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Fondren Research Essay  

“If Fondren be the food of good grades, study on...”  
-Shakespeare, “An Old Poet Reflects on University Libraries”  

Unlike most areas of study, labor history has mostly been written by people actually “on the ground;” its most important stories have been told by everyday men and women who risked their lives by organizing strikes during the turbulence of the First World War, by union leaders who worked with the Roosevelt administration to create the first major labor reform legislation, by socialist fire-brands who distributed revolutionary pamphlets to downtrodden factory workers. And, although this directness makes labor history unusually exciting, it also makes it particularly difficult to research, especially when focusing on labor movements in countries outside of the U.S. So many valuable primary sources and documents can only be accessed through specific databases or found within obscure history journals. Without Fondren and its trove of informational resources, I would not have been able to write my research paper (titled “Power in a Union?”) about German trade-unions and their relationships with the Nazi Party for my German history class.  

I started my research where any deadline-driven, sleep-deprived student would: the sixth floor of Fondren and the Classic Catalog search feature on the library website. By entering “Nazi Party and unions” into the search engine, I was able to find dozens of relevant books, like a copy of William Shirer's *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* that was originally owned by Edgar Odell Lovett, and a copy of *Mein Kamp* that was annotated by labor historians in 1939. Fondren gave me access to materials that were not only filled with relevant historical content, but were, themselves, artifacts of history that made my research feel so much more engaging and personal. Many of the books I found just by searching through
Range 118 of the stacks (where books about Nazi history are held), also (in their bibliographies) gave me information about other texts that were written by American labor leaders during Hitler’s rise to power. In turn, Fondren’s subscription to online databases like JSTOR let me access these more obscure primary sources, which otherwise would have been impossible to locate. The OneSearch engine on Fondren’s website was incredibly useful for combing through databases to find sources like Alfons Goldschmidt's 1937 essay “The Labor Problem in Germany.”

I cannot, in good conscience, praise Fondren without mentioning the vending machines on the fourth floor. At Rice if you’re hankering for a bite after about 10 PM, you’re probably out of luck (there are no late-night eateries close to campus), unless you’re writing a paper at Fondren. The fourth floor vending machines are like an oasis in the middle of some vast snack desert, filled with Mrs. Freshley’s Donut Sticks and Pibb Xtra (my personal favorite).

Although I’ve spent many painful nights there finishing essays, Fondren Library has been invaluable in not only giving me a great place to study, but in providing a single location to track down and digest mountains of information.