

**Project Title:** Readers' Marks: tracing the past in Fondren's rare book collections



## **Summary**

This project aims to begin an investigation into the way books and other objects in the Woodson Research Center have been read and used by previous readers/owners. Rice has an important collection of books and manuscripts at the Woodson Research Center dating from the medieval period to the present. Many of these materials have traces of past reading and ownership marks. These traces include handwritten notes in their margins, book plates, names and dates written on flyleaves, as well as numerous other marks by well-known figures such as Charles Darwin as well as numerous less well-known (or even unknown) readers. The work of historians, literary scholars, and others is especially attuned to the way books have been read in different ways at different times. Helping catalog these different reading practices will ensure the Woodson Research Center can continue to meet the needs of these scholars already at Rice as well as bring in new researchers from around the world.

In consultation and collaboration with Dr. Philip Mogen, Professor Aysha Pollnitz, and the Archivist and Special Collections Librarian Rebecca Russell, students working on this project would create an initial list of materials to begin their inquiries into reading practices. They would then begin studying these books and research, describe, and transcribe identified marks in order to better catalog them and make information about these reading marks and ownership histories available to researchers at Rice as well as outside scholars. To complete this project, students would simply need time and access to the special collections materials at the Woodson Research Center. They would create a database in which they would record metadata on the reading practices and ownership marks they observe in their analysis of collection materials. Ultimately, they would be expected to make this material available to be inserted into the library catalog and write a short document detailing their experiences tracing reading and provenance marks in the archive. They would also be well placed to further present information about their discoveries to the Rice community and even help develop a small exhibition (either physical or digital) highlighting the way Rice's collections have been used by readers in decades and centuries past.

## **Outline the key tasks that the Fondren Fellow(s) would work on.**

- Developing a coherent subset of materials at the Woodson Research Center on which to focus their research.
- Examining books in the Woodson Research Center
- Investigating and transcribing readers marks within these books
- Researching the provenance/ownership history of these books
- Creating a database of information about these books that could then be incorporated into the library catalog

- Producing a written summary of their work that outlines their research/contributions and highlights particularly interesting discoveries

**What qualifications would you expect from students working on this project?**

- Interest in history/literature and rare books
- Experience working in the Woodson Research Center or other special collections library/archive
- Introductory knowledge of printing history/processes
- Basic/reading knowledge of languages other than English (many collection items are in Latin, for example)

**What would students learn through their participation in this project?**

- Techniques for studying/examining books (bibliographic description) and readers' marks (provenance/paleography)
- Qualitative research and communication skills
- A greater knowledge of the way books have been used and read in the past
- Basic library cataloging skills