

# Impact Report:

## Learn How Gale's Resources Enable Detailed Analysis While Saving Time

Gale-CLGBTH Non-Residential Fellowship Recipient Makes Sense of a Complex History



**Jacob Bloomfield**

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Gale-CLGBTH Non-Residential Fellowship

### MEET THE SCHOLAR

As one of five scholars awarded a fellowship from Gale and the Committee on LGBT History in 2022, Jacob Bloomfield's research project, *Tutti Frutti: Little Richard, Sex, Gender, and Transgression in America and Europe*, examines how the gender nonconforming African American recording artist Little Richard became one of the most popular musicians in the United States and Europe during the 1950s and pre-"sexual revolution" 1960s. With his research, Bloomfield argues that although observers found Richard appealing because of his flamboyant persona, his status as a queer cultural icon was a complicated one.

All Gale-CLGBTH Non-Residential Fellowship recipients were granted access to Gale's *Archives of Sexuality and Gender* and *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* (the *Lab*) for a six-month period of research. *Archives of Sexuality and Gender* is the largest historical collection available in support of gender studies and sexuality, spanning from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* is a cloud-based digital humanities tool that helps researchers tell impactful visual stories with data from Gale's archives.

Fellows received training on how to use the text and data mining tools available in the *Lab* to explore *Archives of Sexuality and Gender* and advance their work using digital humanities methods. Read on to see how Bloomfield used this powerful cloud-based platform to draw on a wide range of primary sources to analyze the historical reception to Richard's music and image — including in the mainstream American and European press, the Black press, entertainment industry publications, the queer press, and fan magazines.

## TROUBLING LITTLE RICHARD'S STATUS AS A QUEER ICON THROUGH ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

In Bloomfield's estimation, what sets his work apart from other researchers who have studied Little Richard is that most existing scholarship focuses on Richard's music and personal reflections as a primary source. By contrast, Bloomfield used archival research to concentrate on third-party reception to Richard's music and persona. A central concern for Bloomfield is understanding Richard's status as a queer icon — and whether or not he merits such a distinction.

"Posthumous assessments of the singer have argued that Richard, as a gender nonconforming popular figure who hinted at his same-sex desire as early as the 1950s, was a cultural trailblazer who fought oppressive sexual and gender norms," Bloomfield observes. "My project investigates this aspect of Richard's cultural impact. Specifically, I want to investigate whether Richard was historically a source of inspiration to queer observers or whether Richard's status as a queer icon is a more recent phenomenon."

Regarding his decision to apply for the Gale-CLGBTH Non-Residential Fellowship, Bloomfield explains, "From my past engagement with Gale resources, I knew that Gale would offer a remarkable swath of material that I would never be able to find otherwise, or would only be able to find after a great deal of traveling and effort."

"I was greatly impressed by the amount of resources available, the kinds of resources Gale offered, and how easy it is to navigate Gale's databases."



Venezuelan magazine calls Little Richard the queen of rock and roll and rock's first punk, *Música*, Marzo-Abril 1981, *Boletín Informativo del Grupo Entendido*, Caracas, Venezuela, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.

## A GEOGRAPHIC BREADTH OF REPORTING ON LITTLE RICHARD FROM THE 1960S UNTIL THE 2000S

According to Bloomfield, Gale's *Archives of Sexuality and Gender* was hugely valuable in advancing his research on Richard. "In particular," he says, "I found a great set of commentary about Richard written in LGBTQ publications dated between the 1960s and the 2000s."

The geographic breadth of the documents that Bloomfield encountered was immense. Not only did he find materials from the United States and United Kingdom, he also uncovered publications from the Basque Country, the Netherlands, and Venezuela.

Adds Bloomfield, "The publications also represented various cultural perspectives, such as the queer, Black, lesbian, and trans communities. Some of these publications were mainstream, as far as the queer press is concerned, while others were more niche."

"The ability to browse historical newspapers and periodicals was the most valuable feature offered by Gale's *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*. As gauging reception is a critical part of my research, the *Gale Digital Scholar Lab's* tools regarding that were valuable to me."



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## Comentarios Berriak

**AMERIKANO ATZERAKOIAK**

"Gai Pied" aldizkari frantsesak esaten duenaren arauera 0/0 2 noruegarrek uste dute homosexualitatea joera okerra dela. Ipar Amerikako "Glamour" kazetari argitaraturiko inkesta batek, aldiz, 0/0 55 amerikano homosexualitateaz ez dela inolaz ere onargarria pentsatzen dutela adierazten du. Ezkontzatik kanpoko harreman sexualak ere 0/0 15ek baino ez omen dituzte onartzen aldizkari berak aipatzen duenez. Zalantzagarria da beraz, amerikanoen suposatutako arrazazetasun aldarrikatua. Ala ez?



**LITTLE RICHARD**

Oge handiko musikalaria izan den jaun honek telekaria itzelak esan omen ditu amerikar telebistan. Haien artean "rock and roll" delakoa Amerikak jasaten dituen ezbehar guztien iturria dela, aitaseko, alferkeria eta homosexualitatearen lehen kausa baita. Ba dirudi, bai, rocka txarra dela, baina bururako, txo!!

**NAPOLEON**

Henri Viard-ek atera berri duen liburua batean, Napoleon homosexuala zela esaten digu, eta arago ere, Zar Alexandrokin maitemendurik zegoela. Guk ez dakigu norainoko egia izango denik, baina badakiguna zera da, rocka ez zela izan eruduna, alajainkoal

**SOBRE LO OCURRIDO EN "LA HABANERA"**

El sábado por la noche un grupo de homosexuales causó serios destrozos en el pub "La Habanera", terminando todo con una llamada al 091 por parte de la persona que regenta el local. Nada más producirse la llamada se personó en el lugar de los hechos la Policía Nacional llevándose a tres compañeros homosexuales.

Nuestra intención es la de dar a conocer a la opinión pública el por qué de dicha acción de cara a aclarar algo que, de lo contrario, podría llegar a considerarse como un acto de gamberrismo sin más. Y nada más lejos de ello.

Tendremos que hacer un poco de historia sobre el local del que estamos hablando. Guria siempre ha sido lugar de encuentro de gente homosexual: lo conocemos bien porque, como homosexuales que somos, y teniendo en cuenta que hasta hace muy poco tiempo hemos sido considerados como peligrosos sociales, lo hemos frecuentado mucho. ¿Dónde sino íbamos a poder expresarnos libremente?

Pues bien, de un tiempo a esta parte nos ha venido sucediendo una serie de anécdotas, humillantes, degradan-

**LESBIANEN BIKOTEA**

Inglaterrako Herford herrian bi emakume lesbianek etxe bat edukitzea lortu dute udalaren bidez. Horretarako espreski eskatu behar izan dute, zeren bikote heterosexuali baino ez baitute normalki ematen pisurik horren azkar. Bi lagun ezkongabe bezala ere lor zezaketen, baina zenbait urte itxaron ondoren, "familiatik" premia larrigoa dute eta (hain ustez, noski).

**POLIZIA**

San Francisco-ko Udalak (USAKoan, noski) gay eta poliziaren arteko tirabirei nolabait irtenbidea bilatu nahirik, gayen bizimoduari buruko bideo bat grabatu dute. Bideoa hontan topikoak alde batetara utziak izan ei dira, eta gay eta lesbianen benetako bizitza agertzen dela jakin dugu. Bideo hau polizia berrien formazio ikastaroetan ematen hasi dira. Polizia berriak, era berean, gay-tokiak bisitatzera gonbidatuak izan

28 September-1 October 1990 issue of the Atlanta-based publication *Etcetera* and an article in the August 1985 issue of Madison, Wisconsin's *Out* lesbian and gay newspaper.

Beyond categorizing opinions as strictly positive or negative, Bloomfield wanted to understand the extent to which these queer publications considered Richard to be a member of the LGBTQ community — or, in Bloomfield's words, "a fellow traveler." The *Lab*, Bloomfield says, "helped me sift through the opinions expressed in these sources: positive, negative, and neutral."

"This Fellowship was of great value. I would not have found many of these sources without this Fellowship, or I would have only found many of them after a great deal of traveling and archival searching."

## SAVING TIME ON THE JOURNEY FROM HYPOTHESIS TO CONCLUSION

Peeling through the layers of a complicated history to separating the legacy of a larger-than-life cultural icon like Little Richard from actuality is no easy undertaking. However, through the power of Gale's suite of analytical tools, Bloomfield felt that he was able to arrive at some definitive conclusions.

"This Gale Fellowship allowed me to prove — conclusively, I believe — that queer commentators and observers have historically had an ambivalent relationship with Little Richard," shares Bloomfield. "I found that queer, Black figures such as musician Sylvester and author James Baldwin were more likely to be discussed by the queer press compared to Richard. Some straight public figures considered to be queer icons, such as Patti LaBelle, were also covered by the Black, queer press more than Richard."

At the same time, Bloomfield's research using the *Archives of Sexuality and Gender* also proved that Richard was being understood as a queer man by observers from the 1960s onward, if not earlier.

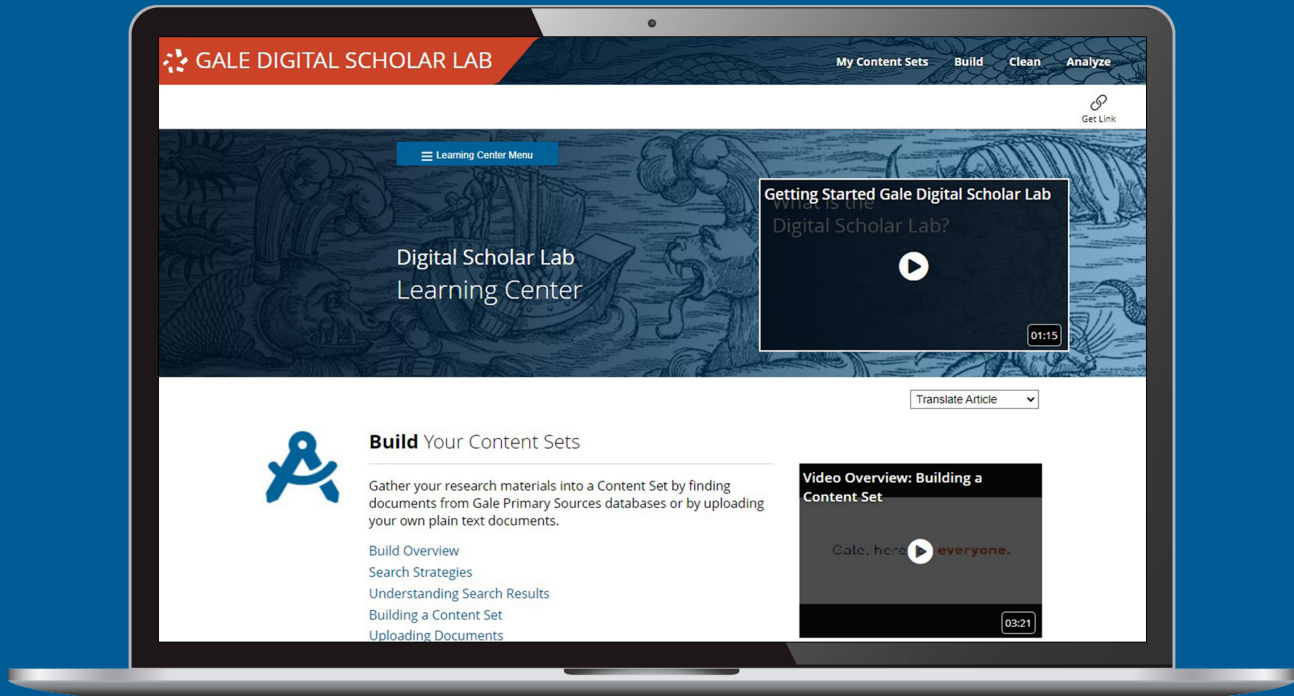
"I came into this Fellowship with a sense of the above insights, but the evidence I reviewed from the *Archives of Sexuality and Gender* confirmed my inklings."

## APPRECIATING THE NUANCE IN A COMPLICATED HISTORY WITH GALE DIGITAL SCHOLAR LAB

As part of Bloomfield's research, he was able to review hundreds of individual primary sources. In sorting through the wealth of material available to him, he was able to organize his sources with the help of *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* according to the opinions they espoused.

"Most of the sources I reviewed tended to see Richard as either a source of inspiration to the queer and Black community — or a mockery because the singer, at a few points in his career, claimed to be a so-called 'ex-gay' and made bigoted statements about queer people," Bloomfield shares. Examples of the former, among many others, include a poem published in the June-August 1989 newsletter for the organization Black and White Men Together and a 1999 article in the San Francisco publication *Anything that Moves*. Among the latter, examples include an article in the





# Take a Nuanced Approach to Your Research with Gale's Digital Humanities Tools

Curious to explore the tools Bloomfield used to unpack a complicated legacy?

Discover the possibilities of *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* at [gale.com/digital-scholar-lab](https://gale.com/digital-scholar-lab)

Find more information about *Archives of Sexuality and Gender* at [gale.com/primary-sources/archives-of-sexuality-and-gender](https://gale.com/primary-sources/archives-of-sexuality-and-gender)

# Interested in learning more about the CLGBTH?

Find more details about the Committee on LGBT History (CLGBTH), including the society's initiatives and events, at [clgbthistory.org](https://clgbthistory.org)