Instead of shaking hands at the end of their championship game, the students from Scheck Hillel Community School and Archbishop Carroll Coleman High School began to brawl. According to news reports out of Miami, this incident began with Antisemitic and hate-filled curses.

This melee in Miami generated news headlines because this behavior goes against our shared aspirations of sportsmanship, and, even worse, signifies a symptom of a growing national problem. Distrust of the “other” has become a regular occurrence in schools around the country. While team sports are supposed to build character and community, there are similar stories of verbal taunts and some punches thrown at schools from Los Angeles, California, to Franklin, Massachusetts.

With so much of our attention focused on what is being taught in the classroom, it behooves us to notice what is going on outside. How often do children get together with those who are different from themselves? Where do students engage with new peers?

Over the past nine months with Civic Spirit, I have had the chance to talk with teachers and students about these very questions. What I learned is that students mostly meet peers different from themselves on a sports field, in a debate tournament, at Model UN and a Science
Fair. All of these activities contribute to our children’s development, yet their common thread is a focus on competition.

Robert Kennedy once said that "the lessons of competition are lessons for life." Competition pushes us to reach our potential and affords the opportunity to learn how to win with grace and lose with dignity.

But what happens when our only interaction with the other is through competition?

When one doesn’t know the people on the other side of the field be it in Miami or Anytown USA, it is too easy to classify an opponent myopically as merely a member of another religion, race, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic background. The problem with contact limited to competition is that our pastimes can easily become clash times.

As much as Civic Spirit provides training in civic education to faith based schools, we provide opportunities for Jewish, Catholic, Christian, and Muslim teachers and students to meet and work together. While dialogue across differences is an important first step, real change transpires when we collaborate in an ongoing manner. This approach constitutes the underpinnings of our Educators Cohort, Student Delegates program, and Civic Spirit Days. These experiences expose participants to other points of views and facilitate an environment where collaboration takes place and can be leveraged to address common concerns and reach shared aspirations.

What amazes me most about the field of civic education is the amount of collaboration taking place. This week Civic Spirit has been participating in Civic Learning Week with offerings from an array of organizations. The spirit of the week is that all of us are needed to enhance civic education, despite differences in approach and overlapping needs.

Reflecting on the clash between the students in Miami, I am reminded of the words of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks: “We encounter God in the face of a stranger. That, I believe, is the Hebrew Bible’s single greatest and most counterintuitive contribution to ethics. God creates
difference; therefore it is in one-who-is-different that we meet God.”

When we give our youth the opportunity to work together rather than against one another, we will all win the day.

Looking Forward,
Rabbi Charlie Savenor

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

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Upcoming Events

Join us on 3/15 for “What is Religious Liberty: The Founders’ View”

We continue our We the Educators series on FDR’s Four Freedoms with an exploration of the freedom of worship with Professor Vincent Phillip Muñoz. Muñoz is the Tocqueville Associate Professor of Political Science and Concurrent Associate Professor of Law at the University of Notre Dame. He is the Founding Director of ND’s Center
for Citizenship & Constitutional Government. Dr. Muñoz writes and teaches across the fields of constitutional law, American politics, and political philosophy with a focus on religious liberty and the American Founding.

Missed the first two sessions in the series? Watch them here!

- We invite you to view the recording of last week’s session “Protecting the Freedom of Speech: Historical and Contemporary Challenges” with Floyd Abrams and Professor Rita Koganzon.
- "Freedom from Fear: Wisdom from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks" with Rabbi Dr. Raphael Zarum.

Civic Learning Week

Civic Spirit is proud to be a partner in the first national Civic Learning Week, which brings together students, educators, policymakers, and leaders to energize the movement for civic education across the nation. We invite you to check out the events and resources page of the Civic Learning Week website to access programs and materials from Civic Spirit and other civic education providers.

Civic Spirit Day
For the first time since 2019, we are bringing students back together to enjoy Civic Spirit Day as an in-person experience! Students will have the opportunity to connect and work collaboratively across differences and design solutions on shared civic issues.

On Monday, May 1, High School students will meet at the New-York Historical Society in Manhattan. Using some of the galleries of the museum alongside interactive programs and discussions, students will explore the topic of “Finding our Civic Voices”.

This year’s topic for Middle School students, “Civic Spaces, Empowered Voices: Designing Intentional Public Places for Teens,” will allow participants to practice working with others, express ideas, engage in respectful dialogue and discourse, and use civic knowledge to respond to challenges about what it means for teens to inhabit communal space. Middle School Civic Spirit Day will take place on Thursday, May 11 at Luria Academy in Brooklyn.
Apply now for the 2023-24 Educators Cohort

Spots are filling up for the Educators Cohort! If you are considering applying, we encourage you to get your application in. 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 will have two fellowship cohorts in 2023-24, each one launching with a Summer Institute. **We have changed the location of the July 10th-13th Summer Institute to Boston.** The July 31st-August 3rd 3rd Summer Institute will take place in New York City.

Applications are due by March 24, 2023.

Questions about the fellowship and its stipend? Contact Yael Steiner at yael@civicspirit.org.
Civic Spirit founders, Rabbi Robert Hirt and Virginia Bayer, graciously hosted our community of supporters for an inspiring evening event with Dr. Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations and New York Times bestselling author of The Bill of Obligations: The Ten Habits of Good Citizens. The night was comprised of an engaging conversation between Civic Spirit co-founder, Dr. Tamara Tweel, and Dr. Haass on the importance of civics, its role in healing divisions and protecting our democracy, and Civic Spirit's mission alignment in the imperative task of imbuing this responsibility in our students and educators. Moreover, our Executive Director, Rabbi Charlie Savenor, had the opportunity to share our vision for Civic Spirit's next stage in scaling and expansion. During the reception, our Civic Spirit team conversed with participants and supporters. Thank you to all who attended and to all who continue to be a part of our community dedicated to reinstating and reinvigorating a comprehensive civic education for our students and educators.

To view more photos of our event, click here.
If you would like to support our efforts, consider making a gift.

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Student Delegates Update

Our Student Delegates continue to explore "what it means to be a citizen in the digital age". This year's group has 18 participants from New York to Texas. They recently learned with Sanah Jivani, Founder and CEO of Love Your Natural Self Foundation, hearing how she uses social media to positively and effectively share her journey from self-bullying to self-love. Student Delegates are currently creating their own posts about issues that are personal and important to them. Be on the lookout over the coming weeks for news and updates about these issues from our Delegates over our social media platforms!
Educators Cohort Workshops and Learning Gatherings

Nina Taub, Civic Spirit’s Director of Education, ran a workshop for the Civic Spirit student club at Yeshiva University High School for Girls (YUHSG). Saritte Wolkenstein, a 2022-23 Educators Cohort fellow, created the club to encourage students to appreciate the role America has played in welcoming their families as immigrants. At the workshop, students recorded family stories of emigrating to this country and finding their place in American society. Students will continue to research their family history in preparation for a YUHSG immigration history fair in the Spring.

Civic Spirit Educators Fellows also came together to learn from fellow cohort members, Judith Ortega (2022-23 cohort) and Adrian McConnel (2021-22 cohort). Adrian founded Youth Revive, an organization dedicated to increasing civic engagement and providing empowerment opportunities in low income communities. Judith and Adrian presented Youth Revive’s curricular scope and sequence and led current cohort members through a lesson on how students can use the power of their own voice and ideas to change society.

Alumni Learning Session

Civic Spirit held an alumni learning session with Dr. Sandy Kessler on February 21. Dr. Kessler of John Jay University presented on the different takes of Lincoln and Thoreau on civil disobedience. Dr. Kessler led us through a lively mock debate between Lincoln and Thoreau and challenged
us to think about how their positions play out in a modern context. Stay tuned for more alumni programming in 2023!

Cohort 4 Updates

- **Beverley Madar’s Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School** National Honor’s Society students are creating skits and videos that showcase the toll social media takes on students' mental health. Students are writing questions for a panel discussion that will take place at the school that will showcase the important civic skills the students developed while collaborating on this project.

- **David Lakin’s** Advanced Placement Government classes in **The Weber School** are taking online politics surveys that analyze their political typology. They will then analyze the data they learned about their political viewpoints and compare it across different survey results to see how accurately they felt the polling data captured their viewpoints.

- **Ari Levine and Linda Litland**, of **Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy**, created a student driven project to encourage students to learn about the importance of the Constitution and the circumstances in which it was created. Students will research the
creation of the U.S. Constitution and create infographics to present their findings to their peers.

- **Tamar Gaffin-Cahn** created a new program for Temple Emanuel’s Social Action Committee. Eighth grade students are meeting monthly to practice civic skills, such as dialogue, and discuss civic action projects that they hope to jumpstart in their community this spring.

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**School Visits**

Our Executive Director, Rabbi Charlie Savenor, headed to Florida this past month to visit with faith-based schools in the area and learn more about the needs educators have in implementing civics in the classrooms. He had the pleasure of meeting with Rabbi Benjy Horowitz, Sharona Kay, and Dr. Holly Seidenfeld at Katz Yeshiva High School of South Florida and Helena Levine, head of school at Donna Klein Jewish Academy. Civic Spirit stays committed to hearing from our fellow educators and faculty in the field to find the best of way of partnering with our team to bring a comprehensive civic education to students across the US.

If you would like to nominate a school or educator who can benefit from our programs and would be interested in learning more, we invite you to submit your nominations below!

Refer a Friend to Civic Spirit!
“Hear ye, hear ye!” Announcements

Better Arguments Ambassador Program - Congratulations to Hillary Gardenswartz, our Director of Student Experiences, on her acceptance to the Better Arguments Ambassador Program! Hillary will be joining the fellowship this spring and learn from the organization a framework on how to engage thoughtfully across divides and improve civil discourse in our communities.

"An accident waiting to happen: The Presidency of John Tyler" - Executive Director Rabbi Charlie Savenor published an article in The Fulcrum on the complicated legacy of our tenth US president, John Tyler. Check out his latest article 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 conduct a workshop on the role of the Bible in Presidential speeches. Learn more and register here.

The Bible in Context: A Methodology for Interpreting the Bible - Congratulations to Jason Hensley, Cohort 3 member of our Educators Cohort, on publishing his new book that presents a specific methodology for interpreting Bible passages and how its messages can be applied today. Read more about his book here.

Remembering Judith Heumann, "Mother of the Disability Rights Movement" - We are saddened by the passing on March 4th of disability rights leader, activist and author, Judith “Judy” Heumann. Heumann became an internationally recognized leader for her instrumental work pushing for historic legislation, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the
Rehabilitation Act. In her 2020 memoir, she reminds us of the impact civic action can have and the power we all hold as members in our society: "Some people say that what I did changed the world. But really, I simply refused to accept what I was told about who I could be. And I was willing to make a fuss about it.”

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