

The Existentialist

Newsletter of the **First Existentialist Congregation of Atlanta**

470 Candler Park Drive, N.E., Atlanta, GA 30307 • Founded in 1976 •

A Philosophically Based Spiritual Community

Dedicated to Human Liberation

and Founded on Existentialist and Feminist Principles •

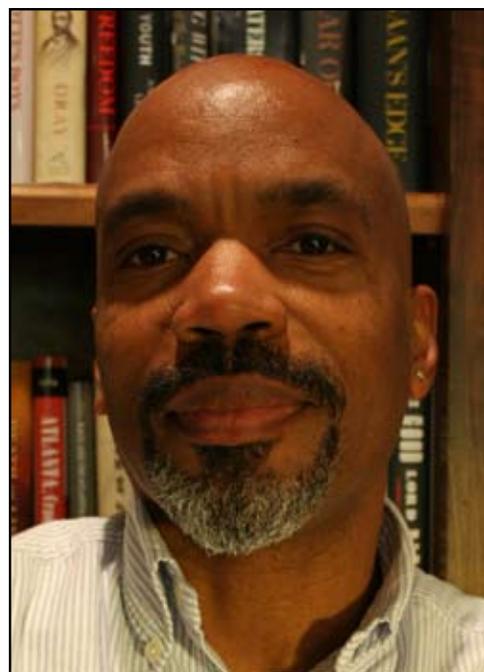
First Existentialist Celebrates Black History Month with Guest Speakers



February is Black History Month, traditionally the month when churches, schools, and other institutions present programming related to the history and achievements of African Americans. This February, First Existentialist presents a month of programming featuring African American history and culture.

On February 7, Charles Stephens, writer, scholar, and activist, will speak on "Between Resistance and Restoration: Healing as Social Justice."

Dr. Leslie Harris is Associate Professor of History and African American Studies at Emory University. She will speak on February 14 on "The Opportunity We Have Now."



Anthony Knight, who speaks on February 21, is

CEO of The Baton Foundation—a Georgia nonprofit organization that serves the emotional, intellectual and cultural needs of Black boys in grades five through nine. He organized the recent series of programs at the Atlanta Cyclorama commemorating the Civil War from perspectives of African Americans.

Rev. Duncan Teague, an ordained Unitarian Universalist (UU) Minister and a longtime friend of and speaker at First E, will speak on February 28 on "and the Oscar goes to. . . ."

Upper left: Charles Stephens; lower right: Anthony Knight. Photos courtesy of the photographed. For more about our speakers, see pages 7 and 8.

**First Existentialist
Congregation of
Atlanta**

470 Candler Park Drive,
NE
Atlanta, Georgia 30307
404-378-5570
www.firstexistentialist.org

All Are Welcome
Join us in our
Celebrations of Life on
Sundays at 11:00 a.m.
Children's Program
during Sunday services

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We are a philosophically based
spiritual community
dedicated to
human liberation
and founded on existentialist
and feminist principles.



Notes From the Board of Directors

By D. Patton White, Board Chair

The Board of Directors met on Monday, January 11, at 7:00 p.m. Stell Simonton shared that her daughter Anna would like to conduct an oral history project on the First E. to coincide with the 40th anniversary of the congregation. The board also discussed in more detail the possibility of increasing our staffing, principally through increased hours. They also weighed some of the pros and cons of having a half or full time minister. This was the last in-depth discussion on the five areas of focus from the board's annual retreat in August. Patton will prepare a report to be presented at the Annual Meeting, which has been scheduled for April 24, following the Celebration of Life. Bill Laney reported that he can get an automatic door opener for the front door for approximately \$1,800.00, and the board asked him to proceed. Additional reports were filed by our staff members, Marsha and Edith, as well as guilds and committees. Exciting news: First E. ended the year with a \$6,742.00 surplus! The board will elect how to designate those funds at the February board meeting, which will be on Monday, February 1, at 7:00 p.m. in the sanctuary. All are welcome to attend. ~

Community News & Activities

Ongoing:

--The Program Guild meets on Tuesday, February 16, at 6:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary upstairs. All members and friends are welcome to attend. The Guild meets quarterly.

--The Social Justice Guild meets on Sunday, February 7, after the COL downstairs. All members and friends are welcome to attend. The Guild meets every other month.

Community:

--Dr. Pauline Rose Clance gave the keynote address at the 12th Annual National Institutes of Health Graduate Students Research Symposium in Bethesda, MD, on January 12, 2016. The title of Dr. Clance's talk was "The Impostor Phenomenon: Present Day Relevance for Successful Graduate Students."

--Rev. Duncan Teague was the LGBT Grand Marshall at the Annual MLK, Jr. March on January 18. Duncan spoke at the rally after the march.

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Calling All Artists!

The First Existentialist Congregation of Atlanta is looking for visual artists-- painters, photographers, collage artists, and more--to exhibit on the walls of our Sanctuary. Our motto is "Art on the Walls, All the Time!" There is no charge to artists to exhibit. So if you are an artists interested in having a show on our walls, please contact Glen Lopez, Art Guild Chair, at 30307@comcast.net or call him at 404-681-5856. Or contact Charlene Ball at mcharleneball@yahoo.com.

Guild Reports

Program Guild ***By Charlene Ball***

The Program Guild will meet on Tuesday, February 16, at 6:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary. We welcome members and friends who would like to attend and give feedback. Our members are Patton White (chair), Linda Bell, Charlene Ball, Saralyn Chesnut, Bill Laney, and Hank Pfadenhauer. This month we are honoring Black History Month. Our speakers are as follows: Charles Stephens, writer, activist, and independent scholar; Dr. Leslie Harris, Associate Professor of History at Emory University; Anthony Knight, historian and museum and exhibit curator; and Rev. Duncan Teague.

We also secure musicians for accompaniment and special music, as well as facilitators. If you are a musician or know of a musician you would like to recommend, contact Patton (patton@beacondance.org). If you are interested in learning about facilitating, contact Charlene (mcharleneball@yahoo.com). ~

Membership Guild ***By Charlene Ball***

The Membership Guild coordinates openers--who open the building, start the coffee, turn on the lights and heat or air conditioning, and put out songbooks and tambourines--and greeters, who welcome you with a smile as you enter the Sanctuary and hand you a bulletin. Elaine Gale, Carol Sandiford, Hank Pfadenhauer, Robert Stewart, Bill Laney, Mary Howard, and Wilj Sturkey are members of the Guild. Elaine, Hank, Wilj, Stell Simonton, and Andy Weiskoff serve as openers. They also plan potlucks and kiddushes (a kiddush is a traditional light meal with bread, cheese, fruit, and beverages).

If anyone would like to know more about the Membership Guild, including when their next meeting occurs, contact Wilj at cincodemayo55@comcast.net or Elaine at ergale@hotmail.com. ~

Social Justice Guild ***By Linda Bell***

The Social Justice Guild meets every other month. Members remain active in various social justice projects, including writing for the Social Justice Corner in *The First Existentialist Newsletter*, sponsoring the Book Discussion Group, and taking part in community social justice activities. ~

Art Guild ***By Charlene Ball***

The Art Guild met on Wednesday, January 27, 2016, from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary at First E. Present were chair Glen Lopez, Charlene Ball, and Kitty Wimbish. We discussed ways of getting art on the walls at First E. Some ideas: put public service ads on radio stations and contact artists we know. Glen will send PSAs to WRFG and other radio stations. Glen reported that painter Claire Vohman will be exhibiting beginning March 1 and going 4-6 weeks. Charlene has been in contact with Barbara Joye and Reid Jenkins about a photography exhibit sponsored by the DSA (Democratic Socialists of America), and the exhibit will go up Sunday, May 1. An opening will be held at 2:00 p.m. after the COL. We will all contact artists we know, including First E members. Charlene will also put an announcement in the First E February newsletter that First E is seeking artists.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 p.m. ~

Social Justice Corner

We Have a Duty to Win

By Anna Simonton

Sometime between Michael Brown's murder and a grand jury's failure to indict his killer, young people of color in Atlanta shut down the interstate. I had heard about the plan the day before and found out where they were going to get on the highway hours before the action.

I biked down Auburn Avenue, slowing only to cross the perilous tracks of the new 100 million dollar streetcar—built to attract already upwardly-mobile millennials, according to the mayor, not to remedy the findings of a 2013 study showing that Atlanta ranks lowest in the nation for economic mobility – in large part due to its piss-poor public transit (though it's hard to see how a two-mile loop between the Martin Luther King Center and Centennial Olympic Park will woo “the best and the brightest,” unless that turn of phrase is synonymous with “tourists,” or a word I only recently learned: conventioners).

***"We have a duty to fight for our freedom.
We have a duty to win."***

I arrived unscathed and locked my bike to a traffic sign by the on-ramp to I-75/85 at Piedmont and John Portman Boulevard. Protest marshals wearing bright orange vests were already in the middle of the highway, waving through cars that had, as planned, slowed traffic to a stop so people could walk onto the roadway safely.

A crowd had congregated for a banner drop from an overpass a few hundred feet from the ramp. With traffic at a standstill, about thirty people made their way down to the asphalt of the I-75/85 Connector, spread out a banner that read “Black Lives Matter,” and settled in for half an hour of victorious dancing and chanting before dispersing in order to avoid arrest. I snapped photos and jotted notes that I would later turn into a report for Atlanta Progressive News. I was glad to have a job to do, afraid that otherwise I would be at a loss for the simplest things. Where to put my body. Where to focus my gaze. How to use my voice.

Part of it was taking space. The experience can be rare, but I had it before—both in the context of political action and spontaneous fun. When a group of people take over a space for something other than its prescribed use, vistas of possibility suddenly crack open. It becomes gleamingly apparent that no laws of nature ordain that an interstate is only for cars, or the steps of a bank are not a dance floor, or public buildings that we pay for cannot be our living rooms. These rules are made by people, and people can unmake them.



Black Lives Matter activists at the 2015 MLK March in Atlanta. Photo courtesy of Anna Simonton.

This blockade was different than any experience I had of taking space because, this time, Black and Brown people owned the space, proclaiming their humanity and uncompromising power, challenging the cops to do something about it, running the show on their own, exhilarating terms. Some in tears, some stone-faced, some with hands up (don't shoot), some with fists up, they shouted Assata Shakur's words in call and response:

***"We have a duty to fight for our freedom.
We have a duty to win. We must love and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains."***

I felt I was witnessing the birth of something new out of something 400 years

Continued on back page.

Minister's Corner

By Rev. Marsha Mitchiner, First E Fellowship Minister

BIG THANKS TO

Marty Nolan, aka, Marty the Plumber, who recently came to our rescue on short notice to unclog our upstairs toilet. If you need plumbing services, consider calling Marty. 404-358-5868.

CONGRATULATIONS TO:

***Libby Ware, whose debut novel *Lum* won the American Library Association Stonewall Honor Book Award.**

***Demmie Hicks, who has married her partner Noel Gregg and moved to Athens.** We will miss her in Atlanta but are happy for her as she begins this new, happy adventure.

***Carol Calvert and Lisa Cottrell, who are LEGALLY married** and now have the automatic rights and protections afforded married couples. Yeah!

***Duncan Teague, who was the Honorary Grand Marshall representing the LGBT community** at the 2016 MLK parade. Duncan received this opportunity in recognition of his work in the community.

* **Suzi Parron and Glen Smith, who are traveling the country as Susie collects information,** often via personal interviews, for another book and Glen continues his telecommuting. They are having a great time but promise to return to give us an update. ~

FORTY YEAR FUN

Founders Day in 2016 will mark our 40th year of existence as a community. Over the years there have been many remarkable events to equal our remarkable members and friends. We want our celebration to include activities that will highlight these events, remind us of how creative/talented/caring/fun we are.

Newsletters: We will display newsletters covering our decades of providing an open, caring, philosophical community based on existential and feminist principles. Once we have determined which issues we are missing, we'll put out a request for those we need.

We'll have lists and pictures for:

***Marriages/Commitment services; *Births/Deaths; *Ordinations *Special events such as book signings, plays, concerts/dances, arts & crafts shows**

***Fun quizzes about ourselves** such as, matching baby pictures and little known facts to the appropriate member/friend. So start thinking about your favorite memories and looking for those pictures. This will be a great year of celebration! ~

Community News & Activities ~ Continued

--**Sister Harriet**, a women's spirituality circle, meets on the second Sunday of every month in the First E Sanctuary at 2:00 p.m. Rev. Angela Denise Davis leads the circle.

--**Sunday Assembly** will hold its monthly potluck in the First E Sanctuary on February 7 at 6:00 p.m. To RSVP, go to <http://www.meetup.com/Sunday-Assembly/events/228026145/>

--**Sunday Assembly** holds its monthly meeting on February 21 in the First E Sanctuary at 6:00 p.m. To RSVP, go to <http://www.meetup.com/Sunday-Assembly/events/226671093/>

--**OLOC (Old Lesbians Organizing for Change) Atlanta will hold a "Dessert Throwdown"** at First E on Saturday, February 27, from 5-7:00 p.m. See Saralyn or Charlene for more information.

Continued on page 7

Speakers in February

February 7: Charles Stephens

Charles Stephens is the Executive Director of the Counter Narrative Project and co-editor of the anthology *Black Gay Genius: Answering Joseph Beam's Call*. In 2014 he was the conference coordinator for the "Whose Beloved Community? Black Civil and LGBT Rights Conference" hosted by Emory University. Charles has been a Co-Chair of the Emory University Hope Clinic Community Advisory Board, led the AID Atlanta sponsored social marketing campaign "From Where I Stand," and has been a fellow at the CDC Institute for HIV Prevention Leadership and the Black AIDS Institute Community Mobilization College. He has worked with such organizations as the Ford Foundation, Kaiser Family Foundation, AIDS United, and AID Atlanta, providing strategic guidance and programmatic expertise around community engagement, advocacy, racial justice, LGBT rights, HIV/AIDS, and black gay men. His writing has also appeared in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Lambda Literary Review*, *Creative Loafing*, *RH Reality Check*, *The Gay and Lesbian Review*, *Alternet*, and *WireTap*. His work in Black LGBT politics and culture has been honored by PFLAG, ZAMI (which awarded him their Marlon Riggs Social Justice Award) and Unity Fellowship Church which honored him with their Community Award. Charles is a former Women's Studies minor at Georgia State University. He will speak on February 7 on "Between Resistance and Restoration: Healing as Social Justice." ~

February 14: Dr. Leslie Harris

Leslie M. Harris is Associate Professor of History and African American Studies at Emory University. She received her undergraduate degree from Columbia University and her doctoral degree from Stanford University. She is the author of the award-winning *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* and co-editor with Ira Berlin of *Slavery in New York*, which accompanied the groundbreaking New York Historical Society exhibition of the same name. She recently completed *Slavery and Freedom in Savannah* (UGA Press, 2014), co-edited with Daina Ramey Berry, in collaboration with Telfair Museums' Owens-Thomas House. From 2004 to 2011, she co-founded and co-directed the Transforming Community Project at Emory University, which used history to engage the university community in dialogues on racial and other forms of human diversity. The Transforming Community Project received generous funding from the Emory University Strategic Plan Fund and from the Ford Foundation. Harris is currently working on a book on late-twentieth century New Orleans. She has also co-edited volumes on slavery and the university and slavery and sexuality. Dr. Harris will speak on February 14 on "The Opportunity We Have Now." ~

Speakers in February ~ Continued

Anthony Knight is the President & CEO of The Baton Foundation—a Georgia nonprofit organization that serves the emotional, intellectual and cultural needs of Black boys in grades five through nine. Mr. Knight has extensive experience with and interest in African American history and culture, public and living history, informal education and Black youth. Mr. Knight’s work with The Baton Foundation reflects his ongoing interest in the issues and practices related to the collecting, preservation and interpretation of information about and material culture from the African Diaspora.

Mr. Knight worked for twenty-two years as a museum educator and consultant and Mr. Knight organized the recent series of programs at the Atlanta Cyclorama commemorating the Civil War from perspectives of African Americans.

Mr. Knight’s undergraduate work was in Spanish and English (Ohio Wesleyan University), and his graduate work was in museum education (The George Washington University). Mr. Knight also holds a degree in Spanish-to-English translation from the Núcleo de Estudios Lingüísticos y Sociales, Caracas, Venezuela. Mr. Knight is a New York City native. He will speak on February 21 on "The Mask We Wear." ~

February 28: Rev. Duncan Teague

Rev. Duncan Teague is an ordained Unitarian Universalist (UU) Minister and a longtime friend of and speaker at First E. He has more than twenty years of work in HIV/AIDS advocacy, prevention, education and research and is a recognized leader in the GLBTQ community. He contributed to the book *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* by E. Patrick Johnson, and he was featured in the reader’s theatre production and the full staged adaptations of the book. He was the senior member of the ADODI Muse: A Gay Negro Ensemble. He is happily married to his husband, David Thurman. Duncan will speak on February 28 on “and the Oscar goes to. . .” ~

Community News & Activities ~ Continued

--**Arlene** would be happy to know of anyone whose **kids need tutoring**.

--**Submissions and news for the March Newsletter** are due to Charlene by Sunday, February 21. Send to mcharleneball@yahoo.com. Contact **Robert Stewart** with your news and activities for his weekly e-newsletter: robertstewart369@gmail.com. ~

February 2016 Sunday Celebrations of Life

February 7 *Between Resistance and Restoration: Healing As Social Justice*

Speaker: Charles Stephens

Facilitator: Rev. Marsha Mitchiner

Accompanist: Alan Dynin

February 14 *The Opportunity We Have Now*

Speaker: Dr. Leslie Harris

Facilitator: Dr. Saralyn Chesnut

Accompanist: William "Bill" Chelton

February 21 *The Mask We Wear*

Speaker: Anthony Knight

Facilitator: Bill Laney

Accompanist: David Tyberg

February 28 *"And the Oscar Goes To. . . ."*

Speaker: Rev. Duncan Teague

Facilitator: Patton White

Accompanist: Aviva and the Flying Penguins

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The Back Page

Members and Friends Speak

We Have a Duty to Win ~ continued from page 5



old. As those who locked arms across four asphalt lanes embodied the legacy of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, they also pushed beyond those proffered paradigms to center historically marginalized voices and implicate not only racism itself, but also the systems that create and perpetuate racism.

Their banners declared that Black queer and trans lives matter. Black women's lives matter. Undocumented lives matter. And the presence of these lives on the highway, blocking the flow of commerce, signaled a determination to understand and brazenly target the systemic, economic roots of racial injustice.

Yoehzer Yeeftakh, an organizer of *#ItsBiggerThanYou*, a campaign which has played a big role in mobilizing the movement in Atlanta, later wrote about his reasons for blocking the interstate:

"Many Black men and women are born into an environment that, in many ways, denies their right to exist. Everywhere they go, they're told that they're not good enough. They make less money than their white peers, they get approved for fewer loans, and they are accepted into fewer prestigious academic programs. [...] They must work harder than anyone else to just get a foothold. And, at any moment, that foothold could be removed. At any moment, their brother, uncle, or son could be killed by a gun owner toting his weapon in the name of self-protection. Then they have to deal with the fact that this gunman may not be held accountable for murder."

Since the blockade, I've been on the sidelines of Atlanta's Black Lives Matter movement as much as I can be. I've offered my support mostly as a reporter and, where it's appropriate, as a White body in the streets marching in solidarity with my Black and Brown peers.

I haven't been to every action, and I haven't been on the inside of the close-knit groups planning them. I haven't lived most of the conditions that make this movement necessary. My observations are an attempt to document, from my limited perspective, some of what's unfolding in my home city, as well as to explore the emergent politics of Atlanta's small part in a movement that's sweeping the nation. ~

This article was excerpted from a longer one that appeared in the online journal *Scalawag*, July 8, 2015. Read the full article at <http://www.scalawagmagazine.org/articles/we-have-a-duty-to-win>. Reprinted here with the permission of the author.

Once you commit yourself to a place, you begin to share responsibility for what happens there. ~ Scott Russell Sanders

The Existentialist is published monthly. Deadline for the March 2016 newsletter is February 21. Send your articles and announcements to mcharleneball@yahoo.com. The editor reserves the right to edit or refuse any material submitted.