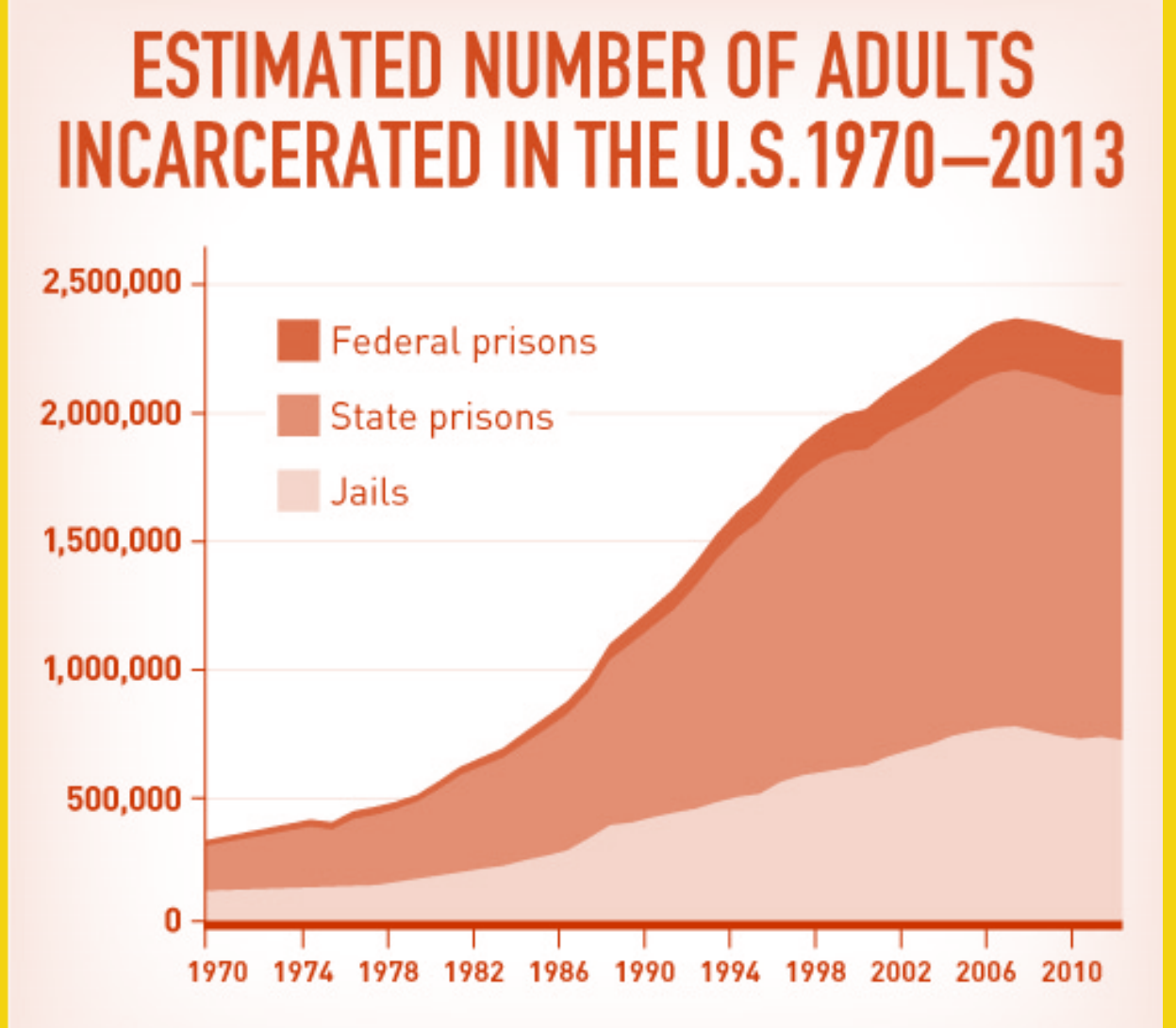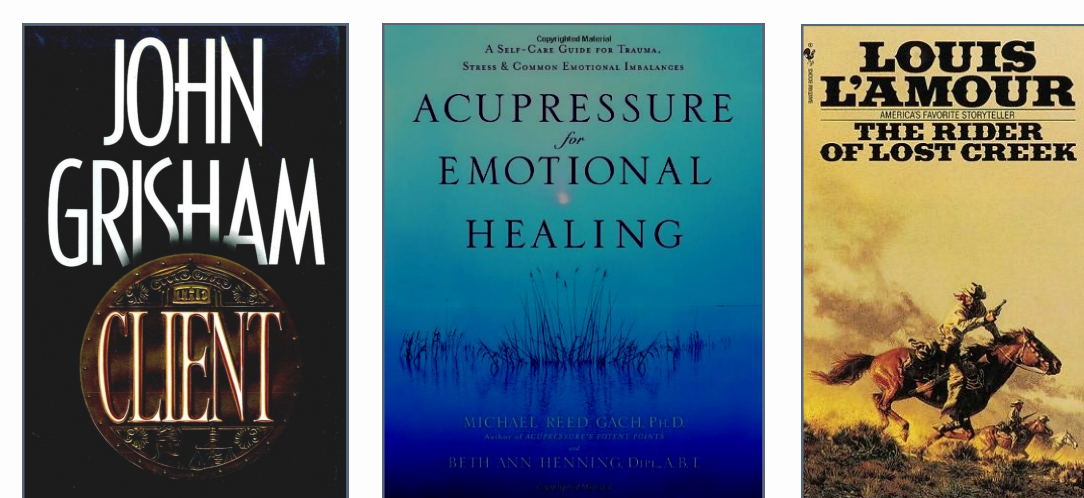# ORGANIZING INSTITUTIONAL RESTRICTIONS
FOR BOOKS TO PRISONERS

In the last four decades, the incarceration rate in the United States has grown exponentially. Over the same period, despite research suggesting that reading promotes rehabilitation, inmates' access to books has been reduced by falling budgets, privatization of state prisons, and policies that restrict reading materials due to format and content.

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF ADULTS INCARCERATED IN THE U.S. 1970–2013

- Federal prisons
- State prisons
- Jails

Seattle-based nonprofit group Books to Prisoners mails free books on request to incarcerated individuals throughout the United States, in an effort to foster the love of reading, encourage self-improvement, and break the cycle of recidivism. Commonly requested items include dictionaries and thesauri, GED study guides, genre fiction, and foreign language materials.

BTP's biggest expense is postage on book shipments, but up to 10% are refused and sent back by institutions, at BTP's expense, because the contents were found to violate restrictions on inmate access to reading material that can vary by state, county, and institution. Due to limited resources, BTP had been unable to effectively organize known restrictions, resulting in thousands of dollars in wasted postage.

ANALYZE
Examine sponsor's existing documentation

ORGANIZE
Create standardized vocabulary and data structure

RESEARCH
Obtain complete data on institutions and restrictions

EVALUATE
Build training document and test usability

PROJECT DELIVERABLES:
- **Data validated spreadsheet for institution contacts and restrictions**
- **Documentation & user guide**

IMPACT & NEXT STEPS:
- Reduce returned shipments and associated costs
- Retain and build upon institutional knowledge
- Use information to secure grant-based funding
- Research access to and capacity of prison libraries

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BOOKS TO PRISONERS