

C. Deloris Tucker

Dear Ms. Deloris Tucker
keep stressen me
fuckin" with a muthafucken mind
I figured you wanted to know
you know
why we call them hos bitches
and maybe this might help you understand
it ain"t personal
strictly business baby
strictly business....
(From "Wonda Why They Call You Bitch" - By Tupac Shakur)

Ms. Tucker and William Bennett successfully raided a board meeting by the leaders of Time-Warner, and used their might to get the company to drop Interscope and Death Row records, two major sources of rap music. Afterward, Tucker bullied Suge Knight, the now former CEO of Death Row Records, into handing the label over to her. Both companies sued Tucker for extortion. During the fight, Tucker threatened Suge Knight, via her attorney, that if Death Row was not turned over to her Suge would spend the rest of his life in jail.

C. Delores Tucker also has sued Tupac Shakur for his "All Eyez On Me" album, which she described as "ruining her sex-life". Tucker then sued Newsweek Magazine for running a story about her lawsuit against Tupac.

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Gangsta Warfare

By Michael Saunders,

His body is his billboard, proclaiming that Tupac Shakur lives by the creed etched onto his stomach: "Thug life."

His persona as the gangsta rapper 2Pac has ferried the 24-year-old from the streets to stardom, then to jail. Out on \$1.4 million bail pending appeal for a sexual-abuse conviction, and awaiting trial next month on a gun charge, he's on top of the charts with a new CD, ``All Eyez on Me,'" the first ever double CD by a rapper and one of the few rap discs to make its chart debut as the nation's top-selling record.

Both by its success and by its subject matter, ``All Eyez on Me'" stokes the simmering hostility toward gangsta rap. After several months of relative calm, this long-running battle of morality vs. money is about to flame up again.

On Feb. 21, MCA Records announced a \$200 million deal to buy 50 percent of Interscope Records, which, along with a roster of popular modern rock acts, distributes gangsta rap albums produced by Death Row Records, where Shakur records.

C. DeLores Tucker, chairwoman of the National Political Congress of Black Women, and former education secretary William Bennett lead a loose coalition of civil-rights activists, clergy and conservatives who have pledged to renew their opposition to gangsta rap. They promise an unceasing struggle against, as Tucker says, ``anything that pimps pornography to our children'" - possibly to the point of urging shareholders to sell their stock in any companies that profit from sales of gangsta rap. The giant Canada-based Seagram Co. owns 80 percent of MCA and provides gangsta rap foes with a new, highly visible target.

``We have discussed programs to begin divestment action against Seagram, as we did against

Time Warner, if they profit in any way from this music,"" Tucker said last week during a lengthy phone conversation. ``The position of the National Political Congress of Black Women has always been that anyone who promotes and distributes music that defames women, that is pornographic, obscene and misogynist, will be the target of our challenge and our protests. We are determined to pursue whatever legal means necessary to stop it.""

``Gangsta rap"" songs are street tales told in ragged, unblushing rhymes, where life is often a race to ``get paid"" and get laid before a bullet stops the party. Women are usually absent from this million-record-selling landscape of guns and money, except in their roles as gold-digging ``bitches"" and sex-dispensing ``hos."" This world is distinguished by its colors, the ones that identify friend or foe, and those cordoned behind yellow crime-scene tape: brown bodies with congealed blood a lifeless maroon, and the red-rimmed eyes of a new statistic's mother.MCA controls

Considering the heavy doses of graphic sexual content, violent imagery and uncompromising misogyny, it's easy to see why gangsta rap has attracted high-profile enemies determined to curb it, then kill it. But MCA has reserved the right not to distribute any material its executives find objectionable. A high-ranking Seagrams spokesperson said last week that some within the company are ``frustrated"" over what they see as Tucker's saber-rattling. ``We would have to be totally insane to do this without knowing exactly what we were getting into,"" said the spokesperson. ``We have said publicly that we will be judged by the material that we would be distributing. Why would we have gone out with such a strong definitive statement to that effect if we were not prepared to honor that commitment? ... We're really trying to do this the right way."" If there is a hit list of companies and performers marked for condemnation, it's likely the first name on it would be Death Row Records. This four-year-old firm, whose logo features a hooded inmate strapped to an electric chair, claims gross receipts of \$125 million. Most of that wealth is derived from sales of the wildly popular West Coast gangsta rap style. It's a genre that borrows heavily from funk and soul riffs recorded 20 or more years ago, electronically pasted into a collage of new and old sounds. There's a continuum from jump blues to James Brown to George Clinton of Parliament-Funkadelic to Dr. Dre (``The Chronic,"" nearly 4 million copies sold), Snoop Doggy Dogg (``Doggystyle,"" nearly 5 million copies sold), and Tha Dogg Pound (``Dogg Food,"" about 2 million copies sold). Add to that Tupac Shakur's new ``All Eyez on Me"" and various other products and performers, and you get Death Row's claimed sales figures of 18 million pieces - and counting.

It is one of the most profitable independent record companies to emerge in the past 10 years, and certainly one of the strongest distributed by Interscope. But just six months ago, Interscope looked like an industry pariah, made untouchable by its distribution deal with Death Row. Tucker and Bennett, skillfully employing a combination of public protests and behind-the-scenes arm-twisting, persuaded a congressional subcommittee to hold hearings on gangsta rap and

offensive rock "n" roll.

Tucker's group breached the corporate wall at Time Warner, which had half ownership of Interscope, by buying Time Warner stock and speaking out at a stockholders' meeting. They amplified their words with those taken directly from some of the songs released by companies controlled by Time Warner. Less noticeably, Tucker and Bennett used their network of high-placed corporate friends to circulate talk of a stock-divestment effort.

Wisely, Tucker and Bennett also controlled how the issue was defined to the public. As Tucker said, gangsta rappers are ``black role models for children who are most susceptible, who need guidance, who in many cases don't have a father. The role models that they see in the streets are the drug pushers and the Snoop Doggy Doggs and the Tupac Shakurs telling them to use drugs. These are messages that our children are practicing.'''White and black hats

In their congressional testimony and their carefully worded protests, they were careful to avoid incurring the wrath of First Amendment absolutists, making it even easier for people to imagine each side in easily identifiable white and black hats. As a result, most mainstream media have portrayed the contestants as caricatures: the crusaders for decency battling the nefarious underminers of society. With the sides drawn so distinctly, it was a simple choice for consensus-seeking politicians - such as presidential candidate Bob Dole - to flock to the cause. It seemed an equally easy choice for Time Warner five months ago to sell its interest in Interscope back to the company's founders, Jimmy Iovine and Ted Field.

This certainly looked like a solid win for the good guys, but as the Seagram's spokesperson noted, Time Warner still makes money from Death Row Records in the form of publishing rights to songs that are still selling. ``Just because they sold Interscope doesn't mean that they stopped all the other deals behind the scenes.''' Also, the public pillorying of Time Warner obscured the fact that the company's distribution arm, WEA, was not alone in handling gangsta rap. As Iovine told Billboard magazine after the sale to MCA, ``Every music distributor put out rap music. ... They all distribute different versions of controversial rap music and [Tucker] realizes it.''' Considering that, industry analysts are waiting to see if MCA's resolve not to distribute offensive records remains strong when Death Row releases several potential million-sellers later this year. Dr. Dre has a new album in the works, as does Snoop Doggy Dogg, who said in a recent MTV interview that he plans a July 4th release. He and other Death Row performers are likely to appear on a compilation disc destined to fuel more controversy.

Regardless of MCA's stance, Tucker says she's ready to fight. ``We have to stop these messages. What has really injured my passion more than anything else are the figures coming out now of the cities, of the numbers of black males under justice-system jurisdiction. This is something that should alarm any decent human being.'''The statistics

A recent study revealed that 39 percent of young black males in California are under the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system, either in jail, on parole or on probation.

Or at Death Row Records, where the roster's cumulative rap sheet seems to bear witness to those numbers. Snoop Doggy Dogg, aka Calvin Broadus, was acquitted of a murder charge several weeks ago. Death Row president Dr. Dre (Andre Young), 30, has served time for assault. Tupac Shakur, 24, served eight months of a 1-to-4-year sentence for first-degree sexual abuse of a female fan. He was released Oct. 12, 1995, after a team of lawyers petitioned a New York judge to cut his bail from \$3 million to \$1.4 million. Shakur's bond was secured by Death Row CEO Marion ``Suge''' Knight, 30, a 6-foot-4 inch, 315-pound former college defensive lineman who has been accused of physically intimidating competitors. Shakur remains free while his lawyers (including Harvard Law School professor Charles Ogletree) appeal his sexual assault conviction. He also faces a possible three-year jail term if convicted on a 1994 charge of carrying a concealed weapon, his second such offense. Last Monday, a Los Angeles judge set an April 15 trial date for Shakur and his half-brother, Maurice Harding.

Neither Knight or Shakur was available to comment, but a spokesman suggested that the company's official position can be found in this lawyerly statement: ``Much of Death Row Records' music chronicles the observations and experiences of young African-Americans, often describing experiences and observations arising from the urban ghettos of this country. These observations and experiences represent a part of life in America that is non-mainstream and that the government, prior to the popularity of rap, was able to control, limit and keep from the middle class. The current appeal of this music to suburban America has caused great concern to the government, politicians and others looking to benefit from and capitalize on these events.'''

It may sound like corporate boilerplate, but this statement is an accurate assessment of both gangsta rap and of its foes. If not for the legitimate business of making music, many self-proclaimed gangstas have said they would be on the streets living out the deeds celebrated in song. Instead, Knight and his cohorts are making money and creating jobs. On the other side, Republican presidential candidate Dole and a congressional amen corner of conservatives have seized upon the issue. And both Bennett and Tucker have been accused of using the controversy for their own political gain, which Tucker vehemently denies. ``All my life I have

fought for the dignity and decency of my people and all people. I have joined in every struggle,"" Tucker said, describing the walls of her office, adorned with pictures of Rosa Parks and photos of Tucker marching arm in arm with Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King. ``This is a continuing thing with me all of life, even when I first suffered discrimination. I would not have my dignity demeaned,"" she continued, her tone darkening like an approaching storm. ``And here they are, promoting and distributing, all around the world, images of our black males. Negative, stereotypical images calling their mothers, grandmothers, all the women in their community whores, bitches and sluts. That's offensive and we shall not take it!""

If gangsta rap dies, it will likely be from an acute lack of creativity, with audiences tuning out the repetitive hyper-violence and now-blase sexual imagery. More fans may turn to the East Coast style, of higher-IQ lyrical flows from groups such as Genius-GZA, or Ol' Dirty Bastard. It's possible that Death Row's next few releases might be creative duds like last fall's ``Dogg Food"" disc. It was hyped by the label as the most controversial rap album ever, but reviled by critics as a pathetic indictment at how limited gangsta rap had become.

Still, as the Seagram's spokesperson said of where things stand: ``The irony of this is that it only fuels sales. I don't blame people for being cynical. It is just a little depressing.""