DIGITAL LIBRARIES AND PRISON LABOR: A PRELIMINARY INQUIRY

This poster marks the earliest findings of my research on the use of prison labor in digitization projects. From maps, to newspapers, to high school yearbooks, incarcerated people are digitizing materials a wide range of materials. In many cases, the end customer/user for these digitized materials is unclear. In others, it's clear from their own advertising of that libraries and archives are making use of prison labor to digitize materials in their collections.
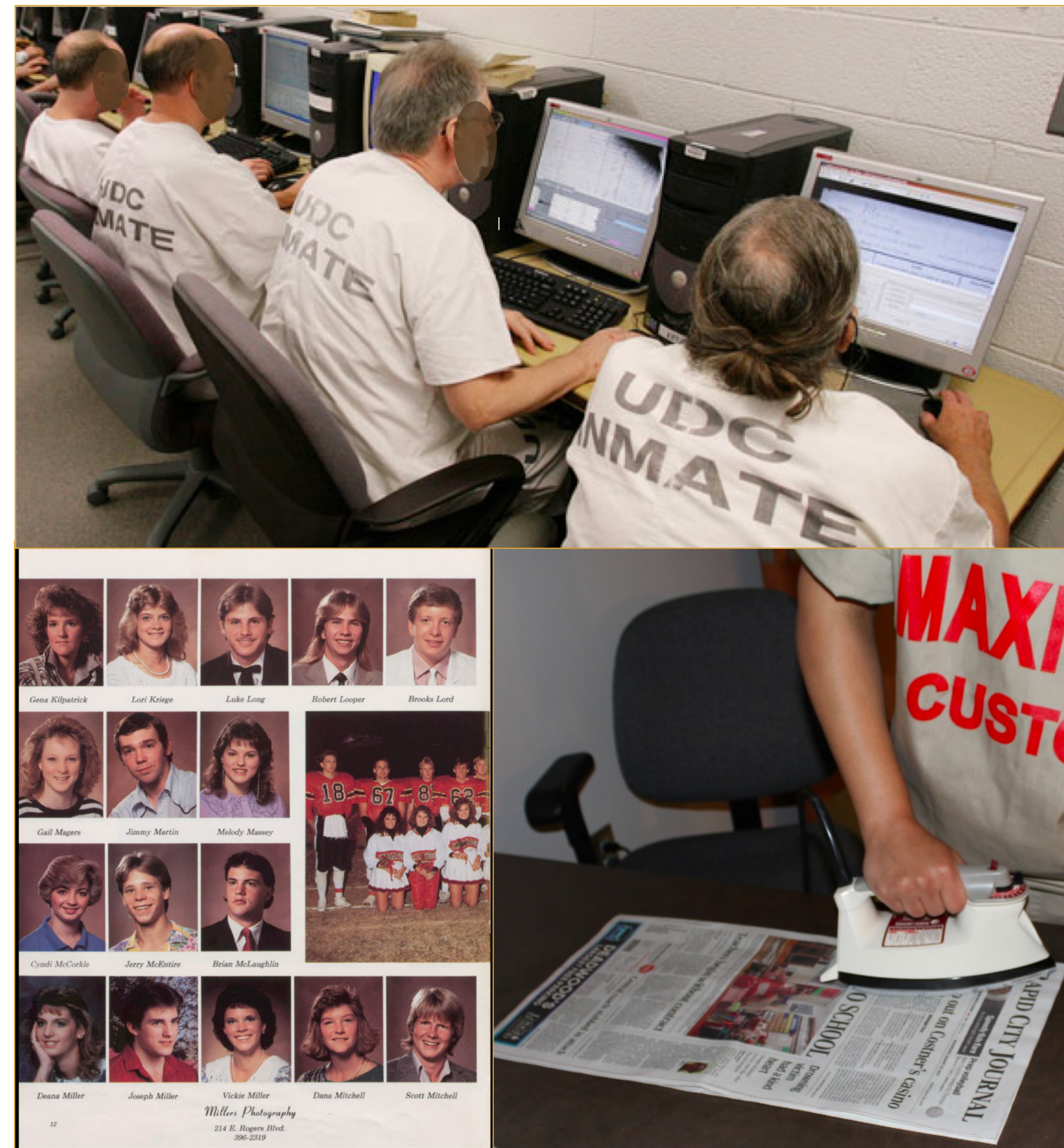
> What other practices are worthy of another critical glance to identify the human values and actions embedded within them, and how does recognition of them change our understandings of them?
> —Sarah T. Roberts, *Behind the Screen: Content Moderation in the Shadows of Social Media*

Clockwise from top: Inmates at Utah Department of Corrections index genealogical records on behalf of the Jesus Christ Church of Latter Day Saints (source: www.churchofjesuschrist.org); An inmate at a South Dakota women's prison irons a newspaper in preparation for digitization (source: https://doc.sd.gov/about/programs/microfilm.aspx); A sample yearbook scan from the Oklahoma Department of Corrections (source: http://www.ocisales.com/digital-imaging).

Early findings
In this first stage of my research, I sought to discover exactly where digitization services were being performed by prisoners nationally. I surveyed the websites of each state's correctional industries* to see if they offered scanning, OCR, digital indexing, or any other related service.

Through my initial searches, I was able to identify twelve (12) states offering some variety of digitizing and/or microfilming of records, documents, and ephemera.

States where correctional industries offer digitization services

Average wage : $0.33-$1.41/hr

Source: Prison Policy Institute

Where digital labor and critical prison studies meet
Throughout this research, I hope to shed light on a specific service performed by incarcerated people that impacts the work we are able to do in libraries and archives, and as researchers and community partners. In the process, I hope to raise questions about expanding reach of invisible labor that makes our work possible. I situate this work at the intersection of digital scholarship and critical prison studies; the former as a site of research that relies upon digitized sources from a variety of origins, the latter an emerging, interdisciplinary field that seeks, in part, to situate incarceration within a neoliberal logic of power and capital (Seigel 2018).
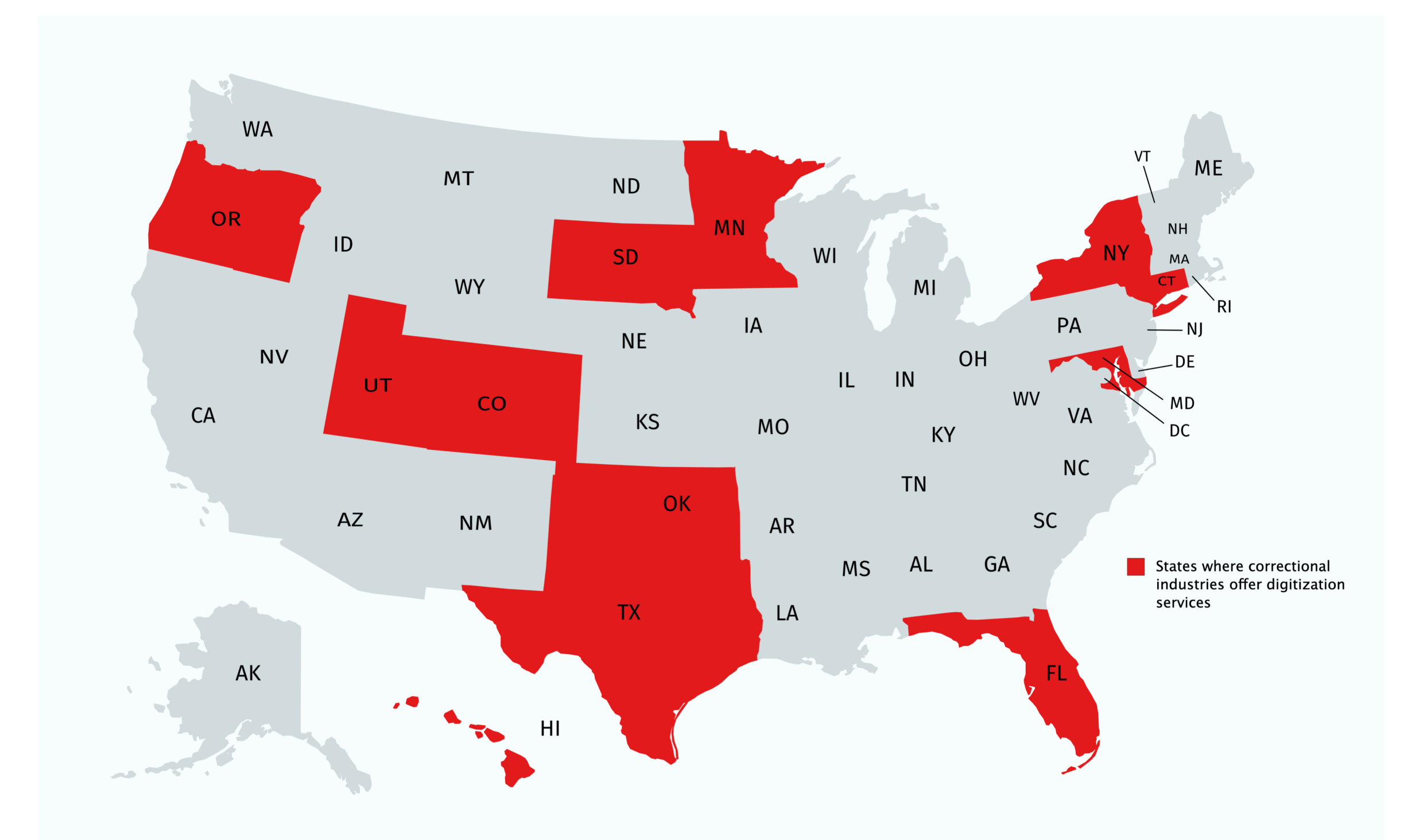
Surfacing invisible digital labor
In her recent book, Sarah T. Roberts exposes the largely invisible work of commercial content moderation to "raise awareness about the fraught and difficult nature of such front-line...work, but also to give the rest of us the information we need to engage with more detail, nuance, and complexity in conversations about the impact of social media in our interpersonal, civic, and political lives. We cannot do the latter effectively if we do not know, as they say, how the sausage gets made" (2019). Learning how the "sausage" of digital records is made, allows us to start asking questions about who, when, and under what sorts of labor arrangements are our digitized documents are produced. Nanna Bonde Thylstrup has shown us that mass digitization is always political (2019). What are the implicit politics of using invisible prison labor in the production of a digital cultural record?

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Poster: https://z.umn.edu/DigiLibPrison

References
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