Will We be Ready for Independence Day 2026?

Independence Day holds great meaning for our democracy, but it suffers from its placement on the calendar. The Fourth of July is associated more with the beginning of summer, barbeques, and beaches than the birth of our nation.

Just three years from now, the Fourth of July will take center stage as the United States will mark the Semiquincentennial, the tongue-twister name for America’s 250th birthday. The question is, will we be ready?

With civic education and history knowledge at all-time lows on our National Report Card, we have reason to be concerned about whether students will understand the significance of the day. Further, political polarization has made telling the story of America more complicated than not just for students, but their teachers, too.

Nailing down the significance of Independence Day has never been simple, even in 1776. In a letter to his wife Abigail on July 3, 1776, John Adams writes: “The Second Day of July 1776, will be the most memorable Epocha, in the History of America. .. It ought to be commemorated, as the Day of Deliverance by solemn Acts of Devotion to God Almighty .. from one End of this Continent to the other from this
Time forward forever more.”

The second of July?

Adams associated Independence Day with July 2 because the Continental Congress voted that day on the resolution to declare independence. In the eyes of our second president, this vote for liberty captured the spirit of the Independence Day more than the signatures that affirmed this body’s decision two days later.

With the 250th national anniversary slowly appearing on our radar, Adams’s wrestling with the cornerstone of Independence Day is more relevant than ever. Are we commemorating a historical moment of signatures on the Declaration or celebrating an ongoing process of democratic self-governance distinct from a monarchy across the ocean?

These positions clearly inform one another, yet each possesses its own legitimacy and limitations. At a time of tribalism and divides, both understandings of July 4 generate intense reactions.

One of the strengths of Civic Spirit is our nonpartisan, inclusive approach to comprehensive civic education. Our mission holds that the path to a stronger democracy is paved with democratic fluency, civic skills, and civic belonging. We promote dialogue across differences so that the next generation of our democracy are prepared to respect one another, work together, and share dreams of a future stronger than our own.

Grateful for our successes and excited for innovations to come, our team appreciates your support and trust. Your generosity will enable us to provide training and resources to faith based schools - and starting this summer, camps - across the country.

Starting preparations today for our nation’s Semiquincentenniel, Civic Spirit will frame this experience as an opportunity for reflection, collaboration, and revitalization. By starting 3 years in advance, our students will be prepared for Independence Day 2026 and everyday that follows.
Looking Forward to 2026,
Rabbi Charlie Savenor

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

Donate Today

Civic Spirit Goes to Camp

Civic Spirit is bringing civic education to summer camps! Hillary Gardenswartz, Director of Student Experiences, has developed a slate of programs intended to be used in the camp setting with campers from a variety of ages. These programs were shared with camp directors and administrators of several different camps, especially in advance of July 4th. In addition to counselors running our programs, Hillary and our Executive Director, Rabbi Charlie Savenor, led some of the sessions.

Partnering with Camp Ramah in Nyack, New York, Camp Ramah in California in Ojai, and Camp Yavneh in Northwood, New Hampshire, Hillary and Rabbi Savenor visited these camps to meet with and train staff, lead programs, and get a chance to observe camp life during the summer. Our programming engaged over 300
participants! We look forward to our continued growth in the camp space as we expand our reach and deepen our work in experiential learning.

Check out more photos from our visits on Facebook!

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Civic Spirit Clubs

We are excited to launch a new version of our Student Delegate Program in the 2023-2024 school year with the creation of Civic Spirit Clubs! These co-curricular clubs will be school-based, providing students with opportunities to meet regularly in-person and address local issues that are important to their community. Working with an advisor to develop a capstone project that they will present at the end of the year, students develop leadership skills, practice problem-solving, and build bonds as a group. They will also have the chance to connect with other students across our network, and learn from civic change makers across the country.

Thanks to a generous grant, Civic Spirit will pay the advisor of a school’s Civic Spirit Club $2,026 to facilitate the group for the year.

To learn more about Civic Spirit Clubs or if you are interested in
In just two weeks, 38 educators from 25 schools and organizations across the country have been accepted to the 2023-24 Educators Cohort. This year the number of educators has not only more than doubled, but we also will have two cohorts - one for middle school educators and another their high school counterparts. The fellowship will launch with a Summer Institute at the New-York Historical Society in Manhattan on July 31-August 3, 2023.

This year's theme is “Liberty, Equality, and Citizenship” will be explored through scholar-led seminars and engage in pedagogy workshops with Civic Spirit and New-York Historical Society staff. Evening programs include a night on Broadway to see “Hamilton” and our second Summer Speaker and Reception at the New-York Historical Society for supporters and friends of Civic Spirit.

We look forward to sharing updates about Summer Institute on social media and in the next newsletter.
Civic Spirit at KIVUNIM

The KIVUNIM Fellowship provides an international educational study and travel program for high school educators seeking to expand historical and contemporary understandings of race and religion and combat racism, bigotry, and anti-Semitism in the classrooms. Civic Spirit educators and Educators Cohort alumni - Petrus Fortune and Beverley Madar of Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School, David Lakin, Melinda Goodwin, and Dr. Rachel Rothstein of The Weber School, and Eileen Postler of Xaverian - joined the fellowship this summer and have recently traveled to Morocco in an intensive study mission along with a cohort of 40 educators.

Melinda Goodwin describes her experience:

"The opportunity to travel with Muslim social activists and meet with Muslim student organizations who are seeking to bridge the divide between Jews and Muslims in Morocco and Israel was inspiring. It will continue to challenge the three of us [educators] from Weber in our government and civic engagement courses and stretch us to challenge our students further in the classroom and field experience...The parallel aims between Civic Spirit and KIVUNIM was evident and for me personally was an excellent way to build on last summer's educational cohort experience to an expanded application of civic ideals in the global context."

Special thanks to Peter Geffen, Founder and President of KIVUNIM, for his partnership. We appreciate his vision for learning about civics, history, and civic belonging at home and abroad.
To view more photos of their study mission to Morocco, visit our Facebook album here! This fall we will hold a We The Educators session to learn more about their experience abroad and how they are implementing into their classrooms.

Start of the Year Giving Campaign

Help Civic Spirit start off our new fiscal year by donating today! We are immensely grateful for the support our donors have given this past year that has enabled our team to double the size of our incoming Educators Cohort and bring back our in-person Civic Spirit Day. Without our community of dedicated supporters, this work would not have been possible.

As Civic Spirit continues to grow and expand our civic education programs this year, your donation will help us say "yes" to more students and educators. Our team will be welcoming in a new cohort of educators into our Summer Institute this August, launching Civic Spirit Clubs in schools this fall, and widening our scope to include experiential and summer camp students into our programs. Be a part of the movement that is reigniting civic education back in the classrooms and instill faith in our shared democracy.

Donate Today

Jolts of Justice: A Balancing Act
Civic Spirit has been a source of unparalleled inspiration in my professional growth as an educator. When I joined the first Educators Cohort in 2018, I found the ideas explored at the Summer Institutes and the yearlong follow-ups affirmed nurtured questions I had been grappling with. Specifically, how are we cultivating and nurturing within our students a sense of connection and identity within our nation? How are we affording our students opportunities to form and express these affinities?

I am honored to presently join as the Director of Education and Innovation and help influence the national civic landscape with exciting new initiatives and rich learning experiences, and partner with master educators in this sacred endeavor. One particular area of passion is the realm of Supreme Court education by exploring contemporary issues through the lens of judicial decisions with their expansive history and implications for the future.

The recent bevy of Supreme Court decisions has sent shockwaves across the fruited plain, eliciting an assortment of reactions from celebration to public outcry, including questioning the legitimacy of the High Court. The flood of decisions emanating from the Court addressed a wide range of topics that require skillful balancing of interests and value considerations. Among them, to what extent does liberty of conscience secured under the First Amendment hold weight when one's conscience precludes one from providing a service for a protected group under the Fourteenth Amendment? In the case of Creative LLC vs. Elenis, a web designer refused her graphic design services to same-sex couples raising the question; can the government compel her to work against her will? Does Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 allow higher education institutions to consider race as a factor in admissions while redressing systemic inequality based on race, as in Students For Fair Admissions vs. Presidents and
Fellows of Harvard College and the University of North Carolina? In these cases and many others, this balancing exercise of competing values is influenced by various factors, notably one's philosophical approach to interpreting the law and perspectives on a host of issues.

According to Alexander Hamilton, in Federalist 78, the Courts are tasked with absorbing some of the charged aspects of societal discord and dissensus. He writes:

"The interpretation of the laws is the proper and peculiar province of the courts. A constitution is, in fact, and must be regarded by the judge as a fundamental law. It, therefore, belongs to them to ascertain its meaning, as well as the meaning of any particular act proceeding from the legislative body. If there should happen to be an irreconcilable variance between the two, that which has the superior obligation and validity ought, of course, to be preferred; or, in other words, the Constitution ought to be preferred to the statute, the intention of the people to the intention of their agents."

Hamilton regards the courts as the guardian of the Constitution. In striking a balance between the will of the people as expressed through laws passed by the legislature and the will of the people as manifest through the Constitution, as interpreted by judges, he prioritizes the latter. In this manner, the courts serve as a check on the legislative branch. As someone schooled in the Federalist philosophy, Hamilton affords greater credence to the judges than the legislature when a conflict emerges.

Civic Spirit helps educators explore these charged topics decided recently by the SCOTUS by providing dialogic skills training and workshops addressing and inserting divisive issues. The classroom can serve as a learning lab for students to listen curiously to understand and learn from their peers, not merely to win an argument. The civic skills of fostering empathy and extending a generosity of spirit can begin with even one great classroom simulation of civil discourse that weaves together intellectual diversity and civility.

For more information about our educational offerings and Professional Development, email audi@civicspirit.org.
“Hear ye, hear ye!” Announcements

BBYO International Kallah 2023 - Civic Spirit has been invited to present at the international BBYO Summer Kallah on July 21-23 in the Poconos. Over 150 teens will participate in the weekend, as Rabbi Savenor, Audi Hecht, and Hillary Gardenswartz will present and facilitate sessions on "Judaism and Democracy".

"JKHA Faculty Complete Civic Education Fellowship" - Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy faculty and 2022-2023 Educators Cohort participants, Ari Levine and Linda Litland, are recognized for their hard work and dedication in completing our fellowship! Read more about their experience in this article here.

"From gun violence to great composers: Meet our Student Podcast Challenge finalists" - Civic Spirit Day attendee, Mia Tweel, was a finalist for NPR's fifth annual Student Podcast Challenge! Educators Cohort alum and Luria Academy faculty, Chiara Cafiero, worked with Mia in producing their podcast titled "We The Students," which prompts the question "How can you love democracy after losing an election?" The podcast was also developed as Chiara's Civic Spirit Project during her time in our Educators Cohort program last year. Special congratulations to Dr. Tamara Tweel, Civic Spirit's founding director and Mia's mother!

Congratulations to Carla Arichavala on being promoted to our new Development and Communications Manager! Carla will continue to work with our network of donors and stakeholders in supporting Civic Spirit's growth and expansion this upcoming year. She looks forward to sharing stories, news, and updates from the educators and students in
Civic Spirit's programs who continue to inspire her everyday!

To view updates to our Civic Spirit team, visit "Our People" page [here](#)!}

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