POLITICAL ART CENSORSHIP: A PRODUCTIVE POWER

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**Introduction**

For my senior thesis, I investigate censorship of political art by comparing specific censored artworks from the United States and China as case studies: Dread Scott’s *What Is The Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag?*, exhibited in Chicago, Illinois in 1988 and the Stars’ *Stars Exhibition*, shown in Beijing, China in 1979. I examine these case studies through two theoretical approaches towards censorship. The first theoretical approach is the traditional, or liberal, view of censorship, which focuses on the repressive actions of authorities, usually by the state. The second is the modern view of censorship inspired by Foucaultian theories of power and knowledge, referred to as “New Censorship Theory,” which states that censorship has many forms and emphasizes its ability to produce discourse and knowledge.

It is important to examine empirical cases of censorship through the perspective of New Censorship Theory so that we can better understand the ways that our actions and speech function within networks of communication and structures of power. Employing a broad definition of censorship as both a repressive act of silencing and as a force that generates discourse and knowledge to two instances of censorship reveals its various effects and manifestations. New Censorship Theory reveals the in which power relationships between the censored and the censor operate. In these case studies, the censored are the artists, Dread Scott and the Stars, and the censors include various political institutions and organizations including national and local governments, interest groups, and the media. However, while there are explicit and physical censors, there are also subtle and invisible forces and institutions that enable censorious acts. I examine the ways that these institutions and organizations have carried out censorship and how the artists have responded to these efforts, which will reveal how censorship as an act of power that through its efforts to constrain actually produce discourse and knowledge.
By researching specific instances of censorship we can better understand specific relationships of power rather than only speaking of these relationships in broad and theoretical terms.

The ways that censorship of art is manifested depends on the specific circumstances of each case. In my thesis, I compare the historical circumstances of each exhibition in an effort to find out what dictated each case of censorship. This includes not only the content of the artworks that have been deemed controversial, but also the motivations of the artists and the censors, the historical climate leading up to each case, and the effects of the works’ censoring. While other researchers have analyzed the works of Dread Scott and the Stars Group individually, it is beneficial to examine them in a comparative framework in order to emphasize the unique manifestations that censorship takes.

My cases are similar in that both Dread Scott and the Stars were censored because their art, or the display of their art, criticized government policies or ideologies. Therefore, investigating each country’s political ideologies is essential for understanding why and how these instances of censorship occurred. I reveal how two different governments have employed art censorship as one of the various tactics to create and maintain national identity. Therefore, it is important that the selected countries function within two different systems of government: the United States, a democratic nation; and China, a socialist, one-party state. I have chosen the United States and China as the locations in which I examine art censorship because of their strong global presence today. Widely recognized as two of the most powerful countries in the world, the United States and China maintain the two largest economies based on GDP, and both enjoy significant political influence and strong militaries.1 Although these countries rose to their

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current powerful state at different time periods and at different paces, both governments employed degrees of freedom of speech that they believed would contribute to their country’s national identity. Because my analysis focuses on political art censorship, I employ the writings of art historians, political philosophers and censorship theorists for the theoretical frameworks of my case studies.

New Censorship Theory

Censorship theory has evolved over the past several decades due to advancements in understandings of power and communication. The theoretical lens that I analyze my cases with is New Censorship Theory, influenced by the theories of Michel Foucault. Contemporary censorship theorist Matthew Bunn outlines the definition of New Censorship Theory in his essay *Reimaging Repression* on which I base my analyses. New Censorship Theory “stresses the multiplicity of forms of censorship.” According to this theory, the definition of censorship includes several characteristics: censorship in its traditional form as a repressive act of intervention, often by state authority; censorship as a productive and generative force; censorship as a “ubiquitous phenomenon” in which discourse is dictated by structures of power and societal rules; and censorship as necessary and inherent in communication networks. I employ this definition because it emphasizes the variety of forms that censorship takes.

Traditional conceptions of censorship focus on the repressive and intervening actions of authorities. In this view, censorship is defined as an act of interference from an external figure, which is often a government force. The figure is recognized as external because they intrude and

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3 Frederick Schauer, “The Ontology of Censorship,” in *Censorship and Silencing: Practices of
disrupt practices of free speech. Prior to the twentieth century, censorship debates consisted of those who were for or against censorship, focusing on the degree to which regulation of speech is beneficial or harmful. As newer understandings of censorship advanced from Foucault’s theories on the workings of power and knowledge, people began to inquire into the structures and manifestations of censorship rather focusing on its favorability. Censorship as an infliction of negative power, silencing, and limiting, is considered a traditional conception of censorship because this was the general presumption prior to these newer understandings of the structures of power and knowledge. As censorship theories continued to develop into the twenty-first century, modern censorship theorists became hesitant to fully embrace the generative qualities of New Censorship Theory out of fear that they would undermine people’s experiences of silencing.

Robert C. Post, whose work has informed this study, embraces a Foucaultian perspective while at the same time calling for an analysis and examination of individual cases. Post criticizes Foucault for discussing individual cases of censorship in universal terms, as opposed to distinguishing the silencing, struggle, and in some cases proliferation of discourse within each relationship of power. He argues that it universalizes the different kinds of power that contribute to censorship, such as power of the police versus the media. By compiling essays from scholars from different academic fields with varying perspectives on forms and motivations of state regulation, Post attempts to build on Foucault’s work. Helen Freshwater, who provides an overview of the evolution of modern censorship theory, is also important for this study. Freshwater argues, “Censorship is a structural necessity.” She credits Foucaultian theories for

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4 Ibid., 147.
6 Helen Freshwater, “Towards a Redefinition of Censorship,” in *Censorship and Cultural*
revealing that all dissenting material is dependent on and functions within conventions and regulations. However, Freshwater criticizes Foucault for discussing individual cases of censorship solely in theoretical terms while failing to acknowledge individuals who consider their experiences as overtly repressive. As a solution, she proposes a “redefinition” of censorship that focuses on the “responsiveness to the experience of the censored author or artist.”

While Post and Freshwater both emphasize the innovative theories of Foucault, they also acknowledge the shortcomings of this new scholarship. Both theorists agree that newer theories defining censorship as productive are prevalent, but that it is imperative to maintain a balance between modern censorship theories and more traditional ones that emphasize the repressive power of the state. They are cautious of newer theories undermining the experiences of those who have been repressed. Post suggests that in order to avoid this, theorists should incorporate concepts from the new scholarship to cases of state censorship “without sacrificing the values and concerns of more traditional accounts.” Matthew Bunn addresses Post and Freshwater’s concerns while still embracing a Foucaultian lens by proposing that repression and silencing should be distinguished as one type of censorship among others rather than overshadowed by newer concepts laid out in New Censorship Theory.

The most significant aspect of New Censorship Theory defines censorship as “a productive force that creates new forms of discourse, new forms of communication, and new genres of speech.” This notion is directly influenced by Foucault’s theories on power, knowledge, and sexuality, in which he offers an alternate definition of power. Foucault states that there is an assumed and classical understanding of power, solely thought of in “negative

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7 Ibid., 225.
8 Post, 4.
9 Bunn, 26.
terms: refusal, limitation, obstruction, censorship.”¹⁰ Power, according to Foucault, is a productive force. In *A History of Sexuality Vol 1.*, Foucault explains how silences that surrounded sexuality actually created a desire to produce diverse and extensive discourses on the topic.¹¹ New obsessions with sexuality led to expanding interests and areas of knowledge and study.

Another essential aspect of New Censorship Theory defines censorship as “a diffuse, ubiquitous phenomenon in which a host of actors (including impersonal, structural conditions) function as effective censors.”¹² From this perspective, there is not one explicit censor. Instead, censorship is achieved only from the effects of subtle social structures that create and dictate the limits of discourse, which include “the market, ingrained cultural languages…and other forms of impersonal boundaries on acceptable speech.”¹³ Pierre Bourdieu’s theories on the structural field of cultural production contribute to this definition of censorship.¹⁴ Bourdieu emphasizes the social conditions that dictate the production and circulation of discourse, describing their effects as unavoidable. He goes on to define the class of people who have the power to dictate the field as those in economically, symbolically, and culturally dominating positions, who are able to use their influence to define the legitimate boundaries of speech. Censorship cannot be distinguished from everyday speech because it is an inevitable effect of the boundaries of acceptable speech and an inherent part of the process of cultural production. New Censorship Theory states that silencing is an essential and inherent part of communication.

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¹² Bunn, 27.
¹³ Ibid.
In my case studies, I analyze how the dominant class/political party attempted to shape cultural production by censoring certain productions that were perceived outside the boundaries of acceptable speech and artistic expression. I examine invisible forms of power and communication networks that shaped the reception of these exhibitions. I also analyze the motivations of the artist/s in creating controversial art. I argue that even though the work created by the artist/s challenged conventional ideological structures, these challenges were posed within the framework of what was and was not allowed in the social structure in which they appeared.

Drawing on Bunn and Post, I examine the idea of censorship as a productive force, as well as the repressive manifestations of censorship in my case studies. In doing so, the experiences of the artists are acknowledged, while the subtle forms of communication and power become more discernible that actually created more, rather than less, discourse are exposed. Using the definition of censorship as a generative force, I argue that despite attempts to censor the exhibitions, artists were actually provided an even greater platform to promote their work, eventually resulting in more successful careers for the artist. I illustrate how cultural anxiety about these exhibitions created new and desired discourses about the political ideas that these artists were challenging. The productive forces of power enabled artists to generate even more knowledge to a greater amount of people about their activist agendas. By analyzing my cases through New Censorship Theory, I reveal how the many manifestations of censorship are carried out and reveal their different effects.

Stars Exhibition

With my analysis of the Stars Exhibition, I provide a historical background of the social and political climate in China under both Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping whose policies each
shaped artistic productions in China for the better part of the twentieth century. Mao Zedong’s ideologies regarding the power of the arts in achieving national liberation and his own policies about appropriate artistic production are illustrated in his speeches given at the 1942 Yan’an Forum. This forum took place only seven years before Mao’s founding of the People’s Republic of China, which he governed as the Chairman of the Communist Party. Mao stresses the relationship between art and politics, and demands a united artistic style that would be used to unite and educate the citizens in his effort to promote the revolution of the PRC. I examine Mao Zedong’s speeches given at the Yan’an Forum as a firsthand account of how art had been used for political objectives in China.

In order to put his beliefs into action, Mao enacted the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution, a ten-year campaign in which the Chinese government had Red Guards extinguish “class enemies” and all cultural materials that did not align with communism or a socialist realist artistic style. During this time, book burnings occurred, art schools and magazines were terminated, guards conducted home invasions, and individuals were tortured, often being sent to the countryside to perform manual labor as a punishment. Additionally, the artistic guidelines enforced during this campaign dictated the types of art produced and therefore restricted the creativity of artists. Overall, China experienced the cessation of ordinary civil rights, including freedom of speech and expression. A summary of Mao’s China provides the ideological framework in China in which the Stars spent their formative years. All of its members had grown up during this period of artistic and political suppression.

The death of Mao Zedong in 1976 marked a transition in Chinese history and culture,

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specifically regarding the types of artistic materials that contributed to the overall culture of the nation. Deng enacted the “four modernizations” in 1978, a set of economic reforms with the goal of triggering a free market in China. As part of this reform, Deng opened China to the international community in order to participate in foreign trade and foreign investment after years of isolation under Mao. China’s openness provided opportunities for cultural exchanges between the east and the west.

In 1979, recognizing the national shift that was occurring under Deng and seeking an opportunity to gain more artistic freedom of expression from the opening of China to the world market, a group of amateur artists formed the avant-garde art group “Stars,” also known as Xingxing. Founded in Beijing by two activist artists, Huang Rui and Ma Desheng, the group sought a more democratic society and was highly critical of the artistic guidelines enforced under Mao’s communist state. The formation of the Stars marked an important time in Chinese art history because they were one of the first avant-garde groups of artists who challenged Chinese government authority through aesthetic choices and political ideology, both conveyed in their *Stars Exhibition*.18

While only a few of the artworks in this exhibition contained explicit political imagery, a majority of the work was controversial because it challenged aesthetic standards set by Mao and subtly continued by Deng. The *Stars Exhibition* was censored on political grounds as well as aesthetic grounds because the Stars used an aesthetic that symbolized freedom of expression. Many of the artworks were created in an abstract style, as opposed to the Socialist Realism style that was the preferred painting and sculpting style of the Chinese government. By creating their

17 Ibid., 72-73.
work through abstraction, a style that had been historically used in the west to illustrate political dissent, the Stars were also rejecting Communist ideologies in favor of democratic values. Because Mao believed in a strong association between art and politics, the stylistic choices of the artists was a political protest against state repression.

On October 27, 1979, in protest of having their request to organize an exhibition in the National Art Museum of China denied by the Beijing Artists Association, the Stars exhibited their works outside the museum on a park fence. The exhibition attracted a large and supportive audience that included several museum administrators. After two days, police officers attempted to shut down the exhibition on the grounds that it “affects public order and environmental cleanliness.” Despite attempts by the artist to negotiate with police, the next day the artists found that their works had been removed from the site. The artists were told that the work would be returned after the National Day holiday on October 10. The police detained ma Desheng and Huang Rui until later that day. On September 30, the anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the Stars protested this violation of artistic freedom by marching from the Xidan Democracy Wall to the headquarters of the Peking Municipal Party Committee. Joined by thousands of protesters and foreign journalists, this demonstration reveals how the censorship of the *Stars Exhibition* provoked widespread responses from an angered Chinese public with deep-rooted feelings of resentment against the government. Evidently, one effect of censorship is public mobilization to denounce state intervention.

Shortly after, from November 23 to December 2, 1979, the Stars were able to reopen their

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20 Ibid.
previously censored exhibition.\textsuperscript{21} After obtaining approval from the Chairperson of the China Artists Association, Jiang Feng, the exhibition was successfully held in at a different venue called Huafang Zhai, attracting thousands of visitors over the eighteen days that it was open. Additionally, the Stars were able to display a second \textit{Stars Exhibition} in the National Art Museum of China with even more artists and larger audiences than the first two. The success of these subsequent \textit{Stars Exhibitions} exemplifies the beginning of the Stars’ increased success as artists.

After the artists enjoyed a brief period of support, evident by their invitation to the Central Academy of Fine Arts to give lectures, conservatives began opposing the revolutionary activities of the group. For example, the artists were unable to re-enroll in the Beijing Artists Association after their radical artistic actions. Additionally, a journalist for \textit{Fine Arts Magazine}, Li Xianting, was forced to resign after writing a favorable article on the Stars and expressing support for the group.\textsuperscript{22} Members of the Stars began to self-exile, predominantly to European countries where their artistic careers prospered. For example, Ai Weiwei, one member of the Stars, has had a strong international career as a dissident artist who continues to comment on freedom of speech and government censorship through his art. Additionally, several Stars members were invited to participate in the Venice Biennale, such as Ai Weiwei, Huang Rui, Qu Leilei, and Mao Lizi. I provide an analysis of the subsequent successful careers of many Stars members in order to show how their experiences being censored created public interest in their work and therefore enhanced their careers as artists on an international scale.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 39.
One movement that shaped the social climate after the exhibitions and influenced the actions of the Stars was the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign of 1983, supported by Deng Xiaoping and centered on the belief of “negative influence of Western culture.”\textsuperscript{23} It is clear that this movement is at least partially a response to the \textit{Stars Exhibition} because the goal of the artists was to promote democratic values by employing Western art styles. An analysis of this movement will reveal how art censorship was used by the Chinese government as a political tool to control the nation during this period of openness to the international community.

Another event that also indicates the effects of censorship in China is the Tiananman Square protests of 1989. This movement was defined by a strong desire for democracy in China. According to a handbill created for the protest that outlined the protestors’ stance, “Our slogan is to oppose bureaucracy and authoritarianism, and strive for democracy and freedom.”\textsuperscript{24} A major democratic value that protesters sought was the freedom of speech. This movement suggests that repressive actions of the government such as the censoring of the \textit{Stars Exhibition}, one instance of China’s violation of freedom of speech, have contributed to social and political opposition of the Chinese Communist Party. In this case, art censorship also contributed to further discourse about human rights and justice in modern China.

\textit{What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag?}

Dread Scott grew up in a middle-class neighborhood in Chicago and attended the School of Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) for his undergraduate degree, where he displayed his notorious installation \textit{What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag?} Scott’s political art installation was

\textsuperscript{23} Rui and Desheng, 29.
influenced by his discontent with President Ronald Reagan’s social policies. Under Reagan, the Republican right experienced a rise in power that informed not only domestic and international affairs, but also the cultural climate of the eighties. In a statement where he explains the meaning behind his work, Scott declared, “this is a world where a tiny handful controls the great wealth and knowledge that humanity as a whole has created.”

This was most likely a reference to Reagan’s tax reform, which provided the wealthy with tax cuts while increasing the gap between the rich and the poor. This economic, political and social inequality was what Scott sought to address in his art.

In describing his work, Scott referred to his observations of impoverished neighborhoods in Chicago with high minority populations, predominantly African American, that demonstrated an inequality of opportunity and education. Policies enacted by the Reagan administration perpetuated systemized economic and social inequality that contributed to this poverty, particularly the War on Drugs. Legislation that contributed to the War on Drugs such as the U.S Sentencing Reform Act of 1984 and The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 created minimum sentencing for crack-cocaine possession, a drug that was predominantly used by minorities in inner cities. Combined with overcrowded prisons, law enforcement also became more aggressive in inner cities. The institutionalized racism that resulted from government policies such as the War on Drugs exemplifies Scott’s dissatisfaction with American politics, giving insight on his inspiration for his controversial installation.

Because Scott’s work addresses issues of freedom of speech regarding flag desecration, a history of this discourse is also essential for understanding why this work was considered so

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controversial. According to a summary about flag protection acts from the Library of Congress, opposition to the Vietnam War led to multiple cases of public flag burning, which resulted in Congress’s enactment of the first Federal Flag Protection Act of 1968.26 In 1984, Gregory Lee “Joey” Johnson set fire to an American flag in protest of the re-nomination of President Ronald Reagan. He was arrested and charged with “desecration of [a] venerated object” on the grounds of the 1973 Texas state penal code.27 The case was eventually taken to the Supreme Court in Texas v Johnson, which ruled 5 to 4 decision in favor of Johnson. Protecting the First Amendment, Justice William Brennan declared that “governments may not prohibit expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable.”28 Chief Justice William Rehnquist disagreed, stating that the flag “deserved special protection and warranted certain restrictions on speech,” which contributed to a nationwide debate about flag desecration.

Displayed as part of a student exhibition at the SAIC, Scott’s work was an installation for audience participation. The installation consisted of a photomontage with images of flag-draped coffins, South Korean students burning flags with raised signs that read “Yankee go home son of a bitch,” and the question “What is the proper way to display a U.S flag?” written on top of the page. Underneath the photomontage, Scott installed a shelf with a book in which audience members were invited to answer this question. In order to write their response in the book, audience/participants were required to walk on an American flag, which was laid on the floor in front of the shelf. Scott’s installation addressed the issue of compulsory patriotism, the question

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28 Ibid., 201.
of freedom of speech in regards to flag burning or any desecration of the American flag, and the
values placed on symbolic objects.

*What Is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag?* drew the ire of not only the top of the
political hierarchy, but also from several interest groups and individuals from the public sphere.
First and foremost, Vietnam War veterans mobilized to protest Scott’s work, making
unsuccessful efforts to have it removed. Individual spectators who attended the exhibition further
contributed to its censoring as some people took it upon themselves to pick up the flag, fold it
properly, and place it on the shelf.29 While thousands of people participated in protests to
denounce the exhibition, some also protested to support Scott’s exercising of his First
Amendment rights. Individuals on opposing sides of the debate felt compelled to convey their
message through different uses of the American flag. For example, those opposed to Scott’s
installation proudly waved the American flag in the air as they marched in protest in front of the
SAIC. On the other hand, Scott’s advocates showed their support by desecrating American flags,
predominantly by burning them. Despite attempts by war veterans and the Chicago City Council
to have this work removed, the SAIC remained supportive of the artistic choices made by Scott
and allowed the work to stay.

The book in which people were invited to answer the question “What is the Proper Way
to Display a U.S Flag?” was filled with hundreds of pages of responses from thousands of
participants. These responses ranged from respect and support to disgust and opposition. Scott
provides samples of these responses on his website, which I use as evidence of these various
reactions. The variety of attitudes and opinions in these responses reveals the degree of

29 Michael Welch, John Sassi, Allyson McDonough, “Advances in Critical Cultural
Criminology: An Analysis of Reactions to Avant-Garde Flag Art,” *Critical Criminology* 11 no. 1
controversy that was engendered by this installation. Regardless of the content of each response, both supporters and critics contributed to the success of Scott’s work by generating public discourse about patriotism and American values, which was essentially his goal.

Eventually, officials from the city, state, and government began addressing flag desecration. Chicago’s City Council passed a local ordinance banning flag desecration.30 A prominent reason as to why this piece received so much public attention was that several politicians publicly denounced it. President George H. W. Bush declared the work “disgraceful.”31 Senator Bob Dole of Kansas also made a critical comment about Scott’s installation, suggesting that it was not art but simply an act of flag desecration.32 I argue that public statements such as this amplified the effects of this piece, a common theme among censored artworks. This idea is evident by the various newspaper articles that quoted these critical comments, such as The New York Times and the Los Angeles Times.33

Scott’s work became so impactful that several Congress people made fierce yet unsuccessful attempts at passing a Constitutional amendment that would ban desecration of the American flag. Senator Bob Dole of Kansas, one of the leading proponents of the flag desecration amendment and a critic of Scott’s installation, added to the proposed amendment the outlawing of “[flags] on the floor or ground,” a direct reference to What is the Proper Way to

30 Scott, interview with Kameelah Rasheed.
Display a U.S Flag? The flag desecration amendment was never passed because most Congress people as well as President George H. W. Bush feared that such a law would infringe on the right to freedom of speech protected by the First Amendment. Nonetheless, on October 28, 1989, Congress enacted the Flag Protection Act (FPA) of 1989 that outlawed intentional desecration of the American flag. The FPA of 1989 was a strategic editing of the FPA of 1968 that “[removed] any language which the courts might find made the statute one that was aimed at suppressing a certain type of expression.” This manipulation of language suggests awareness among policymakers of possible violations of the First Amendment. Catching the attention of the federal government, Scott and his installation inspired nationwide discourse regarding flag desecration, freedom of speech, and patriotism. Efforts to outlaw Scott’s display of the flag raised the question of what is more important to national identity: the preservation of a symbolic object, or the First Amendment that ensures freedom of speech, a guiding principle of democracy.

To protest the recent enactment of the FPA of 1989, Scott, along with David Blalock, Sean Eichman, and Gregory Johnson (from Texas v. Johnson) burned American flags on the U.S Capitol steps on October 30, 1989. Although my thesis primarily focuses on Scott’s installation in the exhibition, his action of flag burning is a continuation of the ideological focus in his installation and resulted in an even greater production of discourse regarding flag desecration and the First Amendment. Arrested by the Capitol police, Scott and the others were charged by the Washington, D.C district court for violating the FPA of 1989. Although the district court ruled in favor of Scott, Solicitor General Kenneth Starr used an FPA provision that required the Supreme Court to review the district court’s decision. As a result, the 1990 Supreme Court case

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34 Watson, “Bush Calls Flag Art Here ‘Disgraceful.’”
35 Luckey, 2.
U.S v. Eichman ensued. The court ruled in favor of Eichman and Scott, stating that flag burning was indeed protected by the First Amendment. Starting in an undergraduate art exhibition, Scott and his installation played a pivotal role in the history of flag desecration in the U.S as they inspired federal legislation, government action, and public discourse on the topic.

Comparing the Cases

Both the Stars and Dread Scott received enhanced public opposition to or acceptance of their artwork as a result of government influence. In the United States, the mobilization of Vietnam War veterans, the critical statements made by Bush and other politicians, and efforts by the federal government to nationally outlaw flag desecration led to multiple large protests. It also resulted in several prominent newspapers reporting on Scott and the installation. Similarly, in China, excessive use of police force to shut down the Stars Exhibition led to a protest march with thousands of participants, as well as two subsequent Stars exhibitions that attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors. The sizable protests of the exhibitions are prominent sources of the impassioned responses that were generated from each case of censorship.

The protests that occurred with each incident of censorship mark another similarity between the cases. Both the Stars and Scott engaged in protest marches against their respective governments after they perceived the actions of these authorities as repressive, believing that their freedom of expression had been infringed upon. The artists physically confronted their governments by marching to political institutions to air their grievances. The Stars organized a protest that ended at the Municipal Government building where they presented authorities with “A Letter to the People,” denouncing this case of censorship, while Scott and other activists

37 Luckey, 7.
protested the FPA of 89 by burning flags on the Capitol steps, resulting in a Supreme Court case.

The contrasts between these cases exemplify the different manifestations that censorship takes. While the Stars faced censorship from law enforcement and the government, the top of the political hierarchy, Scott encountered attempts at censorship not only from the top, but also from civilians who were exercising their right to free speech. These differences reflect the notion that instances of censorship are highly circumstantial.

While both the United States and Chinese governments were willing to take measures to combat those who would threaten the country’s national values despite their different political systems, they did so differently. The protection that Scott received from the SAIC, refusing to close the exhibition, and his constitutional right to freedom of speech contrasted with the abrupt shutting down of the Stars Exhibition by Chinese police forces. Regardless of how objectionable Scott’s display of the flag was to many, he was able to continue showing his installation until the exhibition’s scheduled closing date because people accepted his right to free speech. On the other hand, the Stars Exhibition was forcibly closed on the second day of its showing without the same considerations. The careful analyses of the artist’s actions and intentions in a court of law are a result of democracy, as opposed to strict cultural regulations and artistic guidelines that are products of China’s authoritarian government. The differences between the reactions of each case and the way that censorship was carried out parallel the differences in the governments under which they were produced.

Another important difference between these cases is the artists’ ability to continue producing works in the countries where they were censored. While Dread Scott continues to produce politically controversial artworks in the United States, most of which still engender controversy, various members of the Stars chose to leave China. Although the Stars were not
necessarily forced to leave China, their continuous censoring from magazine publications and universities as a result of the pressures from the PRC evidently left them with a feeling of hopelessness in their attempt to exercise artistic freedoms. This difference informs the ways in which the artist/s were able to gain visibility and achieve successful careers as artists after the incidents. While Scott was able to stay in the same place in which he produced the controversial installation, the Stars had to leave China in order to practice art freely.

In the remainder of this thesis, I investigate these two cases of censorship in light of New Censorship Theory. Chapter 2 provides an examination of the Stars and their Stars Exhibition, and Chapter 3 focuses on Dread Scott and his installation What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag? Both of these chapters begin with the political and cultural backgrounds of the artist/s respective countries. For China, I emphasize the relationship between art and politics by highlighting its national policies on art and culture imposed by Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. For the U.S, President Ronald Reagan’s economic and social policies are outlined in order to highlight the institutionalized marginalization that Scott is responding to in his work, as well as a brief history of flag desecration in the U.S. In each chapter, I then go on to give detailed accounts of the exhibitions, including descriptions of the artwork, the events that took place, and the way that each case of censorship was carried out. I provide both the positive and negative reactions and responses towards the exhibitions in order to gage the general opinions of different types of individuals and institutions. The individuals, media outlets, and different levels of government that contributed to each exhibition’s censoring are examined in order to see how censorship is a collective act of society. Finally, I investigate the degrees of success that the artists received after their incidents of censorship, tracing their careers from directly after the exhibitions to current day. By comparing these two cases studies, I highlight the unique manifestations that censorship
takes, while also noting the more common effect of the production of discourse and the structures of power.
The Stars’ *Stars Exhibition*

In 1979, two activist artists in Beijing, Huang Rui and Ma Desheng, formed an avant-garde artist group called “Stars,” also known as “Xingxing.” The Stars gained international notoriety, as they were the first Chinese avant-garde art group to hold an unofficial public art exhibition, the *Stars Exhibition*, as a protest of Mao Zedong and government suppression during the Cultural Revolution.\(^{38}\) For this reason, they continue to be considered the initiators of contemporary art in the PRC.\(^{39}\) They were also famous for having their unauthorized *Stars Exhibition* censored by the Chinese government. Ironically, the repression of this exhibition proved auspicious for the careers of many individual artists in the Stars, who went on to gain international recognition outside of China. Government censorship in this case also resulted in the mobilization of an outraged Chinese public to denounce this deep-rooted repression. By analyzing the manifestation and effects of censorship in this case, I argue that government efforts to silence the Stars ultimately led to the circulation of discourse on free speech in China, reflections on the nation’s historical oppression, and greater visibility for the artists that paved the way for their successful artistic careers.

The Stars were comprised of painters, sculptors, and poets who employed Western avant-garde styles as a way to promote democratic values through art. Members were selected if they were “artists with views against the mainstream system.”\(^{40}\) The members are considered amateur artists because most did not receive formal art training and were not involved with official art institutions.\(^{41}\) While more than thirty artists participated in the group’s exhibitions between 1979

\(^{39}\) Ibid.
\(^{40}\) Huang Rui and Ma Desheng, 33.
\(^{41}\) Wu Hung, *Exhibiting Experimental Art in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 12.
and 1981, certain members are generally considered central: Ai Wei Wei, Bo Yun, Gan Shaocheng, Huang Rui, Li Shuang, Ma Desheng, Mao Lizi, Qu Leilei, Shao Fei, Wang Keping, Wang Luyan, Yan Li, Yang Yiping, Yin Guangzhong, Zhong Ahcheng and Zhu Jinshi (Figure 1).  

Although the Stars Exhibition occurred during a period of political activism and artistic experimentation in the post-Mao era, it is important to review Mao’s China because the Stars were commenting on this period. The members of the group were all born between the late 1940’s and 1950’s during Mao’s leadership and experienced oppression during the Cultural Revolution. The works in their exhibitions served as responses to the injustices of the Mao era. Therefore, knowledge of the leadership of Mao and the ideologies that constituted the Cultural Revolution is essential for understanding the controversial nature of the group’s exhibitions. The chapter begins with an outline of the political and cultural context of the exhibitions, including Mao Zedong’s totalitarian leadership, his cultural policies such as the implementation of socialist realism as the national art style of China, the Cultural Revolution, the transition of power to Deng Xiaoping after Mao’s death in 1976, and China during the post-Mao era. It is also essential to examine artistic productions in China around the time of the exhibitions, as well as the connotations and historical uses of the Western styles that the Stars employed as their artistic methodology.

Political and Cultural Background of China

Mao Zedong, the Chairman of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), ruled China from 1949 until his death in 1976. Mao’s rise to power was fueled by his involvement in the Chinese

42 Cohn, “Meditation on the Stars,” 68-73.
Civil War between Nationalists and Communists in the first half of the twentieth century.

Growing up, Mao was an educated revolutionary and a devout Communist whose success as a protester led to his promotion to one of the nine members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in the early 1920’s. Mao was later given the role as the leader of the Communist Party’s Peasant Movement Committee, responsible for bringing the Communist revolution to the countryside. Party members were cautious of Mao’s bold military ideas, yet he proved an effective leader after successfully heading the Long March where the CCP made significant strides in defeating the Nationalists.\(^{43}\) By the spring of 1935, Mao was chosen to be a political officer of the Red Army and was elected Chairman of the CCP, further establishing himself as a leader of the Party.\(^{44}\) Although critics of Mao remained within the CCP, he used intimidation and violence to suppress these criticisms, most notably during the rectification campaign at Yan’an.

After gaining authority from the success of the Long March, in the spring of 1942, seven years before the founding of the PRC, Mao launched the Yan’an Rectification Campaign. Mao established this campaign in order to create an ideologically unified Communist Party by addressing disagreements on Marxist theory applied to Chinese politics and criticisms against the Party for treating its members unequally.\(^{45}\) At the time of these lectures, the CCP was fighting in the War of Resistance against Japan and also the Chinese Civil War against the Nationalists. Because of this, Mao believed that political and cultural unity among party leaders was imperative. The campaign foreshadowed Mao’s methodology of purging intellectuals and

\(^{44}\) Lynch, 145.
dissidents, which included encouraging writers to express their dissent and subsequently punishing them for their criticisms either with imprisonment or manual labor in the countryside. For example, during a meeting at the campaign Wang Shiwei openly criticized the economic inequality within the CCP, angering Mao who consequently put Wang on trial for undermining the Party.\textsuperscript{46} Wang was imprisoned and then several years later executed. This exemplifies how Mao consolidated his power in the Party through intimidation. The Yan’an Rectification Campaign was intended to guide intellectuals towards a state of submission to party authorities, and Mao’s violent methods of imposing this unity made the Party fear him and unquestioningly support his leadership. After the campaign, in response to the Nationalist leader publishing a textbook that labeled himself as China’s leader, the Communist Party created a textbook using Mao’s writings, which helped legitimize Mao’s role as the head of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and also demonstrated his support within the party.\textsuperscript{47}

Mao expressed his belief that art could be used as a political tool to unify the CCP and China during the Yan’an Rectification Campaign, where he delivered lectures on art and culture known as “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Art and Literature” or the “Talks.” During the “Talks,” Mao stressed the relationship between art and politics, and demanded a conventional artistic style that would be used to unite and educate the citizens. He believed that all art and literature should serve the interests of “the masses,” which he defined as workers, peasants, soldiers, and revolutionary cadres. In his speech, Mao stated, “No revolutionary writer or artist can do any meaningful work unless he is closely linked with the masses, gives expression to their thoughts and feelings, and serves them as a loyal spokesman.”\textsuperscript{48} This statement exemplifies how Mao

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 89.
\textsuperscript{48} Mao Zedong, “Talks at the Yan’an Forum.”
carefully and meticulously outlined the role of the artist within the regime. He presented these cultural guidelines as if he was creating a new and exciting role for the artist as the “spokesman” of the masses. Mao viewed abstract art in the west as bourgeois. Instead, he advocated for realistic forms easily understood by the masses. Yet Mao also advocated for a romanticized illustration of life under the CCP. “Life as reflected in works of literature and art can and ought to be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life.”

When these idealistic visions were implemented into China’s policies during the Cultural Revolution, it prohibited illustrations of the true struggles that faced China, such as hunger from China’s Great Famine of 1958-62 and violence from the Cultural Revolution. The “Talks” exemplify Mao’s belief in the power of the arts to affect political ideologies, essentially paving the way for the implementation of Socialist Realism in China. The “Talks” remained a crucial part of Chinese politics throughout Mao’s reign, as they were published in 1943 and again in 1953 as part of a required reading for all party officials and intellectuals.

Mao announced the official founding of the PRC on October 1, 1949, at Tiananmen in front of a crowd of 100,000 people. As Chairman of the PRC, Mao implemented a totalitarian system in China in which his assertive political control extended to all aspects of life, including “housing, salary, education, employment, and social mobility.” The goal of his revolution was to create an ideologically united Chinese nation with a reputation of military and political strength and progress despite its actual weaknesses, which dictated both his domestic and foreign

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49 Ibid.
50 Lynch, 169
51 Denton, 465.
52 Clements, 93.
policies. Within the first months of his leadership, Mao demanded the confiscation of private property as part of his efforts to ease China into a communist society. He sought to create a peaceful and organized economy. However, with China’s sudden involvement in the Korean War of 1950-1953, Mao’s plans were put to a halt, as China was forced to embrace a military-based economy and society.

Mao decided to send the PRC military to help communist North Korea invade American-backed South Korea because of his fear that if Americans overtook Korea, they would eventually seize the opportunity to invade China as well. Many of Mao’s foreign policies were based on this anxiety of American military takeover. Throughout the three years of the Korean War, nearly half a million Chinese troops were killed and another half wounded. The war resulted in increased tensions between China and the U.S. Domestically, it hampered the PRC’s economy as China was put into greater debt from wartime production costs.

Mao governed China through ideological control and the imposition of absolute truths that citizens were not permitted to question. He integrated conflict and “class struggle” as part of his domestic policies by cultivating oppositional forces through anti-campaigns and movements such as the Cultural Revolution. Similar to his rationale during the Yan’an Rectification Campaign, Mao employed anti-campaigns in order to eradicate that which did not align with Maoist ideologies in pursuit of a united China in the in the wake of war with Korea. In 1951 “the three Anti-Movement” began, which targeted corruption in Party administration. In 1952, “the five Anti-Movement” was introduced in Mao’s attempt to remove corruption in the

54 Lynch, 151.
55 Ibid., 152.
56 Ibid., 154
57 Ibid., 3.
58 Lin, 26
59 Ibid., 155.
workplace, such as stealing state property or fraud. His intention with these campaigns was to force China into a state of political and economic submission while also exposing perceived enemies.

Mao advocated for a drastic shift away from Confucian tradition and capitalism by defining the appropriate customs, habits, culture, and thinking of China, exemplified in his national policies regarding culture and art.\textsuperscript{60} Transforming his theories from the Yan’an Rectification Campaign into cultural policies during his position as Chairman, Mao adopted Socialist Realism as China’s national art style in the 1950’s, a precursor to the Cultural Revolution.

Socialist Realism has historically served as an art style and a political tactic. The Soviet Union employed Socialist Realism from the early 1930’s to the 1980’s to ensure that art aligned with its political and ideological agendas.\textsuperscript{61} Socialist Realism was intended to emphasize the prosperity and unity of the nation. Its general aspects included “mandatory optimism, aesthetic conservatism, moral puritanism, and…’party-mindedness.’”\textsuperscript{62} To implement the doctrine of Socialist Realism, the Russian government created guidelines for artists that limited subject matter to soldiers, families and workers portrayed as heroes. Additionally, when Joseph Stalin became leader of the USSR in 1922, artists were obligated to present him as “a benevolent father or a brave leader.”\textsuperscript{63} Soviet leaders sought to constrain the creativity of artists because they understood art’s powerful influence on the public. Mao’s desire for an artistic style that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{61} “Socialist Realism,” \textit{Salem Press Encyclopedia} (January, 2015), Research Starters, EBSCOhost.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
promoted the Party and the prosperity of the China, expressed during his the “Talks” at Yan’an, was best demonstrated by Socialist Realist art.

In order to implement Socialist Realism in China, the Soviet Union and Chinese governments dictated cross-cultural interactions between the nations’ artists. Soviet-style Socialist Realist art was employed in China “as a model of integrating realist style with socialist content.” Mao embraced the official style of the Soviet Union because it exemplified another communist dictatorship that was successful. He invited artists from the USSR to teach the Socialist Realist style of art to students and professors at China’s art academies. From 1955 until 1957, the Soviet government sent Moscow-based artist Konstantin M. Maksimov to the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing to train 21 selected art professors in oil painting in Soviet-style realism. Additionally, in 1952, the artistic methods of Russian artist Pavel Chistyakov were promoted by art academies, taught to all drawing instructors throughout China in a special workshop. In the same year, Chinese Communist Party committees were introduced to all Chinese academies, virtually controlling all academic content including productions in art academies. By enforcing this artistic training of both teachers and students, the Chinese government was controlling the content of education as well as the art world to shape the future of Chinese culture.

Despite Soviet influences, Chinese Socialist Realism was specific to Mao’s political ideologies that guided his leadership and advanced the PRC. Socialist Realist art in China was limited to artistic depictions of happy worker and peasants in fields, a prosperous China, and

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65 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
Mao as a powerful and popular leader alongside other smiling subjects. One oil painting that exemplifies Mao’s ideal socialist realist artwork is *The Founding Ceremony of the Nation* by Dong Xiwen (1951) (Figure 2). The painting depicts the historical moment of Mao founding the PRC at Tiananmen in 1949, surrounded by Party leaders and standing before a massive crowd. While this painting embodies the tenants of Socialist Realism in its realistic rendering and its celebration of the Party, it also contains variations from Soviet-style painting, such as brighter colors and Chinese inspired patterns. Mao’s satisfaction with this painting is evident by its immediate approval and its reproduction as a poster, printed 56,000 times. It was also repainted three times based on changing party officials throughout Mao’s regime. In order to ensure the continuation of this type of artistic production, Mao and the Party launched several political and cultural campaigns.

The most significant campaign in which Mao and his administration ruthlessly enforced artistic and political policies was the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, proclaimed by the PRC on May 16, 1966. The Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976 was a ten-year political campaign that sought to extinguish “class enemies,” or those who failed to conform to the ideologies of Mao’s Communist Party. Mao enacted this campaign in order to eradicate any remaining critics within the PRC’s leadership that threatened his implementation of Communism by supporting aspects of capitalism and traditional Chinese values such as Confucianism. Mao sought to rid the nation of “liberal bourgeois elements” that contradicted the workers, peasants, and soldiers

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69 Croizier, 60.
70 Smith, 152.
71 Lin, 9.
inherent in Socialist Realism and his overall political ideologies. In order to execute this, Mao instilled factional politics within the masses through psychological manipulation by employing a Marxist theory of “Proletariat dictatorship,” which labeled citizens as either enemies or friends of the Communist System. Based on this notion, millions who were perceived as a threat to Communism were exiled and persecuted. Intellectuals, party leaders, and any citizen who failed to conform to Maoist ideologies were sent to the countryside to perform manual labor or were executed. Through intimidation and threats of imprisonment, exile or death, Mao succeeded in cowing dissidence and any cultural expressions that did not reflect his own.

Mao used slogans to persuade the youth to rebel against their parents and teachers and the working class against their party leaders. He disrupted the education system by closing schools and preventing children from receiving formal education. In 1968, he had all middle school graduates sent to the countryside where they would be “reeducated” by farmers and peasants to counter their traditional and alleged “bourgeois” schooling. Mao’s manipulation of the youth is most evident by his establishment of the Red Guards, an untrained and uneducated youth militia between the ages of thirteen and twenty-five that violently carried out Mao’s demands. They attacked Communist Party leaders, conducted hostile home invasions, destroyed thousands of historically significant institutions including Confucius’s home, burned ancient books, and publicly tortured and humiliated individuals, even killing many without consequence.

Art during the Cultural Revolution was used as propaganda to abolish remnants of capitalism and to promote Chairman Mao and prosperity in China under his leadership. Mao

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72 Smith, 152.
73 Lin, 8-9.
75 Ibid., 11.
employed art as political propaganda because of his belief that it would contribute to an ideological transformation of the masses, reinforcing a strong connection between politics and art. For example, one branch of the Red Guards was part of the Zhejiang Joint Provincial Headquarters base located at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts.\textsuperscript{77} At this base, talented Red Guards and leading members of the revolution were art academy students and teachers responsible for spreading acceptable artistic themes throughout China to schools, factories, villages, farms, and office buildings. Portraits of Mao became a popular theme and an iconic image of the revolution in order to emphasize his authority. One example of an acceptable and idealistic artwork during the Cultural Revolution was Liu Chunhua’s oil painting \textit{Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan}, 1967 (Figure 3). Part of the exhibition “Mao Zedong’s Thought Illuminates the Anyuan Workers Movement” in 1967 at the Museum of the Revolution in Beijing, the painting depicts a young Mao as a god gracing the earth with his divine leadership.\textsuperscript{78} Artworks favorable to Mao and the Party were reproduced as posters called \textit{huapian}, purchased for decorative or inspirational uses.\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan} exemplified \textit{huapian}, being reproduced in print over nine hundred million times and given out in poster form for free with copies of journals such as the People’s Daily.\textsuperscript{80} Artworks such as this were commonplace in China, while more experimental art forms, such as the modern art that the Stars would embrace, were rarely seen.

Despite Mao’s demands for romanticized portrayals of China under his leadership, by the end of the Cultural Revolution, as a result of his economic, political, and cultural policies, two

\textsuperscript{79} Shen, 154.
\textsuperscript{80} Shanchun, 94-95.
million people had suffered chronic malnutrition, twenty million had been sent to the countryside for “reeducation” and manual labor, and nearly half of a million people were either executed or committed suicide.\textsuperscript{81} The Cultural Revolution ended with the death of Mao Zedong in 1976.

After Mao’s death, those affected by the revolution were able to re-evaluate and reflect on their memories of oppression.\textsuperscript{82} In order to express this discontent, millions protested in Tiananmen Square on April 5, 1976, which foreshadowed the Democracy Wall and the more popular 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations. Beginning with the collective mourning of the beloved Premier Zhou Enlai, the 1976 demonstration started with poetry readings by citizens and quickly escalated to public outcries condemning the oppression and violence that occurred during the Cultural Revolution.\textsuperscript{83} This was one of the first instances of public criticism of Mao during the post-Mao era. Mao’s chosen successor Hua Guofeng continued Mao’s policy of censoring free speech. The demonstration was labeled a counterrevolutionary event and suppressed.\textsuperscript{84} The types of public outcries expressed during this protest would later permitted in 1978 when Deng Xiaoping became the leader of China.

Deng Xiaoping ruled China from 1978 to 1992 after overpowering Hua Guofeng. Deng had an eventful political history during Mao’s reign. In 1956 when Mao launched the Hundred Flowers Campaign, Deng was sent to punish critics for speaking out against the Communist Party, including sending nearly one million intellectuals to the countryside to perform manual labor.\textsuperscript{85} However, Deng became critical of certain policies by Mao and was jailed during the


\textsuperscript{82} Lin, 1.

\textsuperscript{83} Merle Goldman, \textit{From Comrade to Citizen} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 27.

\textsuperscript{84} Lin, 22.

\textsuperscript{85} Jiu-Hwa Lo Upshur, "Deng Xiaoping," \textit{Salem Press Biographical Encyclopedia} (January
Cultural Revolution in 1966. He was later rehabilitated, and in 1973 became vice premier by Premier Zhou Enlai. After the deaths of Zhou and Mao Zedong’s wife and a brief power struggle, Deng became the leader of China.

Deng acknowledged that the structure of the Chinese government and economy had to change in order to modernize China.\(^6\) The policies at the beginning of his leadership are referred to as “Reform and Opening Up,” which advocated for a more decentralized government, as opposed to the highly centralized one under Mao.\(^7\) In 1978, he introduced “The Four Modernizations,” a set of economic reforms in agriculture, industry, education, and defense with the goal of triggering a free market in China and stimulating economic growth.\(^8\) One aspect of this plan was to open China up to the rest of the world in order to participate in foreign trade and foreign investment after years of isolation under Mao, known as the Open-Door Policy. This enabled limited cultural exchanges between the East and West. Deng acknowledged that Western influence in science and technology was necessary, yet sought to limit the its cultural influence in favor of a new sense of national identity with traditional Chinese culture.\(^9\)

Deng allowed people to exercise degrees of independent thinking in order to distance himself and his administration from the tyrannical reputation of Mao and to regain the public’s trust. Deng denounced the Cultural Revolution and strongly supported the notion of “thinking things out for yourself,” as opposed to unquestionably supporting Mao.\(^10\) Those who had been

\(^6\) Kissinger, 330.
\(^7\) Ibid., 329.
\(^8\) David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 121.
\(^10\) Kissinger, 336.
exiled to the countryside by Mao for “reeducation” were now permitted to return as regular citizens. He supported intellectuals such as teachers, artists and writers by encouraging them to partake in political debates regarding the future of China, such as whether or not to employ communist theory in the nation’s policies.91 These debates are best exemplified by the activities that took place at the Democracy Wall movement of 1978-1989.

The Democracy Wall movement advocated for democratic values implemented into China’s political reforms.92 Participants in this activist movement were generally “urban youths” whose education had been brought to a halt during the Cultural Revolution.93 A significant number of protesters were groups of former Red Guards who returned to the cities from their exile in the countryside to demand human, civil, and political rights. These activists sought the right to free speech. They used various means to spread their message, such as posters, pamphlets, and protesting in public places such as parks. They were able to express disagreements with party leaders and embrace alternative ideological views such as liberalism. For example, activists Xu Wenli and Liu Qing started the first unofficial journal April 5 Forum, which published political analyses, commentaries, critiques of the Cultural Revolution, and proposals for economic reform.94 This inspired a wave of other unofficial journals publishing similar materials, such as Reference News for the Masses, Beijing Spring, and Seek Truth Journal. Additionally, activist Wei Jingsheng displayed a wall poster in 1978 calling for a “Fifth Modernization” as democracy. Referring to Deng’s economic reform called the Four Modernizations, Wei stated, “Without democracy, there can be no four modernizations.”95

91 Lin, 31.
92 Goldman, 7.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., 34.
95 Ibid., 35.
Despite this activity, Deng was uninterested in changing the structure of the government and embracing democracy. Instead, he sought to legitimize the Communist Party after the unreasonable violence of the Cultural Revolution. At first, Deng encouraged these activities in order to distinguish his administration from that of Mao’s. However, in 1979 Deng shut down the Democracy Wall and some leaders of the movement were arrested, including Wei Jingsheng. Despite Deng’s degree of free speech and openness to Western culture, dissidents still posed a threat to a united Chinese national identity. There remained underlying ideas of “class enemies” as a threat to socialism under Deng, which eventually enabled the government to justifiably silence or monitor its citizens through suppression of protests and the enactment of the Anti-Spiritual Campaign of 1984. As Deng sought a new political and economic approach in China, he took advantage of post-Mao critiques by identifying Maoists who posed as a threat to his new government. This pattern of brief liberalization combined with underlying attempts to control the public was played out in the art world as well.

Chinese contemporary art began in 1976 with the end of the Cultural Revolution and the death of Mao Zedong, marking the beginning of a period of political and cultural uncertainty. Paralleling the open political debates regarding political and economic approaches for China, the beginning of contemporary Chinese art created an opportunity for artists to experiment with alternative concepts and styles previously banned during the Cultural Revolution. An announcement made by the Fourth Congress of Literature and Art Workers in November 1979 stated that art was to be no longer restricted by government-imposed guidelines and new art

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96 Lin, 34.
97 Dijk, 14.
98 Goldman, 31.
99 Smith, 152.
forms were encouraged. Additionally, in 1977, the Zhejiang Academy of Art, a prominent national art academy, was reopened after being forcibly shut down during the Cultural Revolution. The academy provided students with a large art library that contained Western books and art journals.

The new openness in China contributed to the nation’s artistic atmosphere by permitting art from around the world to be shown there, providing influences of Western modern art. Foreign art exhibitions became more frequent in China during the 1970’s, displaying mostly Western art, including a 1977 exhibition of nineteenth and twentieth century Romanian art, an exhibition in March 1978 entitled *Exhibition of French Rural Landscape Paintings from the 19th and 10th Century* at the National Gallery of Art in Beijing, two exhibitions by Pablo Picasso, and an exhibition of German artist Käthe Kollwitz. These exhibitions galvanized the members of the Stars, who made their slogan, “Picasso is our figurehead and Käthe Kollwitz our forerunner.” Young artists used this inspiration to create commentaries on the Cultural Revolution by comparing their own histories and cultures to those of the West.

The avant-garde styles that Chinese artists adapted originated in the West. Styles that became popular from China’s Open-Door policy included Impressionism, Abstraction, Cubism, and Expressionism. In the West, artists who pioneered these art movements were recognized as dissidents critical of capitalism. Modern artists in the west sought to break with the western tradition in painting. Abstract Expressionism was the artistic style of the existentialist movement

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100 Lin, 79.
102 Dijk, 18.
of the post-WWII period when artists became disillusioned with the violence imposed by authoritarian systems and prized individual autonomy instead.\textsuperscript{104} Chinese artists adopted the western avant-garde modernist styles because the styles themselves symbolized rebellion.

Deng still maintained that art must complement Chinese political ideology. However, he was much less dogmatic than Mao. During the first year of his leadership, Deng praised the direction that Mao had set, stating, “Our policy on literature and art was on the right course and our achievements in this area were remarkable during the seventeen years prior to the Cultural Revolution.”\textsuperscript{105} While he denounced the radical cultural policies under Mao, he maintained that art must serve the interests of the Party.\textsuperscript{106} Nevertheless, Deng condoned relatively unrestricted cultural innovations in order to distance himself and his administration from the violence of the Cultural Revolution and thus legitimize his power. Artist collectives such as the Stars were able to take advantage of this brief period of openness. Experimental exhibitions became more frequent in China as artists began organizing themselves into artist groups in the late 1970’s. These groups distinguished themselves from official art circles by creating works inspired by forms and styles used in the west, forms that signified political rebellion against the status quo.\textsuperscript{107}

\textit{About the Stars Exhibition}

Founders of the Stars Huang Rui, Ma Desheng, Zhong Acheng, and Qu Leilei met in 1978 when they were all working for an unofficial literary magazine called \textit{Today}. Launched in 1978 by Stars founder Huang Rui, \textit{Today} was an independent, underground magazine widely

\textsuperscript{104} Robert Atkins, \textit{Art Speak: A Guide to Contemporary Ideas, Movements, and Buzzwords, 1945 to the Present} (Hong Kong: Abbeville Press, 2014), 124.

\textsuperscript{105} Maria Galikowski, \textit{Art and Politics in China 1949-1984} (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1998), 189.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{107} Dijk, 15.
circulated among participants in the Democracy Wall movement. The soon-to-be members of the Stars’ participation in Today established an immediate connection as political activists fighting for democracy in China.

The Stars used modern art styles associated with the western avant-garde in order to challenge China’s history of cultural control and suppression of freedom of expression under Mao. The group borrowed from modernist styles that were previously banned in China, which included German Expressionism, Fauvism, Dada, Cubism, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, and Impressionism. By employing avant-garde styles from the west, the Stars were rejecting Communist ideology in favor of democratic values. The Stars depicted their own realities, observations, and feelings rather than the romanticized vision of life under Mao. Because of the political and artistic uncertainty and experimentation of the period, any exhibition with such a large range of historically political styles would have been somewhat controversial as it contradicted the correct way to represent reality according to Mao and the PRC.

The exhibition included work that addressed explicit political issues; however, their intention was also to make an implicit political statement by using new styles to promote self-expression. In a preface to the first Stars Exhibition, Huang Rui described the group, stating, “We, twenty-three art explorers, place some fruits of our labor here. The world leaves unlimited possibilities for explorers. We have used our own eyes to know the world, and our own brushes and awls to participate in it. Our paintings contain all sorts of expressions, and these expressions

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109 Atkins, 238.

speak to our individual ideals.”\textsuperscript{111} Both explicitly and implicitly, the Stars intentionally used these historical avant-garde styles because they represented rebellion, as well as freedom of speech and individual expression.

The Stars held three separate exhibitions between 1979 and 1980. The first (unauthorized) \textit{Stars Exhibition} from September 27 to 28, 1979 was held outside of the National Art Gallery in Beijing. The second \textit{Stars Exhibition} took place from November 23 to December 2, 1979 at an art gallery in Beijing called Huafang Zhai. This was the first authorized exhibition of the Stars. The \textit{Second Stars Exhibition} took place from August 20 to September 7, 1980.\textsuperscript{112} This was the Stars’ third exhibition in total, but only their second authorized exhibition.

For the first \textit{Stars Exhibition}, a number of the artists actively courted being censored. Wang Keping, for example, showed twenty-eight sculptures at the first \textit{Stars Exhibition} (Figure 4).\textsuperscript{113} One wooden sculpture that made an overt political statement was \textit{Silence} (1979) (Figure 5). The sculpture depicted the head of a man with a log stuffed into his mouth that would prevent him from speaking, and an “X” carved over his left eye. Wang stated that his decision to carve the “X” was inspired by his beliefs that the Chinese government prevented its citizens from communicating with the rest of the world, metaphorically covering their eyes and mouth.\textsuperscript{114} It also represented an overall lack of freedom of speech, as the figure is unable to speak. Additionally, Wang’s other popular wooden sculpture from the exhibition that was also overtly political was \textit{Idol} (1979) (Figure 6). This wooden sculpture depicts a cartoonish portrait of Mao

\textsuperscript{112} Rui and Desheng, 39.
\textsuperscript{114} Xianting, “About the Stars Art Exhibition (1980),” 12.
that resembles Buddha, intended to comment on the public worship of Mao during the Cultural Revolution, as his portrait had become an icon. At the exhibition, Wang also presented Torso, a wooden sculpture of a nude female, cropped at her upper thighs and void of a neck or head (Figure 7). The figure’s breasts and genitals are emphasized from the color and pattern of the wood grain. Wang’s depiction of sexuality was shockingly explicit in the context of Socialist Realist art.

Wang was not the only artist to challenge Socialist Realism. For example, Ma Desheng’s woodblock print, Rest (1979) expressed his critical observations of peasants and workers who were sent to the countryside to perform manual labor during the Cultural Revolution (Figure 8). His black and white print depicts a tiny peasant plowing a vast field. The small figure in contrast with the seemingly infinite background combined with a lack of color conveys senses of isolation and hopelessness. These images contradict the heroic depictions of peasants and workers that Mao demanded of artists. Ma also included large blocks of black in his print because the CCP previously considered this color counterrevolutionary. The darkness of black contradicts the bright and shiny red that represented the Communist Party. Ma employed this technique in several of his prints in the exhibition, such as The People’s Cry (Figure 9). The piece depicts a small village at the bottom of the page, with five large hands and arms reaching out of the village. This image represented the community’s dissatisfaction with the current situation and desire for something better.

As stated above, choice of style also played an important role. Huang Rui’s artworks in the Stars Exhibition were stylistically radical without overt political imagery. For example, his oil painting The Guitar’s Story shows the influence of Fauvism with its gestural and spontaneous

brush strokes and two-dimensionality (Figure 10). The figures and the guitar are depicted elongated and disproportionate, revealing the influence of abstraction. Another one of Huang’s oil paintings entitled *Infinite Space* suggested Cubist inspiration (Figure 11). Huang filled the canvas with geometric shapes in shades of blue, brown and red, with gestural white marks strewn across them. Huang’s paintings synthesize several modern art styles inspired by the west, exemplifying the group’s experimental art practices.

Qu Leilei promoted social change through his artworks. In *Homeland, Homeland! No. 1* (1979) Qu expressed hope for the future of China in its path towards modernity (Figure 12). This print depicted two hands presenting a fetus, suggesting the importance of the youth in shaping politics and culture. His print *The Law* (1978) was also displayed, depicting a head with three faces with a yin-yang sign on their adjoined forehead, a symbol from Chinese philosophy that represents two opposite yet complementary energies (Figure 13). Other works from the exhibition included Ma Desheng’s woodblock print *Untitled 2 (Self Portrait)*, Yan Li’s oil painting *Home*, and Huang Rui’s oil painting *New Life in the Yuan Ming Yuan* (Figures 14, 15, and 16).

The artists sought to create and exhibit works that emphasized self-expression and their personal feelings about the injustices that occurred throughout Mao’s China. The emphasis on self-expression in their work represented their goal as an artist group to promote freedom of speech. By tapping into their own feelings, the group was able to identify with much of the public who was also dissatisfied with their lack of freedoms. What becomes exceptionally significant about the Stars was their ability to use western avant-garde modernist styles to mobilize and reach a public that had long been suppressed.

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The Censoring of the Stars

The Stars planned their first exhibition in May 1979, which they titled *The Stars Exhibition*. In June, Huang Rui and Ma Desheng applied to the Beijing Artists Association to request space for a formal art exhibition at the National Art Gallery, the headquarters of official art. The chairman of the association, Liu Xun, accepted the request, yet did not have any available space in the gallery until the following year. Liu’s decision was also most likely due to the national cultural policy at the time, which stated that artists displaying public art exhibitions must gain official approval from the PRC and prove their history of compliance to the artistic policies of the nation. Huang and Ma had not received this government approval and were unable to prove their compliance. Deciding that sharing their political message was too urgent to wait until the next year, the Stars secretly installed their exhibition on the park fence of the gallery without informing Liu Xun. On September 27, 1979, the Stars opened *The Stars Exhibition* outside the National Art Gallery without official permission (Figure 17). The exhibition contained 140 artworks of various media, content, and style by 23 artists: Huang Rui, Ma Desheng, Wang Keping, Ai Weiwei, Bo Yun, Zhong Acheng, Shao Fei, Shao Jingkun, Mao Lizi, Li Shuang, Qu Leilei, Yan Li, Zhou Maiyou, Zhu Jinshi, Yin Guangzhong, Guan Naixin, Yang Yiping, Gan Shaocheng, He Baosen, Wang Luyan, Zheng Zhenting, Cao Liwei, and Wang Jianzhong. Despite the different stylistic choices of the artists, all members of the Stars had a common goal to challenge aesthetic standards and political authority and to gain more individual freedom and self-expression.

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117 Rui and Desheng, 35.
119 Gladston, 93.
120 Rui and Desheng, 35.
The exhibition attracted many curious spectators as well as intellectuals and friends invited by the artists (Figure 18). Although the exhibition was unauthorized, several senior arts administrators attended and showed support for the group, including Jiang Feng, head of the Chinese Artists Association; Yu Feng, deputy director of the Chinese National Art Gallery; and Liu Xun, chairman of the Beijing Artists Association.\textsuperscript{121} Liu Xun’s support was particularly surprising, considering the group’s blatant disregard to his response to their previous exhibition request. These administrators revered the Stars for their bravery and commitment and even allowed them to store their works in the gallery at night.\textsuperscript{122} However, the exhibition’s brief success was overshadowed by its unexpected cancellation.

The exhibition was open for only two days before the Public Security Bureau of the Dongcheng District of Beijing intervened, dispatched by the Beijing Municipal Communist Party Committee (Figure 19).\textsuperscript{123} On September 28, 1979, the security officers attempted to shut down the exhibition on the grounds that it “[affected] public order and environmental cleanliness.”\textsuperscript{124} Additionally, the police brought a large group of students from the Public Security School to disrupt the exhibition by harassing the artists and instigating reporters. The next morning on September 29, 1979, the Public Security Bureau arrived at the scene with nearly one hundred policemen to confiscate all of the exhibited works.\textsuperscript{125} Authorities promised that the works would be returned, but could only be exhibited after the end of the national holiday on October 10. The art was kept in the storage room of the National Art Gallery (Figure 20). When Ma Desheng and Huang Rui took responsibility as the group’s leaders as the work was being confiscated, the

\textsuperscript{121} Andrews and Shen, 209.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{124} Rui and Desheng, 35.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
police took the two into custody on the grounds that they had not received legal permission from the national artists’ associations and the Public Security Bureau, and because the popularity of the show, in light of other activist activities of the Democracy Wall movement, was becoming a threat to public order.\textsuperscript{126} The two were released later that day. As the censorship that took place at the attempted \textit{Stars Exhibition} caught the attention of a public dissatisfied with Chinese politics, unofficial press organizations and Democracy Wall activists mobilized to denounce the Dongcheng Bureau.\textsuperscript{127}

Angered by the events that had just taken place, the Stars planned a protest march on October 1, 1979, the 30-year anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China. About one thousand protestors and foreign journalists assembled at the Democracy Wall at Xidan with the Stars (Figure 21).\textsuperscript{128} Leading members of the Stars Huang Rui and Ma Desheng expressed their grievances at the protest by explaining the repressive events that took place at the exhibition, the significance of the show, and their formal complaint against the Public Security Bureau (Figures 22 and 23). They protested against the violation of freedom of expression by marching from the Democracy Wall to the headquarters of the Peking Municipal Party Committee in order to hand deliver their formal letter of complaint against the bureau. One thousand people marched with the artists, including protestors and foreign journalists. Their protest slogans stated, “We want political democracy! We want artistic freedom!” and “The Beijing Municipal Public Security must protect citizens’ rights” (Figure 24).\textsuperscript{129} As the march commenced, hundreds of police officers arrived, blocking the protestors’s intended route. The

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{126} Gladston, 95. \\
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 9. \\
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 10.
\end{flushright}
parade of protesters detoured and successfully completed the march at the Municipal Government building. Six leading protesters met with representatives from the Municipal Committee to negotiate yet nothing was resolved.¹³⁰

On October 1, 1979, two activists and founders of the underground political magazine April 5th Forum Xu Wenli and Liu Qing wrote an impassioned “Letter to the People,” a document that expressed the artists’ and the public’s discontent with the repressive actions that took place at the exhibition. The document also provides an account of the goals and collective activities of activists, artists, and the unofficial press organizations at the protest led by the Stars. “Launched by the united unofficial press organizations, this collective parade for upholding the Constitution did all that one could hope in attempting to realize political democracy and artistic freedom in our country.”¹³¹ The letter was signed by several activists and artists: the organizers of The Stars Exhibition; Fertile Soil art group; and editors of magazines including Search, Today, Beijing Spring, and April Fifth Forum.¹³² The mobilization of so many organizations showed the group’s substantial influence on democratic movements in China during the early years of the post-Mao era. The treatment of the Stars Exhibition served as a significant factor in the public’s already increasing distrust in the government. The group’s ability to organize such a large and powerful protest in light of the recent censorship was indicative of the public’s determination for freedom of expression.

The following month, Liu Xun invited leading members of the Stars to meet with him at the National Art Museum, where they arranged for The Stars Exhibition to be remounted. This time, it was displayed at a venue in Beijing that belonged to the Beijing Artist Association called

¹³⁰ Ibid.
¹³¹ Ibid.
¹³² Ibid.
Huafang Zhai (Figure 25).\textsuperscript{133} This second exhibition contained 163 artworks by 23 artists.\textsuperscript{134} The exhibition was on display from November 23 to December 2, 1979, attracting nearly 200,000 visitors, including professors from art academies and other professionals from the fine art world.\textsuperscript{135}

The following year, the Stars held the second authorized \textit{Stars Exhibition} from August 20 to September 4, 1980. This time, the group obtained official approval from the Chairperson of the China Artists Association, Jiang Feng. The exhibition was successfully held in the National Art Museum of China and widely attended. Over the 18 days that it was opened, the second \textit{Stars Exhibition} received more than 100,000 visitors, a record-breaking number for the museum.\textsuperscript{136} The original group, listed above, was augmented by Song Hong, Zhu Jinshi, Yin Guangzhong, Guan Naixin, Yang Yiping, Zhi Zhong, Zhang Shiqi, Liu Daxuan, Xiao Dayuan, Li Yongqi, Bao Pao, Chen Yansheng, Zhao Dalu and Zhao Gang.\textsuperscript{137} The success of this exhibition exceeded that of the previous two Stars exhibitions, evident by the increase in participating artists as well as audience members.\textsuperscript{138} The popularity of the exhibition led museum officials to extend the exhibition until September 7, three days later than its scheduled closing.\textsuperscript{139}

\textbf{Aftermath of the Stars}

Following the exhibition, there remained degrees of open thinking, suggested by the

\textsuperscript{133} Rui and Desheng, 37.
\textsuperscript{134} Minglu, 92.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid; Gladston, 98.
\textsuperscript{136} Rui and Desheng, 39.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
increase in diversification and openness of the mass media. At the beginning of the economic reform in 1979 China only had 320 newspapers, yet by 1987 the number had grown to 2,509 with an even greater spike in readership, especially among young people.

Despite the sharp increase in publications, the government maintained the regulation of the press, demanding that all newspapers must be licensed by the government and overseen by the Party. In the early 1980’s, high-ranking government officials began punishing those who spoke out against the socialist system in China and its ideologies despite Deng’s encouragement of freethinking.

The specific question of how to implement Marxist theory in the Chinese political system became a sensitive topic. As intellectuals began to give their opinions on whether Marxism was suitable for China at all, government bureaucrats ruled that this degree of independent thinking was unacceptable.

For example, from 1979 to 1983 a group of intellectuals published several articles criticizing government corruption, violations of freedom, and the Party’s use of Marxism to justify their alienation of the country.

These declarations faced opposition from government officials, who believed that these claims were beyond the appropriate realm of intellectual thinking and posed a threat to socialism. In 1983, one of the prominent writers of these articles was removed from his job as the editor of People’s Daily and was rarely seen in public thereafter. This is just one example of the increased government suppression that led to multiple movements, both by the party and by the public.

The gradual expulsion of intellectuals by the government eventually led to the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign. In 1983, Deng Xiaoping defined “spiritual pollution” as that which

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140 Lin, 98.
141 Ibid., 81.
142 Ibid., 84.
143 Ibid., 64.
144 Ibid., 63.
opposes the socialist system and the Communist Party leadership and more broadly, any activity or ideology that was “corrupt.” He labeled Western influences as part of this anti-spiritual pollution. The campaign began in 1984 and was intended to “persecute the questioning scholars and quell the dissenting voices.” Originally, the campaign was aimed at eliminating pornography, which was seen as the root cause of increasing juvenile delinquency rates. However, as the campaign grew, party officials broadened the definition of spiritual pollution to include foreign music and art and types of dress, eventually leading to the return of harsh cultural suppression. Although Deng promised to wage fewer political campaigns such as the Cultural Revolution, the Anti-Spiritual Pollution proved that his claims would not hold true. The campaign even resembled the Cultural Revolution in that the government’s strategies to impose their rules included verbal abuse, humiliation, and detainment.

The public’s dissatisfaction with the crackdown on intellectual and political civil liberties was manifested with the 1989 occupation of Tiananmen Square. Starting as a small demonstration and eventually becoming a historical occupation at Tiananmen Square, this six-week long anti-government protest was inspired by a strong desire for democracy in China. A handbill created for the protests that outlined the activists’ stance stated, “Our slogan is to oppose bureaucracy and authoritarianism, and strive for democracy and freedom.” The protests began around April 15, 1989 with the collective mourning of the death of the politically progressive General Secretary Hu Yaobang at Tiananmen Square. Recognizing an opportunity to publically display their discontent with China’s political system, students in Beijing and other cities

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146 Lin, 64.
147 Mosher, 30.
148 Ibid.
149 Pattengale, “China Crushes Predemocracy Demonstration.”
protested against “corruption, inflation, press restrictions, university conditions, and the persistence of Party ‘elders’ ruling informally behind the scenes.” Groups of students refused to stop protesting until their demands for reform were met. By June, protests had become nationwide, taking place in 341 different cities. Starting on June 4, the government began harshly suppressing the protest at Tiananmen after Deng and other government officials ordered the People’s Liberation Army to evacuate Tiananmen Square.

The artists enjoyed a brief period of government support after their exhibitions. Wang Keping, Ma Desheng, Huang Rui, Qu Leilei and Zhong Acheng received invitations from the student council of the Central Academy of Fine Arts to give lectures in September 1980. Their support was further evidenced by an article written about the *Stars Exhibition* in March 1980 by Li Xianting, a young critic and journalist for *Fine Arts Magazine*. The title of the article, originally written in Chinese, translates to “About the ‘Stars’ Art Exhibition.” This was the first mass media publication on the activities of the Stars. In the article, Li provides an interview with Wang Keping, Ma Desheng, Huang Rui and Qu Leilei. The interview provides a platform on which the artists are able to discuss the political influences and meanings behind their works, in addition to their opinions on the function of art as a way to express feelings and experiences. Li portrayed the Stars as a progressive and thought-provoking group of artists and intellectuals. The group’s popularity among writers and young artists suggests they were widely admired. Yet this quickly changed. Eventually, due to the reinstatement of government-imposed

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150 Kissinger, 409.
151 Ibid., 410.
152 Rui and Desheng, 39.
cultural policies demonstrated by the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign, Li was forced to resign due to his public support of artists such as the Stars.\textsuperscript{156}

Pressure from the government eventually left the Stars without support. In 1982, the Chinese Artists Association magazine, \textit{Artists Communications}, published an article condemning the Stars exhibitions.\textsuperscript{157} Huang Rui, Ma Desheng, and Wang Keping were all members of the Beijing Artists Association, yet in 1981 they were not permitted to re-enroll into the organization.\textsuperscript{158} Aware that artistic repression had gradually returned, members of the Stars began to self-exile, often moving to the west. With its members leaving China, the Stars officially split up in 1984. Although the artists’ futures have proven to be varied, their experiences with the Stars inevitably shaped their ensuing careers.

One member of the Stars who gained considerable international popularity and continues to be recognized as a prominent Chinese political activist and artist in the west is Ai Weiwei. Ai moved from China to the United States in August 1981 to study at Parsons School for Design. Ai was immediately welcomed into the western art world, participating in two group exhibitions in the U.S during the 1980’s, entitled \textit{China’s New Expression} and \textit{The Star at Harvard: Chinese Dissident Art}.\textsuperscript{159} It is evident from the titles of exhibitions that Ai was in demand in the west as a Chinese avant-garde artist and political activist. Despite his past involvement in the controversial Stars exhibitions, in 1999 Ai was chosen to represent China at the 48\textsuperscript{th} Venice Biennale among other Chinese artists. In 2000, his role as co-curator of an exhibition in Shanghai called “F**k

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{156} Siyan, 149.
\textsuperscript{157} Rui and Desheng, 41.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
off,” which highlighted “issues of power” and cultural freedom, angered the Chinese government once again. At this point, Ai was gaining significant international acclaim, having exhibited works in the U.S, Korea, Germany, Japan, Sweden, Italy and France. Various prestigious publications in the west began reporting on Ai Weiwei as an activist artist, including his first *New York Times* review in 2004. Since then, Ai’s work and political activities have received extensive coverage in the west, appearing in *The New York Times, BBC News, Juxtapoz,* and *CNN.* The Chinese government perceived Ai’s increasing popularity in both the east and west as a threat to its culture, taking measures to regulate his communication with the public. In 2011 he was detained in solitary confinement for 81 days during a “government crackdown” in which various people from the media and intellectual circles were also imprisoned. Ai continues to attract western interest and support, as evidenced by a web site “Free Ai Weiwei,” which gave continuous updates at the time of his sudden disappearance and continues to provide news about him and his work. In 2011, *ArtReview* named Ai “the most

powerful person in the art world."\textsuperscript{165} Ai Weiwei currently lives in Beijing where he continues making political art.

In 1984, Huang Rui exiled to Japan where he continued producing art and gained immediate recognition.\textsuperscript{166} Huang’s first solo exhibition, \textit{Huang Rui Exhibition}, took place in 1984 in Gallery Ueda, Tokyo, Japan, the same year he self-exiled.\textsuperscript{167} Thereafter, Huang consistently displayed the \textit{Huang Rui Exhibition} in Japan for nearly fourteen consecutive years. Huang began expanding his international art practices, with solo and group exhibitions in the U.S, France and Taiwan Germany, London, South Korea, Sweden, Austria, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic. Further evidence of Huang’s rising success was his participation in a group exhibition at the 55th Venice Biennale entitled \textit{Grand Canal}.\textsuperscript{168} Huang currently lives in Huantie, an artist community in Beijing where he continues making politically charged artwork.

Wang Keping left China and relocated to France in 1984. His first group exhibition after the Stars took place in 1983 at the Brooklyn Museum in New York, entitled \textit{Painting the Chinese Dream, Chinese Art 30 Years After the Revolution}.\textsuperscript{169} He has had solo exhibitions almost every

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\textsuperscript{166} Young, “Where I Work.” Huang returned to Beijing permanently in 2002. The Chinese government had been closely monitoring him between 2001 and 2007 until they determined that he was not a threat. \\
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In 1983, Ma Desheng was labeled a threat during the anti-spiritual pollution campaign, which influenced his decision to leave China. In 1985 he fled to Switzerland, and one year later he moved to Paris where he has lived and practiced art for nearly thirty years. Ma was able to hold his first group exhibition after the Stars in the U.S at the Brooklyn Museum in New York in

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171 Jane Perlez, “A Muzzled Chinese Artwork, Absent but Speaking Volumes,” *New York Times*, October 15, 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/16/world/asia/a-muzzled-chinese-artwork-absent-but-speaking-volumes.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/16/world/asia/a-muzzled-chinese-artwork-absent-but-speaking-volumes.html). Wang Keping was a survey of over 50 works created throughout his 35 years as a sculptor. This article reported on the absence of Wang’s sculpture *Silence* from the exhibition, a piece that was displayed during the unauthorized Stars Exhibition and evidently continues to face censorship. The article states that the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture must pre-approve all imported artworks for display. At the advice of the Ullens Center, who expressed concern that *Silence* would put the entire exhibition at risk, Wang intentionally did not even attempt to include this work in the show.

172 “Wang Keping,” *Galerie Zürcher*. His most recent solo exhibition was in 2016 in Paris.

173 Cohen, “Eternal Spring Ma Desheng.” The year he moved to France permanently in 1986, Ma was involved in four exhibitions.
Thereafter, he participated in one exhibition in 1983 in Switzerland and one in 1985 in Japan. He has also exhibited works Italy, Sweden, The Netherlands, Portugal, and the UK.

Zhu Jinshi moved to Berlin in 1986 and was immediately able to exhibit work internationally. Zhu participated in notable group exhibitions such as *Beijing/ New York: Avant-Garde Chinese Art Touring Exhibition*, City Gallery, New York, 1986 and the *4th International Istanbul Biennale- OrientAtion*, Istanbul, Turkey, 1995. He has had several international solo exhibitions, including *Zhu Jinshi*, Blum & Poe, New York, 2016 and *Feng*, DAAD gallery, Berlin, Germany, 1990. He has collections in well-known institutions such as the Picasso Foundation in Spain and the Brooklyn Museum in the U.S. Zhu has been written in *Hyperallergic* online magazine as well as *Architectural Digest*. He currently lives and works in Beijing and continues exhibiting work worldwide.

Li Shuang, the only female in the original Stars, moved to France in 1983. One year after she arrived in France, she was part of two exhibitions: the ARCO in Madrid, Spain, and the Fall

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Salon in Paris, France. In 1986 she had six group exhibitions and two solo exhibitions in the U.S and one in France. As her popularity in the west increased, Li was written about in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1986. She did not return to China until 2006 when she participated in two group exhibitions, including the *China International Gallery Exposition* in Beijing, 2006. She continues to live and work as an artist in Paris.

Mao Lizi moved to France after the Stars. In 1990 he worked as a visiting professor at the Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts in Paris after receiving a grant from the French government. Mao was highly successful in Paris, winning several awards including first prize in the *Artists du Monde* group exhibition and in the *Paris International Exhibition*, as well as having his *Solo Exhibition* tour three different galleries. In 1998, his works were chosen to be part of *5000 Years of Chinese Arts* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. In 2013 he was invited to the

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179 Denise Tsui, “Embracing Many Talents: In Conversation With Mao Lizi,” *ArtAsiaPacific*, June 24, 2016, [http://artasiapacific.com/Blog/InConversationWithMaoLizi](http://artasiapacific.com/Blog/InConversationWithMaoLizi). In 1989 he traveled to New York for his first international solo exhibition at Hefner Gallery and planned on moving to the U.S, yet after returning to China to witness the Tiananmen Square events, the New York gallery became concerned about their involvement with a dissident Chinese artist, so he stayed in China.


55th Venice Biennale Collateral Event. He continues to work as an artist today in Beijing.

Zhou Dalu did not leave China until 2001 when he moved to Rome and then Australia, yet was able to maintain professional and commercial success as an artist in China prior to his move.\textsuperscript{182} In 1985, Zhou became a professor for the Department of Fine Arts at the Capital Normal University in Beijing.\textsuperscript{183} In 1988, the Culture and Art Publishing House published Xhao’s collection of his paintings in \textit{Oil Paintings of Human Body by Zhao Dalu}, followed by two additional volumes. Zhao had four solo exhibitions in Rome, Italy between 1990 and 2000 and was awarded by the International Institute of Cultural Unity of Italy in 1993.\textsuperscript{184}

In 1986, Qu Leilei left China to study at the Central School of Art in London. Despite the reputation of the Stars, Qu was able to participate in the National Ceramics Exhibition in Beijing.\textsuperscript{185} He presented his works at the 48\textsuperscript{th} and 49\textsuperscript{th} Venice Biennale in 1999 and 2001, the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Beijing Biennale in 2005, and the Pompidou Centre in Paris in 1989. He has given various lectures at prestigious institutions, including the Royal Academy of the Arts in London, Christie’s Institute in London, and The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.\textsuperscript{186} Today, Qu works as a

\textsuperscript{185} “Biography of Qu Leilei,” \textit{Hua Gallery}, accessed February 17, 2017, http://www.huagallery.com/artistcv_qll.html. His second exhibition was in 1986 entitled \textit{East Meets West} in London. The exhibition title suggests an emphasis on cross-cultural relationships and influences, one of the goals that Qu and the Stars aimed for with their art and activism. Qu’s exhibitions have dominantly been located in China, London, and the UK, yet he has also shown in Paris, Tokyo, Spain, Norway and Geneva. He has also written seven books, published between 1996 and 2007. His work is part of the permanent collections of China’s National Art Gallery, the British Museum, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.
freelance artist in London. Additionally, Zhao Gang left China to study abroad in 1983.\textsuperscript{187} His first group exhibition after the Stars was \textit{Beijing/ New York: Avant-Garde Chinese Art} in the U.S in 1986, shown at three different venues.\textsuperscript{188} Zhao also had his first solo exhibition in New York the following year in 1987 at the Lavaggi Gallery. Thereafter, he had many group and solo shows throughout the U.S, as well as Paris, Tokyo, Sydney, Hong Kong, Rome.\textsuperscript{189} Zhao currently lives and works as an artist in Beijing.

Yan Li moved to New York in 1985 where he started a magazine in New York called \textit{First Line} that provided writings by contemporary Chinese poets and translated American poetry.\textsuperscript{190} He was a participant at the University of Iowa’s International Writing Program in 2003.\textsuperscript{191} Although Yan’s biography states that he has held many exhibitions and published books, these are untraceable. Zhong Acheng moved to the U.S in the 1990’s where he was able to gain considerable acclaim as a writer. His novella \textit{The King of Chess} is recognized as one of

\textsuperscript{187} “Gang Zhao Biography,” \textit{Galerie Nagel Draxler}, accessed February 20, 2017,\url{http://nagel-draxler.de/artists/gang-zhao-2/}. He attended the State Academy of Fine Art in Holland, Vassar College in the U.S, and received an MFA from Bard College in the U.S.

\textsuperscript{188} Sharon Creative Arts Foundation, Sharon, CT; Vassar College Art Gallery, Poughkeepsie, New York; City Gallery, New York.


\textsuperscript{190} Michael Standaert, “Interview with Yan Li,” \textit{Modern Chinese Literature and Culture Resource Center} (May, 2004), \url{http://u.osu.edu/mclc/online-series/yan_li/}. From 1995 to 1999 his work was banned in China after a magazine published an excerpt of his story about China’s openness to the west. Yan intentionally began \textit{First Line} in New York because of the difficulties of publishing in China. He explains that in 1987, he began gathering poetry in Chinese from poets in China, Hong Kong, and Shanghai, yet these modern poets were unlikely to have their works published due to press regulations and the media’s fear of government intervention so he published them in New York and sent 400 copies back to China to sell.

the most popular post-Mao Chinese works overseas.\textsuperscript{192} His fame is evident by his inclusion on popular online sources, such as \textit{IMDb} and \textit{Wikipedia}.\textsuperscript{193} In 1986, Zhong was invited to the U.S to do a lecture tour at several universities. He won the Golden Rooster Award for Best Screenplay for \textit{Hibiscus Town}. He received the Italian Nonino International Prize for his literary achievements in 1992.\textsuperscript{194} In 2008 he worked in the Chinese Pavilion at the 11\textsuperscript{th} Venice Architecture Biennale.\textsuperscript{195}

Several members of the Stars stayed in China, failing to attain the same artistic status as their colleagues yet continuing their practice. Bo Yun remained in Beijing, yet was still able to hold nearly twenty solo exhibitions starting in 1985 in Paris, France.\textsuperscript{196} In 1991 he had two exhibitions in the U.S in Chicago and Seattle. Similar in artistic success, Shao Fei has been a full time painter for Beijing Fine Art Academy since 1976.\textsuperscript{197} In 1984, her paintings were featured in the exhibition \textit{Contemporary Chinese Painting} in the U.S. In 2014, Shao was selected as one of 48 Chinese contemporary artists to be part of a group exhibition in Mimar Sinan Fine Arts

\textsuperscript{194} “Ah Cheng,” Paper Republic.
University of Turkey called *Spirit in Ink – Art Exhibition of Contemporary Chinese Painting*. She currently lives and works near Beijing and serves as a member of the Chinese Artists’ Association. Wang Luyan also remained in China when the Stars split, continuing to engage in radical activities by participating in the *China Modern Art Exhibition* in 1989 at the National Art Museum of China in Beijing. Wang had several group exhibitions in Germany, Spain, Hong Kong and Japan between 1993 and 1995, yet a majority of his exhibitions were located in China.¹⁹⁸ He has had one group show in the U.S in 1998, *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* at the Asia Society and P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in New York. Finally, one of the least active artists was Bao Pao China, having one solo exhibition in April 2011 called *Red Archaeology – Bao Pao Solo Exhibition*, held at the Song Zhuang Art Center in Beijing, China.¹⁹⁹

There is no indication that Gan Shaocheng, Chen Yansheng, Zhang Shiqi, or Zhi Zhong produced any significant artwork after the splitting of the Stars. Song Hong and Guan Naixin participated in an exhibition entitled *Apartment Art in China 1970s-1990s – The Ecology of Post-Cultural Revolution Frontier Art* in 2008, but were both publically inactive after that. Zhou Maiyou exhibited in *Apartment Art in China* as well, in addition to *Unofficials- Art Before ‘85*, yet beyond these two exhibitions Zhou became inactive as well. Liu Daxuan is represented by FaFa Gallery in Beijing, China. The only exhibition he participated in was *Yunnan Landscape*.


Paintings in 2004 at the FaFa Gallery, in which he displayed oil painting landscapes.200

After the group separated, they held various retrospectives for the Stars exhibitions in China and west. The first Stars retrospective was The Stars: Ten Years shown in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and two different cities in France in 1989, a year marked the tenth anniversary of the first Stars Exhibition. Chang Tsong- Zung, one of the organizers of the exhibition in Hong Kong and Taiwan, states that the show received considerable attention. He says, “In both cities, the exhibition dominated the cultural news for many weeks and marked the first public awareness of China’s underground culture.”201 The public discourse that this exhibition initiated exemplifies the Stars’ groundbreaking activities that evidently continued to inspire young contemporary artists ten years later. In 1993, a second retrospective, The Stars: 15 Years, was held in Tokyo.202 In 2000, Demand for Artistic Freedom, The Stars, 20 Years, Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, the title most likely a reference to one of their slogans written on a banner during their protest in 1979.203 The next retrospective that the group presented was Origin Point at the Today Art Museum in Beijing, 2007. This exhibition contained nearly 100 artworks created by the Stars prior to 1985.204 Their decision to hold the exhibition in Beijing was noteworthy because they were now forced to confront the society that had once oppressed them. In addition to retrospective exhibitions, the Stars also participated in other educational events such as museum talks. In 2013

a talk entitled *The Light of the Stars* was held at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, which included four of former Stars: Huang Rui, Li Yongcun, and Wang Keping. These events allowed the artists and public to reflect on the traumatic yet preserved memories of their fight for freedom of expression. Although the Stars were able to reunite to provide the public with engaging retrospectives, for some of the former members, their artistic activities did not exceed this.

Some of the artists continued to exhibit together in group shows that were unrelated to the Stars. In 2008, Guan Naixin, Song Hong, Zhao Gang, Wang Luyan, Zhou Maiyou, and Zhu Jinshi, along with other artists, participated in a group exhibition at the Shuimu Art Space in Beijing, China entitled *Apartment Art in China 1970s-1990s – The Ecology of Post-Cultural Revolution Frontier Art*. This exhibition focused on “Apartment Art,” a term developed by Gao Minglu, defined as an extension of the underground, experimental, avant-garde art that rose in the last quarter of the twentieth century. It is a style that “reflects the originality and characteristics of Chinese avant-garde art because... It is a completely independent, spontaneous form of art activities.” The description of the show’s focus makes it evident that these artists continued to develop Chinese avant-garde art in China after the Stars era by expanding their practices. They moved beyond the styles of Expressionism from the Stars exhibitions and contributed to the progression of Chinese contemporary art.

In 2014, some of the Stars gathered again for an exhibition at the Boers-Li Gallery *The Unofficials- Art Before ’85*, that featured fourteen artists, seven of which included Li Shuang,
Wang Luyan, Yan Li, Huang Rui, Zhao Maiyou, Zhu Jinshi, and Zhao Gang.208 The exhibition highlighted the different artistic strategies that groups such as the Stars used in order to promote freedom of expression. Their selection for this exhibition indicates the Stars’ continued significance in Chinese contemporary art history today. When compared to other artists of the time, the Stars are often used to exemplify a political approach to art making and problem solving. The collective activities of various members within the Stars after the group split shows that many remained ideologically connected and had similar goals as artists. However, the disbanding of the Stars as well as the physical separation of the members left the fates of these individual artists varied.

The Stars Exhibition was a case of censorship in which attempts at silencing came from the top of the political hierarchy and was imposed on the citizens. Support from citizens was evident by the lack of criticism in the media. Li Xianting risked his career as writer for the Fine Arts Magazine when he wrote an article condoning the activities of the Stars and enabling them to further voice their demands for freedom of speech and democracy. Audiences were supportive of the Stars, as thousands of visitors attended all three shows, each having a larger turnout than the last. As opposed to silencing the Stars as they anticipated, government authorities actually helped the group promote their exhibition, their democratic values, and their own artistic careers. The hundreds of police officers that confiscated the work created such pandemonium that citizens became intrigued and eagerly attended the following Stars exhibitions to see the artworks that sparked such a controversy. The bold actions of the Stars gave them a reputation of notoriety that eventually helped them propel their careers as individual artists.

Tracing the careers of the former Stars members reveals that many of the artists used

their experiences from the group advantageously while few regard them as a distant memory. Overall, most of the artists became notable in both the east and the west, exhibiting their works across the U.S, Europe, and Asia. Although degrees of cultural regulation persisted in China, some of the members continued their role as artist activists by expressing political critiques through their practice. All of the artists who left China were able to fuse eastern and western cultural elements into their works, a methodology that was used during the Stars exhibitions yet came to full fruition after studying and working in the west.

With China’s new Open-Door Policy, the increasing interests of Chinese art in the U.S made the Stars’ transition into the western art world swift and welcoming. This is evident by the national newspapers that reported on the artists, as well as the several art exhibitions on Chinese art that the Stars were able to participate in. Ai Weiwei continues to be recognized as one of the most popular Chinese artists in the west as he challenges free speech in China. While not all of the Stars artists have enjoyed the same international recognition as their colleagues such as Ai Weiwei, Huang Rui, Ma Desheng, and Wang Keping, it is evident that all of the members were able to gain further artistic success as a result of their experiences with censorship.
Dread Scott’s *What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag?*

Dread Scott’s *What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag?*, a mixed media installation for audience participation created in 1988, caused a tremendous amount of controversy when people were invited to walk on the American flag.\(^{209}\) The work consisted of a photomontage with pictures of flag draped coffins and South Korean students burning American flags and raising signs that said “Yankee go home son of a bitch.” Written above this photomontage was the question asking, “What is the proper way to display a U.S flag?” Underneath the photomontage, Scott installed a shelf with a book in which audience members were invited to answer this question. Scott also placed an American flag on the ground leading to the book, which audience members were forced to step on in order to respond in the book (Figures 26, 27). Scott was attempting to address systemic inequality in the U.S by challenging the notion that the American flag represents freedom and equality for all of its citizens. According to Scott, he wanted to give a voice to those who “are personally the victims of America and American imperialism or just hate what it does in the world.”\(^{210}\) Scott hoped that *What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag?* would address the issue of compulsory patriotism, freedom of expression, First Amendment rights, and the way in which U.S imperialist policies were hidden behind a patriotic discourse and the symbol of the flag.

Displayed at the School of Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) in 1989, Scott’s piece produced a media maelstrom. Rarely has an undergraduate exhibition caused so much controversy. Initially, no one paid much attention to *What is the Proper Way to Display the American Flag.* Yet that all changed when a local Chicago news station reported on the


exhibition, alerting local veterans groups that an exhibition with “flag desecration” was taking place at the SAIC. Politicians and public pundits weighed in on the issue of desecrating the flag, some even advocating for a flag desecration amendment in response to the work. President George H. W. Bush weighed in on the exhibition when he called Scott’s work “disgraceful.”

Scott’s exhibition turned into a national event.

The protection of freedom of speech granted by the First Amendment determined the way in which the censoring of Scott’s piece played out. Elected public officials on the local, state, and national levels used the example of Scott’s installation to defend the American way of life while simultaneously and ironically upholding the First Amendment. Veterans groups comprised primarily of men who had served in Vietnam, a war that was initiated due to U.S. imperialist policies, organized daily protests against the piece. The veterans ritualistically went to the exhibition everyday to pick up the flag from the ground to properly fold it in their attempt to censor the work. The SAIC continuously supported Scott’s right to free speech and to display this controversial work, refusing to remove it from the gallery despite requests from veteran’s groups and the Chicago City Council. Ironically, the attempts to censor the piece were productive rather than destructive, as it quickly gained national acclaim and launched Scott’s artistic career.

Scott was aware of the effects of censorship, and most likely expected What is the Proper Way to Display the American Flag? to engender degrees of controversy. Just a few months prior to the installation of the piece, David Nelson, one of Scott’s classmates at the SAIC, created a controversial painting of Chicago’s late Mayor Washington entitled Mirth and Girth, (1988), in which the Mayor was depicted wearing a bra, garter belt, and stockings. Chicago City Councilmen personally removed and destroyed the painting. As a result, newspapers began

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reporting on the incident, putting Nelson in the public eye. Scott had witnessed the production of
discourse on Nelson and his painting after attempts had been made to silence the work. Aware
that the local media would be watching the SAIC for another controversial exhibit to occur, Scott
capitalized on the new reputation and visibility of the school.

Growing Up in Ronald Reagan’s America

Scott’s *What Is the Proper Way...* was displayed in 1989, one year after President George
H. W. Bush was elected and two years after President Ronald Reagan had left office. Scott has
expressed discontent with the social, political, and economic inequality that occurred as a result
of President Reagan’s policies.\(^{212}\) Ronald Reagan was the president of the United States from
1981 until 1989. Today, President Reagan is known for heading a newly strengthened
conservative movement in the Republican Party, based on a decentralized government and the
free market.\(^{213}\) His Neoliberal economic policies were named “Reaganomics.” One of the
principles of Reaganomics was to allow businesses to flourish with little intervention from the
government. It also emphasized “trickle down” economics, in which tax cuts were given to
corporations and the wealthy. Personal tax rates for the rich decreased from 70 percent to 28
percent, recognized by historians as “the largest tax cut in history.”\(^{214}\) This tax plan meant that a
factory worker, a schoolteacher, and a billionaire could have potentially all paid the same amount


Companion to Ronald Reagan*, ed. Andrew L. Johns (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Inc.,

\(^{214}\) David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015),
26.
In an address to the nation given on May 28, 1985, Reagan explained his tax reduction policy, stating that it was necessary to “[simplify] the complex system of special provisions that favor some at the expense of others.” While attempting to give the illusion of fairness and equality in his tax policies, President Reagan was actually imposing a plan that was inherently inequitable. One of the main criticisms of Reaganomics was that the tax cuts resulted in a drastic increase in the wealth gap, leaving living conditions in inner cities worse and giving more economic power to the upper class.

President Reagan’s stance on social welfare programs was one example of his antipathy towards civil rights. He cut $140 billion from social programs, which provided welfare for dependent children, care for the mentally ill, and financial aid for unemployment among others. 350,000 people lost Social Security benefits, many of whom were Vietnam War veterans. A popular justification from conservatives was that welfare programs would not relieve poverty. Instead, economic inequality of minorities was a result of their own immoral behavior. Through his use of euphemisms, Reagan contributed to the belief among working and middle class white Americans that poor African Americans were taking advantage of the welfare system. President Reagan often recounted a fictional story about a “welfare queen,” an African American woman who stole hundreds of thousands of dollars from the welfare system, in order to press for welfare

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217 Ibid.
218 Ibid.
219 Ibid.
Reagan was responsible for contributing to institutionalized racism and classism, prejudices that were exacerbated by his anti-drug policies.

The War on Drugs, which was first declared by Richard Nixon in 1971, reached a new level of intensity under the Regan administration in the 1980’s, leading to an increase in systemic racial inequality. In 1984, when crack cocaine addiction became an epidemic in inner cities among low income African Americans, Congress passed several anti-drug policies, including the Bail Reform Act of 1984, the U.S. Sentencing Reform Act of 1984, and The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986. Many of Reagan’s critics believed that this new legislation was racist because of the disparities between prison time for crack, dominantly used by minorities, and cocaine, more popular among rich white people. The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 imposed a mandatory minimum sentence of five years for possession of five grams of crack with intention to distribute, however, mandatory minimum sentence requirements for similar charges for cocaine was only 10-37 months. Additionally, the legislation gave police greater authority to search without a warrant, which resulted in “over-policing in ghetto communities.” A combination of these new policies of the war on drugs led to a sharp rise in incarceration rates for African Americans. The spike in numbers of inmates created overcrowding in prisons, which resulted in a decline in educational programs offered that decreased their likelihood of rehabilitation. The War on Drugs exemplified the growth of institutionalized racism under the Reagan administration, an issue that Scott sought to address through his art.

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221 Ibid.
224 Ibid.
225 Ibid.
226 Ibid.
Flag Desecration in the 1980’s

When Scott created his controversial installation, issues regarding state and national flag desecration laws were at the center of social and political debates, beginning in 1984 with Gregory Lee “Joey” Johnson’s flag burning, resulting in the 1989 Supreme Court case *Texas v. Johnson*. At the Republican National Convention in Dallas, Texas, Johnson set fire to an American flag in protest of the re-nomination of Ronald Reagan and certain Dallas-based corporations that were allegedly involved in Reagan’s foreign policy ventures. Johnson participated in a riotous demonstration with nearly one hundred protesters, marching through the streets of Dallas while committing several acts of minor vandalism. When the protest ended at the Dallas City Hall, Johnson revealed an American flag, poured kerosene on it, and set it on fire. Immediately after the flag burning, Dallas police began arresting protesters for disorderly conduct, including Johnson. Later on, Johnson and three others were charged with “desecration of a venerated object” on the grounds of the Texas Venerated Objects law. While four individuals were charged, Johnson is the only one who decided to fight the charges. On December 13, 1984, Johnson was convicted by a jury and sentenced to a maximum of one year in prison and a fine of $2,000. Johnson appealed the ruling, a process that continued for five years. On January 23, 1986, the Court of Appeals for the Fifth District of Texas ruled against Johnson, arguing that the upholding of the Texas desecration law did not violate his First Amendment rights.

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231 Goldstein, *Saving Old Glory*, 198
court stated, “Acts of flag desecration are of themselves, so inherently inflammatory that the State may act to prevent breaches of the public peace.” However, on September 16, 1987, the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals argued the Johnson case once again, and on April 20, 1988, with a 5-4 vote, they reversed the previous ruling. The court declared that Johnson’s actions were indeed protected by the First Amendment as he had been engaging in “symbolic speech” and protest and did not pose danger or violence at the scene. Texas’s interests in protecting the flag, as a national symbol did not outweigh Johnson’s constitutional rights to freedom of speech and protest.

Unsatisfied with this turn of events, Dallas County overturned the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals’ ruling to the U.S Supreme Court, resulting in the case Texas v. Johnson. Oral arguments for the case were made on March 21, 1989, a highly anticipated date as Scott’s exhibition had closed only three days before. On June 21, 1989, with a 5 to 4 ruling, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Johnson. Protecting the First Amendment, Justice William Brennan declared, “If there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that the government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable.” Chief Justice William Rehnquist disagreed with this ruling, stating that the flag “deserved special protection and warranted certain restrictions on speech.” Despite opposition, the Supreme Court’s ruling in favor of Johnson contradicted the 1968 national flag desecration law as well as state desecration laws in 48 states.

Scott’s exhibition took place in the midst of this flag desecration controversy. The Johnson trials and the What is the Proper Way...? exhibition had been occurring simultaneously.

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232 Ibid., 199.
233 Ibid.
235 Ibid.
Scott and Johnson coordinated efforts by appearing at protests and speaking on radio and TV shows together. Scott and Johnson became well acquainted, as they had participated in flag burning protests together after the passing of the FPA of 1989. Johnson’s legal process had started in 1984, enabling Scott to witness the long-term effects of Johnson’s public dissent. Scott observed Johnson’s increased media attention and the rapid and widespread circulation of discourse that was produced as a result, both about flag desecration and also about Johnson. The media sensationalized their reports on *Texas v. Johnson* in light of the highly patriotic 1988 presidential election.

The political atmosphere in which Scott created his work was defined by extreme patriotism and ruthless protection of American symbols, exemplified by the 1988 presidential election between George H. W. Bush and Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis, both of whom attempted to come across as more patriotic than the other. Continuously throughout his campaign, Bush denounced Governor Dukakis’s decision to veto a bill in 1977 that would have required the Pledge of Allegiance to be recited in the state’s public schools. Dukakis argued that after discussing the issue with state judges and the State Attorney General, he agreed that legally requiring people to recite the pledge was unconstitutional because it contradicted the First Amendment. Bush not only mentioned Governor Dukakis’s veto during several campaign rallies, but also recited the Pledge of Allegiance to display his own devotion to the nation. As part of his 1988 presidential campaign, Bush visited the Annin & Company flag factory in Bloomfield, New Jersey, the largest and oldest flag manufacturer in the nation.

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236 Goldstein, *Burning the Flag*, 87.
238 Ibid., 175.
239 Ibid., 249.
240 Dorothy Collin and Janet Cawley, “Search for Patriotic Motifs Brings Bush to Flag Plant,”
tour, he made several comments that suggested a parallel between the popularity of the flag and the prosperity of the nation. First, he referred to the increase in American flag factory plants during Reagan’s presidency, defining this change as “the new pride in America.” Bush stated to the workers of the factory, “The flags you make fly over an America that today is stronger and more prosperous than at any time in its proud history.” In an attempt to ride on the coattails of Ronald Reagan, one of the most popular presidents in the history of the United States, Bush took great pains to emphasize his own patriotism, along with his affinities with the working class whites, which included the veterans that would protest against What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag?

History of Controversy at the School of Art Institute of Chicago

Prior to Scott’s exhibition, the SAIC had a history of community backlash from politically controversial artworks that put the institution at the center of debates regarding the First Amendment and the freedom to dissent. As mentioned above, David Nelson displayed Mirth and Girth in 1988, a painting of the late Mayor Washington that was so offensive that Chicago City Council members took it upon themselves to personally destroy the work (Figure 28). Washington was the first black Mayor in the history of Chicago, elected in 1983. The painting was displayed at a three-day student fellowship exhibition as part of Nelson’s final for his painting degree. However, the painting was not previewed and discussed by gallery

Ibid.


administrators prior to its display. On May 11, 1988, repelled by this representation of the city’s beloved mayor, three members of the Chicago City Council stormed into the private exhibition to remove the painting, calling it racist and a “disgrace to the city.” The Councilmen were stopped by a school official, who escorted them to the SAIC president’s office where the painting was to be returned. They managed to slice a gash across the center of the painting before it was returned to the school. The Councilmen then had Chicago police remove the painting from the campus and taken into custody (Figure 29). Nelson was able to retrieve his painting following day.

The censorious acts conducted by the Chicago City Council provoked a nationwide discourse about freedom of expression. On May 14, 1988, the Washington Post published an article that stated, “This is not an issue of race…but an issue of censorship.” The New York Times’ Michael Brenson reported that the American Civil Liberties Union in Chicago called the seizing of the painting the “essence of censorship.” Due to the backlash that the SAIC was facing from allowing this painting to be displayed, the school issued a public apology for distress that the work caused. SAIC officials also expressed a commitment to make stronger efforts to increase diversity of the students, faculty, and board at the institute. However, the SAIC had a commitment to protecting its student’s rights to freedom of expression and the school condemned the removal of the painting by the Councilmen. Nelson filed a lawsuit against the councilmen for

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244 Steven C. Dubin, Arresting Images (Great Britain: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1992), 28.
245 “David Nelson.”
removing his painting, arguing that this was a violation of his First Amendment rights. The courts agreed with Nelson, and in 1994, the suit was settled when the City of Chicago agreed to pay him $95,000 in attorney fees.\(^\text{249}\)

The SAIC rapidly came under the national spotlight as the media quickly caught wind of the Nelson incident. On May 13, 1988, only two days after Councilmen seized the painting, both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* published articles about the incident: “Chicago Alderman and Police Seize Portrait That Blacks Deem Offensive” and “The Painting Pandemonium.”\(^\text{250}\) Both of these articles contained sensationalized headlines, designed to be inflammatory and to emphasize controversy. On May 22, 1988, the *Chicago Tribune* published an article entitled “The Mayoral Painter’s 15 Minutes of Fame,” a title that hints at the productive nature of censorship by acknowledging Nelson’s sudden notoriety. By the end of May, Americans across the nation had seen the SAIC implicated in headlines regarding controversial political art.

Dread Scott

Dread Scott’s upbringing in a racially and economically diverse neighborhood had primed him for his future in creating political art. Scott was born in 1965 in Chicago, Illinois as an only child. His father was a professional photographer turned photojournalist, while his mother was a housewife who later worked as a travel agent when Scott’s father became sick.\(^\text{251}\) Scott was raised in town called Hyde Park on the South-side of Chicago. Hyde Park, which includes the

\(^{249}\) “David Nelson.”


prestigious University of Chicago, was a highly diverse neighborhood. The area in which Scott was raised had a predominantly white demographic. Not far from Hyde Park were impoverished African American neighborhoods that were riddled with crime and drug abuse. As an African American, Scott was acutely aware of the divide between white people and black people. He attended an elite private Latin School on the North-side of Chicago where he was one of the few black students in a school with a majority white population. Scott was often bullied due to his race. Comparing his elite school to the diverse he had witnessed throughout the South-side, he became aware that most African Americans in the city lived in poverty. Scott noted that his classmates were uncomfortable cultural when they would all travel to the South-side for soccer games. These observations contributed to his awareness of class and racial discrimination and segregation at a young age. Dissatisfied with the current system, Scott dropped out of high school before graduating after receiving poor grades. Supported by his parents, he pursued a degree in photography at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). He received his BFA in 1989 after the controversial exhibition.

Scott’s birth name was Scott Tyler, but he adopted the professional name “Dread” in 1988. First, “Dread Scott” is reminiscent of the Supreme Court case *Dread Scott v. Stanford* in which an African American slave Dred Scott attempted to sue for his freedom in 1847. This case resulted in the landmark decisions that African Americans were not U.S citizens and therefore not entitled to the constitutional right to sue in courts, and that the federal government could not limit slavery in the states. The artist’s adoption of the name “Dread” was intended to highlight the notion that the socio-political forces that punished Dred Scott in 1857 continued in the present in different forms. Scott sought to remind people of the continued marginalization of black people

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252 Dubin, 104.
253 Ibid.
even after slavery was abolished. Another reason for choosing “Dread Scott” is because “dread” is synonymous with fear. Dread, instead of Dred, a concept that continues to be inherent in his art making as he has attempted to challenge and question audience’s beliefs. Finally, “Dread Scott” was an ode to Rastafarians, who often wear dreadlocks. Although Scott is not Rastafarian himself, he expressed a connection to the culture as “oppressed people fighting for justice.” He also had dreadlocks at the time that he chose his professional name, which became an identifying trait.

Scott began his artistic career as a photographer when his parents bought him a 35mm camera, which he used to photograph his travels and family. Eventually, he sought to combine his photography with his interest in activism by embracing more overtly political subject matters. Scott became concerned with the oppression of African Americans and institutionalized racism and classism. Scott had characterized himself as a communist. Although not a member of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), Scott acknowledged its influence on his thinking. He wrote, “[This] is a world of profound polarization, exploitation and suffering and billions are excluded from intellectual development and full participation in society. It does not have to be this way and my art is part of forging a radically different world.” Scott was a revolutionary who attempted to make art that represented those whose experiences and histories had been marginalized.

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255 Ibid.
257 Goldstein, Burning the Flag, 79.
258 Ibid.
lost economic and social power during Reagan’s presidency. Scott began developing his ideas about the role of artists and activists in his youth. He made an effort to distinguish the roles of the two while also emphasizing their inherent connections; a notion that is evident in What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag? Today Scott believes that political activism should be used to mobilize people for coordinated action, while art should be intended to encourage audiences to reevaluate and critique their preconceived ideas. Scott has strategically employed political issues, such as compulsive patriotism and institutionalized oppression, into his art in order to offer alternative realities that are egalitarian and anti-racist. Throughout his career, he has sought to create spaces where people could freely engage in oppressive histories and reconsider how the future can be different by offering challenging social questions. Scott continues to define himself as both an artist and a political activist.

According to Scott, growing up during Ronald Reagan’s presidency influenced his desire to use his art to address political issues. Scott’s artistic evolution was inspired by Reagan’s domestic and foreign policy, which Scott believed was imperialist. Scott developed a hatred of U.S imperialism, stating, “there was this lunatic in the White House threatening to destroy the world so that he can expand his empire…if you can think about it, it was just insane.” Furthermore, Scott became intrigued with the American flag during the 1988 presidential election when George H. W. Bush and other candidates included the preservation of the flag as part of their platform. In addition to these public observations, Scott began collaborating and gaining inspiration from like-minded revolutionaries when he became associated with a group called No Business As Usual in 1985. The group’s slogan was “Prevent World War III No Matter What It

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262 Dread Scott, interview with Kameelah Rasheed.
263 Ibid.
About Scott’s Work

*What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag?* was part of a larger body of Scott’s work entitled *American Newspeak...Please Feel Free* that he began creating in 1987. *American Newspeak...* consisted of a series of 12 “installations for audience participation” (Figure 30). The 12 installations each included a black and white photomontage with accompanying “political” statements. Located underneath the photomontage was a shelf with offset prints of reproductions of the photographs as well as text that stated the owner of the print agrees with that “political” statement. Each installation had instructions that encouraged the viewers/participants to take an offset print if they agreed with the corresponding “political” statement. Those who took the prints were then asked to explain their reasoning in a book provided. Many of these statements were quotations from well-known individuals and sources such as Malcolm X, the Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party in the U.S, and a quote from the film *Public Enemy*. For example, one “political” statement in the series stated, “War on Crime: ‘You’re quite hostile.’ ‘I got a right to be hostile. Man, my people been persecuted!’—*Public Enemy*. If your people are being persecuted and you’re quite hostile, please take a print, kick some science, and say what needs to be said.”

The titles of the “political” statement associated with each of the 11 other installations in the series included: *War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength, Be All That You Can Be, We Serve and Protect, War on Drugs, War on Crime, War on Gangs, Simpson Rodino Amnesty Act, Don’t Suspect a Friend Report Him, The System is Doome...Let’s*

264 Dubin, 103.
266 Ibid.
Finish it Off. What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag? was intended as the final piece of the twelve-part series, suggesting that it was possibly Scott’s most powerful piece. Although it did not require audience members to take away prints, the installation did require audience participation wherein people had to record their responses to the text “What is the proper way to display a U.S flag?” This context of What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag? has been ignored by the media and Scott’s critics, who solely focused on the controversial nature of this individual installation. Scott’s decision to display this specific piece from the larger series suggests that he intended for it to be inflammatory.

What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag? made its first public appearance as part of American Newspeak in November 1988 in a two-person show at the Near NorthWest Arts Council Gallery (NNWAC) entitled Our Aim is to Destroy Them! Scott’s installation at the NNWAC did not attract any negative attention. The ease at which Scott was able to display this work is perhaps due to the particular nature of the space. NNWAC was and continues to be a non-profit arts organization that supports artists in managing their own spaces to display art for the community. The organization’s mission is to “[strive] to create, protect, design and advocate affordable space for multidisciplinary arts activities.”267 Because NNWAC most likely attracts a more narrow audience of community members that were already disposed to be sympathetic to Scott’s What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag? was well received. Additionally, NNWAC was a smaller space that did not attract as much attention as institutions such as the SAIC.

The following year in 1989, What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag? was

displayed at the SAIC as part of a student juried exhibition entitled *A/Part of the Whole*. The exhibition opened on February 17, 1989. It was organized by the school’s Black Student Association and was sponsored by Ethnic American Students United. It featured 72 artworks by minority artists from the school. Scott submitted three pieces to the show’s call for entries, and *What is the Proper Way...* is the piece that the jurors selected. However, the day before the opening of the exhibition, at the request of SAIC administration, one of the jurors asked Scott to submit a different piece instead. Scott responded by saying, “I’m not going to censor myself. You guys can censor me.” SAIC president Anthony Jones later admitted that he and other administrators were concerned about the legality of placing the flag on the ground. After having the school’s legal counsel determine that this action was indeed legal, SAIC administrators allowed the piece to be shown, although aware of the controversy that it would create.

The Controversy Over Dread Scott’s Flag

On February 22, 1989, only six days after the exhibition opened, a local Chicago news station reported on the controversial work, leading to the mobilization of offended community members. In a television broadcast, the news station reported a story in which four veterans were seen at the exhibition removing the flag from the ground in protest. There was an immediate rise in threats of violence to Scott and SAIC if they did not shut down the exhibition. Scott

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269 Dubin, 105.

270 Ibid., 107.

271 Ibid., 111.

272 Goldstein, *Burning the Flag*, 79.

273 Ibid., 80.

274 Ibid., 81.
even began receiving several death threats. In the following week, an influx of visitors came to the exhibition to witness firsthand the offensive display of the flag (Figure 31). On February 24, 1989, a group of 60 war veterans gathered outside the SAIC, waving small American flags in solidarity. They also marched into the gallery to remove the flag from the ground and place it on the shelf, an act that eventually became a popular form of protest among veterans. The number of threats directed at SAIC and the censorious acts of angry war veterans became so prevalent that administrators decided to close the gallery to the general public from February 27 to March 3, 1989 in order to increase the school’s security. On February 28, 1989, *Chicago Tribune* published another article about the piece by Marja Mills, who wrote that SAIC officials and representatives from veterans groups met days earlier to debate whether or not the show would reopen. According to one of the veterans at the meeting, no agreement was reached and the school continued to allow the flag to be displayed on the ground.

War veterans were the first group to mobilize against Scott’s work. Organizations such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) and Chicago’s local Windy City Veterans Association helped to mobilize war veterans. Describing the protests, Scott stated, “You had 2,500 troglodytes from the VFW coming out and threatening to kill me.” The VFW continues to be a nonprofit veterans service with local chapters located throughout the country that provides its members with information and news. This organization created a network through which veterans were able to communicate about issues and events such as the controversy at the SAIC.

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276 Goldstein, *Burning the Flag*, 81.
277 Marja Mills, “Threats Over Flag Exhibit.”
278 Goldstein, *Burning the Flag*, 78.
Joseph Morris, general counsel for the Mid-America Legal Foundation, provided legal representation for the veteran organizations and individuals who sought to take measures to have the piece removed. The Windy City Veterans Association attempted to file an injunction against Scott’s installation on the grounds that “trampling” on the flag violated state flag desecration laws. However, local judge Kenneth Gillis from Cook County, Illinois rejected the request, ruling that displaying the flag on the ground did not violate desecration laws and was protected under the First Amendment. Judge Gillis went on to state, “[the] role of the flag and the artist [was to] communicate and motivate ideas and feelings and traditions. Certainly the artist here has succeeded in this particular case of communicating ideas and feelings.” Despite their failure to have the show legally terminated, veterans continued to protest the exhibition by picketing outside the school. They described Scott’s display of the flag as a “slap in the face of millions of veterans who gave their lives…to defend the values symbolized by the flag.”

The veterans’ interactions with Scott’s installation also functioned as their form of protest. They developed a type of ritual in which they would visit the installation every day dressed in uniform to pick up the flag, folding it ceremoniously and placing it neatly on the shelf provided. Gallery administrators or other participants would always place it back on the ground. Scott understood that people would physically interact with the piece, but he requested that gallery monitors place the flag back on the ground if it was lifted. Gallery director Joyce Fernandes was obliged to continuously replace the flag on the ground, as veterans lined up to pick

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280 Dubin, 111.
282 Goldstein, Burning the Flag, 81.
283 Ibid.
284 Dubin, 109.
it up once again. While the veterans could not censor the entire show, they attempted to censor a specific component of the installation that they felt was problematic and within their control. This persistent gesture paradoxically revealed the veterans’ deep dedication to this installation, devoting time to it each day for nearly a month and giving it the attention that they initially sought to revoke.

By March, public hysteria regarding flag desecration as well as freedom of speech had considerably escalated. On March 5, approximately 2,500 protesters gathered in front of the SAIC gallery to condemn Scott’s work. One week later on March 12, 1989, an enormous protest erupted outside the SAIC gallery with an estimated number of 7,000 people, primarily consisting of war veterans (Figure 32). Protesters surrounding the gallery and lines to get in became so long that police shut down Michigan Avenue, a major street in the loop. SAIC gallery monitors eventually had to limit audience visits to eight minutes due to the massive crowds in attendance. Police officers escorted audience members into the gallery in groups of 15, where several security guards were positioned. Veterans from other states came to Chicago to join the protest, which was filled with patriotic chants. Some people recited the Pledge of Allegiance, while others were more aggressive as they stomped on “Scott Tyler dolls.” People held up signs with slogans such as “The American flag is not a doormat.” Some of the signs were seemingly designed to incite violence, with slogans such as, “The flag and the artist, hang them both.”

Protesters in support of Scott also demonstrated, yet in fewer numbers and generally consisting of

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286 Ibid.
287 Goldstein, *Burning the Flag*, 82.
288 Hess, 26.
290 Goldstein, *Burning the Flag*, 82.
291 Ibid.
other SAIC students. Scott’s supporters campaigned for his right to freedom of expression, which they promoted by carrying signs that had slogans such as “Art makes us mad, makes us think, makes us act. Is this un-American?” Additionally, to symbolize the consequences of suppression of free speech and artistic censorship, many protesters carried empty picture frames. Ironically, all of this attention made the exhibition very popular, as evidenced by a record attendance for the gallery.292

The demonstrations were not entirely peaceful. Approximately twenty protesters from both sides were arrested over the course of the exhibition.293 Most arrests made during the exhibition were for disorderly conduct, as well as more intentional acts of flag desecration by Scott supporters. For example, two SAIC students were charged with property damage as they painted American flags on sidewalks near the gallery, attempting to force the opposition to step on the flag.294 This action was punished by a fine of $400 each as well as one year of court supervision. Additionally, four high school students were arrested for sitting on an American flag.

The first official institution to take action against Scott’s work was the Chicago City Council. On March 8, 1989, the council unanimously adopted a resolution asking the SAIC to shut down the exhibition.295 More than eight other suburban community governments in Chicago followed the path of the city council, also creating resolutions condemning the installation.296 Chicago City Council Member Alderman George Hagopian, a World War II veteran described by the local Chicago media as a “fierce patriot,” sponsored a measure to put a referendum proposal on the March 20, 1989 primary ballot that advocated for a Constitutional amendment outlawing

292 Ibid.
293 Ibid.
294 Ibid.
295 Goldstein, Burning the Flag, 85.
296 Ibid.
U.S flag desecration.\textsuperscript{297} Taking their desire to stop the exhibition a step further, the Chicago City Council passed a local ordinance banning flag desecration on March 16, 1989.\textsuperscript{298} This law prohibited “defacing, misusing, trampling on or placing on the floor any flag of the U.S, the state, the city or a foreign country,” with “penalties up to six months in jail and a daily fine of $250.”\textsuperscript{299} The installation even became a concern for the cultural education of younger children, as one local school board unanimously voted to ban student field trips to the SAIC while Scott’s work was exhibited, arguing that the work taught children “disrespect for our country.”\textsuperscript{300}

On March 14, 1989, the state legislatures of Indiana and Illinois passed a measure demanding that the SAIC terminate the exhibition. It passed with a 99-5 vote in the Illinois House and unanimously in its Senate.\textsuperscript{301} Illinois additionally added an amendment to the state flag desecration law that outlawed placing flags on the ground.\textsuperscript{302} James Thompson, the governor of Illinois, approved the bill on September 3, 1989. Governor Thompson also signed a budget for the Illinois Arts Council that significantly decreased state funding to the SAIC and the Illinois Arts Alliance for supporting SAIC’s decisions to show and protect the exhibition.\textsuperscript{303} The SAIC’s funding decreased from $65,000 to a spiteful $1.

The SAIC stood by its students’ rights to freedom of expression and refused to shut down the exhibition. Throughout the month-long exhibition, Tony Jones, the President of SAIC, issued several statements that supported Scott’s right to exhibit his work. He maintained that it was “the

\textsuperscript{298} Dread Scott, interview by Kameelah Rasheed.
\textsuperscript{300} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{301} Goldstein, \textit{Burning the Flag}, 85.
\textsuperscript{302} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{303} Ibid., 86.
responsibility of institutions like ours to protect art, no matter how controversial, charming or soporific.”

In response to the governor’s decision to defund SAIC, Jones questioned the role of the state government as the overseers of proper standards of art. Despite SAIC’s efforts to protect the exhibition, the negative attention that Scott’s work received took a toll on the school and its resources. Jones stated that the college received numerous threatening letters, phone calls, and bomb threats throughout the exhibition. He stated, “[They] were very, very violent and dangerous- ‘we’re going to kill you.’ I got death threats…” The staff and security guards were constantly anticipating eruptions of violence to occur. Jones also stated that the female staff answering telephones became frightened and upset due to the extreme “level of sexual vulgarity and violence” that the phone calls contained. In addition to the loss of state funding, the school paid $250,000 for security at the gallery.

Meanwhile, opportunistic politicians jumped on the bandwagon, anxious to enhance their prospects of reelection. At a protest on March 12, 1989, several politicians made guest appearances to support the public denouncement of Scott’s work, including 11 members from the city council, 10 state legislators, a member of the Cook County Board, mayoral candidate Edward Vrydolyak, and State Senator Walter Dudycz. At the protest, Senator Dudycz was reportedly “grandstanding” during Scott’s exhibition in opposition to his placement of the flag. Dudycz was to run for Congress in 1990, and his devotion to the anti-desecration protests revealed his underlying intentions to appeal to the public through acts of patriotism. Senator Dudycz was the

304 Schmidt, “Disputed Exhibit of Flag is Ended.”
305 Goldstein, Burning the Flag, 86.
306 Ibid., 84.
308 Goldstein, Burning the Flag, 84.
309 Ibid., 83.
only Republican from Chicago in the Illinois state Senate.\textsuperscript{311} In an article published by \textit{Chicago Tribune} days after the protest, Mike Royko condemned Senator Dudycz’s use of this event as an opportunity to advance his political career.\textsuperscript{312} He stated, “Hardly a day has passed without Dudycz doing something to show his love of the flag and country. And his love of seeing himself on TV and in the newspapers.”\textsuperscript{313} Dudycz held several press conferences in which he spoke against flag desecration such as Scott’s, urging people to complain to the school, and even participated in the installation by attempting to remove the flag from the floor.\textsuperscript{314} Despite Dudycz’s clear campaign efforts at the protest, in 1990, Dudycz lost the nomination for the House of Representatives.\textsuperscript{315}

Senator Bob Dole of Kansas, the Republican minority leader in the U.S Senate from 1987 to 1995 and a World War II veteran, was at the forefront of the political battle for stronger federal laws banning American flag desecration as a result of both Scott’s and Johnson’s treatment of the flag. In response to Scott’s exhibition, he stated, “Now, I don’t know much about art, but I know desecration when I see it.”\textsuperscript{316} Dole introduced the first proposed constitutional amendment that would outlaw flag desecration. After reviewing the House of Representative’s version of the bill, Dole added to it the outlawing of “a flag on the floor or ground.”\textsuperscript{317} Based on his previous condemnations of Scott’s work, the specific language that Dole contributed to the proposed amendment was undeniably a result of Scott’s actions. Dole evidently believed that if local and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{312} Royko, “Ah, the Flag.”
  \item \textsuperscript{313} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{314} Goldstein, \textit{Burning the Flag}, 83; Royko, “Ah, the Flag.”
  \item \textsuperscript{315} Long, “Dudycz Won’t Seek Re-election.”
  \item \textsuperscript{316} Schmidt, “Disputed Exhibit of Flag is Ended.”
  \item \textsuperscript{317} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
state governments could not censor the unsatisfactory exhibition, then the federal government must intervene. After losing the Senate vote for the flag desecration amendment, Dole gave out boxes of petitions to continue the fight, stating that the failed vote in the Senate was “a loss to the American people.” Yet the failure of the amendment did not stop Congress from imposing other flag desecration legislation in its attempt to overturn the Johnson ruling.

President George H. W. Bush took the time to express his disapproval of Scott’s work. In a statement originally reported by the Chicago Sun-Times daily newspaper, President Bush declared the work “disgraceful.” The article, published on March 16, 1989, contains quotations from President Bush, who stated, “I don’t approve of it at all.” Yet he then followed up by stating that he would be “very wary” of proposing legislation that would punish citizens for displaying the flag on the ground in this way, explaining, “I’m always worried about the right of free speech.” In response to President Bush’s denouncement of the work, Scott stated, “I thought this was a great honor. It meant that I was doing something right.” Statements made by President Bush, the single most powerful individual in the nation, had the ability to influence opinions and incite discourse among U.S citizens. The media understood the importance of President Bush’s pronouncement, as seen with the Chicago Sun-Times headline “Bush Calls Flag Art Here ‘Disgraceful.’” President Bush’s impact on the reputation of Scott’s work is still seen today. Scott’s work continues to be referred to as the artwork that caught the attention of President Bush. A 2014 article written by Anjulie Rao for the SAIC newsletter entitled “What is

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319 Dread Scott, interview by Kameelah Rasheed.
321 Slate, “Dread Scott: Making Art and Revolution.”
the Proper Way to Display the U.S. Flag?: An Interview with Dread Scott” contained the bold subheading, “Dread Scott (BFA 1989) talks about the provocative work that the President of the United States deemed ‘disgraceful.’” President Bush’s statement provided Scott with even greater visibility, as he had the power to communicate and capture the attention of wider audiences than Scott ever could as a student of the SAIC.

Audience members were able to voice their opinions on the work by writing in the book provided for visitors to answer the question, posed by the title of the installation, “What is the proper way to display a U.S. flag?” The book was filled with over 400 pages of responses and 1,635 entries that included both oppositional and supportive statements. A team of cultural criminology researchers, Welch et al., conducted a content analysis on all of the entries from Scott’s book in order to better understand how forces such as power, hierarchies, and social inequality influence the criminalization process avant-garde flag art. The researchers identified four prominent themes within the responses: Dread Scott and his art, freedom of expression, morality and religion, and American patriotism. A majority of entries were directed at Scott and his work, with 51 percent of those opposing the display of the flag and 49 percent supporting his actions. The balance of this ratio is surprising considering the size of the protests against the work.

Many of the responses continue to be very disturbing thirty years after the event, containing obscenities, racial slurs, and death threats directed at Scott. Examples of these comments include the following: “As a veteran defending the flag I personally would never defend your stupid ass! You should be shot!” written by a member of the U.S. Navy Seal Team;

323 Welch et al., 11.
324 Ibid.
325 Ibid.
“I think you are an unpatriotic son of a bitch”; “In Russia you would be shot and your family would have to pay for the bullets. But once again what do you expect from a n***** named ‘Dread Scott’”; “You’re a commie bastard.”\textsuperscript{326} On the other hand, many veterans and their families, or patriotic citizens in general, expressed what the flag represented to them. Comments included, “Scott unless you served you don’t know what it means to cover a body with the flag”; “Right now a lady is on the ground crying because of what you have done. I feel you did something wrong and I feel you should be put in jail or have something done to you for this”; and “I am a U.S Marine and it kills me to think that I’m protecting a person like you.”\textsuperscript{327} The event that surrounded \textit{What is the Proper Way…?} has been structured in terms of black and white, as two sides that either supported Scott’s freedom of expression or condemned his treatment of the flag and lack of patriotism. Yet examining the specificities of individual audience members’ responses reveals other complex issues that go beyond flag desecration, such as war, morality, and democracy. The discourse produced as a result of the installation was actually quite complex as audience members began applying their own experiences to the work.

The support that Scott received was largely from those who applauded his use of free speech as well as those who believed that their marginalization had been addressed in a powerful way. Based on the findings of Welch et al., freedom of expression was the second most popular theme among the book’s responses.\textsuperscript{328} A majority of these responses supported Scott’s use of freedom of expression and advocated for his constitutional right to display the flag on the ground. For example, one person wrote, “I regard the overreaction to your work as unbelievable- also

\begin{footnotes}
\item[326] Goldstein, \textit{Burning the Flag}, 83; Scott, “What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag?”
\item[327] Dubin, 109; Robert Justin Goldstein, \textit{Desecrating the American Flag: Key Documents of the Controversy from the Civil War to 1995} (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 155; Scott, “What is the Proper Way to Display the U.S. Flag?”
\item[328] Welch et al., 11.
\end{footnotes}
ironic in view of the fact that it pertains to the First Amendment. Keep expressing yourself.”

However, everyone who supported free speech did not necessarily agree with the actions of Scott, as one person stated, “Personally, I think you’re an idiot, but they have no right to censor what is in your mind. Art! Freedom to express.”\(^{329}\) Emotional pleas came from this side of the debate as well, as one audience member wrote, “This flag I’m standing on stands for everything oppressive in this system- the murder of the Indians and all the oppressed around the world, including my brother, who was shot by a pig who kicked over his body to ‘make sure the n***** was dead.’ The pig was wearing the flag. Thank you Dread Scott for this opportunity.” This statement, calling attention to historical racism, precisely exemplifies the reason why Scott chose to display the flag in such a controversial manner. In this sense, Scott’s installation was successful.

Supporters were also more understanding of the role of this piece as a political artwork that was intended to generate discourse. One person stated, “Good work at provoking a reaction. That’s what art is supposed to do.”\(^{330}\) Yet similar to many oppositional comments, violent comments that condoned the work were also found in the book. One person, clearly ideologically aligned with Scott aggressively answered the question posed by stating, “Lightly seasoned with high octane new super leaded Shell gasoline and then torched before a televised audience encompassing everyone who’s been used and abused by Old Glory.”\(^{331}\) Regardless of the content and tone of each response, both supporters and critics contributed to the success of Scott’s work by prompting public discourse about patriotism, symbolism, marginalization, and free speech.

\(^{329}\) Ibid., 12.
\(^{330}\) Goldstein, *Burning the Flag*, 83.
\(^{331}\) Goldstein, *Desecrating the American Flag*, 155.
Censorship Attempts at the Federal Level

Incredibly, Scott’s piece actually inspired the passing of federal legislation. In response to both the unpopular ruling of *Texas v. Johnson* as well as Scott’s controversial display of the flag on the ground, Congress proposed a constitutional amendment to ban all desecration of the American flag on July 18, 1989. This proposed amendment was titled Senate Joint Resolution 180.\(^{332}\) The proposed amendment read, “The Congress and the states shall have the power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States.”\(^{333}\) Many democrats in Congress feared that it would interfere with the First Amendment. Democrat George Mitchell, the Senate Majority Leader at the time, stated, “We can best honor our Bill of Rights by leaving it alone, securing the liberties of each and every American.”\(^{334}\) Additionally, Democratic leaders in Congress believe that the amendment would be a “dangerous tampering with the Bill of Rights.”\(^{335}\) While many democrats opposed a flag desecration amendment, they were willing to accept a flag desecration act as an alternative.\(^{336}\) On October 5, 1989, Congress passed the Flag Protection Act (FPA) of 1989, which outlawed intentional desecration of the flag. The House of Representatives passed the FPA on September 12, 1989 by a vote of 380-38. The Senate passed the legislation on October 5, 1989 by 91-9.\(^{337}\)

On October 19, 1989, the Senate rejected the proposed constitutional amendment


\(^{334}\) Ibid.

\(^{335}\) Toner, “Senate Rejects Amendment Outlawing Flag Desecration.”

\(^{336}\) Goldstein, *Burning the Flag*, 199-200.

\(^{337}\) Ibid., 200.
outlawing flag desecration. President Bush heavily supported the amendment, stating after the Senate rejected it, “I remain convinced...that a constitutional amendment is the only way to ensure that our flag is protected from desecration.”  

Instead, the new FPA of 1989 was put into effect on October 28, 1989. The act “[eliminates] knowingly casting contempt on the U.S flag as an element of desecration to the flag. Makes it unlawful to maintain a U.S. flag on the floor or ground or to physically defile such a flag.” This was a rewriting of the earlier Flag Protection Act of 1968, focusing on protecting the American flag’s “physical integrity” as opposed to protecting it from desecration. The language used in this act was intended to remove that which could be interpreted as the suppression of certain types of expression. The vote for the FPA was 465 in favor and 50 against, revealing that the belief that the American flag deserves certain protections was held across party lines.

As a protest of the FPA, several flag burnings occurred in cities across the country, in which Scott eagerly participated. Hours before the law went into effect, flag burnings were conducted at universities including the University of California, Berkeley and Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado. Other protests were held the morning that the FPA was put into effect, including one in New York City with about 150 people led by Gregory Lee Johnson. The other protest that occurred minutes after the law was put into effect on October 28 was in Seattle, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) burned an American flag in front

338 Ibid., 231.
340 Luckey, 3.
341 Goldstein, Saving Old Glory, 214.
of a crowd of nearly 200, raising it on the pole as it burned. Additionally, protesters were given one thousand mini paper flags to throw into fires. Several protesters were arrested in violation of the new act. The other protest, even more momentous as it led to a Supreme Court case, involved Dread Scott.

On October 30, 1989, Scott, along with three other activists, Gregory Johnson from *Texas v. Johnson*; Shawn Eichman, a member of the RCP; and David Blalock, a member of the VVAW, burned American flags on the steps of the Capitol in Washington, D.C in protest of the FPA (Figure 33). The group’s demonstration took place in front of a crowd of reporters and photographers who claim to have seen at least one flag ripped and three burned. Eventually, Capitol police arrested the four on the grounds of violating the FPA, demonstrating without a permit, and disorderly conduct. Despite the police’s efforts to censor the protesters, the group’s actions and intentions were evidently captured and disseminated by media representatives, countering any attempts at censorship. The Bush administration tested the new FPA on these incidents in Seattle and D.C. The next day, of the four protesters, only Scott, Blalock, and Eichman were charged in violation of the FPA.

Those arrested from both the Seattle and D.C. flag burning protests were prosecuted in early 1990 in their respective state’s district court. Both courts upheld the decision from the *Johnson* case, ruling that the FPA was unconstitutional as applied to these specific cases because flag burnings did not “jeopardize freedoms” and were a form of political protest protected under the First Amendment. The courts ruled that the protesters had the right to free speech despite their disagreeable actions. Solicitor General Kenneth Starr expressed his dissatisfaction with the

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343 Ibid.
344 Goldstein, *Burning the Flag*, 233.
345 Goldstein, *Saving Old Glory*, 216.

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court’s ruling when he summoned the FPA’s expedited review provision.\textsuperscript{346} This provision required mandatory Supreme Court review of final federal district court decisions, allowing the case to go over the appellate courts and straight to the Supreme Court. The Seattle and D.C cases were consolidated in a Supreme Court case called \textit{U.S. v. Eichman}.

Once again, the Supreme Court upheld the rulings of the district courts and \textit{Johnson} decision. On June 11, 1990, the Supreme Court announced its ruling, in a 5 to 4 decision, that the FPA was unconstitutional when applied to Eichman’s case.\textsuperscript{347} Justice Brennan, who wrote the \textit{Johnson} ruling, wrote the decision for \textit{Eichman} by essentially paralleling the earlier case. He argued that flag burning is “a mode of expression” that “enjoys full protection under the First Amendment.”\textsuperscript{348} He argued that although the government was attempting to preserve the flag as a symbol, that simply destroying it does not diminish the symbol itself. The court’s main concern was that the government was suppressing speech because the content was disagreeable, yet this was a clear violation of the First Amendment.

\textbf{Aftermath of \textit{What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag?}}

Scott’s installation was covered by prominent publications including \textit{The New York Times}, \textit{Los Angeles Times}, \textit{Chicago Tribune}, and the \textit{Chicago Sun-Times}.\textsuperscript{349} All of these articles discuss the remarkable amount of opposition that Scott faced from this work, especially calling attention

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 214.
\item Ibid., 215.
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\end{footnotesize}
to the groups of veterans who continuously attempted to shut down the exhibition. Ironically, the publications that featured the veterans actually advertised the exhibition. Scott was able to generate discourse on a national scale.

Scott credited the political controversy of his own installation as contributing to both the *Johnson* and *Eichman* decisions.\(^{350}\) Scott affirmed that his controversial installation “set the stage” for the *Johnson* ruling, which took place days after Scott’s show closed. He argued that the Johnson case gained visibility as a result of his installation. Scott stated, “Because of all of the political controversy…the Supreme Court was forced to back down.”\(^{351}\) Scott then made similar comments regarding the *Eichman* case, once again stating that the courts were forced to “back down” due to the powerful public opinion that his work and the *Johnson* case inspired. This public opinion was expressed through letters to editors, letters to congress, op-eds, forums and debates about flag desecration and freedom of speech issues.\(^{352}\) Scott was aware of his contribution to these landmark court decisions, and to nationwide discourses and debates about American values.

The national attention that *What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag?* received launched Scott’s successful artistic career. Scott’s work has been shown in major museums, such as MOMA PS1, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Walker Art Center.\(^{353}\) In 2006 he participated in the Whitney Biennale as well as the Whitney Museum’s inaugural exhibition for their new building.\(^{354}\) He has had numerous solo exhibitions at smaller galleries and universities including

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\(^{351}\) Ibid.

\(^{352}\) Ibid.

\(^{353}\) That Was Then...This Is Now, MOMA PS1, New York, 2008; *Agitprop!*, Brooklyn Museum, New York, 2015.

Dread Scott: Welcome to America, 2008 at MoCADA, New York and Dread Scott: It’s Right to Rebel at Hofstra University, New York. His work is included in the collections at the Whitney Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Akron Art Museum. Scott has also participated in international group exhibitions in Holland, Zimbabwe, Spain, Switzerland, Greece, and Finland. In 2012 he took part in a group exhibition entitled Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art, which toured the Walker Art Center and the Contemporary Art Museum in Houston. He has been written about in The New York Times, ArtNews, Sculpture Magazine, and Art21 Magazine. In the November 2016 issue of ArtForum, Scott’s work Imagine a World Without America was featured on the cover. Scott has been invited to discuss his controversial artworks on popular television shows including Oprah, The Today Show, and CBS This Morning.

The attention that the SAIC had been receiving over the previous year, combined with the rising public interest in flag desecration as a political issue provided Scott with an opportunistic environment in which he was able to gain swift national fame as an artist. Scott was aware of the spotlight that SAIC had been placed under since David Nelson’s controversial painting of Mayor

355 Ibid.
359 “About,” Dread Scott.
Washington in *Mirth and Girth*, which placed the institution at the center of censorship and free speech debates. It is evident that Scott used the SAIC’s media attention to his advantage as the institution was already being closely monitored by newspapers who had reported on Nelson. Even Tony Jones admitted, “He has manipulated the situation to the advantage of the work.” Scott used the visibility of the school to increase his own visibility as well.

Scott was evidently aware of the possible legal repercussions of tackling such a sensitive topic, as he had been at Johnson’s Supreme Court hearing for the *Texas v. Johnson* flag burning case. *What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag?* was designed to be inflammatory. Scott’s awareness of the likelihood of a national controversy thus became a tactic to promote his art, his politics, and himself. Scott stated, “It’s weird, I mean, people want my autograph now. People just want to hear every word that comes out of my mouth.” This statement reveals Scott’s awareness of the effects of censorship. Part of Scott’s methodology was to create an artwork that would lead to new and perhaps uncomfortable discourses as a way to challenge preconceived beliefs and realities. That being said, Scott was aware that the installation would be inherently controversial, as was the institution that allowed him to exhibit it. *What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag?* provided Scott with opportunity not only to promote his revolutionary political messages, but also to become a successful, internationally-known artist.

For the entirety of its month-long appearance, *What Is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag?* triggered a culmination of responses from multiple areas of society, unspecific to a single demographic. Reactions to this piece reveal that political art censorship is not restricted to

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361 Richard Hefter, “What is the Proper Way to Display the American Flag?” *SPIN* 5 no. 3 (June, 1989), 27.
regulation by the government. The various individuals, institutions, and organizations that attempted to censor this work suggest that censorship is a collective act of society.

In describing the media coverage and widespread recognition of his work, Scott stated, “This work first became known nationally and threatened with censorship in the pre Internet era.”\(^{362}\) This is significant because it shows how this piece created such a powerful discourse at a time when information was not as readily available and easily circulated as today’s technologically dominant society. In this case, the attempt at censorship created a proliferation of discourse and legal action that ultimately resulted in more freedom of speech.

\(^{362}\) Scott, “What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag?”
Conclusion

What can we take away from comparing two instances of art censorship separated by country of origin, type of work, political system, and one decade? First, the primary reason that these two cases of censorship were ultimately very different is that one took place under a totalitarian, Communist government while the other occurred in a Democracy that promotes free speech as its bedrock principle. The Stars had their art confiscated without any type of judicial review or legitimate legal reason. The Chinese authorities argued that the show was creating a disturbance. However, the government’s decision to send one hundred police officers to confiscate the artwork was an overly aggressive use of force. This forceful insertion of power emphasized the government’s continued belief that art must serve politics and that which did not was still considered rebellious.

In Scott’s case, U.S government officials, including President Bush, claimed to dislike Scott’s work. However, they acknowledged his First Amendment rights. President Bush, characterized the work as “disgraceful,” while stating that he was hesitant to censor the work as it violated the First Amendment. Additionally, the Windy City Veterans Association filed for an injunction that would require Scott to remove his installation from the SAIC. However, Illinois Judge Kenneth Gillis upheld Scott’s freedom of speech by denying the injunction, understanding that an artist’s role is to inspire thoughts and feelings. In this case, the system of checks and balances on which the U.S. democracy was founded enabled Scott to continue showing his work as opposed to the Stars. There was also a historically ingrained understanding in the U.S that citizens had the right to freedom of speech. The censors believed that they too

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363 Watson, “Bush Calls Flag Art Here ‘Disgraceful.’”
364 Goldstein, *Burning the Flag*, 81.
were upholding democracy, fighting to protect a sacred national symbol that represented freedom of speech.

The political systems in each case also determined the artists/artist’s abilities to produce and show work in their respective countries. Scott was able to stay in the United States and maintain a successful career as a practicing artist because his dissident artwork was tolerated by the government, embraced by the art world, and protected by the First Amendment. He was even able to continue his flag desecration protests when he and three others burned flags on the Capitol steps in protest of the Flag Protection Act of 1989. Leading to a Supreme Court case *U.S v. Eichman*, their actions of flag desecration were indeed considered constitutional by the courts.365 On the other hand, for the Stars to be seen as contemporary artists, they needed to relocate outside of China. The most successful members of the Stars were those who self-exiled to the west. Exhibiting in Chinese venues, even one as prominent as the National Art Gallery in Beijing would not have given the artists much visibility outside of China, as the country was still isolated and totalitarian.

Despite the difference in political systems between the U.S and China, attempts to censor or silence the artworks ultimately resulted in a proliferation of discourse about the artworks, the artists, and freedom of speech. After catching wind of the controversial display of the flag at the SAIC in February 1989, the media was quick to jump on the moral and ideological panic bandwagon when the news of Scott’s installation went viral. Headlines such as “Capture the Flag: Is Dread Scott’s Flag-Piece Art, Treason, or Both?” and “Bush Calls Flag Art Here ‘Disgraceful’” were typical.366

Prior to both exhibitions, the Stars and Scott were at the beginning of their careers and

generally unknown as artists. The Stars were described as “amateur” while Scott was finishing his undergraduate degree at the School of Art Institute of Chicago. Yet immediately after each exhibition, both the Stars and Scott had become household names. The increased popularity of the artists is evident by their ensuing careers after the controversy of the exhibitions. Several members of the Stars, most notably Ai Weiwei, went on to participate in major international art exhibitions including the Venice Biennale. Their works have been exhibited at prominent museums and galleries, including the Musée Maillol in Paris, the Tate Museum in London, and the Museu of Contemporary Art in the U.S.\textsuperscript{367} Similarly, Scott’s work was included in the Whitney Biennale and is also in the collection of several notable museums, including the Brooklyn Museum and the Walker Art Center in the U.S.\textsuperscript{368} The production of discourse about these artists who incited such controversy catapulted them into the art world where their careers as artists have thrived ever since.

The Stars gained much needed visibility in the west, a visibility that they courted by using western art styles. Along those same lines, Scott, an undergraduate student with an installation that was conceptually and stylistically simplistic and undeveloped, gained a great deal of notoriety and thus visibility in an art world. In both cases, the visibility of the work resulted in the visibility of the artists, most of who have gone on to have careers that would not have been possible without the initial instance of censorship.

The Stars and Scott both anticipated and actively courted the controversy that would occur as a result of their anti-establishment exhibitions. The Stars had spent most of their lives under Mao’s China and experienced the radical ideologies and cultural campaigns implemented by the government. At the time of the exhibition they had only recently emerged from the

\textsuperscript{368} “CV,” Dread Scott.
brutality of the Cultural Revolution. Although Mao was dead, the Stars knew that the
government under Deng Xiaoping would not ensure freedom of expression, and that their activist
practices could be potentially dangerous for the artists involved. Based on China’s history, the
Stars were aware that the possibility of imprisonment or even execution for creating politically
critical art was not unlikely.

Unlike the Stars, Dread Scott was never in imminent danger of being detained,
imprisoned, exiled, or even executed; however, Scott was still fully aware that his installation
would incite controversy. Scott was associated with Gregory Lee Johnson, who, prior to Scott’s
exhibition, was taken to the Supreme Court in *Texas v. Johnson* for violating the Texas
Venerated Objects law after burning a flag in protest of Reagan’s re-nomination. Scott observed the moral panic that surrounded the perceived mistreatment of the American flag.
Scott’s installation deliberately included flag desecration because it had become a highly
contested topic in light of the *Texas v. Johnson* trials. Additionally, Scott knew that the media
would be watching the SAIC for another artwork or exhibition that would be newsworthy and
engender controversy after David Nelson’s *Mirth and Girth* incident. While it is probably safe to
say that Scott likely did not expect the reaction that he got, it is impossible to deny that he did
not expect some degree of controversy. Scott’s awareness of his environment suggests that *What
is the Proper Way to Display a U.S Flag?* was predominantly intended to be inflammatory.

The controversy of the *Stars Exhibition* and *What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S
Flag?* resulted in an increase in discourse on issues of freedom of speech. The Stars were able to
mobilize thousands of Chinese citizens dismayed by the Chinese government’s history of the
suppression of free speech. The supportive public was enraged by the most recent incident of art

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censorship, which suggested a continuation of that repressive history. Similarly, 1989 saw political debates in the U.S regarding the First Amendment right to free speech. Scott’s installation inspired Congress’s proposal of a constitutional amendment outlawing flag desecration, in addition to the enactment of the FPA of 1989. The installation led to powerful debates about whether or not flag desecration laws infringe on First Amendment rights to free speech. Additionally, hundreds of participants responded positively and negatively in Scott’s ledger book to the question “What is the proper way to display a U.S flag?” One of the most popular themes among these responses was freedom of expression.

The Stars Exhibition was designed to represent and give voice to the oppressed citizens of China. After the decade of Mao’s violent enforcement of radical cultural policies during the Cultural Revolution, the Stars used Modernist western avant-garde art forms that had signified personal expression to represent their demand for more freedom of expression and democracy for the people of China. Likewise, Scott’s work was also intended to represent marginalized African Americans who believed that their rights symbolized by the flag had not been equally protected. Significantly, both the Stars and Scott claimed to be speaking for a voiceless group that had been disenfranchised- the Chinese public in the case of the Stars and poor African Americans in the case of Scott. At the same time, both the Stars and Scott benefitted from speaking for marginalized groups of people without necessarily creating conditions that bettered these individuals that they defended so passionately.

Understanding the way that censorship is manifested in various contexts can prepare individuals for their own possible experiences of silencing and regulation of speech, as debates about freedom of speech are still continuing today. On November 29, 2016, President Donald

\[370\] Welch et al., 11.
Trump released a tweet that stated, “Nobody should be allowed to burn the American flag – if they do, there must be consequences – perhaps loss of citizenship or year in jail!” Trump’s statement was most likely inspired by an incident of flag burning at Hampshire College in Massachusetts. This statement is reminiscent of President George H. W. Bush’s 1989 declarations expressing his desire for a strong anti-flag desecration law, also in response to the flag burning protests of Gregory Johnson and Dread Scott. Both President Trump and President Bush spoke against flag desecration as they were campaigning for the presidency of the U.S. in 1986 and 2016 respectively. Debates regarding flag desecration and freedom of speech are evidently timeless, as politicians still use it to appeal to voters 30 years later. President Trump’s statement, however, is more extreme than that of Bush’s, going as far as to propose the loss of citizenship as punishment for desecrating the flag. While the federal government evidently considers making efforts at narrowing the boundaries of free speech to include flag desecration, it is imperative to remember that this type of censorship can have counterintuitive effects. As the debate about flag desecration resurfaces, those who ideologically align with Scott and the Stars will also have their voices heard, as efforts at censorship and silencing evidently incite discourse that leads to action.

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372 Ibid.
Figures

Figure 1.

Figure 2.
Figure 3.
Figure 4.
Figure 7.
Figure 10.
Figure 12.
Figure 13.

Figure 14.
Figure 15.
Figure 18.

Figure 19.
Figure 22.

Figure 23.
WHAT IS THE PROPER WAY TO DISPLAY A U.S. FLAG?

Figure 27.
Figure 28.
Figure 29.
Figure 32.
Figure 33.
Bibliography


