Take a Bullet for the Country

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“Take a Bullet for the Country” is a remediation of a work of art called, “Take a Bullet for the City” by [R. Luke DuBois](http://lukedubois.com/), which is an art piece that fires a blank from a real gun every time an attached Raspberry PI detects a reported shooting in New Orleans. The intention was to take the core idea, visualizing gun incident data in a visceral manner, and bring that to the web. To that end, “Take a Bullet for the Country” utilizes the user’s location to show every reported criminal incident involving a gun in their city within the last 72 hours.

The user’s location is gathered via the navigator object that’s standard in web browsers and uses the Google Maps JS API to match the latitude and longitude coordinates provided by the navigator with their current city. Currently that is the only method to get the user’s location and use the piece.

The gun incident data is downloaded from [www.gunviolencearchive.org](http://www.gunviolencearchive.org/), an independent research and data collection group whose mission is to provide comprehensive database on gun violence and gun crime. Their methodology for compiling gun incidents is transcribed below.

“GVA began with the goal to provide a database of incidents of gun violence and gun crime. To that end we utilize automated queries, manual research through over 2,000 media sources, aggregates, police blotters, police media outlets and other sources daily. Each incident is verified by both initial researchers and secondary validation processes. Links to each incident are included in the incident report to provide further information on each incident for researchers, advocate groups, media and legislative interests. The incident reports provide a starting point for researchers, media and legislative interests to add texture to our raw data. “([Methodology](http://www.gunviolencearchive.org/methodology))

Currently “Take a Bullet for the Country” does gather it’s data programmatically. When the server boots up, it scrapes everything off of gunviolencearchive’s “last 72 hours” section and turns that into a Javascript object to pass to any client that attempts to connect.

The visualization itself was greatly inspired by the work of Muller Brockmann. His work mixing photographs and typography in particular shaped the artistic direction. Although Brockmann’s work was primarily print, “Take a Bullet for the Country” still maintains certain qualities that can only exist on the web.

The piece is primarily generative. The length of the work is dictated by the number of gun incidents in the given city it was opened in. The incidents are generated, in turn, on the left and the right-hand side of the page, giving the whole work a jagged, teeth-like appearance. The gun itself is a 3d model rendered using [A-Frame](https://aframe.io/), a web VR platform. The bullets surrounding the gun are also rendered within A-Frame, and are each randomly placed in a radius around the gun with a random rotation as well. The number of bullets is equal to the sum total of injured and killed people in the last 72 hours by guns within the selected location.

My goal from all of this effort was to provide to the user a visceral, local, emotional representation of gun violence in the US. I felt that the original work had a very visceral way of representing the dehumanizing, aggregated data that’s usually shown. Additionally, in the US actual data on guns is rarely even logged, largely because The Dicky Amendment, attached to the 1996 appropriations bill as a rider, required that

“..none of the funds made available for injury prevention and control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention may be used to advocate or promote gun control“ ([Source](http://www.latimes.com/business/hiltzik/la-fi-hiltzik-gun-research-funding-20160614-snap-story.html)).

The vagueness of the rider has prevented the CDC from doing any proper research or data gathering for 20 years now for fear that even studying gun violence or injury would be interpreted by an authoritarian, fearful NRA back Congress.

All of this is to say that the project surfaces data that would otherwise be lost in due to oppressive ideology in an emotional, visceral and local way. While nothing in the project explicitly advocates against these frustrations in our political climate, it is a direct reaction to that frustration and my hope is that showing this data as something other than a number will cause people to see this violence not as an inevitable aspect of our reality but as a societal failure to prevent this from happening.

If you open “Take a Bullet for the Country” and nothing highlights, I’ll be happy.