

RETROREPORT

Independent • Objective • Nonprofit



LESSONS FROM HISTORY
THAT MATTER TODAY

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Retro Report is working to solve the information crisis threatening our democracy.

Retro Report is an award-winning independent nonprofit newsroom creating trusted documentary videos and classroom resources. More than 300 videos and free classroom resources connect the past to the present, fostering civic engagement and critical thinking skills.

Retro Report videos explore contemporary issues through a historical lens, often bringing untold stories to light. We partner with PBS, the New Yorker, Scientific American, Time, The New York Times and others. Our work has been recognized with awards from national news organizations.

OUR MISSION AND VISION

Retro Report is an Emmy Award-winning nonprofit newsroom dedicated to producing documentary journalism and educational resources. Our work blends meticulous reporting steeped in historical context and interactive classroom resources. Our mission is to revitalize civics education by providing the foundational civics and history information people need to be full members of a democratic society.

THE PROBLEM

The need for revitalized civics and history education has never been greater: According to a national survey, only 14 percent of students tested at or above “proficient” in history, and only 22 percent reached that level in civics. In 2023, the Annenberg Public Policy Center reported that one-third of Americans cannot name all three branches of government. In the wake of federal No Child Left Behind legislation, 44 percent of school districts have reduced time spent on civics and history. Moreover, only 39 states require a civics course for high school graduation. Civics-based knowledge is necessary for a strong democracy.

DONORS MAKE IT POSSIBLE

With your support, Retro Report is addressing the shortcomings of the education system by providing students with essential civics and history knowledge. Our more than 300 documentary videos and 150 corresponding classroom resources are accessible free online. We work with a network of 30,000 educators across the nation to create and distribute engaging materials that spotlight critical issues and guide viewers through the noise to the heart of the issue. These lessons are easy to use and can be quickly incorporated into classroom settings at many learning levels.

Retro Report is a 501c(3) nonprofit organization under the Internal Revenue Code. We seek tax-deductible donations from foundations, institutions and individuals to support our work.

Message From the Executive Producer



Dear Friends,

We've all seen news stories about how Americans are becoming less civically engaged and feeling isolated due to a lack of understanding and common ground. It sometimes feels as though our social fabric is unraveling as connections wither, empathy declines and misunderstandings rule how we act and think. What's more, young adults have abandoned traditional news sources. According to one expert, our nation has an abysmal civics IQ.

At Retro Report, we see a more promising picture. In our work in classrooms across the nation over the last few years, we've met students eager to learn about history and about their government. They want to hear new ideas and explore different points of view. They care about what is going on in the world.

When current events and history are brought to life — when students can step into the shoes of the people who shaped the past — engagement naturally follows. Retro Report's documentary videos use narrative storytelling to shed light on pressing contemporary issues and dig to find root causes. What's more, they are created in a format that resonates with young people: short-form video.

One student told us how much she valued hearing from first-hand witnesses in our stories. "It's actually somebody who was involved in the situation, telling you how it happened and how it felt," the student said. "It's very moving and empowering."

Another student said he didn't realize how much he could learn from hearing different opinions. "It really does help me see the other viewpoints and standpoints," he said.

Through our work, we've also learned what causes students to disengage and distrust. They are very aware of bias. "Most news sources only show you one side and they tell you their opinion," one student said. "I want the full story and the whole broad view of it so I get to make my own decision."

In other words, students want to weigh the evidence and make up their own minds.

Teachers who use Retro Report materials report that students are most engaged when they grasp how an event from the past directly affects them today. One of our expert advisors, a history teacher in Wisconsin, has a poster that takes up most of a classroom wall. It reads "Why It Matters."

At Retro Report, we are working to reinvigorate social studies education, making it effective for today's students. This isn't rocket science. Students enjoy debating ideas, empathizing with protagonists, drilling down into issues and sharpening their arguments with evidence. Given the opportunity to engage in this way, they will shine.

And, just maybe, we'll see a new generation of people who want to learn about the news. "I've got to learn about what's going on around me and not just how the government works," one 16-year-old told us. "I'm going to vote in two years, and I really need to understand who I'm voting for and why."

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kyra Darnton". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Kyra Darnton, President and Executive Producer

SPOTLIGHT



Retro Report in the Classroom: Growth in 2023

Retro Report Education By the Numbers

- We conducted **69** presentations at conferences, webinars and school district training across the nation.
- We connected in person with more than **3,000** educators.
- Our teacher advisory groups grew to **200** educators who contributed to lesson plans and resources. We have our sights set on working directly with more than **300** teachers in 2024.
- Our education newsletter now reaches more than **5,500** subscribers each week.
- We created **67** new lessons and built new themed collections for teachers.

Photo Producer Matthew Spolar, on screen, discussed his work during a virtual classroom visit.

Bringing History to Life, Guided by Educators



Dear Friends,

As you can see from our numbers, the Retro Report education team was busy in 2023. Among the most popular new classroom resources we've shared are the Environmental Education collection; lessons that accompany "How Saba Kept Singing," a video about a Holocaust survivor; and a growing number of Retro Report stories that align with Advanced Placement courses.

We continued to draw upon the expertise and guidance of teachers through our Council of Educators and Teacher Ambassadors. Both of these groups grew in size in 2023, and we look forward to reaching even more teachers in the year ahead.

David Olson, Director of Education



> Environmental Education Collection

This collection of more than a dozen videos, lessons and activities lets students explore the effects of environmental policies and processes, giving an understanding of the profound impact humans have on the planet. Two examples:



Nuclear Meltdowns Raised Fears, but Growing Energy Needs May Outweigh Them

Catastrophic accidents at power plants have heightened fears about the safety of nuclear energy, but environmentalists and others are giving it renewed attention as a way to fight global warming.



Unprepared: Lessons From Two Massive Oil Spills

An oil spill off the coast of Alaska and the explosion of a rig in the Gulf of Mexico revealed a pattern of unsettled standards that cast doubt on the oil industry's preparedness.



> 'How Saba Kept Singing' Education Collection



Classroom resources accompanying Retro Report's feature-length documentary "How Saba Kept Singing" help students gain a deeper understanding of life at the Auschwitz Nazi concentration camp; explore the connections in music, humanity and perseverance; and examine how anti-Semitism has evolved through modern history.



Remembering Auschwitz

David Wisnia, a survivor of the Holocaust, felt that his life could provide inspiration to others. He believed that we must "...do away with hatred, as hatred leads to death." Here, David recounts his experiences as he returns to Auschwitz, accompanied by members of his family.



Avi: The Song Grandpa Sang to Dad

Students can examine the meaning of music in their own lives, then use text and video resources to contrast the use of music by concentration camp prisoners as a means of resistance with the use of music by the Nazis for domination and violence.



> Teacher Advisory Groups

Retro Report's education initiative is driven by excellent teachers. Our Education team collaborates with teacher advisors from classrooms across the nation who provide ideas, feedback and guidance in the creation of documentaries and lessons.

Members of Retro Report's 20-member Council of Educators have created over a dozen new lessons and contributed to several conference presentations. This dynamic group met for a three-day summit at the Retro Report newsroom in New York in July.

Our Teacher Ambassadors, 200 secondary and post-secondary teachers, meet virtually throughout the year. They amplify our work on social channels and provide insight into how Retro Report resources are being used in the classroom.

For more information or to join our advisory groups, please visit our website: RetroReport.org/Education.



Director of Education David Olson welcomed members of Retro Report's Council of Educators to a three-day summit in Manhattan.

Photo: Caroline Watkins

Teacher Testimonials

“ You guys are doing great stuff. It is apparent that your content has been created by educators with educators in mind. Please keep it up.

“ Fantastic resources as usual! Everything from Retro Report is always so high quality in terms of content and production!

“ I love the idea that you are providing pathways to connecting history in the past to today. This is what motivates students to learn history and we have to help them connect the dots. If they can assess the present with clues from the past it will make them better citizens. I am so excited to use these resources for that reason.

“ Thank you again for this wonderful resource and all of the time that was put into making the lives of teachers easier!

'Generations Stolen'



DIRECTOR AND PRODUCER Sarah Weiser
CO-PRODUCER Gabrielle Glaser
EDITOR Anne Checler

A Supreme Court ruling in 2023 upheld the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act, which enacted legal protections for Native families and affirmed the authority of tribal governments over their children. In this collaboration with World Channel, we explore how Native communities are overcoming generations of trauma and demanding accountability for policies designed to erase their culture.

“They put us on a bus, and we’re going to this boarding school – Wahpeton Indian Boarding School. I wrote down a couple of words when I tried to describe my experience there. Abuse, neglect, bullying, torture and pain.

— Dennis Decoteau (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa)



'How Saba Kept Singing'



DIRECTOR, WRITER AND PRODUCER Sara Taksler
EDITOR Jackie Soriano
CONTRIBUTING PRODUCERS Margaret McCarthy, Michael Potter

Holocaust survivor David Wisnia returns to the Auschwitz Nazi concentration camp to uncover his past. David had never told his family the whole truth about how he survived nearly three years in the camp. The family knew that he had used his singing voice to entertain the Auschwitz guards, but his grandson Avi suspected that there was more to the story. This video was produced in collaboration with HiddenLight Productions, Burnt Umber Productions and the WNET Group’s reporting initiative Exploring Hate.

“Music was my life right from the beginning. When I got into the camp – that’s what saved my life.

— David Wisnia, Holocaust survivor



'Healing the Ozone: First Steps Toward Success'



PRODUCER Jonathan Schienberg
EDITOR Heru Muharrar
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER Emily Orr

In the 1970s, scientists began to worry that Earth’s protective ozone layer was being depleted by chlorofluorocarbons, man-made chemicals commonly used as refrigerants and in aerosols. Soon pressure grew for global action. In 1987, a U.N. summit in Montreal brought together global leaders, scientists and industry representatives. A treaty they ratified, the Montreal Protocol, pushed chemical companies to invest in profitable alternatives. In early 2023, scientists announced that the ozone layer was starting to recover.

“It’s basically almost unwieldy when you think of that many countries with that many issues. And it took all of us to actually get the job done.

— Eileen Claussen, Senior Environmental Official in the Reagan administration



'The Secret C.I.A. Operation That Haunts U.S.-Iran Relations'



PRODUCER, NARRATOR Matthew Spolar
EDITOR Brian Kamerzel

Talks last fall that led to the release of five Americans imprisoned in Iran marked the latest turn in a fraught diplomatic relationship that stretches back decades. In 1953, the C.I.A. helped to orchestrate a coup that ousted Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and restored Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, a U.S. ally during the Cold War, to power. But eventually, opposition to corruption and repression fueled a 1979 revolution, the overthrow of the shah by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and the decline of American influence.

“Tehran was caught up in violent street fighting for days, and nobody on either side realized they were both being paid by the C.I.A.”

— Stephen Kinzer, *New York Times* Correspondent



'Fighting Drought With an Ancient Practice: Harvesting the Rain'



PRODUCER Kit R. Roane
EDITOR Heru Muharrar
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER: Manuel Cuéllar
FIELD PRODUCER: Sadiq Naqvi

Could rainwater play a role in alleviating drought? Conservation experts are reviving ancient farming practices from across the globe to collect and store stormwater. In India, a former physician is teaching villagers how to dig a large pit, or johad, to capture monsoon rains. In Tucson, an environmental activist is showing his neighbors how to adapt a skill pioneered by Indigenous people to divert rainwater to crops.

“Storm water is a free resource that is renewable, that we can harness to offset other water needs and put that water to work in the most effective way possible.”

— Blue Baldwin, Program Manager, Tucson Water



'The Crime That Fueled an Asian American Civil Rights Movement'



PRODUCER, NARRATOR Joseph Hogan
EDITOR Brian Kamerzel

Vincent Chin, a 27-year-old Asian American, was beaten with a baseball bat in Detroit in 1982, at a time when anti-Asian sentiment was on the rise. He later died of his injuries. Family members and allies pressured the Justice Department to prosecute the attackers but Chin's assailants never spent a day in jail for the death. The episode redefined hate crimes and energized a push for today's stronger legal protections. (Mural by Anthony Lee.)

“It was a moment of total outrage, total shock. How could this be? You beat a man to death and you get probation?”

— Helen Zia, Asian American Activist



2023 ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND AWARDS



“American Reckoning” was nominated for a News and Documentary Emmy Award for Outstanding Historical Documentary. The film, made with PBS Frontline, uncovers an untold story of the civil rights movement.

“American Reckoning” was also nominated for a Peabody Award in the Public Service category. The Peabody Awards honor excellence in storytelling that reflects the social issues and the emerging voices of our day.

Watch “American Reckoning” here:

[RetroReport.org/Video/American-Reckoning/](https://retroreport.org/Video/American-Reckoning/)



“Extremism in America” won first place in the 2023 Editor & Publisher Eppy Awards as best news or event feature video.

“Extremism in America” also won a Webby Award for best 2023 Video: News & Politics.

Watch the series here:

[RetroReport.org/Series/Extremism-In-America/](https://retroreport.org/Series/Extremism-In-America/)



“The Weight of Stigma: Heavier Patients Confront a Bias,” released in collaboration with Scientific American, was named a 2023 finalist by the National Institute for Health Care Management Foundation Awards. The story examines how bias in the medical community about body size has affected the care of heavier patients.

Watch it here:

[RetroReport.org/Video/The-Weight-of-Stigma-Heavier-Patients-Confront-a-Bias/](https://retroreport.org/Video/The-Weight-of-Stigma-Heavier-Patients-Confront-a-Bias/)



Retro Report creates trustworthy, compelling documentary videos and free classroom resources that bring clarity to complicated issues and inspire civil discussions. You can help us tell more stories from history and reach teachers across the country.

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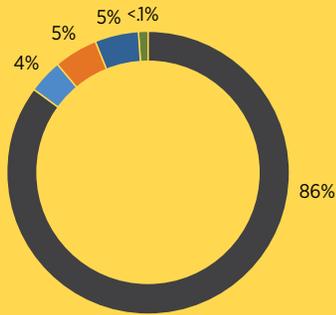
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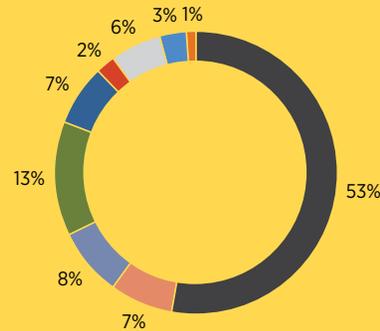
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Revenue



Expenses



- Donations, including founder contribution
- In-kind contributions
- Grants and foundations
- Production and licensing revenue
- Ad revenue, royalties, other

- News Salaries
- Non-News Salaries
- Production costs
- Benefits and taxes
- Occupancy and office expenses
- Marketing and outreach
- Legal, accounting, insurance (includes in-kind)
- Professional services
- Depreciation

NOTES Figures are unaudited. Totals include in-kind costs and asset depreciation costs. Upon request, we will provide you with a description of our programs and activities for which donated funds will be expended. A copy of our most recent financial report is available from the New York State Attorney General's Charities Registry, www.charitiesnys.com

Revenue

Donations (including founder contribution)	\$ 5,738,715
In-kind contributions	227,213
Grants and foundations	335,310
Production and licensing revenue	353,625
Ad revenue, royalties, other	15,578
Total	\$ 6,670,441

Expenses

News Salaries	\$ 3,772,162
Non-News Salaries	512,314
Production costs	584,101
Benefits and taxes	936,359
Occupancy and office expenses	511,189
Marketing and outreach	165,038
Legal, accounting, insurance (includes in-kind)	454,741
Professional services	183,400
Depreciation	49,021
Total	\$ 7,168,325

OUR PARTNERS

Retro Report's documentary videos, classroom resources and community events reach wide audiences across evolving digital platforms. Our work is supported, distributed and amplified by partners who, like us, are committed to informing and elevating conversations around issues of national importance. If you'd like to join us, please contact Colleen McCarthy, Head of Strategy and Partnerships: cmccarthy@RetroReport.com.



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D. Ben Benoit is the executive director of the Peter and Carmen Lucia Buck Foundation. A former senior vice president at U.S. Trust/Bank of America, he assists individuals and organizations with financial, estate and tax planning services.



Emily Bennett is a principal investor at Owl Ventures, a leading education technology venture capital firm. Previously she drove product strategy for technology and media companies including Facebook, The New York Times and Spotify.



Barbra Bluestone Rothschild, M.D., a lecturer at Columbia University, has taught medical ethics at the graduate level for 20 years. She is an advisor to the Oak Foundation and serves on the board of Yaffed.



Christopher Buck, the founder and chairman of Retro Report, developed the project concepts in collaboration with co-founder Larry Chollet. He is a former television editor, most recently with the National Basketball Association. He is president of the Peter and Carmen Lucia Buck Foundation.



Todd Larsen is president of the global Nexis Solutions division of LexisNexis. In past roles, he was the C.E.O. of Blurb, a digital publishing platform; president of the news, sports and entertainment groups at Time Inc.; and president of Dow Jones & Co., where he oversaw the business operations of The Wall Street Journal.



Justin Nyweide is a founding partner and co-C.I.O. of HMI Capital, which invests globally in technology, media, and financial services companies. Previously he worked in private equity. He serves on the board of Reveal/CIR, a journalism nonprofit.



Richard Tofel, currently a distinguished visiting fellow at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, was the founding general manager of ProPublica and was its president from 2013 to 2021. Tofel was previously the assistant publisher of The Wall Street Journal.



Alexandra Wallace is the head of media and content at Yahoo. Previously, she was senior vice president of NBC News and executive in charge of “Today” and “Meet the Press.” She has worked with Google and The Wall Street Journal and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.



Paula L. White is the executive director of Educators for Excellence, an advocacy organization serving New York City public school educators. She has taught elementary grades, founded a public charter school, and led efforts toward statewide public school improvement.



Dana Wolfe is a broadcast journalist, documentary and live event producer and podcast creator. She was the founding executive producer of the debate forum Intelligence Squared U.S., and has served as executive director of the Rosenkranz Foundation.

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Associate Producer Emily Orr on location in a classroom in Clarksburg, W.V., at work on a documentary series coming to PBS in 2024. (Photo: Leslye Davis)

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