

Half the place was filled with generic lawyer types in drab gray-and-blue uniforms. Nothing interesting or unusual—a typical pack of paunchy, middle-aged men. As to the other half, well, plaintiffs' attorneys are the self-proclaimed "lawyers of the people." And they looked it. Milling around the bar area felt like the scene in *GoodFellas* where Henry Hill describes each of the members of Paulie's crew, the camera rolling past every toupee, pompadour, pinkie ring, sharkskin suit and all the cake-faced goomads in press-on nails and fire-engine red lipstick. The room was chock-full of "bling," but it was stale, confused and slapped together—the "Jersey" kind.

The hotel was a Super Bowl of people-watching. Just waiting in line I saw Johnnie Cochran's doppelgänger in gold-plated Puff

Daddy glasses and a vertical-striped tie, an old man in a baby-shit brown version of Tom Wolfe's three-piece suit and a woman who was a dead ringer for Milton Berle, dressed in what looked like a geisha-themed ball gown. A couple of cigarette girls in pasties and dwarves on miniature ponies would have rounded out the atmosphere perfectly.

When I finally reached the bartender, I had to yell to him over the sound of a lumpy man with a recessed chin barking into a cell phone to my left, gesturing with his free hand to impress the people around him. "No, the settlement is never going to work with thirty thousand dollars! I need thirty-six!" It was hard not to lean over and squeeze his cheeks. *Hey Spanky, I know you're a big-time wheeler and dealer, but how about taking it outside?* To the right a couple of "playas" in brand-new suits, deep October tans and Andrew Dice Clay haircuts were angling into my space at the bar, laughing loudly and posturing for phantom paparazzi. It was all I could do not to tap one on the shoulder and ask for a favor. *Hey Fonzie, how about elbowing the jukebox? It's stuck on "Piano Man" again.*

I'd say the scene was Gatsbyesque, but that seems cruel to Fitzgerald. A better analogy would be Rodney Dangerfield's "Regular Guy" fashion show from *Easy Money*. There's no way to be kind about it—this was a crowd for radio. If I hadn't been dragged to the damn dinner, I'd have had that queer guilt you feel rubbernecking past a car accident or watching some horrible show on celebrity plastic surgery gone wrong. And the only thing more comical than the scene was the conversation, the sort of political sermonizing you'd expect from a freshman at Sarah Lawrence.

"These companies don't care about the workers. They just move everything overseas. Everything's about profit!"

"It's criminal that an oil executive gets paid \$30 million and forty million people have no health insurance."

"The least Bush could have done was meet with Cindy Sheehan. Her only son died so Bush could avenge Saddam's attempt to kill his father."