

Fred Korematsu

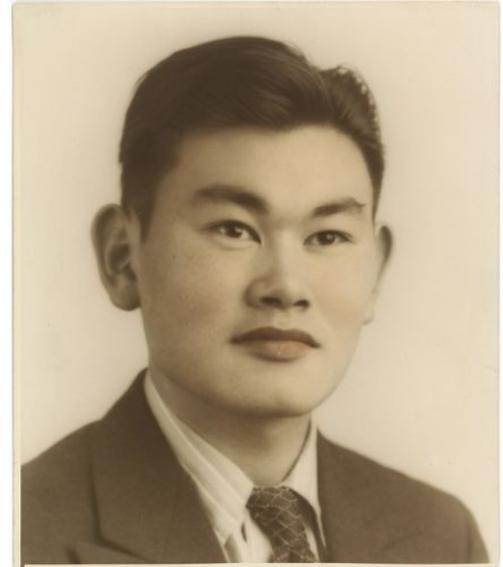
by ReadWorks

Fred Korematsu was born on January 30, 1919, in Oakland, California. He is best known for being a civil rights activist. Growing up, Fred faced racism. Many people in the United States looked down on people of Asian descent and thought they were inferior. After graduating from high school, Fred worked at a shipyard. Then when he showed up to work one day, he was fired because of his Japanese ancestry.

Things got worse for Japanese Americans in December 1941. On December 7, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, a naval base in Hawaii. The attack was a surprise, and many Americans began to question the loyalty of Japanese Americans to the United States. Two months later, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. The government applied the order mostly to Japanese Americans living on the West Coast, relocating them from their homes to special camps known today as internment camps. The government at the time argued that this relocation was necessary for national security.

Many Japanese Americans cooperated with the order. They left their homes and moved to internment camps. These camps were like a prison. Families lived in cramped spaces and were not allowed to leave.

Fred refused to follow the order. He even changed his name and appearance to try and hide his Japanese ancestry. Despite this, he was discovered. He was arrested and found guilty of violating the order. Fred believed that his conviction was unjust. He felt that the executive order went against the rights and freedoms guaranteed in the Constitution. Fred argued that people were imprisoned in the internment



National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution;
gift of the Fred T. Korematsu Family

This is a photo of Fred Korematsu from around 1940.



This is a photo of Japanese Americans in an internment camp doing an activity for Memorial Day.

camp based on their race. Along with the American Civil Liberties Union, he fought back in court. Eventually, his case was heard by the Supreme Court in 1944. However, the Supreme Court ultimately voted against Fred. They decided that the executive order was justified and not motivated by race.

After losing his appeal, Fred moved to an internment camp. The other people in the camp stayed away from Fred. They were scared of being seen as troublemakers if they talked to him.

When World War II ended, Fred moved to Michigan and attempted to live a normal life. His conviction made his life difficult, and he had trouble finding a job. He continued to have trouble even after moving back to his home state of California.

Years later, researchers discovered that the government knew that Japanese Americans did not pose a risk to the nation during the war. The government had hidden this evidence and continued forcing Japanese Americans to move to internment camps. Because of this new knowledge, a judge overturned Fred's conviction in 1983.

Fred remained an activist for the rest of his life. He advocated and fought for an official apology from the United States government. He cautioned against extreme national security measures after the 9/11 attacks. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1998. His birthday, January 30, is observed as "Fred Korematsu Day of Civil Liberties and the Constitution" in several states, including California, Virginia, and Florida. Fred's legacy shows the importance of speaking up and fighting against unjust situations, no matter the odds.