

C 'Deplorable' vs Tupac and Suge Knight

Written by Westside ID176

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As Tucker explained to *Chicago Tribune* writer Monica Fountain, "these images of black young kids acting like gangstas go all around the world." She objected to such lyrics being sold to minors and asked the Federal Bureau of Investigation to launch an inquiry. Both the NAACP and the Congressional Black Caucus lent support to Tucker's cause. Congressional hearings were held on the subject in 1994, and soon afterward Tucker set her sights on an even larger target, the Time Warner media empire. The company distributed Interscope, whose rap subsidiary, Death Row Records, put out the recordings of some of the most popular gangsta artists. Tucker purchased stock in Time Warner, which allowed her the privilege of attending shareholders' meetings and speaking out. At a May 1995 shareholders' meeting, she stood and asked the executives to read aloud the very lyrics through which their company reaped such profits. They refused. "How long will Time Warner continue to put profit before principle?" she asked at the meeting, according to Fountain's *Chicago Tribune*

article. "How long will it continue to turn its back on the thousands of young people who are dying spiritually and physically due to the violence perpetuated in these recordings?"

Tucker also focused her ire at Time Warner chair Gerald Levin. "I told him about the black males--25 percent are either in jail or under some judicial regulation," she declared in another *Chicago Tribune*

profile by Sonya Ross. "I said, 'Mr. Levin, how are we going to raise a race of people with no men?'" Tucker has also noted that she has served as surrogate parent to many nieces and nephews, not all of whom went down the right path, and over the years came to realize that cultural forces and images play a large role in shaping self-esteem. Not long after the incident, Time Warner sold its interest in Interscope. Tucker considered it a victory, but Death Row head Marion "Suge" Knight hired investigators and then filed suit against Tucker on behalf of his roster of artists. She was accused of conspiracy and extortion as a result of a meeting with Knight at which two recording artists (who were also National Political Caucus of Black Women members), Melba Moore and Dionne Warwick, were also present. Supposedly the women offered Knight a deal to leave Interscope and sign with a black-owned record company they planned, but Tucker retorted that they had simply asked him to try for more positive messages in his artists' music. He said he would need "distribution" to engineer such a situation, and Moore and Knight agreed then to look into financing for such a possible black-owned enterprise.

Some believed that Knight and the gangsta-rap camp had set Tucker up. A smear campaign had indeed been launched against her, which brought up her 1977 Pennsylvania dismissal as

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well as the fact that in the 1960s the properties her mother had owned and passed on to Tucker and her husband had deteriorated to substandard conditions. (Tucker recounted in a *Los Angeles Times*

interview with Chuck Philips that back then, she and her husband had "rented to displaced women on welfare with six or seven children who couldn't get housing anywhere else. We tried to help them, but the tenants never paid their rent.... It got to the point where they had to all be boarded up.")

Still, Tucker refused to back down in her campaign to stop the potentially harmful messages espoused by gangsta rap. "It's important to pay attention to who is dredging up all these charges," Tucker told Philips in the *Los Angeles Times*. "Remember, these are the same people who are out there pimping pornography to your children. Their record and records speak for them." She called for a boycott of a large record chain, and others rallied in support; singer Anita Baker gave a \$10,000 check toward her defense fund. Tucker, a lifelong Democrat, also earned support from unlikely corners--former U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett became an ally. The two often appear at the same speaking engagements against rap lyrics. "She's a daunting figure," Bennett told Weintraub of the *Washington Post*.

"Usually I'm the noisy one, but she's ferocious." In 1997, Tucker's campaign against rap led her to (unsuccessfully) sue the estate of the rapper Tupac Shakur, who had made derogatory remarks about her in some of his songs.

In September 2000, Tucker appeared on CNN's Crossfires Chat. In response to a question from an audience member about rap and artistic freedom, Tucker was careful to acknowledge that while artists do have a right to create works of art, "they don't have a right to stereotypically record music or do anything objectionable to any group." She went on to say, "This music has been proven injurious by psychiatric studies, so there's nothing that can be done but ask the industry to regulate itself. If not, like with cigarettes, we'll have to have government regulation. American people say they feel they're fighting the culture to save their children."

In 2001, speaking for the Parents Television Council, Tucker publicly deplored the "levels to which the entertainment industry has gone to market its adult-oriented material to children and teenagers," and urged TV sponsors to fund instead family oriented programming. "Just as violent and vulgar programming--the kind that pollutes young minds and encourages them to engage in dangerous and risky behavior--is funded by advertising dollars, so too is wholesome, uplifting, family-oriented programming," she noted.

Tucker, who turned seventy in 1997, is founder and leader of the Bethune-DuBois Fund, which

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raises and distributes money for voter-registration drives in African American communities and lends political support to its candidates. She is also the convening founder and national chair of the National Political Congress of Black Women. She was also influential in the reform movement within the NAACP. As a national executive board member, Tucker spoke out against the financial misdeeds of President William Gibson in 1994, and organized a "Save Our Ship" committee; the board eventually ousted Gibson and advanced Tucker's friend, civil-rights activist Myrlie Evers-Williams (widow of slain 1960s activist Medgar Evers), to the presidency. In her lifetime, Tucker has received over 300 honors, is publisher of *Vital Issues: The Journal of African American Speeches*, and has served as a vice-president of the *Philadelphia Tribune* since 1989. In the interview with Weintraub of the *Washington Post*, Tucker did admit to wondering who might fill her shoes: "I wish other people could do what I'm doing so I could step back and retire."