Executive Director Message

Eighty years ago, an American ship transporting 900 troops to fight in World War II was destroyed. The 700 lives lost in this tragedy are remembered as much as the bravery of “The Four Chaplains” on board.

When the SS Dorchester was attacked by the Nazis in the Northern Atlantic, these chaplains - a Catholic, a Jew, and two Protestants - worked together to assuage the fears of those onboard and guide the men to safety, primarily to the lifeboats. When the supply of life jackets ran out, the four chaplains did not hesitate to take off theirs and give them away. As the Dorchester sank into the ocean, soldiers watched from afar as the four chaplains sat shoulder to shoulder and recited prayers. These four men could have made their way to safety, but chose to go down with the ship and the souls they pledged to protect, comfort, and inspire.

“The Four Chaplains” are united beyond their final moments. In fact, their first steps to military service share the same impetus, namely the attack at Pearl Harbor. Further, we can only imagine their call to service was informed by a sense of civic responsibility from their civic education.

Civics is at the forefront of the educational conversation in America today. Next month Civic Spirit will participate in Civic Learning Week from March 6-10. We encourage you to take advantage of the many offerings online and in your home community. Moreover, Civic Spirit
will launch our **We the Educators** online seminar series featuring the theme of “The Four Freedoms.”

Our democracy’s needs will be met by ongoing civic education and the dialogue and communal collaboration that accompanies it. This enterprise requires daily attention by teachers, civic leaders, clergy, parents, and all interested stakeholders.

Civic education can inspire us to do great things – to stand up for what is right, speak out against injustice, embrace the opportunity to vote, represent our peers, and the list goes on and on.

Civic Spirit is committed to providing quality, non-partisan civic education to faith based schools. Thankfully, with your help and support our offerings are expanding and their impact is growing.

I am confident that the seeds we plant with the students of today will yield the citizens and leaders of tomorrow who live up to the hopes and ideals of “the Four Chaplains”.

Looking Forward,
Rabbi Charlie Savenor

If you would like to support our efforts, consider making a gift.

Donate Today

Upcoming Events

**Explore the Four Freedoms with Civic Spirit’s We the Educators Series**
Join Civic Spirit's **We the Educators** series for a deep-dive into the freedom of speech with **First Amendment expert, Floyd Abrams**. Floyd Abrams has argued in 13 cases before the Supreme Court, including the landmark Pentagon Papers case. We'll explore how the freedom of speech has uniquely shaped American society, and the ongoing challenges of protecting free speech today.

This session on March 1st kicks off a four-part exploration of FDR's Four Freedoms: Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Workship, Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Fear. Stay tuned for more details about sessions throughout the month of March.

**Register Here**

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**Civic Spirit Day**

Civic Spirit Day brings together students to connect and work collaboratively in designing solutions to shared civic issues. Further, this experience provides students with an opportunity to develop meaningful relationships and practice problem-solving across differences.
We are ecstatic to be holding **two Civic Spirit Days in 2023**, one for High School students and one for Middle School students! These events will convene over 100 students and educators, spanning diversity across socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, immigration status, and religion.

Holding two separate days allows us to tailor content to students' needs in a more targeted manner that speaks to their age, interests, and meeting them where they are in their civic education.

On Monday, **May 1**, High School students will meet at the New York Historical Society in Manhattan and use this amazing institution as a living lab to explore the topic of “Finding our Civic Voices”.

On Thursday, **May 11**, Middle School students will gather at Luria Academy in Brooklyn to explore the question of what it means to design and create intentional public spaces for teenagers.

Both days will include deep exploration of their theme, robust dialogue and discussion, and students working together in a culminating design challenge that expresses the day’s learning and applications. We can't wait!

For more information, please contact **Hillary Gardenswartz, our Director of Student Experiences**, at hillary@civicspirit.org

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**Apply now for the 2023-24 Educators Cohort**
The Educators Cohort is a 10-month fellowship for teachers and administrators committed to developing their capacity in non-partisan civic education and bringing new approaches to their schools and communities to enhance civic knowledge, skills, and responsibility. We are thrilled to announce that we will be expanding to two fellowship cohorts in 2023-24. This means two Summer Institutes, one in Chicago in July and another in NYC in August.

Applications are due by March 24, 2023.

Questions? Contact Yael Steiner at yael@civicspirit.org.

Apply Here

Join our February Friend-Raiser!
February is here and Civic Spirit is hosting its very first *Friend-Raiser!* As our signature Educators Cohort fellowship is expanding and doubling in size this year, our team is looking to our network for nominations of dedicated educators and schools that are interested in our program’s offerings.

Do you know an educator or school administrator that would benefit from Civic Spirit’s professional development? Is there a faith-based school in your community looking to revamp its civic education curriculum?

**Nominate them today!** We will be reaching out to nominees with invitations to join our upcoming events and learn more about Civic Spirit.

* Nominate one person or school and receive a Civic Spirit *Pocket Constitution*!
* Nominate two or more people/schools and you will enter for your chance to win free *Apple AirPods*!

We need your help to expand the Civic Spirit community and, most importantly, extend the impact of our work in advancing civic education.

We are grateful for your contributions and look forward to making new friends!

Nominate Here
Student Delegates

This year's Student Delegate Program is off to an exciting start! Comprised of 19 students in nine different schools from New York to Texas, this group represents high school students from a variety of backgrounds. This year's theme is "Digital Citizenship", and the group will explore what it means to be a citizen in the digital age.

The participation in the Student Delegate Program this year has increased over 100% from last year's cohort, a remarkable testament to the power of how engaging deeply with meaningful issues and working collaboratively across differences can create change. We can't wait to continue learning with this year's cohort and see how the projects they develop will create change in their communities!

Civic Spirit Runs Professional Development Session at Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School

Nina Taub, our Director of Education, and Hillary Gardenswartz, our Director of Student Experiences, had the opportunity to lead the entire Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School in a Professional Development session that highlighted our approach to engaging in difficult conversations around primary source texts. The session, “How might text based seminars help us have difficult and important conversations?” provided teachers with tools and experiences to foster school wide dialogue. The session focused on conceptions of patriotism and how patriotism is expressed in the Pledge of Allegiance. Teachers were asked to share their thoughts with each other in a Socratic Seminar discussion. They debated the merits of sharing their personal political viewpoints with students in their classes, discussed what the Pledge means to them, and whether they believe the words “under God " belong in the Pledge of Allegiance. The workshop
allowed teachers to express their viewpoints and also listen reflectively to their colleagues' points of view.

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Cohort 4 Updates
• **Melinda Goodwin** created a program for ninth grade students at **The Weber School**. The program centered around a screening of the movie *Refuge* and a Q and A session with the film’s Director, Erin Bernhardt. Melinda says that the experience, “really highlighted for me once again the power of film to evoke empathy and helped them to see the humanity of both men [a Kurdish refugee who befriends a former klansman]. It also raised great questions on political socialization, belonging, and citizenship.”

• **Executive Director, Rabbi Charles Savenor**, was a guest speaker in **Kim Gantz-Wexler’s** Public Speaking class at **Ramaz Middle School**. In honor of President's Day he spoke about George Washington’s Letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island.

• **Cary Riker**, English Department Chair at **Torah Academy of Bergen County**, built out a scope and sequence for the English curriculum by adding research components to the ninth-twelfth grade learning experience.

• **Mollie Beek**, history teacher at **Luria Academy**, took her students on a trip to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty to accompany their study of the immigrant experience in America.

• **Madeleine Cahn** created a document study for her students at **Ezra Academy** that helped students compare Hammurabi’s Code
to the United States Constitution and Connecticut’s Penal Code as well as to various Biblical texts.

Alumni Updates

Nina also had the opportunity this month to meet with Daniel Linehan, Assistant Principal of Student Affairs and Dean of Students, at St. Jean Baptiste High School. Mr. Linehan is a member of the 2018-19 inaugural Civic Spirit Educators Cohort. Nina and Dan discussed the importance of a cohort experience that allows teachers to make connections with those of different backgrounds and faiths. Mr. Linehan hopes to work with Civic Spirit to create partnership programs between his Catholic school students and Jewish day school students. Nina and Dan also spoke about our shared ideas for expanding Civic Spirit student programming to include civic skills projects. Hillary Gardenswartz, our new Director of Student Experiences, hopes to develop a year long experience for students in which they engage in civic research and problem solving.

Special Event for Educators Cohort Alumni
We are inviting alumni and current Educators Cohort fellows to be on the ground partners as we look to expand our alumni programming. Please join us on Tuesday, February 21, at 7:30-9:00 pm ET, for a session taught by Professor Sandy Kessler, “Lincoln and Thoreau on Civil Disobedience: When Should Young Americans Take to the Streets?” This session presents the opposing views of Abraham Lincoln and Henry David Thoreau on the important and controversial subject of civil disobedience. These great American thinkers can help us, as civic educators, think about what and how we should teach young Americans about their political obligations in these deeply contentious and troubled times. Following Dr. Kessler’s text study, we look forward to hearing your thoughts about future alumni programming.

Register Here

“Hear ye, hear ye!” Announcements

Remembering the four chaplains eighty years later, The Fulcrum - Civic Spirit Executive Director, Rabbi Charles
Savenor, writes about the four military chaplains - a Catholic, a Jew, and two Protestants, aboard the SS *Dorchester* and their common mission of serving their country. Read about their courageous acts of service [here](#).

**The Straus Center's *Restoring the American Story* Conference: March 19th, 2023** - High school educators will have the opportunity to explore the Hebrew Bible's role in American History at the Straus Center's upcoming conference at Yeshiva University next month. Civic Spirit's Director of Education, Nina Taub, will be conducting workshops on the role of the Bible in Presidential speeches. Learn more and register [here](#).

**Civic Learning Week: March 6th-10th, 2023** - Civic Learning Week seeks to highlight the importance of civic education in sustaining and strengthening constitutional democracy in the United States. Learn more and stay tuned for Civic Spirit’s Civic Learning Week programming.

**National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) 2023 Convention, April 11-13, 2023, Virtual and Dallas, TX** - Civic Spirit will be presenting a virtual session for the NCEA 2023 Convention on-demand library, available this Spring. To register for the convention and check out our session, "*Why Civic Education is What Our Students Need Today,*" and other available offerings for Catholic and religious educators, please click [here](#).

**Aaron Katler, CEO of UpStart, LinkedIn post on Civic Spirit** - We are thrilled to be a part of [Cohort 13 in UpStart's Venture Accelerator](#) and are even more excited to be featured in CEO Aaron Katler's latest LinkedIn post highlighting the work and impact of Civic Spirit. We invite you to read, share, and let us know your thoughts in the comment section [here](#).

**Schoolhouse Rock! 50th Anniversary Singalong** - For those feeling nostalgic, the beloved series is celebrating its 50th anniversary with a singalong special featuring a myriad of artists and celebrities, available to stream now on Hulu. Read more about the New York Times' take on the special [here](#).
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