

The money or the message?

Gangsta rap found itself out on the street when Time Warner buckled under pressure

We have used the adage "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" so often it's a cliché. It doesn't say much: everyone interprets things differently. But so what? The message the statement relays certainly doesn't break new ground.

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Interpretation is what makes art so subjective. Whether we observe or hear art, few people will ever pinpoint the artist's original intent.

However, with a particular art genre — gangsta rap music — some critics believe they know exactly what the artist's intent is and censure it with unyielding fervor. The debate over gangsta rap's lyrical content provokes response from artists, critics, politicians and laymen.

Just as we all have the right to criticize different forms of art, we all have the right to express ourselves in whatever way we feel necessary. When one feels it necessary to place a crucifix in a jar of urine, to take a few snapshots of nude men, or to use sexist, racist (or any other -ist) slurs, we must keep in mind that it is art, whether the individual interpreting it deems it bad or good.

In the realm of gangsta rap, however, a significant number of critics regard its message as destructive and indecent.

Two critics have even gone so far as to form an alliance: Dr. DeLores Tucker, chair of the National Political Congress of Black Women and William Bennett, former secretary of education during the Bush administration. The liberal activist and conservative bureaucrat — who targeted nearly every facet of gangsta rap — unleashed the bulk of their wrath on the Time Warner Corporation.

Tucker, Bennett and others have ridiculed Time

Warner for endorsing gangsta rap lyrics that advocated senseless violence and destructive behavior. Time Warner released this music through its predominantly gangsta rap subsidiary, Interscope Records.

Last month, Time Warner sold back its part of Interscope to the label's founders. So the concerted ef-

fort of Dr. Tucker and Mr. Bennett triumphed over the money-hungry capitalists at Time Warner, right?

Probably not.

According to the Recording Industry Association of America, the

sale of rap music is ebbing. Sales of rap music have declined 2.1 percent from a high of 10 percent in 1991.

One of the reasons why sales are declining is because of the message gangsta rap — perhaps the most popular form of rap — continues to send. Tones of racism, violence and misogyny are turning its audience off. According to U. S. News & World

Report, women connoisseurs of rap (tired of being referred to as "bitches" and "hoes"), steadily switch to female R&B artists.

Tucker believes gangsta rap lyrics "coerce, influence, encourage and motivate our youth to commit violent behavior, to use drugs and abuse women through demeaning sex acts." In addition, white teenage boys aren't using gangsta rap as much to piss off their parents. Heavy metal and

rock are becoming the irritants of choice.

Even though gangsta rap artists are losing segments of their audience, rap accounts for a substantial chunk of music sales: nearly \$1 billion annually. So was Time Warner's decision to sell Interscope purely based on financial reasons?

Absolutely. If Time Warner continued to cash in on gangsta rap for the unforeseeable future, would it even think of bending to the stringent demands of Tucker and Bennett?

It's quite doubtful. A decreased market was the overwhelming factor in Time Warner's decision to sell off Interscope. Given, the work of Tucker and Bennett may have had some bearing on the company's decision, but how much clout did they really have? Bennett's political and bureaucratic squabbles and Tucker's grass-roots efforts were not enough to start an all-out boycott of Time Warner's products.

So we do not have Tucker and Bennett to thank for Interscope's sale; we should thank Time Warner for getting squeamish when the pressure was turned on, and the sales decreased.

Obviously, Time Warner thinks little of the art form that is gangsta rap. Some may say the message gangsta rap relays is not a positive one, but without government intervention, the artists have the right to say whatever they please.

Unless there is a resurgence in gangsta rap's market, we can count on the eventual extinction of corporate support for this art form which could endanger the distribution that propagates rap music and its culture.

And then corporate America can sleep soundly.

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Future could be taxing to consumers

GOP's national sales tax proposal would force consumers to pay more

I could take it when they tried to crack down on the flag-burning craze that swept the country.

I could even handle it when they wanted to amend the Constitution to make themselves balance the budget because they didn't think they could do it without a law.

But now, the Republicans in Congress are wanting to pass laws that would actually affect people, and some of their ideas scare me.

The worst idea involves changing the federal tax system. Underlying the current tax cut debate in Congress is the concept of radically altering and simplifying the tax code.

Rep. Bill Archer, the powerful House Ways and Means chairman, and Republican presidential candidates Sen. Richard Lugar and Pat Buchanan are promoting an idea which would scrap the federal income tax and replace with a national sales tax.

Consumers would pay 17 percent on top of nearly everything they purchase. The goal is to eliminate the IRS, eliminate unfairness and encourage savings.

It won't work.

First of all, most modest estimates say that a tax rate of 21 percent would be required to raise the revenue the IRS is currently collecting.

Bruce Bartlett, a senior fellow with the National Center for Policy Analysis, suggests that the figure could even reach 32 percent because business investments, exports and government purchases would be difficult, if not impossible to tax.

Adding a 21 percent consumption tax to

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the current tax of around 8 percent levied in most communities would force consumers to pay around 29 percent on most goods.

For most college students and other low-income individuals who consume most of their income, this would hurt tremendously.

For example, if your textbooks cost \$300, you would have to pay an extra \$87 in taxes.

If the new Red Hot Chili Peppers CD cost you \$15, it would come to \$19.35 with the sales taxes.

Even the Big Meal Deal at Swensen's, a bargain at \$4.99, would inflate to \$6.44 with taxes.

It is no secret that consumption taxes are unfair, because upper income people consume a smaller proportion of their income than lower income people do.

Also, squeezing the poor to finance the government isn't a very effective way to raise revenue. Just ask Marie Antoinette.

If Archer, Buchanan and Lugar want to encourage the poor to save money, they should reconsider making them pay even more of their income to buy necessities.

To make matters worse, administration of the sales tax would make people yearn for the good ol' days of the IRS.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development recently issued a report stating that a retail sales tax of over 10 to 12 percent encourages evasion.

To put it another way, a 29 percent sales tax would create a huge black market, unless the government put a lot of energy into making sure people paid taxes. To accomplish this, the government would

have to be more intrusive than the hyperactive Kramer on *Seinfeld*.

Of course, the collecting and auditing would be a mess, because different states tax different products, and some states do not tax consumption at all.

If the new Red Hot Chili Peppers CD normally cost you \$15, it would come to \$19.35 with the sales taxes.

Also, states would be responsible for collecting the federal sales tax — an unappealing prospect for any state government.

Obviously, the problems with tax evasion and collection would defeat the purpose of simplification.

If the federal government really wants to simplify the tax code and keep it fair, it should consider implementing a flat income tax.

This would tax all wage and investment income above a certain amount at one rate and eliminate all deductions.

That way, the poor and low-income individuals would not have to pay taxes they couldn't afford. There would be no loopholes for the wealthy and corporations, the tax would be fair and the return would be easy to file.

Of course, no member of Congress, Democrat or Republican, has proposed anything this fair and simple, but that's not too surprising.

Leave it to Congress to make simplification of the tax code complicated.

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EDITORIAL

DON'T STOP

The Regents should take the steps necessary to gain students' trust.

Last night, the Board of Regents took steps to repair its badly damaged credibility by holding an open house for the students. This should be the first step on a long road to recovery.

The alcohol scandal that rocked the Board in the summer of 1994 caused people to doubt the ethical standards of the regents.

Furthermore, the decisions increasing the general use fee and the tabling of the student liaison proposal further confirmed suspicions that the regents had no interest in the concerns of the students.

However, the current Board seems bent on cleaning its tarnished image.

By holding an open forum and allowing student to express their concerns, the regents are beginning to satisfy the demands of students who

have been wanting a more responsive Board.

Now, the real challenge begins for the Board.

Although the Board is to be commended for holding the forum, the regents need to prove that they are not just interested in improving their image, but are willing to incorporate students' ideas in their actions.

Also, the Board should not be content to reaching out to the students exclusively through monthly open houses. More frequent interactions with students would be welcome, and the regents should not discard the idea of a student regent.

It is good to see the Board of Regents is extending an olive branch to the students, but many students will not be satisfied until they see more of the tree.