KAREN KOREMATSU INTERVIEW
THE SOUL OF AMERICA
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

Karen Korematsu
Daughter of Fred Korematsu
June 7, 2019
Interviewed by Katie Davison
Total Running Time: 53 minutes

START TC: 01:00:00:00

The history about Japanese-American incarceration is not thoroughly taught

01:00:07:10

KAREN KOREMATSU:

There's definitely a big difference as far as education about our history, especially about the World War II Japanese-American incarceration. On the East Coast, I still have people that say, oh well, they read like a sentence in a book about Pearl Harbor, World War II, they may know something about the Japanese-American incarceration but that's it. They don't know the in-depth inhumanity of the whole time in history and what people went through, how they suffered, how they lost not only their property and possessions, but their dignity. That's what a lot of the Muslims are facing today as being targeted, and what's happening down at our borders. The parallels, what I try to bring is to show people the parallels between the Japanese-American incarceration in World War II and what is happening now. Whether it is down at the border, separation of families, I mean, we had separation of families the day after Pearl Harbor, in 1941, so it's not something new that the government has done. They even had registration, we're kind of outraged

when we're talking about the Muslim registration, well there was the Japanese registration after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. So this is the pattern that this country has taken in our history, and that's what people need to realize so that we stop it, if we don't understand what happened in the past and we can't stop it, we can't make that change, we can't address those issues of inequality and racism.

The Japanese-American incarceration not being included in American's historical memory

01:02:17:13

KAREN KOREMATSU:

I think people thought that the Japanese-American Incarceration was just a Japanese-American issue or a West Coast issue, right? But this is an American story, this is about America. That's why it is so important to bring that to the forefront, because that's why my father fought the Japanese-American Incarceration, because at the end of the day, he was an American, he just happened to be of Japanese ancestry. What happened after World War II, is that the Japanese-Americans especially, they just wanted to get on with their lives. And it was so painful for them to talk about it, they lost their dignity, lost their property, and they just wanted to start over and show that they were good American citizens. It's interesting because, even talking to families where they have World War II veterans in their families, a lot of those soldiers, they didn't even want to talk about that time. So, it's that generation, I think, that we can say they found it difficult. We just had the 75th commemoration of D-Day and all these veterans that were there at Normandy to honor this. It's like the first time they had ever even talked

about this. I think they were amazed how people wanted to take their picture and interview them, and to let them know that they are American heroes. So it is that generation that was very quiet about their experiences, it just was too painful. I think it's generational. Definitely, because it wasn't just my father that didn't talk about the incarceration, it was a whole community. But then it was also that whole generation that included the World War II veterans as well as the 442nd and 100th battalion that was the Japanese-American units, which still to this day are the most decorated unit for military in the United States. I've met some of those veterans and friends as well, and it's not like they're going to sit down and tell them your story, you almost have to drag it out of them. But they felt so strong about representing our country as well, which is another part of our history. You know, I like to point out that it was really was when the 442nd was created and they were back in Mississippi, and there was a conflict between the 100th battalion which came from Hawaii, and the 442nd, and one of the generals took the 100th battalion to one of the incarceration camps in Arkansas, I don't remember if it was Jerome or Rohwer, but, when these soldiers saw that these families were behind barbed wire yet their sons were fighting for this country, it really made them think differently about what it is to fight for this country and be an American.

Most of the people incarcerated were American citizens

01:06:06:01

KAREN KOREMATSU:

I am always correcting people that say Japanese internment. It was the Japanese-American internment. 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry were incarcerated in concentration camps around this country. 2/3 were American citizens. And 1/3 of those were children under the age of 18. There was also Japanese internment even in Siberia, where they had kidnapped the Japanese in Mongolia and took them to labor camps. There were Japanese internment camps in China, as well as Japan. The description needs to be clarified, because it happened on American soil and that is what is so outrageous.

Comparing the Japanese-American incarceration camps to Auschwitz

01:07:11:03

KAREN KOREMATSU:

When I first started speaking, I talked about in terms of the Japanese-American concentration camps, and had a lot of pushback. They would say, "Karen you can't call them concentration camps, that only happened in Germany," well I said, "It was worse in Germany because those really were death camps," the majority of them, and even though there were many people that were in the Japanese-American camps that thought they were going to get killed. They thought they were going to be shot, in fact some people were shot for one reason or another. It's not exclusive, no matter how you look at it, it's a tragedy and actually inhumane. People don't realize, they are in this mode it's going to happen to them but not happen to me, and that's

human nature. You have to kind of look at this as what's human nature, but that doesn't mean it's acceptable. It just means that obviously they need to be educated about these differences, about, and also because with the Holocaust that happened on German soil, in Europe, and to this day people are in denial about the Japanese-American concentration camps in this country: "Oh that didn't happen." And then you have to go into, "Well yes it did." So, we have a long way to go before we really have people understand this historical perspective, and really understand that we're all humans, and in this country, we are all Americans. And I have to say that being an American in this country means having to support citizens and non-citizens. That's a true American, and that's what I tried to encourage people to understand, because we have a responsibility for people that come to this country. The history of this country was immigration—all of a sudden immigration was like a dirty word. I find that outrageous because this country was built on the backs of immigrants like my grandparents on both sides of my family. I want people to understand that we should be proud that we are immigrants, that we helped to build this country. It's not perfect, we have our imperfections, but we really should be proud of what we have achieved. Sometimes it's three steps forward two steps back—that's democracy. But our democracy is on attack and we need to work towards making sure we make that strong. Liberty is important to everyone.

48 Wheeler Ave, 3rd Floor Pleasantville, NY 10570 T 914-238-6800 kunhardtfilmfoundation.org

Racial targeting and discrimination have been a constant in American history

01:10:37:16

KAREN KOREMATSU:

Certainly after Pearl Harbor, the Japanese-Americans were targeted. It was their fault, they looked like the enemy, and certainly that parallel carried over to what happened after 9/11 when the Muslims were being also targeted and accused that it was their fault for the planes going in to the Twin Towers and plane going into the Pentagon. In that context, that's a strong parallel. That's why the Japanese-American community was the first to speak up after 9/11 to remind this country that you did this in 1942, don't do this again. You're trying to pigeonhole this situation. We're too quick to blame those people we can identify. I mean it was, even in the time of General John DeWitt when he issued Executive Order 9066, it was for the Japanese-Americans, you can't separate the sheep from the goats, that's why they all need to be put in prison camps. That was also the attitude after 9/11. So, it's not anything new. It's not excusable, and because we did not learn the lessons of 1942, of the World War II Japanese-American incarceration, here we are.

American's historical tendency of demonizing immigrant communities

09;34;29;08

KAREN KOREMATSU:

The backstory to the Japanese-American incarceration is agriculture. As we do in this country, when we want cheap labor, we recruited the Chinese to work on our railroads, and we went into Japan at the 1900s when the

economy was very poor in Japan, and the government went to the five prefectures, meaning counties, that were heavily agricultural. And recruited people like my grandfather – come to America, land of opportunity, we will help you with your work, you can do well here, we'll give you land in some cases, and on the other hand, we're going to treat you like slaves, going to marginalize you, there will be prejudice. None of those things that are ever even told, that's what they experienced. That's how this agriculture belt was created up and down the West Coast. The backstory also is that the Japanese nationals and Japanese-Americans were doing so well, the cry was, "They're taking away our jobs," well where have we heard this before? This is how history is repeated. We're doing that to the Mexicans and Latinos, "They're taking our jobs, they're coming to our country, we can't have them," and that happened to the Chinese, Japanese, and now here we are again. And even in—you know, in targeting Muslims, they're coming over to take our tech jobs. This is the issue, at the core of why we have not learned or history, why we need to "stop repeating history" and to educate people that we all belong here, we all have something to contribute. We've lost respect in this country, it's quite clear. That's what I'm trying to help, especially this generation of students realize, that moral principles of right and wrong, of treating other people like they want to be treated is something that will take you through your entire life, or should take you through your entire life. That's why we want people to understand our history, because we go from one issue to the next, to the next and here we are. Like I said I have my opinions.

48 Wheeler Ave, 3rd Floor Pleasantville, NY 10570 T 914-238-6800 kunhardtfilmfoundation.org

The importance of teaching moral principles and civil engagement

01:15:19:12

KAREN KOREMATSU:

We are all born the same, more or less. We have our different economic issues in neighborhoods, and ethnicities and those kinds of challenges, but we're all born as human beings, so what happens when we do not learn moral principles of right and wrong? It's not complicated. We try and make everything so complicated in this country, but it's very simple. There is no grey area, there is right and wrong. We try to rationalize; we try to argue away the core of what should be true to ourselves. If we are true to ourselves and have that understanding then we can contribute, that's what being an American is. When you actually are civically engaged, and that's something I've been talking about it, being a part of your community. So, when you are civically engaged and we push civic education, you're not only doing this for your own community, your state and this nation, you're also doing it for yourself. That just makes you a better person, and isn't that what we all want to be? Don't we all want to be better people? You know the American dream of — we hear stories of these people who are born with nothing and they are able to build themselves up and build businesses and contribute to this country. That's what we all should be striving for, and it may sound a bit Pollyanna, but somewhere along the way we have lost that core values that we need to concentrate on. On remembering, learning, sharing and teaching.

Fred Korematsu as an example of morality and core values

01:17:16:17

KAREN KOREMATSU:

To him, the Japanese-American incarceration was wrong, to be put into prison was wrong, and he was right to stand up and say "No I'm not going to do this, why should I be put in a prison camp when I have done nothing wrong?" It wasn't complicated. And that's what resonates with so many people, when I talk about my father and talk about his story, because he was a humble, kind, generous person. He would give you the shirt off his back if you needed it. I don't know too many people -- I know this is my daddy, but I don't know too many people who live by their principles of right and wrong. It's always this grey area that they're walking this fine line, this tight rope—not him. And so, he's my inspiration, that's why his story, as Dale says in -- the legal team, my father's legal team loved my father, and my mother, who was the cheerleader. Because he was so true to his own values. That's important, an important lesson to teach because you think people automatically know that—they don't. That's why it always gives me great pleasure to share that part of my father's story, because that's what inspires. That's why we have Fred Korematsu Day of Civil Liberties in the Constitution on my father's birthday of January the 30th. That was actually established by Assembly Member Warren Furutani from California and Assembly Member Block, that they created this legislative bill that was non-partisan. Both sides of the aisle, the Senate and the House passed it with flying colors, and that's how we have Fred Korematsu Day of Civil Liberties in the Constitution, because, it's about education. That's like in the first paragraph of the bill. Even though it's in perpetuity, meaning it's forever the governor of

California, whoever that is, the Superintendent of Education instruction also encourages teachers to teach about my father's story, his fight for justice and how it relates to our issues today of immigration and racial profiling and national security, in context of the World War II Japanese-American incarceration. It's not a holiday yet, we need to have several states under our belt, a majority of them, before you can have like a federal holiday, but it's amazing because the state of Hawaii, the Commonwealth of Virginia as they like to be referred to, and the state of Florida, and New York City all have the day in perpetuity.

01:20:46:01

In fact, my favorite story is the state of Florida was established by students, 7th graders. So, their teacher in Clearwater Fundamental School in Clearwater, Florida, was teaching about the Japanese-American incarceration and about my father. So, kids being kids, Googled Fred Korematsu and saw that other states had Fred Korematsu day, and of course they wanted Fred Korematsu day, they really wanted a holiday, but that's okay, we'll take it. And they had a state senator visit them at their school, civic education, 7th grade. And they expressed to the senator what they wanted, and he said, like the lesson of how do you create a bill, the cartoon, he said "If you write letters to me, I will create a bill and I will take it to the senate" and he did, and it passed, and he took it to a colleague, who took it to the House, and it passed, and that's how we have Fred Korematsu Day of Civil Liberties in the Constitution for the state of Florida by the power of the pen of 7th graders, of students.

The impact of Fred Korematsu disobeying Executive Order 9066

01:22:07:05

KAREN KOREMATSU:

For my father, taking the stand to disobey this military order, I don't think he realized the magnitude of it. It wasn't complicated to him. He was an American citizen. He grew up just like any other American kid. He was born in Oakland, California. He had never been to Japan. He barely could speak any Japanese; it was more like children's Japanese. And so, when this executive order was issued, certainly my grandparents were very afraid, because they're immigrants. Of course, they wanted to become American citizens, but that law didn't even change until 1952, so he said 'Why should I be put in a prison camp' when he had done nothing wrong. And that's basically how he made his decision. It wasn't complicated for him, and he learned about the constitution in high school, he thought he had rights as an American citizen, and that's all it took.

Peace has always been a crucial element for moral leaders

01:23:24:10

KAREN KOREMATSU:

If you look at, especially our American civil rights heroes, if you look at Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, Rosa Parks, Fred Korematsu, they were all people of peace. They were about peace. They believed in their own convictions. It wasn't really complicated to them either. Rosa Parks just refused to sit at the back of the bus, not complicated. Fred Korematsu refused to be put in a prison camp, not complicated. They all had this inner I want to say strength, or value, that they probably couldn't even explain to you, and

that's what makes them civil rights heroes. A hero doesn't go out to say, "I'm going to be a hero," it doesn't work that way. It is what people label them afterwards, not what they label themselves. My father never thought of himself as a hero, and I'm sure the other civil rights heroes never thought of themselves that way as well. What they did was believed in their convictions and what they wanted to work for and wanted this country to be. That was what made them a hero, and that's how we have given that label to others like my father.

Fred Korematsu wasn't supported by his family when he disobeyed Executive Order 9066

01:25:05:09

KAREN KOREMATSU:

My father was 23 years old, when the executive order was issued, so his birthday is January 30th, so he was 22 at that time, 23 years old, a young man of legal age. My grandparents, from what he told me, were so concerned about their own lives, own livelihood. What pains me is that the Japanese-Americans had worked so hard on their businesses, on raising their families, and then to be stripped away from all that I none brushstroke, without any due process of law, that was so outrageous. No one had a charge, a hearing a day in court, the 4th and 14th amendments were totally violated, all because of what we called then "military necessity," which we now call "national security." See the parallel? It was very scary time for them, and their opinion was, my father was old enough to make his own decision. Certainly, he brought shame to the family once they all had to go to the incarceration camps. My father did have to go it alone. He didn't talk about it, he kept it all

to himself and just carried on and kept pushing and just believed that someday the wrong would be a right.

The importance of knowing your family's history and preserving their legacy

01:26:55:09

KAREN KOREMATSU:

It's interesting because what I try to encourage people to do now, the young generation, especially now as we move away from our generation, the World War II generation, is to go home and find out their own story. Once they know their own story, they can appreciate other people's stories. Where did they come from, what were the struggles, what were their challenges, what did they have to sacrifice? How do they feel about that now? Because I never did that. I wish I would have, after the fact, wish I would have sat down my father and asked him all these questions, but I didn't do that, and so he didn't volunteer it. In fact I have had students tell me that their parents won't talk about the Japanese-American incarceration, or their grandparents that were in World War II won't talk about that time, and I said, no they won't, but you need to tell them that it's for a school assignment and start asking them general questions, not so personal to begin with. What was happening at that time? Where were they? How did they feel? And then ask them those personal questions.

01:28:25:23

Because I wish I had done that. Who would have thought my father's legacy would have grown to be so impactful at this time. When I'm talking to a group, certainly my father received the presidential Medal of Freedom on

January 15th, 1998 for his fight for justice and the fight ultimately for the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 that was signed by President Reagan, but you never know what's going to happen to someone's legacy after they pass away. You don't predict that, and in my eyes my father was going to live forever, which is not reasonable, but it was emotional. When these things started popping up like the assembly members who wanted to create Fred Korematsu day, now we have four schools named after my father -- three in the San Francisco Bay area and one in Sacramento, an elementary school, and in the bay area a high school an elementary school and a middle school. Who would have thought that would have happened? Also, it's interesting, my father's Supreme Court case, Korematsu vs. the United States, is studied in Constitutional Law in law school. So that's also how students have come to me and asked me to speak to them at their schools, universities. Because they have learned about this case and it's about a real person, but it's also about one of the worst decisions that the Supreme Court ever made. That's the reality of it. Also, because the case still resonates today. It still means that we have not addressed those issues of racism and prejudice and the negative rhetoric that we're hearing today.

Becoming involved with preserving Fred Korematsu's legacy

01:30:48:19

KAREN KOREMATSU:

I think my involvement just happened kind of over time, my father passed away in 2005. I was fortunate enough to be able to travel with my parents about four years before my father passed away and my mother didn't pass

away until she was 92 ½ in 2013, which was six years ago. So you know, I was able to hear more of my father's story that way, but because people started reaching out to me… My civil rights advocacy started when my father's case was reopened in 1983. That's when I was starting to do more with the Asian-American community, and they would draw me in. it's not anything I would do on purpose, it was over time. "Karen will you do this, will you do that, will you come speak," and I thought, not me, I'm not the public speaker. So that kind of took some time to be comfortable. Because this was so important to my father that he didn't want something like the Japanese-American incarceration to happen again, that's why he crisscrossed this country and continued to speak five months before he passed away at the age of 86. He could have very well said, Japanese-American community, you didn't want anything to do with me, why should I have anything to do with you. But he wasn't like that. And he just wanted people to learn the lessons of history so we would not repeat them.

Fred Korematsu's advocacy evolved over time

01:32:39:12

KAREN KOREMATSU:

His advocacy didn't start until his Coram Nobis case was vacated in 1983. And that was little by little, the same process. People wanted him, invited him to come speak, and "I don't know" or just show up, and he would show up and people would ask him questions. He got a little more comfortable, and that's been my process as well. I think because, I could see how important that was to my father, and I think as Americans we all have the responsibility of making this country better. If I can do that in some small way by speaking

out, by pointing to these historical parallels, then in trying to change hearts and minds. How do we change hearts and minds in this country? Oh my gosh, it's such a big challenge. But if we all did that, if we all understood the inhumanity -- that's what bothers me. The human's rights violations that we keep, really building up to a point now where we are still separating families at the border. That's not American, we haven't learned our lessons of history.

The need for Americans to become civically engaged

01:34:20:10

KAREN KOREMATSU:

This is a big country, and we need to get people involved, so now I'm encouraging people to be civically engaged—to participate. If we don't all participate in this country, we are not going to make change. That means voting, whether it's in your community, your state, your nation. Our census that's coming out in 2020, I'm very afraid that people are going to say, "Oh no if I'm going to do the census then they're going to come get me." And if we don't, if people aren't encouraged to participate in the census, then we can't create those programs to help these communities. People need to be counted, we need to have that representation, we need to provide that support to communities. It all trickles down to how we can support each other as Americans, and that's what is so important today, I feel, and my responsibility to encourage people and motivate them and show the urgency that if we don't do something, we're going to be in big trouble. Look at our environment, which is totally a different issue. I'm really afraid about our environment and about this climate change issue, and it all connects. There are no separate parts it's all in one. At the end of the day, it's about what it

means to be an American citizen and what it means to participate, to uphold those rights. We've seen this in the past where our voting numbers are just so bad. It's like a throwaway. This is a privilege that we have in this country, I travel around the world to countries that aren't able to vote, or they have these struggles, or they want to vote and are being turned away for one reason or another. We still have these issues, don't get me wrong. We still have voting rights issues, language access, but that's what people need to work on so that we can make that change.

The parallels between the Japanese-American incarceration and the Muslim travel ban

01:36:43:11

KAREN KOREMATSU:

This current President issued his first executive order on January 27th, 2017 that was called the Muslim Ban. And then it became the immigration ban, because, and then it became the travel ban. That's what we do in this country, we try to water down the impact, like the euphemisms. One of the words that I totally hate, regarding the Japanese-American incarceration of World War II is "evacuation." Now I can tell you, five-year old's know the difference if they're living in earthquake country, hurricane country, tornado country, and now we're dealing with guns, what evacuation means—people were forcibly removed. Those were kind of the euphemisms that were being put out there in 1942, and so we try to water down the impact of targeting, especially the Muslims. So, when the Trump v. Hawaii case was launched, we said well we need to show the courts the parallels. We need to remind the courts of the

parallels between the Japanese-American incarceration and what's being done now to Muslims, because it's racial profiling.

01:38:20:06

Now, it was racial profiling in 1942, now it's racial profiling and religious profiling. Talk about violation of constitution rights, and that's wrong. That's why the responsibility is, we need to speak up. The Japanese-American community needs to speak up. So, we had an Amicus Brief that was… we have the Fred T. Korematsu center for law and equality at Seattle University School of Law, so that was established in 2009. My mother and I when she was still living, and I established the Fred T. Korematsu Institute in 2009 as well at the same time in April, the Korematsu Center for Law and Equality is certainly academia, but they have worked on Amicus Briefs as well, they have their law students work on these briefs. So it was kind of natural that they would be the ones to work on this brief along with Akin Gump in New York City. All did it pro-bono, meaning for free because it took hours and hours to put this brief together, but at the end of the day what we wanted to tell the court was the parallels between the Japanese-American incarceration of 2002 and what's happening now to Muslims with the Muslim travel ban, and to remind the court of the dangers of overreaching of power. We have three branches of government which we are still trying to get the public to… you know, what are they… You have the executive branch, judicial and legislative. So, one branch should not be an overreaching of power to another, that's why they're separated, that's why the Constitution did that.

01:40:21:07

That's why our forefathers wanted those separations because they wanted to act independently: checks and balances, rule of law. Those are points we

need to remember, and that was the point of the Amicus Brief that I put my name to because Korematsu v. the United States is considered the major case of the other two. Hirabayashi and Yasui had to do with the curfew, but my father disobeyed the military orders. That's why it's the most studied case. I was really quite surprised and pleased that Justice Sonya Sotomayor mentioned my name in her dissent. The point of the majority opinion and decision, it was 5-4, it wasn't unanimous. And Justice Sotomayor along with Ginsburg wrote one opinion, and Justice Breyer and Kagan wrote the other dissenting opinion, and clearly my, I'm not an attorney, so my personal opinion is that Justice Sotomayor in her dissent went to the juggler. She got to the point. She said this is wrong. And cited my name in her decision, her dissenting opinion, I should say. But that's what needs to be studied, because she reminds the court and this country that we are still making the same mistakes. To target a group of people is wrong, and we need to keep fighting that. My personal opinion is, when Chief Justice Roberts issued his majority opinion, and something that people don't realize because even I have said in the past, my father's Coram Nobis case, Korematsu vs. the United States, it was the federal conviction that was vacated. The case itself still stood on the Supreme Court record. It could still be used as precedent, and it would take something of outrageous means to bring it up again as it did in the case of Trump v. Hawaii.

01:43:09:08

The Supreme Court justices all read what their opinions are, so when Chief Justice Roberts wrote his opinion, and getting to the point, he agreed he upheld the opinion. When he said in his opinion that, "This has nothing to do with Korematsu," meaning Trump v. Hawaii has nothing to do with

Korematsu v. United States. Then goes on to say 'However, Korematsu v. United States was wrong,' a wrong decision and not part of our constitution so he's going to take the opportunity to overrule it. Now, constitutional scholars, you can ask them, what did Justice Roberts actually overrule, that's still debatable. Could my father's Supreme Court case still be used again? Who knows? It would have to find its way in another case that would address that. But, just as Roberts' when he said that Korematsu v. United States has nothing to do with Trump v. Hawaii, and was going to overrule Korematsu and marginalize the Muslims and other ethnicities, he dishonored my father, all in the same breath. It's almost like he used my father's name in vain, Justice Roberts, used my father's name in vain to make a point because his opinion, the way that many of us look at it, was like a throwaway, when he overruled Korematsu it was a throwaway like in retaliation to Sotomayor's opinion. And that's not what a Supreme Court justice should be doing, that's not their role. They should be better than that.

Executive Orders in America

01:45:51:11

KAREN KOREMATSU:

Executive Orders go back to the time of our first President, President Washington, and he used Executive Orders as directives to the military. In the Constitution, there is nothing in there that specifically phrases executive order. Certainly, the Constitution gives executive power to the President. So, it really wasn't until Roosevelt, as far as I know, when President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, that it was used in a manner that targeted and marginalized Americans. And so, but it was interesting because all these

years… when we said Executive Order 9066, and we would talk about February 19th and that was the day of remembrance, what the Japanese-American community and even other communities really commemorate to show the lessons of history, how they are still being repeated. It's interesting because people didn't know what executive orders were about. With this current president issuing this executive order on January 7th, 2017, then all of a sudden it was, oh, what is an executive order? Then people started realizing that the president had all this power to issue these orders that were not positive in reality, they were negative, and that's not really what this country is about. So, it's maybe something that needs to be addressed about executive orders. That's something that maybe congress needs to do or should be doing.

The crisis at the U.S. – Mexico border

01:48:01:12

KAREN KOREMATSU:

I haven't been down to the border where they are separating families. Certainly, they've been putting them in Crystal City, Texas, and Crystal City, I haven't been there either, but originally was a Department of Justice camp, during the World War II Japanese-American incarceration, they had brought up Peruvians and Latin Japanese to incarcerate them. That backstory is that they were kidnapped, the Japanese Latins and Peruvians to be used as trade for prisoners of war. So there's that issue as well. Even I will point out, there was an incarceration in Canada. 20,000 Japanese-Canadians were incarcerated on the West Coast of Canada. So, this is an international issue that obviously we have not addressed before, and that's why it's so important

to draw these parallels. The senator from Oregon created a bill called "No Internment Camps". And so that's what I started having communication with him. The stories have trickled up, and I have Japanese-American friends who have gone down there to bring attention to what is going on down there, but the stories are the same—the conditions are inhumane, the families are being separated. It's a terrible situation that it's frustrating because of the way people are being treated. It's just plain inhumane.

Fred Korematsu's legacy and message

01:50:05:19

KAREN KOREMATSU:

I will leave you with my father's words, because that is really the reminder. He said, "stand up for what is right, when you see something wrong, protest, but not with violence. Otherwise they won't listen to you. But don't be afraid to speak up." My father loved to speak to, especially attorneys because he knew they would have the tools that would enable them to keep fighting for our civil liberties and civil rights in this country and uphold the Constitution. But he wanted all of us to be a part of that process, and to participate, you can't say, somebody else is going to do it. And granted everybody is busy, everyone has busy lives and I point that out. But if everyone participated a little bit here, a little bit there, maybe when they're a little bit older obviously they have kids they're working, but maybe when their kids are out of school, they're empty nesters, they can get more involved in their community. There are ways of doing it, of getting more involved in this nation. I'm sure no one wants their own children to have to face all this racism, prejudice, negative rhetoric, because that brings us down and we're better than that as

Americans. We have so much to do, especially with our climate control and our environment. What are we leaving this generation to face? It's a big problem, so that's what my father's message… That's why my father's story resonates on so many different levels, because at the root of it is social justice, and social justice is in all aspects of life, career and community, or it should be. And no matter what your discipline is, whether you're a scientist in the medical field or a teacher or in religion or in makeup and film, and a director, because at heart, it is very heartwarming when celebrities do speak up and try to make change, because that's using their status in a positive way, and that's what we need for our young people: to have role models that are positive. That's why American civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and Cesar Chavez and Rosa Parks and Fred Korematsu are so important. That's why Fred Korematsu Day of Civil Liberties in the Constitution is so important, because it represents the Asian-American community. The Asian-American community is the fastest growing community in the United states. Where is that representation? Where is that role model? Having a federal day recognized in his name is the opportunity to bring that part of education to our history. That is important for all of us to remember. At the end of the day when you tie all these American civil rights stories together, we are Americans, no matter if you're indigenous or an immigrant.

48 Wheeler Ave, 3rd Floor Pleasantville, NY 10570 T 914-238-6800 kunhardtfilmfoundation.org