

Korematsu v. United States:
Fighting for Rights, Facing Responsibilities

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Process Paper

Going into National History Day, I knew I wanted to find a topic related to a court case because I really enjoy this aspect of history. I started researching landmark Supreme Court cases and found that *Korematsu v. United States* interested me in particular. It not only relates closely to this year's theme, but also is profoundly relevant to the real world we live in today.

Delving into my research, I found an extensive amount of primary sources online, including anti-Japanese newspaper articles during World War II, original court rulings, and Executive Order 9066. In a local library, I got one of my most helpful sources which was the documentary *Of Civil Wrongs and Rights*. It provided interviews with Mr. Fred Korematsu, his defending lawyers, and law professors discussing the legality and legacy of the case. After I read the Fred T. Korematsu Institute's official website, I tried to set up a personal interview with Ms. Karen Korematsu, daughter of Mr. Fred Korematsu, Co-founder and Executive Director of the Institute. After multiple emails and telephone call attempts, I was able to interview Ms. Korematsu via Skype to get her personal perspective on her father's defense of his civil rights and the case's legacy. I also contacted Mr. Evan Goldberg, the Institute's Education Manager and conducted a telephone interview to expand my understanding of the case. Additionally, I met Mrs. Ann Piccard, a law professor from Stetson University to gain her insight on the legal and historical significance of this case.

Unlike the traditional presentation of court cases, a website allowed me to incorporate text, images, audio clips and video interviews to build interaction with viewers. My objective was to inform and engage the viewers with sufficient historical facts, in-depth legal analysis, easy navigation and interesting visual representations. The video clips of Mr. Korematsu telling his personal encounter and the argument of defense lawyer Peter Irons brings viewers first-hand information which helps to enhance their understanding of the case. To better reflect the theme of constitutional rights, I utilized the Photoshop software to overlay pictures of an American flag, Korematsu's portrait, and internment camps as each page's top banner.

My topic ties closely to this year's theme of Rights and Responsibilities in History. In this case, Fred Korematsu defended his constitutional rights as an American citizen while the United States government and the Supreme Court exercised its duty and responsibility to protect

national security during wartime. Mr. Korematsu argued that Japanese American Internment without evidence of wrongdoing was unconstitutional. The ruling, based on racism, limited civil liberties and expanded the Executive Branch's authority during a crisis of war. Korematsu's conviction was overturned in his coram nobis case on November 10, 1983. The government later recognized its wrongdoing and issued the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. *Korematsu v. United States* serves as an example of the fine balance between protecting rights through responsibility and establishing rights using responsibility.