

# Digitization & Exploitation:

Toward Ending the Exploitation of the  
Incarcerated in Memory Work

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# Yearbook Project



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# Exploitation

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**“To exploit someone is to take unfair advantage of them. It is to use another person’s vulnerability for one’s own benefit.”**

Matt Zwolinski and Alan Wertheimer,  
“Exploitation,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2016.

# Digitization & Exploitation

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1. **Argue:** Prison labour is exploitative
2. **Propose:** Two possible interventions

**Argument: Prison labour is exploitative**

# Is prison labour inherently unethical?

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No.

Possible value of prison labour to the incarcerated:

- Money
- Enjoyment or satisfaction
- Develop skills for post-incarceration

# Mutually beneficial exploitation

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“Exploitation can also be mutually beneficial, where both parties walk away better off than they were *ex ante*. What makes such mutually beneficial interactions nevertheless exploitative is that they are, in some way, unfair.”

Zwolinski and Wertheimer, “Exploitation” (2016).

# Wages

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Inmates in Canada:

\$5.25 - \$6.90 per day (2019)

Inmates in U.S.:

\$0.86 - \$3.45 USD per day (2017)

Quebec Minimum Wage:

\$14.25 per hour (May 1, 2022)

Vermont Minimum Wage:

\$12.55 per hour (2022)



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Oklahoma Department of  
Corrections received...

\$7.25 per prisoner per hour

Prisoners received...

\$1.45 per hour

# Penal Labour Exemption

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“Neither slavery nor **involuntary servitude**, except as **punishment** for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States.”

Thirteenth Amendment, U.S. Constitution  
Ratified December 6, 1865

# Exploitation

— — —

**“To exploit someone is to take unfair advantage of them. It is to use another person’s vulnerability for one’s own benefit.”**

Zwolinski and Wertheimer, “Exploitation” (2016).

**Proposal: Two possible interventions**

# Intervention 1

Hire the formerly incarcerated with memory work experience.



# Intervention 2

Label items, collections, and databases that benefit from exploitative labour.



# Intervention 2

Label items, collections, and databases that benefit from exploitative labour.

1. Include name(s) of prisoner(s); OR
2. Include a more general statement that incarcerated individuals performed this labour



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## ARCHIVES



### 1905 STATE CENSUS INDEX

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## ARCHIVES

### SPECIAL PROJECTS PROGRAM

The State Archives operates a Special Projects Program that can assist with digitizing state and county government records and converting microfilm rolls to digital files.

The Special Projects Program oversees the digitization of a wide variety of records from state agencies and county offices. Archives staff trained in preservation and digitization techniques supervise inmates at the Women's Prison in Pierre who operate the scanners. The scanners are capable of digitizing large leather-bound record books as well as flat documents. In addition, a roll film microfilm scanner can convert microfilm to digital PDF or image files for easier office use.

For information concerning digitization services, please email the South Dakota State Archives at [archref@state.sd.us](mailto:archref@state.sd.us)

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# Issue: Stigma

What about the possibility of a boycott or public backlash?



# Answer

What about the possibility of a boycott or public backlash?

- Don't rely on exploitative labour.



# Answer

What about the possibility of a boycott or public backlash?

- Don't rely on exploitative labour.
- Use a more neutral attribution.



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## ARCHIVES



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**Suggested [neutral] language:**  
“This database was made possible by the [exploitative] labour of inmates at the Women’s Prison in Pierre, South Dakota.”

# Conclusion

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