

Honoring Fred Korematsu

by Navya Menon, Diversity Unit Intern

Fred Korematsu was a civil rights leader and pioneer. During WWII, when the Army forced Japanese Americans into concentration camps, Korematsu refused to comply with the orders and was arrested. His refusal led to his conviction for defying the government, and he was ultimately sent to the camps. Korematsu fought his conviction and internment, appealing the case on the grounds that it was a discriminatory conviction that violated constitutional rights.

The case, *Korematsu v. United States*, reached the Supreme Court in 1944, which ruled against him, claiming his incarceration was justified as a military necessity. Nearly 40 years later, in 1983, legal historian Peter Irons and researcher Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga uncovered documents revealing that Japanese Americans had committed no acts of treason, rendering mass incarceration unjustified. Based on this new evidence, Korematsu's case was reopened, and his conviction was overturned due to government misconduct. This landmark decision in civil rights history brought justice after 40 years.

Korematsu remained engaged in activism throughout his life and received the highest civilian award, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, from President Bill Clinton. In 2010, California passed the Fred Korematsu Day bill, designating January 30 to honor him. Fred Korematsu Day is the first day in the U.S. named after an Asian American, serving as a reminder of the ongoing fight for racial equality and justice.