices that make many of the funding decisions. Jackson calls attention to the deep rooted and complex structures that support white privilege and suppress Black accomplishment that, often despite good intentions, permeate all of our institutions—including our own Ethical Union.

On June 11th our Assembly passed a new resolution on racism, “Toward Repairing the Harm of Racism.” Doing so was a significant accomplishment if we, as an organization, make good on the resolution’s call for our communities to “study the lasting effects of the heritage of enslavement and racial discrimination...to study the effects and consider ways to repair such effects...to find one or more areas to focus on where such injustice is experienced...to center the participation and voices of people of color in such efforts...study proposals and legislative efforts which originate in communities of color, with an intent to identify initiatives the Society will focus on and support.”

When the proposed resolution was presented to the President’s Council there was some pushback—largely on the grounds that the proposal didn’t go far enough—that it called for more study but was not very specific on the actions that would be taken to move us forward toward repairing our fractured society. And so, as we study, let’s look to how we’ll put our study to work. A system that has been assembled over hundreds of years will be difficult to dismantle. And as a predominantly white Movement, our membership is likely to carry biases, often unconsciously, that will, if left unexamined, work against the empowerment of those whose lives have been most negatively affected by structural racism.

Honoring the resolution entails both study and commitment to action, and both study and action need to be informed by an unflinching historical perspective and deep engagement with individuals and organizations who know personally how racism divides our communities and exalts some while oppressing others. Honoring the resolution means getting past our own reluctance and discomfort to move into unfamiliar territory as we move from anti-racist allies to anti-racist collaborators who are deeply invested in creating and sustaining a society that supports the flourishing of all people—with no exceptions.

The Union’s Ethical Action Committee will be providing educational resources to Ethical Societies to help with study and action, and will strive to build our national conversation about our efforts to overcome the challenges that impede progress. And we rely on you, our members and supporters, to join the fray and share your experiences with the Movement.

And you can start right away by joining (if you haven’t done so already) the Union’s Ethical Action list. Just send an email message to Ethical.Action.List@aeu.org and we’ll put you on the list! Together we can honor the resolution we have supported to repair the harm of racism. Together we can make a positive difference in our communities and in the world around us.
Humanitas: W.E.B. Du Bois and Felix Adler in the Silence of Solidarity

Emily Newman, AEU Communications Coordinator

For the past two Assemblies, the American Ethical Union has focused on building racial justice, confronting white supremacy, and questioning how we as individuals, communities, and a nation could do more. This work is important now but it is not new to Ethical Culture.

“I remember a long evening which I once spent in the company of a leader among the colored people, and one of the best men I have ever known. I looked that night deep into a suffering, sensitive human soul, and I tried to put myself in his place. I realized the hardships of his lot, the anguish that I myself should suffer if I were in his position.” (An Ethical Philosophy of Life, p. 236)

Felix Adler, who founded Ethical Culture in 1876, is referring to meeting W.E.B. Du Bois, the Pan-Africanist civil rights leader. “Adler tries to understand a peer’s struggle in order to look outside his own patriarchal whiteness. W.E.B. struggles to identify himself in human framework when he was not seen as human by society often,” explains Jé Hooper, Ethical Culture Leader-in-Training and 2017 Mossler Fellow. “I’m going to bring this to life.”

For his Mossler Fellowship to help spread Ethical Culture nationally, Jé will conduct a racial-historical and performance analysis between Felix Adler and W.E.B. Du Bois to “interrogate the Victorian era’s social behavior towards race and equity in light of our struggles in modernity...The goal is to utilize this film to assist in developing strategies for reconciliation and restorative justice, while re-evaluating and re-imagining the history of Ethical Culture.” Jé’s film, “Humanitas: W.E.B. Du Bois and Felix Adler in the Silence of Solidarity,” will include a provocative mix of music, dance, discussion, and silence as we explore the relationship between these two great thinkers. The film screening, which will occur in 2018 in New York City (the birthplace of Ethical Culture), will be followed by a panel discussion allowing viewers to ask questions and express thoughts on the film. Jé will also be documenting and sharing his process on a website with video-commentary, so you won’t need to wait until next year to enjoy this project.

Along with being a passionate member of the Riverdale-Yonkers Society for Ethical Culture and their former Director of Family Programming, Jé is a scholar of arts, justice, and theology. He received a BFA and a Master of Professional Studies from the Pratt Institute in art-based learning and administration. He graduated the Union Theological Seminary, earned a DMin from the New Seminary, and is now working towards a Ph.D. at Ohio University. For the AEU, he has run workshops, performed at Assembly, and developed new forms of Platforms that go way beyond the traditional lecture format.

We can’t wait to see how Jé’s project develops and encourage you all to watch for updates.

*Before Du Bois, the modern Pan-African Movement was started by Henry Sylvester-Williams in 1900. Henry’s grandson, Shaun Sylvester-Williams, is a member of the New York Society for Ethical Culture.*
Notes from Your AEU Board

Karen Elliott,
former Board Secretary

The American Ethical Union Board met on Saturday, May 6, 2017 at the New York Society for Ethical Culture and on Thursday, June 8 and Sunday, June 11, 2017 in Baltimore, MD at the AEU Assembly.

AEU Executive Director Bart Worden reports that action continues on work to help existing Societies grow and new Societies form. The Membership Committee, led by Richard Koral (former President of the AEU and a Leader at the New York Society for Ethical Culture), is organizing web meetings as a venue for newly forming groups to interact with each other. Many organizers would like help with identifying people they can reach out to and how to publicize formation of the groups. If you would like to help the AEU create a more ethical culture by promoting the growth of Ethical Societies and providing more services to member Societies so that they may also increase their membership, please donate on a national level as well as to your local Society.

The Membership Committee is also collaborating with the Ethical Education Committee, led by AEU National Director of Ethical Education Melissa Sinclair, and the Communications Committee, led by AEU Communications Coordinator Emily Newman, on a multi-faceted fall training called AEU Skills Summit 2017.

The Board approved a project to look at re-branding the AEU. We are really excited about this process, which has already begun with a survey sent out to all members of member Societies. We expect the project to produce a high graphic quality logo available in various formats, as well as developing templates and guidelines for a standard look and feel for all AEU materials.

Much of May’s meeting was dedicated to decisions and information related to the upcoming Assembly, which (spoiler alert) was packed with great information and meaningful experiences. (See the AEU on Facebook for some samples of what those attending experienced.) On a sadder note, after many deliberations and attempts at reconciliation the Board agreed to the Ethical Humanist Society of Chicago’s request to leave the Union. (Note: the Chicago Ethical Humanist Circle is growing and individuals are welcome to be members of both groups).

Work has begun on rethinking the AEU’s popular Lay Leadership Summer School. LLSS has been held every other year since 1996 in the mountains of North Carolina, which are ideal for a retreat “away from it all” but both the location and the length of the time commitment have limited the number of attendees. There has also been a desire expressed for LLSS to be more inclusive in the way materials are covered and what information is covered as well. To help the group looking into this, those who attended the LLSS Reunion during Assembly in Baltimore were asked to give their ideas about what could be done better and a bit of how. As one would expect, there was plenty of feedback provided. Although there will be no LLSS (or replacement) in 2018, we can look forward to a re-imagined version in the future. In the meantime, many of those of us who had the pleasure of attending LLSS remain active both nationally and locally on behalf of the Ethical Movement.

The new Board was elected into office at the Assembly, with five elected members continuing. Outgoing members are Past President Andra Miller, who regretfully resigned her position early, Linda Napoli who served one three-year term, and Carol Bartell and myself (Karen Elliott), who both served two three-year terms and were thus term-limited off of the Board. Serving on the AEU Board is work, but it is also a great pleasure—both in having a greater awareness of positive growth in the Movement and in knowing that in some ways we have helped the Movement, which has so much to offer to so many individuals—many of whom are unaware of who we are and what we do.

New Board President John McCormick (Philadelphia Ethical Society) sees three major priorities for the in-coming Board: determining how people who want to support and participate in the Movement but do not live near a Society can join us, re-imagining Lay Leadership Summer School, and getting the new AEU Resources Site (using Google’s G Suite) fully implemented, publicized, and in use. Regarding the latter, staff and committees of the AEU have been working on gathering

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and sharing materials that they use and/or that would be helpful to Societies. Some areas will be available to all members of AEU member groups and others will be restricted to certain working groups, such as committees, task forces, and the Board. This will develop into a robust, well-used source of information.

The AEU Board is aware that effective communications within the Movement has been a weakness. Some years ago, the Presidents’ Council was revived to increase communications between the AEU Board and the Societies. The Board has also just formed a task force to look at how we can better communicate internally (within the AEU and within the Movement). Task force members are AEU Communications Coordinator Emily Newman, Sonja Kueppers (AEU Board), Ken Novak (AEU Board and Communications Committee), Karen Elliott (AEU Personnel Committee), and John McCormick (AEU Board President). The first challenge is to assess those areas that require the most work.

The next AEU Board meeting will be a teleconference on Saturday, July 29, 2017 starting at 10 am. Members of member Societies are always welcome to attend and can request the call-in number from Law’rence Miller, Administrative Director, at lmiller@aeu.org. AEU Board meetings are posted in advance in the Events section of the AEU website.

This will be my last “Notes from the Board.” As I mentioned previously, it has been my pleasure to serve the Ethical Movement as a Board member for the last six years and I look forward to continuing to serve it in other capacities in the future. The world—and in particular our country—has a great need for many voices reminding people that living ethical lives and working to bring out the best in others will help each of us live truly rich and rewarding lives in such ways that we do not limit others’ ability to do so as well. It is up to all of us who realize the importance of this to spread the word about how beneficial living in Ethical community can be. As the great scientist Albert Einstein said, “Without ‘ethical culture’, there is no salvation for humanity.”
Good morning. In Ethical Culture—that’s this—there are a lot of ways to grow. We take care of each other through life’s ups and downs. But at this time in history we are called on to confront systemic racism. This is not easy. Just ask our friends of color in this room who’ve been doing it all their lives. For those of you, this is for you—thanks for being my teachers.

Another teacher, Michael Eric Dyson, used to say in church, “If the sermon ain’t making you a little bit uncomfortable, it ain’t effective.” In his book Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America, Dyson explains, “…if it doesn’t cost you anything, you’re not really engaging in change; you’re engaging in convenience. You’re engaged in the overflow.”

At our best Ethical Culture can do better than that. We are all at different points on this journey, but we have this much in common—we all have much more work to do, as individuals, as Ethical Societies, and as a nation. And I suggest that those of us who identify as white, as I do, have the most work to do.

For people of color, the wounds of racism are painful, often fatal. But racism has infected us all and wounded us all—psychologically and ethically—in manners profound and subtle and obvious and mundane. We must transform those wounds into corrective action and redemption.

For this transformation to reflect Ethical Culture values, it must be grounded on loving, candid, respectful, ethical relationships. We know that. This is the heart of Ethical Culture after all. Anti-racism work for us—the salvation is in our relationships.

But for this transformation to be effective, it must involve working for transformation simultaneously internally, institutionally, and nationally. You can’t wait for one to do the others.

(I) Transforming My Petty Suffering

On the personal level, the work I have to do to transform my personal petty suffering to help me do my anti-racism work is pretty simple for me. I use the term “petty” to describe the wound I have due to racism, intentionally. I don’t mean to be dismissive. I don’t mean to be dramatic. Despite my comfortable life, the suffering is real, as it is for many who lead a comfortable life.

But I use the term “petty” as a relative term. My suffering is obviously petty compared to 400 years of suffering endured by enslaved African and their descendants, and people of color from suffer from racism. I’m not going to go into the multiple and nefarious ways racism continues to wound and kill people of color. You can read Randall Robinson or Michelle Alexander or talk to a number of people in this room.

Transformation began for me growing up on a college campus during the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King Jr. was a hero of mine who epitomized Cornel West’s reminder “…that justice is what love looks like in public.”

So I developed a deep though naïve yearning to end racism. In my adolescent imagination I was walking right alongside the icons of the movement, as some of you did in reality. But in this little imaginary experiment, it helped transform the fear, anger and ugliness of racism into righteous indignation. I didn’t want to be part of the problem. I wanted to be part of the solution.

The day after King was shot that solution seemed a lot further away. My 5th grade teacher gathered us together for something of a public service announcement. She said, “Be careful heading home and over the weekend because the black children are angry—they might take it out on you. Watch where you go in the city.” I was confused, sad, scared.

My confusion grew only more when in 1969 when we moved to Berkeley, California, and I attended 7th grade at Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School, just renamed in honor of the slain moral leader. There the color of my skin, and the correct assumption of my privilege, made me a target. So I was threatened a couple of times, beaten up a couple of times, and I felt paralyzed and unable to process then.

I’m not going to go into the details about the inner work I did as an adult to begin to process my childhood fears and anger. You can do that work. But too often whites get caught up trying to prove to each other who was most wounded, or maybe trying to prove you are “more multicultural than thou.”

Do the inner work, but connect that inner work to the outside work. You can’t retreat and do it alone.

And I connected my inner work with my work in studying history. History frames our current work. In the words of John Hope Franklin, we must “…confront our past and see it for what it is.” One reviewer said of Franklin, he saw that “The past ‘is.’ Not the past was. The past lives on... Only if we understand and acknowledge this past can we grapple with the conflicts of the present and the promise of the future.”

So in this context of such historical suffering, my own subjective discomfort began to paralyze me less. Because I learned from the context, from slave narratives, historical analysis, and stories from people many in this room who have been victimized by racism. I learned by stories from Dan Smith, who often attends the Washington Ethical Society, whose father was born a slave. Let me repeat that: whose father was born in slavery. It wasn’t that long ago—don’t let them tell you that.

Dan shared with my students and my school how racial injustice lives on today—literally embodied in him as it is embodied in many in this room. He taught me that racism wasn’t just my

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problem—it's historical, it's institutional, it's systemic…and it's my problem. So that scared little boy in me began to grow up because of those stories.

The personal is the political—inner work supports outer work. I hope it helps me in my work in Ethical Culture. So let me talk about the institutional transformation we need.

(II) Transforming Ethical Humanism

When I ask the question, “How can generally majority white communities—which happens to describe Ethical Societies—do authentic, respectful, and effective racial justice work?” Recently I’ve wondered if that was the right question to ask. In contemplating the next step in anti-racism work for “dominantly majority white communities,” perhaps the answer that I was looking for is, stop being “dominantly majority white communities?” Might we ask not about what “we do,” but about who “we are?”

This existentially institutional question is challenging, I know. Most Ethical Societies are wrestling with this question in the context of their own strengths and weaknesses and opportunities and threats. You know that. We make mistakes all the time. We may forget to assure diverse voices on our boards or on our platform programs or in our Assembly programs. For those of us lucky enough to be in relatively racially diverse areas of the world, we can begin by opening our doors and developing inclusive organizational cultures. Some Ethical Societies are doing this organic transformation.

What can happen when an Ethical Society near diverse populations truly reflects their community? It changes them. And change is scary. We know that. It can evoke a sense of loss—the loss of the familiar; the loss of unquestioned assumptions; a loss of the ability to ignore the ugliness of racism and the work that it calls us to do. Because no longer are racial issues “out there.” They’re in our communities. And once they are in our communities, they’re in our hearts. Transforming our Societies brings the discussion into our community.

One small step in transforming one of our Societies was when the Board of the Philadelphia Ethical Society voted to display a “Black Lives Matter” banner on their windows. By itself, it was very modest. But it reminds us why we organize and fund Camp Linden that serves primarily inner city children of color. It reminds us why we joined POWER (Philadelphians Organized to Witness Empower and Rebuild), an interfath organization that focuses on issues of concern to communities of color in Philadelphia. It reminds us why we formed a task force on confronting systemic racism. It reminds us why we host racial justice discussion groups, workshops, talks, and art installations.

And, most importantly, it reminds me of how much more work we have to do.

At the Baltimore Society we are reminded of the work we have to do every day just by looking at the local paper, every day. We were reminded by the death of Freddy Gray, just a mile or so from here in Sandtown. He didn’t die from just one fall in a police van. He died because of the economic and social burdens that are simply dumped on communities of color. It’s not just about individuals. It’s about the system. It’s about us.

The Baltimore Ethical Society was so moved by the work that Free Your Voice, the Elliott-Black winners, were doing [nominated by Baltimore Ethical Society]. These teens were fed up with toxins being thrown into their neighborhoods. And as was mentioned by our speaker Saturday morning, Freddy Gray, according to the Baltimore Sun, may have struggled in school and fallen into being a target of the police because of the lead poisoning that infected his body, moving from one lead-infected rental apartment to another in Baltimore. Experts say that his impairment might have been severe. Records indicate that Gray picked up harmful levels of lead as his family moved from one lead-laden rental home to another. Experts say that his impairment may have been severe. You wonder how many more people have been so harmed?

On top of environmental issues, many neighborhoods suffer from cuts to school funding and after-school programs, unequal housing opportunities, lack of jobs, educational disparities, housing, etc. This led us to join BUILD, Baltimorans United in Leadership Development, that’s our local Industrial Areas Foundation group. [Hosted our 2017 Assembly Ethical Action Project.]

One of the reasons we joined that group is we are too small to do it by ourselves. But we also found BUILD’s values and process were similar to our own. BUILD’s website says, “You’ll find us working for change on front stoops and in living rooms, and in churches and classrooms, in City Hall and at the State House.” The secret of the organization’s success is its “commitment to identify and develop leaders in every community where BUILD works.” We don’t assume we have the answers at BUILD. We seek common space to share experiences and knowledge about what communities need to heal. Ethical Societies can be those spaces too.

In particular, because on the BUILD website they describe the following as their most “radical tactic.” It says, “We meet people face-to-face and build relationships that help to re-knit the frayed social fabric… We don’t seek justice and social change for people, we seek change with people.” That’s Ethical Humanism.

At our best Ethical Culture, like BUILD, embraces what I like to call “relational integrity.” And for me integrity implies wholeness—wholeness of every individual, wholeness of our communities, and wholeness of our country.

(III) Transforming the Nation

Which brings me to our country. When we seek to transform how we build racial justice in our country, we have to know the history and tell the truth—this bizarre juxtaposition of 400 years of democratic idealism and white racial supremacy.

In my very first history course my Professor, Ed Morgan, explained the interweaving of  idealism and brutality was commonplace. He said, “The

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A humanitarian disaster is unfolding as you read this. In a world filled with excess food, some 20 million people across four countries (South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and North-East Nigeria) face the risk of famine. Some 1.4 million children are estimated to be at imminent risk of death from severe malnutrition. Among the causes of this disaster are conflict, poverty, inequality, and extreme weather.

The crisis is also largely human-made, as each of the four countries mentioned is at war. Scorched earth tactics by conflicted parties are destroying crops and critical infrastructure like health facilities. Heavy fighting is forcing farmers to abandon their fields and blocking humanitarian access to people in desperate need of food aid and clean water. The effect of hunger is particularly devastating to children. There are specific nutrients like vitamin E, C, and D that children need in their early years. Improper nourishment leads to a reduction of immunity and susceptibility to diseases that could be fatal.

Famine is never just a natural disaster it is always a product of politics. United Nations Secretary General Guterres has pointed out that very little money to provide humanitarian aid is available. Whether the US, by far the biggest humanitarian donor, will follow through on its commitments under President Trump remains unclear.

Why are these countries at war? The political pressures are different in each country. In Nigeria and South Sudan the hostilities are driven by the desire to control valuable oil and natural gas assets and the resulting wealth.

Nigeria is a nation split in two. The oil rich, largely Christian south is potentially very wealthy whereas the Muslim north is extremely poor. There is widespread anger at government officials who have become rich, corrupt and autocratic thanks to abundant oil revenues. Corruption is rampant and very little of this potential wealth goes to the population. This disgust, especially in the poverty stricken north, has sparked the violent insurgent group Boko Haram.

The conflict in South Sudan has different roots but shares a common link to oil. A civil war in Sudan lasted from 1955 to 1972 and only ended when the Muslim dominated government in the north agreed to grant autonomy to the southern part of the country, largely practitioners of traditional African religions or Christianity. When oil was discovered in the south, the rulers in the north repudiated many of their earlier promises and sought to gain control of the oil fields, sparking a second war which lasted from 1983 to 2005. In the end the south was granted full autonomy and became independent in 2011. A power struggle within the new country has resulted in a brutal ethnic civil war between the Nuer and the Dinka tribes. The violence and famine are causing great problems for nearby countries. For example, almost 3000 refugees are fleeing South Sudan each day into Uganda. The number of refugees could surpass a million by the middle of 2017. Uganda is being overwhelmed and is increasingly unable to cope with these vulnerable refugees.

Hunger is not just an African but a worldwide silent disaster. You might think that hunger is about too many people and too little food. This is not the case. Hunger persists in a world where there is more food available than ever before and agricultural yields have increased enormously. Worldwide, almost a billion people do not have enough to eat. People are chronically hungry because they are too poor to purchase enough food or have lost the land they used to cultivate. Hunger kills more people each year than AIDS, Malaria, and Tuberculosis combined.

Many hungry people live in countries with food surpluses—not food shortages. Last year India exported 30 million metric tons of food worth more than $23 billion in US dollars. That included 11 million tons of rice and 2 million tons of vegetables. Meanwhile, India’s food-insecure population is about 250 million people.

It should be noted that rich countries can also be victims of hunger. In the United States almost 50 million people struggle against hunger—not because there is a shortage of food. The famine in Ukraine in 1932-33 was a direct result of Stalin’s policies of collectivization. The devastating continued on p.11
Despite the devastating potato failure, Ireland was forced to export around 300,000 tons of grain annually during the famine.

To alleviate hunger what is needed are: addressing the political problems in these countries, a more robust social safety net and policies preventing people being forced to leave their farms. While food banks and humanitarian help are important the aim should be to replace charity with social justice.

To quote President Franklin Roosevelt, “The test of progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough to people who have too little”.

To help, connect with Oxfam, UN World food program (WFP), Feeding America, and UNICEF.

Guilt is a luxury that we can no longer afford. I know you didn’t do it, and I didn’t do it either, but I am responsible for it because I am a man and a citizen of this country and you are responsible for it too, for the very same reason…” [Wise, p. 15 quoting James Baldwin, from “Words of a Native Son”, 1964]

It’s not easy work; of course it’s not. Racism is ugly. But we can face the ugliness more fully if we work to transform ourselves. As individuals and Societies. We use our Societies to support our individual transformation and we use ourselves to change our Societies.

The ugliness that was described by Martin Luther King Jr. from behind the bars of the Birmingham jail scrawled on the edge of a New York Times newspaper said that the violence that he was accused of stirring up as he moved through the south, he explained, it was already there, underneath the surface, described by “law and order.” Is it described in our Ethical Societies as “what is convenient” or “what is comfortable”?

Violence is in the civic body. King said, “Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed...” That’s when the work really starts.

At times of uncertainty and weakness many people—many people in this room, myself included—may think we don’t have the resources to repair the harm.
How did FES “Connect to Exchange to Change”?  
Christian Hayden, 
Future of Ethical Societies

Last May, Future of Ethical Societies met in Asheville during Memorial Day weekend for our yearly conference. The title of the event was “Connect to Exchange to Change.” Forgive if it sounds a little hokey, but if Ethical Culture holds building ethical relationships as a core ideal in its communities, why not dive into it with some intention?

FES is a unique space within Ethical Culture because it can have a range of newcomers and return attendees and that does not affect the depth of the conversation or the hugs. Five minutes into a car ride, who else starts talking about white supremacy in service spaces? And not in a “let me one up you with my wokeness” sense but let us share our testimonial and how we struggle with being human.

Appreciating the Effect of Mountain Light Sanctuary

One implicit theme of the conference was offering a reprieve from the current political climate. Sure on the way to the Pisgah Forest you drive past Confederate flags, ‘We Buy Guns’ and ‘Make America Great Again’ signs, but all that is worth it in order to witness blue mountains, and sleep in an open-to-the-elements room where you can hear, smell, and taste the creek running by. Mountain Light Sanctuary is a reasonably priced gift, warm and engaging. It is a place on its own spiritual quest as it continues to build and rejuvenate itself. See the just-completed compost toilet and yet-to-be-finished outside shower. This place was the conference as much as anything else we did. Thirty-five miles out of Asheville, I couldn’t tell you a better place to stay.

Saturday Resonance, Some Small Service

Saturday is usually the heart of the conference, it is when we do the workshops, the service, and get out into the town. Our morning kicked off with some yoga led by Anya Overmann, and I led a mirroring activity. Then we did some resonance activities led by Justin Taft-Morales.

Now resonance is an interesting idea. It taps into the humanity of us telling our story, how sharing has been part of our experience as a species, and that when we tell stories, our brains mirror one another. So we need to honor our storytellers, and maybe build a space where we can feel safe sharing our story. We need to give resonance, telling the storyteller how their story impacted us, what emotions or reactions they called inside of us. What we do not do when giving resonance—we do not ask questions, we do not immediately share a story of our own, or try to interpret what the speaker said.

(I failed my first time because as organizer I was handling other fires and missed my instructions. Favio shared his story about experiencing the earthquake which devastated Port Au Prince, and I immediately, came with “the triumph and renewal in your story was fascinating, you really embodied a new lease on life.” No one told me immediately I was wrong, but Justin and others modeled the correct way to do it—honed in on a moment, recount the feeling it gave you. I learned my lesson, the old fashion way, messing it up with the best of intentions.)

Later we went into Asheville and into a “worker-owned/community powered space,” Firestorm Café and Books, where we participated in a book-to-prisoner mailing. We got a tutorial on how to wrap the books, what information to provide, and went to work cutting and folding grocery paper bags around various incarnations of prisoners’ requests. We did not debrief this activity but in a way it was its own reflection and answered its own question: how just or humane is a system that disconnects people from family, friends, and community, restricting access even to these paperback and glue-banded portals to the outside world?

Platform and Gathering

Every year, we share a platform with our host city. The platform is an interesting phenomenon because each time we have little idea what we will talk about until literally moments before. We explored our guiding theme of relationships with the Ethical Humanist Society of Asheville. Ariel, a representative from the International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organization (IHEYO), spoke about he manifestations of humanism in his two homes and how dictatorship and authoritarian rule breaks down civil society, making it harder to maintain and grow humanist community. Dominque shared about North Carolina and the divide of its political state, and how the intentional impact of relationships between political, racial, economic identities can change the atmosphere for the better. Favio shared his story (mentioned above) about the earthquake to this audience, and Justin invited the audience to practice giving resonance. This time I got it right, I responded to the moment he felt split in half—on one side was death as in those who died from the earthquake, on the other side was life as in those who survived. I relayed I felt at that moment being split between two worlds. Then the audience broke into

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small groups and shared stories about connecting to someone or struggling to do that and then they gave resonance to one another. Again, FES brings out the funky and the possible of Ethical Culture. Who else could get a group of adults and make them find harmony by humming together in a circle, before taking the collection. At Firestorm, we met a couple traveling, preparing to part ways possibly for good, trying to live out fully each moment together. We shared with them who we were and they seemed interested. We invited them to the platform and even though we gave them the wrong time they still came back to see us! Later, they accompanied us to our Sunday community meal, hosted by Asheville member Rich Wasch. At one point Joy McConnell began telling her story of how she and her husband healed together from wounds of trauma; she, an abusive household, and him, the sears of serving in Vietnam. She talked about shadow selves, self-forgiveness, re-parenting. All the while, after a few glasses of hospitality, I thought more of resonance and how I could give my own to Joy but then I noticed one of our new guests listening deeply and nodding, and then she shared how like joy she had suffered abuse as a child. The conversation continued, and I simply sat back and watched the space we had created and how these two new honorary members were able to inculcate themselves in this space so quickly. We of the FES may struggle as a group in many ways, we are disjointed, separated, preoccupied, but we do have something that Ethical Culture needs to hear—and maybe others too.

A New Train on the “Journey” of Ethical Culture

Christian Hayden, 2016 Mossler Fellow

On the morning of June 11 after months of attending trainings with Theatre of the Oppressed and Lay Leadership Summer School with the American Ethical Union, facilitating events at my job and Bartram High School, and attending workshops where I explored writing reflections as a group, I was ready to share some of my Mossler Fellowship with a place that has great significance for this project. I returned to the place it all started, the birthplace of Colloquy, the home Society of Leader Emeritus Arthur Dobrin, the Ethical Humanist Society of Long Island.

When I first got back from my year with the Humanist Service Corps in Ghana, I visited Arthur at his home in Long Island to inform him of my project, which sought to use the Colloquy as inspiration. He offered his support with a heap of Spelling God with Two O’s, and some more of his and his wife Lynn’s work inspired from their time in Kenya. I began to more firmly set a path beside his footsteps while also hoping to take Ethical Culture into a new direction.

But this time, after an overnight bus ride from the AEU Assembly in Baltimore to Long Island, I was not nervous. I had run this Journeys program three times by then, the rockiest of course being at the Philadelphia Ethical Society (first time kinks), then at the Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture and Hampshire College. The way Journeys works is to offer a multi-tiered approach to reflection. First a compass is made of North, South, East, and West, and attendees orient themselves according to a few prompts. “In relationship to this space,” I would say, “go to where your place of origin would be on this imaginary map… next a place you felt out of place.” Then when they are in each of those spots, they find a partner with whom to share equally one minute about big small questions: What is something that you have lost? What do you want to learn? It works as a mixer, giving people an opportunity to share snippets of their experiences and worldview. Then participants read a poem, and shared their reflections on that poem, focusing on lines that resonated with them. Then, the most difficult part: QUESTions where folks were only allowed to share in questions. This trips up folks who usually feel smart enough to give or entitled to receive answers. Some people offered really personal reflections, like “what more could I do to show I care for my partner?” One challenging question directed at me was “what is your point here?”

And to that I had no response. Not only because that was the point of this particular part of the exercise, but for that experience, and others, I seek to share in my final report; there is no particular point. Some people say the exercise offered confirmation that this is a community they want to be a part of; for others it was a space they get to interrogate questions that may have gotten away from them; and for some it encouraged them to ask questions they may not have had the space to voice. My aim with these, and maybe my larger role in Ethical Culture, is not to give anything in particular, but offer a way, a process that could help us shape and deepen our relationship to our community. One person asked during the QUESTions portion of an installment of Journeys, “is this a new train within Ethical Culture?” To that question I might have an answer.
AEU Works to Repair Harms of Racism

At our 102nd Assembly, held in Baltimore, MD, the American Ethical Union passed an important resolution on reparations. We urge all to study the effects of racism and focus on areas “where such injustice is experienced: educational opportunities, income and wealth, housing and food access, environmental racism, cultural erasure and exploitation, the criminal justice system including incarceration, and health care.”

The Resolution continues the work of our 2016 Resolution on Systemic Racism by highlighting that due to “the persistence of negative effects from the enslavement of and discrimination against millions of people” simply stopping acts of discrimination going forward is not enough. Therefore “we of the American Ethical Union and its member Societies are committed to the full blossoming of human worth and dignity for all persons, recognizing that social, political, cultural, and economic disparities often suppress or limit such blossoming in those targeted, and that injustice ultimately damages the entire social fabric.”

Read the full “Toward Repairing the Harm of Racism” resolution at: aeu.org/resource/2017-toward-repairing-the-harm-of-racism.

Celebrating Bob Berson

Leader Robert (Bob) Berson celebrated 30 years at the Ethical Society of Northern Westchester on Sunday, June 18th. After a lovely morning program of music and stories, the community gathered for a toast. Watch it online at https://youtu.be/ac7BL-Q5GrI

Photos and Videos of Bmorethical2017, the 102nd AEU Assembly, available on aeu.org
Assembly Platform Opening Words

Randy Best, Leader of Northern Virginia Ethical Society

I am not the person that I was when the Assembly began three days ago. My life journey of understanding continues, with encounters along the way that challenge my thinking, from Ah-Ha moments of insight to seeds of ideas that will germinate with greater understanding.

I am beginning to recognize my privilege, and see more clearly, my moral obligations to others. I am beginning to glimpse the harm that Systemic Racism does to others. I am beginning to understand the world through a nonwhite perspective.

I open my mind and my heart to listen deeply and support a movement toward justice. This has been a selfish process for me. I find that I gain far more than I give. I won't stop listening and changing and supporting and giving.

Like Felix Adler, I believe that we are all deeply connected. All of us. Every one of us. Harm done to others affects us all. I am moving to a different place, where ideas of justice are imported from the lived experience of others. My transformation will never be complete.

Through pain, with love, and in struggle I move forward doing the best that I can and trying to do better. Important work that helps me become my best self. This is what all of us do—together. This is my lived Ethical Humanism. Connecting to others in new ways. Recognizing the worth and dignity of others in a deeper way that expands my circle of concern. This is how racial justice work has changed me. Through working with others, I hold a vision of the future where everyone experiences the joy of their human potential.

In the words of Felix Adler: When the light of the sun shines through a prism it is broken into beautiful colors, and when the prism is shattered, still the light remains. So does the life of life shine resplendent in the forms of our friends, and so, when their forms are broken, still their life remains; and in that life we are united with them; for the life of their life is also our life, and we are one with them by ties indissoluble.