

It's all very simple: We need to stop living in fear.

DARRYL JAMES (www.darryljames.com) is an award-winning author (“*LA Riots, Revolution,*,” *Notes From The Edge,*,” *Detective’s Affair*”), lecturer, syndicated columnist and the publisher of *Tenacious Books*, a boutique publishing house for self-publishing authors. He appears in Janks Morton's film "*What Black Men Think*". James has lectured for the National Council of Negro Women, the National Urban League, The Black American Law Students Association and the NAACP, in addition to radio stations, colleges and universities across the nation. His nationally syndicated column, “[The Bridge](#)”, deals with issues ranging from relationships to politics and from entertainment to the “isms” (racism, classism and sexism). James helped to define Rap Music Journalism as a writer for *The Source* and went on to launch the second largest Rap Music publication, *Rap Sheet*. He is the proud father of Darryl James, Jr.

[<Back to the Top>](#)

Chapter 8 - The Art of the Diss

By Yanick Rice Lamb

Like many people, I used to think Clint Eastwood was cool. But then again, I didn't know that he was a Republican either.

The Dirty Harry we knew wouldn't talk to a chair. He had too much swagger for that. A man of few words, he'd probably just shoot it up.

Unlike his alter ego, Eastwood used lots of words in his “performance” at the 2012 Republican National Convention. But to quote James Brown, he was talking loud and saying nothing — saying it awkwardly to a chair.

Back in the day, when we were playing the dozens under the glow of the streetlights in Akron, Ohio, even the little kid on the corner would have asked, “That's the best you got? A chair? Really?”

OK, to be fair, Eastwood got in a few digs at President Obama. He followed the model of this campaign and too many others, blending myths and facts while seasoning them with lots of scare tactics that elude unsuspecting citizens. The problem with the chair is that it's symbolic of what's wrong with how politicians, and even we, diss each other.

True, all is fair in love and politics, especially in a democracy. However, lines are being crossed. Even the best trash talkers know how far to go when playing the dozens. They understand the art of war, how close to come to the line and when to cross it.

These days, so many people want to be a bad boy or bad girl. Their disses are either terribly corny or terribly cruel. Once upon a time, extreme disses led to literal and figurative black eyes; now they can result in character assassination or murder in worst-

case scenarios.

Civility has gone the way of everything from home-training to honor among thieves. And this so-called era of incivility spares no one, not even a president, and especially a black president in a White House.

Criticisms of his record aside, President Barack Obama has been attacked just for being black and sometimes just for being. He's been called a liar, a tar baby and a monkey. New York magazine even depicted the president as evolving from an ape to make a comparison to his evolution on gay marriage.

"This is the dark undercurrent to the increased diversity of American culture," Andrea Gillespie, an associate professor of political science at Emory University in Atlanta, said in a CNN interview, noting backlashes during "periods of progress."

Gillespie also blamed "an erosion of respect for government officials post Watergate." That might account for the pass that so many accorded President John F. Kennedy for his extramarital extracurricular activities.

While people made fun of President Gerald Ford tripping over his feet or President George W. Bush tripping over his words, no one ever called them monkeys. Newt Gingrich described Obama as the "biggest threat to national security," even though it was Bush, who stretched the truth on weapons of mass destruction, turned a surplus into a deficit and proudly proclaimed, "We're at War!"

Some also argue that Obama needs to take off the gloves more often and use a bit of that natural swagger to get people told, as my grandmother would say. His swagger was on display for all the world to see when he roasted Donald Trump to a crackly crisp over his presidential aspirations and birth-certificate conspiracy theories at last year's White House Correspondents' Association dinner.

"Say what you will about Mr. Trump, he certainly would bring some change to the White House," the president said, playing the dozens to perfection. Besides an over-the-top renovation of the presidential quarters, Obama explained, Trump would focus on "issues that mattered" such as "Did we fake the moon landing?" or "Where are Biggie and Tupac?"

What made all of this so swaggerlicious for many was that Obama joked with a poker face while Osama bin Laden was being captured by Navy Seals under his command.

So, President Obama can go there — a little too hard at times, detractors claim, citing negative campaign ads or brushoffs at news conferences, but not enough in the opening presidential debates. He still has time to fix that. During the rest of this campaign, the president can elevate the art of the diss. He can bring it, but bring it with class and accuracy. He can speak truth to power and show how to take it to the line.

And like Dirty Harry, he can say, "Go ahead; make my day." And let 'em have it with both barrels.

YANICK RICE LAMB, co-founder of Fully-Connected.com, is an associate professor of journalism at Howard University. She covered the historic three days of health-reform