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Preface

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THE ANCIENT CHINESE PHILOSOPHER Confucius once said, "I was not born to wisdom: I loved the past, and sought it earnestly there." 1 Though many students of history would agree with this Eastern sage about the benefits of seeking wisdom in the past, in an era where information is often conveyed in thirty minute episodes and 140-character tweets, the meticulous study of the past preferred by both Confucius and BYU history majors may seem as dated as the figures and events they research.

The student historians represented in this journal have embraced the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital era with vigor. A compelling film may distract us from completing a history paper, but these same films also provide excellent lenses through which ambitious scholars can track historical change and continuity. The Internet distracts, but also provides access to previously unobtainable primary sources. Thanks to the technological advances of our media age, the opportunities to learn from the past have never been greater.

The student essays selected for publication in this year's journal use a wide variety of both traditional and non-traditional sources to extract meaning from the past. Stephanie Bergeson's essay on Holocaust memorials in modern Germany demonstrates how monuments reveal as much about public attitudes towards the past as they do the events they commemorate. Brandon Hellewell's essay on Reed Smoot's involvement with the League of Nations uses traditional written sources to understand the conflict that occurs when individual convictions clash with the ideals of one's community. Bradley Kime's essay on Masonic rituals in Roald Dahl's Charlie and the Chocolate Factory sheds light on the potential Masonic influences on this well-beloved children's story, illustrating how centuries-old ritual and symbolism can permeate even the most unlikely of sources.

Continuing on to Cameron Nielsen's essay on Mao Zedong and the Hundred Flowers Movement, we see political speeches being used to reconstruct the internal motivations of an important historical figure whose fateful decisions influenced the lives of millions. Lark Plessinger's analysis of written correspondence between English immigrants to nineteenth-century Ohio and their

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brother in England reminds us, however, that significant meaning can also be derived from studying the lives of less prominent historical figures.

Kelsey Samuelsen’s work on premillenial dispensationalism in modern apocalyptic media uses a wide variety of contemporary sources to demonstrate how modern concerns about a catastrophic future pay unconscious tribute to the past. Carlyle Schmollinger’s essay on photographer Laura Gilpin’s work among the Navajo shows us the power of images to relate a fascinating story as well as advocate for the welfare of a marginalized people.

In another essay that explores Native American issues, Annie Walker uses oral interviews to piece together and draw conclusions from the experiences of Native Americans in the LDS Church-sponsored Indian Placement Program. Oral interviews also are among the many primary sources in Katherine White’s essay about the WWII-era Japanese Language School in Boulder, Colorado, an institution that sought to make language a weapon but inadvertently helped it become a tool for empathy and understanding. The journal concludes with the essay of Emily Willis, which uses a very unconventional source—children’s literature on natural disasters—to demonstrate how society seeks to protect its most vulnerable members by fostering an illusion of control over the powerful forces of nature.

The essays in this journal represent hours of dedicated research, writing, and rewriting on the part of their talented student authors. In their quests to “earnestly” seek wisdom from the past, many of these authors endured late nights and looming deadlines to produce works worthy of inclusion in The Thetean. The contributions of the history department faculty also deserve recognition. Many of these essays would not have made it past the rough draft stage had it not been for the guiding hands of experienced scholars.

I hope this finished journal becomes a source of pride for both the student writers and their faculty mentors. I also extend my earnest appreciation to the talented editors who helped prepare this journal for publication. Preparation for this year’s Thetean issue was a collective process, and I am grateful that among spirited debate and a chocolate chip cookie or two we were able to produce a student journal worthy of representing our history department.

In conclusion, I dedicate this journal to all those whose effort has allowed this year’s issue to come to fruition. The future is bright for the newest generation of history scholars at Brigham Young University. I also dedicate it to the earnest scholar anywhere whose love for history leads them to seek wisdom in the past. Best wishes in your pursuits.

Joseph Seeley
Editor in Chief

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