Fondren Library Research Award Essay

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For a research paper completed during the Fall 2017 semester, I wrote about Houston architect John Saunders Chase (1925-2012) and his important legacy as an African American architect. This work was completed for the graduate level seminar “U.S. Social/Cultural History Methods” (HIST 587) at Rice University, taught by Dr. McDaniel and Dr. Yarbrough. Throughout my semester-long research project, Fondren Library provided essential resources, both in the depth of its holdings and databases, and, in particular, in offering items about the Houston's architecture and history.

My research about Chase began with an architectural interest but grew to focus more directly on the architect’s relationship to and participation in Houston’s African American history. A such my work for the seminar moved between architecture and social/cultural research strategies. I sought to understand both the buildings that this architect produced as well as the social and political climate of his time.

Fondren Library’s resources helped me on both accounts. I used holdings to understand Houston’s architectural history, including an Architectural Guide authored by Rice Architecture historian and lecturer Stephen Fox and monographs on Houston architects, as well as items about the experience and history of African American architects generally. I also
broadened my knowledge about the intersection of African American history and urban politics.

Through the Inter-Library Loan program, I was able to quickly source a printed copy of Chase’s 1952 Masters thesis from the University of Texas at Austin, and to refer to the document throughout the semester as I worked.

Throughout, materials that took Houston as its subject were easily accessible. A 1978 Ph.D. Thesis from the University of Texas at Austin helped me understand the organization of political leadership within the black community during the 1970s. A DVD copy of *This is My Home It Is Not For Sale*, a limited release film about the nearby Riverside neighborhood was useful. The Woodson Research Center Special Collections and Archives was also a resource, as one Houston-specific title was available only through this collection.

I also made extensive use of online databases made available through Fondren Library. The Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals allowed me entry into a wide range of writings about architecture and race. America’s Newspapers database gave me access to the *Houston Chronicle*, which was extremely valuable in following mentions of my research subject throughout the decades as a way to understand his political leanings and social appearances.

I completed addition research through working with the architectural archive of the Houston
Memorial Research Center and through interviews with Chase's son and, separately, with the former Vice President of his firm, but the resources of Fondren Library were essential during my coursework. I utilized a wide range of sources and strategies to write about Chase through architectural and historical lenses, and thankfully Fondren Library provided me with the tools I needed to make this new knowledge grounded in prior scholarship, historically accurate, and relevant to contemporary life.