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Electoral College Sweep

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Electoral College Sweep

Is it true that George Washington is the only president to win every vote in the Electoral College?

That's right -- George Washington is the only man who became president with a unanimous vote in the Electoral College. The hero of the American Revolution accomplished that feat not once, but twice. In 1789 he received all 69 votes, and in 1792 all 132. He was without peer.

Few Americans realize that a later candidate came close to replicating Washington's total domination of the Electoral College. In 1820, during the Era of Good Feelings, incumbent James Monroe ran unopposed for president. He received all but one vote in the Electoral College, which was still quite a feat considering there were many more votes (231) cast that year than either of the years Washington was elected.

But -- since Monroe ran unopposed, how is it that he failed to sweep the College? There are two versions to this story, and both involve New Hampshire Governor William Plumer, who cast the singular vote against Monroe. One story -- the more romantic -- is that Plumer voted against Monroe to preserve Washington's record as the only man to enjoy a unanimous vote in the Electoral College. The other, more likely story is that Plumer genuinely disliked Monroe, and cast his ballot for a fellow New Englander, John Quincy Adams.

(Question from Chris F of Honolulu, HA)