

RIT History Department Newsletter

December 2021



Stunning November leaves outside the Carlson Center for Imaging Science at RIT. Photo: T. Carroll

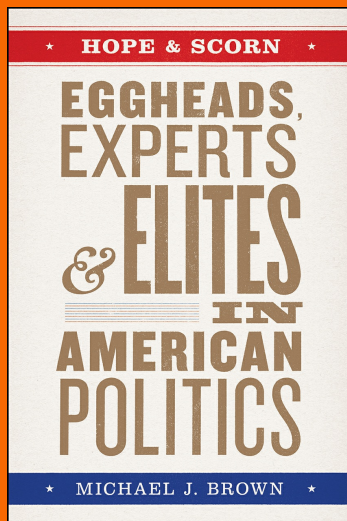
It was a beautiful fall here at RIT, and we were thrilled to welcome our first history majors to campus for a mix of in-person and online courses and activities. We received approval in the late spring from New York State to offer a B.S. degree in History, and already more than a dozen students have declared a major or double major in History. We enjoyed meeting them, and our Museum Studies majors, at our History and Museum Studies Open House in September. Other highlights of the fall semester include: In her History 180: Information Revolution course, Dr. Corinna Schlombs hosted Dr. Mar Hicks of Illinois Institute of Technology for an engaging and well-attended public lecture, "Features, Not Bugs: Historical and Social Impacts of Technical Systems." Among other topics, Hicks discussed how eliminating women from the computing workforce following the end of WWII placed Great Britain at a competitive disadvantage.

Museum Studies Program Director Dr. Juilee Decker, in collaboration with Dr. Christine Kray of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, brought the participatory art exhibition *Hostile Terrain 94* to Booth Hall, and many RIT students, faculty and staff wrote out the more than 3,000 toe tags representing migrants who have died trying to cross the Sonoran Desert of Arizona between 1994 and 2019. Project creator, anthropologist Dr. Jason De León, gave a very moving lecture about the genesis and implementation of the project, and additional programming gave the RIT community opportunities to reflect on immigration policy and human rights.

Visiting Assistant Professor, Dr. Siyin Zhao, brought three of his students to participate in sharing their research at the New York Conference on Asian Studies hosted by SUNY Brockport. According to History Program Director Dr. Joseph Henning, who also participated in the conference, the students did a great job presenting their papers on women in pre-modern China.



MUSE major Noelle Perry examines one of the toe tags, part of *Hostile Terrain 94* on view in Booth Hall through January 11, 2022. Photo: A. Sue Weisler



Assistant Professor Michael Brown published his first book, *Hope and Scorn: Eggheads, Experts, and Elites in American Politics*, with the University of Chicago Press in October of 2020. In a tumultuous year of politics amid the pandemic, the themes of the book resonated with contemporary events. Brown offered further historical perspectives on politics and the pandemic in essays for the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Rochester Beacon*, as well as in a video presentation for the Seward House Museum in Auburn, NY. Recently, he



Siyin and Yifang Zhao with their daughter, Shirley.

COVID-19 has changed the world redefining almost every aspect of our daily lives. It is also reshaping the status quo and future of higher education across the globe. During the pandemic, I taught virtual classes for the first time. My experiences, together with my students' evaluations, prompted me to consider things I had not thought about before.

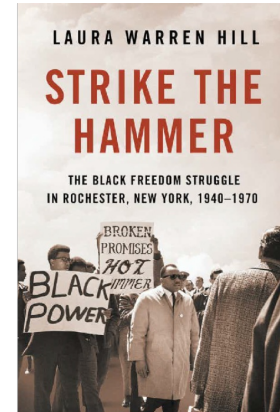
Surprisingly, I found that more students joined in discussions. Some of them who might have felt awkward speaking in class felt more comfortable dropping their ideas or answering questions in the Zoom chat box, thanks to the digital tools. One student wrote, "The class was engaging; there was a lot of discussion and overall it felt probably more interactive than a physical classroom even." Though not all students adapted to or were content with online learning, virtual platforms undeniably have provided ample opportunities for students to find, compare, and use online

celebrated the 120th anniversary of Rochester's Baden Street Settlement House with a public lecture there and an appearance on WXXI radio's Connections talk show. Brown also began serving as co-chair for the Advocacy Committee of the Board of the National Council on Public History. The transition to online teaching last year led him to investigate just how many Star Wars Zoom backgrounds one might find. Brown salutes students for their skillful adaptation to the changes brought by remote learning and welcomed the opportunity to discuss with them how explorations of the past can be a resource for thinking about the present.

resources. This fostered their digital literacy. Moreover, I was also aware of the possibility of increased access to education given the many virtual academic events around the world that students could attend via Internet from anywhere, and which enhanced our class discussions.

In addition, the pandemic has allowed history instructors like me to help students realize that they are living through a world historical event. Students enhanced their ability to recognize and develop connections between historical issues and life outside the classroom and to examine current issues from historical and global perspectives.

Dr. Siyin Zhao



Laura Warren Hill and her new Cornell University Press book, "Strike the Hammer: The Black Freedom Struggle in Rochester, NY, 1940-1970."

Save the Date for Guest Speaker Dr. Laura Warren Hill!

When: January 27th from 4-5:30 pm

Where: Lowenthal 3215

Bloomfield College historian Dr. Laura Warren Hill will be talking about her new Cornell University Press book, *Strike the Hammer: The Black Freedom Struggle in Rochester, NY, 1940-1970*. Hill examines Rochester's long Civil Rights history and, drawing extensively on oral accounts of the community as well as records from national and local organizations, offers rich and detailed stories of Rochester's protest tradition. Now, especially, this story of struggle for justice and resistance to inequality resonates. This event is free and open to the public. For more information or to be added to the Friends of the RIT History Department email list, contact Dr. Tamar Carroll at tamar.carroll@rit.edu.