



Media are victims of hoax

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From Correspondent Christine Negroni

NEW YORK (CNN) -- A New York City prankster has struck again, duping CNN and other media with a story of high-tech justice.



Last month Joey Skaggs presented himself as an expert on trial justice when he was interviewed for CNN. In fact, he is a wise guy who said he faked the persona to teach the media and the public a lesson.

"I'm an ethical liar. The lie is the message. I'm only the messenger. I'm saying we are lied to constantly, and I try and illustrate that with humor and satire and controversy."

-- Joey Skaggs

"I don't know if there's a great awareness as to how irresponsible the media is. I think that people feel that way, but I like to show it," Skaggs said by way of explanation. ([128K AIFF sound](#) or [128K WAV sound](#))

Toward that end, Skaggs posed as Joseph Bonuso, Ph.D., out to replace the American jury system with a computer-generated, emotionless verdict.

"The jury is just a bunch of manipulated puppets," he said when CNN confronted him about the story. "You are the puppet." ([96K AIFF sound](#) or [96K WAV sound](#))



And indeed CNN was. Bonuso's Solomon Project was 100 percent fiction but nonetheless, believable. A number of newspapers carried the story and lawyers who had received letters from Bonuso, on what appeared to be New York University Law School letterhead, responded with interest.

The law school's vice dean is still scratching his head over that.

"We've been somewhat embarrassed by his using our name in connection with a project that, on the face of it, is somewhat silly, frankly," said Oscar Chase, vice dean of NYU Law School.

Skagg's Solomon Project farce was carried out at the offices of the Voyager Company, a creator of multi-media products, including a CD-ROM project in progress by the now-renowned prankster.

Documentary producer Frederic Marx, who characterizes Skaggs work as fascinating and brilliant, filmed Skaggs in the role of Bonuso for a movie he's making.

"I'm an ethical liar," said Skaggs. "The lie is the message. I'm only the messenger. I'm saying we are lied to constantly, and I try and illustrate that with humor and satire and controversy."



Skaggs may have a point, according to Columbia University professor Rhonda Lipton.

"The public is skeptical of news organizations, the reporters the producers and the people who make decisions," she said. "What this person has succeeded in doing is saying, 'You know, folks, you're right.'"

Skaggs agreed that's his goal. But after pulling hoaxes on programs from Good Morning America to Sonya Live, after promoting with a straight face pedestrian rules for the road and personal refrigerator diet police, Skaggs has been exposed, leading many in the media to hope that he has pulled his last hoax.

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