



# Ethical Action Report

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## Welcome to the Ethical Action Report 2.0

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### ***Give Me Back My Democracy!* Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society and Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia**

This article is hopefully the first of a series exploring the question: “How can the average citizen reclaim democracy?” Unfortunately, this is not a rhetorical question, given the dual challenges to our democratic system: (1) the growing influence of money in politics, and (2) continual encroachments on the right to vote. The National Leaders Council is discussing how best to rally Ethical Culturists across the country to the cause. There are plans to offer further learning opportunities at the Chicago Assembly in May.

In the meantime, it is important to discuss how we can best lessen the influence of money in politics. Do we challenge corporate personhood and the ruling in *Citizens United*? (See the *AEU Resolution on Citizens United*, Columbus, OH, June 19, 2011 at [aeu.org/library/display\\_article](https://www.aeu.org/library/display_article)). Do we demand greater transparency regarding campaign donations?

And how do we increase the average citizen’s access to the vote? Do we focus on expanding registration, giving more people the opportunity to vote, or should we make sure those who register actually do vote at election time? Do we expand the time period for voting? Or are the two major political parties so completely owned by moneyed interests that our only hope is to support a major shake-up of the system through third party alternatives?

Andy Reed, the Board Recorder of the **Ethical Humanist Society of Asheville** suggests we all look into the national group *Move to Amend* (<https://movetoamend.org/>). This five-year-old national coalition has dozens of local affiliates in 32 states and the District of Columbia. They proclaim commitment to “social and economic justice, ending corporate rule, and building a vibrant democracy that is genuinely accountable to the people, not corporate interests.” The method they are advocating is an amendment to the U. S. Constitution challenging corporate personhood, declaring that inalienable rights belong to human beings

only, and insisting that money in political campaigns can be regulated because money is not a form of protected free speech under the First Amendment.

Many feel that *Move to Amend's* values fit well into Ethical Culture. In fact, some groups are already involved. For example, at the time of this writing the **Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture** (BSEC) is preparing to screen and discuss *Move to Amend's* 30-minute documentary, [Legalize Democracy](#). We hope to hear back from BSEC how the film was received and whether it stimulated concrete ethical action.

Members of the **Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia** (EHSOP) report that they had a successful screening of another related video, Bill Moyers' [United States of ALEC](#). Last October about 50 people shared popcorn while viewing and discussing this intriguing expose of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). ALEC is a national consortium of state politicians and powerful corporations facilitating the lobbying effectiveness of corporate power. Philadelphia's Ethical Action Committee Chair Kate Esposito reported some rare good news on this front. Last month Commonwealth Court Judge Bernard L. McGinley ruled that Pennsylvania's voter identification law is unconstitutional and places an unreasonable burden on voters. Feeling some positive momentum has led to more interest and activity regarding voting at EHSOP. The Society is urging members and friends who have experienced issues related to voting to testify at a February 6<sup>th</sup> hearing before the National Commission on Voting Rights. By speaking out on inordinate delays at polling sites, registration problems, demands for photo IDs, or other problems might help improve citizen participation in Pennsylvania's elections. EHSOP members are reaching out to PA Governor Tom Corbett asking him not to appeal this ruling.

Please consider offering your advice in the next Ethical Action Report, such as suggestions for concrete ethical action opportunities, or news about what your Ethical Society has done to address both the challenge of money in politics as well as voter repression.

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### ***A New Civil Rights Frontier: Our Hidden Biases, Abe Markman, Member, New York Society for Ethical Culture***

There is growing evidence that significant advances in civil rights can result from gaining control of our hidden or subconscious biases.

What follows are excerpts from two platforms I gave or participated in on the subject at the **New York Society for Ethical Culture** (NYSEC). A version of the first platform from April 3, 2011, became a published article that was replicated in the September 2013 EAR called *Overcoming Hidden Biases*. The second platform was a panel I participated in and helped organize on Sunday, January 19, 2014 in honor of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I drew from a remarkable *Wall Street Journal* article, "Bringing Hidden Biases into the Light." Both Platform addresses can be seen on [nysec.org](http://nysec.org).

Taken together, the excerpts demonstrate (1) that police officers with intensive training can control their hidden biases even when they think their life is threatened; and (2) personnel staff in large corporations with two hours of intensive training of subconscious bias control are able to be more objective in hiring and promoting people of color and women. Here are more details:

(1) A look at how police confront racial bias is very informative. There is now a method of training, recently implemented by the New York Police Department that helps officers recognize and overcome bias. It uses research that indicates that when police officers believe their lives are in danger, they become so frightened that they are no longer able to recognize body language. When facing a person of color, officers too often are overcome by stereotypical thinking and believe that the person is carrying a gun or a knife and is ready to use it.

In the training, the officers are taught to wait a split second before determining whether or not to shoot. With repeated virtual life threatening street scenes, an officer is able to put his or her bias aside in a nano-second, recognize the person's body language, and act appropriately. Former NYPD Commissioner

Raymond Kelly announced a sharp decline in shootings by police officers. It is most likely that the bias training was an important factor in that reduction.

(2) BAE, a defense industry contractor, requires that all 1,600 middle managers and executives take a two-hour class about unconscious bias. The company partly credits the management training for an increase in the number of women and people of color targeted for advancement last year.

Other very large corporations have had similar results. The consultant firm that trains business groups is called Cook Ross. Here is an excerpt from their introductory statement:

*We all have Bias*

*The traditional view of these patterns of discriminatory behavior in organizations is that these actions are conscious. In this oversimplified formulation, people who know better do the right thing, and those who don't have overt bias. As a result, we have developed a "good person/bad person" paradigm of diversity. A more accurate depiction, however, is that we all have bias of one kind or another. It is not restricted to one or a few select groups of people.*

My follow-up plan is to contact those I know in foundations, non-profit, government and inter-faith spheres to see how this type of training can be funded and adapted to the non-business world. My initial contacts have been quite encouraging.

It is also most encouraging that large corporations are addressing discrimination with substantial funds. I really believe that we may be on to something with short and long-term possibilities of improvement in inter-racial, inter-cultural, inter-tribal, and inter-national relationship building.

In short, a new civil rights frontier has been discovered inside our very own psyches. Let's not hide our biases any longer and join the growing number of people who are relieved to know they do not have to be ashamed of having a bias against a person with a different skin color than their own—and that with training, they can do something about that bias. If police and business personnel can control their biases thanks to training, and in so doing make better judgments, others can do the same as well. (Note: Two possible training sites are being explored. If they seem to be adaptable to our needs, all Ethical Culture Societies will be informed.)

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***Protecting Our Privacy, Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society and Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia***

Many members of the Ethical Societies in the New York area read the *New York Times* every day with their coffee. But those Ethical Culturists further from the big apple might have missed one letter to the editor published last month supporting clemency for Edward Snowden written by an Ethical Culture Leader. It was in response to the *Times* own New Year's Day editorial calling for authorities to demonstrate leniency toward our most famous whistleblower. The *Times* stated:

*Considering the enormous value of the information he has revealed, and the abuses he has exposed, Mr. Snowden deserves better than a life of permanent exile, fear and flight. He may have committed a crime to do so, but he has done his country a great service. It is time for the United States to offer Mr. Snowden a plea bargain or some form of clemency that would allow him to return home, face at least substantially reduced punishment in light of his role as a whistle-blower, and have the hope of a life advocating for greater privacy and far stronger oversight of the runaway intelligence community.*

The *Times* goes on to support their position by noting the two federal judges who have accused the NSA of unconstitutional behavior as well as the creation of a presidential panel to investigate and overhaul our intelligence operations and structure. Both inside of Ethical Culture and in the general public there is a

wide diversity of opinions regarding Mr. Snowden. He is described as a patriot, whistleblower, victim - and also as a traitor, spy, and criminal.

Ethical Culture, full of independent freethinkers, probably reflects this diversity of opinion. The *Ethical Action Report* offers you the opinion of one of our most respected commentators, **Joe Chuman**, Leader of the Ethical Culture Society of Bergen County, New Jersey:

*To the Editor:*

*Your editorial is on the right side of history in calling for clemency for Edward J. Snowden. The future will judge the extensive invasion of individual privacy perpetrated by the National Security Agency as it has the Palmer raids against anarchists and leftists after World War I, the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II and the excesses of McCarthyism: as violations of our fundamental freedoms and values that we have later collectively come to regret.*

*In the same light, Edward J. Snowden will be assessed as an exponent of the disappearing values of dissent and civil disobedience who acted in the service of protecting privacy and government restraint, the foundations on which democratic liberty is sustained.*

*JOSEPH CHUMAN, Hackensack, N.J., Jan. 2, 2014*

The *Ethical Action Report* seeks ideas as to how we, as a national movement, might contribute to solutions that both maintain national security as well as protect citizens from abuse by our own intelligence apparatus. Just last week CNN reported that attorney general, Eric Holder, implied that he might allow Snowden to return from Russia as part of a plea-bargain. Do you think such an arrangement is the best, most balanced approach to this issue? Has your Ethical Society taken any official positions regarding this issue? What sources or articles would you recommend to others to become more educated about Mr. Snowden and national security. Write to [HughTM@gmail.com](mailto:HughTM@gmail.com).

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## **The Ethical Action Report 2.0**

As Ethical Societies around the country continue their 2013-2014 program season, the EAR is evolving to try to be more useful to you and to generate more constructive, engaged dialogue about “deed before creed” throughout the movement. We hope this new format offers stimulating ideas and practical hints that make ethical action more effective and rewarding at your societies and in your lives.

### **EAR 2.0 hopes to offer:**

- More in-depth analysis of particular social justice issues.
- Stories of ethical action projects that worked well at one of our societies and might enliven your home society.
- Discussion of ways to frame Ethical Culture’s commitment to Ethical Action
- Excerpts from recent Ethical Culture platform addresses or statements from around the movement about civic, social, or ethical issues.

### ***Join the fun! Offer your thoughts and news items for the March edition.***

- Write about an issue with which you are familiar due to your professional life or private interest.
- Share news about an interesting ethical action project at your society, current or from the past.

- Write a “letter to the EAR editor” addressing any articles in this or future issues, or about other issues relating to our commitment to action.
- Do a historical reflection on an Ethical Action moment from Ethical Culture’s history.

The pieces can range from 250-1000 words, and if you submit them early, the editorial volunteers can help polish your offering. Feel free to float your idea by me at [HughTM@gmail.com](mailto:HughTM@gmail.com) or send something to me by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month prior to publication. All final copy has to be sent to me no later than the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month.

Sincerely, Hugh  
Hugh Taft-Morales - Ethical Culture Leader and *Ethical Action Report* Editor

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### ***Ethical Action Spotlight***

***Thanks to Abe Markman for his contribution.***

***The growing support for the Ethical Action Report around the movement is inspiring. Keep sending me your ideas for future submissions - let’s share our Ethical Action successes and challenges with others in the movement!***

In each edition of the EAR 2.0, I hope to offer a brief description of one successful ethical action project undertaken in Ethical Culture. (You could also share hints about what to avoid in such projects if you wish, since mistakes can teach us a lot!) Please contact me ASAP if you would be willing to share your good work with other Ethical Culturists. [HughTM@gmail.com](mailto:HughTM@gmail.com)

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**To share your views on national legislation with the Secular Coalition for America (SCA) go to:**  
[www.secular.org](http://www.secular.org)

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