

## NACBS-Gale Digital Scholar Lab Fellowships

Gale Digital Scholar Lab Takes Research in British Library Newspapers to a New Level with Digital Humanities Approaches

In partnership with NACBS (North American Conference on British Studies), Gale invited five fellows to spend the 2023–24 academic year working in depth with our [British Library Newspapers](#) and [Digital Scholar Lab](#) to explore how a digital humanities approach could elevate their research.

Join us as the NACBS-Gale Fellows take a look back on their experience—and imagine what Gale can do for both your research and your students' learning!



### THOMAS J. SOJKA, PH.D.

Candidate, Boston University, United States

**Project:** Sojka's dissertation project, "Moving Beyond Mayfair: Rethinking Social Life in Interwar Britain," shows how Britons in the 1920s and 1930s understood the contemporary leisure landscape of London, its rural environs, and beyond. By focusing on the Bright Young People—an informal group of aristocratic and upper-class individuals active during the period—this project decenters London's West End as the premier site of elite sociability. In their pursuit of pleasure, the Bright Young People moved from Mayfair townhouse to Soho nightclub and from Scottish country house to Riviera villa, and these movements, in turn, were reported on by gossip columnists. This mobility allowed for new kinds of cross-class interactions, increased publicity of the formerly private activities of the upper classes, and consequently worked to reshape social life in Britain in the decades that followed. In their embrace of mobility, hedonism, and publicity, the Bright Young People challenged the power dynamics of the very social order which made their lifestyle possible, shaping ideas of modern celebrity and sociability in the process. Additionally, this project argues that these gossip columns worked to democratize elite social life by opening an otherwise inaccessible world to a broader reading public. These seemingly trivial parties and gossip in fact revealed deep anxieties about the future of British society. The media attention paid to the Bright Young People spoke to concerns about the role of aristocrats and their ilk at a time when they were becoming increasingly irrelevant in British political and social life.

## THOMAS J. SOJKA'S REFLECTIONS ON THE FELLOWSHIP

### Value of *British Library Newspapers*:

The Gale resources added valuable context beyond major national daily papers to the fifth chapter of my dissertation, helping to expand the scope of reporting on the Bright Young People and subsequent changes in how the Bright Young People were reported on (and changing meanings ascribed to “Bright Young Things”) over the course of the interwar period.

### Impact on digital humanities research methods:

The Gale Fellowship helped me to appreciate both the opportunities and limitations of digital humanities. While not every project is well-suited to DH methods/outputs, it has been interesting to explore the various tools in the *Digital Scholar Lab*. That being said, it has made me think about adding a DH element to the broader dissertation project: mapping elite social life during the 1920s and 1930s.

### Methodology for identifying sources:

I found approximately one thousand hits for the “Bright Young People/Things” and other variations, which I used as a jumping-off point for working with the *Digital Scholar Lab*. These accounts largely confirmed what was present in the national newspapers I had previously consulted at the British Library.

### Most valuable Digital Scholar Lab tool:

I primarily used the Sentiment Analysis tool to try and elucidate how perceptions of the Bright Young People changed over the course of the interwar period. While the tool itself pointed to overall “neutral” sentiment, seeing the various data points laid out helped me to get at changes in how the public viewed the group. Specifically, it was interesting to see how over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, the Bright Young People had both defenders and detractors, often in conversation with one another at the same time.



“Access to the digital corpus of *British Library Newspapers* allowed for me to consult more material than would have been possible in situ at the British Library.”

—Thomas J. Sojka, Ph.D. Candidate, Boston University, United States

## ABOUT BRITISH LIBRARY NEWSPAPERS

Unparalleled in depth and scope, *British Library Newspapers* consists of collections from the British Library, which span 300 years of newspaper publishing in the United Kingdom and Ireland. The rise of newspapers in Britain was a phenomenon that characterized a new age. The newspaper was increasingly a medium for information required by the commercially minded societies of major cities and regional centers.

Taken as a whole, the huge production of newspapers in Britain provides an enormous resource for research in all topics relevant to British life, both urban and rural.

[Learn more](#)

## ABOUT THE NACBS-GALE FELLOWSHIPS

Gale and NACBS offered five NACBS-Gale Non-Residential Fellowships to support research or teaching projects that rely on *Gale Primary Sources*, including those held in Gale's *British Library Newspapers* series and *Decolonization* collection, and use DH methodologies.

Each fellow received a stipend of \$2,500 to support the equivalent of one month's full-time work (160 hours). Awardees could dedicate four consecutive weeks to the fellowship project or spread their work out over a longer period. Applicants from all countries were eligible to apply for the fellowship. Eligible applicants were required to be members of NACBS and be either doctoral students or have Ph.D.s.

[Learn more](#)

**How can *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* and *British Library Newspapers* expand and enliven your research?**

Contact your Gale representative for more info.