

“SENDING A CLEAR MIXED SIGNAL” Still More Amusing Bloopers and Anomalies

DON HAUPTMAN

New York, New York

donhauptman@nyc.rr.com

Announcement: Having written a bunch of articles in this vein for *Word Ways*, I'm now working on a book with the same theme. If you encounter any amusing published errors or other content that lends itself to this treatment, I would appreciate receiving them. To document authenticity, I need originals or copies, sourced with the publication's name and date. Please mail to me at 61 West 62 St., New York, NY 10023, or fax to 212-397-1964, or send scans or website links to the above e-mail address. Thanks for your contributions. And now, on to a new rogues' gallery of media gaffes and oddities, enhanced by the usual snarky rejoinders.

The New York Times, advertising industry column, April 29, 2005:

“For us to make significant changes to our current marketing plan would send a clear mixed signal,” said Dennis L. Lynch, [Wendy's] senior vice president for communications.

Not if he explains it in a simple complex way.

The Wall Street Journal, Corrections & Amplifications, August 16, 2004:

Some jesters in a British competition described in a page-one article last Monday ride on unicycles. The article incorrectly said they ride on unicorns.

The unicorns' union is filing a protest about those lost jobs.

The New York Times, Health & Fitness section, February 8, 2005:

I had assumed that most West Africans [including the hospital patient] only spoke French along with their native languages. . . . Spanish? He spoke Spanish? I slapped my head against my forehead.

An informative anatomy lesson for the staff.

The New York Times, January 2, 2006:

But unseen by most mortals, the business of Christmas gets underway months earlier. . . . By Easter, ornament peddlers like Ellen Morstein, who owns a chain of mall kiosks, will have started to unpack and price her crates of glass baubles. “I'm Jewish and I spend every waking moment thinking about Christmas,” said Ms. Morstein.

That's funny; Jesus often made the same comment.

New York Resident, London travel feature, December 12, 2005:

Find your way to Dennis Servers' House. . . . Here you are invited to wander around a house left in its 18th-century state by a family you never actually see.

Except for Thursday afternoons, when reincarnations are scheduled.

The New York Times, Corrections, March 1, 2006:

The Antiques column in Weekend on Friday misstated the date of the Paris exposition that participants in the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition hoped to surpass. It was 1889, not 1900.

Of course, with all that newfangled technology, they might have been able to see the future.

The New York Times, Obituary, September 26, 2004:

Marvin H. Davis, a billionaire . . . died yesterday at his home in Beverly Hills, Calif., a family spokesman said. He was 79. Mr. Davis died of natural causes, said the spokesman, Michael Sitrick. Friends said that Mr. Davis, who was six feet four and weighed 300 pounds, had long suffered from heart trouble, back pain, diabetes and other effects of morbid obesity.

Hey, where's that certificate? Let's change it to "artificial causes."

The Wall Street Journal, November 9, 2005:

David Morris, a university professor who teaches brassiere studies at United Kingdom's De Montfort University. . . .

Professor Morris! Professor Morris! How do we apply for your job?

The New York Times, photo caption, June 18, 2005:

Tom Cruise, far right, announced his engagement yesterday to Katie Holmes, right. . . . Mr. Cruise and Ms. Holmes are actors.

In other breaking news, the Pope is Catholic.

The New York Times, House & Home section, February 23, 2006:

The Guynd [is] a handsome but decaying Georgian mansion in northeast Scotland. . . . The Guynd, the Gaelic word for a high, marshy place (it rhymes with wind), is also the title of Ms. Rathbone's recently published memoir. . . .

Thanks for that unambiguous pronunciation clue!