

Not so long ago I was surprised to learn that I am a 12th generation American, directly descended from early settlers who arrived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1638. Those settlers produced descendants who fought in the revolution, including a major general who was second in command to General George Washington.

This got me thinking about what it means to be an American.

Our nation is dedicated to the proposition that it is a self-evident truth that all men are created equal. Obviously, at that time, the founders did mean only men, and only white men, and of those white men, only those who owned property. Also, we had slavery.

Clearly, there was some room for improvement...

Much later, specifically four score and seven years later, a civil war nearly tore apart the nation over our original sin of slavery. But President Lincoln held fast, assuring us at Gettysburg that government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth.

Still later, through more wars and citizen activism, many more people began to share in that self-evident truth of equality.

President Obama told us at his second inaugural speech:

“We the people declare today that the most evident of truth that all of us are created equal – is the star that guides us still; just as it guided our forebears through Seneca Falls and Selma and Stonewall.”

Once again, we find ourselves living in interesting times...

But in these troubled times it appears as though our institutions are holding fast, so far.

The best thing for us lawyers and judges is to follow Lincoln’s example and hold fast to our oaths of office.

Every year in June, we celebrate pride.

So let’s take pride in what we do in these great professions of ours.

Whether you are a 12th generation American, a 1st generation American, or a recent immigrant – if you believe in this American creed, together we can advance equality to form a more perfect union.

“e pluribus unum” – out of many, one – and let us hold fast to this creed by working together for one vision, that of an inclusive and tolerant society, one common banner, that of equality for all, and one nation, of which we all can be justly proud.