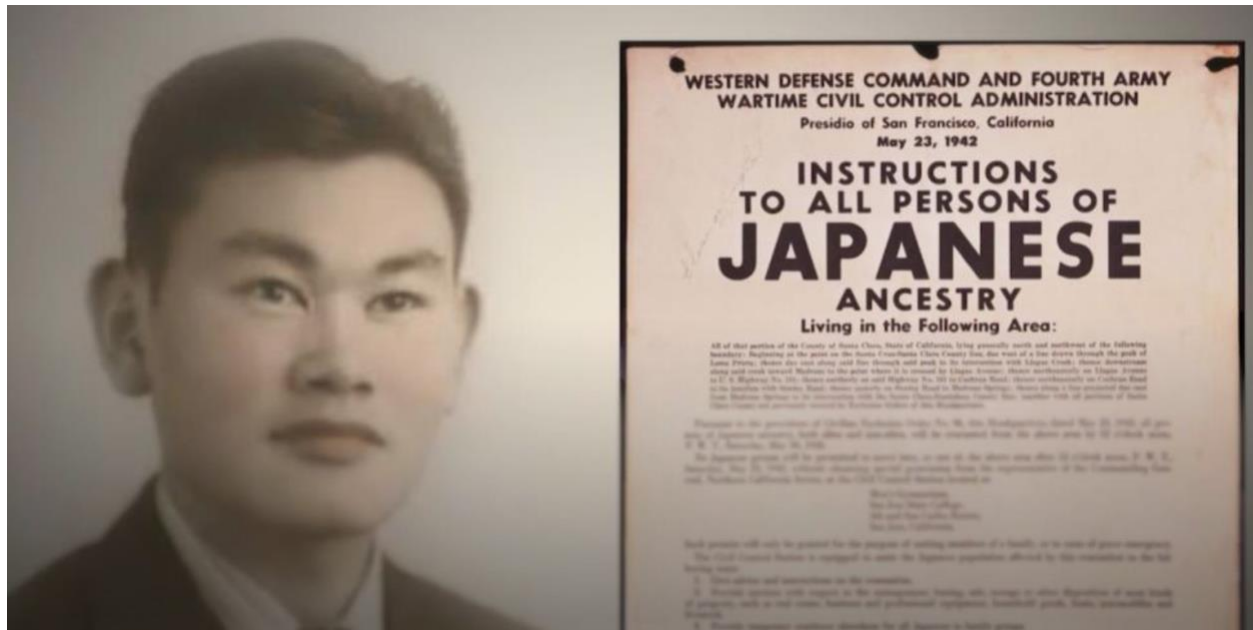


A Veteran Teacher's Lessons: Commemorate Civil Rights Hero Fred Korematsu



Oakland native Fred Korematsu defied Executive Order 9066, which called for the incarceration of Japanese Americans on the West Coast during WW II.

January 30th is Fred Korematsu Day in California. Korematsu became a national civil rights hero for his refusal to go to the US government's incarceration camps for Japanese Americans during World War II. The end of this month is a chance for social studies teachers to tell his story to students.

Fred Korematsu stood up against the injustice of Japanese American internment. An online [biography by the Korematsu Institute](#) explains, "After he was arrested and convicted of defying the government's order, he appealed his case all the way to the Supreme Court. In 1944, the Supreme Court ruled against him, arguing that the incarceration was justified due to military necessity."

For teachers who want to teach his story, the [Korematsu Institute](#) also has an excellent [curriculum kit](#) they will send to you for free.

Their materials include the Emmy award winning documentary entitled, [Of Civil Wrongs and Rights: The Fred Korematsu Story](#). The film not only tells the story of Korematsu's arrest, incarceration and Supreme Court loss, but also his victory in 1983 when his conviction was overturned in a federal court in San Francisco. This case was an important moment in civil rights history since it demonstrated Japanese Americans, like Korematsu, committed no acts of treason to justify their mass incarceration.

For US History teachers who want to teach about Korematsu's heroism within a unit on Japanese American internment, I'd recommend the [Densho resource guide](#). This guide includes the [Densho Encyclopedia](#), a free online resource about the history of Japanese American exclusion and incarceration experience and the [Densho Digital Repository](#) which "preserves the testimonies of Japanese Americans," offering "irreplaceable firsthand accounts, coupled with historical images and teacher resources..."



120,000 Japanese Americans were incarcerated in 10 Internment Camps during WWII.

I've found that photos and writing are powerful ways for students to learn about Japanese American Internment. I asked my students to [write a letter back home](#), describing their experiences from the point of view of an incarcerated teenager. Students began by [gathering details from a series of photos of the Manzanar internment camp](#). [The Letter from Manzanar Lesson](#) not only asked students to describe life in the camps from these details, but also to imagine how Japanese American teenagers felt during their imprisonment. It is a lesson emphasizing historical empathy.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the *Korematsu v. U.S.* Supreme Court decision. For Government teachers, this is an opportunity to explore the constitutional issues raised by the case. American citizens of Japanese ancestry who committed no crimes had their basic civil liberties and due process rights violated.

For those teachers who would like to connect Korematsu's story with more contemporary events, view and use the excellent documentary [Divided We Fall](#). This is the story of hate crimes against American Sikhs after 9/11. The filmmaker, Valerie Kaur, links the violence against Sikhs with intolerance against American Muslims, and includes parallels to the treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II.



In 1998 Fred Korematsu received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Bill Clinton.

2020 marks the 100th anniversary of Fred Korematsu's birth. Whether you observe Fred Korematsu Day on January 30th or commemorate his fight for civil rights as part of a larger unit on Japanese American internment or our Constitution, his is a name your students should know. Fred Korematsu's story continues to inspire.