MEET THE SCHOLAR

As one of five scholars awarded a fellowship from Gale and the Committee on LGBT History in 2022, Justin Salgado used digital humanities tools to enrich his research on the history of the Comstock Gay Rodeo in Reno, Nevada, which began in 1976. With his research, Salgado examined reactions to the rodeo as captured in newspaper articles.

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 the knowledge 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 the Archives of Sexuality and Gender and advance their work using digital humanities methods. Read on to see how Salgado used this powerful cloud-based platform to understand how rodeo participants, concerned citizens, and businesses contended notions of “traditional” Western values and togetherness in the rural community.
EXPANDING THE GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE OF RESEARCH WITH A NEW APPROACH

Salgado applied to the Gale-CLGBTH Non-Residential Fellowship having already spent several years conducting research. After spending some time with the Archives of Sexuality and Gender, however, Salgado quickly realized how much more there was to explore.

The project was a prime opportunity for Salgado to bridge the gap between traditional research methods and digital humanities. With his focus on the history of the gay rodeo in Reno, he was able to broaden the geographical scope of his work to understand national patterns.

“I was able to combine these sources into specific data sets and run analyses, primarily of sentiment analysis, to get a better picture of themes through a more significant geographical lens,” Salgado explains. “Using these resources helped me center national attitudes while using Reno as a case study, which was the primary goal of this project.”
Impact Report:
Learn How Gale’s Suite of Digital Humanities Tools Is Transforming Historical Studies

GAINING NEW PERSPECTIVE THROUGH ORGANIZATIONAL, ANALYTICAL TOOLS

Gale Digital Scholar Lab empowered Salgado to expand his research by helping organize and analyze large content sets from sources that included records from the Golden State Gay Rodeo Association, the Canadian National Gay Rodeo, as well as advertisements, correspondence, and newspaper clippings from across the United States.

“I was able to use keywords such as ‘cowboy’, ‘western’, and ‘horse’ to find trends and themes in the sources,” shares Salgado. “This analysis was especially beneficial because I could more or less map out the emergence of a clear and coherent reclaiming of cowboy culture within gay spaces and circles throughout the latter half of the twentieth century.”

The Lab’s powerful analysis tools offered new perspectives on the rodeo experience that invited new avenues of inquiry, particularly on gay tourism, that Salgado had not previously considered.

“Gale Digital Scholar Lab enabled me to manage the number of sources by creating and then examining the content sets ... to understand overarching themes and terms in a straightforward and accessible way.”

“Using sentiment analysis, I created large content sets of popular culture material in primarily LGBTQ+ publications. For example, I found that between 1968 and 1970, there was a dramatic uptick in the usage of the term ‘cowboy’.”
While Salgado homed in on Reno as the basis for his case study, it was also important to understand how the gay rodeo in Reno fit into broader nationwide trends. As part of his research, Salgado undertook a comprehensive mapping of the growth of the gay rodeo throughout the United States.

“For this part of the project, I used named entity recognition to identify various gay rodeo associations,” Salgado says. “What I found is: In 1976, Reno hosted the first rodeo. By 1979, there were two in Nevada and Utah. But by 1985, I found six rodeos in Arizona, California, Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, and Utah. By 1995, there were a total of 25 gay rodeos operating in the United States. This information not only highlights the growth of the gay rodeo but its prominence and permanence in queer circles.”

Salgado was also able to identify that, at the same time as gay rodeo was expanding out from Reno, the volume of cowboy-related content in LGBTQ+ magazines was also expanding. He found that, in 1968, there were 14 publications discussing cowboys. This figure rose sharply to 95 in 1970.

“This information correlates strongly with the prominence of Western-themed films and music that grew dramatically in popularity in the late 1960s and early 1970s,” Salgado observes. “The founding of the gay rodeo in Reno occurred in 1976, and a guiding question here is: To what extent did the founding of the gay rodeo correlate with the emergence of cowboy culture in the mid-1970s?”

“The tools provided by the fellowship have given me the distinct opportunity to frame my research questions in a way that offers quantifiable information, which has helped broaden not only the geographical scope of my article but also created a more inclusive and diverse data set to analyze that is much more representative of the community that I am discussing in my work.”
The Gale-CLGTH Fellowship deepened Salgado’s appreciation for the power of digital humanities to elevate his research.

“I could use humanist-based research questions and the tools offered by Gale Digital Scholar Lab to obtain some raw data and results,” Salgado explains. “By data mining large sets of source material, I could better grasp larger patterns and themes in my study, which helped me think more comprehensively about the project.”

“I intend to recommend Gale Digital Scholar Lab to colleagues and students,” the Ohio State doctoral student shares. “This fellowship allowed me to learn new methods that are the future of historical research. Now that I am entering the next stage of my doctoral program, primarily the research and writing stage, I intend to use Gale Digital Scholar Lab to help me gain a distinct perspective on my project.”

Regarding potential application for undergraduates, Salgado adds, “With this program, students especially will be able to gain a new perspective on primary sources, which I strive for in my classes. The analyses they will be able to run can be catered to their specific interests, which is beneficial in helping to promote critical thinking and engaged learning in the history classroom.”

“The Gale Fellowship advanced my understanding of digital humanities research methods by helping me better comprehend the theoretical linkages with its practical analyses.”
Deepen Your Research and Widen Your Scope

Curious to explore the tools Salgado used to expand his research and develop his digital humanities skill set?

Discover the possibilities of Gale Digital Scholar Lab at gale.com/digital-scholar-lab

Find more information about Archives of Sexuality and Gender at 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