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Though the economic prowess of Bill Gates, the political potential of President-elect Obama and the determination for social equality of Betty Friedan were very different, they all shared two things; these leaders were Americans who showed great initiative. The United States, a self-governing society must be made up of citizens who take the initiative to fight the status quo, overcome great challenges or cause change "in order to form a more perfect union" and preserve the fundamental principles of American society.

One American who exemplified the value of initiative was Ida B. Wells. Ida was born a daughter of two freed slaves from Mississippi. When she was just fourteen, her parents and baby brother died of yellow fever. Wells rose to the challenge, raised her seven younger siblings and with no financial support from her parents, put herself through college and became a teacher. Wells famously co-founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) whose mission is to "ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination." For her entire life, Ida B. Wells had the initiative to fight for the rights of others and for that she is truly an American.

Far before Ida B. Wells was born, initiative was an evident principle in American culture. The Preamble to the Constitution of the United States (1787) is a profound example of this. The Preamble was written by a group who stood up to the challenges of repealing the government under the Articles of Confederation and created an entirely new document. This document illustrates that initiative has been with America since its creation, hundreds of years ago. Further, the text of the Preamble very effectively illustrates the instilment of initiative in the foundation of the United States.

"We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

The Preamble "in order to form a more perfect union," not only recognizes the goals of "domestic tranquility," "common defense" and "general welfare," but establishes a fundamentally unique governing document which creates a nation unlike any other. The Preamble to the Constitution is a great example of initiative, because its authors recognized problems and had the initiative to create solutions that have kept the nation running for more than 200 years.

I have always been aware of the struggles others face. From a young age, I have gotten to see firsthand some of the struggles that those less fortunate than I have. Early in my life, I learned about societal issues including homelessness and abuse. As I matured and developed an interest in politics, I researched the challenges of the public education system and the environment in the United States.

To help mend the wound these problems created, I first helped run canned food drives for food banks and battered women's shelters. Then, I produced documentaries about homelessness and an environmental crisis in my hometown, so that others could be educated and hopefully persuaded to use their time so that we might overcome these obstacles. Currently, I am in the process of passing legislation in Texas and in Congress to create student advisory councils to the State Board of Education and the Department of Education, so that students can have a voice in the education policy discussions that affect their daily lives and most importantly, their futures.

Being educated about the issues was good, but what makes me different from most, yet inherently American is what I do with that knowledge. I have the initiative, the pep, the energy to stand up and fight for the causes I believe in. That is what America is about. It's standing up and fighting for what one believes is right and making change in society so that in the end, all lives will be improved.

Initiative is having the energy to start a business, run a political campaign or fight injustice. Initiative is what started Microsoft, elected the first African-American President, and put millions of cracks in the glass ceiling of equality. Most importantly, initiative, the motivation and energy to stand up, fight and suffer for one's cause, is what defines us as Americans. Having the initiative to improve society is what it truly means to be an American.