

# Ice-t and time warner case

Business



Clifton Smith Business Ethics Nov. 1, 2012 Ice-T and Time Warner Case Amendment I Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. Ice T's Introduction: " This next record is dedicated to some personal friends of mine, the LAPD.

For every cop that has ever taken advantage of somebody, beat 'em down or hurt 'em, because they got long hair, listen to the wrong kinda music, wrong color, whatever they thought was the reason to do it. For every one of those f\*\*kin' police, I'd like to take a pig out here in this parkin' lot and shoot 'em in their mothaf\*\*kin' face. " Ice-T's Cop Killer! : Yeah! I got my black shirt on I got my black gloves on I got my ski mask on This s\*\*t's been too long I got my twelve gauge sawed off I got my headlights turned off I'm 'bout to bust some shots off I'm 'bout to dust some cops off

I'm a...

COP KILLER, better you than me COP KILLER, f\*\*k police brutality! COP KILLER, I know your family's grievin' ... F\*\*K ' EM! COP KILLER, but tonight we get even I got my brain on hype Tonight'll be your night I got this long-a\*\*ed knife and your neck looks just right My adrenaline's pumpin' I got my stereo bumpin' I'm 'bout to kill me somethin' A pig stopped me for nuthin'! COP KILLER, it's better you than me COP KILLER, f\*\*k police brutality! COP KILLER, I know your family's grievin' ...

F\*\*K ' EM! COP KILLER, but tonight we get even DIE, DIE, DIE, PIG, DIE!

F\*\*K THE POLICE! COP KILLER, it's better you than me COP KILLER, f\*\*k police brutality! COP KILLER, I know your family's grievin' ... F\*\*K 'EM! COP KILLER, but tonight we get even F\*\*K THE POLICE! F\*\*K THE POLICE, for Daryl Gates F\*\*K THE POLICE, for Rodney King F\*\*K THE POLICE, for my dead homies F\*\*K THE POLICE, for your freedom F\*\*K THE POLICE, don't be a p\*\*y F\*\*K THE POLICE, have some mothaf\*\*kin' courage F\*\*K THE POLICE, sing along! COP KILLER! I'm a muthaf\*\*kin' COP KILLER! I.

Executive Summary So go the lyrics to cop killer by Ice-T on the album " Body Count. " Body Count" was released by Warner Bros.

Records, part of the Time Warner media and entertainment conglomerate. In a Wall Street Journal op-ed piece laying out the company's position, Time Warner CEO Gerald states that Ice-T's Cop Killer is misunderstood. " It doesn't incite or glorify violence . . .

It's his fictionalized attempt to get inside a character's head...Cop Killer is no more a call for gunning down the police than Frankie and Johnny (1966 United Artists; 1991 Paramount Pictures) is a summons for jilted lovers to shoot one another. Instead of " finding ways to silence the messenger," we should be " heeding the anguished cry contained in his message. " Rap music has never generated more than a tiny sliver of total revenues for Time Warner, Inc. , but the lyrics of some rap artists on its labels made it the target of powerful critics. These critics called Time Warner irresponsible for distributing violent, degrading, and sexist lyrics and for making money by undermining community values.

Like a junkie quivering toward a fix,” wrote one critic, “ Time Warner simply can’t resist cashing in on the amoral singers who work tirelessly to tear the culture apart, glorifying brutality, violence and the most hateful attitudes toward women the public culture has ever seen, ranging from rape to torture and murder. ” Time Warner countered that rap lyrics which offend critics express ideas from the black community that deserve voice and, in any case, are protected as free speech. This response never worked.

If Cop Killer has a message, it is that the murder of policemen is a justified response to police brutality. And not in self-defense, but in premeditated acts of revenge against random cops (“ I know your family’s grievin’-f---? ’em. “).

Killing policemen is a good thing, that is the plain meaning of the words, and no larger understanding of a neglected culture, the rage of the streets or anything else can explain it away. As in much of today’s popular music, the line between performer and performance is purposely blurred. These are political sermons clearly intended to endorse the sentiments being expressed

Time Warner states, “ We stand for creative freedom. We believe that the worth of what an artist or journalist has to say does not depend on pre-approval from a government official or a corporate censor. ” Of course Ice-T has the right to say whatever he wants.

But that doesn’t require any company to provide him an outlet. And it doesn’t relieve a company of responsibility for the messages it chooses to promote. Judgment is not censorship. Many an anguished cry goes

unrecorded. This one was recorded, and promoted, because a successful artist under contract wanted to record it.

There is nothing wrong with making money, but a company cannot take the money and run from the responsibility.

No commercial enterprise need agree with every word that appears under its corporate imprimatur. Time Warner intends to be ‘ a global force for encouraging the confrontation of ideas,’ but a policy of allowing diverse viewpoints is not a moral free pass. Pro and con on national health care is one thing; pro and con on killing policemen is another. A bit of sympathy is in order for Time Warner. It is indeed a ‘ global force’ with media tentacles around the world.

If it imposes rigorous standards and values from the top, it gets accused of corporate censorship. If it doesn’t, it gets accused of moral irresponsibility. What a dilemma. But someone should have thought of that before deciding to become a global force. Another genuine dilemma.

The Time-Warner merger of 1989 was supposed to produce corporate synergy. The “ Cop Killer” controversy is an example of negative synergy. People get mad at “ Cop Killer” and started boycotting Time Warner movies. A reviewer praises “ Cop Killer” (“ Ice-T’s poetry takes a switchblade and deftly slices life’s jugular,” etc. , and Time Magazine is accused of corruption instead of mere foolishness.

Senior Time Warner executives find themselves under attack for, and defending, products of their company they neither honestly care for nor really understand, and doubtless weren’t even aware of before controversy

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hit. Anyway, it's absurd to discuss " Cop Killer" as part of the confrontation of ideas or even as an authentic anguished cry of rage from the ghetto. " Cop Killer" is a cynical commercial concoction, designed to titillate its audience with imagery of violence. It merely exploits the authentic anguish of the inner city for further titillation. Ice-T is in business for a buck, just like Time Warner.

II. Facts and Relevant History: • In the late 1980s major record labels began distributing rap music, and sales soared. By 1991 rap had a \$700 million-a-year market and accounted for 9 percent of all music sales. Almost 75 percent of it was purchased by whites and its market had grown to over \$1 billion annually. • Time Warner is the world's largest media/ entertainment corporation with revenues of \$7.4 billion in 1992.

It was formed in 1989 by a merger of Time, Inc. , and Warner Communications, Inc. a union that combined two divergent corporate cultures. Time, Inc. , was started in 1923 by an entrepreneur named Henry Luce, who used its flagship magazines, Time, Life, and Fortune, to give readers a view of American life based on conservative moral, political, and intellectual values.

• In 1992 the music group generated 23 percent of Time Warner's operating income, but only about 2 percent of its revenues came from rap music. • On March 28, 1992, Warner Bros. Records, a subsidiary of Time Warner, released Body Count, a new album by rap artist Ice-T and his heavy metal band Body Count.

Body Count was not a rap album; it was a crossover album from rap to rock. Later, it would be misrepresented as rap, which has less public acceptance than rock music, but the lyrics fit the rap mold.

A theme in Body Count was revenge against brutal and racist white police. One song, 'Smoked Pork,' was about shooting police officers responding to a false call for help. Another, 'Cop Killer,' contained lyrics about getting a sawed-off shotgun and a knife and driving in a car with the lights off, being ready to kill a police officer. The refrain included the phrase 'Die Pig, Die!' followed by eight repetitions of 'F\*\*k the police!' • At the time the release of Body Count was unremarkable. It did not stretch boundaries for popular music; its content had been pioneered years earlier by, among others, the rap group N. W.

A. in their song, 'F\*\*k tha Police.' The album was an immediate hit and ultimately sold 310,000 compact discs. There was no hint of a tempest brewing. • On April 11, a Texas State Trooper stopped a stolen truck and was shot to death by the driver, a 19-year-old black who was playing the rap album 2pacalypse Now by Tupac Amaru Shakur on the truck's tape deck.

A song on the album, 'Soulja's Story,' told of 'blasting' a police officer and 'droppin' the cop' during a traffic stop. Time Warner distributed 2pacalypse Now for Interscope Records. The driver told police that the rap tape had inspired him to kill the trooper. The trooper's family sued Interscope and rap artist Shakur for selling lyrics that incited 'imminent lawless action' and the incident received national media coverage. Police around the country were provoked.

Vice President Dan Quayle called on Interscope to take 2pacalypse Now out of distribution.

Suddenly the black rage expressed in rap music was more than artistic license; it was seen as a concrete danger. • Then, on April 29, violence broke out in Los Angeles following the acquittal of four white Los Angeles Police Department officers accused of using excessive force on a black motorist named Rodney King. Violent attacks on white motorists in heavily black South Central Los Angeles followed. Soon violence and looting spread across the metropolitan area. The uprising created tremendous fear that black anger could get out of control.

The press conference created a story line of confrontation and the national media jumped on it. Police groups across the country announced support of CLEAT'S (Combined Law Enforcement Association of Texas) demands; some boycotted Time Warner. The National Rifle Association took out newspaper ads pledging legal assistance to the interests of any police officer shot or killed if it is shown that Ice-T's " Cop Killer" incited the violence. The pressure, however, was overwhelming. • Late in June, Time Warner fired Doug Morris, president of Time Warner's U.

S. usic division. It was to Morris that ran Interscope (a Gangsta rap label 50% owned by Time Warner). • On July 28, Time Warner announced that at the request of Ice-T it would produce a new version of the Body Count album without the song " Cop Killer. " Though Time Warner issued no apologies for " Cop Killer," CLEAT decided it had won a victory and never called a boycott. • Within six months Ice-T and Warner Music Group parted company.



- In September, Interscope and Time Warner ended their profitable relationship. III. Rationale to the decision that was implemented:

The universal ideas expressed by the rap artists are police brutality towards blacks, volatile urban/inner-city life, and degrading views of women. These ideas have merit as they represent truths in our society and representing them in a negative, violent way does erode decency. However, we are on a slippery slope and it is hard to know where to draw the line. We accept video games, movies, and TV shows depicting similar ideas.

We, as society, have already allowed the desensitization of killing as an unthinkable act. Yet, I agree that whenever we can prevent further erosion we should do so.

The ways in which the ideas are represented in the songs in question have artistic merit. To create public awareness through music is valuable, but to tell the story of police brutality, racism, urban life, and the degradation of women through rap is not artistic. To use these horrible, sad truths to further encourage the madness are simply immature and irresponsible at the least.

It is a condition that exists, just as those in the rap songs, however not one I want to exacerbate. • Businesses are in business to profit.

Just as with personal financial success, corporate success comes with social responsibility. Again, there is a fine ethical line between taking risks for the sake of freedom of expression and selling products that are detrimental to society. Time Warner made the argument that lyrics do not kill. Neither do guns.

However, Smith and Wesson would be hard pressed to merely stick a warning label on guns and get society to condone the sale of them to minors.

- “ Time Warner is committed to the free expression of ideas for all our authors, journalists, recording artists, screenwriters, actors and directors.

We believe this commitment is crucial to a democratic society, where the full range of opinion and thought-whether we agree with it or not-must be able to find an outlet. ” Jesse Jackson argued that “ rap music and the rhythms mirror the reality we would rather not see. The police are insensitivity to the black community.

Let’s not be mistaken here. This is an attack on rap. The police in Texas are trying to scare companies into silencing the viewpoint of rap artists. ” IV.

Ethical Principles That Should Have Been Implemented: Freedom of speech is a central value in American culture.

It derives from a long philosophical tradition.

Freedom of opinion and expression are necessary to maintain a free society, the kind of society that could protect liberty and promote happiness. A natural tendency existed to silence discomfoting or unorthodox views. But this is wrong, because no person is in possession of ultimate truth.

Restricting debate deprives society of the opportunity to find new ideas, which are better than prevailing ones. Even bizarre or hurtful comments can contain partial truth and should be valued. Censorship of any kind is wrong because no person, society, or generation is infallible.

It is better to leave open many avenues for challenging mainstream views so that falsehood and pretension can be exposed. Truth, needs to be fully,  
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frequently, and fearlessly discussed. In American society the philosophy of free speech is given legal force in the First Amendment, which prohibits government from abridging the spoken or printed expression of ideas. Over the years the Supreme Court has given expansive protection to all forms of expression.

Indeed, free speech may best serve its high purpose when it induces a condition of unrest, creates dissatisfaction with conditions as they are, or even stirs people to anger.

And the Court has been faithful to his argument. It has, for example, permitted racist language, burning of the American flag, sexually explicit material, malicious parodies of public figures, and the right of the Ku Klux Klan to advocate racial violence on television. The First Amendment, however, protects speech only from government censorship. Time Warner's critics did not suggest that Congress pass a law censoring rap lyrics, knowing that this probably violated the First Amendment. Instead, they argued that Time Warner, a private corporation, should exercise social responsibility and not sell songs about killing police.

This would not be government censorship. Ice-T was unimpressed by the relevance of First Amendment arguments. His inner city minority fans who believed the police were corrupt had no media platform to voice their support on the grounds that his lyrics reflected reality. Ice-T's message was misleading and morally wrong.

- Holiness (Accountability): Time Warner handled nothing well.

While they needed to defend and explain their position if they were determined to maintain it, they offered no understanding towards the very serious concerns of their critics.

In some cases their responses, or refusals to respond, only fueled the opposition. A more diplomatic response would have been to agree to review the lyrics and look into the matter while making it clear they believed in artistic freedom. Their cause lost credibility when they would not read the offensive lyrics aloud and did not want the music played in their neighborhoods. • Holiness (Purity in Communication): Time Warner's release and support of " Cop Killer" undermined values of decency in American society.

Ice-T glorified criminality. Cop Killer" was training minorities and people stuck in a poor economic state to become a violent mob. • Justice (Procedural Rights): " Cop Killer" put the lives of police in jeopardy. By undermining values of decency in American society, individuals might feel justified to kill a police officer even though they are not neglected and/or mistreated. • Love (Self-Sacrifice): " Cop Killer" should never have been released. Since it was, I suppose severing ties was what needed to be done to preserve Time Warner's reputation and ability to attract consumers to their other products.

It however was in no way a noble act on their part. It appears that had public pressure not been what it was, they would still be in the business of promoting artistic freedom that promotes societal bondage to hate and violence. • Love (Empathy): Time Warner and Ice-T functioned as a cultural

agent, producing the illogical violence of the riots. Ice-T knew of the hostility building among the neglected inner-city population he was representing. By addressing a tactical means of retaliation of killing police officers, he expressed no compassion to the majority of police officers who do not practice assaulting innocent people.

V.

Stakeholder Analysis: Time Warner's shareholders accused the company of being devoid of social conscience and citizen responsibility, and of putting profit before principle. Shareholder and financial companies possessing Time Warner stock threaten Time Warner with lawsuits and the sell-off of Time Warner stock. CEO Gerald Levin rose to defend the right of rap artists to be heard, asserting that music is not the cause of society's ills and announcing that the company would campaign for industry-wide standards for labeling that would identify music that could be considered objectionable.

He also initiated a 12% increase in dividends. Although Time Warner continued to support the free speech rights of rap artists there was inner tension.

After the June shareholders' meeting some Time Warner directors expressed deep concerns about rap lyrics. And there was a division of opinion within management ranks that reflected the gulf between aggressive and conservative cultural styles. The conservatives would win. Late in June, Time Warner fired Doug Morris, president of Time Warner's U. S.

music division.

Morris fought an aggressive campaign for Ice-T and was responsible for Interscope; a venture partly owned by Time Warner. Within six months Ice-T and Warner Music Group parted company. And in September, Interscope and Time Warner ended their profitable relationship. Time Warner maintained their stand as a global force for encouraging the confrontation of ideas, but it knew compromises among fellow employees and shareholders must be maintained. VI.

Alternatives and Conclusion: Being the sole representative of his people, Ice-T and Time Warner should create a forum to let the unheard be recognized.

Since Time Warner has established itself a global force for encouraging the confrontation of ideas, a community outreach would bring these two worlds together in an effort to bring social harmony. Once the problem has been identified, a solution can be suggested and implemented. I know the purpose of this case is to reveal the ethical transgressions of Time Warner and Ice-T. However, inner-city minorities and whites are unfairly targeted by the police because of the state of their financial conditions and/or who they are.

Ice-T's lyrics may not be polite or responsible, but he is describing the way many people in the community feel. Even though this message went unheard to the majority of society, it was whispered on the lips of all who felt neglected. That is why I included the 1992 riots in Los Angeles as a relative fact to this case. Every part of society needs to be represented and Ice-T filled that void at that moment of unrest. Is Ice-T a villain or a hero? It depends on which view you can associate yourself with.