Lessons From History
OUR HISTORY

Retro Report was launched in 2013 to serve as a counterbalance to the 24-hour news cycle, addressing the emerging problem that the incentives driving news coverage no longer aligned with the public good.

Using investigative reporting and narrative storytelling, our 250 short documentaries have reached tens of millions of viewers through longstanding partnerships with The New York Times, PBS, The New Yorker and others.

We’ve been recognized with multiple Emmy Award nominations, Edward R. Murrow Awards, Webbys, a Gerald Loeb Award and more, and our documentaries have been showcased at film festivals across the country.

RETRO REPORT IN THE CLASSROOM

Teachers, especially social studies teachers, tell us that our videos solve a growing problem in their classrooms: bringing history to life for their students. Our growing archive of over 250 short documentary videos makes use of first-hand accounts and rich archival video to provide deep, fact-based historical context.

In 2020, we launched Retro Report in the Classroom, a free, easy-to-use resource for middle school, high school and college educators. We have expanded our reach to teachers through partners including Common Sense Media, PBS Learning, New American History and the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.

STRATEGIC VISION

Today, 6 of 10 Americans don’t trust the media to report the news accurately. At the same time, two-thirds of Americans don’t know enough basic history to pass the U.S. citizenship test. The solutions to these two problems are intertwined: News reporting is more accessible with historical context, and history curriculum can be more relevant if infused with current events.

We have created a nonprofit newsroom dedicated to injecting history and context into the news cycle and creating engaging content for the classroom. We’re building a resource for students, teachers, journalists and the general public that illuminates connections between the past and the present. Our work fosters critical thinking and civic-mindedness, counteracting partisan politics and the rancor of social media.

On the cover: Official White House photo by Joyce N. Boghosian; Svetlana Kucherova/Alamy; Paul Thompson
Dear friends,

2020 was a difficult year for all of us at Retro Report, and I can’t begin to express how proud I am of every single member of our staff for working so hard to consistently do good work under challenging conditions. They not only managed to report, film, edit and release stories remotely over the past year, but were invigorated by our mission to provide historical context as we all confronted one of the biggest stories of our lifetime.

Beginning in March, we worked to help viewers understand the coronavirus outbreak spreading across the globe by looking back at the lessons that could be gleaned from previous outbreaks in our history: how American Samoa avoided the 1918 pandemic, the way immunity was treated as an indicator of social status after the yellow fever epidemic of the 1800s, and the failure of the public health system during the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s.

I’m also really proud that we were able to provide context to the 2020 election with our first feature-length documentary, “Enemies of the People,” which aired on VICE-TV and provided critical context for President Trump’s toxic relationship with the press.

Finally, we listened to teachers who were struggling to respond to the challenges of teaching online and launched our education initiative, Retro Report in the Classroom. I’m excited to share that we’ve heard from social studies teachers that our archive of videos is helping them solve a growing problem in their classrooms: how to bring history to life for their students at a time when an understanding of American history and civic literacy are diminished.

Thank you all for your support. We couldn’t do this work without you.

Best,

Kyra Darnton, Executive Producer
2020 AWARDS AND EVENTS

THE EPPY AWARDS
The Domestic Violence Case That Turned Outrage Into Action
Best News or Event Video

THE WEBBY AWARDS
Coronavirus Reignites a Fight Over Rights of Detained Migrant Children
Honoree for Best Video: News and Politics

MILITARY REPORTERS & EDITORS JOURNALISM AWARD
She Rocked the Pentagon
Television: Large Market

In 2020, we organized two interactive online events to connect viewers with experts who shaped our reporting. We used surveys and call-outs as part of our community listening strategy to learn about new and existing audiences.

UNFAIR HOUSING PRACTICES IN FRESNO
Retro Report presented an online panel discussion with four experts who discussed the challenges created by a 100-year history of housing inequality in Fresno, Calif., where longstanding practices have put communities of color at risk of losing their homes and their lives during the coronavirus pandemic. This event was part of “Hitting Home,” an ongoing multiicity, multiplatform reporting project providing historical context for the nation’s growing lack of affordable, safe housing.

COVERAGE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
“The Burning Bed,” a co-production from The New Yorker and Retro Report, explores the history of society’s response to domestic violence and illustrates flaws in the way the criminal justice system responds to the issue today. In an online seminar with subject-matter experts, moderated by Retro Report producer Scott Michels, the discussion centered on the ways domestic violence is covered by news organizations, and how they can do better.

Unfair Housing Practices in Fresno

Coverage of Domestic Violence
As a news organization committed to adding historical context to today’s most important headlines, Retro Report sprang into action to help viewers understand the coronavirus outbreak spreading across the globe. We produced 10 short films that examined the far-reaching impact of Covid-19 and the lessons that were available from history. Here are some highlights. View the full playlist on YouTube.

**What the Bungled Response to H.I.V. Can Teach Us About Dealing With Covid-19**

Released: July 1, 2020

By the early 80s, when AIDS emerged, we had let our public health infrastructure deteriorate and it was poorly funded, really poorly structured.

— Allan Brandt, medical historian

**American Samoa Dodged a Pandemic in 1918. Here’s What We Learned.**

Released: April 27, 2020

During the 1918 outbreak, the list of communities that avoided the onslaught of disease was tiny: a rural town in Colorado, a naval station in San Francisco Bay, a sanatorium for tuberculosis patients in upstate New York. Like American Samoa, they were small and isolated.

— From the script

**Why History Urges Caution on Immunity Testing**

Released: May 13, 2020

Epidemics and pandemics provide any society great challenges. But the real danger is that these moments exacerbate all sorts of existing inequalities that we already have in our societies.

— Kathryn Olivarius
Assistant history professor, Stanford

In the rush to re-open the world’s economies, an idea has been taking shape: field a workforce of survivors who can be shown to have Covid-19 antibodies. But history urges caution. Science historians and ethicists say a great deal can be learned from times when desperate people would “buy the pox.”

“The idea behind a “Covid passport” was that it might allow re-opening of economic activity. I discovered that others had attempted such a system before, when Yellow Fever was the scourge of the Antebellum South. The result? People sought out infection.” — Kit R. Roane, Producer
The toxic relationship between Donald Trump and the press was a hallmark of his presidency. Journalists who covered the 2016 presidential campaign now offer a candid analysis of their role – and missteps – as he rose to power. We produced this popular long-form broadcast documentary video on election coverage in partnership with Vice News.

**Enemies of the People: Trump and the Political Press**
**Released: October 9, 2020**

*We have to think really hard about how everybody behaved. And it needs to be a ruthless telling of the history if we’re going to learn anything from it.*

— David Remnick, The New Yorker

**PRODUCERS:** Susie Banikarim and Victor Couto  
**SENIOR PRODUCER:** Karen M. Sughrue  
**EDITOR:** Bret Sigler

Journalists who covered the 2016 presidential campaign offer a candid analysis of their role in President Trump’s rise to power and the decline of public trust in news.

**Poll Watchers and the Long History of Voter Intimidation**
**Released: Nov. 1, 2020**

*We want to know that eligible voters will not be disenfranchised. . . . The problem is when it crosses the line into intimidation and harassment.*

— Professor Rick Hasen, University of California, Irvine

Poll watchers operate under strict rules. President Trump’s call for his supporters to guard polling places during the 2020 election raised concerns about the potential for voter intimidation. This story was supported by the Economic Hardship Reporting Project.

**The Rise of the Political Meme**
**Released: Jan. 29, 2020**

*Memes are condensed expression. They’re shorthand. Just add water, and they become something bigger.*

— Professor Henry Jenkins, University of Southern California

Political memes are, in the words of one expert, “the people’s editorial cartoons.” As election season heated up, they were weaponized by the left and the right to score political blows, sometimes below the belt.

**Political Debates: What the Unforgettable Moments Reveal**
**Released: September 24, 2020**

*The idea that Kennedy won because he had the better makeup job, I think, has left us with a distorted view of how the presidential debates work.*

— Professor David Greenberg, Rutgers

Tell-all moments in political debates are embedded in political folklore, from knockout one-liners to astonishing gaffes. High-stakes debates put candidates in the hot seat. But are they helpful to voters?
A new documentary presented in collaboration with The New Yorker looks at a landmark domestic violence case, and what has (and has not) changed in the years since.

**The Domestic Violence Case That Turned Outrage Into Action**

Released: July 9, 2020

You couldn’t tell anybody or you’d get beaten up worse. So women had kept silent. Now they took to the streets.

— Ann Jones, Author, ‘Women Who Kill’

I don’t know if I can describe it to you, but it was the most alone feeling in the whole world. I could hear the kids crying and hollering, ‘Mommy, are you all right?’

— Francine Hughes

A new documentary presented in collaboration with The New Yorker looks at a landmark domestic violence case, and what has (and has not) changed in the years since.

The “Burning Bed” case — when Francine Hughes killed her abusive husband — made headlines in the 1970s and caused a national outcry. Today, despite stronger protections, millions of women a year are still abused by a partner. This video was accompanied by an essay for The New Yorker by Annie Boots.

Retro Report producer Scott Michels moderated an online seminar for journalists, spotlighting subject-matter experts. Their conversation touched on the ways domestic violence is covered by news organizations, with a goal of developing a list of best practices.
WE’RE BRINGING RETRO REPORT TO THE CLASSROOM

In 2020, we launched a prototype of Retro Report in the Classroom. Our goal: to build a free, easy-to-use resource for educators in middle schools, high schools and colleges that is based on our growing archive of over 250 short documentaries.

According to a report card issued by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, history scores have declined from 2014. Only 15 percent of eighth-grade students scored proficient in U.S. history, and only 25 percent hit the proficiency mark in civics.

Yet despite the low scores, today’s students are increasingly interested in civic engagement. Educators are charged with providing students not only with a solid foundation of historical facts, but also critical thinking skills, helping them to understand the ways lessons from the past affect their lives today.

Middle school and high school social studies teachers tell us that our videos solve a growing problem in their classrooms: how to bring history to life. Our 10- to 15-minute videos make use of first-hand accounts and rich archival video to link past and present, providing students with deep, fact-based historical context.

We deliver our stories and resources in a format teachers and students prefer, regardless of grade level. Teens and young adults appreciate video as a format for learning. A recent study showed that 82 percent of Generation Z prefers learning from YouTube videos over textbooks.

The response to this initiative has been overwhelmingly positive. Nine out of 10 teachers surveyed said they would recommend it to a colleague and 70 percent said they could use it in their classes. In addition to teachers themselves, our partners in this venture include education leaders like Common Sense Media, PBS Learning, the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, National History Day and New American History.

In 2021, our goal is to support thousands of teachers through Retro Report in the Classroom. We will accelerate our outreach and expand our content offerings and teacher training.
A MESSAGE FROM THE DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

As the coronavirus pandemic disrupted daily life and dramatically changed the way we work, our Retro Report team rose to the challenge with resilience and creativity, producing 10 stories that explored the impact of Covid-19 and the lessons learned from history. Following the deaths of George Floyd and Breanna Taylor, we tackled the issue of racial unrest with a look back to the 1960s for context. Generous grants from the Pulitzer Center, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Economic Hardship Reporting Project are supporting an ongoing project on affordable housing. These efforts and many others reflect our deep commitment to informing the public on issues that matter most by adding historical context. All of this work is made possible through the extraordinary support of our donors and patrons, to whom we are incredibly grateful. Onward!

Craig T. McMurray

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HOW TO DONATE

Every tax-deductible donation we receive is used to create new documentaries and update stories in our archive.

To learn how you can support Retro Report, please contact Craig McMurray, VP Development: cmcmurray@retroreport.com, or call 646-869-0722.
**2020 Revenue**

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**2020 Expenses**

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*Notes: Figures are unaudited. Totals include in-kind costs but do not include fixed assets 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 recently filed financial report is available from the Charities Registry on the New York State Attorney General’s website (www.charitiesnys.com) or, upon request, by contacting the New York State Attorney General, Charities Bureau, at 28 Liberty Street, New York, New York 10005, or us at 633 Third Avenue, 16th Floor, New York, New York 10017. You also may obtain information on charitable organizations from the New York State Office of the Attorney General at www.charitiesnys.com or (212) 416-8401.*

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Thank you to the partners who support and distribute our work, and to the editorial teams that collaborate with us. We reach audiences across evolving digital platforms with videos, a newsletter, YouTube playlists, Instagram and Twitter stories, and online articles related to our documentaries. We are seeking partners committed to helping us inform and elevate the conversation around issues of national importance through short videos and community events informed by history.
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Christopher Buck  Founder and President, Retro Report
Mr. Buck developed Retro Report’s concepts over a 10-year period in collaboration with co-founder Larry Chollet. Mr. Buck is a former television editor, most recently as a senior editor with the National Basketball Association. He is president of the Peter and Carmen Lucia Buck Foundation. Mr. Buck graduated from Emerson College with a B.S. in Communications.

Nick Ascheim  Senior Vice President-Digital, NBC News and MSNBC
Mr. Ascheim has also served as Senior Vice President, Consumer Digital at BBC Worldwide North America. He earned a B.A. in English at Cornell and an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School.

Richard Tofel  President, ProPublica
Mr. Tofel oversees ProPublica’s non-journalism operations, including communications, legal, development, finance and budgeting and human resources. Previously, he was assistant publisher of The Wall Street Journal. He served as vice president, general counsel and secretary for the Rockefeller Foundation and as president and chief operating officer of the International Freedom Center, a museum and cultural center that was planned for the World Trade Center site.

D. Ben Benoit  Executive Director, Peter and Carmen Lucia Buck Foundation
Mr. Benoit has over 30 years of experience assisting individuals and organizations with financial services. He was a senior vice president at U.S. Trust, now Bank Of America Private Bank.

Brewster Kahle  Founder, Internet Archive
Mr. Kahle founded the Internet Archive, a nonprofit digital library offering free universal access to books, movies and music, as well as 362 billion archived web pages. He graduated from M.I.T., where he studied artificial intelligence.

Dana Wolfe  Former Founding Executive Producer, Intelligence Squared
Ms. Wolfe is a five-time Emmy Award winning journalist, television and debate producer. She serves as executive director of the Rosenkranz Foundation. After more than a decade as a producer at “Nightline,” Ms. Wolfe became an independent media consultant. She earned a B.A. at York University and an M.A. in International Studies from New York University.

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