

## Chapter 8: CYBER-CIVIL WAR

WAR IS ALL HELL; YOU CAN MAKE NOTHING ELSE OF IT. —William T. Sherman, Union general, American Civil War

*So, here we were, a battered group of OJI's crying on each other's cyberspace shoulders, venting our cyberspace spleens and planning our next strategic moves when disaster struck. Tiger had sent each of us a private appeal—you know, person to person, not OJG to OJI—to condemn a member of our CTV community for behavior unbecoming a decent human being. It had a familiar ring to it—a damn familiar ring, like the private note I got from her about Trille. With my shameful first response to that appeal behind me, I was not about to let it happen again. Lord knows what private messages she'd sent to Chameleon to influence how she saw us, but I knew by this time that Tiger had no equal in her ability to find our weaknesses and use them against us. Jamal had become the perfect focal point of her next attack.*

*With all the OJG's on her side, with Chameleon angry at Jamal and at us for siding with him, Peggy and I were especially susceptible to persuasion on account of our particular weaknesses.*

With me, it had been my desire to be seen as fair-minded. When that was threatened, so was my judgment. With Petlady, it was abusive language. The OJG's were smart enough not to use that kind of language on her, but she was aware enough to see that it was being used more and more on both sides. The way Peggy saw it, Jamal's posting gave her the opportunity as well as the responsibility to put her foot down on the whole ugly phenomenon....

Subj: Jamal and others like him  
Date: Mon, 10 Feb 1997 12:38:09 -0800  
From: Margaret Richardson (petlady)  
To: Chameleon  
CC: All

## IAGO IN BRENTWOOD

Chameleon and everyone— I went back to the threads yesterday and I could not believe what I read. What happened here? What used to be an intelligent, insightful discussion group, has turned into a mob. I can't just sit back any longer and not say anything. I will admit I am at a loss for words. The things that are being said are frightening.

Trooper, I know you admire Jamal, but I am going to put in this e-mail a post that Jamal made on 2-7-97:

“To: Trille, Crowe, Algee, Hhhana: As I type this, Alan Dershowitz is going like GANGBUSTERS on CNN with appellate issues—but that's not the reason for my post: I am suggesting that we can use this thread to get our ideas posted in public without AGGRAVATION, by following a few SIMPLE RULES:

“(1) We have to give up our 2/4/97 thread—the VERMIN have infected it.

“(2) If any of you STILL TAKE COGNIZANCE OF anyone except the people mentioned in the title of the thread (and Openminded and myself) —YOU ARE ENCOURAGING THE VENOMOUS STINGS OF THE VERMIN. Are you all masochists? Don't you understand that they post ONLY TO GET A RISE OUT OF US? How hard is it to studiously (sic) ignore the insignificant creatures that have been spewing their venom all these months?

“(3) IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND THAT WE ARE SPECIAL, THAT THE UNWASHED MULTITUDE HAS TO EARN the right to be addressed by us—that's your problem—not mine. (4) Hargrove & Trooper1 —You are both, of course, MORE THAN WELCOME IN THIS PUBLIC ARENA—It's hard for me to believe that the rudeness and hatred from the other side have forced you guys to retreat into privacy.”

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Now, Jamal is saying that: “If you don’t agree with me, you are vermin (any of various insects, bugs or small animals regarded as objectionable because destructive, disease carrying, etc., flies, lice, rats or weasels; a vile loathsome person). If you don’t say as I say, you are spewing venom (the poison secreted by some snakes, spiders, insects; malignancy, spite, malice). If you listen to anyone other than me, you are encouraging the venomous stings of the vermin (a vile, loathsome person—vile: morally base or evil, wicked, depraved, sinful, offensive to the senses or sensibilities, repulsive, disgusting, cheap, worthless, degrading, low, mean, most inferior). If you believe as I do, you must ignore the insignificant (having little or no meaning, having little or no importance, trivial, small, unimposing, low in position, character, mean)

IF YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND THAT WE ARE SPECIAL, (of a kind different from others, distinctive, peculiar or unique—word used where pre-eminence is implied, eminent above others, exalted) THAT THE UNWASHED (self-explanatory) MULTITUDE HAS TO EARN the right to be addressed by us —Jamal.”

Trooper, is this what you admire? Is this the way you feel? Is this the way Laura or Hhhana and Patricia feel? From what I have read in the e-mail from all of you, this is not what you feel [*Editor’s note: Of course not. That’s not how Jamal felt either. I know, because he did what I like to think I would have done under the circumstances if I’d seen any chance of communicating privately in a public forum, or getting the OJG’s to see themselves. The only thing Jamal did was wrap an OJI message in an OJG package. I thought he did a splendid job of putting a mirror up to the OJG’s. I also suspected that he was trying to take the heat off the people his letter was addressed to and to bring Hargrove and me back to the boards.*]

Trille, a long time ago you asked me to not write to you anymore. Outside of the post, “To All” after the verdict, and this

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one, I have respected your wishes. I don't need to ask you if you agree 100% with Jamal, because I honestly feel that you do, and I am sorry. I keep receiving mail from you and I think it's time that it stopped, because I have nothing to say in return. Trooper came to your defense, and that is his prerogative. I have tried to respect his wishes and refrained from saying anything to him with regard to your thoughts or e-mails. Please, no more vituperative remarks.

I still feel OJ is not guilty and not liable. There are too many unanswered questions. There are too many things that do not add up. I know a lot of you believe he is guilty and liable. That is your prerogative. I am perfectly willing to discuss (talk or write about; take up in conversation or in discourse; consider and argue the pros and cons of) ideas and opinions with anyone. But I will not stoop to name-calling, to considering myself superior to anyone, to thinking that my opinion is the only one that matters, or to SHOUTING to get my point across.

Maybe with this letter I have disassociated myself from some of you. If so, I apologize, but this has been building up for some time, and I'm afraid I let Jamal bring it out in the open. If any of you want to continue to consider the possibilities, want to discuss the pros and cons, or just want to converse in general, let me hear from you. As you can tell, the dictionary came in handy this morning. —Peggy

Talk about low points, this was one of the lowest for the OJI's. Our various personalities, sensibilities, experiences on the CTV threads, and levels of expertise in e-mail technique and etiquette had collided in a way that none of us could see at the time. What Peggy did, looked to her like a justifiable reaction to intolerable behavior on the part of Trille. For Trille, it was a bewildering attack she was justified in responding to the way she did. For me it was just plain bewildering.

None of us knew each other well at the time, but I'd read enough of what Peggy and Trille wrote to see that they had entirely different ideas of how

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one was supposed to communicate in cyberspace. It was like choosing what clothes to wear to a party; tuxedos and gowns, suits and dresses, dressy casual, real casual or come as you are? This was a dressy casual affair. You could wear T-shirts with wrinkles and sneakers with grass stain if you wanted, but they had to be the right brands of T-shirts and sneakers. That is, you could say whatever you wished, however you wished to say it, but only up to a point. Trille often went past that point, which was one of the things I liked most about her. Trille was different. She said exactly what she thought.

From an OJG standpoint, all of us OJI's and OJU's were different. From where we stood, the OJG's idea of "different" appeared to be the same as "inferior." All one had to do was substitute the epithet "nigger" for the acronym "OJI" and it was all familiar territory to me.

Subj: Tiger and others like her  
Date: Sunday, February 09, 1997 9:26 PM  
From: Trooper  
To: petlady  
CC: All

Peggy— Boy, did you miss the point!

You know how much I like you, so I hope I can say this without causing offense....What Jamal wrote and what you read are entirely different things. You made the same mistake with Trille and me. Before you paraphrase what we say, it would spare all of us needless pain if you took more care to READ IT in the context of our association with PEOPLE LIKE TIGER.

Sorry about the shouting. That's what normal human beings sometimes do in a noisy environment where their normal speaking voice is drowned out. It's what ordinary human beings often do when they have something out of the ordinary to say and they want to be sure to get your attention. Shouting is what people on the receiving end of relentless attacks against their maturity, their integrity and their intelligence

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can be expected to do when they know they have not been heard.

Try not to assume that I have petty, ill-informed or dishonorable motives for siding with Jamal as I did with Trille. Such assumptions may be why you missed what they had to say in the first place. That may be why you missed what I said about the same people Jamal and Trille took up the cudgel against on the CTV threads. If you assume that I don't understand the value of civil discourse with people who don't agree with me, you'll miss the point again.

I do admire Jamal and every OJI he mentioned. I hold Dable in high esteem. But you, Peggy, you are the prize we have all been fighting over. You are a thoughtful and honorable person. You want to see good in all of us, to get us to see the good in each other. What you say and don't say carries a lot of weight. When the OJG elite can get you to pillory an OJI, they win big. They have won big three times.

Approval is the currency of our racially segregated little cyberspace community (OJG's seem to be one race and OJI's another). Everybody likes you and wants you to like them. That gives you a tremendous amount of leverage—and I think you know it. That's why your public (and unfair) criticism of Trille hurt both of us so much and made us both so angry. You used it again against me and now you're using it against Jamal. It is as though our language and manners were so offensive to you that there was nothing Tiger, Bear or Lion could have done to warrant our use of it.

I urge you to take another look.

I told Tiger that she did a good thing with her letter of condolence [*Editor's note: OJU Sara Reason had recently died*]. I said it because I thought it was appropriate and true. Other than that, we have nothing to say to each other. Silence is one language people like Tiger seem to understand. If we

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can't communicate as equals, the hell with it, and she and others like her have made it plain that they will tolerate no such thing from the likes of Jamal, Trille, Hhhana, Hargrove, Crowe, Openminded or me.

So, what do we call these people who have thought up so many clever ways to call people like us "niggers," without ever having to use that unpleasant epithet? Racist is not a nice word. Neither is vermin or asshole. But, bigger than shit, they all fit. The racist, vermin, asshole lynch mob led by people like Tiger are the ones who set themselves up as being superior to us and pounded us with it relentlessly. Jamal is just throwing it back at them. He's speaking the only other language they seem to understand. —Your friend, Jasper (trooper1)

Sub: Jamal and others like him

Date: Mon, 10 Feb 1997

From: Trille

To: Petlady

CC: All

Petlady—Don't you realize that Jamal IS ONLY RESPONDING IN A SARCASTIC TONE TO THE MOB, THE TIGERS, THE LIONS, THE LOGGERS, THE JIMMERS, THE MAMBOS, THE ONES WHO HAVE ENDLESSLY INSULTED OUR INTELLIGENCE, OUR MOTIVES AND OUR WAY OF THINKING. IT IS OBVIOUS YOU HAVEN'T READ ALL THE POSTINGS AND THE THREADS BECAUSE YOU WOULD UNDERSTAND WHY JAMAL IS SAYING WHAT HE SAID [*Editor's note: I thought so, too. The way the threads were laid out, it is possible that Peggy hadn't seen the posts we had. When I got on her thread by accident I didn't see any. Bear was a Teddy Bear. Lion and Tiger were kittens*]. DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND SARCASTIC, PEGGY?!!

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As far as writing to you, you are on the list and I don't know how to take you off, so go to hell Peggy. And if you don't like my postings and e-mails, don't read them. —Trille

Subj: Tiger and others like her  
Date: Sunday, February 09, 1997 9:48 PM  
From: Tiger  
To: Trooper173; Petlady  
CC: All

My fifteen minutes of fame. Wow, am I something! I have to go and take another look at myself. Trooper has me all figured out. Gee, thanks. Now I know who and what I am. Sad, sad, sad.

Silence, dear Trooper, is NOT a form of communication. It is the weapon of the rebellious child, the apathetic observer, the indifferent participant, and most of all, it is the response of someone who cannot form into words the ideas and opinions which could be used in intelligent, adult discourse. Silence, however, when there is nothing to be said, is truly golden. This message is not an exercise in silence. You deceive yourself and all the people who read this when you make accusations, call names, draw asinine conclusions, and slander the personae of others—and insist that you have chosen to be silent. You have taken us all to a new low. —Tiger