Loyola School

COHORT 6

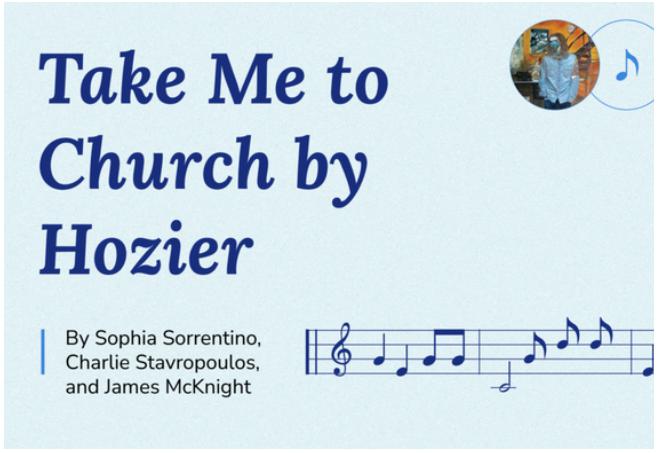
Joseph D'Alessio,
Teacher, Director of Music

Loyola School's mission statement declares that we challenge our "young men and women to become intellectually fulfilled, open to growth, religious, loving, and committed to doing justice." This commitment to doing justice was the cornerstone to my Civic Spirit project.

As both the Director of Music, and an English teacher, I wanted to blend my students' classroom experiences in a unique project for civic expression. All Sophomores at Loyola School take one semester of Intro to Music Theory & Composition. In that class, students do not just learn the foundation of songwriting and composing - they analyze melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic components of their favorite artists. In the Sophomore English class, the same students engaged with works of protest. They analyzed the rhythm of the rhetoric, and answered some key questions: whose voice is being amplified? Who needs to hear this? Which message strikes the strongest note?

English and Music students analyzed a collection of protest music from the 1960's to present day. The students then researched works of protests that resonated with them. They conducted presentations to the class, guiding discussion about these works.

English students are currently creating their own protest songs, informed by their previous presentations. They will present and perform their songs to our larger school community, on the stage, at the end of the year.



My goal was for students to recognize issues that directly affect them and their classmates. I wanted them to see how their voices have power, and how they can use rhetorical skills to affect change.

This project fits into my English curriculum as students constantly develop their critical thinking skills. We had analyzed works of literature leading up to the project, but this was the first time that my Sophomore English students had analyzed historical

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speeches, letters, and song lyrics. Their journey began with the study of influential protest pieces, including “Ain't I a Woman” by Isabella Baumfree, "Another Brick in the Wall" by Pink Floyd, Bob Marley's "Get Up Stand Up," and many others.

I believe that this project is a reflection of Civic Spirit’s pillars of Civic Belonging and Civic Skills. I wanted students to be able to identify issues in their immediate community, and analyze works of protest that spoke out about those same issues. The hope was for students to feel empowered to speak their mind and raise awareness, while utilizing outside research to support their voices. As students worked with not only speeches and letters, but also songs, I believe that this project also reflects the pillar of Democratic Fluency.

I very much enjoyed seeing students express themselves freely, while grappling with often difficult topics. They seem to have a newfound appreciation for the socially-charged music that they enjoy. The hope was to ignite the passions of others and propel them to also consider their roles as champions for civic change and progress.

Loyola School embodies the Jesuit ideal of “ite, inflammate omnia” - “go, set the world on fire.” Students at Loyola School “set the world on fire” with their passions. This project was meant to empower students to raise their voice in song, and affect change.

To view examples of presentations made by students in Mr. D’Alessio’s class, click here!

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Joann Kusk,
History Department Chair

I have always been fascinated by the spirit or geist of a civilization and the factors that go into shaping a narrative or essence of a kingdom or country. Throughout history, the arts, music, media, use of propaganda, and even architectural structures have helped represent ancient, as well as modern civilizations. This past school year, I had the opportunity and challenge to teach our AP United States History Class to our 11th grade students. Being selected to participate in the Civic Spirit Program this past summer, gave me the chance to create a project that would focus on how the art of photography has been used to create American narratives and presidential visual legacies. I hoped that my students would see the power of photography with regard to how we see our nation and our leaders. I also wanted to give my students the chance to reflect on their America by creating a photo essay that expressed their personal vision. Our students live in a world of Memes, TikTok, SnapChat, Instagram; I wanted to see what they could do with classic photography, without the extraneous "noise" of Social Media.

My goals for my students at the end of this year-long project were three-prong:

1. To recognize a historical "point of view" by studying the work of iconic American photographers then, to use the photos as primary documents to deepen their Democratic Fluency.

2. To understand how official visual legacies were created by presidential staff, and, of equal importance, to critique how well the "image" of Presidents held up against their policies and handling of historical events during their tenure. This goal speaks to both Democratic Fluency and Civic Skills, as we used their findings for discussion and debate.

3. To create a photo essay titled "My America," where students choose their own photos to tell their American story. This will allow them to reflect upon their own sense of Civic Belonging.

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We began the first phase of our project in October 2023 by allowing each of my 17 students in the AP US History class to pick one photographer whose work appealed to them. Each student created a padlet based on research relating to their photographer. They then identified the narrative, how it related to America's story, and why this photographer's work resonated with them. Each of my students met with me during office hours during October and November to talk about their padlet and it was amazing to have the chance to see firsthand how the photo's touched them.

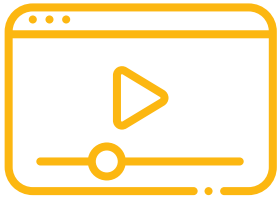
I invited Ms. Lily Keller Bellows (Photojournalist and Loyola Class of 2017) to speak to my students about the way photojournalism has changed through the added use of video as a medium. Lily's presentation resonated with them due to her age and how she was able to show them how photojournalism has evolved during the 21st century.

For this next phase of our project, students were given the chance to work with each other as they analyzed official White House photographers and their visions of American Presidents of the 20th and 21st centuries. Students made up their own teams and then chose which President they wished to research. They curated specific photos and then created video lessons for the class in which they analyzed the photos and explained the visual legacy that was created through the photos.

The last phase of the project was to create a personal photo essay in which the students created their own narrative of what America means to them. Reflection is an essential component of a Jesuit Education, and I felt this lent itself to Civic Belonging. The students would not be sharing their photo essays as class presentations, but all students would have access to their work in our Google Folders.

This seven month journey with my students has been incredibly interesting, and at times, quite moving. My favorite moments of the project were the times we spent during office hours talking about photographers, the most surprising parts of the research, and the challenges they faced when confronted with historical facts that may have contradicted popular "images" of iconic Presidents. The class presentations were solid but the office hours conversations were the most inspiring.

I would definitely assign this project again next year and plan on spending some time this summer revising certain rubrics to help my students become even better critical thinkers as they explore America's stories. Thank you to everyone at Civic Spirit for helping me grow in my journey as a lifelong learner!



To watch a multimedia presentation on FDR made by Ms. Kusk's students, click here!