

Ms. C. Dolores Tucker, Chairwoman of the National Congress of Black Political Women, is a staunch and vocal critic of gangsta rap. She believes that gangsta rap lyrics insult, degrade, and seriously endanger women by their frequent glorification, and implicit encouragement, of violence against them. Recently Ms. Tucker was named as a defendant in a lawsuit brought by Interscope Records, which accuses her of trying to persuade Interscope's leading producer of Rap to leave the record label. The suit contends that Ms. Tucker told the producer, Marion (Suge) Knight, that if he cleaned up his albums she would use her influence to arrange an extremely lucrative contract for him with Time-Warner Inc. The suit accuses Ms. Tucker of attempting to induce Mr. Knight to breach his exclusive contract with Interscope. Ms. Tucker acknowledged that she met with Mr. Knight and talked to him about working out an arrangement for him with Time-Warner, but said she wasn't aware that her talks violated his contract with Interscope. "I welcome my day in court, Interscope ought to be ashamed of themselves putting out such filthy records," Ms. Tucker said.

Was Ms. Tucker morally justified in talking to Knight about arranging a new contract for him with Time-Warner? If so, why? If not, why not?

MODERATOR'S ANSWER: Ms. Tucker's actions were morally justifiable, or, at least, they weren't clearly unjustifiable. She attempted to induce Mr. Knight to breach his agreement with Interstate Records, but did so out of a sincere, conscientious belief that the records he produces result in significant harm to women. If Mr. Knight had made an agreement with someone to do something that unarguably would result in significant harm to other individuals then attempting to induce him to breach the agreement would not only have been justifiable but, possibly, even morally required. In this case there is room for reasonable disagreement about whether Mr. Knight's records result in harm to women, but it would seem, Ms. Tucker was justified in acting upon her own beliefs in this case. Some might find her methods of combatting gangsta rap ineffective or unappealing, but it does not seem she had an obligation to avoid such methods, even in light of her position as Chair of the National Congress of Black Political Women.

Case from the February 3, 1996 Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl. Copyright Robert Ladenson, Center for the Study of Ethics at the Illinois Institute of Technology, 1996.