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Hitting the Nail on the Head



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Introduction: This Might Sting A Little

In my thesis exhibition, *Hitting the Nail on The Head*, my sculptural works examine how the ethics and morality of American society are shaped through our words. The idioms and sayings in the United States' lexicon have a direct correlation to the development of our thoughts, actions, and understanding of the world and its citizens. Through my sculptures, I task the viewer with examining their use of common phrases like, "When in Rome, Do as the Romans Do", and if it excuses insult based on lack of understanding with images of Hollywood icons ignorantly appropriating various elements of Black culture in America, in the form of postcards. In my video, "One Bad Apple Spoils the Barrel", I present the viewer with categorical evidence that the commonly used alternative phrasing they have been hearing on television following tragic events, is an inversion of the truth with decomposing apples displayed in a time-lapse video. In my monument, "Thoughts & Prayers", I confront the viewer with an assault rifle mounted to a mountain of 27 children's bookbags covered in the candle wax to challenge the 2nd amendment and what the years of political inaction has cost us in innocent lives.

Context: What You Talkin' 'Bout Willis?

The English language is considered a "top contender" in difficulty to master according to the Oxford Royale Academy.¹ One of the hardest things to grasp when learning English is our use of idioms, or combinations of words that together have a meaning otherwise not legible from its individual components. Examples of this are when you are facing a tough situation and someone says, "Every cloud has a silver lining" or when you are forgiving someone who has wronged you and you say, "It's water under the bridge". Without previous indoctrination to the time and context to use these particular phrases; they make no sense. The English language is filled with idioms that exist for no other reason than the beautification of plain and boring language; syllables and words joined together in alliterative allegorical syntax to create prose and stance, to impress, elevate, and persuade the minds of our fellow speakers. Nancy H. Kleinbaum's, *Dead Poets Society*, is dedicated to expressing the power and influence of the English language, writing "So avoid using the word 'very' because it's lazy. A man is not very tired, he is exhausted. Don't use very sad, use morose. Language was invented for one reason, boys - to woo women - and, in that endeavor, laziness will not do."²

A lofty sentiment, that language's singular purpose for existing is the pursuit of romantic endeavor, but what if instead it was used antithetically to this notion? What we see in

¹ "Why Is English So Hard to Learn?" Oxford Royale Academy, February 19, 2021. <https://www.oxford-royale.com/articles/learning-english-hard/>.

² Kleinbaum, Nancy H. *Dead Poets Society*. New York: Bantam, 1989.

American society now is the result of the artful combination of stringing consonants and syllables formerly used to pursue love, instead implemented as a conscious or subconscious tool of subversion, domination, degradation, scapegoating, and creating moral and ethical ambiguity. The phrase, “Don’t do the crime if you can’t do the time”, does not teach that crime is inherently amoral and unethical. Instead, it connotes an ego-centric focus on the personal consequences we would face, not the negative effect of our actions on our community. Another ethically deceitful phrase entering the lexicon is, “You get what you get, and you don’t get upset.” While initially this sounds remarkably Zen, it teaches complacency and builds a pattern of merely accepting whatever is thrust in front of you regardless of appeal or satisfaction. If repeated enough, how does the use of particular phrases and idioms create a recognizable pattern in our interactions with one another? What is the power of language to form opinions, biases, stereotypes, and the general lenses through which we view one another? In my work, by examining our idioms and colloquial phrases, I am exploring the connection between our words, our uses of them, and the power that lies within to form the moral and ethical compass we, as a society, follow.

Process and Methodology: Method to the Madness

The inspiration for the concept behind the body of work in my exhibition is twofold. First, being raised by a lawyer, I was taught from a remarkably young age the importance of choosing your words carefully. There is power in the words we choose and the contexts we use them in, that shape how we interact and see the world, and how it looks back onto us. For example, when taking the subway in New York City, if I hear someone in the train car ranting and raving, screaming “Oh fuck”, into the air around them, the sense of unease and discomfort that grows amongst the other passengers is practically corporeal, and it shapes their actions towards the speaker. Instead of having both headphones in, people will remove one, so they stay aware enough of their surroundings if a violent situation suddenly erupts, viewing the speaker as a potential threat. However, if someone on the train were instead to look at their phone, and then quietly said to themselves, “Oh fuck”, the tone and context offer a completely different set of reactions from the people around them, instead of danger and discomfort, this might provoke curiosity and empathy. Second, my inspiration to address the power of language and specifically idioms, came from the abuse of the phrase “thoughts and prayers”. While I illustrate the vapidness of repeating this overused phrase later in this paper, it stood out to me years ago as a pedestrian effort to try and console the inconsolable. “Thoughts and prayers” became the stock response following tragic events in the United States, which has them so regularly, it developed a stock response

for when they occur.³ My distaste for this particular phrase grew exponentially worse when it started getting abbreviated to “#T&P” so that it could more easily fit into someone’s 280-character tweet. The practice of shortening “thoughts and prayers” seems to coincide with the decreasing amount of time we as a country spent mourning events like mass shootings, instead focusing on the lengthy and specific wording of laws put in place that continue to allow us to buy and produce the same weapons killing our friends and family.⁴

My research for developing this body of work started and continues with an ongoing 28-year, immersive examination of what it is to be an American. As a mixed-race man living in New York City, I have often been made to feel like this is not my home, primarily through repeated use of racist, xenophobic, and derogatory language and phrases like, “Go back where you came from”, “dune-coon”, and “sand-nigger”. While this has been an alienating culture to grow up in, it offers a more detached, objective, perspective; almost like living in one of those deep ocean divers you see on marine life-science shows. This objectivity I view the world with led to the second aspect of my research, which is watching and studying the 24-hour news cycle perpetually broadcast over America’s airwaves. Television news media has a fascination with catchy, pithy one-liner phrases, or what they refer to as “sound bites”; clips of a speaker taken out of context and used in a persuasive manner, regardless of original meaning or intent by the speaker.⁵ Through the manipulation of language untethered by context, the news media in the United States is filled with divisive rhetoric, fear and warmongering, and scapegoating language offered to select races and professions. In watching these daily transgressions and abuses of wording, I became inspired to create visual representations of what years of repetition of morally and ethically ambiguous idioms and abusive language have done to American society. My goal for these representations is not necessarily to inspire external conversation, although that is not unwelcome, but more geared toward self-reflection and introspection of our personal use of these phrases in our own lives.

³ Berkowitz, Bonnie, Adrian Blanco, Brittany Renee Mayes, Klara Auerbach, and Danielle Rindler. “More and Deadlier: Mass Shooting Trends in America.” *The Washington Post*, August 5, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/08/05/more-deadlier-mass-shooting-trends-america/>.

⁴ Sequeira, Robbie. “A New Gun Bill Aims to Remove Open and Concealed Carry Restrictions for ‘Law-Abiding Citizens’.” *The Gainesville Times*, March 3, 2021. <https://www.gainesvilletimes.com/news/politics/new-gun-bill-aims-remove-open-and-concealed-carry-restrictions-law-abiding-citizens/#:~:text=However%2C%20under%20new%20legislation%20titled,gun%20owner%20in%20the%20state.>

⁵ Foley, Megan. “Sound Bites: Rethinking the Circulation of Speech from Fragment to Fetish.” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 15, no. 4 (2012): 613-22. Accessed April 2, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41940624>.

The Exhibition: The Sum of My Parts

In my thesis exhibition, *Hitting the Nail on the Head*, I make use of: brash, unforgiving imagery of backpacks representing children murdered in school shootings⁶, empirical scientific evidence that the news has been lying to them about how many “bad apples” there are⁷, and covert opportunity to study subconscious behavior based on being raised in a culture of violence and appropriated identity.⁸ From all these painful and upsetting images, I want viewers of my thesis exhibition to examine a freeze-frame of the American society that we have built with our actions inspired by such morally ambiguous or empty language. *Hitting the Nail on the Head*, is comprised of three sculptures, one which includes four editions of digital prints. While each piece addresses a different specific topic, they all tie back into commenting on the moral and ethical standing of America through its current social issues.

When in Rome, do as the Romans do is a five-and-a-half-foot tall rotating metal postcard stand. The stand is comprised of four walls, each wall has six slots on it for greeting cards to be placed. Each wall of the stand will be filled with the same kind of digital print, for four different cards total available for viewers to take with them. The cards are a five-and-a-half-inches wide by a four-and-a-half-inches tall and each card is hand signed with a message that relates to the culturally appropriated imagery on the front, as well as the edition number. Each card is mail ready once a stamp is applied.

American culture is so unsure of itself that it created an idiom expressly for teaching us how to behave in situations of uncertainty: “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” It is a seemingly innocent phrase meaning that when you are unfamiliar with a foreign behavior or culture, you could mimic it and assume that makes you fit in. However, uninformed cultural appropriation is detrimental to the development of the culture, usually a minority or group that it is sourced from, and does nothing to, in return, elevate and highlight that origin. Cultural appropriation is an encompassing term for the centuries of uninformed mimicry that have formed a vast number of current American identities, defined as “the unacknowledged or inappropriate adoption of the customs,

⁶ Barron, James. “Nation Reels After Gunman Massacres 20 Children at School in Connecticut.” *The New York Times*, December 14, 2012. <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/15/nyregion/shooting-reported-at-connecticut-elementary-school.html?>

⁷ Rosner, Helen. “How Apples Go Bad.” *The New Yorker*, June 8, 2020. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-gastronomy/how-apples-go-bad>.

⁸ Thompson, Nicholas. “America’s Culture of Violence.” *The New Yorker*, December 15, 2021. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/americas-culture-of-violence>.

practices, ideas, etc. of one people or society by members of another and typically more dominant people or society.”⁹

It is no secret that the United States is a white dominant society that has an ugly history of relying on Black culture for its entertainment, from black face to rock and roll’s roots in early Black folk and bluegrass music. In the early 1900’s, performer Al Jolson, was known as “The World’s Greatest Entertainer”¹⁰ and is today more appropriately referred to as “the king of blackface”.¹¹ Unfortunately, the practice of stealing from Black culture didn’t pass on with Jolson, inspiring generations of cultural appropriation in American pop culture. The practice of blackface is still seen in contemporary television programs like, *30 Rock*, *Saturday Night Live*, and the widely popular, *The Office*.¹² When the film, *Back to The Future*, came out in 1985 it was an instant box office smash and has remained a cult classic to this day. However, many forget the glaring cultural appropriation in the famous scene where Michael J. Fox’s white character is given credit for writing Chuck Berry’s classic rock hit, “Johnny B. Goode”. Back to the present in 2018, American singer and global teen icon, Taylor Swift releases the music video for her triple platinum song, “Shake It Off”. In the music video, the cohort of white only ballerinas stand in stark contrast to the Black only “street dance” crew Taylor imitates with big hoop earrings, reducing them to only twerking. Perhaps she was following cues from the queen of Hollywood, Kim Kardashian, one of the most prominent public figures in American pop culture who defended her cultural appropriation of Fulani braids, a traditional type of box braid originating in an African tribe of the same name. Given the lack of acknowledgment that goes hand-in-hand with cultural appropriation, Kardashian referred to the tribal hairstyle as “Bo Derek braids”, as the white actress also appropriated them in the movie, *10*.¹³ Ironic that a white woman with box braids should be considered a “perfect 10”, but Black children are sent home or even suspended from school until their braids are removed.¹⁴

⁹ *What I Hear When You Say*. PBS. Public Broadcasting Service, 2017. <https://www.pbs.org/video/what-i-hear-cultural-appropriation-vs-appreciation/>.

¹⁰ Cooke, Alistair. “Al Jolson Dies on Crest of a Wave.” *The Guardian*, October 25, 1950. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/1950/oct/25/derekmalcolmscenturyoffilm>.

¹¹ Abramovitch, Seth. “Blackface and Hollywood: From Al Jolson to Judy Garland to Dave Chappelle.” *The Hollywood Reporter*, December 2, 2019. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/blackface-hollywood-al-jolson-judy-garland-dave-chappelle-1185380>.

¹² Dessem, Matthew. “Just How Many Recent Shows Featured Blackface, Anyway?” *Slate*, June 30, 2020. <https://slate.com/culture/2020/06/blackface-tv-episodes-30-rock-scrubs-community-snl.html>.

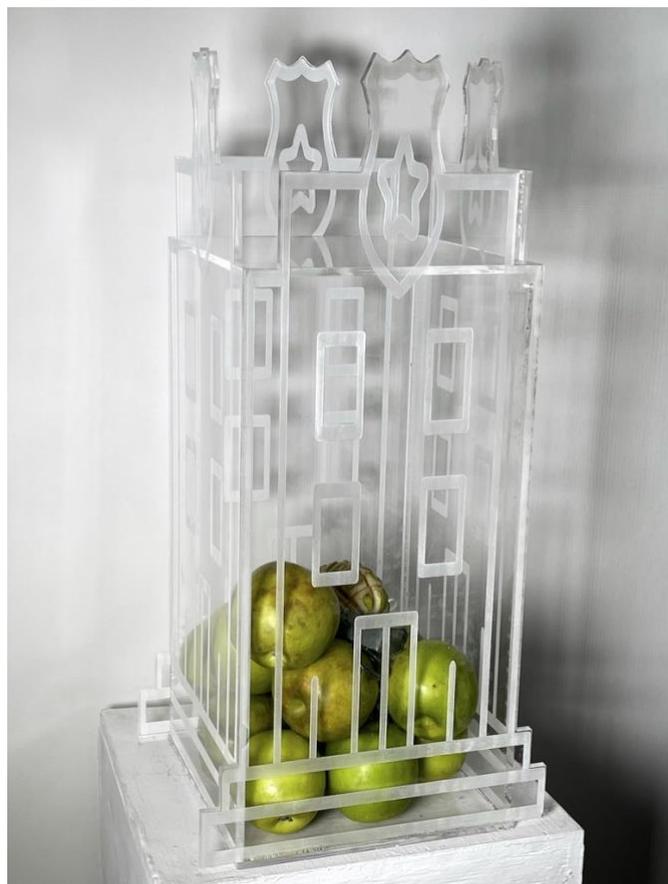
¹³ Barr, Sabrina. “KIM KARDASHIAN CAUSES CONTROVERSY WITH BRAIDED HAIRSTYLE SHE LABELLED AS 'BO DEREK BRAIDS'.” *The Independent*, January 30, 2018. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/fashion/kim-kardashian-bo-derek-braids-new-hairstyle-braided-cultural-appropriation-snapchat-instagram-a8184801.html>.

¹⁴ Jacobs, Julia, and Dan Levin. “Black Girl Sent Home From School Over Hair Extensions.” *The New York Times*, August 21, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/21/us/black-student-extensions-louisiana.html>.

When in Rome, do as the Romans do is meant to highlight the extensive history of cultural appropriation that American popular culture has built itself upon. I want the viewers to ask themselves how an entertainer like Al Jolson, whose rocket to fame was fueled by blackface and singing racist songs like “My Mammy”, can still have three different stars on the Hollywood walk of fame. It is my hope that these postcards can highlight the appropriation of Black music, style, and bodies to fit racist stereotypes, which are then used to enrich the life of a white woman like Taylor Swift. It is my desire that from the images on the cards and the writing on the backs of them, that viewers will be curious enough to do more research on these examples, and from there look at how American popular culture came to be, and who it is benefiting most.

Against the wall opposite from the postcard stand is the piece, *One Bad Apple*, an acrylic box resembling a police precinct filled with apples in states of decay. I created the design of the box from vector drawing files of a police precinct that I laser-cut and engraved into acrylic. Inside the acrylic box are 15 apples to correlate with the standard number of bullets in a cop’s gun.

One apple was carved by hand to resemble an old-style hand grenade and an original grenade top was added to it. All 15 apples were placed inside the box before it was permanently sealed, leaving them trapped inside. Some holes were cut into the back of the box to let some pressure and gas out to avoid any explosions. I took time-lapse style photos of this box every day, two to three times a day, for the last three weeks. As the carved grenade apple began to rot first due to its exposed flesh, its mold and rot rapidly spread throughout the box as the methane gas circulated around. The time-lapse photos, as well as detail shots have been compiled into a 2:03 minute video displayed on a loop on a 32-inch, 1080p television.



One Bad Apple, apples, acrylic, grenade top, 2021

Perhaps suspending a Black student over their natural hair is indicative of a much larger systemic racial issue or, perhaps that principal is just “one bad apple”. First recorded in English in 1340, the original phrase was, “As one bad apple spoils the others, so you must show no quarter to sin or sinners.”¹⁵ The phrase states that if one person or thing in a group is a negative influence, it will spread to others around them, and therefore that source of negativity should be removed. Over time the idiom’s specific wording changed but the meaning remained the same, eventually becoming “One bad apple, spoils the barrel.” However, there has been a direct and obvious political manipulation of this idiom that has resulted in an inversion of the phrase, turning it into “One bad apple doesn’t spoil the barrel.”¹⁶ This phrase is most seen in defense of wrongful police killings, and more specifically, killings of people of color like Rodney King, Philando Castile, Michael Brown, and many others. Rather than acknowledge fallibility in its police force, the American government regularly excuses the otherwise inexcusable actions of those who are meant to “protect and serve.” This constant permission for such heinous violence through the manipulative phrase, “one bad apple”, is evidence of systemic racism throughout the police force in the United States. According to a study done by the, *Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health*, done between 2013 and 2017, Black Americans are on average 3.23 times more likely to be killed by the police than their white countrymen across the country. This racial disparity can rise dramatically when looking into specific major cities like Chicago, where a Black Chicagoan is 650% more like to be killed by police than their white counterparts.¹⁷ It is easy to speak of percentages when talking about statistics, but these are human lives, over 5400 of them since 2015 to be exact, based on research done by the Washington Post.¹⁸ These unlawful killings regularly end without justice for the victims or their families, and lead to further tensions with the public, as seen in the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, following the brutal killing of Eric Garner. By continuously repeating “one bad apple doesn’t spoil the barrel”, it prevents open and honest dialogue about the crimes our judicial system has repeatedly failed to charge the murderers with. Instead, it spawned new phrases like “the thin blue line”, which stands for the notion that cops should not testify against or speak out against fellow officers. This calls into question the ethics and

¹⁵ Cunningham, Malorie. “‘A Few Bad Apples’: Phrase Describing Rotten Police Officers Used to Have Different Meaning.” *ABC News*, June 14, 2020. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/bad-apples-phrase-describing-rotten-police-officers-meaning/story?id=71201096>.

¹⁶ Cunningham, Malorie. “‘A Few Bad Apples’: Phrase Describing Rotten Police Officers Used to Have Different Meaning.” *ABC News*, June 14, 2020.

¹⁷ Schwartz, Gabriel L., and Jaquelyn L. Jahn. “Mapping Fatal Police Violence across U.S. Metropolitan Areas: Overall Rates and Racial/Ethnic Inequities, 2013-2017.” *PLOS ONE* 15, no. 6 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0229686>.

¹⁸ Berman, Mark, John Sullivan, Julie Tate, and Jennifer Jenkins. “Protests Spread over Police Shootings. Police Promised Reforms. Every Year, They Still Shoot and Kill Nearly 1,000 People.” *Washington Post*, June 8, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/protests-spread-over-police-shootings-police-promised-reforms-every-year-they-still-shoot-nearly-1000-people/2020/06/08/5c204f0c-a67c-11ea-b473-04905b1af82b_story.html.

efficacy of the Internal Affairs Bureau, as well as the state, and federal government. Since 2005, 104 officers have been arrested for manslaughter charges. Of the 104 arrested officers, only 35 have been charged with a crime. Of the 35 charged with a crime, only ten of the victims were armed with lethal weapon.¹⁹

I offer my sculpture *One Bad Apple*, as a relief to those who have heard this phrase twisted and mangled from its original meaning and utilized to defend the unjust killings committed by the police across this country. It is my desire that those who have fought against racial injustice, and specifically those fighting for the Black Lives Matter movement, can use this artwork to defy all who would manipulate the phrase “One bad apple, spoils the barrel,” to mean anything other than exactly what it says.



¹⁹Philip M Stinson and Chloe Wentzlof. "Research Brief One-Sheet – No. 9: On-Duty Shootings: Police Officers Charged with Murder or Manslaughter, 2005-2019" (2019)
Available at: http://works.bepress.com/philip_stinson/104/



The centerpiece of my show is my sculpture *Thought and Prayers*. Standing at roughly eight feet tall and five feet wide, the sculpture is composed of a steel and chicken wire frame covered with soft material, wax, a replica assault rifle, and children's baseball apparel. 27 backpacks encircle the piece, each representing one of the lives lost in the Sandy Hook massacre (2012). It is often forgotten that the 27th victim that day was the shooter's own mother and she was in fact the first person he killed. Over 50 lbs. of microcrystalline wax encase the backpacks to create volume and texture. The wax represents the countless vigils that have been and will continue to be held in honor of all the lives consistently lost in the country until our gun laws change. Above the wax and bags is a non-firing, dummy replica M4 training, assault rifle permanently affixed to a steel fabricated baseball home plate. At the base of the gun is a pair children's size 4 baseball cleats, and atop the gun is a youth XS baseball helmet. These three objects are arranged in the traditional fallen soldier monument, turned into one for the kids we are letting die in the "war on guns".

Our government's stock response to wrongful killings is "one bad apple". The American peoples stock response is "thoughts and prayers", which as a concept in and of itself is ethically ambiguous and disheartening that our culture has so many tragic events and has them so regularly, we developed a stock response for when they occur.

Thought and Prayers, Steel, Wax, 27 Bookbags, Candles, 2000 FMJ .223 rounds, Baseball apparel, Replica M4 Training Rifle, 2021

The 'thoughts and prayers' idiom joined the lexicon and has been used by Americans to express sympathy during times of great tragedy. After the horrific Sandy Hook shooting, which took the lives of 20 elementary school children, it was a widely popular catchy

phrase that became a politician's go-to soundbite and the citizenry's immediate tweet when following mass shootings occurred. Since December of 2012, there have been over 542 deaths from mass shootings,²⁰ and over 3,000 mass shooting events.²¹ With each death, with each CNN breaking news banner, "thoughts and prayers" fell victim to a phenomenon called, semantic satiation, which is when a word or phrase is repeated so often it loses its meaning. While at first, millions of tweets and well wishes were seen as statements of compassion and solidarity, they have since become an empty, divisive, and ineffective gesture. For too long have lives been lost to avoidable gun violence due to inaction of political leaders with ability to enact change in this country's gun laws. In 2017, Telemachus Orfanos was in Las Vegas when the United States' deadliest mass shooting occurred. Orfanos was lucky to survive the massacre only to find himself in another one just 13 months later, where he did not survive. As "thoughts and prayers" poured in, Orfanos' mother said, "I don't want prayers. I don't want thoughts. I want gun control, and I hope to God nobody else sends me any more prayers. I want gun control. No more guns."²² This vapid, empty phrase creates a cycle of inaction: a mass shooting occurs, victims die, politicians offer their "thoughts and prayers", people demand changes to gun laws, politicians say this isn't the time to talk about guns, it's a time for "thoughts and prayers."

I offer my sculpture *One Bad Apple*, as a relief to those who have heard this phrase twisted and mangled from its original meaning and utilized to defend the unjust killings committed by the police across this country. It is my desire that those who have fought against racial injustice, and specifically those fighting for the Black Lives Matter movement, can use this artwork to defy all who would manipulate the phrase "One bad apple, spoils the barrel," to mean anything other than exactly what it says.

It is my hope that, *Thoughts and Prayers*, will shock viewers into sadness and anger at the tragic loss of life due to the gun violence this country sees every day. Once snapped to attention, they are faced with a freeze frame capture of the loss of young innocent life this country's gun fetish costs society. If the cost of getting to buy a weapon of war at Walmart is the lives of innocent children, my sculpture should make them question whether they agree with that, and more so if they do: how many lives is it worth?

²⁰ Wilson, Chris. "41 Years of Mass Shootings in the U.S. in One Chart." *Time*, April 16, 2021. <https://time.com/4965022/deadliest-mass-shooting-us-history/>.

²¹ Lopez, German. "Mass Shootings since Sandy Hook, in One Map." *Vox.com*. Vox, July 9, 2018. <https://www.vox.com/a/mass-shootings-america-sandy-hook-gun-violence>.

²² Yan, Holly. "This Mom's Son Died in the California Massacre, but She Doesn't Want Your Thoughts and Prayers." *CNN*, November 9, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/09/us/california-victim-mom-gun-control>.

My work should make the viewers ask themselves: How did we get to this moment as a society? What is my role in creating or solving these issues? How can I change my behavior for the better?

Conclusion: That's a Wrap

Morally and ethically ambiguous idioms like “When In Rome, Do as the Romans Do”, “One Bad Apple”, and “Thoughts and Prayers”, that do not require any particular person or group to accept responsibility for their actions are having a negative impact on the way we as a society interact with one another. We have allowed uneducated mimicry to surpass its origins while simultaneously belittling the originators. We listened to the police give themselves a pass time and time again for decades swearing it was only a few bad apples. We let the youngest and most vulnerable amongst us fight our “war on guns” for us, dying to protect the same poorly written 2nd amendment right that got them killed in the first place. For too long have we as a country operated with an unsure sense of identity, blindly following those around us, “doing as the romans do.” However, if we’re all following the “one bad apple”, we are not going to break away from the cycle of “thoughts and prayers”, any time soon. We can and must act now to reverse the damage generations of language that excuses otherwise inexcusable behavior. Stand up and speak out in the face of injustice. Silence is compliance

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Adam Elmadany | Artist Statement

In my thesis exhibition, *Hitting the Nail on The Head*, my sculptural works examine how the ethics and morality of American society are shaped through our words. The idioms and sayings in the United States' lexicon have a direct correlation to the development of our thoughts, actions, and understanding of the world and its citizens. Through my sculptures, I task the viewer with examining their use of common phrases like, "When in Rome, do as the Romans Do", and if it excuses insult based on lack of understanding with images of Hollywood icons ignorantly appropriating various elements of Black culture in America, in the form of postcards. In my video, "One Bad Apple Spoils the Barrel", I present the viewer with categorical evidence that the commonly used alternative phrasing they have been hearing on television following tragic events, is in an inversion of the truth with decomposing apples displayed in a time lapse video. My monument, "Thoughts & Prayers" is an unavoidable visual confrontation to the 2nd amendment and what years of political inaction has cost us in innocent lives, mounting an assault rifle to a mountain of 26 children's bookbags, covered in the wax of candles.