PRESIDENTIAL ANAGRAMS

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The year 1976 witnessed a unique melding of American history and presidential politics. In view of this conjunction, it seems appropriate to present the latest results of a long-term activity of recreational linguists — the anagramming of presidential names. For readers unfamiliar with this activity, an anagram of a presidential name is a rearrangement of the letters into a word or phrase that pithily characterizes the man. Unfortunately, the ideal of appositeness is difficult to realize in practice because of the small number of letters one has to work with — the longest name has 23, and two have only 9.

Presidential anagramming has been indulged in for nearly a century; the earliest dated one I am aware of is 1883. Many have been generated in the form of puzzles in the Enigma, the monthly publication of the National Puzzle rs' League.

To make the anagramming task a bit easier, a number of alternative forms of presidential names have been allowed: for example, JAMES EARL CARTER, JAMES E. CARTER, JAMES CARTER, J. E. CARTER and even the bare surname, CARTER. Sometimes a short form, though containing fewer letters to work with, yields a more felicitous phrase.

Starting with our newest president, what can be made out of the letters of JAMES EARL CARTER? The best that I have been able to find is JEER? AM CLEAR STAR! — a rejoinder that Carter might plausibly make to those doubting Thomases who, at the start of 1976, wise-cracked "Jimmy who?" (If he spelled his middle name Earle, the slightly more grammatical message JEER ME, A CLEAR STAR? results.)

For GERALD RUDOLPH FORD, a somewhat gloomier message emerges: HARD PULL FOR "RED DOG". The hard pull is, perhaps, obvious — first, his efforts to restore dignity to and confidence in the presidency after the shambles of Watergate, and second, his uphill fight to win the Republican nomination and the election in 1976 (the latter, of course, unsuccessful). "Red dog" is an allusion to Ford's participation as center on the University of Michigan football team; used as a verb, this phrase describes the action of rushing a passer in the hope of preventing a successful pass. Worshipful Republicans might wish to reverse the letters of the last word (an anagram suggested by David R. Williams of Rochester, N. Y.), but I am certain
that Ford would be the first to resist such anagrammatic defilement.

Nixon's administration will no doubt be remembered primarily for the Watergate break-in and subsequent cover-up, and the following anagram of RICHARD MILHOUS NIXON reflects this fact: HUSH - NIX CRIMINAL ODOR! In passing, it is interesting to note that Nixon is the only president whose name contains the letters of the word CRIMINAL, a clear logological sign never pointed out in advance to the American electorate. (Readers may enjoy searching for other suggestive words of, say, six or more letters that are hidden in presidential names -- a somewhat easier task than forming a full name-anagram.) Josefa Heifetz Byrne of Mill Valley, California also alludes to Watergate with HORRID HUMAN: IS COX NIL?

Proceeding backwards in time, Dmitri Borgmann proposed in Language on Vacation (Scribner's, 1965) for LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON the apt anagram NO NONNY, HE'S ON JOB, LADS, reflecting both his great energy and his above-average intelligence. (He also pointed out a logological coincidence unrelated to anagramming: the first names of Johnson and his opponent, Goldwater, were united in Thackeray's novel Barry Lyndon, released as a movie in 1976.) Mary J. Hazard of Rochester, N. Y. suggests the equally flattering NON-N. Y. LAD SHINES ON JOB; a Texan is, indeed, the polar opposite of a New Yorker. In a recent New York Magazine Competition, William Wunder of Port Washington, N. Y. suggested NN-NH, I JES' I AN OLD BOY, SON.

The bright hopes of the Kennedy administration were abruptly shattered by an assassin's bullet; JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY is transmuted into the somewhat cryptic message ZING! JOY DARKEN, THEN FLED. A better anagram is needed.

Eisenhower's most lasting claim to fame is the leadership that he provided in the European and African theaters during the Second World War; hence, DWIGHT DAVID EISENHOWER becomes HE DID VIEW THE WAR DOINGS according to Mary Hazard, or HE INVADED, WISER, WITH GOD according to an NPL member. "Emo W.," proposed a similar anagram for DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER in 1952: WOW! HE'S RIGHT; INDEED; Paul W. Thompson of Alstead, N. H. suggested in 1945 that the surname EISENHOWER be anagrammed to SEE HERO WIN.

Truman's full name contains the smallest number of letters of any president since John Tyler, making him hard to anagram successfully (the S is his middle name, not an abbreviation of a larger one). Perhaps the best anagram of HARRY S TRUMAN is Mary Hazard's RASH ARMY RUNT. Although his father might well have been called a runt (he was nicknamed "Peanut"), Truman was actually of average height -- 5 feet 8 inches. He served in the army during the First World War, and had a tendency to speak pungently (especially when the singing ability of his daughter Margaret was criticized) and act decisively (he once ordered the army to run the strike-bound railroads). Unfortunately, there is no evidence to suggest that he decided to SHUN ART, MARRY as suggested by David Williams.
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In contrast, FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT is tied with Hayes for the longest presidential name. I like the 1938 anagram by NPL member "Spud" referring to Roosevelt's quarrel with the Supreme Court during his second term: A REVOLT IN ONE FOLD RANKLES. Mary Hazard's ELEANOR KIN, LAST FOND LOVER has a certain zany charm. Franklin and his wife are Roosevelt cousins, and FDR's long-time affair with Lucy Mercer has recently come to light. (However, in view of the alleged peccadillos of Jack Kennedy, the adjective last may not be particularly accurate.)

No doubt HERBERT CLARK HOOVER was regarded as THE EVER BLACK HORROR by rabid Democrats or those who lost their jobs or fortunes during the Great Depression; however, David Williams' anagram seems unnecessarily harsh in view of his many philanthropics. Yet, no good alternatives have been suggested for this almost-forgotten president: OH, HARK, CLEVER BROTHER or OVERT HARBOR HECKLE make no sense whatever.

In contrast, Coolidge has generated a number of reasonably apt anagrams. Mary Hazard notes that JOHN CALVIN COOLIDGE transmutes into ONCE JOVIAL? NIGH COLD. James Rambo of Palo Alto, California suggests D. C. VOICE GOAL NIL, and David Williams adds LOVE? A COLD ICING for the reduced name CALVIN COOLIDGE. Brian Sylvester of Windsor, Berks discovered several more anagrams for this taciturn Puritan: NO VICE, LAD - LOGIC; N.AIVE COLD LOGIC; I CALL GOD NOVICE; DIG LA CONIC COVE. (The last phrase needs a bit of interpretation: dig is slang for "appropriate" and cove is British slang for "fellow").

At the time WARREN GAMALIEL HARDING was elected in 1920, NPL member "Jo Mullins" anagrammed him HIM LAGGARD? A REAL WINNER! This accurately reflected his 16-million to 9-million win over Cox, the largest percentage mandate ever given a new president. Two modern ones are Harry Hazard's ALARMING WARD-HEELING? RA and David Williams' LEARNING LA W, MARRIED HAG. Harding was a newspaper publisher and owner, not a lawyer, and pictures of Mrs. Harding do not substantiate this slander.

According to Mary Hazard, THOMAS WOODROW WILSON yields WORN SHADOW LOOMS, I WOT, an allusion to his debilitating stroke in 1919. The more familiar WOODROW WILSON anagrams to WOOS LORN WIDOW by NPL member "Stocles", referring to his second marriage to Edith Bolling Galt during his first term. James Rambo adds I SOON WOW WORLD (his vain hope for the League of Nations?) and David Williams notes WW: I DROOL, SWOON (an appropriate reaction from women of that era, in view of Wilson's distinguished appearance).

The portly appearance of WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT is the subject of several anagrams, the oldest one written by NPL member "The Sphinx" at Taft's election in 1908: A WORD WITH ALL -- I'M FAT. This is echoed by James Rambo's O, LARD A FLAW -- TWIT HIM and Harry Hazard's amusing FAT? WOW! THRILL A MAID!
In view of the well-known interest of THEODORE ROOSEVELT in outdoor sport and conservation, Mary Hazard's LOVED HORSE, TREE, TOO seems quite apt. Brian Sylvester's LOR! SHOOTER, DEVOTEE strikes a similar note. His exploits with the Rough Riders in the Spanish-American War are hinted at by Mary Hazard in ROLE? O, SO THE VET RODE. James Rambo provides a general encomium: VESTED ROLE TOO, HERO. Older anagrams, one referring to his trust-busting, also exist: a 1903 one by NPL member "Primrose" HERO TOLD TO OVERSEE, and a 1908 anagram by NPL member "D.C. Ver" HE OVERRODE LOOT SET. "Arcanus" of the NPL anagrammed ROOSEVELT into LO! TO SERVE!

Most presidents prior to Roosevelt lack good anagrams; is this a consequence of shorter names, forgettable biographies, or some other factor? To begin with, consider WILLIAM MCKINLEY; I see no plausible explanation for WILY MICE KILL MAN (even though he was assassinated) or CLAW IN LIMEY MILK. Benjamin Harrison is similarly ill-endowed: SHINER RAN MAIN JOB; HE-MAN, SIR, RAN IN JOB; IRISH BANJO MANNER. It is a relief to turn to GROVER CLEVELAND who has two excellent anagrams: an 1898 one by NPL member "Arty Fishel" reading GOVERN, CLEVER LAD, and David Williams' DANG CLEVER LOVE R. As an illustration of his cleverness, Cleveland managed to get elected president in the heyday of Victorian morality, despite whispers that he was the father of an illegitimate child!

CHESTER ALAN ARTHUR has four highly laudatory anagrams. His full name anagrams into either Mary Hazard's CHANT: HE A STAR RULER or David Williams' HE RAN A CLEAR THRUST; CHESTER A. ARTHUR becomes James Rambo's RATES HURRAH, ETC., and the even briefer CHESTER ARTHUR was turned into a TRUTH SEARCHER by "Camillus" in 1883. Alas, the aptness of these praises is in question, for Arthur, who was elevated to the presidency by Garfield's assassination, served only a partial term and was dumped by his own party at the next nominating convention.

Three post-Civil War presidents -- Garfield, Hayes and Grant -- can be quickly summarized. JAMES A. GARFIELD becomes LEAD FAR, SAGE JIM by James Rambo; this hope was quickly dashed by his assassination. Harry Hazard notes that HARD CRY BROTHERS FRAUD HEIR fits RUTHERFORD BIRCHARD HAYES well, because he won the election by a fraud. The seven letters of R.B. HAYES turn into HE BRAYS, the acerbic observation of Tilden's supporters, according to Brian Sylvester. Finally, ULYSSES SIMPSON GRANT was memorialized by "Bolts" with SURPASSINGNESS MY LOT -- a more accurate description of his Civil War achievements than his scandal-touched presidency.

The quality of anagrams for presidents who served prior to 1868 is, in general, low; I mention a few which seem to be the best of the crop. David Williams' OH, CALL MAN BRAIN celebrates ABRAHAM LINCOLN's obviously high intelligence, but Lincoln was certainly not an egghead or intellectual in the modern sense of the word. Both
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Mary Hazard and David Williams discovered MILD FARMER, I LOLL in MILLARD FILLMORE; although the only farming he ever did was as a boy on his father's New York farm, he was noted for compromise and conciliation rather than fiery reform. Was it true, as Brian Sylvester suggests, that MARTIN VAN BUREN undertook to TAN URBAN VERMIN (discipline the Tammany Hall crowd)? Harry Hazard discovered that WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON was a HORNY LIAR; RAIN SLEW HIM. Although it is likely that only the most zealous partisans of Van Buren regarded Harrison as a devilish prevaricator, it is true that Harrison died of complications resulting from a cold incurred on a cold, rainy inauguration day. Brian Sylvester points out that MONROE said NO MORE to European expansionism when he enunciated his famous doctrine in 1823, and certainly MADISON, after the White House was burned by the British in 1814, IS NOMAD. Finally, of the many GEORGE WASHINGTON anagrams, I like best the ones by "Ches A. Peake" HE'S NOW GOING GREAT, by James Rambo GREAT WHIG'S GONE ON, and by George Fairbanks of Nutley, N.J. in the New York Magazine Competition WAR ON: HE GETS GOING and HERO WINS: GET A GONG!

OULIPO REVISITED

OuLiPo (Ouvroir de Litterature Potentielle), a French group of mathematic-linguists whose activities were described in the May 1976 Word Ways, has been recently brought to the attention of a much wider American audience. A Science article on OuLiPo in the January 10, 1977 issue of Time magazine starts off with a rhopalic (snowball) sentence, and contains a picture of co-founder Francois Le Lionnais holding a copy of Queneau's Cent Mille Milliards de Poems, a do-it-yourself sonnet with alternative lines printed on individual strips of cardboard. In Mathematical Games in the February 1977 Scientific American, Martin Gardner explores the OuLiPo output in more depth, and brings in other poetic experimentation such as "Pied Poetry" - rewriting a well-known short poem by rearranging its words.