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HYPERALLERGIC

Six Times Right-Wing Groups Went After Artists

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Throughout history, conservatives have consistently targeted artists creating works outside of their agenda.

As Republicans continue to chip away at Americans' rights and liberties through oppressive conservative legislation, it's worth remembering that right-wing politicians and activists have consistently targeted artists who

challenge their beliefs. Visual and performing artists who pushed boundaries through aesthetic and conceptual means have been stripped of funding opportunities, blacklisted from arts spheres, and threatened by religious fanatics, among myriad other attempts to stifle their visibility and suppress their voices.

Recently, artist Shellyne Rodriguez became the target of verbal harassment and threats after right-wing media circulated a video of her confrontation with anti-abortion activists on the Hunter College campus. Weeks later, when a *New York Post* reporter showed up at Rodriguez's apartment unannounced, the artist was filmed threatening him with a machete, an incident that was further amplified by conservative outlets. Rodriguez was let go from adjunct roles at Hunter and the School of Visual Arts (SVA) and faces charges of menacing and harassment.

Dread Scott

In 1989, artist Dread Scott showed his work "What Is the Proper Way to Display a US Flag?" (1988) at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in an exhibition organized by the college's Black Student Association. The installation comprised a 34-inch-by-57-inch United States flag on the floor below a photomontage depicting South Korean students burning the flag and flag-draped coffins. Viewers were invited to write in a book propped up on a shelf above the flag, allowing viewers to walk on it to get there.

Then-president George G.W. Bush called the exhibition "disgraceful" and Republican Senator Bob Dole of Kansas introduced a bill making it illegal to display the American flag on the ground. The legislation passed unanimously.

Scott's exhibition became a touchpoint for conversations around the nature of patriotism and the limits of freedom of expression in the US. Tony Jones, then-president of the School of the Art Institute, said it was "the responsibility of institutions like ours to protect art, no matter how controversial, charming or soporific."