I am a black. I am a woman. I am a metalsmith. I am fascinated by the categories and labels into which people are placed. As necessary to organize our world, certain groups and labels operate within this hierarchy of race and class and thrive while others fail. I will explore in this paper how I feel this hierarchy was conceived. I work like a detective, searching to fill in the blanks of a history that excludes people that are given labels of particular race and class. This investigation relates to my interest in post colonial thought. In this paper I will explore the labels I carry and how they relate to my voice as an artist. I will go over the artists that influence my work and our commonalities. History plays an important role in my work so I will go over broom, mop, and hair to link it to my work and the present. I will explain how metalsmithing as a field and a methodology support my inquiry.

Metalsmithing is considered to be a craft-based practice as opposed to a fine art. Traditionally, a metalsmith is someone who makes small objects or jewelry. Bound by a history of processes and craftsmanship, metalsmithing is one of the oldest trades. As a trade metalsmithing has focused on making useful items such as tools, weapons, jewelry and kitchenware. Handcrafted objects reflect a tradition a process that has been learned and passed down through the centuries. It is a skill completed by a hand with simple tools, working with natural materials from the earth. Body adornment such as rings, bracelets, and pendants are also a big part of metalsmithing. So metalsmithing is split in two categories functional objects and wearable objects. If what you make doesn’t fit into either of those categories, then it is not metalsmithing.
The gemstone was the center of jewelry making in the past, the precious metals were used to work around and show off the gemstone. Metals such as gold and bronze are example of the materials used to make jewelry. Roland Barthes french Literary theorist, philosopher, linguist, critic, and semiotician; wrote the book titled The Language of Fashion, explores the social roles and values embodied by the trade of metalsmithing.

Jewellery is no longer routinely given the job of showing off a prize that is, so to speak, inhuman(gemstone): you see jewellery made of common metal, or inexpensive glass; and when jewellery imitates some precious substance, gold or pearls, it is shameless; the copy, now a characteristic of capitalist civilization, is no longer a hypocritical way of being rich on the cheap- it is quite open about itself, makes no attempt to deceive, only retaining the aesthetic qualities of the material it is imitating. In short, there has been a widespread liberation of jewellery; its definition is widening, it is now an object that is free, if one can say this, from prejudice: multiform, multi substance, to be used in variety of ways, it is now no longer subservient to the law of the highest price nor to that of being used in only one way, such as for a party or scared occasion: jewellery has become democratic. (Barthes)

This quote carries many implications in the metalsmithing world. There is a difference between a jeweler, beader, costume jeweler and a metalsmith. The materials that objects and jewelry are made reflect a material hierarchy. The questioned of is it or is it not metalsmithing comes up often. What if a piece of jewelry is made completely out of alternative materials such as plastic for example? Jewelry reflects the status and, affiliation, whether it be for ethnic, religious or social reasons. Because of that I often like to use material which reflects race, class, capitalism, and labor to create a narrative in my work. I also think this quote is the result of the industrial revolution. Machines and factories are now a part of the jewelry making categories.
There is a hierarchy in craft and lots of rules of tradition and a lot of debates and arguments. In the craft world it is important to make sure there is a difference between the handmade and machine. In 1436, in response to Modernity, an intellectual and cultural movement began. The Arts and Craft movement attempted to reform design and decoration which started in Britain and from there was a practice that was spread across the world. The hand made object and the importance of the individual maker and process was the focus of this movement. The Arts and Craft movement focused on making objects with a function and a purpose. The Arts and Craft movement distrusted widespread mechanization of mass production and industrial design. There were three intellectuals that defined the movement through the years: architect Augustus Pugin, writer John Ruskin and artist William Morris.

Around the late 1800’s The Studio Craft movement began, this movement pushed to establish craft programs within educational institutions. What made this movement different from The Arts and Craft movement is the acceptance to non-functional object making. In 1943, The American Craft Council was founded to support craft people. Council developed American Craft magazine and The Museum of Art and Design. The Studio Craft movement was very successful in putting craft practice academia, now you can even get your Masters in craft. Craft theory emerged romanticizing intellectuals like William Morris from the arts and craft movement.

The DIY movement started because of the effects of the Studio Craft movement which grew to become more conceptual, theoretical, and expensive.
The DIY stands for Do-it-yourself, which rejects the academic and institutional aspect of craft. If you search craft up on Google glitter and color paper pop up. The discussion of craft is not popular, people are overall still in the dark on what craft is. The majority of the mass media, is run by corporate interest. There are a ton of marketing campaigns that claim there items are handmade. Marketers have recognized consumers desire for handmade items, the romanticized nostalgia of the handmade compare to impersonal mass produced machine made products. There is a privilege in making craft objects, that has to be recognized. It cost money to collect all the items needed to make something and it also requires a studio and tools. If you can afford to go to craft workshops or craft educational institutions to attain the hand making skills and to learn processes. If money and time are an issue than most people find solace in a least buying advertised hand made products. Metalsmithing is a small exclusive community mostly compiled of white women. Not to mention all the crafted items which are made in sweat shops and factories.

Rather than envisioning craft as a retreat from the complexity of contemporary social relations, we argue that its value lies in recognizing and challenging the ways it is entangled with the global flows of capital, materials, meaning and labor. (Friday)

Craftivism is a movement which combines these two sentiments craft + activism. This group is anti-capitalism, environmentalism, and feminist. This movement plays with the complexity of craft.

Knowing the history of craft and the material traditions are important to making my work. I insist on having this metalsmithing label, and I purposely
challenge and subvert the discourse of what a metalsmith is. As a metalsmith I investigate like an archaeologist, and I search for objects and people that reflect the history of post colonialism in America.

Where would humans be without objects in our world? Before there was such a thing as money for centuries people used to barter goods such as fabrics, food, jewelry, objects, and people. There are layers of history an object carries symbols and marks that reflect variety of cultures and geographic locations. The following quote comes from a podcast episode from The New York Public Library featuring recent Macarthur Genius Grant winner Ta-Nehisi Coates national correspondent for “The Atlantic” and best selling author, with the Director of NYPL’s Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and writer Khalil Gibran Muhammad. These two black men know history, and they talk about how the labor of people of color has been written out of history.

How can the villainy, just a few archival boxes away. Certainly here in this building and at 134 street at the Schomburg center. Be so lost in history. How can it be that the record of history, which tells us how civilization both in an idea and in what we might agree are it’s realities it’s brick and mortar. How did they come to be? Somebody built the railroads, laid the red bricks on the road, extracted the coal from the mines. (Coates, Theft, Atheism, and History)

I started to see even though there are no names I could find of black metalsmiths in the past. I had to take a critical look at the effects of slavery had on this country. How this country was built with was on the backs of slaves. History excludes working class minorities: The faceless and nameless who
worked the land picking cotton, digging coal, and cleaning ditches. This statement may seem obvious to some, but I have to recognize that in the metalsmithing world, I am an minority. I now question why that is, I can count on my hand the people of color that are in this field. Which I think is because of the lack of accessibility and knowledge on what the hell craft is to people of color. The dream that has been programed for many people of color is to get rich being an athlete, musician or entertainer.

I have kept my eye shut on purpose through the years wanting to deny what it means to be black in America. Ignorance is bliss to most of us, but for me it just became painful like running in to wall repeatedly but trying to pretend it didn’t happen over and over again. But I learned a lot from pop culture about the black social construct. I watched a lot of television and movies, I also read a lot of books of fiction and romance. I willfully avoided anything with black characters. But I learned so much about the black social construct from white point of view. I tried to lose myself in fantasy, but there was always a barrier to take me back to reality. The fact that there was a willful exclusion of black people in the stories said a lot and if they were mentioned it was in certain historical stereotypical roles. I didn’t realize how much this affected me with a self-hatred and fear.

**Influences**

When I decided to come to graduate school, I decided to empower myself to search history and look between the lines. I started searching for other black
artists. Which all carried the history of the time they lived in and the effects of the past. I have a lot in common with artist David Hammons. Making objects with materials that carry history of meaning that illuminate racial and cultural baggage. The two things I made that relate to him are a basketball hoop and a hooded sweatshirt. I made a long basketball net with transparent string and hundreds of clear round faceted beads and one net with brown braided synthetic hair with clear hair beads and aluminum foil on the end of the braids. Both nets hang around five feet down from the hoop. From April 10, 1986-March 27, 1987 David Hammons had a group of basketball hoops displayed at Brooklyn's Cadman Plaza Park. He made these during the Public Art Fund artist-in-residence in New York City. The sculptures were titled Higher Goals, and they were ten foot high labor intensive constructions covered with thousands of five different bottle caps that were arranged with different patterns.

More than twenty years ago Hammons made a piece titled 'In the Hood' which is a dark green hoodie disconnected from the body mounted and hung on
a wall like a hunting trophy. I made a chainmail hooded sweatshirt out of hundreds of aluminum pop can tabs and aluminum jump rings. The idea came while I was in an assisting my former professor during a undergraduate metals crit. There was this student who loved making things out of chainmaille and of course in an academic setting that’s not enough he was often encourage during our critiques to add a conceptual element to his work. He was not into that but I was and he inspired me, along with the recent tragedy that happen to young black boy wearing a gray hooded sweatshirt, Trayvon Martin. Hooded sweatshirts have carried a stigma for years, youth in hoodies are seen as criminals and trouble makers. I transformed the material of a hooded sweatshirt to invoke an attempt for protection. In the past men wore chainmail on the battlefield for protection from swords, snake bites, and crossbows. However chainmail became obsolete with the invention of guns. Although my hooded sweatshirt visually looks very heavy. The material choices I made along with the title “Bulletproof” is a commentary on the amour like quality of the piece, an attempt to protect but will ultimately fail protection from a bullet. I discovered my similarities to David Hammons after I made these pieces. The reason why this is important because it appears colored artists are always facing the same issues over and over again.
I made a pearl necklace out of my own hair into round little afro puffs and tiny gold beads. The idea behind that piece was to make nappy hair precious which historically has not been the case. Hair just like jewelry and the clothing people wear reflects their class and status. My work is in dialogue with the history of mourning jewelry. Mourning rings made out of hair have been around for centuries. Mourning jewelry during the Victorian Era which spanned 1837-1901 became an art form. Hair from the beloved who passed were fashioned into
jewelry. The hair in these object are arranged so beautiful that you can’t even tell it’s hair. I am not interested in hiding the fact that I am using hair in my work. I am interested in playing around with the abject. I used my own hair to make this necklace. Just like with David Hammons, I didn’t discover until afterwards that Sonya Clark already made a hair pearl necklace in 2010 titled *Heritage Pearls*. Sonya Clark is an fiber artist from Afro-Caribbean heritage. She is known for using a variety of materials including human hair and plastic combs to address issues of race, culture, class, and history through her artwork.

Hair can measure hegemony within our culture,” Clark says. “I am convinced that when Afros become coveted, mainstream hairstyles, worn by those who do not naturally grow them — in the same way straight blonde hair is coveted and worn by those who do not naturally grow it — that will be one indicator of racial balance and equality.

The work of Clark and Hammons became examples that confirmed to me how important it is to know what came before me and what is going on now in the art world. The black artists I have discovered have been speaking about issues of blackness and identity since the Harlem Renaissance and now. It makes me question what the point of me repeating the same subject over again if it doesn’t change anything? The work of most black artist reflects the lens of history, which made me understand that that I needed to make work that draws on my own personal experiences in order to make it both unique and authentic.
It is something, I have chosen to do. And I felt compelled to do it so it is my role. But sometimes I wish it wasn’t, I think the artists who don’t get involved in preaching messages are probably happier. But you see I have to live with Nina and that is very difficult.

-Nina Simone

**Buckets**

My work now involves using one of the most familiar domestic objects: the bucket. I made a mold of an old metal bucket, and replicated it in plaster. I replicated the bucket’s handle out of clay and wrapped it around a stick. I put two heavy buckets filled with water at the end of each side of the stick and with my hand wrapped around the clay handle I lifted the buckets. My hand was imprinted in the clay handle, this became the only alteration I made to all the buckets. I then placed the buckets in an environment that added to the narrative I was trying to communicate. The Historic Huguenot Street is located in the Hudson Valley in New York which is just a couple of blocks away from SUNY New Paltz. Huguenot Street is considered to be one of the first preserved areas in America. The street was called home by Native American, French, Dutch, English, African, as well as other men and women, all whom played a role in creating a new identity for America. The Historic Huguenot is now a tourist attraction to those who wish to travel down memory lane. I had the opportunity to pick a space on Huguenot street to exhibit my work. I saw the areas usually the basement or attic where the slaves once were forced to live. I choose to display
twenty of my buckets outside around a waterwell near one of the historic homes. I wanted the viewer to connect to the past and what was once there but what has been erased from history. I have to address the fact that I have been making multiples, which I have never done before in my work until the Huguenot project. This made sense because of I am speaking about a group of erased people. Every bucket represented person connected under the same oppression.

Any one change between today and Jim Crow. It is that it is certainly possible for individual African Americans to achieve the pinnacle of success in this society. That's a huge difference right? You couldn't have had a Barack Obama fifty years ago. But I don't write on behalf of the individuals. I am not thinking about just individuals who can achieve certain things. Because the fact of the matter is even if that is true. Your child can be killed, your child can be taken from you. In a way that is just not true for other folks. (Coates, Between the World and Me)
The use of hair in black art is played out. Black artists such as David Hammons, Sonya Clark, Carrie Mae Weems and Lorna Simpson, to name a few, who have dealt with it as a subject and material. However I am enjoying the fact that I am joining a dialogue with the community of black artists that have already explored this subject. The question is why do Black artists choose to use hair in their work?

Hair is essentially strands that grow out of human pores and animal skin, yet in the black community a big part of our lives revolve around hair. Black hair has been seen as a bad and evil thing since the days of slavery. When slaves were stolen and shipped to America their hair was shaved off. Africans wore many elaborate hairstyles which took hours sometime days to finish creating. Hair was used as a way to reflect their tribe, class and status. Shaving off a slave’s hair was another way their identities were stripped away. Slaves were physically and psychological abuse, everything unique and different about them was seen as evil and dirty; hair was one of those things. Black face and caricatures were used as a tool for further psychological torture to blacks. The physical scars of the past maybe gone but the psychological scars carry on today. Since black hair was seen as nappy, dirty, and kinky; what was the opposite of that? What hair type of hair that is seen as the ideal of beauty; long strands of blond hair, of course.

The quest for straight hair was often a torturous obsession for the slaves, but it was not just about conforming to the prevailing fashions of the day. Straight hair translated to economic opportunity and social advantage. Curiously, the hair was considered the most telling feature of Negro status, more than the color of the skin. (Tharps)
I found in my research that the social structure in the slave community was controlled by an hair texture hierarchy. Resulting after the first generation of slaves being raped, the so called mulatto appeared. Mulatto is a term that describes a baby that is half black and half white.

Slave masters reinforced the “good-hair” light skin power structure in two ways. By selecting the lighter-skinned, straighter haired slaves for the best positions within in his household, he showed they were more desirable. At slave auctions he would pay almost five times more for a house slave than for a field slave. Black people themselves internalized the concept and within their own ranks propagated the notion that darker-skinned Blacks with kinkier hair were less attractive, less intelligent, and worth less than their lighter-hued brothers and sisters. (Tharps)

This is the core issue with hair that is still in play now, black against black and the roots started here. There used to be a straight hair test at churches, you couldn’t even enter a black congregation to worship the Lord if you hair could not go through a fine toothed comb. The light skinned, straight haired slaves were more likely to be free and have more opportunities than the kinky hair blacks. So light skinned, straight haired groups stuck together and prospered. Terms such as house slave, and Uncle Tom were used as an insulting way to describe light skinned, straight haired slaves. The more modern day phrase I heard when I was a kid was the term Oreo. Term implied black people that want to be white, like an oreo cookie with a dark chocolate cookie crunch exterior and a creamy white center. The effects of slavery can be felt today, but it’s not simply that blacks want to be white, it’s about conforming for survival. If you have straight hair you are most likely to get a job and not get beaten or killed.
I grew up in a beauty salon with a room full of black women doing black women hair. I got to hear women talk about their lives and their hair. I also got to hear what they thought about what was going on in the news and pop culture at the time. Hearing how they all read between the lines of what the news reported and how to give their opinion of a sort of truth that wasn’t white washed. A lot of women struggling alone with kids, babies having babies, women taking care of unemployed men. Even though I never attempted to learn how to do hair like my mom, the tools and the chemicals she worked with are an
inspiration to me. Another group of women who had a big influence on me are my grandma and my Aunts. Straight long hair seemed to be very important to all of them. It's hard to write and acknowledge it, but it was very important to conform to the white standard of beauty and not to appear to be ghetto. One of my Aunts favorite saying is “Well white people do it”. The same aunt who said this has a daughter, my cousin, who has had several plastic surgeries on her nose to make it appear less black. I love these women, but years later I am now aware of how the black social construct has affected them and me. Now I am trying to channel those memories into my work.
After some thought and research I confirmed what I was feeling which was, black women spend a significant amount of money and time on their hair way more than any other race. Additionally there is tremendous pain that is involved in the
processes of straitening hair with a perm which requires monthly reapplication. The pain that you have to go through, the smell of the fumes made while preparing the perm product the minutes it takes to comb it through your hair can feel like an eternity. Perms burn and feel like they will melt your skin off, and finally when the it is being washed off it feels like your skin will slitter off down the drain too. Nothing reflects the affects of racism as much as what black men went through to get straight hair. Slave men used to put toxic lye in their hair to make it straight. Men also used to put axel grease in their hair to straighten it. Malcolm X is the most famous for getting someone to straighten his hair with two potatoes, one egg and lye. It was called a conk, which was more painful then a perm, which is saying a lot. I can say with certainty that no one goes through the pain and work of hair as much as black people.

**Brooms in History**

Brooms are made to aid in the sweeping of dirt and dust found on the floor. In the past heating for cooking was produced with a fireplace which created dust and ashes. Getting rid of this was matter of life and death. Brooms were handmade and are commonly made out of fur, hemp, animal hair, fine twigs, grass, straw and corn husk. The so-called inventor of the broom who actually went through the trouble of submitting a patent, was farmer Levi Dickerson, who in 1797, made the first sorghum broom for his wife. Shakers are known for their ornate designs and, in 1798 the Shakers designed and marketed
the first known flat broom. Theodore Bates of the Watervliet Shaker community is credited in creating wooden flat vise, which he used to pressed the round sorghum bristles flat, which were then sewn with twine into a flat shape. By 1820s the United States was the biggest producer of brooms. The United States used to dominate the broom market but because of the progress of the industrial revolution and manufacturing and the introduction to synthetic brooms it became a competing broom market. A company called DuPont began creating filaments and extruded plastic products in the 1950s and 60s. These new technologies paved the way for new versions of the broom such as the large janitor size push broom. In 1994 foreign brooms were permitted into the U.S., duty free. Mexico soon took over the broomcorn market there are now only 15 broomcorn manufactures left in the U.S. Despite the introduction of manufactured brooms, handmade brooms are still appreciated and considered an art. Handcrafted Brooms are a common feature at craft fairs and festivals, where heritage craft is considered an art form. I also should mention that despite the invention of machinery it did not take over completely, there was partnership of sorts between the person and machine.

Today, the machinery is electrically powered. However, in even the largest American broom factory, the production of broomcorn brooms is still remarkably a handcraft. One factory foreman in a large broomcorn factory says he can pick up a broom and tell who amongst his staff made it because each one is made according to the skills and preferences of the maker. A single machine and operator sits at a machine and constructs broom. The machines, and the methods, have not changed in over 40 years. (Broom)

It is hard to find out information on who invented the floor mop. This maybe because of the many different categories for the mops. When I search
inventor of the floor mop the name Joy Mangano pops up. Joy Mangano is a woman who invented the miracle mop in 1990. This mop let you pull a mechanism on the mop pole so you can ring out the water without bending down, which, if you have to do this all day, is indeed a miracle. Before mops where on sticks people had to get down on their knees to scrub and clean the floor, and even after the stick mop was around you had to bend down a lot to wring the accesses water off the mop. Joy Mangano mop wasn’t around until the 90’s so she wasn’t the inventor of the first mop. I find it interesting how her name is all over the internet there was even a movie made about her in 2015 titled “Joy” starring Jennifer Lawrence was nominated for an oscar for her portrayal of Mangano. Joy Mangano is seen as all american girl, success story. Wikipedia provides a confusion version of floor mop history.

A mop (such as a floor mop) is a mass or bundle of coarse strings or yarn, etc., or a piece of cloth, sponge, or other absorbent material, attached to a pole or stick. It is used to soak up liquid, for cleaning floors and other surfaces, to mop up dust, or for other cleaning purposes. The word (then spelled mappe) is attested in English as early as 1496, but new refinements and variations of mop designs have been introduced, from time to time. For example, American inventor Jacob Howe received U.S. patent #241 for a mop holder in 1837 and Thomas W. Stewart (U.S. patent #499,402) in 1893.

The name under inventor and patent is of great importance because that information is what gets in the History books. I searched Jacob Howe on google and found a link titled ‘Replacing black inventions on Wikipedia-Stromfront’ activist which is a white pride world wide website. There was also a link to “Black invention myths”, which is organized by a white nationalist group. There are a lot
of black inventors, most of the invention are domestic objects or food which only makes sense when you think of how slavery forced people to farm, clean, and cook.

African-American Thomas W. Stewart, he was awarded the first patent for a floor mop in 1893. Stewart designed a clamping mop that could wring the water out by the use of a lever. Stewart’s last invention was created in 1887—an oscillating metal bending machine that was a bending process that was safer and more efficient.

It is important to know who on paper invented the broom and the floor mop, because to me it is a reflection of American imperialism. The reality is what is not what’s on paper in the history books. The broom and mop were around long before that, not only in America but around the world. Everyone around the world shares the need to clean their spaces. What I find fascinating is the superstitions and myths that invoke purity and patriotism connected to the broom. Because it has the power to sweep away the dirt, the broom has come to represent purity. This can be seen in many narratives including the bible.

The New Testament, for example, mentions broom use in Jesus’ discussion in Luke 15:8 of the importance of even one lost soul: “Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?

The broom is also associated with the folk lore of witchcraft which is passed down in books, comics, movies and television. As a child I remember seeing so many dancing and flying magical brooms in cartoons and books. The
Wiccan religion uses a besom in their rituals, which most people have mistaken for a broom because it looks very similar. Wiccans often use broom/besom as tool to not only literally clean a place but cleanse the space of malevolent spirits of the dead. In Anglo-Saxon England there were professional broom making artisans called Besom Squires. In the 18th century there was a bawdy folk song developed called ‘The Besom Maker’ which makes fun of a female besom maker’s need to search in the woods for materials for a besom but on the way seeks other carnal pleasures. There is a jumping the broom tradition that served as a ritualistic version of a marriage ceremony that dates back to slavery. Rather than invoking ownership as the core of a marriage it focused on partnership and could be voided if a couple jumped backwards over the broom. Superstitions and rituals centered around the Broom is world wide.

If you wish to avoid ill luck which follows sweeping at night, all you have to say is: busy, busy, for I am receiving the bride and groom. (Japanese Folk Saying)

The amazing thing about the broom is that every country owns the broom in their own way. In the 2000s there is a huge local and regional market for traditional, handcrafted twig and grass brooms developed in the Bushbuckridge municipality, of South Africa, providing an important means of livelihood security for several hundred poor households in the face of increasing economic hardship. In Lagos, Nigeria the broom is used as a political symbol.
We intend to sweep all the evil things out, ACN District Chairman James Odunmbaku said as the rally kicked off. All political parties with no vision, we will sweep them out of our domain in totality.

**Mass Incarceration**

I was moved by the documentary titled ‘The House I Live In’ which navigates the history of the ‘war on drugs’ and how it’s become our new racial caste system. First there was slavery, then there was Jim Crow now there is mass incarceration. I wanted to use imitation drugs and real drugs in my work to evoke these histories and I am still in the process of figuring out what these objects look like and how I will find a scientific research facility that will let me explore dangerous materials in my craft. How do I reveal the privilege some have with their drug use and the system that makes others into targets?

In reference to jewelry, I made a shirt collar, out of clear plastic stitched with white thread containing the residue of cocaine between its layers. The materials I used for the collar reflect status: Plastic is considered to be a low brow material, man made mass produced material. Plastic is everywhere it is used and discarded, supposedly worthless material with a history, currency and agency. I am attempting to use cocaine in this work as if it is valued like diamonds. Diamonds are commonly the rock used to show of wealth and class status.
I am also interested by seeing young mostly black and brown men wearing their pants so low they almost look like they are going to fall off. I found out in my research that saggy or baggy pants originated in prison. Men in prison were prohibited from wearing belts with their pants, to prevent them from using it as a weapon or to use it to commit suicide. The saggy or baggy pants trend started coming around in the 1980s, this is also when crack started appearing in the streets. Saggy or Baggy pants are a result of prison and gang culture and became a huge style trend which was marketed with the popularity of the hip hop music industry. Wearing baggy or saggy pants are now seen as criminal and men or boys who wear their pants too low can get a ticket and be fined. I
appropriate those sources into sculptural outcomes that connect the material and process to symbolize the continuous chains of slavery. I made three versions of saggy pants. One is made out of plastic yellow chain and black zip ties. Zip ties are commonly used by the police as another version of handcuffs to subdue protestors. I used the zip ties to weave the yellow chain together to create a pattern. The pants look a lot like caution tape the police use to block off a crime area. The second pair of baggy pant are made out of handmade barbwire.

Barbwire was used to block off enemy areas during war and was also used to control farm livestock. Furthermore it was used to top fences at prisons as a security measure for certain properties. Integrating the function of barbwire as a barrier, the third pair of pants are made out of steel wirer woven in fence pattern.

When you try to understand why we call something white today and why we call something black today, you go back into the history and you cannot get
away from the notion of plunder. Someone decided that they wanted to be able to strip as many people as possible of their labor, the fruits to their labor. They called the group of people black... We've had groups of people come to America at various points and not necessarily be called white, and slowly because of some sort of political interest, they get called white. If you think about the world that way, if you understand race as a done thing, not the work of God, not the work of Jesus, but an actual done thing, a decision that was made by a group of people, it charges you with some things. (Coates)

I decided to title my thesis show “Make it Plain”, this is what Malcolm X would say to his men when he was ready to be introduced on the stage. Unlike his former mentor Elijah Muhammad who loved people to worship him and talk him up and the Nation of Islam. Malcolm said the words make it plain to remind his associates to introduce him humbly with no bells or whistles. This show at the Dorsky Musuem is my introduction to the art world as I see it. I want to keep it simple and have my work speak for itself. No one will know what I am referencing unless I tell them but I don’t think it is necessary to know. Make it plain to me works as a title to my work because I seeking to reveal and make plain the things that no one wishes to see or talk about: what it means to live in a black body in America the so called land of the free.
Bibliography


**Documentary Films**

The House I Live in, Director Eugene Jarecki 2012

The Farm: Life Inside Angola Prison, Director Liz Garbus and Wilbert Rideau 1998

The Central Park Five, Directors Sarah Burns and Ken Burns 2012
The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975, Director Goran Olsson 2011

What Happened, Miss Simone?, Director Liz Garbus 2015

American War on Drugs: The Last White Hope, Director Kevin Booth, 2007

Freeway: Crack in the System, Director Marc Levin, 2015

Podcast
[http://www.nypl.org/blog/2015/10/20/podcast-nehisi-coates](http://www.nypl.org/blog/2015/10/20/podcast-nehisi-coates)