Executive Director Message

“The Making of An American”

Our Educators Cohort opened earlier this month with this question: “What experience shaped your American identity?”

This seemingly straightforward question generated robust conversation. Fellows spoke about going into the ballot box with their parents, visits to historical sites, and trips abroad that generated first opportunities to reflect upon America from afar. Group members mentioned iconic events - the pandemic, 9/11, the Bicentennial, etc. – and their impact on their lives. Memories intermixed with inspiration, questions, and aspirations.

The members of this year’s Educators Cohort represent schools of different faith traditions, hail from all over the United States, and include newcomers to the field along with their veteran peers. Beyond the diversity of this year’s fellows, what struck me most upon meeting them at our recent Summer Institute were the commonalities, beyond their responses to the ice breaker question.

Similar challenges motivated them to join the fellowship, including teaching America’s story during a time of intense political polarization and a societal preference of scattered soundbites over ongoing conversations of consequence. More importantly, their conviction that civic education can enable us to overcome contemporary issues and inspire students to develop strong American identities energized the
This summer has been filled with many programmatic achievements for our organization. We piloted experiential education at several overnight camps. This year’s Educators Cohort is more than double the size of last year’s group. Moreover, our second annual Summer Speaker and Reception at the New-York Historical Society attracted an enthusiastic crowd to explore “Frederick Douglass: The Making of an American” with Professor Lucas Morel.

As great as these programs are, they serve as vehicles to achieve our larger goal. Civic Spirit ultimately brings people together in study, conversation, and collaboration to create opportunities to develop and strengthen our American identities.

Our Summer Institute began with a question about personal meaning because these educators themselves are meaning makers for their students. It was clear from our opening conversation that these fellows embrace the responsibility beautifully expressed in the musical Hamilton: “History has its eyes on you.”

With so much at stake currently in the United States, Civic Spirit seeks to transform civic education in day schools to inform what it means to be an informed, engaged, and responsible citizen in America today. Like the members of our Educators Cohort, our team works each day on the making of Americans to secure American democracy for generations to come.

Looking Forward,

Rabbi Charles E. Savenor
Executive Director, Civic Spirit

P.S. – If you would like to share an experience that shaped your American identity, please email me at charlie@civicspirit.org. I look forward to hearing from you!
Summer Institute Recap

From July 31-August 3, thirty six educators from 22 schools and organizations participated in Civic Spirit’s Summer Institute, run in partnership with the Jack Miller Center. More than double the size of last year’s group, educators were divided into two cohorts, with 22 participants working in middle schools (Cohort 5) and 14 in high schools (Cohort 6). Held at the New-York Historical Society, the Summer Institute kicks off the year-long Educators Cohort fellowship, through which fellows study, design, and implement new civic learning opportunities in their schools. These projects include new classroom
content or school wide programs aligned with Civic Spirit's methodology of cultivating civic belonging, democratic fluency, and civic skills.

The theme of the Summer Institute was “Liberty, Equality, and Citizenship”. Fellows participated in scholar-led seminars on pivotal American texts, inquiry based sessions led by New-York Historical Society and Civic Spirit educators, and gained new skills for facilitating dialogue on divisive topics. Scholars included Professors Susan McWilliams Barndt of Pomona College, Roosevelt Montás of Colombia University, Lucas Morel of Washington and Lee University, and Diana Schaub of Loyola University Maryland.

Thanks to a generous anonymous gift, Civic Spirit brought participants to Hamilton on Broadway. More than reinforcing the texts explored earlier in the day during Summer Institute, this night on Broadway was meaningful because of the connections between the show and hip-hop music, which is currently celebrating its 50th anniversary.

With the ongoing support of a Civic Spirit coach and virtual learning opportunities throughout the year, we are excited to see how the fellows in these two new cohorts will bring new civic learning opportunities to their educational communities.

Check out more photos from our Summer Institute on Facebook!

Civic Spirit Clubs
Launching This Fall
We are excited to launch **Civic Spirit Clubs** in high schools this year! 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 nationwide network, and learn from civic change makers across the country.

It’s not too late to bring a Civic Spirit Club to your school! To learn more, or if you have any questions, please contact Hillary Gardenswartz, our Director of Student Experiences, at [hillary@civicspirit.org](mailto:hillary@civicspirit.org).

View our Civic Spirit Clubs flyer [here](#)!  

NEW Professional Development Opportunities  
2023-24
Civic Spirit offers expansive and relevant professional development that will enrich the civic landscape at your school! Our Professional Development offerings provide educators, school administrators, and community leaders with an exploratory and immersive experience in crucial civics topics. These topics are carefully curated to align with the pressing issues in today's classrooms and the halls of national debate. Our workshops offer a content and skills-rich approach, equipping educators to foster meaningful discussions and active learning experiences for their students. Educators will have the opportunity to reflect on and process their individual work and practices throughout the workshops, ensuring a personalized and transformative learning experience. We understand that each school community has unique needs and interests, and our program is fully customizable, allowing you to choose from abridged or comprehensive learning experiences based on your aims.

Below are some of our current offerings that can be offered to educators or tailored to a community of students:

- Teaching Election 2024: Red & Blue Badge of Courage
- Drawing the Line on the Free Speech Spectrum
- National Growth Mindset: Bridging Rights with Responsibilities
- Diversity and Intellectual Inclusion: What’s Your Civic Language?
- American Pride and Un-American Prejudice: Fostering Civic Identity while Navigating Dissonance

To view full descriptions of our Professional Development offerings, access our flyer [here](#).
Long Island Educators Cohort

Civic Spirit is excited to launch the Long Island Educators Cohort for educators and school leaders who teach or support social studies, history, government, humanities, Judaic studies, and student life. Using the same components of the Educators Cohort, the program begins with a two-day Winter Institute on Sunday to Monday, December 3-4 with scholars and practitioners in civics education where will introduce strategies for implementing our participating school’s visions for civic education that reflect the mission and aims of their school communities. The program will continue with coaching during the school-year, virtual professional development workshops, and guidance for implementing a civics project at participating schools. Workshops will also include timely support for navigating the 2024 Election. There is also another full day seminar on Wednesday, March 6.

We look forward to welcoming Long Island educators to this cohort and expanding Civic Spirit’s influence for the benefit of our students and nation. For more information, please contact our Director Education and Innovation, Audi Hecht, at audi@civicspirit.org.

Parliament of World Religions
Civic Spirit’s Director of Education and Innovation, Audi Hecht, participated in a panel on Judaism & Democracy at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, Illinois on August 15. Facilitated by Aaron Dorfman, Founder and CEO of A More Perfect Union, the panel also featured Dani Levine, Director of Social Impact at Hillel International; and Rabbi Jessica Wainer, Congregation Eitz Chaim in Chicago. Audi Hecht spoke to the education aspect of work in the sphere of Judaism and Democracy, Dani Levine on college campus work, and Rabbi Wainer to congregational work. Panelists addressed topics such as Judaism’s inspiration for civic work and engagement, overcoming challenges associated with polarization, and how leaders can create spaces and communities where people of all political affiliations feel welcome and embraced.

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**Summer Speaker and Reception Recap**

This August, Civic Spirit held its second annual Summer Speaker and Reception and shared a wonderful evening of learning and inspiration with our community of educators and supporters. Our guests convened at the New-York Historical Society where our featured speaker, Professor Lucas Morel spoke about "Frederick Douglass:
The Making of an American,” followed by a dialogue with Civic Spirit's Co-Founder and Strategic Advisor, **Dr. Tamara Tweel**. Our program honored the work of our dedicated educators taking part in our Summer Institute and the commitment they make to providing students with a comprehensive civic education. Guests were invited to explore the museum and its latest exhibits as the space remained closed to the public for the evening. We are grateful to our guests and donors who celebrated with us the virtues of civic education and can't wait to continue learning with our community throughout the year!

Thank you to our donors for believing in our educators and students. If you would like to support our work and upcoming programs, we invite you to make a gift.

**Donate Today**

**To view photos from our event, check out our Facebook album** [here](#).

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**“Hear ye, hear ye!” Announcements**

**Jolts of justice: A balancing act** - Civic Spirit's Director of Education and Innovation, Audi Hecht, examines the recent Supreme Court decisions in her latest article published in the Fulcrum. Read her article [here](#).

**The attack on Salman Rushdie and freedom of expression** - Rabbi Charlie Savenor reflects on the assault on author Salman Rushdie at Chautauqua Institution in August 2022. To read to his article, click [here](#).

**Jewish-Muslim Solidarity Rally organized by the Combat Anti-Semitism Movement** - On July 27, Rabbi Charlie Savenor joined Jewish and Muslim leaders in this global rally that called for unity and respect in our communities. To view the online recording, click [here](#).
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