

Interview Transcript with Ann Piccard

Interviewer: Hi Professor Piccard, nice to meet you.

Professor Piccard: Nice to meet you too Amy. What questions do you have for me today?

Interviewer: First, I'd like to know in your opinion, did the government have the power to put Japanese Americans in internment camps through Executive Order 9066?

Professor Piccard: Certainly the government gave themselves the authority to. Whether it was constitutional or not was going to be up to the Supreme Court. An executive order from the President is not usually overruled by the Supreme Court since there is a balance in the three branches of government. They're supposed to be on the same level. Without the Constitution, there would be no President and no Congress. Does the Constitution give the government the right to imprison people based on their ancestry? I would say no. How did they decide who to imprison? Anyone who looked vaguely Japanese? That's clearly unconstitutional. The fear and popular culture was such that it made it possible. I think that's why during the forties no one would object. The only way for this to change is that finally someone started bringing court cases so the laws get changed and that's how we move forward. That's how I think we've done so much better to the extent of civil rights in this country.

Interviewer: Going with that do you think the decision made in *Korematsu v. United States* was wrong?

Professor Piccard: The Supreme Court believed that at the time, national security was more important. I don't believe it. There's nothing in the Constitution that talks about national security. There is a lot mentioned in the Bill of Rights about civil rights. How the court decided national security triumphs everything, I don't know.

Interviewer: How did this decision impact civil rights?

Professor Piccard: You know it's interesting because it got swept under the rug. Nobody really talked about it, but eventually the government did pay restitution. The Japanese American Internment was the only case of national restitution I know of. Maybe it was less embarrassing to pay the individuals than to keep arguing about it.

Interviewer: Thank you for your input, I really appreciate your help.