



ATTENTION AND DEMOCRACY (with guest Danielle Allen) 6 February 2026

2026-02-06 14:16:56 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:
<https://www.schoolofattention.org/art-programs>

2026-02-06 14:18:09 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:
Merrrrch!!

2026-02-06 14:18:10 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:
<https://www.schoolofattention.org/store>

2026-02-06 14:18:40 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:
Free registration for Monday 📌

2026-02-06 14:18:40 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:
<https://ipk.nyu.edu/events/book-talk-d-graham-burnett-attensity-a-manifesto-of-the-attention-liberation-movement/>

2026-02-06 14:23:08 From Peter to Everyone:
COALITION LINK:
<https://www.schoolofattention.org/join-our-coalition>

2026-02-06 14:25:37 From Peter to Everyone:
From my favorite Amazon review: "this book is HEIDEGGER ON WHEELS"

2026-02-06 14:27:30 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:
Welcome, Ingrid!

2026-02-06 14:27:51 From Ingrid Jacobsen to Everyone:
Hi everyone! Happy to be here

2026-02-06 14:28:23 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:
Alyssa at SXSW!
<https://schedule.sxsw.com/contributors/2241587>

2026-02-06 14:50:38 From Gwen Olton (she / they) to Everyone:

Your earliest civic memory. Key: Identify, wherever possible, concrete details that can conjure a picture of the when, where, and what of that memory

2026-02-06 15:04:20 From Peter to Everyone:
Breakout 5 (1/3):

Ingrid: Going to the library with my mom in my mid-sized city. They had a book-mobile, and I didn't know it at the time, but there was a lot of organizing with local moms to make that happen. My mom told me we had to go to the library to "keep showing them" that there was a demand for the library efforts.

Sophie: When I was younger, my grandfather was part of the team leading the village. I remember hearing conversations at the coffee table about what the city should do, how we could help. We would often help people organize their efforts throughout the village. Every Saturday, there was some sort of political activity happening.

2026-02-06 15:04:26 From Alex Soojung-Kim Pang to Everyone:

Michael Lang: first memory is going to the bookmobile that came around Queens neighborhood. The idea of sharing things I loved with people I didn't know. There was something magical about that-- you don't need to buy anything, you're sharing.

Vitoria Oliveira: in Brazil, the World Cup of 2002, waking up in the middle of the night to watch Brazil. It was an intense year: we won the Cup, Lula was elected, and the contrast between football uniting Brazil while politics is a source of division.

Mathias: At 7 being taken to a protest against pension reform. First, they served food that Mathias remembered as being delicious-- it was convivial, almost like a party. Second, it was a rare moment of convergence between his center-right father and progressive mother.

Alex Pang: Having the Whole Earth Catalog in the house, and a sense of this as a tool that you can use to create a different future. (Basically Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities for my 5 year-old self!)

2026-02-06 15:04:42 From Peter to Everyone:
Room 5 (2/3):

Lauren: Until I was 12, I lived in Maine, where there are small spaces for democratic conversations that I didn't understand were special as a kid. My parents must have been part of some community group, and there was a local debate (governor? Senator?) when I was 10 years old where I met Susan Collins. I asked her questions and she was very responsive to me. I've written to her many times since then.

Peter: In my Missouri suburbs, we had Fourth of July parties. I remember the fire trucks, the banners, the water balloons.

Ingrid: I'm struck by how routine and cyclical these memories are. In Sophie's childhood, this was a weekly occurrence. The Fourth of July is every year. The library is always there. I sense a reliance on recurring events...

2026-02-06 15:04:47 From Etienne Turpin to Everyone:

Michael _ late 60s, early 70s w/ conservative parents - funeral of JFK is a first memory; a deep sense of unease about parents knowing something was wrong, but along with this is flashing memories of July 4th. so, a divided experience of early civic memories. later this changed.

Sebastian _ early 80s in Germany. parents were green party. concrete memory is father marching for peace, anti-nuclear marches against US nuclear storage. ambivalent memories of leftist parents. fighting something makes you different than your peers but proud of your leftist parents, while it marks you as different.

2026-02-06 15:04:53 From Etienne Turpin to Everyone:

Mihir _ late 70s in India, early memory of PM being assassinated. son had to burn the body of his mother on TV; watching this personal grief on the TV, and everyone watching, made me feel distant from civic activity. weary of public nature of civic discourse.

Etienne _ early 80s. the steelworkers strike. will my dad return from this explosive political event ... what was it? what was this kind of time, that was different from normal time? what kind of time was "strike time" and what should I do, as a child, to be timely in the sense of supporting it and my family.

2026-02-06 15:04:59 From Peter to Everyone:
Room 5 (3/3):

Sophie: I am struck by Danielle's emphasis on memory. It's strange to realize that we are forming a civic identity from an early age.

Peter: I have been acculturated NOT to be proud of my American identity. I regret that, and have been longing for the social infrastructure that allows people to cultivate their civic identity.

Lauren: My memory foregrounded a debate. That wasn't a performance. It was reliable, and people could take part.

Peter: I was just so touched by Danielle's intimate and personal approach to democracy - which is so often an ABSTRACT subject...

2026-02-06 15:05:59 From Akua Banful to Everyone:

Kristin: MLK's "I have a Dream" was on television, and the family watched it together. It was the only time before MLK's death that she saw her father weep. She understood that there was a shared premise between equality, justice, and what is right.

Eric: My first political memory was a headline of a newspaper saying Nixon was resigning. I was six years old and confused and my parents tried to explain.

Molly: My famile went to DC with my parents when I was 6 or 7 and I learned about women's suffrage. I remember using my own money to buy a kid friendly biography of Susan B. Anthony. I remember asking by great aunt who was born in 1905 and lived to be 98 what her family thought of women's suffrage and they thought it was just fine. I also remember that my dad went for a morning run on that DC trip and they ran into Bill Clinton. My dad snubbed him.

Akua: The national debt in early 2000s Ghana. I was seven and knew to feel shame about the state of things.

2026-02-06 15:06:03 From Gwen Olton (she / they) to Everyone:

Alyssa, Monique, Justin, Gwen (1/3)

Alyssa: Really struck by this question! My mom is in politics so I have all these memories of going to the white house, etc. but these somehow felt contiguous with my experiences in the suburbs vs. the substance of civic responsibility. After prop 8 passed in CA (the one that banned gay marriage) I was really hurt by, 2009 going to DC and marching. I was so overwhelmed and gave an interview and felt like it was bad because I was so

Monique: My parents were hippies during the heyday and I grew up going to marches, anti-Vietnam war protests. So I have all these flashes of images. But I don't think I thought of them as part of my civic identity until recently when Bob Weir died - there was this kindness and openness and treating each other with dignity, not controlling. There was this - you can do whatever, but don't control one another! The whole community took care of me, not just my parents.

2026-02-06 15:06:22 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:

Luisa: remembers being 5 years old — mom recently naturalized and had had to give up her Brazilian citizenship (“my dad was not happy about it”). Remembers debate about Jimmy Carter, and mom asserting her right to go vote, and to make her own decision.

Alex: was in Romania, 1989 protests/people were in the streets. Family was attacked by police, strong memory of that, of the crowd of people, and understanding self as part of a bigger thing, the marks on the buildings that become scars, part of the city’s memory

A “major transformation of reality” “a bizarre kind of new year.”

2026-02-06 15:06:24 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:

Brian: my parents weren’t particularly civically active, overtly political. Thinks of going to the library, being at the library (contrast to Alex’s memory) Not defining it as a “civic space” when younger, but can now recognize that and the way that it was created by people working together, caring, “it felt like the whole point of that environment was to attend to my imagination and creativity. Sanctuary!

Donica: going to vote with mom as a child, and being amazed that EVERYBODY gets to vote. Strong sensory memories of the building (still standing in hometown), the layout of the room etc. Being desperate to grow up enough to vote!

We reflected on these as “stories of transmission” and our own capacity to do the work of transmission (and attention): responsibilities, modeling.

2026-02-06 15:06:48 From Kristen Gleason to Everyone:

Evan: Parents’ ability to buy a house in a white neighborhood was such that father got a white neighbor to pose as the buyer, became aware of property rights. Now more white people are moving back into the neighborhood. The humor of history.

Niki: Went to movie theater in Castro in SF, had a distinct sense of gay pride flags, asked dad: Why are there rainbows everywhere? Thought: This is its own city. Later realized that this act of protection was an act of organizing that precipitated political changes. Rights were lost and rights were taken back.

Jillian. Went with mom to vote. Parents are in an interreligious and interpolitical-party marriage. Message: you have to vote and it’s a private duty, you don’t need to talk about it, but you need to do it.

2026-02-06 15:07:03 From Gwen Olton (she / they) to Everyone:

Alyssa, Monique, Justin, Gwen (2/3)

Justin: I couldn’t join the discussion (circumstances here chez moi prevent that), but I did want to say that sometime around July 4, 1976, I was three years old and my grandpa had just poured some concrete for a walkway in front of the house. Someone had traced in it some words or symbols commemorating the bicentennial. My grandpa said to me: “That’s a pretty old country!” I found it confusing mostly because this was my paternal grandfather, while I had for some reason already become convinced that it was my maternal grandfather who was, somehow, a literal avatar of George Washington (the face on the quarter looked like his, I think). So I was surprised that the other grandpa had a patriotic sense as well, and I began to think very hard about the nature of that abstract thing that bound them together.

2026-02-06 15:07:20 From Larry Berger to Everyone:

Bush-gore election. In uncle’s apartment in bklyn. They were happy and reacting positively to it all.

I don’t know why they are happy. It’s the first time I realized I can have an opinion. Under a pink lampshade. I now live in that space.

Two sets of parents - father and stepmom very conservative. Mother and stepdad very marxist. Paul Robeson. His tragic life. Those who stood for what was different than the current life. Paul Robeson as earliest memory.

grew up in Holland, kids falling on soccer field, we keep hurting ourselves. We got an audience with the mayor. He took notes and 6 weeks later a new field. I thought that was how politics worked.

2026-02-06 15:07:26 From Larry Berger to Everyone:

The 2017 Macron election in France and the happiness by her mother that Macron won and now a version of this election replaying and the possibility of things going the other way.

Happiness and optimism of the bicentennial in the US. And the sense of a Carter administration that was going to care about the environment, care about social issues, etc. And then a few years later, Reagan would get elected and it seems hard to imagine anyone in the decades that followed could have the level of optimism that I think I had in 1976 small town America.

2026-02-06 15:08:06 From Gwen Olton (she / they) to Everyone:

Alyssa, Monique, Justin, Gwen (3/3)

Gwen: Trying to discern what are the first political memories vs. civic memories. Grew up watching political right wing programming on Friday nights when my friends got to watch TGIF (a bunch of Friday night sitcoms that I felt I was missing out on) and debating politics felt like sports but it was always at this national political level and never a focus on what was actually happening in our community. Maybe my first civic memory would be debating all these extreme right wing beliefs with my first college roommate who grew up in very different circumstances from me. And having my mind changed.

2026-02-06 15:08:25 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:

life as podium time...oof

2026-02-06 15:09:08 From Kristen Gleason to Everyone:

Nabil: A mystery — going to Cerritos community college to celebrate independence day of India. Don't I have a country? Why are we celebrating this other country? India's independence was fraught as both grandparents lost everything because of partition. Confusing, as a child: Which country do I and my parents belong to? Why are we celebrating something traumatic.

Mathieu: Remember an Amnesty International poster in flat of his parents. They tried to explain that in some countries people are in jail because of their ideas. As a child, he could not understand how it was impossible to be imprisoned because of something you think.

Kristen: At a party of parents' friends, in a sunken living room, with all white furniture, she was told that her civic role would be determined by the degree of her own wealth.

2026-02-06 15:10:56 From Melissa (she/her) to Everyone:

Our group, Part 1:

Jennifer: in elem school, one side of my family are activists - marched with MLK. The other side - a lot of prejudice - I was at my grandmother's house - I said, people are people no matter what color their skin is. My face felt so hot - I knew something would happen with the reaction. It was the first time I decided which narrative would be the one for me

CJ the X

I remember Trump's first election - the cynicism - Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump are both so bad. But there is a difference in kind - there is something about dignity and decorum when it's false or flawed. I was part of a radical Christian ministry - we would invite people into our home. We were doing a lot of co living - from when I was 8 years old - that brought a lot of agency
the massive difference that the relationships have rather than checking a box

2026-02-06 15:11:58 From Eric Nadler / Ben Webster-Burr to Everyone:

I just want to add the first part of my story of civic engagement... I grew up outside of Philadelphia on the Main Line. A few minutes walk from me was a Women's Auxiliary Meeting House and the church where I went to Boy Scout meetings. My place of worship was a synagogue, and I didn't know much

about what went on at the Meeting House but I had a sense of the importance of places of public gatherings, places to have discussions, and to do things collectively.

2026-02-06 15:12:23 From Melissa (she/her) to Everyone:
Our group, Part 2:

Jacob

I grew in a place that was racially and ethnically homogenous. I was blind to the fact that racism was still such a force in people's lives. A freshman in HS - school project - I started talking with Black people in my life. I was talking to a friend of my sister's - how she was followed around in stores - it registered for me how deeply people have very different experiences - because of the color of their skin, different positions - that civic experience - a feeling of solidarity, with people across difference

Melissa

My first memory is actually reconstructed from photos - when I was 3, in 1986, my parents and I got to ride the tall ships in NY Harbor for the Statue of Liberty's anniversary. I remember the flags on all the boats, the pomp and circumstance, the first feeling of being part of a history of a country.

2026-02-06 15:12:23 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:
In our breakout Brian shared he's planning to take this prompt into other conversations!

2026-02-06 15:14:39 From Brian Janosch to Everyone:
Thank you so much, Danielle

2026-02-06 15:14:55 From Gwen Olton (she / they) to Everyone:
Thank you, Danielle!

2026-02-06 15:14:56 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:
Just WOW thank you Danielle!

2026-02-06 15:15:05 From CJ The X to Everyone:
Moved by all the memories. Thank you note takers truly appreciated

2026-02-06 15:15:07 From Etienne Turpin to Everyone:
Cuz looks amazing! Thanks Danielle!

2026-02-06 15:30:37 From Mihir Kshirsagar to Everyone:
Have to jump, but an amazing conversation

2026-02-06 15:39:30 From Cody Upton to Everyone:
It was so nice to be part of these conversations. My best to everyone.