

Oxymorons for Nonmorons

I can no longer read the daily paper or watch the 6 o'clock news without being dazzled by the endless parade of impossible juxtapositions, some linguistic, some political, and some economic. Each of them has a legal twist, but that is not what makes them so darkly amusing. It is their reflection of how bleak our national character has become that draws me in, rather like a horror movie that you hope is just kidding, but turns out to be a seriously written plot.

Here are a few bulletins from the last few weeks, starting nationally:


I just can't take it. It's time to find sources of information that filter hyperbole and mendacity.

1. **Eliot Spitzer:** Who knew that for all these years he wasn't talking about moral rectitude but moral *erectitude*?
2. **Mrs. Spitzer:** Even if you decide to stand by your man, do you have to do it in front of the inevitable *mea culpa* press conference in which the sinner finds god, confesses to addiction, says he's getting professional help as soon as Dr. Phil finishes with Britney and must leave office to spend time with his first

priority—his loving, faithful family? How I would love for one of these wives to grab the microphone and yell, "Let's get this s.o.b. where it hurts!" instead of quietly standing with a thousand-yard stare, hoping the floor opens up and swallows her and her impossible pain.

3. **Attorney General Ashcroft**, testifying before Congress about ethical issues arising from his receiving a multimillion-dollar Justice Department contract without any bids or standards from one of his former senior aides at Justice, saying, "This isn't a conflict of interest, or even the appearance of one." Then what would a conflict of interest look like, I wonder? Being given the Justice Department building as a birthday present? But without those naked-lady statues in front, of course.
4. **New York** finding its man of real vision in a blind lieutenant governor (one can guess that at least his affairs weren't all about looks).
5. **The credit/housing/banking crisis** that has plunged us into recession (followed by massive bank bailouts, dollar devaluation and increased trade deficits), being described by our President: "You know, these mortgages can be pretty frightening to people, I mean, there's a lot of tiny print" (his speech to N.Y. financial community, Friday, Mar. 14, 2008). I guess investment banks don't read the fine print either. The newest financial entity may be called "Chase Bear" or "Bear Chase," but it's the rest of us who got mauled.

6. **Columnist William Kristol's** recommendation that John McCain select Clarence Thomas as his running mate, because Justice Thomas is "the most impressive conservative in American public life." I bet that gave Justice Scalia a very bad day.
7. **Geraldine Ferraro** saying that Barack Obama will only become president because he got to be black.
8. **Richard "Dickie" Scruggs**, the king of class actions for the public good, pleading guilty to a six-count criminal charge that he conspired to bribe a Mississippi judge over litigation touted to help Katrina victims. Is there anything the citizens of New Orleans have not suffered?
9. **The People's Republic of China** holding all our country's notes, so that when they decide to call them in, the biggest question will be "Is this what Chinese take-out really means?"
10. **Locally**, and not quite so epically, **the botox bandits** are out again, getting ready for swimsuit season. It works like this: A member of the spa sisterhood comes in, gets shot up, pays with a bad credit card and then, in the ensuing "discussion" over the card rejection, causes a scene and flees. The issue: How to describe her for the police report: Blank expression? No facial movement? Appears to be a robot? Could be any wife of a disgraced political husband?

I just can't take it. It's time to find sources of information that filter hyperbole and mendacity. I am hoping to learn to read smoke signals. As I recall from the old westerns, those puffs of news go directly to the point and are comfortably predictable: cavalry coming, buffalo big this year, casino futures are up, and, of course, the favorite: White man speak with forked tongue. 



Roxie Bacon

Roxie Bacon is a former President of the State Bar of Arizona. She is a Distinguished Fellow at Western Progress, an organization dedicated to the coordination and advancement of progressive policy solutions.