Executive Director Message

The Responsibility of A Living History
By Rabbi Charles E. Savenor

When America’s founders were imagining the great seal of this new democracy, several suggested a depiction of the Exodus from Egypt. The Israelites’ overcoming oppression and reaching freedom captured their imagination, as they saw themselves in this miraculous, triumphant story.

While this biblical narrative inspired Benjamin Franklin and some of his peers, other leaders harbored reservations about the power of this story. After the Haitian Revolution in 1804, slaveholders in the British West Indies and American South worried about how enslaved people would hear the Exodus story and fear the conclusions they would draw from it. In an attempt to safeguard against a rebellion of those seeking freedom, slaveholders not only limited literacy, but also censured the Bible. So much so, in 1807 a version of the Bible was produced without mention of the Israelite Exodus.

This so-called “Slave Bible” may have removed the Exodus from its pages, but the human desire for freedom and liberty can never be erased. Moreover, we know from the many African American Spirituals - like “Let My People Go” and “Go Down, Moses” - that the Exodus story framed slaves’ aspirations of reaching a “Promised Land” where
freedom is a shared norm.

As the Jewish people celebrate Passover this week, the Exodus story is retold and embraced anew. What makes Passover special is not just the telling of the tale, but the internalization of its values and visions through rituals, questions, and conversation.

Our celebrations of Passover, Easter, and Ramadan are also elevated by the storytellers as much as the story. At our holiday tables, we are all educators. Many of us will be in multigenerational settings where we are receivers of our most cherished narratives that one day we will be expected to pass down to our students, children, and grandchildren. Relaying these experiences through our eyes, we become what Abraham Lincoln calls a “living history, ..a history bearing the indubitable testimonies of its own authenticity.”

It is important for us to consider that just as the Exodus has inspired hope on these shores, so too has the American experiment in democracy seeded dreams around the globe. At a time when democracy is challenged near and far, our role as a “living history” about the American story is more important than ever. When we embrace the opportunity to share how responsibility, integrity, listening, and compromise contribute to the free society in which we live today, we plant the seeds of hope for tomorrow.

On behalf of our Civic Spirit team, I wish you and yours a happy and healthy holiday!

Looking Forward,
Rabbi Charlie Savenor

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

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Upcoming Events
The Coronation of King Charles will fascinate with its historical echoes and magnificent pageantry as it draws a tremendous TV audience worldwide. But is it just Britain's version of Hollywood or should it be taken more seriously? With his unique insights into English society and experiences with the royal family, Clive Lawton will guide us through the deeper meaning of the Coronation, its ancient biblical roots, and its significance in today's world.

This is the first session of a two-part series with Clive. The series is co-sponsored by the Orange County Community Scholars Program (CSP).

Clive Lawton is CEO of the Commonwealth Jewish Council which draws together and represents about 40 communities around the globe. He was co-founder of Limmud – an annual Jewish learning festival attracting thousands of participants - and worked for its global expansion so that there is now a Limmud in about 90 locations worldwide. With degrees in Literature, Education, Theatre and Film, Hinduism and Islam, and Management Science, he is considered a
Middle School Civic Spirit Day will take place on May 11th at Luria Academy in Brooklyn. Students from Luria, De La Salle Academy, Ramaz, and Ezra Academy will have the opportunity to connect and work collaboratively across differences and design solutions on shared civic issues. 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.

Please note that High School Civic Spirit Day has been postponed until the 2023-2024 school year. We look forward to sharing a new date in the coming months!

For more information, please contact Hillary Gardenswartz, our Director of Student Experiences, at hillary@civicspirit.org
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. The fellowship launches with a Summer Institute in New York City from July 31st - August 3rd at The New-York Historical Society. The Summer Institute is run in partnership with the Jack Miller Center, and this year's theme is Liberty, Equality, and Citizenship.

The application deadline has been extended to Friday, April 21st.

Thanks to generous funding, this fellowship is offered without cost to participants and with a stipend.

Questions about the fellowship and its stipend? Contact Yael Steiner, our Director of Programs, at yael@civicspirit.org.

Apply Here
Director of Education, Nina Taub, presented at Yeshiva University’s Straus Center Conference *Restoring the American Story: The Hebrew Bible’s Role in American History*. Nina’s presentation focused on the topic of Divine Providence in Jewish and American History. Nina asked educators and scholars to partner together to read and compare the ways in which the concept of divine Providence shapes the Hebrew Bible and American thought. Participants also engaged in a lively discussion of the sources and the ways in which they can be used to encourage critical reading, thinking, and discussion skills in the classroom.

You can read more about the conference here: [YU Blog](#) - features Civic Spirit in an article about the Straus Conference.
Civic Spirit visited with Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School for Girls' Civic Spirit Student Club where students presented their research and action plans for creating local change on an issue they care about under the guidance of faculty advisors Samantha Kur and Chani Rotenberg. Civic Spirit educators provided feedback and encouragement to the students as they work to create awareness campaigns and plan for Spring collection drives. It was inspiring to see students' passion and motivation to use their free time to make change within their school, community, and society at large.
Our team also had the pleasure of visiting **The Frisch School**, where we met with Educators Cohort alumni, Nina Cohen and Ethan Zadoff, and Rabbi Eli Ciner. During our visit, we sat in on a Government class where students took part in a self-facilitated conversation about passing down democratic values to the next generation.

Our Executive Director, Rabbi Charlie Savenor, visited **Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School** where he met with current Educators Cohort member, Beverley Madar, and alumni, Petrus Fortune and Bill Mason. Rabbi Savenor had the opportunity to teach about “The Power of the Exodus Story” to the African American Studies Class and “Germany Between the World Wars” to the Holocaust Class.

**Cohort 4 Updates**
Emily Schwartz of Lumen Verum Academy in Braintree, MA, is asking students to analyze American values in literature and history. In class, through discussions of The Last of the Mohicans, students are discussing the value of rugged individualism. Their final project will be to write their own American mythic literary tale.

Madeleine Cahn and Amanda Brodie of Ezra Academy in Woodbridge, CT, accompanied their students on trips to Alabama and Washington DC. They worked to prepare students for the experiences by thinking about the role of individuals in social movements and preparing position papers on issues to present to elected officials. Students learned first hand the role of citizens as active participants in our democracy.

Colleen Coveney and Dacy Jirovetz of Milwaukee Jewish Day School are creating a Scope and Sequence for fifth through eighth grade Social Studies classes that explicitly focuses on civic dispositions and skills needed for 21st century citizenship.

Development
Your donation can have double the impact thanks to the generosity of UpStart's Venture Accelerator! We are thrilled to take part in the Matching Gift Campaign and raise the funds needed to grow our student and educator programs and ensure civic education is accessible to everyone in our faith communities.

Make a gift today and help us meet our goal of raising $15,000 for a $15,000 match!

Donate Today!

Civic Spirit is honored to announce recent grants from The Good People Fund and The PwC Charitable Foundation. The support, investment, and belief in Civic Spirit's mission that we have received from foundations and you, our stakeholders, are an incredible gift. We welcome new donors to our wonderful community!

Civic Spirit educates, inspires, and empowers schools across faith traditions to enhance civic belonging, knowledge, and responsibility in their student and faculty communities. Every gift, small or large, enables us to do this work and we are thankful for every single one of our donors dedicated to restoring faith in our democracy.
“Hear ye, hear ye!” Announcements

Facing History and Ourselves Founder, Margot Stern Strom - We mourn the loss of Margot Stern Strom, the founder of Facing History And Ourselves and educator of anti-hate curriculums. To read more about her legacy and important work, click here.

"Changing pastimes" - Executive Director Rabbi Charlie Savenor's recent article in The Fulcrum uses America's pastime preferences to explore what happens when students only meet new peers in competitive environments. Check out his latest article here.

Museum of Political Corruption features Civic Spirit - Civic Spirit is proud to be featured in the Solutions Hall of the Museum of Political Corruption, a nonpartisan institution dedicated to educating and empowering the public by providing a better understanding of political corruption, and encouraging solutions that promote ethics reform and honest governance.

National Week of Conversation on April 17-23 - We invite you to look at the compiled resources and engage in conversation in your community. To learn more about how clergy are utilizing these resources to create dialogue in divided communities, read here.

Interested in all of the religious holidays taking place right now? - Check out the latest article by Interfaith America on each of the religious holidays happening this April here.
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