

THE PRESIDENTS, MORE OR LESS

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In a transdeletion, one or more letters are subtracted from a word and the remaining letters rearranged (if necessary) to form a new word. In a transaddition, one or more letters are added to a word to supply the letter-stock for a new word. The goal in each case is usually to transform one word into another with the fewest possible subtractions or additions of letters. In the February 1998 Word Ways, Darryl Francis offered a list of transdeletions and transadditions of American state-names; in the list below, this idea is applied to the surnames of American presidents. Asterisks denote one-letter transadditions or transadditions. All words are taken from Webster's Second or Third Editions, or are inferred forms of entries therein (plurals or past tenses). Entries must have no relation to the presidential names (thus, entries such as JOHNSONIAN are not permitted). Are any improvements possible?

WASHINGTON	gnathions*	notwithstanding
ADAMS	dams*	madams*
JEFFERSON	offers	
MADISON	domain*	diamonds*
MONROE	Romeo*	doormen*
JACKSON	snack	jackstone
VAN BUREN	urbane	overabundant
HARRISON	sornari*	narrowish*
TYLER	rely*	styler*
POLK	lop*	polka*
TAYLOR	royal*	royalty*
FILLMORE	filler	mollifier*
PIERCE	price*	receipt*
BUCHANAN	bunch	Nudibranchia
LINCOLN	collin*	anoncillo
JOHNSON	noons	Jonathanizations
GRANT	tang*	argent*
HAYES	ashy*	shaley*
GARFIELD	fragile*	dragonflies
ARTHUR	hurt	urethra*
CLEVELAND	cleaved	decollectivization
MCKINLEY	nicely	yachtsmanlike
ROOSEVELT	overtoe	overlightsome
TAFT	aft*	fatty*
WILSON	lions*	lowings*
HARDING	daring*	hoarding*
COOLIDGE	oceloid*	ideologic*
HOOVER	hover*	overhot*

TRUMAN	urman*	natrium*
EISENHOWER	onewhere	overwhelmingness
KENNEDY	kenned*	damnyankee
NIXON	nino*	annexion
FORD	rod*	frond*
CARTER	trace*	craters*
REAGAN	anger*	arrange*
BUSH	hub*	shrub*
CLINTON	tonic	continual

Other solutions are possible; for example, UNSTANCHABLE is a noncapitalized transaddition of BUCHANAN. Note that JEFFERSON is the only president without a transaddition. Wake up and smell the coffee, you JOE-SNIFFER!

What might be the next name to go on this list? Plausible prospects include GEPHARDT, GINGRICH, POWELL and GORE. Of these, GORE seems the most transpositionally interesting, inasmuch as it offers politically-germane alternatives. For instance, some may see Al as an environmental GOER--ERGO, ROE and GROVE might be fitting--whereas others could see him as more of an OGRE, in which case EGO and ROGUE might be apter. Well, we can REGO O'ER this question in 2001 if the need arises!

There are more than thirty one-step transadditions of GORE in Webster's Second and Third, surely more than for any president:

orage	Grebo	corge	gorce	rodge
gored	forge	gofer	gorge	grego
glore	grove	ogler	gomer	ergon
genro	goner	negro	grope	porge
gorer	Roger	gorse	soger	gores
ogres	goers	ergot	rotge	sorge
orgue	rogue	rouge	zero-G	

What two presidents are closest to each other, logologically if not politically? The answer is CLINTON and LINCOLN. One can be transformed to the other by the removal of the letter T and the addition of the letter L, followed by rearrangement of the letters. (The shortest word containing both presidents is CONTROLLING.) This two-step change is nearly equalled by the three-step change between TYLER and TAYLOR. On the other hand, the two least neighborly presidents appear to be TAFT and EISENHOWER--they share no letters, and a total of 14 must be added and subtracted.

I am indebted to the editor for various improvements to the list, and to Darryl Francis for the WASHINGTON examples.