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Civic values inspire people to step out of the ordinary and become extraordinary. Courage, initiative, and perseverance motivate us to achieve great things for the benefit of others. Giving birth to America, these values continue to define our national identity. In all things, we must have courage to stand up for what is right, initiative to start the change, and perseverance to see it through. Our progress as a society can only continue when these values are embraced.

The greatest achievements occur in the face of opposition and even peril that require courage, initiative, and perseverance to succeed. The story of the Declaration of Independence exemplifies these values. Authored by our Founding Fathers in a time of conflict, this historical text demonstrates that anything is achievable with courage, initiative, and perseverance. In the face of overwhelming odds, the Declaration of Independence was proclaimed to England and the world. This manuscript accused King George of his injustice towards America, therefore, justifying the colonists' break away from England. Without courage, initiative, and perseverance, our Founding Fathers would not have been able to stand up for their right of freedom, much less achieve their dream. They formed one of America's most lasting documents and improved the lives of millions with enduring freedom.

Fredrick Douglass, a man of courage, boldly spoke in the face of great opposition. He opened minds and touched hearts with his eloquent speeches to abolish slavery. As a former slave and well-known abolitionist, he helped set the stage for the freedom of African-Americans. Born a slave in Maryland, he was taught at age twelve the alphabet by his owner's wife, Sofia. After being reprimanded by her husband, Sofia refrained from teaching Douglass. But this small education stirred Douglass' imagination. He continued to educate himself by observing the writing of land owners. Soon he began to read anything and everything he could obtain. In 1838, Douglass escaped to New Bradford where he attended abolitionist meetings regularly. At one of these meetings, he was unexpectedly called upon to speak. After delivering a powerful speech about his life, many encouraged him to become an anti-slavery lecturer. His avid abolitionist career included traveling to Ireland and England where his orations attracted massive crowds and opened the minds of countless. By the time of the Civil War, Douglass was one of the most famous black men in America. In 1872, he became the first African-American to be nominated for Vice-President of the United States. Frederick Douglass did not live by the common dictates of the past; but by courage and initiative, he surpassed the expectations of others and achieved his potential. He cried out for the freedom of all and exhibited this belief throughout his life. He often said, "I would unite with anybody to do right and with nobody to do wrong." His life portrays how perseverance can and will pay off.

Courage, initiative, and perseverance hold my life together and have molded me into the person I am today. Although I am mostly a quiet and reserved person, I put my all into everything I do no matter how small or large the task. Using these values have shaped my character and have prepared me for the next phase of my life: college. As our Founding Fathers had a dream for independence and as Douglass had a dream of equality for all men I too share a similar dream. When I tell people of my dream to become a humanitarian pilot, they are always astonished. It is uncommon for young people to have such a desire to serve others in foreign countries. My plan is to attend a costly private college for pilot training and preparation for missionary work. I have been accepted to the college of my dreams; and with courage, I plan to attend this college with the financial means yet to be provided. I know this will not be an easy task, but everyday I take courage in knowing others have done it. By attending a junior college as a dual credit student, I've taken the initiative in preparing for the vigorous work ahead of me. I strive everyday to maintain a straight "A" average in my course work and anticipate to continue this achievement through college. These values will make my dream a reality like they have for others.

Civic values prompt changes by allowing the unachievable a chance to become achievable. Courage, initiative, and perseverance are the solution to any and all problems; the fulfillment to any dream.