

Bill Watson

From: Scott Kasierski [scottkasierski@gmail.com]
Sent: Thursday, September 07, 2006 9:43 AM
To: wwatson@gracehopkinsville.org
Subject: Athenaeum paper



ATHENAEUM.cwk
(40 KB)

Dear Bill --

Thank you so much for agreeing to present this for me. I REALLY wish I could be there, because I think this paper may prompt some entertaining responses.

The paper is both attached as a finished document, and also below in plain text format. I prepared it on a Mac, so I thought I'd put the text below in case you have any trouble with the translation of the attachment to Windows. If neither of these vehicles works, just call me, and I'll think of some other way to get it to you.

Also, I will send a rebuttal shortly...

Thanks again. Regards to Sally.

Yours,

Scott Kasierski

cell #270-348-2503

YOUR MOTHER...

The Athenaeum Society

Scott P. Kasierski

September 7, 2006

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

I DEEPLY REGRET BEING UNABLE TO ATTEND THIS MEETING, BUT MY DUTIES AS A PARENT MUST OVERRIDE MY DUTIES AS A MEMBER OF THE ATHENEUM. HECK, YOU MIGHT AS WELL JUST GO AHEAD AND KICK ME OUT. AND, AS AN IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER, I WANT TO EMPHASIZE THAT THE OPINIONS, CONTENT AND STATEMENTS MADE HEREIN ARE ENTIRELY MY OWN -- PLEASE DO NOT BERATE THE KIND READER WHO, I MUST REMIND YOU, IS A MEMBER OF THE CLERGY.

THE TITLE OF MY PAPER IS "YOUR MOTHER." NO, I AM NOT GOING TO GIVE A PAPER ON EACH OF THE FINE, UPSTANDING AND ELEGANT WOMEN WHO REARED YOU, MY FELLOW MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY. AND NO, I AM NOT GOING TO DISCUSS THE SOCIOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE MATERNAL IDEAL.

IN FACT, I'M NOT GOING TO TALK ABOUT REAL MOTHERS AT ALL. I AM NOT REALLY GOING TO TALK ABOUT "YOUR MOTHER" -- I'M GOING TO TALK ABOUT "YOUR MAMA."

BECAUSE OF THAT SLIGHT CHANGE OF LANGUAGE, YOU MAY BE ANTICIPATING THAT WHAT FOLLOWS WILL BE INSULTING COMMENTS ABOUT YOUR MOTHER. IN THAT, YOU ARE ABSOLUTELY

CORRECT. BUT, BECAUSE WE ARE ALL FRIENDS HERE, AND KNOW EACH OTHER REASONABLY WELL, YOU ARE PROBABLY NOT ANTICIPATING A SERIOUS SCREED THAT WILL LEAVE YOU SHAKING IN ANGER. AGAIN, YOU ARE (HOPEFULLY) ABSOLUTELY CORRECT.

THAT IS BECAUSE THE PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER IS NOT TO INSULT YOU, BUT RATHER, TO DISCUSS THE SOCIOLOGICAL ROLE OF INSULTS IN OUR CULTURE, AND IN THAT PECULIAR SUBCULTURE THAT IS THE ATHENAEUM SOCIETY.

THIS IS A PARTICULARLY FERTILE GROUP IN WHICH TO CONDUCT SUCH AN EXPLORATION, BECAUSE IN THE ATHENAEUM SOCIETY, WE REGULARLY PRACTICE A FORM OF RITUALIZED, STRUCTURED INSULTING OF EACH OTHER. INDEED, THE CENTERPIECES OF OUR MEETINGS (AND OFTEN THE MOST INTERESTING AND ENTERTAINING PARTS) ARE THE COMMENTS AND REBUTTALS, WHERE WE MAKE DISPARAGING REMARKS ABOUT EACH OTHER. IN SOME WAYS, THE PAPERS SEEM TO MERELY SERVE AS VEHICLES TO GET US TO THE GOOD STUFF -- THE INSULTS.

AT THEIR MOST BASIC LEVEL, INSULTS ARE WORDS OR ACTIONS THAT APPEAR TO COMMUNICATE CONTEMPT. INSULTING ACTIONS (E.G., EXTENDING ONE'S MIDDLE FINGER) ARE, TO ME, LESS INTERESTING THAN VERBAL INSULTS, AND SO I CHOOSE TO IGNORE THEM IN THIS PAPER. LIKEWISE, I AM NOT GOING TO DISCUSS UNINTENTIONAL INSULTS. RATHER, WHAT INTERESTS ME IS THE RITUALISTIC USE OF INSULTING LANGUAGE, PARTICULARLY WHEN USED TO FURTHER THE PURPOSES OF A GROUP OF PEOPLE, OR WHEN USED TO ESTABLISH OR FURTHER RELATIONSHIPS.

IT IS NOT ALWAYS OBVIOUS TO DISCERN WHEN SUCH A USE OF INSULTS IS TAKING PLACE. TO GIVE A PERSONAL EXAMPLE, WHEN I FIRST MET A PARTICULAR WOMAN IN COLLEGE, SHE GREETED ME IN A SARCASTIC VOICE, SAYING "NICE SHIRT." I CORRECTLY PERCEIVED HER SARCASTIC, BUT INCORRECTLY INTERPRETED THE PURPOSE OF HER INSULT. I THOUGHT SHE WANTED TO FURTHER A RELATIONSHIP WITH ME -- I THOUGHT SHE WAS FLIRTING. SHE LATER ASSURED ME SHE WAS NOT -- THAT SHE DID, IN FACT, WANT TO INSULT WHAT I HAVE TO ADMIT NOW WAS AN EXCEEDINGLY UGLY SHIRT. BUT IN ANY EVENT, WE'VE BEEN MARRIED FOR FOURTEEN YEARS.

RITUALISTIC INSULTS CAN SERVE IMPORTANT COMMUNICATIVE AND RELATIONSHIP PURPOSES, BEYOND THE OCCASIONAL FINDING OF A SPOUSE. FOR EXAMPLE, THE HUMOROUS INSULTS OF MEDIEVAL COURT JESTERS SERVED THE IMPORTANT PURPOSE OF ALLOWING FOR DIRECT CRITICISM OF THE MONARCH IN A MANNER THAT DID NOT THREATEN THE KINGDOM'S COMMUNITY OR CHALLENGE ITS MEMBERS' LOYALTY. OFTEN, THE JESTER WAS THE ONLY PERSON WHO COULD MOCK THE KING WITHOUT FEAR OF BEING KILLED. THIS SERVED THE GROUP'S PURPOSES BY PROVIDING AN OUTLET FOR LEGITIMATE CRITICISM, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME SERVING THE INTEREST OF THE KING BY ALLOWING HIM TO CONSIDER OTHERS' VIEWPOINTS WITHOUT APPEARING TO COMPROMISE HIS OWN AUTHORITY. THE RITUAL FORM OF THE JESTERS' HUMOROUS INSULTS WAS ESSENTIAL TO PRESERVING THE ORDER OF THE GROUP, WHILE ALSO ALLOWING INDIRECT DISCUSSION OF NECESSARY CHANGES.

WITHIN GROUPS, INSULTS SERVE SEVERAL PURPOSES. FIRST, AND PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE CONTENT OF INSULTS REFLECTS AND REINFORCES SHARED GROUP IDENTITY AND VALUES. YOU CAN DISCERN WHAT A GROUP VALUES BY WHAT IT INSULTS. FOR EXAMPLE, WITHIN THE ATHENAEUM, BASED UPON THE USUAL INSULTS THAT FLOW FREELY DURING COMMENTS, YOU CAN TELL THAT THE SOCIETY VALUES INTELLECTUAL RIGOR, BREVITY, WIT, AND ENTERTAINMENT. IN LARGER SOCIETY, THE PREVALENCE OF "YOUR MAMA" INSULTS DEMONSTRATES THAT SOCIETY VALUES MOTHERHOOD. INSULTS THAT REFLECT AND REINFORCE GROUP VALUES THUS SERVE TO ENABLE THE INTERPERSONAL BONDS BETWEEN GROUP MEMBERS -- WE RECEIVE SUBTLE REINFORCEMENT OF OUR MEMBERSHIP IN THE GROUP BY RECOGNIZING THAT THESE PEOPLE VALUE THE SAME THINGS WE DO. IN THAT WAY, INSULTS TOLD WITHIN A GROUP SERVE AN INCLUSIONARY PURPOSE.

AT THE SAME TIME, INSULTS SERVE AN EXCLUSIONARY PURPOSE AS WELL. EVEN AS INSULTS COMMUNICATE VALUES AND AFFIRM THEIR IMPORTANCE TO THE GROUP, THEY ALSO SERVE AS A "KEEP OUT" SIGN TO THOSE WHO DO NOT SHARE THOSE VALUES.

ACCORDINGLY, INSULTS OFTEN SERVE AS A FORM OF GROUP INITIATION. IN THE SAME WAY AND FOR THE SAME PURPOSE, FRATERNITIES AND SPORTS TEAMS OFTEN ENGAGE IN HAZING. THUS, INSULTS CAN, PARADOXICALLY, BE USED AS A FORM OF WELCOME. THE PERSON DOING THE INSULTING INDIRECTLY COMMUNICATES THAT THE GROUP DEEMS THE INITIATE STRONG ENOUGH TO "TAKE IT," AND FURTHER, THAT THE INITIATE SHARES THE GROUP VALUES TO A SUFFICIENT EXTENT TO MAKE THE INSULT IS MEANINGFUL. WE SEE THAT AT WORK WITHIN THE ATHENAEUM. NEW MEMBERS GENERALLY RECEIVE LESS-INSULTING COMMENTS THAN MORE SEASONED VETERANS. INDEED, THE AMOUNT OF HUMOROUS INSULTS A PAPER RECEIVES IN THE COMMENTS GENERALLY SERVES AS A SIGN THAT THE MEMBER HAS BEEN HERE AWHILE, AND IS ACCEPTED

AND POPULAR.

IN THIS WAY, UNDERLYING GROUP INSULTS IS THE PRESUMPTION OF A CERTAIN LEVEL OF INTIMACY. HERE, WE MUST LOOK TO SOCIAL NORMS IN COMMUNICATION. MOST CONVERSATION BETWEEN STRANGERS AND ACQUAINTANCES TAKES THE FORM OF WHAT LINGUISTS CALL "PHATIC COMMUNION." THESE ARE STATEMENTS WHOSE TRUE COMMUNICATIVE INTENT IS NEGLIGIBLE, OTHER THAN MERELY TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE OTHER'S EXISTENCE. THE WORDS THEMSELVES IMPART NO INFORMATION, DO NOT TRULY INVITE ANY IN RETURN, AND ARE NOT INTENDED TO DO SO. FOR EXAMPLE, "HOW ARE YOU DOING?" IS USED IN CASUAL CONVERSATION BETWEEN STRANGERS AND CASUAL ACQUAINTANCES. WHEN SOMEONE ASKS THAT, THEY ARE RARELY SEEKING A GENUINE ANSWER. THEY ARE MERELY SAYING "HELLO." NOTHING WILL MAKE A STRANGER MORE UNCOMFORTABLE THAN TO RESPOND TO THE STANDARD "HOW ARE YOU DOING" QUESTION WITH A LENGTHY DISCOURSE ON HOW YOU ARE ACTUALLY DOING -- "WELL, I'VE GOT A CYST THAT I'M GOING TO HAVE REMOVED..."

TO SHOW HOW INSULTS PRESUME INTIMACY, CONSIDER OUR SOCIAL NORMS, AND HOW WITH AN INSULT, CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING. APPROACH A STRANGER TONIGHT, AND TELL THEM IN A WITTY MANNER THAT THEY ARE BORING. YOU WILL NO DOUBT PROVOKE A HOSTILE RESPONSE, AND POSSIBLY EVEN PHYSICAL VIOLENCE. HOWEVER, IN THE CONTEXT OF A GROUP SUCH AS THIS, THE VERY SAME INSULT WOULD LIKELY RECEIVE THE LAUGHTER AND APPLAUSE OF THE GROUP -- AND THAT OF THE PERSON INSULTED. WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THIS GROUP, OR INDEED OF ANY GROUP, THE EXCHANGE OF INSULTS IMPLICITLY RECOGNIZES THAT WE ARE COMFORTABLE ENOUGH WITH EACH OTHER TO EXPRESS EMOTIONS THAT ARE OUTSIDE THE SOCIAL NORMS SURROUNDING INTERACTIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT MEMBERS OF THE SAME GROUP, OR OTHERWISE SHARE SOME DEEP INTERPERSONAL CONNECTION.

A CLEAR EXAMPLE OF THIS IS HOW SOME AFRICAN-AMERICANS CONSIDER IT ACCEPTABLE TO REFER TO EACH OTHER USING THE "N" WORD. WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF GROUP MEMBERSHIP AND SHARED EXPERIENCES, THE USE OF THAT WORD MAY REINFORCE GROUP IDENTITY AND ACKNOWLEDGE SHARED EXPERIENCES. THE WORD IS THE SAME, BUT THE MEANING AND IMPLICATIONS ARE DRAMATICALLY DIFFERENT WHEN SOMEONE OUTSIDE THE GROUP USES THE SAME WORD. OUTSIDERS WHO ATTEMPT TO JUSTIFY THEIR OWN USE OF THAT WORD "BECAUSE RAPPERS USE IT ALL THE TIME" ARE MISSING THE CONTEXT OF THE SHARED GROUP IDENTITY, WHICH IS THE ONLY CONTEXT IN WHICH SUCH AN INSULT COULD POSSIBLY BE CONSTRUED AS ACCEPTABLE.

INSULTS SERVE OTHER IMPORTANT FUNCTIONS IN A GROUP BEYOND SHOWING AND REINFORCING GROUP VALUES, INITIATING GROUP MEMBERS, AND ESTABLISHING INTIMACY. THEY ALSO SERVE AS A SUBTLE WAY OF ORDERING GROUP MEMBERS. MOST GROUPS VALUE INTELLIGENCE AND WIT, AND IN SOME GROUPS LIKE THE ATHENAEUM, THE PERSON WITH THE WITTIEST INSULTS ACHIEVES A CERTAIN LEVEL OF STATUS. WE CAN SEE THAT AT WORK HERE, WHERE MEMBERS FREQUENTLY DEFER TO OTHERS WHO MORE CLEVERLY INSULT THE PRESENTERS. THERE IS AN UNWRITTEN RULE GOVERNING WHO MAKES COMMENTS IN WHAT ORDER AFTER THE PAPERS. PERHAPS UNCONSCIOUSLY, THE MEMBERS OF THIS SOCIETY DEFER TO THOSE MOST INTELLECTUALLY ADEPT AT THE HUMOROUS INSULT.

THIS IS NOT NECESSARILY HOW OUR GROUP MUST ORDER ITSELF. WE COULD GIVE COMMENTS STRICTLY IN THE ORDER OF SENIORITY, OR BY HEIGHT, OR BY PERCEIVED STATUS IN THE LARGER COMMUNITY. HOWEVER, WE IMPLICITLY DEMONSTRATE THE VALUE WE PLACE ON INTELLIGENCE, CREATIVITY, AND WIT WHEN WE ORDER OUR COMMENTS AROUND WHO CAN GIVE THE MOST WITTILY DISPARAGING STATEMENTS.

WE ALSO DEMONSTRATE ONE OF THE HIGHEST ATTRIBUTES OF SOCIETY, IN THAT WE RECOGNIZE AND ASSERT POWER AND DOMINANCE NOT THROUGH PHYSICAL MEANS, BUT RATHER BY INTELLECTUAL MEANS. THE VERBAL INSULT IS A HIGHLY CIVILIZED WAY TO ESTABLISH HIERARCHY, RATHER THAN THE OLD-FASHIONED AND UNCIVILIZED WAY OF BEATING EACH OTHER TO A BLOODY PULP.

IN WIDER SOCIETY, INSULTS SERVE A MORE DIRECT HIERARCHICALLY-ORDERING PURPOSE. THE EXAMPLES OF FAMOUS PEOPLE USING INSULTS TO ESTABLISH PERSONAL AND INTELLECTUAL SUPERIORITY ARE LEGION, PARTICULARLY IN THE POLITICAL ARENA. OF THOSE, THE INSULTS OF WINSTON CHURCHILL ARE MOST NOTABLE. CHURCHILL FAMOUSLY DESCRIBED ONE POLITICAL RIVAL AS "A MODEST LITTLE PERSON, WITH MUCH TO BE MODEST ABOUT." OF ANOTHER, HE SAID "IF YOU WANTED NOTHING DONE AT ALL, BALFOUR WAS THE MAN FOR THE JOB." OF ANOTHER -- "THERE'S LESS TO HIM THAN MEETS THE EYE." SIR WINSTON DID NOT SPARE AMERICA FROM HIS VENOM -- HE ONCE STATED THAT "THE UNITED STATES INVARIABLY DOES THE RIGHT THING, AFTER HAVING EXHAUSTED EVERY OTHER ALTERNATIVE." CHURCHILL'S INSULTS, LIKE THOSE OF OTHER POLITICIANS, SERVED TO ASSERT HIS POWER AND DOMINANCE, AND EXPRESS HIS VIEWS IN A HUMOROUS WAY THAT ALLOWED HIM TO MAKE OTHERWISE UNDIPLOMATIC PUBLIC STATEMENTS.

BUT CHURCHILL'S GENIUS AT THE ART OF THE INSULT WAS NOT LIMITED TO THE POLITICAL -- HE COULD BE PERSONALLY CAUSTIC AS WELL. TWO OF THE MOST CELEBRATED EXAMPLES OF HIS BITING WIT OCCURRED IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS. AT ONE PARTY, LADY ASTOR APPROACHED CHURCHILL AND SAID "WINSTON, IF YOU WERE MY HUSBAND, I'D POISON YOUR TEA." CHURCHILL RESPONDED, "NANCY, IF I WERE YOUR HUSBAND, I'D DRINK IT." EQUALLY WELL KNOWN IS HIS CONVERSATION WITH BESSIE BRADDOCK. CHURCHILL APPROACHED MS. BRADDOCK AND SAID, "MADAM, YOU ARE UGLY." MS. BRADDOCK ANSWERED, "SIR, YOU ARE DRUNK." CHURCHILL REPLIED, "YES, BUT IN THE MORNING, I SHALL BE SOBER."

WINSTON CHURCHILL STANDS AS THE UNRIVALED KING OF THE POLITICAL INSULT, AND AMERICA HAS YET TO PRODUCE HIS EQUAL. HOWEVER, AMERICANS AS A PEOPLE ARE NOT LACKING IN THOSE SKILLED IN THE ART OF VERBAL EVISCERATION. HOWEVER, OUR AMERICAN CULTURE TENDS TO ACCEPT FUNNY INSULTS FROM ENTERTAINERS AND COMEDIANS MORE THAN FROM POLITICIANS. OF THOSE, TWO AMERICANS STAND ABOVE THE REST IN THE ANNALS OF MALEDICTA -- MARK TWAIN AND DOROTHY PARKER.

AS CRITICS HAVE NOTED THROUGH THE YEARS, TWAIN WAS A CYNICAL, TROUBLED, AND TRAGIC MAN. HIS WORKS ARE FULL OF VARYING DEGREES OF MISANTHROPY. INDEED, HAD TWAIN NOT DISPLAYED HIS PESSIMISM AND DISTASTE WITH SUCH HUMOROUS INSULTS, HE MIGHT NOT HAVE BECOME THE POPULAR AUTHOR THAT HE REMAINS TODAY. SOME OF MY FAVORITE TWAIN INSULTS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

"I DIDN'T ATTEND THE FUNERAL, BUT I SENT A NICE LETTER SAYING I APPRECIATED IT."

AND, COMMENTING ON ANOTHER PERSON...

"HE IS USELESS ON TOP OF THE GROUND. HE OUGHT TO BE UNDER IT, INSPIRING THE CABBAGES."

THE AMERICAN FEMALE MASTER OF THE INSULT IS PROBABLY DOROTHY PARKER, THE NEW YORK AUTHOR AND CRITIC FROM THE FIRST PART OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. AMONG MY FAVORITE INSULTS FROM HER:

"SHE SPEAKS EIGHT LANGUAGES, AND CAN'T SAY 'NO' IN ANY OF THEM."

AND, REVIEWING A BOOK...

"THIS IS NOT A BOOK TO BE TOSSED ASIDE LIGHTLY. IT SHOULD BE THROWN WITH GREAT FORCE."

PRESIDENT CALVIN COOLIDGE WAS A FREQUENT TARGET OF PARKER'S MOCKERY. OF HIM, SHE SAID "HE LOOKS LIKE HE WAS WEANED ON A PICKLE."

UPON LEARNING OF COOLIDGE'S DEATH, SHE ASKED, "HOW COULD THEY TELL?"

AS I HAVE DISCUSSED, INSULTS ARE AN IMPORTANT AND USEFUL ASPECT OF THE ATHENAEUM SOCIETY'S GROUP DYNAMIC -- BUT THEY ARE NOT ITS REASON FOR BEING. IN SOME SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, HOWEVER, INSULTS ARE ABSOLUTELY CENTRAL TO THE EXPERIENCE.

ANCIENT GERMANIC CULTURES, INCLUDING THE NORSE AND ANGLO-SAXONS, OFTEN ENGAGED IN A HIGHLY RITUALISTIC EXCHANGE OF TAUNTS AND INSULTS CALLED "FLYTING." BY THE TIME OF THE MIDDLE AGES, "FLYTING" HAD MORPHED INTO EXCHANGES OF ABUSIVE POEMS.

ANCIENT ARAB POETS ENGAGED IN A SIMILAR FORM OF VERBAL JOUSTING, KNOWN AS "NAQA'ID." ECHOES OF THAT PRACTICE EXIST TODAY IN MODERN LEBANON, WHERE THE PRACTICE IS KNOWN AS "ZAJAL."

SOCIOLOGISTS THEORIZE THAT SUCH VERBAL EXCHANGES OF INSULTS, IN ADDITION TO SERVING TO ESTABLISH AND REINFORCE GROUP IDENTITY AND VALUES AS DISCUSSED PREVIOUSLY, ALSO SERVE AN IMPORTANT FUNCTION AS "SAFETY VALVES" IN WHICH LATENT HOSTILITY AND ANGER CAN BE ADDRESSED THROUGH HUMOROUS AND INSULTING WORDPLAY, RATHER THAN PHYSICAL VIOLENCE. GIVEN THE PRESENT SITUATION IN LEBANON, IT'S HARD TO SEE THIS AS BEING PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE.

IN ANY EVENT, THE HIGHLY-RITUALIZED EXCHANGE OF INSULTS PERHAPS REACHES ITS APEX IN AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN PRACTICE OF EXCHANGING WHAT ARE SOMETIMES CALLED "SNAPS," OR "PLAYING THE DOZENS." THE DOZENS IS PART OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN ORAL COMEDIC TRADITION, AND HAS ITS ROOTS IN SIMILAR PRACTICES EXISTING IN CULTURES INDIGENOUS TO WESTERN AFRICA. THE

PRACTICE HAS BEEN RECORDED OFTEN IN AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE, BEGINNING IN THE 1930'S IN THE SONG "DIRTY DOZENS" BY SEMINAL BLUES ARTIST KOKOMO ARNOLD, AND IN ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S "THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD." MORE RECENTLY, THE DOZENS FIGURED PROMINENTLY IN THE MOVIE "WHITE MEN CAN'T JUMP," IN A POPULAR SERIES OF BOOKS CALLED "SNAPS," IN MUCH ATHLETIC "TRASH TALKING," AND FREESTYLE RAP BATTLES.

ESSENTIALLY, THE DOZENS IS A CONTEST OF WIT, VERBAL ABILITY, AND MENTAL AGILITY BETWEEN TWO PEOPLE. THE PARTICIPANTS EXCHANGE FORMULAIC INSULTS AND TRY TO OUTDO EACH OTHER IN CLEVERNESS, HUMOR, AND SPONTANEITY. ONLOOKERS SERVE AS INFORMAL JUDGES, AND THE LOSER IS WHOEVER SHOWS HIMSELF TO BE LESS-ADEPT BY PRODUCING LAME INSULTS, BEING UNABLE TO PROMPTLY RESPOND TO THE OPPONENT, OR BY GETTING TRULY ANGRY. YES, YOU LOSE THE CONTEST IF YOU TAKE IT PERSONALLY. IN THIS WAY, THE CONTEST MEASURES MORE THAN VERBAL AND INTELLECTUAL AGILITY, BUT ALSO SELF-CONTROL.

INSULTS USED IN THE DOZENS REVOLVE AROUND SEVERAL COMMON THEMES, BUT OFTEN START WITH THE CANONICAL -- "YOUR MAMA..." THE INSULT THEN PROCEEDS TO PURPORT TO DISPARAGE THE RECIPIENT'S MOTHER, OFTEN CENTERED ON THEMES OF HER PURPORTED WEIGHT, POVERTY, IGNORANCE, AGE, OR PERSONAL HYGIENE.

AND NOW, BECAUSE I HAVE DISCUSSED ENOUGH SOCIOLOGY, LET'S TURN TO THE GOOD STUFF -- THE INSULTS THEMSELVES. THE FOLLOWING IS A HIGHLY SUBJECTIVE LIST OF SOME OF MY FAVORITE "YOUR MAMA" INSULTS.

YOUR MAMA'S SO FAT, I HAVE TO TAKE THE TRAIN AND TWO BUSES TO GET ON HER GOOD SIDE.

YOUR MAMA'S SO FAT, WHEN SHE DANCES, THE BAND SKIPS.

YOUR MAMA'S SO FAT, SHE'S GOT SMALLER FAT WOMEN ORBITING HER.

YOUR MAMA'S SO FAT, WHEN SHE WAS MISSING, THEY HAD TO USE ALL FOUR SIDES OF THE MILK CARTON.

YOUR MAMA'S SO FAT, HER BLOOD TYPE IS "RAGU."

YOUR MAMA'S SO FAT, WHEN SHE VISITS THE ZOO, THE ELEPHANTS THROW HER PEANUTS.

YOUR MAMA'S SO FAT, THE RESTAURANTS IN TOWN HAVE SIGNS, "MAXIMUM OCCUPANCY 240 OR YOUR MAMA."

YOUR MAMA'S SO FAT, SHE CAN GET GROUP INSURANCE.

YOUR MAMA'S SO FAT, SHE WAS FLOATING IN THE OCEAN AND SPAIN CLAIMED HER AS THE NEW WORLD.

YOUR MAMA'S SO FAT, SHE HAS TO PUT ON HER BELT WITH A BOOMERANG.

YOUR MAMA'S SO FAT, WHEN HER BEEPER GOES OFF PEOPLE THINK SHE'S BACKING UP.

YOUR MAMA'S SO FAT, WHEN SHE WAS BORN SHE GAVE THE HOSPITAL STRETCH MARKS.

YOUR MAMA'S SO OLD, HER MEMORY IS IN BLACK AND WHITE.

YOUR MAMA'S SO OLD, WHEN I TOLD HER TO ACT HER AGE, SHE DIED.

YOUR MAMA'S SO OLD, WHEN GOD SAID "LET THERE BE LIGHT," SHE FLIPPED THE SWITCH.

YOUR MAMA'S SO STUPID, SHE SPENT 20 MINUTES LOOKING AT THE ORANGE JUICE BECAUSE THE CONTAINER SAID "CONCENTRATE."

YOUR MAMA'S SO STUPID, IF YOU GAVE HER A PENNY FOR HER THOUGHTS, YOU'D GET CHANGE BACK.

YOUR MAMA'S SO STUPID, YOU CAN TELL WHEN SHE'S USED THE COMPUTER BECAUSE THERE'S WHITE-OUT ALL OVER THE SCREEN.

YOUR MAMA'S SO STUPID, SHE GOT FIRED FROM THE "M&M" FACTORY BECAUSE SHE WAS THROWING OUT ALL THE "W"'S"

YOUR MAMA'S SO POOR, SHE USES COBWEBS FOR DRAPES.

YOUR MAMA'S SO POOR, SHE PUTS HER MCDONALD'S ORDER ON LAYAWAY.

YOUR MAMA'S SO POOR, SHE WATCHES TV ON AN ETCH-A-SKETCH.

YOUR MAMA'S SO POOR, THEY PUT HER PICTURE ON FOOD STAMPS.

YOUR MAMA'S SO POOR, SHE GOT MARRIED JUST FOR THE RICE.

YOUR MAMA'S SO SMELLY, SHE WAS PLAYING IN A SANDBOX AND A CAT BURIED HER.

YOUR MAMA'S SO SMELLY, HER "SURE" DEODORANT IS NOW "CONFUSED."

AND FINALLY,

YOUR MAMA'S SO UGLY, YOUR DADDY WORKS AT HOME SO HE WON'T HAVE TO KISS HER GOODBYE.

THANK YOU.