

## **Korematsu v. United States**

The Rights of the People and the Responsibilities of the Government

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Word Count: 500

Selecting a topic for this year's NHD theme, Rights and Responsibility in History, came immediately; as the grandson of Reverend Sumio Koga, a Nisei---whose studies at UC Berkeley were forever disrupted by his mandatory internment at Tule Lake during WWII, I knew I wanted to focus my topic on the rights of the Japanese Americans during World War II. Deciding on a specific issue was harder; the story of the Japanese American internment has been told before--- as a result, I narrowed my topic to find a specific issue which would have meaning today. After watching the dvd, *Of Civil Wrongs and Rights - The Fred Korematsu Story*, I became interested in the landmark supreme court case of 1944, *Korematsu v. US*. Korematsu, who had been arrested and convicted for evading mandatory internment, challenged the constitutionality of the Japanese American internment before the US Supreme Court.

My initial research focused on the events which led to Fred Korematsu's supreme court case. The majority of my information about Korematsu came from the dvd, *Of Civil Wrongs and Rights - The Fred Korematsu Story*, and the Fred Korematsu Institute website. The most important secondary source was *Korematsu v. United States: Japanese--American Internment Camps* by Karen Alonso and William H. Rehnquist, *All the Laws But One*. I found primary documents such as the EO9066 in the the Library of Congress. The second part of my research focused on the experiences of the Japanese Americans living on the west coast and the events that led to their internment. I interviewed two Niseis who had been close friends of my grandfather's, Saburo Masada, and Marion Nakamura . Interviewing them gave me unique accounts of Japanese American life before the war, during the internment, and after the war. They were my best primary sources because they had met Fred Korematsu and had even attended his 1983 *Corem Nobis* case.

My previous years, I chose the website category because my projects had dealt with musical topics. The website format was perfect for including musical clips and videos. I love this format and though this year's topic is not musically related, I chose it again because I feel that a project is never really complete without an immersive multimedia experience. The individual website category gives me freedom to explore topics that I am deeply interested in at my own pace.

My topic relates to the NHD theme, Rights and Responsibilities in History, because the *Korematsu v US* landmark case challenged whether the government's **responsibilities** to keep the nation secure justified their actions to override the constitutional **rights** of the Japanese American people during World War II. Though the Supreme Court's decision, 6-3, in favor of the government, has never been overturned, it is generally acknowledged today that the decision was made in error. The legacy of the lessons learned from this case remains today.