

Dear Readers,

2017 was saturated with events that political and cultural commentators have rushed to characterize as ‘historical.’ The election of multiple transgender candidates to political office throughout the United States in November earned its ‘historical’ designation as a watershed moment for gender equality stateside. At the same time, a global trend towards xenophobic nationalism earned its embodiment in the ‘Age of Trump.’ These appeals to history-in-the-making resonated through discussions of events that continued to unfold; they also articulated subtle claims as to what properly constitutes the ‘historical.’

Given this popular association of the historical with the earth-shattering, one might plausibly expect for the essays in this journal, written by undergraduate historians, to grapple with the grandiose, even the hyperbolic. Yet the pieces that we’ve published in this issue seem to defy this particular vision of history, and their authors have chosen to understand a varied collection of unexpected individuals, institutions, and things as historical subjects in their own right.

Magdalene Klassen’s “Ulrikab Abroad: ‘Authentic’ Inuit-German Encounters in Labrador and Germany” traces the journey of a little-known Inuit Moravian, remembered as Abraham Ulrikab, from Labrador to the human zoos of late nineteenth-century Germany. In subverting our expectations of colonized voice and agency during a triumphalist moment in imperial Europe when race biology thrived, Klassen’s piece is an astute reading of the margins of a burgeoning empire.

In “University in Exile,” Tianyi Dong closely analyzes the oft-overlooked writings of intellectuals at a prominent Chinese university in the midst of the Second Sino-Japanese War. Her sensitive depiction of students’ and professors’ academic and political lives opens onto broader questions about the contestations and constraints that emerged within a university beset by the exigencies of national conflict.

While opium in the British Empire is relatively well-trodden ground, Naomi Elliot’s “Illicit Consumption” returns the gaze to the metropole—an analytical move that has been more popular in literary studies than in historical ones—to discuss how opium use is subtly inflected by race, class, and gender. Elliot’s work brings nuance to the field by laying bare the colonial anxieties that attend the increasingly pervasive consumption of a commodity that was indispensable for the Empire’s economic success.

In “‘Egypt’ and Emancipation: An Exploration of Political Partisanship in Wartime Illinois,” Ian Iverson moves away from the staggering bloodshed of the American Civil War and towards the intricate political drama that unfolded in Republican President Abraham Lincoln’s home state during the midterm elections of 1862. By moving slightly afield from the military events that continue to capture popular historical imagination, Iverson’s detailed study adds crucial nuance to the history of party formation in the United States.

The theoretical exploits of quantum physicists and the minute experiments of biologists seem so hyper-specialized and erudite as to defy lay comprehension. The final piece of our Winter 2018 issue, Ari Feldman’s “Coherence,” engages both. In a tone both clarifying and cheeky, Feldman narrates their surprising confluence in research on purple bacteria, and provocatively suggests the stakes of ‘quantum biology’ for competing conceptions of life itself.

This issue would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of our featured authors; the Chicago Journal of History editorial board; and the CJH editor who pulled double duty as the journal’s designer, Sarah Larson. In the early autumn of 2017, Chicago Journal of History collaborated with UChicago PaleoClub to sponsor a lecture by historian Michael Rossi titled “An Ignorance of Mammoths.” We’d like to use this space to formally thank Dr. Rossi and Alexander Okamoto, President of PaleoClub, for their time and talents as well.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

Sincerely,

Colin Garon and Darren Wan
Editors-in-Chief