

THE
BETTER ANGELS
SOCIETY



2022 ANNUAL REPORT

TELLING AMERICA'S STORIES



Paula, Sam, and Sol Messinger aboard the MS St. Louis, May 1939. (*The U.S. and the Holocaust*)

Inside

2. Letter from The Better Angels Society
3. Board of Directors
4. Library of Congress Lavine/Ken Burns Prize for Film
5. Better Angels Lavine Fellowship
6. The Next Generation Angels Awards
7. Films and Spotlights
8. *The U.S. and the Holocaust* Broadcast
10. Better Angels Stories
12. Financials
14. Donor List

Dear Better Angels and Friends,

Ken Burns credits Mark Twain with having said, “History doesn’t repeat itself, but it rhymes,” and 2022 seems to have been a testament to that. Major gifts provided by our generous Better Angels made it possible for our organization to play a significant role in funding Florentine Films’ *The U.S. and the Holocaust*, which aired and streamed last year on PBS, sparking and informing a global conversation at a time when it is hauntingly relevant.

In addition, our donors’ funding supported a collaboration between PBS, Florentine Films, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to create the profound educational materials that will accompany this film for many years to come. Ken Burns, Lynn Novick, and Sarah Botstein have said that this is among the most important and influential projects that they have ever produced. We’ve long recognized that history documentary films are vital to the national conversation and offer an unparalleled catalyst for civic and educational engagement. We are so grateful to those who share our appreciation for the power of history.

A decade ago we set out to become the preeminent organization supporting American history documentary filmmakers, and we are so proud of how far we’ve come. With your support of the important work of Ken Burns and his team, and other American history documentary filmmakers through our **Better Angels Stories** initiative, we have funded more uniquely American stories than ever before. In 2022 our partnerships with PBS’s *American Masters* and *American Experience* flourished, allowing us to help support more than a dozen high-quality historical documentaries broadcast on PBS in 2022 and 2023.

In 2022 we celebrated the **Library of Congress Lavine/Ken Burns Prize for Film** by congratulating two winning films: *Philly on Fire* and *Bella! This Woman's Place is in The House*, alongside four other finalists telling America’s stories. For the first time since our inaugural Prize in 2019, we had the opportunity to gather together in the Great Hall of the Library of Congress for our award ceremony, celebrating with bipartisan representation from members of Congress and bringing together the wide community of filmmakers that this Prize honors each year.

In addition to funding the Prize, Jeannie and Jonathan Lavine make possible a related annual program run by The Better Angels Society—the **Better Angels Lavine Fellowship**. This program offers filmmakers support and professional development from a range of expert advisors. We recently announced the fourth annual class of Lavine Fellows, and look forward to introducing these talented filmmakers and their films to you in this report.

We hope that as you read the following pages, you feel the same pride we do about the mission of The Better Angels Society. We are deeply gratified and encouraged that the community of generous philanthropists that made our work possible when we began over a decade ago has remained loyal and grown even more generous with every passing year.



Amy Margerum Berg
President



Bobby Stein
Chair

Our Mission

The Better Angels Society’s mission is to be the preeminent organization supporting American history documentary filmmakers, advancing the use of their body of work to promote civic engagement and educate generations of students and lifelong learners.



The Statue of Liberty seen from Ellis Island.
(*The U.S. and the Holocaust*)



The Battle of Bunker Hill. Painting by Winthrop Chandler, ca. 1776-1777. Museum of Fine Arts Boston.

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Jonathan and Jeannie Lavine, Ken Burns, and Dr. Carla Hayden in October 2022. Photograph: Katie Dance

The **Library of Congress Lavine/Ken Burns Prize** for Film is a \$200,000 cash award made possible through a generous endowment from Jeannie and Jonathan Lavine. It is presented annually to one exemplary American history documentary film to cover post-production and finishing costs, including outreach and marketing. The Prize is designed to advance and elevate feature-length U.S. historical documentary filmmaking in the tradition of Ken Burns, and encourage a growing community of history documentary filmmakers working on bringing America's stories to light. Supplemental prizes of \$50,000 (awarded to the runner-up) and \$25,000 (awarded to four finalists) are made possible by The Better Angels Society.

Each year the submissions are subject to a lengthy selection process that includes experts from the Library of Congress, nationally recognized documentary filmmakers, and some of our nation's most prominent historians.

The 2022 **Library of Congress Lavine/Ken Burns Prize for Film** was awarded at a ceremony on October 18, 2022 in the Great Hall of the Library of Congress, with Members of Congress including Senator Roy Blunt (MO) and Representative Jamie Raskin (MD) attending, as well as prominent filmmakers, academics, thought leaders, and distinguished public media professionals who gathered to honor the importance of history documentary filmmaking. The award was presented to two winners in a tie decision: *Bella!*, directed by Jeff L. Lieberman, and *Philly on Fire*, directed by Ross Hockrow and Tommy Walker. These films each received a \$200,000 cash award.

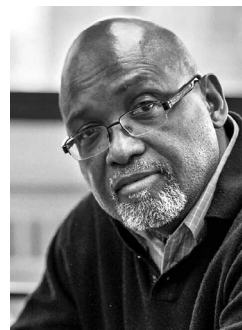
The finalists were *Cannabis Buyers Club* (Directed by Kip Andersen & Chris O'Connell), *Imagining The Indian: The Fight Against Native American Mascoting* (Directed by Aviva Kempner & Ben West), *Raymond Lewis: L.A. Legend* (Directed by Ryan Polomski & Co-Directed by Dean Prator), and *Virgil Thomson: Creating The American Sound* (Directed by John Paulson).

The Better Angels Society is proud to have established this official partnership with the Library of Congress which is only possible through the generosity of Jeannie and Jonathan Lavine through the Crimson Lion/Lavine Family Foundation. Together we are working to ensure that more ideologically balanced, carefully researched, compelling histories will be made accessible to the public and help guide our national conversation.

2022 PRIZE JURY



Dr. Annette Gordon-Reed



Sam Pollard



Dawn Porter



Sally Rosenthal



Dr. Claudio Saunt

2023 Better Angels Lavine Fellowship

The **Better Angels Lavine Fellowship** program was established in 2020 as a component of the **Library of Congress Lavine/Ken Burns Prize for Film**. The **Lavine Fellowship** is made possible by The Better Angels Society and Jeannie and Jonathan Lavine through the Crimson Lion/Lavine Family Foundation.

The Fellows are selected in January through their application for the **Library of Congress Lavine/Ken Burns Prize for Film**. Film projects that demonstrate exceptional potential, especially those with an emphasis on telling the stories of America's diversity, receive support, guidance, and advice from a panel of expert filmmakers. These experts have

experience in all aspects of history documentary filmmaking, including archival research and rights-related issues, legal matters, script writing, distribution, marketing and more. The Fellows also participate in a series of group workshops with experts from the film industry, including one with PBS.

This program is yet another way The Better Angels Society—through generous donors like the Lavines—supports both humanistic inquiry and public media.

Below are the 5 films and filmmakers selected for the 2023 Better Angels Lavine Fellowship.



15th PARISH

Directed by Ben DiGiacomo

The story of New York City's dancehall culture told by its legendary participants, from early pioneers to present-day megastars Shaggy and Sean Paul. *15th Parish* creates a coherent account of dancehall as a New York immigrant evolution of shared Jamaican identity and cultural pride.



NEW WAVE

Directed by Elizabeth Ai

Mile-high hair. Synthesized music. Underground parties. The “Vietnamese new wave” scene of 1980s California was the catalyst to healing a generation of refugees in limbo. *NEW WAVE* is the coming-of-age story about trailblazers who pioneered a raucous music scene and inspired their community to rebuild in the wake of war.



PHOTOGRAPHIC JUSTICE: THE CORKY LEE STORY

Directed by Jennifer Takaki

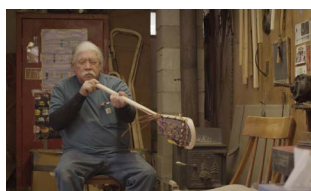
Using his camera as a “weapon against injustice,” Chinese American photographer Corky Lee brought art and politics together through decades of documentation of the Asian American experience. From Lunar New Year to street protests, Pakistani Independence Day to Diwali, Lee's photographs empowered generations of Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) pride. Filmmaker Jennifer Takaki's unprecedented access reveals the triumphs and tragedies of the man behind the camera.



REMEMBERING WOODBINE

Directed by Patrick Longstreth

In 1971 an explosion at the Thiokol Chemical Plant in Woodbine, Georgia took the lives of 29 workers, predominantly Black women. The explosion was one of the worst industrial disasters in U.S. history, and it was caused by the U.S. government's misclassification of material being used to make trip flares for the Vietnam War. Interviews with survivors, relatives, and first responders retrace the events of that day and their lasting effects on the community.



SECOND GROWTH

Directed by Robert Carpenter

Lacrosse is an ancient, Indigenous pastime, played on North American shores long before the first settlers arrived. In the late 1800s, colonists appropriated the game and turned it into lacrosse, which has become a major contemporary sport. *Second Growth* tells the story of the Indigenous lacrosse journey to regain agency in modern lacrosse and use this platform as the foundation of a larger cultural movement.

2022 Next Generation Angels Awards

The Better Angels Society is immensely proud to run **The Next Generation Angels Awards**, a program designed to recognize the excellence and achievement of six student history documentary filmmakers who embody the future of American storytelling. Through their participation in National History Day®, these students create original American history documentary films that compete locally, regionally, and nationally before they are selected as Next Generation Angels.

While creating their documentaries, **The Next Generation Angels Award** winners delve into archival collections of film, photography, sound recordings, and documents before submitting their 10-minute films to the National History Day® contest, which attracts thousands of entries from middle and high school students. The top films selected from both the Junior and Senior categories become the six Next Generation Angels Award winners.

On November 30, 2022, through a new collaboration with the Philadelphia Film Society, middle and high school students gathered—virtually and in the Philadelphia Film Society's main theater—to watch the Fourth Annual Student History Documentary Film Festival, a virtual event where the winners and their films were featured in interviews with Mike Mashon, Head of the Moving Images Section of the Library of Congress.

In addition to the live festival, this collaboration between The Better Angels Society and the Philadelphia Film Society led to the creation of educational resources for teachers and students, making it easier for more students to explore the field of documentary filmmaking. This curricula is a guide to the history documentary-making process, highlighting the narrative, research, and artistic techniques inherent in filmmaking.

"Throughout this experience, I have learned a great deal about the world of filmmaking and most memorably, had the opportunity to engage with filmmakers who have dedicated their lives to creating pieces of art to share with the world. I have always had a love for documentaries, especially historical films. Speaking with Ken Burns, one of the most iconic historical filmmakers in the history of the craft, was a moment that I will never forget."

– Maci Hill,
1st Place, Senior Division (2022)
*Communist in the Cornfields:
Roswell Garst's Citizen Diplomacy*



The Next Generation Angels Awards are funded thanks to the generosity of John and Jessica Fullerton, who have pledged to support this program for ten years. These awards were established by The Better Angels Society as a youth complement to **The Library of Congress Lavine/Ken Burns Prize for Film**.

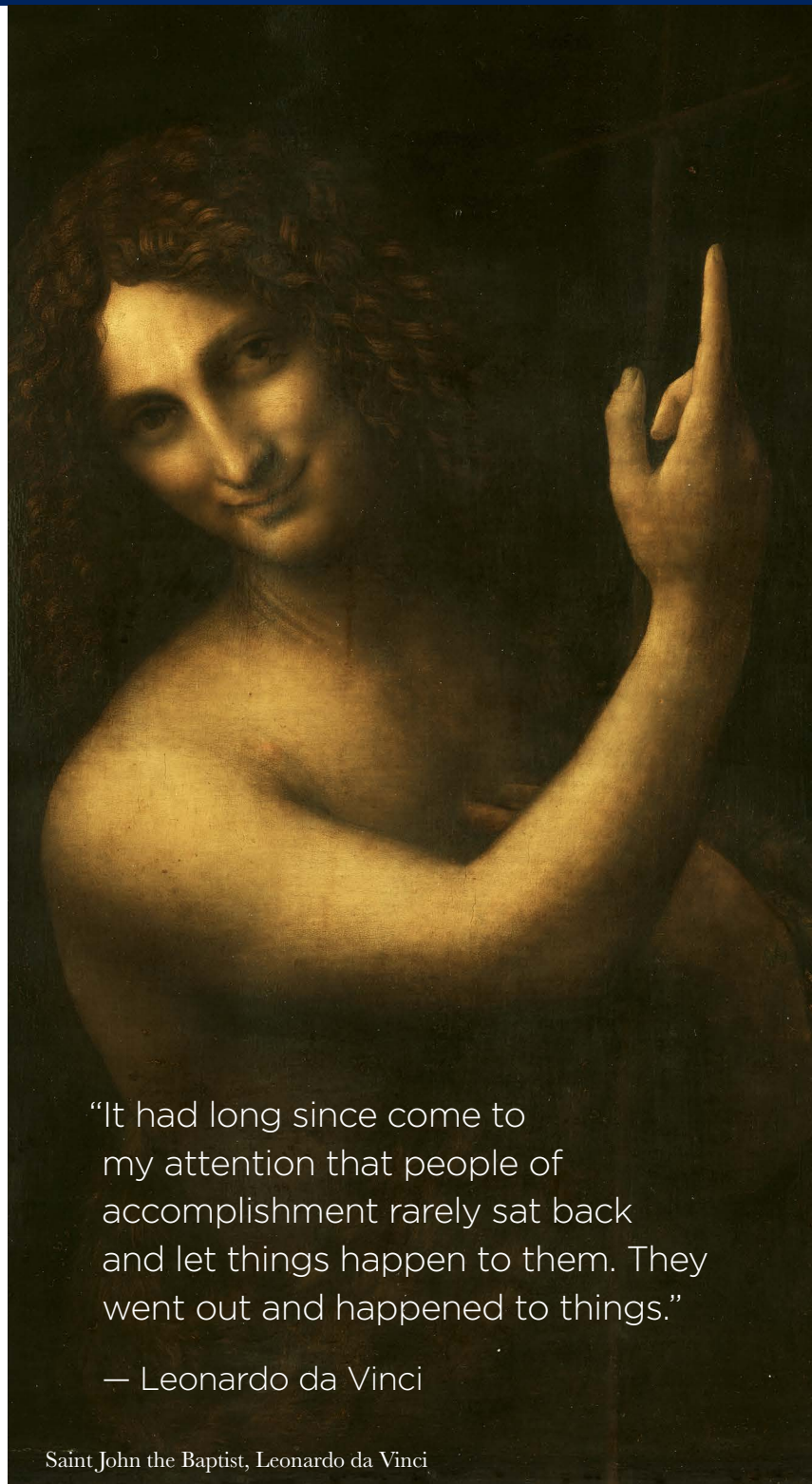
Leonardo da Vinci

This film will tell the story of Leonardo di ser Piero da Vinci, best known as Leonardo da Vinci, a 15th century Italian polymath of soaring imagination and profound intellect, who left behind artistic works of staggering beauty and detailed sketches of futuristic contraptions of warfare and flight that today are marveled at for their technical ingenuity and foresight.

From his birth out of wedlock to a notary and peasant woman and apprenticeship to a distinguished Florentine painter, to his days as a military architect, cartographer, sculptor, and muralist for hire, the film will offer an intimate portrait of a singular visionary whose *Mona Lisa*, *The Last Supper* and *The Vitruvian Man* are among the most celebrated works known to man, but whose artistic endeavors sometimes seemed an afterthought to his pursuits in science and engineering.

Set against a rich and dynamic backdrop of Renaissance Italy, at a time of skepticism and free-thinking, regional war and religious upheaval, *Leonardo da Vinci* will bring Leonardo and his towering achievements to life through his voluminous personal notebooks, primary and secondary accounts of his life and times, and on-camera interviews with modern scholars, artists, engineers, inventors, and admirers.

Directed and produced by Ken Burns, Sarah Burns, and David McMahon, written by David McMahon and Sarah Burns, and executive produced by Ken Burns, *Leonardo da Vinci* is slated for broadcast on PBS in 2024.



"It had long since come to my attention that people of accomplishment rarely sat back and let things happen to them. They went out and happened to things."

— Leonardo da Vinci

Saint John the Baptist, Leonardo da Vinci

Upcoming Films

- **The American Buffalo** | October 16-17, 2023
- **Leonardo da Vinci** | 2024
- **The American Revolution** | 2025
- **Crime and Punishment in America** | 2026
- **Emancipation to Exodus** | 2026/2027
- **LBJ & The Great Society** | 2027



Immigrants waiting to be transferred, Ellis Island, October 30, 1912.

The U.S. and the Holocaust

The initial broadcast of *The U.S. and the Holocaust* exceeded all expectations. As the first documentary series to examine the Holocaust from an American perspective, the comprehensive educational resources and community engagement programs associated with the film will ensure its enduring impact.



Members of the Sturmabteilung or SA - a Nazi paramilitary organization.

The film aired at a time of rising antisemitism, providing viewers with a detailed look at the history of antisemitism in the U.S. and abroad. Its premiere reached more than 16.5 million viewers in the U.S. representing a 260% increase from the PBS primetime average. PBS launched a nationwide rebroadcast in January and interest in the film was equally strong internationally. (Source: WETA)

The U.S. and the Holocaust received widespread critical acclaim, with reviewers highlighting the many ways in which its themes resonate at a time of intense divisions worldwide. Many critics praised the film's ability to promote constructive dialogue across political boundaries. In the U.K., *The Sunday Times* described the film as a "diligent, absorbing, serious, committed piece of astounding television."

For all Florentine Film projects, the generosity of Better Angels allows for the public broadcast and distribution of each film, as well as the development of rich educational resources. The educational materials that accompanied *The U.S. and the Holocaust* are the result of a collaboration between PBS LearningMedia and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, with the support and input of other leading Holocaust education experts.

"It confronts a topic that many Americans of every political stripe prefer to avoid: responsibility."

- Dara Horn, *The Atlantic*

The U.S. and the Holocaust was made under uniquely challenging conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The successful completion of the film would not have been possible without the unwavering support of these generous donors:

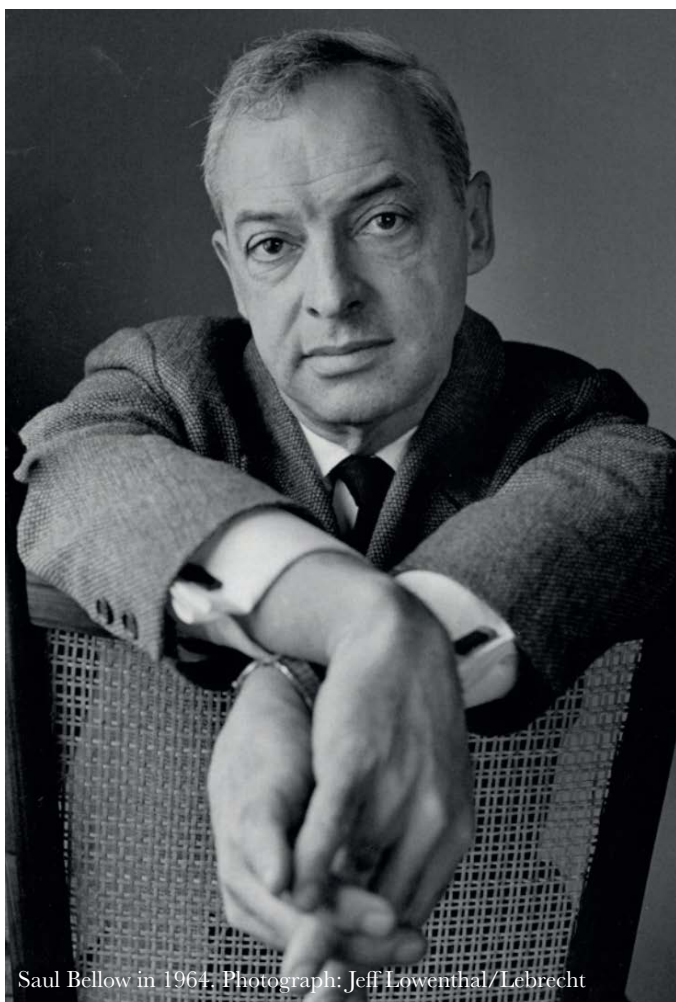
Jeannie and Jonathan Lavine; Jan and Rick Cohen; Allan and Shelley Holt; Koret Foundation; David and Susan Kreisman; Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder; Blavatnik Family Foundation; Crown Family Philanthropies honoring the Crown and Goodman families; Fullerton Family Charitable Fund; Dr. Georgette Bennett and Dr. Leonard Polonsky; The Russell Berrie Foundation; Diane and Hal Brierley; John and Catherine Debs; Leah Joy Zell and the Joy Foundation.



Japanese families in Woodland, California wait for a train at a railroad station to take them to an internment camp. May 20, 1942.

Better Angels Stories

As part of our growing **Better Angels Stories** initiative, the Society has committed to supporting a wide array of historical documentary films bringing the most important untold stories of American history to life on PBS through GBH's *American Experience*, WNET's *American Masters*, and other films broadcast on public media. Our goal is to ensure that these vital, complex narratives can be brought to millions of PBS viewers across the country.



Saul Bellow in 1964. Photograph: Jeff Lowenthal/Lebrecht

THE ADVENTURES OF SAUL BELLOW

(*American Masters*, WNET)

Broadcast December 12, 2022

American Masters: The Adventures of Saul Bellow illuminates how writer Saul Bellow transformed modern literature and navigated through the issues of his time, including race, gender, and the Jewish immigrant experience, through rare archival footage and interviews with Philip Roth, Salman Rushdie, and many others. The film traces Bellow's rise to eminence and examines his many identities: reluctant public intellectual, "serial husband," father, Chicagoan, and Jewish American. It also sheds light on his willingness to confront social issues, his criticisms of American society and materialism, and his provocative political view. A production of Ingenue Productions in association with American Masters Pictures. Directed by Asaf Galay; produced by Naama Pyritz and Rachel Engleberg; executive produced by Aviva Kempner, Anthony McCarten, and Kathryn Dietz.

THE ADVENTURES OF SAUL BELLOW WAS RECOGNIZED AS A FINALIST FOR THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS LAVINE/KEN BURNS PRIZE FOR FILM IN 2020.



"We're thrilled with our partnership with The Better Angels Society. This remarkable community helps us do what we do best: illustrate the creative journeys of America's most captivating historical figures through documentary film for a broad and diverse national audience."

– MICHAEL KANTOR (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, *AMERICAN MASTERS*/WNET)



ZORA NEALE HURSTON: CLAIMING A SPACE (*American Experience*, GBH) Broadcast January 17, 2023

Raised in the small all-Black Florida town of Eatonville, Zora Neale Hurston studied at Howard University before arriving in New York in 1925. She would soon become a key figure of the Harlem Renaissance, best remembered for her novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. But even as she gained renown in the Harlem literary circles, Hurston was also discovering anthropology at Barnard College with the renowned Franz Boas. She would make several trips to the American South and the Caribbean, documenting the lives of rural Black people and collecting their stories. She studied her own people, an unusual practice at the time, and during her lifetime became known as the foremost authority on Black folklore. Directed by Tracy Heather Strain, produced by Randall MacLowry, and executive produced by Cameo George.

“Support from members of The Better Angels Society helps us present to the public diverse, compelling, and often untold stories about some of America’s most intriguing historical figures and moments.”

– CAMEO GEORGE (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, *AMERICAN EXPERIENCE*/GBH)



Better Angels Stories Films

2022 Films

Flood in the Desert
(*American Experience*)

Joe Papp in Five Acts
(*American Masters*)

**Marian Anderson: The Whole
World in Her Hands**
(*American Masters*)

Plague at the Golden Gate
(*American Experience*)

Taken Hostage
(*American Experience*)

The Adventures of Saul Bellow
(*American Masters*)

2023 Films

**Bella! This Woman's Place is
in The House**
(*American Masters*)

Boston School Battle
(*American Experience*)

Casa Susanna
(*American Experience*)

Free Chol Soo Lee
(*Independent Lens*)

**Max Roach: The
Drum Also Waltzes**
(*American Masters*)

**Ruthless: Monopoly's
Secret History**
(*American Experience*)

Storming Caesars Palace
(*Independent Lens*)

The Harvest
(*American Experience*)

The Lie Detectors
(*American Experience*)

The Picture Taker
(*Independent Lens*)

The Sun Queen
(*American Experience*)

War on Disco
(*American Experience*)

William F. Buckley
(*American Masters*)

Zora Neale Hurston
(*American Experience*)

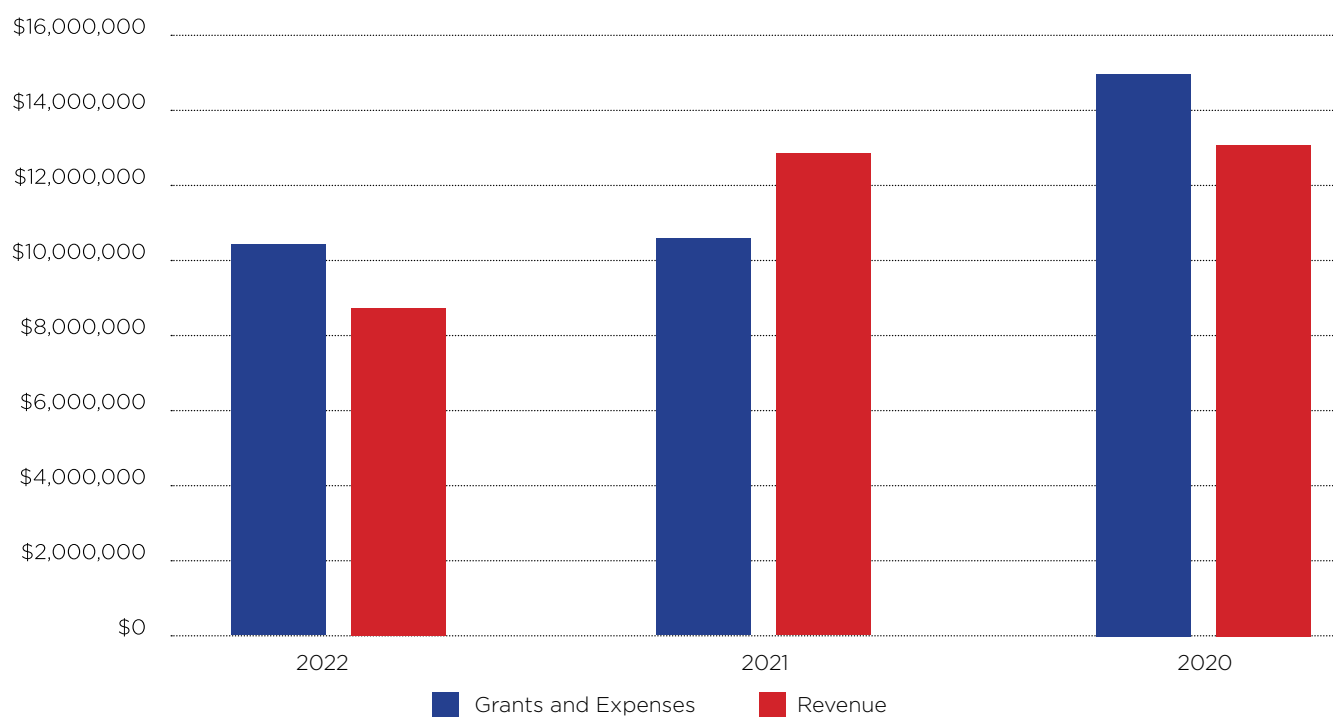
DATA BASED ON AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

	2022	2021	2020
TOTAL REVENUE	\$8,915,783	\$13,121,817	\$13,200,910
EXPENSES			
Program	\$10,151,542	\$10,318,840	\$13,520,579
Administration	\$438,344	\$302,274	\$712,586
Fundraising	\$150,207	\$193,081	\$220,591
TOTAL	\$10,740,093	\$10,814,195	\$14,453,756
OTHER ACTIVITIES			
Change in net assets	(\$1,824,310)	\$2,307,622	(\$1,173,102)
Net assets, beginning of year	\$31,612,247	\$29,304,625	\$30,477,727
Net assets, end of year	\$29,787,937	\$31,612,247	\$29,304,625
TOTAL ASSETS	\$29,814,086	\$31,631,125	\$29,324,402
LIABILITIES	\$26,149	\$18,878	\$19,777
NET ASSETS			
Without Donor Restrictions	\$10,704,260	\$9,687,723	\$9,395,935
With Donor Restrictions	\$19,083,677	\$21,924,524	\$19,908,690
TOTAL NET ASSETS	\$29,787,937	\$31,612,247	\$29,304,625
TOTAL LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS	\$29,814,086	\$31,631,125	\$29,324,402

In 2022, TBAS raised \$8.7 million in contributions and regranted \$9.4 million of both current and prior years' donations.

Over the past five years, the Society has raised over \$62.9 million and has granted \$58.3 million to support documentary filmmakers, advancing their work to promote civic engagement and to provide educational opportunities.

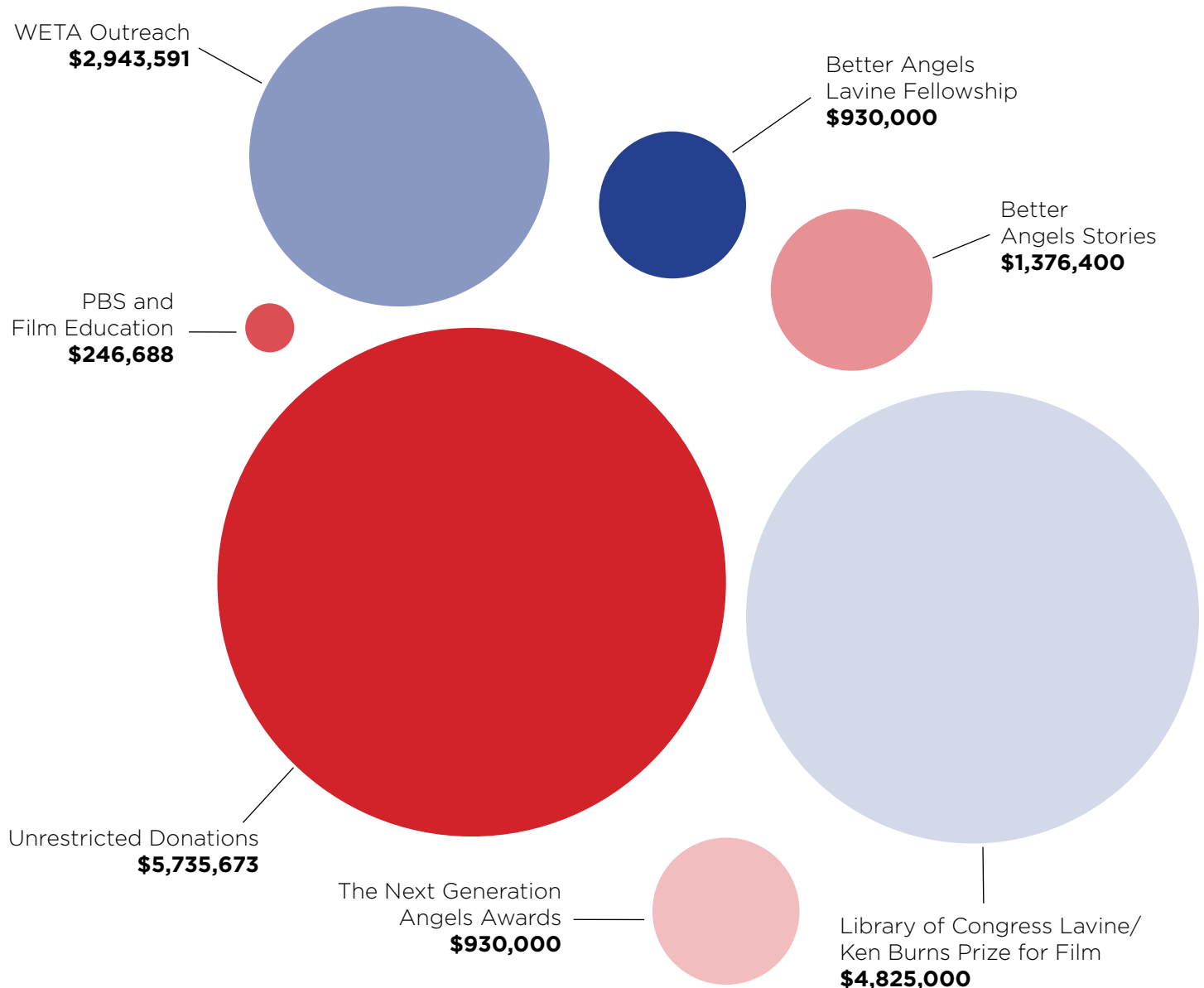
TOTAL REVENUE AND TOTAL GRANTS AND EXPENSES



Expanding Our Scope

As The Better Angels Society enters its second decade, we have expanded our work beyond the films of Ken Burns and his team to include programs that support Ken's legacy and elevate the untold stories of American history. These important programs are represented below.

PROGRAM DIVERSIFICATION BY REVENUE JANUARY 2019 — DECEMBER 2022*



**Excluding administrative fees and donations restricted to operations*

Our donors recognize that philanthropy through American history documentary film strengthens our democracy.

WE ARE THANKFUL TO THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS FOR THEIR SUPPORT

★ Denotes member of the Board of Directors and Founders Board

BETTER ANGELS GIFTS OF \$5 MILLION & ABOVE

Blavatnik Family Foundation

John & Catherine Debs ★

Fullerton Family Charitable Trust ★

Jeannie & Jonathan Lavine,
Crimson Lion/Lavine Family Foundation ★

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Plus Anonymous Donors

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Howard Althiser, Sr.

Karol Ames

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James Austin

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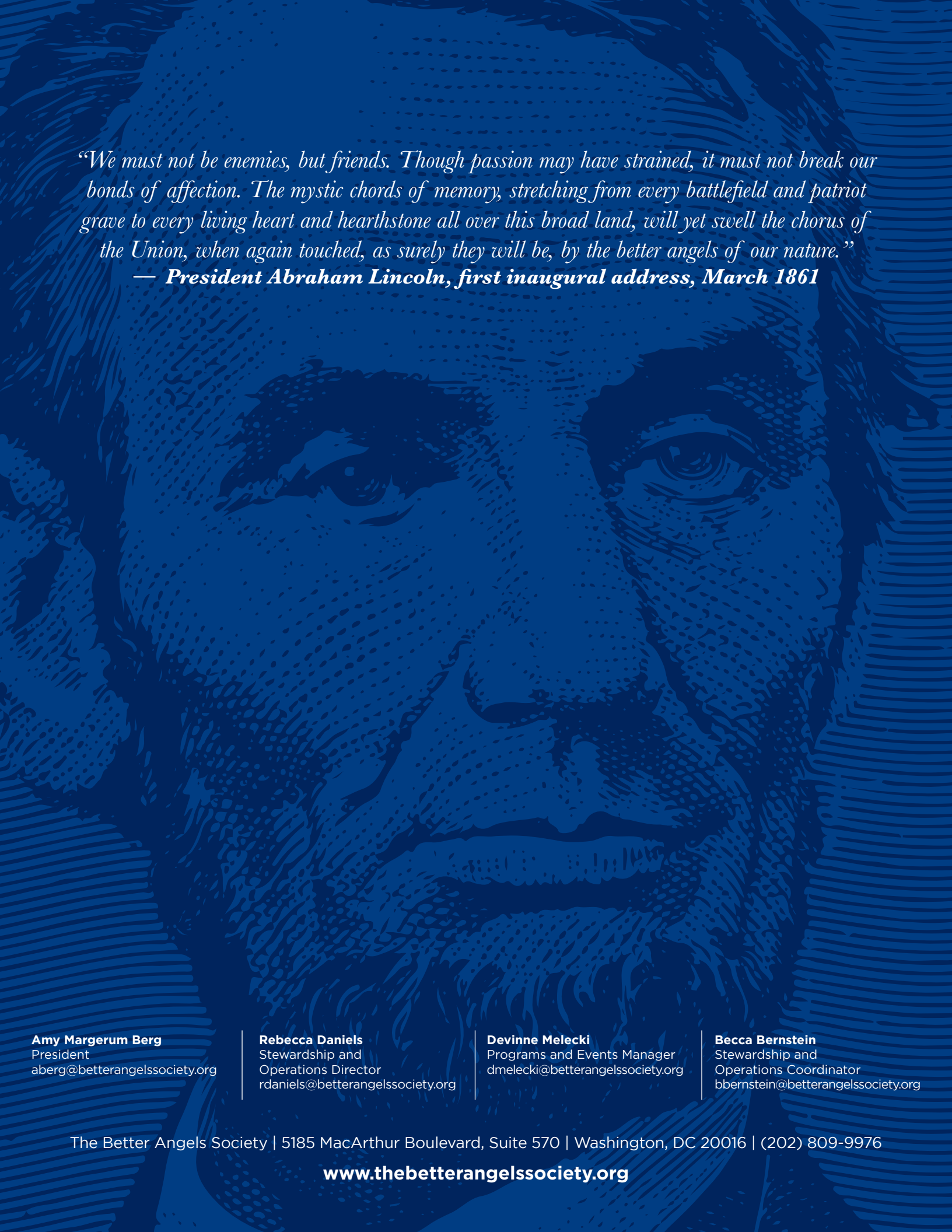
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“We must not be enemies, but friends. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

— **President Abraham Lincoln, first inaugural address, March 1861**

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