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[April Media Fools](#)

Why leave fake news and media scams to the White House, CBS News and the New York Times?

Instead I say — with apologies to Scoop Nisker — “If you don’t like the news, make up some of your own!”

After all, it’s surprisingly easy — as George Bush, Dan Rather, Jayson Blair and innumerable other politicians and journalists have already demonstrated.

As a result, activists of every stripe are increasingly scoring political points with media pranks. From Michael Moore’s self-aggrandizing stunts to the more focused corporate spoofs of [Yes Men](#) Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno to the parodistic “non-traditional media transformations” of the [Newsbreakers](#), more and more merry media pranksters are now fighting fake news fires with fire of their own.

A case in point: the brilliant trick the Yes Men played last December upon the 20th anniversary of the Bhopal chemical disaster in India. After they set up a [bogus website](#), purporting to represent Dow Chemical (Dow took over Union Carbide, the plant’s owners at the time of the catastrophe that killed 20,000), the BBC logged on to request an interview. Bichlbaum and Bonanno accepted the misguided invitation and, posing as Dow representatives, [went on air](#) to announce that the company accepted full responsibility for the disaster and would pay billions of dollars in compensation to the victims. Naturally, their apology quickly made worldwide headlines — thus forcing Dow to retract the phony “apology” and the Yes Men’s “offer” of bogus billions.



The anarchic daddy of all media hoaxers, however, is undeniably Joey Skaggs, who first turned the public prank into a high art form. As [his web site](#) proudly notes, Skaggs “has been called everything from the World’s Greatest Hoaxer to a royal pain in the ass.” In the course of decades of manipulating mainstream media makers — mainly by using their own hypocrisy, laziness, and stupidity against them — Skaggs has been “threatened, assaulted, summonsed, subpoenaed, arrested, deposed, dismissed, trivialized, maligned, even thanked and praised.” Along the way, he’s carved a unique niche as a “notorious socio-political satirist, media activist, culture jammer, hoaxer and dedicated proponent of independent thinking and media literacy.”

“When I create a false reality, I always try to create a plausible structure to help convince people,” Skaggs once explained in an interview with McSweeney’s. “Most important to any fake story is a plausible, realistic edge with a satirical twist that is topical. I want people to be amused or amazed but fooled. I want them to say, “Unbelievable!” but believe it. Satire and believability are irresistible to the news media. Sensationalism gets them every time.”

Skaggs calls his pranks “plausible but non-existent realities,” and says he was inspired “by the need to be cunning enough to fool journalists, while leaving clues and challenging them to catch me.”

Sometimes it’s simply a matter of being topical and outrageous. “Other times you can use a calendar to predict the kinds of stories the media is looking for,” explains Skaggs. “Celebrations of anniversaries of disasters, such as nuclear power plant meltdowns or political assassinations, provide opportunities, as do holidays. And then there are the ubiquitous animal or pet stories. There’s one every day.

“If I’m successful in fooling a wire service, I don’t really have to do anything else to promote the story,” he adds. “Because the media will feed off of itself. They all assume the original author did his or her homework!”

Skaggs, who works for and often by himself, rarely profits from his stunts (although his “[fish condos](#)”— designer apartments for guppies — started as a joke and ended up selling as gifts for yuppies). He’s not looking for dollars — just change. “Revelation is the most important aspect of the process,” as he once told US News and World Report. “That’s the point where consciousness can change.”

A product of the anti-Establishment, Sixties-protest counter-culture, Skaggs stages his Yippie-like stunts in that spirit. He considers

himself a performance artist, in the mode of the Surrealists and Dadaists. As Mark Borkowski [noted in a recent article](#) in The Independent, Skaggs' first effort was nearly forty years ago, in 1966, "when he carried a 10ft crucifix on an Easter parade in New York to rail against the hypocrisy of the Church and man's inhumanity to man. He later strung a 50ft bra across the steps of the US Treasury on St. Valentine's Day to highlight the American male's obsession with female breasts. His premise was simple: he set out to ridicule the media façade, and the fallibility of the public's blind acceptance of the media, so he used the media as his medium."

A decade later, Skaggs placed a newspaper ad announcing the opening of a [brothel for dogs](#) ("A cat house for dogs featuring a savory selection of hot bitches"), complete with a media "photo-opportunity." One company received an Emmy nomination for its coverage of the event.

[Cat House for Dogs](#)



[dog food](#)



Another Skaggs piece involved the opening of a "[Celebrity Sperm Bank](#)", where Bob Dylan and The Beatles had allegedly left deposits. Then there was the [made-up laboratory](#) where Dr. Josef Gregor (aka Skaggs) bred a strain of cockroaches that produced hormones to cure illness and protect humans from radiation. In the competitive frenzy to report the new miracle drug, no one in the MSM noticed that the phony doctor's name evoked the main character in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, who turned from a human into a giant insect. And it's hard to forget the time Skaggs posed as the president of a Korean group called Kea So Joo and sent letters to shelters [asking that unwanted dogs](#) be sent to him to be used as food.

Without Skaggs, as Borkowski notes, "there would have been no Yes Men, no Michael Moore, because Skaggs — as little known as he is — is the originator. Unlike Moore, he is not driven by ego, because he is an artist first and an activist second. Because he shies away from publicity for himself, he remains unknown to the world at large, but his name should be written in lights as an example to us all."

"The issues of my performances vary, but most of the questions buried in the work remain the same," says Skaggs. "What do we believe? Why do we believe it? My challenge as a satirical artist is how to present ideas to people to enable them to question and reexamine their beliefs. My hope is that my work provokes people to look at things in a new way."

"The media's job is to question a premise," he concludes, "But information overload and the strain to get a story first get in the way of getting it right."

More details about all of Skaggs' past work is available on [joeyskaggs.com](#). And for all you Assignment Desk Editor's out there, here's [his latest release](#):

ATTENTION NEWS ASSIGNMENT EDITOR & CALENDAR DESK:

The New York April Fools' Committee is proud to announce:

NEW YORK CITY'S 20th ANNUAL APRIL FOOLS' DAY PARADE

The 20th Annual April Fools' Day Parade will march down Fifth Avenue, from 59th Street to Washington Square Park, beginning at 12 noon, Friday, April 1st, 2005. After two decades, New York's most irreverent parade has finally been officially sanctioned by the City of New York. Also a first, the parade will be broadcast live from 12 noon to 3 p.m. on Time Warner Cable channel 25. The New York April Fools' Committee thanks the Mayor, the city, all our sponsors and participants over the years for their support.

The New York April Fools' Day Parade was created in 1986 to remedy a glaring omission in the long list of New York's annual ethnic and holiday parades. These events fail to recognize the importance of April 1st, the day designated to commemorate the perennial folly of mankind. In an attempt to bridge that gap and bring people back in touch with their inherent foolishness, the parade annually crowns a King of Fools from the parading look-alikes.

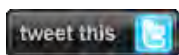
This year's parade, "Divided We Stand", will memorialize the efforts made by people around the world to maintain their power, whether political, religious or personal, at the cost of the greater common good. The Parade Grand Marshall will be Ex CBS Anchor, Dan Rather. The theme song "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition" will be sung by President George W. Bush. The public is encouraged to participate, in or out of costume, with or without floats, and may join the procession at any point along the parade route. Large float entries must be at 59th Street and 5th Avenue no later than 11:30 a.m.

This year's floats will include the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth float, sinking in a sea of lies; the New York Governor George Pataki float in a canoe up a canal without a paddle; the Mud Wrestling float, with Michael Moore taking on all challengers; the Indiana Pacers and Detroit Pistons "We'll Kick Your Butt" float (bystanders are invited to throw beer); the NHL Ice Rink float featuring owners and players kicking each others' butts; and the Airlines' Lost Luggage float. The rear of the parade will be flanked by an empty flatbed truck representing the "Where's God?" float.

Marching celebrity look-alike fools will include: Donald Trump handing out pink slips while wearing one; Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger shouting “girlie man!”; Ex New Jersey Governor James E. McGreevey announcing “I am a gay American”; Sponge Bob screaming “I am not gay!”; Jimmy Swaggert looking to kills gays if they look at him romantically; Bill O’Reilly looking for lust; Anna Nicole Smith looking for money; Attorney General Alberto Gonzales looking for someone to torture; Bill Burkett handing out forged documents to any reporter who will take them; Jeff Gannon, White House pseudo-reporter, handing out fake IDs; Zell Miller ranting “Dissent is treason!”; Howard Dean just ranting; Olympic gold medalist Michael Phelps toasting the crowd again and again; Prince Harry dressed as a Nazi looking for the Halloween Parade; and Ann Coulter being Ann Coulter.

There will be a party with live music, entertainment and food concessions at the end of the parade in Washington Square Park. Revelers can visit the Ukrainian Home Cooking booth featuring the famous Dioxin Borscht served by Ukraine’s Ex Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich; a Social Security Casino concession; and a Steroid Sampling booth manned by Baseball players José Conseco, Barry Bonds and Jason Giambi. Mel Gibson will also be on hand to man his Crucifix Photo-Op concession featuring a ten foot cross with a portrait portal. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld will be collecting scrap metal donations for his Soldiers Vehicle Rearmament Program. And, Harvard President Lawrence Summers will oversee an innate intrinsic gender aptitude research booth featuring Condoleeza Rice and Karl Rove naked as test peek-a-boo science of sex comparison subjects. For \$5.00, which will help to support next year’s parade, the public will be allowed to seek essential differences by asking one question each. Also, Kofi Annan will host a U.N. Food for Oil concession stand. Generous funding for this parade is provided by Pfizer and Merck who will distribute free Celebrex and Vioxx. The King or Queen of Fools will be chosen based on the loudest cheers of the crowd at Washington Square Park. The winner will reign through March 31, 2006.

For information contact: Joey Skaggs, Committee Chair, at 212-254-7878 135 Sullivan Street, Suite 24, New York, New York 10012



This entry was posted on Wednesday, March 30th, 2005 at 10:30 am and is filed under [Columns](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.

7 Responses to “April Media Fools”

1. 1

Jack Shultz Says:

Certainly, Joey Skaggs has performed both great art a great service to Americans illuminating the hubris of American media. But I disagree the conclusion. Joey Skaggs is quoted, “The media’s job is to question a premise,” he concludes, “But information overload and the strain to get a story first get in the way of getting it right.”

The media’s job should be to question the premises of our assumptions, but clearly, those who run the corporate media machine see their jobs differently. They have other objectives and other agendas, and getting it right is not their top priority, or anywhere near the top. Appearance will always trump substance. Gore Vidal came closest to explaining the American media, and the politics it engenders as “the United States of Amnesia”. Americans have the memories of a goldfish. Each trip around the bowl is a new experience. History is a term of derision, as in, “you’re history”, or “that’s history”. Its over and done with. There are no consequences.

There is no past and there is no future, and that is the “conservative” ideology!
America scares the shit out of me.

[March 31st, 2005 at 12:21 am](#)

2. 2

Steve Says:

I like that Skaggs highlights how the media are addicted spectacle. In the end I think it highlights the problem with for-profit media - they just want our attention, so they can sell it to advertisers. Our media must have a public interest mandate - like the COA (<http://coanews.org>)

[April 1st, 2005 at 2:43 pm](#)

3. 3

dan Says:

I like it too

[February 4th, 2006 at 10:16 am](#)

4. 4

appearsjono Says:

At Halliburton/KBR, sexual assault is just part of the workplace experience for women Like many viewers, I watched this ABC 20/20 report when it first aired in December with jaws-open, eyes-bugging horror. It told the story of two women workers for Halliburton/KBR who had been sent to Iraq. There, one, Jamie Lee Jones, a young computer tech, was gang-raped on her fourth day by coworkers after being drugged; the other, Tracy Barker, was sexually assaulted by a State Department employee. Both immediately reported their assaults, only to have KBR first lock them in isolation, then question their accusations. In the case of Jones, it even "lost" the medical report that documented evidence of gang rape.

Click on a small picture to see shocking photos:

[February 23rd, 2008 at 4:44 am](#)

5. 5

XXXLObamaLobby Says:

Klinton vs. Obama. How you think who will win elections in USA?

[March 17th, 2008 at 8:38 am](#)

6. 6

Forexman Says:

Hi. This is really interesting post. Thank You! I have just subscribed to Your rss!

Best regards

[May 25th, 2008 at 6:03 am](#)

7. 7

Hector Says:

Could you help me. Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.

I am from Salvador and learning to write in English, give please true I wrote the following sentence: "What do airline tickets and jamie oliver woks have in common? From airline tickets through to carnival costumes and jamie oliver woks – the answers that."

:P Thanks in advance. Hector.

[March 14th, 2009 at 7:15 am](#)

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Website

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To prove you're a person (not a spam script), type the security word shown in the picture.

allow