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On the fourth of November, two thousand and eight, an incredible event occurred. America reached the other side of the mountaintop. With the election of a black citizen to the position of President of the United States, our nation exhibited the civic value of acceptance. This significant event reflects how America has become a land where character defines an individual, a land whose citizens are accepting of each other. Throughout the history of the United States, additional examples can be found where accommodation is demonstrated. This is because being an American involves acceptance, a genuine reception, of all people.

In 1786 the Virginia General Assembly passed a landmark act which reflected a principal ideal of the young United States. This act, penned by Thomas Jefferson, was named the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, and it clarified the acceptance of all religions and allowed individuals to worship freely without discrimination. The statute boldly proclaimed that "all men shall be free to profess and... maintain their opinion in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no [way]... affect their civil capacities." This initiative was significant because it was contrary to the ideas established in many other countries of the world at the time. This statute set the stage for America to announce to the world that it would be a nation of acceptance, a nation that would welcome all people. The nation would not favor, nor discriminate against any certain belief. As a consequence of this policy set for by the American government, citizens have been able to profess what they believe without fearing penalty. The founding statement of religious freedom set forth the precedent of a hospitable tolerance. Today that policy holds unchallenged and steadfast.

A man who drew the attention of all of America, the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., once spoke of the unvarying accommodation of all people of all backgrounds. In the thousands of speeches that King delivered, he amplified the message of people accepting each other, regardless of skin color. Dr. King showed how acceptance should be more than merely acknowledgment; rather it should encompass encouragement of equality as well as compassion. King was a man who not only preached his idea, he lived it. In the historic March on Washington in the August of 1963, the Reverend King himself was helping to lead the way at the front. King encouraged millions of Americans to vote for civil rights policies, and rallied many to his cause. He prominently preached that all Americans should "live together like brothers and sisters." These words reflect King's ultimate hope.

The majestic sights and boundless opportunities of our beautiful America have long attracted countless dream-seeking immigrants to our country. Over time, the United States has accepted those who venture here in hopes of finding a better life, leading to a unique mix of multiple, diverse cultures. Personally in my life, I had a chance to help welcome a new American family into our country. A family of five, originally from South Korea, moved into my neighborhood. When I originally met them, they had a limited grasp of the English language and barely any knowledge of American customs or lifestyles. I helped to accept them into our community by explaining common American traditions and behavior, as well as introducing them to other neighbors. The oldest son in the family was close to my age, and I can remember teaching him American customs like how to play football and basketball. It was fulfilling to see how receptive the whole family was to something as simple as my efforts to welcome them. The family only lived in my neighborhood for eight months before they had to move again, but during this time I felt that I had the opportunity to demonstrate to them what it means to be an American.

The title 'American' is not simply a meaningless, inherited label. To be an American means to be accepting of all other fellow citizens. If one is American, then one must recognize that every other American has the same equal rights. No slight difference, no major difference should ever impede the acceptance of a citizen of the United States. Being an American involves a conscious decision to accept and welcome all others. This value is what makes our nation great.