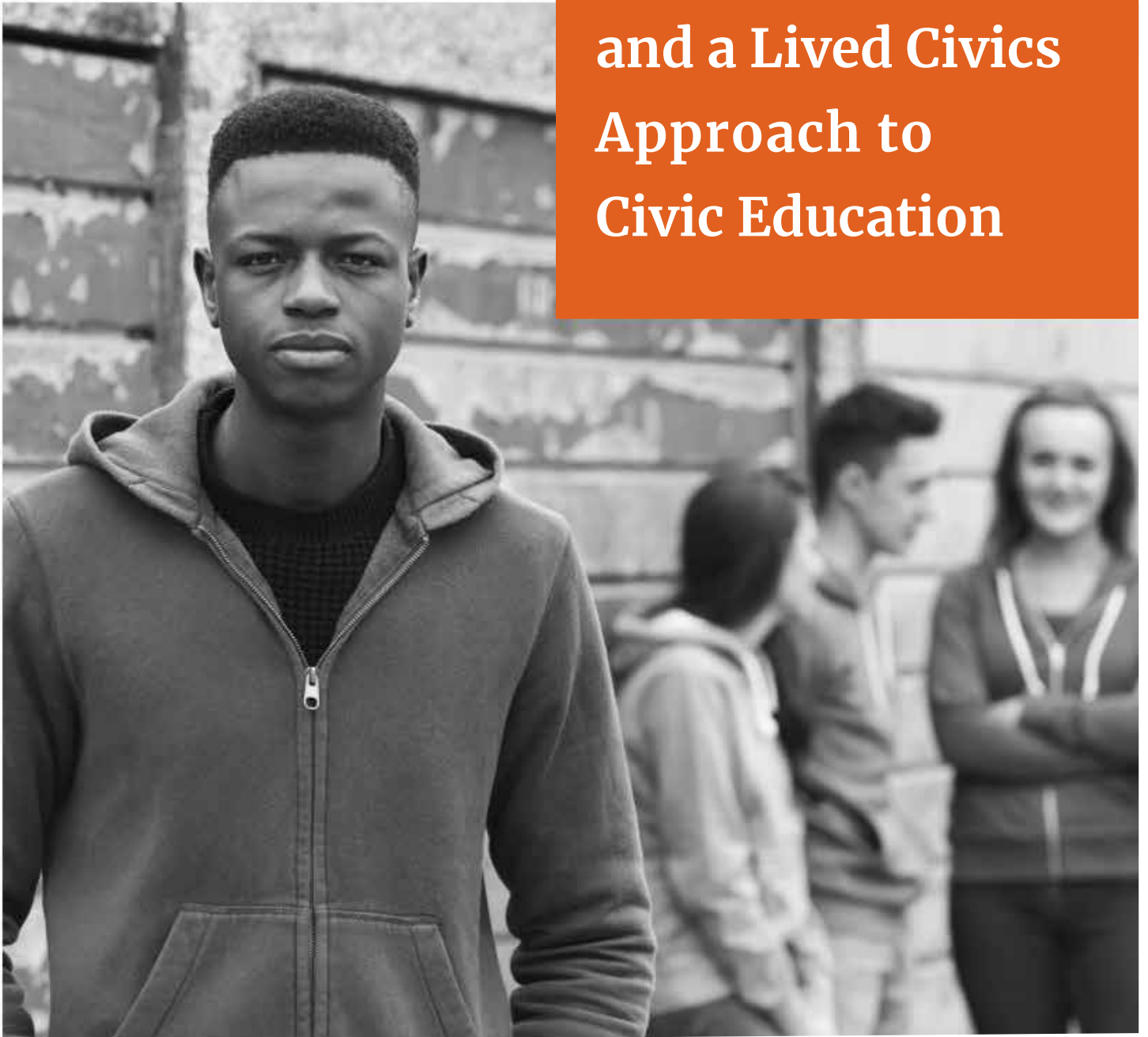


*Let's Go There:*

**Race, Ethnicity  
and a Lived Civics  
Approach to  
Civic Education**



**By Cathy Cohen, Joseph Kahne, and Jessica Marshall**

*With contributions from Veronica Anderson,  
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# *Let's Go There: Race, Ethnicity and a Lived Civics Approach to Civic Education*

By Cathy Cohen, Joseph Kahne, and Jessica Marshall

We live in a time of heightened political and civic activity among young people, especially young people of color. The election of President Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012 inspired increased civic and political participation among young adults. More recently, youth engagement in politics remains highly significant following the election of Donald Trump, the continued killing of primarily young black people by the police, and school shootings, including the shooting in Parkland, Fla.

Meanwhile, digital technology and social media provide near universal and constant access to varied forms of engagement. Movements focused on immigration laws and workers' rights, police accountability, gun violence, and mass incarceration resonate with youth of color, including Black, Latinx, Asian American, and Native American youth. They respond by speaking their minds, creating art and protesting with their bodies to advocate for policy changes to improve their safety, their education and their futures.

While young people of color are raising their voices, getting involved with groups in their communities, and taking to the streets to advance a political agenda meant to address and improve their lives, it is not clear that current approaches to teaching civics in urban classrooms adequately or effectively center or engage these same young people. Best practice methods for teaching and encouraging civic engagement involve combining traditional civics content delivery with student-centered engagement activities, such as current event discussions, simulations of democratic processes, and community-based service learning or civic action projects. These approaches, however, frequently fail to explicitly address the interests, identities and life experiences of young people of color, whose perspectives on the state and democratic processes are often dramatically different than so-called mainstream attitudes and assumptions. Indeed, while mainstream approaches do not explicitly exclude youth identity and experience, they do not put front and center the race, ethnicity, and identity of young people—central factors that shape these young people's lived experience and their relationships to societal issues.

In this paper, we contend that civic educators and advocates must ensure that attention to race, identity, and the lived experiences of youth are central elements of civic education efforts—what we call Lived Civics. Through a Lived Civics approach, the classroom is open to and structured around the many ways, some positive and some negative, young people engage with the political and civic world that surrounds them. With an emphasis on identities such as race, ethnicity and class, both students and educators are positioned as experts and learners. Fundamentally, a Lived Civics approach signals to students that their personal and community-based knowledge is valuable. It is not the total understanding of civic engagement and democratic processes, but it is a critical starting place for exploration and interrogation, placing questions of power, belonging and effective methods for social change on the agenda.

Our effort to surface what such an agenda might involve began with in-depth interviews with leading scholars and practitioners. This group had expertise related to race, political engagement, youth development, and civic education. These scholars identified research that we then examined, which helped us shape a set of principles regarding

educational priorities tied to the approach we are calling Lived Civics. To build on and deepen this work, in addition to reviewing relevant research, we then interviewed youth to gain their perspective and to learn about their experiences with civic education. We then synthesized the lessons from the literature review and interviews into a draft document that outlined main findings. This document was then discussed and critiqued in detail during a two-day workshop with leading scholars, community activists and educators. Input from this group informed this report.

We do not view the result as detailed in this document as a fully finished vision. Rather, our hope is that this report, along with the work of others who are grappling with this agenda, can motivate continued discussion, critique, revision, and action. In fact, we should be clear from the outset that we believe both on-the-ground experimentation and continued writing and reflection will be needed if we are to envision and enact powerful opportunities for Lived Civics.

## A Case for Lived Civics

Widespread agreement regarding the role of schools and educators in developing civic engagement competencies for high school youth has driven the momentum behind a number of recent civic education initiatives. The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools laid the groundwork for consensus with its report “Guardian of Democracy,” which makes the case for investing in civic learning to sustain American democracy. Efforts like these are aimed at preparing youth to be competent, responsible and engaged citizens by delivering content knowledge about traditional conceptions of the government and civic activity; building skills to engage traditional institutions and stakeholders; engaging in discussions of controversial issues, and cultivating attitudes that foster civic engagement.

Energy and engagement of organizations supporting the civics agenda have demonstrated that youth can and should be offered the opportunity to tackle real issues in their lives and communities while also learning about controversial issues and engaging in simulations. Yet these programs often do not explicitly address race and identity, centering the lived experiences and expertise of youth as the driving force behind youth action.

A range of civics programs make important contributions to how civics is both conceptualized and taught in and out of classrooms across the country. However, we see a significant need to expand and reimagine what constitutes civics. In addition to promoting civics curriculum that focuses on civic knowledge and civic action and engagement, we assert that concepts such as race, ethnicity, identity and lived experience must be central anchors of civic education because they shape how young people understand and engage with the state as well as the meanings they impose on any action civics project. The Lived Civics approach we offer highlights and incorporates how young people experience civic and political life and their perspectives on what can and must change.

*“Being Black and Latinx in the U.S. is a political experience. You experience inequality in a way that is lived, not text-booked. It’s not the same for white young people. They live white privilege, although they may not experience it consciously.”*

*Shawn Ginwright, Associate Professor, San Francisco State University*

A Lived Civics approach to civics content and instruction emphasizes theories and practices that are rooted in and responsive to the lived reality of young people, with a focus on race and ethnicity. Viewing civic education through the lens of race, ethnicity and other identities changes how civics curriculum is taught and how youth civic engagement programming is developed. It also changes students’ experiences in the classroom. When educators attend to the lived experiences of students, particularly young people of color, classrooms become places where young people’s expertise become central to addressing the challenges of democracy. A classroom informed with a Lived Civics

approach promotes structures and learning experiences that are co-constructed with young people, allowing space for their voices, agency and expertise. The curriculum engages youth in discussions and interrogations of politics, the state, and power, and invites young people to consider ways in which they can and have engaged in action to change issues impacting their lives. Moreover, making visible issues of race, ethnicity and identity exposes the differences in power, access and experiences with state institutions between students of color and a predominantly white teaching staff that too often are otherwise left unexplored. As one high school youth put it, “When it comes to talking about identity, the students become the teachers and the teachers become the students.”

## Literature Review

An abundance of scholarship points to the value and impact of integrating educational approaches that address race, ethnicity and lived experiences of young people of color into civics curriculum.

First, research on civic education, pedagogy and race finds significant influence of racism on students of color and highlights the need to mitigate these negative impacts (Hope, et al., 2015). Meira Levinson argues that race shapes how people make sense of political life and events, and that these differences ought to be explored and discussed by examining contemporary events that raise questions about who counts as a citizen and who doesn’t (Levinson, 2011). Na’ilah Suad Nasir demonstrates that learning and identity formation are processes that inform each other, and that Black students are racialized in ways that challenge positive learning and identity trajectories (Nasir, 2011). Likewise, Ginwright argues that urban Blackness is a developmental experience that needs space in the classroom to be understood, supported and nurtured (Ginwright, 2010). And the day-to-day criminalization of Black and Latinx young people calls for supplanting the prison-industrial complex with a “youth-support complex” (Rios, 2011). Moreover, recent data collection makes it clear these problems may well have become more significant in the aftermath of the 2016 election (Rogers, 2017). Rogers finds, for example, that more schools, especially predominantly white schools, are “hostile” to racial, ethnic and religious minority groups; and approximately 28 percent of teachers report an increased incidence of students making racist and other offensive comments in class.

Along those same lines, Kirschner notes that negative beliefs about adolescents and the cumulative impact of structural disadvantage leave youth of color feeling dispossessed and in need of opportunities to exercise voice and agency, which in turn have a positive influence on academic and social development (Kirschner, 2015). From a developmental perspective, adolescence is a critical period for youth to practice newly developed abstract and higher order thinking skills to engage in critical analysis and reflection on matters of race (Hope, et al., 2015). For these reasons, youth need “opportunity structures” to promote constructive skills for critically processing, analyzing, and responding to experiences and systems of discrimination. Youth participatory action research (YPAR) constitutes such an opportunity structure, in addition to ethnic studies for developing positive identity and engagement for youth and critical adult leaders (Daus-Magbual and Tintiangco-Cubales, 2016; de los Ríos, Lopez, and Morrell, 2016). Likewise, youth organizing is particularly important for disadvantaged youth of color as it engages them as political actors to identify and solve problems (Kirschner and Ginwright, 2012). As with YPAR and ethnic studies, this type of engagement is important for developing skills and capacity to interpret and resist oppressive systems (Watts, Williams, and Jagers, 2003).

Rubin and Hayes find that lived experiences are powerful influences on students’ civic identities—shaping what they determine is meaningful to them and what is worthy of exploring in the classroom or for a project. Youth of color point to the disconnect between civic ideals they learn in school and the social and political realities of their lives compared to wealthy white youth who report alignment between civic ideals and their lived experiences (Rubin and Hayes, 2010).

Outcomes for Latinx and non-Latinx youth in classrooms using the same civics curriculum and pedagogy can produce different civic outcomes based on students' sense of ethnic identity (Torney-Purta and Barber, 2007). Researchers find that in youth development spaces outside of schools, expansive, humanizing approaches to working with Black youth were challenged by pressure from funders that frame Black youth from deficiency perspectives (Balbridge, 2014). Inside the classroom, Black students are systematically denied full participation as credible holders of and producers of knowledge, and they can often suffer this injustice and mistrust at the hands of educators (Haslanger, 2014). The breakdown of trust and trustworthiness between teachers and students tends to happen along the lines of race and is the source of racial disadvantage. This finding is a most compelling justification for our assertion that students and teachers acknowledge and analyze the privilege and multiple identities that they bring to the classroom and collectively co-construct learning spaces that affirm and embrace those identities.

The dearth of civics education opportunities is but one indication of the denial of full participation for Black students in particular: According to research based on the Black Youth Project's Black Youth Culture Survey, approximately 40 percent of Black 15 to 25 year olds have reported not receiving any civic education (Hope and Jagers, 2014). Moreover, often the knowledge they do bring into a civics classroom is not fully acknowledged as central to the curriculum. For example, research suggests that Black youth have lower levels of knowledge regarding traditional measures of political knowledge, but Black young adults demonstrate more political knowledge than any other group of young people in the domain of carceral violence perpetrated by the state, such as the killing of Black youth by the police. Knowledge of such acts leads to depressed political efficacy and civic and political engagement, while increasing their attachment to their racial group. (Cohen and Luttig 2018).

Sharp disparities in the daily civic experiences of youth from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds suggest that schools can either hinder or encourage development of engaged, action-oriented civic identities among students from various contexts (Rubin, 2007). One hindrance is the lack of democratic practice and opportunities for student voice in school. For example, McFarland and Starmanns note that disadvantaged schools with high proportions of youth of color also tend to lack student governments where students have meaningful decision-making influence compared to more affluent, whiter schools (McFarland and Starmanns, 2009). Moreover, those with councils tend to have lower faculty oversight and focus on social functions rather than exercise the power enjoyed by student councils at elite public schools (McFarland and Starmanns, 2009).

Yet we know that when school climates are more equitable and provide students with similar opportunities to have power and influence, students of color are more likely to be civically engaged (Jagers et al., 2017). For example, middle school students' sense of connectedness to school, when linked to a positive school climate, is an important predictor of civic engagement (Guillaume et al. 2015). Equitable and democratic school contexts are critically important for youth, otherwise students can share a relative disinterest in politics and political action (Middaugh and Kahne, 2014). Disparities in youth opportunities to develop these civic and political skills not only disempower particular students from marginalized backgrounds but also can disproportionately affect their sense of well-being. For youth, perceiving practices as inequitable and unjust can negatively affect their psychological well-being, whereas more just and fair practices can better position them to thrive (Prilleltensky, 2012). These findings further underline the need for the principles of a Lived Civics approach to civics curriculum and instruction. Such an approach would allow school practitioners and communities to align various school initiatives—for example, approaches to social-emotional learning—to a more transformative paradigm of positive resistance and collective well-being (Jagers, 2016).

Cati de los Ríos and Ernest Morrell (2016) call specifically for the use of ethnic studies in high school to fill the void of voices and perspectives of students of color that are missing from traditional curriculum and teaching approaches. Intentional teaching of race not only engages students with materials and topics that are relevant to them but also can



address academic performance in other subjects. In Raza Studies, researchers recount the powerful impact of a Mexican American Studies program in Arizona (Cammarota and Romero, 2014). Ethnic studies imparts a course of study that produces community- and culturally-responsive leaders (Daus-Magbual and Tintiangco-Cubales, 2016). Others have attempted to bring integrated social identity curriculums into the classroom, that provide particular youth of color with opportunities to simultaneously develop agency as they better understand the complex features of social identities (Safer, 2018). Absent such deliberate attention to race and ethnicity, schools assume a color blindness that results in sustaining the existing social, political and economic order (Apple, 1982; Bernstein, 1975).

## Principles of Lived Civics for Educators

The totality of the research outlined above and the interviews with and input from students, educators and scholars, led us to highlight some key principles that we believe educators must address when trying to center the context and life experiences of young people in civics curriculum. Fundamentally, we argue for paying special attention to how concepts such as race, identity and power situate young people—especially those of color—in relationship to civic learning opportunities, the state and democratic practices. Toward that end, we believe the following Lived Civics principles will help educators and school districts who aim to reflect and respect the racial and ethnic identities of urban youth.

**Young people, especially young people of color, have political knowledge and expertise that must be acknowledged, respected, and examined in civics classrooms.** Their life experiences and interactions with the workings of the state may directly contradict many of the civic lessons about liberal democracy, but their expertise should be validated and taken seriously. By examining these lived experiences, a fuller and more accurate understanding of the ways democratic institutions function can be put forward. Youth of color often have political knowledge regarding the unequal implementation of democracy that white youth do not have or do not recognize, and a critical understanding of power and how it is exercised in society requires that the views and experiences of marginalized groups are integrated into the narrative. All young people do not have equal access to power but, in groups and classrooms, efforts can be made for students to have more equitable opportunities to interrogate and voice critiques of current structures and power dynamics—like class and gender—in schools, classrooms and the state.

*“A social justice educator places the multiple identities that young people have that face the world in the front. They know those identities drive how the young person experiences the world.”*

*Shawn Ginwright, Associate Professor, San Francisco State University*

**Curriculum must be constructed and developed with race, identity and lived experiences positioned as central to the learning of civics, politics and government.** Rather than a discrete unit, lesson, or series of activities that are layered on top of a traditional civics curriculum, a Lived Civics curriculum is based on the premise that race, identity and lived experiences are of central importance and are a critical lens through which the content of all civics course material is explored. Fundamental to the work of Lived Civics is the idea that teachers and students interrogate critical concepts such as identity, power and race as a way to theoretically explore how identities shape experiences and relationships to the government.

*“Schools have these really powerful messages around individual agency and meritocracy. Frames that create a disconnect or impediment for young people of color. Race is really important in their daily lives and they talk about it as something important, and yet schools give pretty dominant messages to them that none of this matters.”*

*Jennifer Tilton, Associate Professor, University of Redlands*

**Educators must use instructional approaches that recognize ways that power and oppression operate in classrooms and how these dynamics impact youth engagement with civics course content.** Learning communities should be constructed so that youth have the space to interrogate how issues of power shape classroom dynamics and learning practices. Multiple and intersecting identities and privilege that both students and teachers bring into the room must be acknowledged and examined. Inherent in this analysis must be the space for youth to formulate and express critiques and articulate opportunities to transform the learning environment. Questions asked and statements made may be uncomfortable but both should be explored in ways that further educational and developmental goals for young people. Young people of color can interrogate spaces that are all white while being heard. Likewise for spaces that are full of people of color and the person in the position of power is a white teacher or white administrator. Navigating power and oppression is likely to exacerbate fear and tension in already traumatized communities, so learning environments that support healing are necessary as well.

*“I’m willing to go off my own lesson plans. As long as most students are listening and engaged, I’ll let the conversation run. My goal is that it creates an expectation that their voices matter more than whatever I had planned.”*

*Matt Colley, teacher, Oakland Unified School District*

**Consistent, meaningful and reflective professional learning for educators and youth workers are critical to supporting Lived Civics classrooms.** There is much still to learn about the ways in which a Lived Civics approach can improve outcomes for students. To that end, educators need to regularly explore best practices for teaching, innovate and implement new curricula, and reflect on their practice. As their practice evolves, they must have consistent opportunities to reflect on and interrogate issues of power, privilege and identity for themselves. Educators also need space for “safe practice,” where they are encouraged to try new Lived Civics approaches without fear of reprisal or negative consequences. Ideally, young people are invited to reflect with and provide feedback for educators as they seek to learn from and improve Lived Civics informed curriculum and instruction. Educators committed to a Lived Civics approach require the resources to learn best practices from experienced Lived Civics practitioners and emerging scholarship on the construction and reproduction of race and the racial order. Schools should provide “safe practice” opportunities for educators to employ curriculum and instructional approaches that may be unfamiliar and space to reflect and iterate based on new learning.

## Reflections for Civics Teachers

There is no one way to teach in line with a Lived Civics approach. We believe teachers have benefited and will continue to benefit from ongoing experimentation, safe practice and reflection.

*“Teachers have to unlearn some of their perceptions about who people are. You have to embrace the community where you are teaching. You don’t come into a community and assume you know more about the community and the people than the people who live there.”*

*Educator, Chicago Public Schools*

To aid in this reflective process—and with input from participants in a two-day workshop to preview Lived Civics—we created a set of questions for educators who are looking for guidance to plan Lived Civics learning experiences and construct Lived Civics-style classroom communities.



1. How are my students participating in the selection or shaping of the topics, themes and issues covered?
2. How have I integrated the study of race, power and identity—including resistance narratives—into the curricula?
3. How does my practice and the curriculum I implement acknowledge what students are bringing to the classroom and honor their lived experiences, critical analyses and commentary?
4. How are students invited to co-construct the classroom community and in what ways does the learning space support students to explore, challenge, and share their ideas, experiences, and identities?
5. Do students have an opportunity to question and interrogate traditional structures and power dynamics both in the classroom and beyond?
6. How do I facilitate conversations that are difficult for me or for my students? How do I invite students to identify issues and themes that are critical to them but might be outside of my own comfort zone?
7. How have I explored my own positioning and experiences relative to race, identity and power and how that shapes what I do and who I am in the classroom?

## Implications for the Field of Civic Education

Building a classroom and schoolwide culture for Lived Civics involves a paradigm shift in civic education and courageous instruction from professionally prepared teachers. This highly ambitious agenda will require action on many levels. Below we highlight a range of priorities that surfaced during the workshop and in our subsequent discussions and analysis. The implications of this work extend beyond a traditional civics course and can be applied across the curriculum as well as in out-of-school and youth organizing spaces.

**1. Focus attention directly on race, ethnicity and identity.** Policy documents and curricular frameworks should explicitly recognize the centrality of race, ethnicity and identity in shaping the lived experiences of youth and in relation to civic and political life. Often policy documents, curricular frameworks, and discussion of best practice are shaped in ways that make attention to race, identity, and ethnicity possible, but they often do not explicitly discuss their importance. Thus, it is important to **engage in direct dialog with those who are hesitant to make attention to race explicit.** We understand there are those who may have reservations about this agenda and/or who may question the wisdom of this approach. The only way to take seriously such objections and suggestions is through collective discussion about this move in civics education. Such dialogs may surface points in need of greater clarity, places where revisions may be needed, an understanding of possible partnerships among groups that may not always privilege the same priorities, and greater understanding regarding the perspectives and priorities that may shape the reception of and reactions to those advancing this agenda.

**2. Deepen our conceptual and practical understandings of ways to advance Lived Civics by integrating the work of those who study race and identity that either implicitly or explicitly makes strong links to civic education and development.** The field's ability to attend to issues of race, ethnicity, and identity will be strengthened if we diversify who we gather when we convene thought leaders. Our sense is that leading scholars and practitioners in the field of civic education are, by and large, supportive of the kinds of concerns raised in this paper. At the same time, most leaders in the field do not place a central focus on race, ethnicity, and identity. Similarly, there are many scholars and practitioners who focus on race, ethnicity, and identity, whose work has clear alignment with civic education priorities but who do not generally view themselves as civic educators. We brought several such leaders to our convening and were struck by the ways their insights and experiences could inform the development of strategies to move the field forward. Likewise, it is important to give greater prominence to educators, school and district leaders, and practitioners in these conversations. To be effective in their contexts, these individuals must often be acutely aware of Lived

Civics priorities and are also well positioned to see ways to best integrate and scale both Lived Civics and civics more generally into school systems' core priorities and practices.

One approach to launching such an effort would be to convene a group of practitioners to discuss Lived Civics and explore uses and impact inside and outside of classrooms. This might include a summer workshop for practitioners interested in integrating the Lived Civics into their own practice. It might also include a group of researchers who can develop ways to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach and who would determine the appropriate outcome variable to follow. Another dimension: Create a working group of students who would help identify what a meaningful curriculum structured around Lived Civics might look like to them. These young people might also be invited to further iterate the Lived Civics principles themselves, particularly in rendering the language to make it more accessible to K-12 students.

**3. Partner with ethnic studies, comparative race studies and other school-based programs rooted in the study of race, ethnicity, identity, and power.** School districts in some parts of the country that are already required to address issues of race and ethnicity are adopting ethnic studies courses to do so. A discrete social studies offering, ethnic studies complements traditional civics courses by filling in historical and contemporary gaps in racial or ethnic narratives, and providing students of color with academic space to explore the context of their experiences. In December 2017, school district officials in Bridgeport, Conn., approved a measure requiring every high school student to take a course about race or in African-American or Latinx Studies to get a diploma. In 2015, Oakland Unified School District began phasing in a requirement that every high school offer ethnic studies courses. Previously, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and several other California school districts have required ethnic studies courses to graduate. In addition to providing a useful complement to project-based civic learning, ethnic studies programs also replace misguided colorblind teaching with race-conscious approaches that directly address the perspectives of students of color (de los Ríos, 2016). Incorporating cultural history and justice into narratives related to civic knowledge is an approach that connects history to young people's realities, especially youth of color. The focus on systems and root causes of problems and issues—the perspective at the center of ethnic studies—provides youth of color with background knowledge and opportunities to see examples of youth of color asserting their voices and exercising agency.

**4. Strengthen the foundation that will enable educators to better pursue this agenda.** It is fundamentally important for the field to invest in infrastructure that will both seed and support the development of educational leaders and scholars who can carry this agenda forward. While expensive, such groundwork will pay dividends for many years. We can imagine investments in infrastructure taking a variety of forms. For example, there are many reasons to believe that community-based organizations and some youth organizations are oriented more toward this agenda and may be better positioned to address the Lived Civics agenda than are many schools and school districts. Organizations within a given district or community that facilitate partnerships between schools and the community to further these goals may be important supports for scaling a Lived Civics approach to civic education so that it can reach all youth. Another idea: currently, the field of civic education lacks sufficient leadership that explicitly attends to this agenda. One manifestation of this problem is that many meetings of mainstream scholars, practitioners, curriculum developers, and policy folks are often almost exclusively white. Issues of race are raised, but are often not central concerns and expertise in this area is lacking. **One response to this need could be structured programs that develop and support leaders with these interests, particularly leaders of color.** For instance, one could imagine incubator programs that engage graduate students and junior scholars with interests in these areas. Over the course of a year or so, participants would receive support as well as the opportunity to be part of occasional face-to-face convenings where ideas could be shared and developed. Participants might have a variety of backgrounds. Some might be well-versed in civic education and interested in Lived Civics. Others may have expertise in areas related to race and identity development but not a prior explicit focus on civic education. Numerous models for doing this have been successful in other areas

and this approach could include those interested in policy and practice as well as in research. Those working directly in schools and those focused on broad issues of school reform must also be engaged in these discussions. Such conversations might be organized at meetings of the Council of Great City Schools or at the National Council for the Social Studies and other spaces where educators and leaders convene but don't often address these issues explicitly. The result might be a Lived Civics Theory of Change that clearly lays out goals and outcomes and articulates how the principles move us forward toward those goals. That will also require addressing systemic challenges, such as integration of Lived Civics Principles into state curricular frameworks and standards and the identification of funding streams to support transformation in both schools and reform communities.

**5. Launch initiatives to test varied ways of pursuing and scaling this agenda. Educators, youth, and researchers should then reflect on, discuss, and study these efforts so that our understanding of these goals and ways to pursue them can deepen.** There is a long history of educators advancing approaches that reflect the priorities of Lived Civics. At the same time, such efforts have rarely been scaled and, as with most educational efforts, initiatives do not always reach their full potential. It is clear, however, that working with educators to implement approaches related to this agenda will deepen our understanding both of ways to implement the kinds of principles discussed in this report as well as our understandings of these principles and ways that modifications may be needed. On-the-ground experimentation may well also surface particularly promising approaches as well as ways to scale high-quality practice.

## Conclusion

Race and ethnicity are focal points for young people of color whose perspectives and lived experiences are often overlooked or discounted. Civic education informed by such will engage and enrich the academic experience for Black and Latinx youth, as well as white youth, who may have insights when it comes to gender and socioeconomic class but often have blind spots when it comes to life experience informed by race.

It is indeed time for a reimagined approach to civics education, and we assert that the fulcrum is Lived Civics. Evidence that race, ethnicity, identity and lived experiences of youth, especially youth of color, matter is clearly spelled out in research across the disciplines of education, political science, race and youth engagement. Black, Latinx and other marginalized young people are negatively impacted by racism and discriminatory treatment, yet those experiences are source material for these youth to develop valuable civic knowledge and savvy. At the same time, schools and educators must recognize the experiential knowledge young people of color bring to classrooms. When structural inequities and uneven power dynamics are not actively and explicitly addressed, educators inadvertently recreate and perpetuate the injustices of American society.

The four principles of Lived Civics emphasize the need to acknowledge and validate the voices and experiences of marginalized youth. On that foundation, curriculum must be reshaped so that narratives are inclusive and instruction in government, civics and politics is focused on race, identity and lived experience. Teachers will face many challenges including finding ways to address the power dynamics that can replicate social injustices in the classroom. Teachers will need to transform instruction and will need professional learning supports to do this.

Given the centrality of race and ethnicity to civic education, especially in urban areas and communities of color, we strongly urge civics teachers, youth development educators, curriculum designers, school administrators and policy-makers to consider Lived Civics principles and integrate them into their work. It's time for civic education to go there.

# Appendix A: Lived Civics Convening Participants \_\_\_\_\_

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# Appendix B: Lived Civics Action Steps

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## **Broaden Conversation and Build Bridges**

- Expand discussion of Lived Civics to include ethnic studies, social-emotional learning, and social justice education scholars and practitioners. Provide space for convening of broader set of participants to support collaboration, deeper exploration of lived civics principles, and sharing of best practice.
- Present Lived Civics principles to diverse groups of leading civic educators and engage in dialogue about using them to revisit disciplinary framing and advance instructional practice.

## **Develop a community of practice to deepen understanding of Lived Civics practice**

- Engage practitioners and youth in developing and piloting Lived Civics curricula and instructional tools to deepen understanding of how to integrate Lived Civics principles into instruction.
- Provide opportunities to convene practitioners across initiatives, programs and projects to talk and capture new learning and evolving understandings of Lived Civics.

## **Invest in development pipeline of scholars and practitioners**

- Invest in research and curriculum development to support a pipeline of new scholars and practitioners of Lived Civics. Focus on support for scholars and educators of color, as well as representatives of other marginalized groups, to create more representative thought leadership in this field.

## **Develop policy to expand opportunity for Lived Civics implementation**

- Conduct a scan of existing state, district and school level civic education policy and curricular frameworks to identify where revision or new policy development may be needed to provide more support for implementation of a Lived Civics approach.
- Engage state, county and district level educational leaders in learning around Lived Civics and implications for existing mandates and structures related to civic education.

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