

# Metadata Justice and Exploitative Labor in Libraries and Archives

*ODNFest*  
*October 10, 2023*

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McGill University

# 1931 Census



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## Browse the 1931 Census

At this time, you can browse the [1931 Census](#) by sub-district. In collaboration with [FamilySearch International](#), we are presently indexing and verifying all the first name and last name fields. Once complete, all fields will be searchable through this initiative, consult the page [Preparing the 1931 Census](#).

For more information about doing research with census records, including the



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## McGill Yearbooks

### Browse Years 1941 - 1950 (Old McGill)

1941



1942



1943



1946



1947



1948



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# Yearbook Project



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## Yearbook Examples



# Metadata justice & exploitative labor

— — —

1. **Background**
2. **Argue:** Prison labor is exploitative
3. **Propose:** An intervention centered in metadata justice

# Scale of incarceration

— — —

Country	Prison Population Total	Prison Population Rate (per 100,000 people)
United States	1,767,200	531
UK (England and Wales)	87,793	146
France	74,513	109
Canada	32,261	85
Finland	2,839	51

Source: Data from Institute for Crime and Justice Police Research, World Prison Brief Data, as of October 2023

# Disproportionate impact on BIPOC

— — —

## U.S.

- Percent of Black Americans in the general population: 12%
- Percent of people in prison or jail who are Black: 38%

## Canada

- Percent of Indigenous peoples in the general population: 5%
- Percent of people in prison or jail who are Indigenous: 25%

# Types of prison labor

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## Traditional prison work or operational assignments

- Work necessary for the running of the prison
- Kitchen work, custodial work, laundry, etc.

## External work release programs

- Work that occurs outside of the facility
- Firefighting, agricultural facilities, slaughterhouses

## Correctional industries

- State or federally run programs that create goods or services that are sold at reduced costs
- UNICOR: American Federal Industries Program
- OPI: Ohio Penal Industries





# Is prison labor inherently unethical?

— — —

No.

Possible value of prison labor to incarcerated people:

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

# Exploitation

— — —

**“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.

# Mutually beneficial exploitation

— — —

“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).

# Exploitation

— — —

Exploitation takes advantage of someone “in a way that degrades or fails to respect the inherent value in that being. It is this lack of respect that explains the badness of exploitation.”

Ruth J. Sample, *Exploitation: What it is and why it's wrong*, 2016.

# \$0.03

— — —

**Incarcerated people earn \$0.03 for every \$1.00 their labor generates.**

# Wages

— — —

Incarcerated people in OH earn (2017):

*Regular jobs (non-industry)*

- \$0.10-0.17 per hour

*OPI (Ohio Penal Industries):*

- \$0.21-1.23/hour

Ohio minimum wage:

- \$10.10 (set to increase to \$10.45 on Jan. 1, 2024)

# Penal Labor Exemption

— — —

“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

# Yearbook Project wages

— — —

Incarcerated people received...

\$1.45 per hour

Oklahoma Department of  
Corrections received...

\$7.25 per worker per hour

(equivalent to Oklahoma minimum  
wage)



# \$629,740

— — —

**Total revenue of the Yearbook Project (2020-2022) for Oklahoma Department of Corrections**

From reporting by Wendy Soares



### SERVICES AGREEMENT

Please read this agreement carefully before using our services.

By signing this document, I give Oklahoma Correctional Industries (OCI) permission to make digital images of our yearbooks with the understanding that I will receive a copy of the images on DVD(s) **at no cost**. The yearbooks will be scanned in color at 300 DPI and saved in *PDF* format which is considered publisher quality. After the project is complete, our yearbooks will be returned to us in the same condition as they were sent in. I understand Oklahoma Correctional Industries is a part of Oklahoma Department of Corrections and the labor used is provided by the offender population.

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Thank you for your participation in the OCI Yearbook Project.

Chris Caskey

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Caskey".

OCI Yearbook Project  
Coordinator (405) 527-4825  
[chris.caskey@doc.ok.gov](mailto:chris.caskey@doc.ok.gov)

X \_\_\_\_\_  
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New Hampton School Board website  
# 1 OCI Service Agreement Rev 10.12.2020

# New Hampton School New Hampton, New Hampshire Yearbooks

14 day free trial

Get started

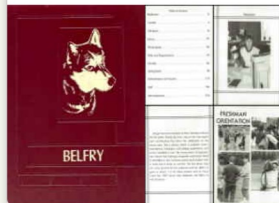
Curious about what your relatives who went to New Hampton School were like during their school years? Choose from the 18 yearbooks available for New Hampton School below to start exploring the extensive Yearbooks collection on Ancestry®.

To find a family member, enter information such as their First Name, Last Name, and where they lived into the [U.S. School Yearbooks](#) database – even a guess can help.

## New Hampton School Yearbook

**Class of 1987**

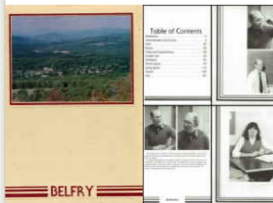
123 images, 853 students



## New Hampton School Yearbook

**Class of 1986**

116 images, 941 students



## New Hampton School Yearbook

**Class of 1985**

88 images, 300 students



## New Hampton School Yearbook

**Class of 1984**

87 images, 310 students

## New Hampton School Yearbook

**Class of 1983**

104 images, 659 students

## New Hampton School Yearbook

**Class of 1982**

86 images, 199 students

Ancestry.com

# Do incarcerated people value the money they earn?

— — —

**Sometimes.**

# Dr. La'Shawn Yvonne Littrice

— — —

On her experience working while incarcerated:

Unicor is one of the greatest sources of income based on inmate labor which contributes millions of dollars to the prison industrial complex. [One] issue is that Unicor makes products for the Bureau of Prisons, which are purchased by the Bureau of Prisons; which means they are essentially getting paid to make the products the prisons purchase for use. **This is nothing other than slave labor.**" (p. 181)

Littrice, L.Y. (2021). The truth about a lie: The criminal justice system, is it just? *Community Psychology* 67(1-2), 179-83.

# Path to employment

— — —

- **Stigma**
- **Applicable skills**

# Enjoyment, satisfaction, passing the time

— — —

**“There would be nothing to do if I didn’t work for Correctional Industries.”**

Quoted in Richmond, K.M. “Why work while incarcerated? Inmate perceptions on prison industries employment.” *Journal of offender rehabilitation* 53(4): 240.

# Blaine Nelson

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On indexing the Freedman's Bank records:

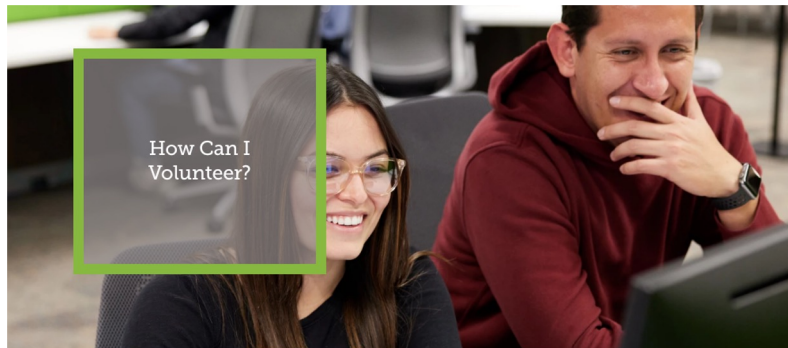
“Before we started, I had no idea the impact this work would have on me and the other inmates, but how can you work with records like this and not feel compassion? ...

“**These records were teaching me compassion, empathy, sorrow, and concern for others.** After each session I would go back to my cell and wait until the lights were off and I was alone. Then I would cry because there was a time when I, too, had mistreated people.” (p. 11)

In Smolenyak, M. (2002). *Honoring our ancestors: Inspiring stories of the question for our roots*. Ancestry.



# Volunteering: is there a moral difference?



Maybe.

But remember: mutually-beneficial exploitation

## The FamilySearch Library is now accepting applications for potential volunteers!

Come volunteer at the FamilySearch Library and help people learn about their ancestors. We are looking for enthusiastic, skilled volunteers to join our team. If you are interested, please fill out the application below.

[VOLUNTEER APPLICATION](#)

The Library offers many volunteer opportunities; click on a volunteer type below to view a description:

Collections Volunteer (on-site)	▼
Discovery Volunteer (on-site)	▼
FamilySearch Volunteer (on-site)	▼
Research Volunteer (on-site)	▼
Photograph and Document Scanning Volunteer (on-site)	▲
• Help guests at the FamilySearch Library scan photographs, personal books, articles, etc., in our Family Memories Preservation Center (Memory Lane, 2nd floor)	
Translation Volunteer (on-site)	▼

# Metadata Justice

— — —

“Metadata justice refers to the use of accurate and appropriate language in metadata systems like library catalogs.

When we describe people, places, and events, the words we use matter. Using **accurate** and **appropriate** language helps us communicate. It can also promote justice for groups of people who historically have experienced systematic inequality.”

Karie Antell, “Metadata Justice [University of Oklahoma LibGuide],” (2022).

# Proposal

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

— — —

# Reparative (re)description

— — —

Archival practice of descriptive interventions that address the perpetuation of systemic and cultural bias.

See, inter alia:

- Robichaud, D. 2021. “Integrating equity and reconciliation work into archival descriptive practice at the University of Waterloo.” *Archivaria* 91:74-103.
- Wilson Special Collections Library. 2022. “A guide to conscious editing at Wilson Special Collections Library.” UNC University Libraries, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://library.unc.edu/2022/06/conscious-editing-guide/>

## Northwest History Room Archives

### Everett High School Nesika

#### About this collection

This collection contains the Everett High School Nesika yearbooks from 1909 through 2013. There is a brief break in coverage from 1917-1918 when the Nesika ceased to be published during World War I. These yearbooks were scanned as a collaborative effort that combined collections from the Everett Public Library, Everett High School, and members of the local community. OCR scanning was employed, so this collection can be searched; we will continue to clean up the scanned text so that search results will become more precise over time. Due to the large file sizes of these documents, images and search results may be slow to load. Contact the Northwest Room staff at 425-257-8005 if you need any assistance, or higher resolution copies of any of these images.

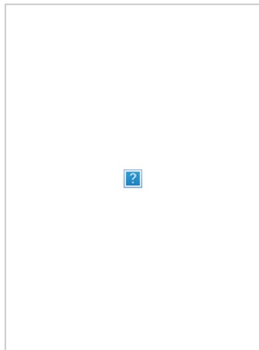
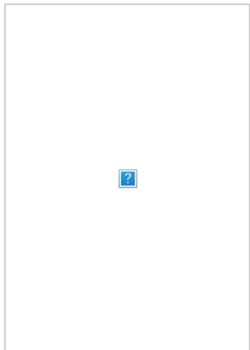
[Browse](#)

### Everett Public Library Everett, WA

No mention of OCl or the Yearbook Project (which we know was involved from local reporting in *Herald Net*).



## ARCHIVES: Millvale and Shaler Yearbook Collection



We are happy to announce that, thanks to assistance from the OCI Yearbook Project, we have digitized dozens of our yearbooks from Millvale and Shaler High Schools! On this page you can find the .pdf links to Millvale yearbooks from 1955 – 1971 and Shaler yearbooks from 1972 – 2017.

### MILLVALE HIGH SCHOOL

[1955](#) ◦ [1956](#) ◦ [1957](#) ◦ [1958](#) ◦ [1959](#) ◦ [1960](#) ◦ [1961](#) ◦ [1962](#) ◦ [1963](#) ◦ [1964](#) ◦ [1965](#) ◦ [1966](#) ◦ [1967](#) ◦ [1968](#) ◦ [1969](#) ◦ [1971](#)

### SHALER HIGH SCHOOL

Find the links to download .pdf of Shaler yearbooks from 1972 – 2017 on [Google Drive here!](#) (Please note that the Shaler yearbook files are very large and may take awhile to download.)

## Milvale Community Library Milvale, PA

Mentions OCI Yearbook Project, but does not expand on the acronym or provide information about the exploitative labor.



## RIHS Watchtower 2001

by [Rock Island Public High School, Rock Island, Illinois](#)

Publication date

2001

Topics

[Yearbooks](#), [School yearbooks](#), [High School](#), [Rock Island Public High School, Illinois](#), [Rock Island \(Illinois\)](#), [Graduating class, 2001](#)

Collection

[yearbooks-rihs](#); [yearbooks](#)

Language

[English](#)

The Watchtower is the name of the Rock Island Public High School Yearbook. This yearbook volume is for the graduating Class of 2001.

The high school's current address is:

1400 25th Avenue  
Rock Island, IL 61201

### Acknowledgement

We express our great appreciation to the Oklahoma Correctional Industries High School Yearbook Project for providing this digital edition of the 2001 Rock Island (IL) High School yearbook.

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**Rock Island Public High School  
Rock Island, IL**  
Explicitly thanks Oklahoma Correctional Industries and the Yearbook Project for “providing this digital edition.”

# Proposal

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

1. Include a general statement that incarcerated people performed integral labor in exploitative conditions
2. Considering including name(s) of worker(s)

— — —



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## ARCHIVES



### 1905 STATE CENSUS INDEX

Last Name:

First Name:

County:

Town/Post Office:

**Search**

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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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## **Proposed Statement:**

### *South Dakota State Historical Society 1905 Census Data Index*

This database was made possible by the exploitative labor of incarcerated people at the Women's Prison in Pierre, South Dakota.

## **Proposed Statement:**

### *Yearbook Project*

These yearbooks have been made accessible by the exploitative labor of incarcerated people in Oklahoma prisons.

# Genealogy

A research guide to genealogy resources available to the McGill community

Home

Genealogy

Genealogy & Local History Resources

Books and Guides

Immigration Resources

Genealogy Resources at McGill

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Need help? Ask us!

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## Genealogy

Welcome to the subject guide for genealogy! This guide is maintained by the Liaison Librarian for History, but may also be useful for genealogists and family historians. Although once considered an ancillary discipline, genealogy is increasingly considered an essential tool for studying the past as well as ourselves.

The guide includes:

- *Genealogy & Local History Resources*: Recommended resources to get started with personal or historical genealogy, organized by location: local (Montreal), national (Canada), and international
- *Books and Guides*: Several specialized physical and electronic books and guides for genealogists
- *Immigration Resources*: Recommended resources focused on immigration records and immigrant experiences
- *Resources at McGill*: A curated list of resources available at and about McGill students, staff, and faculty that will benefit the genealogist

### Ethical Considerations

It is notable that many genealogical companies and websites rely on the use of un/underpaid and exploitative prison labour in order to make genealogical materials such as census records available online and easy-to-use. Keep this ethical consideration in mind when deciding to undertake a genealogical project. To learn more, read:

- Shane Bauer, "[Your Family's Genealogical Records May Have Been Digitized by a Prisoner](#)," *Mother Jones*, August 13, 2015.
- Kristen Howard, "[Digitization and Exploitation: Acknowledging and Addressing the Use of Exploitative Prison Labor by Libraries and Archives](#)," *Library Quarterly* 93, no. 3 (July 2023): 241-55.

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- To request items not owned or licensed by McGill Library

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### [Questions? Ask us!](#)

- Contact the Library via chat, email, or text

See the [McGill Library home page](#) for links to details about all available services.

# Issue: Stigma

What about the possibility of a boycott or public backlash?

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# Answer

What about the possibility of a boycott or public backlash?

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

— — —

## More neutral statements: Remove [exploitative] and derivatives

### *Example 1: Yearbook Project*

These yearbooks have been made accessible by the **[exploitative]** labor of incarcerated people in Oklahoma prisons.

### *Example 2: South Dakota State Historical Society 1905 Census Data Index*

This database was made possible by the **[exploitative]** labor of incarcerated people at the Women's Prison in Pierre, South Dakota.



# Suggestion for approaching this at your institution

— — —

- **Begin with Wilson Special Collections Library's recent "Guide to Conscious Editing" (2022) to begin a discussion of (re)describing items and collections**
- **Consider adopting an institutional Metadata Justice policy**

# Conclusion

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@krchoward

# Digitization and Exploitation: Acknowledging and Addressing the Use of Exploitative Prison Labor by Libraries and Archives

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Kristen C. Howard

## ABSTRACT

This article draws on exploitation theory to argue that the use of underpaid prison labor for digitization projects and other memory work is unethical. Such projects, and therefore our cultural memory institutions, exploit incarcerated people. As the for-profit prison industrial complex only continues to grow and disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous, and people of color, it is imperative that the information profession recognize its contribution to this moral wrong. To this end, I offer two potential interventions: (a) hiring formerly incarcerated people in memory institutions and (b) clearly and honestly disclosing the use of prison labor to users. Enacting these interventions will not end the exploitation of incarcerated people but will provide meaningful benefits to those who are (formerly) incarcerated and work toward greater transparency with our patrons.

*The Library Quarterly*

<https://doi.org/10.1086/725070>

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