

Fondren Fellows Project

Any questions can be directed to fondrenfellows@rice.edu



Name

Fay Yarbrough

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Project Title

The Red Book of Houston

Description:

The Red Book of Houston enables us to visualize the space occupied by the African American community in the early nineteenth century in Houston. Students may conduct research on individuals in the Red Book and write extended biographies that will then be added to an online exhibit in the [Woodson Research Center's Digital Collections](#).

Project Summary:

The Red Book of Houston, published in 1915, provides a detailed view of middle -class Black life in Houston. It includes information pertaining to the fields of education, business, and religion, as well as brief personal histories and lists civic and social organizations. The book provides many physical addresses for churches, schools and teachers, businesses, social clubs, civic organizations, and the home addresses of prominent families. We have worked with both undergraduate and graduate students supported by the Fondren Fellows program, the department of history, and faculty research funds to first map these locations and now offer more context about the people and places in the Red Book. Ultimately, we have created a project that enables us to visualize the space occupied by the African American community in the early nineteenth century in Houston.

For this round of funding, we would like the potential fellows to continue writing biographies, but with the addition of an Ancestry.com nine -month subscription. This subscription could enhance their ability to find a larger range of genealogical resources. Furthermore, we would like at least one of the students to assist with data clean -up. We are creating a small-scale database of names, addresses, and other information of Black people culled from Houston city directories from the 1870s -1920s. A finished database could make searching across the directories quick and easy.

Because of the excellent presentation that the 2023/2024 fellows did at the Black Houston(s) Symposium, we would like the new cohort to present some of their work at an undergraduate research conference such as Humanities Day sponsored by Rice University's School of Humanities and the Office of Undergraduate Research and Inquiry. This would allow students to work on their oral and visual presentation skills.

This is suitable as a Fondren Fellows project because students use archival materials from the library and sometimes from other institutions in the city. It is a multi-layered project that will be useful for the library, the university, and the Houston community, in addition to helping students work on a large-scale digital humanities project. It also is a great way to show the library's outreach to the Black community and by providing a resource for teachers, parents, and researchers.

Number of Fellows?

A team of two students. Students could then choose to clean up data in the database or investigate individuals in the book and write their biographies.

Guthrie and Yarbrough will meet with the students weekly to check in and offer guidance when students hit roadblocks. We have found that the students also offer each other suggestions and insight at these meetings.

Key tasks:

The digital work would entail students cleaning up data in the database. The investigative work involves using newspaper archives, census materials, city directories, government archives, and secondary historical works to research the lives of individuals. Adding an Ancestry.com subscription would make available a wider range of digitized newspapers, yearbooks, and government data for the students to use.

Students who present at a research conference will create written and visual materials for their posters and oral presentations to share with the audience.

Qualifications for applicants:

Both students should be Humanities majors, preferably from the History Department. One should also have experience working with data and be willing to learn how to refine it.

What would students learn through their participation in this project?

Students will build on their research and writing skills if they choose to work on individual biographies. Students who choose to engage in data clean-up will increase their data refinement skills.