

“A blunt for Mr. President”

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A fictional dialogue prepared for the subject STS300, “The environmental context,” University of Wollongong, 2008

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African American hip hop artists

Tupac Shakur and Snoop Dogg

Discuss the pollution of black neighbourhoods and

Human rights principles

With George Bush, the capitalist President

of the United States of America

in

'A Blunt for Mr.

President'

Student Number: 3137958

‘A Blunt¹ for Mr. President’

Cast:

Tupac: *Anti-racist African American hip hop artist*

George: *Capitalist President of the United States of America*

Snoop: *Anti-racist African American hip hop artist, Tupac’s friend and colleague*

George, Tupac and Snoop happen to be staying in the same hotel in Los Angeles, California. George is about to settle in for an early night. Just before he goes to bed, George calls room service and requests a double whiskey on the rocks as a night cap. However, the drink is spiked and within minutes he is completely drugged. He staggers past his bodyguard who is sleepily watching television and finds himself in an elevator with Tupac and Snoop on their way out to a party...

Tupac: (look of disbelief, speaks fast in excitement) No way, I must be hallucinating, was that weed laced or what Snoop²?

Snoop: (very stoned and chilled out, speech is soft, slow and deliberate) No, Pac, I think this is for real.³ (To George) Yo, yo, yo.⁴ You must be President

¹ Blunt: a cigarette containing marijuana, a term used by African Americans. *Tupac: Resurrection* 2003, film, Paramount Pictures.

² Weed: Marijuana. Snoop Dogg refers to marijuana as weed in a number of his songs and documentaries, including the movie, *Tupac: Resurrection* where he talks about his close friendship with Tupac, which was based around making music and smoking weed. Here Tupac is joking that the weed is laced with a hallucinogenic drug to explain their unlikely meeting with President Bush. *Tupac: Resurrection* 2003, film, Paramount Pictures.

³ Most of Tupac’s close friends and family referred to him as ‘Pac’. *Tupac: Resurrection* 2003, film, Paramount Pictures.

⁴ Yo: African American word often associated with hip hop, used like yes, also said as a greeting or a means of getting another’s attention.

George Bush, are you comin' out wit'⁵ us or what?

George: (dressed in a striped night gown and matching night cap, hardly conscious, speech is slow and faint) Ahhhhh! Where am I?

Tupac: (even more excited) Oh my God, Snoop, he's fucked! President George Bush is in the elevator with us, the baddest niggaz⁶ around, and he's off his head! This is totally crazy! Let's take him out for a ride!

Snoop: Hmm.... Alright, always wondered what it'd be like to smoke a blunt with the President!

Tupac and Snoop hoot with laughter, Tupac chucks a large hoodie⁷ and base-ball cap over George to disguise him and he and Snoop link arms with the semi-conscious George as he half walks and is half dragged off the elevator, through the foyer, and out to Tupac's waiting limousine. The limousine cruises along Sunset Boulevard with the hip hop beats pumping, Snoop and Tupac start freestyling.⁸

Snoop: Yo we tha' baddest meanest niggaz

⁵ Wit': with.

⁶ According to Tupac, N.I.G.G.A. stands for "Never Ignorant Getting Goals Accomplished". West Coast hip hop artists, particularly gangsta rappers such as Tupac, have worked to reclaim the previously derogatory word 'Nigger' and ascribe it with new, potentially empowering meanings. In his essay on American gangsta rap, Robin D. J. Kelley explains that "'Nigga' ..describe[s] a condition rather than skin colour or culture. Above all, 'Nigga' speaks to a collective identity shaped by class consciousness, the character of inner city space, police repression, poverty and the constant threat of intraracial violence fed by a dying economy" (p. 137). Kelley, R. D. J. 1996, 'Kickin' reality, kickin' ballistics: gangsta rap in post-industrial los angeles' in Perkins W. *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, pp. 117-158.

⁷ Hooded jacket, often worn by hip hop artists and gangstas.

⁸ Freestyling: rapping freely without rehearsing the words first.

But we done our cheques 'n' figures
And now we're not broke
But it's the craziest joke
That the man who'd bring us down
A racist, capitalist⁹ clown
Is in the back seat
Ha! Aint he in for a treat

Tupac: Yo we gonna give him a lesson that he shoulda learnt in preschool
But wit' the government's oppression no one learns anything useful¹⁰
My life skills, I learnt on the street
Livin' in tha ghetto an' it aint all sweet
(To George) Cos ov' you my people are face down on the ground
But before we shoot chu we gonna cover some ground

*At this, George regains some consciousness and is staring wide-eyed at
Tupac with a look of bewilderment, he thinks he must be watching MTV*

George: (still heavily drugged, speech is slow and slurred) Someone change
the channel... change the channel... I hate hip hop and I hate black
people... ...someone change the Goddamn channel...

⁹ While the Bush Administration definitely operates out of capitalism, this is by no means a clear cut theory. The President's version of capitalism overlaps with a number of other political theories, particularly neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, for which definitions are ambiguous. This ambiguity is further compounded by the fact that policy is delivered not through ideology alone but also through pragmatism, where actions are driven by expediency rather than principle. Fenner A. 2004, *Australian Public Policy*, Pearson Education Australia, Frenchs Forest.

¹⁰ In an interview, Tupac talked about the shortcomings of the American education system and how it doesn't equip you for life. He said that there should be classes in racism and real sex education, instead of gym or volley ball for instance. *Tupac: Resurrection* 2003, film, Paramount Pictures.

Tupac: (laughs raucously) (to Snoop) Yo nigga, did you hear that? I think the President of the United States just dissed¹¹ me! (To George) That was some pretty hardcore dissin' Boy George¹², you wanna be careful what you say around two of America's most wanted¹³. And you aint talkin' to no T. V. screen here, this is real life man, but I'm gonna let it go cos I can see you on some heavy shit, but you gonna have to listen real careful cos me and my brother¹⁴ here Snoop are gonna give you a history lesson...

George: What? How have I ended up here, what happened to me, you won't get away with this. I'm the President, this is big time boys, I could put you on death row for this.

Snoop and Tupac burst out laughing and give each other a high five

Tupac and Snoop together: Haaaaa! Put us on death row! Hey Boy George how did you know the name of our record label?¹⁵

Tupac: Hey Snoop, I think Boy George here is a secret fan!

George looks terrified and bewildered

Tupac: Aw, come on Boy George, we aint gonna hurt you, even though you

¹¹ Dis: African American/hip hop use: put someone or something down.

¹² Tupac starts referring to George as Boy George, partly because it is common for black cultures to use nicknames, but also because it undermines George's manhood and authority, and he is dissin' George back.

¹³ After Tupac served his prison sentence, he joined Snoop on Death Row records. At this time, they were both on the list of 'America's most wanted' criminals. *Tupac: Resurrection* 2003, film, Paramount Pictures.

¹⁴ 'Brother': male friend; does not mean Tupac and Snoop are siblings.

¹⁵ Death Row Records: The name of Tupac and Snoop's controversial record label, owned and managed by Suge Knight. *Tupac: Resurrection* 2003, film, Paramount Pictures.

deserve to hurt badder than anyone on this planet for all the shit you done.¹⁶
Nah, you just dumb, but don't worry, we gonna teach you an' you gonna
walk away here a smarter man...

George: What the hell is going on?

Tupac and Snoop put their arms around George

George: Ahhh! Don't touch! Get away! You're black! No! Get your hands
off me! I'm far too important!

Snoop: Peace brother, there's no need to freak out, we're gonna look after
you, I got some fine weed here that's gonna calm you right down.

George: Weed? But I'm the president, no-one can know I smoke weed! I
only smoke it with my closest consorts on hunting weekends at the
ranch...and of course on my birthday (starts smiling contentedly at the
thought) ... and other special occasions, or just when I need to relax after a
hard day at the White House... oh no! What am I saying?

¹⁶ Since becoming president, Bush has undermined most of America's environmental safeguards that were developed previous to his term. Where safeguards do exist, the white house often fails to enforce the laws, particularly in regard to air pollution and toxic waste. Devine R. S. 2004, *Bush Versus the Environment*, Random House, New York.

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency's Toxic Release Inventory, neighbourhoods with higher proportions of African Americans experience higher levels of exposure to air pollution than do white neighbourhoods. Ash M. & Fetter T.R. 2004 'Who lives on the wrong side of the environmental tracks? Evidence from the EPA's risk-screening environmental indicators model', *Social Science Quarterly*, 85.2, June. Expanded Academic ASAP, University of Wollongong Library, Accessed: 19 May 2008.

Air pollution and toxic waste causes a multitude of health problems, including respiratory disorders, neurological disorders and cancer, and is a main contributor to the health gap between black and white Americans. Harding A.K. & Greer M.L. 1993, 'The health impact of hazardous waste sites on minority communities: implications for public health and environmental health professionals', *Journal of Environmental Health*, 55.7, May. Expanded Academic ASAP, University of Wollongong Library. Accessed: 19 May 2008.

Tupac: Haaaaa!!! I should have known the old coke fiend was a pot head too!!!¹⁷

George: But a smoke might be just what I need... Something's definitely not right with me tonight...

Snoop: Yo George, you been messin' wit' some heavy shit, but it's liftin' and all you need now is some weed to bring you down gently. We gonna take good care of you. You hangin' wit' tha right niggaz tonight, man.

George, still in an severely altered state of consciousness, is somewhat comforted by the prospect of smoking weed. Snoop lights up a large blunt and passes it to George who puffs away happily before passing it to Tupac.

Tupac: (In between draws) But you sure as hell lucky that we're chillin' tonight, man, cos you wouldn't wanna fuck wit' us any other day of the week. Me an' Snoop here, we might be gangstas, but you an' y'all administration, y'all the real criminals, you know what I'm sayin'?¹⁸

George is now incredibly relaxed and has a silly boyish grin on his face. He is un perplexed by Tupac's words and even begins to nod his head in time with the beat. Tupac and Snoop start freestyling again.

¹⁷ George Bush is a recovered cocaine addict. Pot head: marijuana smoker.

¹⁸ While the human rights principles are developed by the United Nations and agreed on by participating countries, they are principles only and do not hold the force of law. Beder S. 2006, *Environmental Principles and Policies*, University of New South Wales, Sydney. Racial Discrimination however is enforceable, but the American judicial system itself is inherently racist, meaning that while the Bush Administration's actions and perhaps more importantly inactions may well be criminal, they are by and large unstoppable.

Snoop: Yo Pac we in tha back wit' tha president
We gotta dope¹⁹ beat pumpin' an' it's time to vent
Our complaints but we do it with intelligence
(to George) Even though we wanna waste ya
Hang ya up an' castrate ya
We only gonna educate ya
Cos we know you just a product of capitalism
Like we two are products of racism

Tupac: Meanwhile my people are dyin' all over town
And politicians keep lyin' to keep us down
This nation was built on black slavery
And we never get no credit, only poverty
For decades an' decades we been doin' it tough
We starving' an' homeless but that still aint enough
You wanna kill us with your toxic factories
That you always seem to build in black communities²⁰
You think cos we're black, we can handle it?
We people too, an' we all had enough of it²¹
There's a human cost to environmental degradation
And your racist, capitalist, Administration
Is makin' real sure that the cost aint white

¹⁹ Dope: Really good

²⁰ A US EPA study found that black Americans are 79% more likely to live in dangerously polluted neighbourhoods than white Americans. This has been called environmental racism, and presents an intragenerational inequity. Bender S. 2006, *Environmental Principles and Policies*, University of New South Wales, Sydney, p.74.

²¹ Tupac was a revolutionary and was involved with many anti-racist movements throughout his short life. In regard to environmental pollution, it could be assumed that he would have supported public participation and the right to know, in the protection of human rights and social justice. *Tupac: Resurrection* 2003, film, Paramount Pictures.

But bore on the back of the blacks, an' it aint right

George: (still grinning) Oh, come on now, no need to be so dramatic, there's always going to be winners and losers. And lets just face it, we're the one's running the place, and we're white. We have to put our waste somewhere, and we're not going to pollute ourselves. Besides, if black people want to make it, there's nothing stopping them, we live in a free country, a country that champions liberty.²²

Tupac: LIBERTY? LIBERTY?

*That blind bitch never did shit for me.*²³

*The penitentiary's packed, it's filled with blacks*²⁴

And our children are dyin', breathin' the air from smoke-stacks²⁵

Back in 1978 blacks were all gettin' sick

When the waste from the rich got put in a ditch

Right underneath

Where we was tryin' to sleep²⁶

²² Here Bush is displaying a combination of liberalism and conservatism that both underlie his presidency's version of capitalism. Stemming from the enlightenment, liberalism is the ideology of market economy and individual liberty that transcends national, cultural or linguistic difference. Under this theory, anyone can 'make it' in a capitalist system. However, when this is combined with Conservatism, particularly in a nation built on slavery and colonialism, then economic progress depends very much on race and class. Conservatism sees social inequalities as natural and good, emphasising the importance of order and continuity in society. When combined with the capitalist zero-sum principle of *laissez faire*, where no concessions are made to those disadvantaged by the operation of market, the result is race-based intragenerational inequity. Bush's statement is filled with contradictions, which in turn reflects the contradictory elements of political ideologies. Fenner A. 2004, *Australian Public Policy*, Pearson Education Australia, Frenchs Forest.

²³ This is a line taken from Tupac's song, *Letter to the President*, <http://www.thugz-network.com>. Accessed: 19 May 2008.

²⁴ This is a line taken from Tupac's song, *Changes*, <http://www.thugz-network.com>. Accessed: 19 May 2008.

²⁵ Childhood diseases related to air pollution are on the rise, particularly in African American children. Pastor M. Jnr., R. Morello-Frosch and J.L. Sadd, 'Breathless: schools, air toxics, and environmental justice in California', *Policy Studies Journal*, 34.3, August 2006, pp. 337-363. Expanded Academic ASAP, University of Wollongong Library. Gale. Accessed: 19 May 2008.

An' now nuttin's changed
Nah it's all the same
Your whole Administration's driven by capitalism
An' it's guilty of environmental racism

George: There's no conclusive evidence to say that minority neighbourhoods are targeted for higher pollution levels, or whether the sites selected for locally undesirable land uses were hosts to minority groups at the time of selection. It's not our fault the blacks want to live in polluted neighbourhoods.²⁷

Tupac: That argument's weak. We all know the black neighbourhoods an' how long they been there. We don't need no study to confirm that. Man, youse whites know damn well where we live. An' that's why you never go there. Unless you need to dump somethun' or build a new power plant. Wha' an' you think that if we move in when the pollution's already there that we gotta choice in that? You think we CHOOSE where we live? We jus' get herded there, that's another kinda racism, we don't CHOOSE where we live, cos' we black.²⁸

²⁶ Public health concerns around toxic waste first came to the forefront in 1978 when the residents of Love Canal, New York complained of illness after chemical wastes were buried there years before. Harding A.K. & Greer M.L., 'The health impact of hazardous waste sites on minority communities: implications for public health and environmental health professionals', *Journal of Environmental Health*, 55.7, May 1993, pp. 6-10. Expanded Academic ASAP. Gale. University of Wollongong Library. Accessed: 19 May 2008.

²⁷ While there is overwhelming evidence to demonstrate that the most polluted neighbourhoods are home to racial minorities, proponents of environmental racism argue that there is not enough evidence that this was the case at the time the sites were selected, thereby refuting the charge based on lack of conclusive evidence. Been, V., "Locally undesirable land uses in minority neighbourhoods: disproportionate siting or market dynamics?", *Yale Law Journal*, 103.6, April 1994, pp. 1383-1422. Expanded Academic ASAP. Gale. University of Wollongong Library. Accessed: 19 May 2008.

²⁸ Racism in regard to access to housing is a major issue in determining where black people can live. This is also true of Aboriginal people in Australia, and it is common for both landlords and real estate agents to blatantly refuse housing to Aboriginal people. This is definitely the case for real estate agents in the Bega and Merimbula areas, therefore most Aborigines have no choice in where they live and are limited to public

George: It's just market dynamics. Besides, you're rich now and you like it don't you? Well, you wouldn't be able to enjoy the lifestyle you do if it wasn't for me and my administration. We safeguard the wealthy, and we look after each other. There's a few losers, but that's just life.

Tupac: Hey, I might have money, but I still gotta black face. Money aint never gonna change that. I'm like a rose that grew from concrete and learnt to breathe fresh air.²⁹ I've always been strong in who I am, so I don't let racism keep me down.³⁰ *But I can barely walk tha city streets, without a cop harassing' me, searchin' me, then asking my identity.*³¹

Police siren starts blaring behind Tupac's limousine

Snoop: Speaking of cops...

Tupac: Ahh shit, here we go...

The limousine is pulled over and police yell for everyone to get out with their hands behind their heads. Tupac and Snoop are thrust up against the wall as

housing only. Public housing is often situated in 'undesirable' neighbourhoods, as is the case for Bega. The area in Bega that has the highest concentration of Aboriginal people is called the Glebe, although some local people refer to as the Bronx, drawing similarities between it and the black ghettos of New York. (Personal Communication, 2008).

²⁹ Taken from Tupac's poem, *The Rose That Grew from Concrete*, <http://www.thugz-network.com>. Accessed: 19 May 2008.

³⁰ In an interview, Tupac's sister Sekiwah Shakur talks about her family and how they do not often encounter outright, blatant racism because they are not looking for approval of who they are. *Tupac: Resurrection* 2003, film, Paramount Pictures.

³¹ Taken from Tupac's song about police brutality against black people, *Trapped*, <http://www.thugz-network.com>. Accessed: 19 May 2008. Police brutality is also a common theme in Australia, The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody held testimony to this. Cunneen, C., *Juvenile justice: youth and crime in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2002.

the police disarm and arrest them, while the President is quickly put into a police van and taken back to the hotel where his security is in a panic. On the way, the van pulls up beside a car full of black youths and one of Tupac's songs is playing...

“...How can I feel guilty afta all the things they did to me
Sweated me, hunted me
Trapped in my own community
One day I'm gonna bust
Blow up on this society
Why did ya lie to me?
I couldn't find a trace of equality
Work me like a slave while they laid back
Homie don't play that...”³²

The lights go green and the music fades as the van pulls away. Bush is left with a vague sense of responsibility, but his main feeling is remorse that he didn't grab some of Snoop's weed before the police pulled them over...it was possibly the finest he had ever smoked...

³² Taken from Tupac's song, *Trapped*, <http://www.thugz-network.com>. Accessed: 19 May 2008.