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2023

### A Country that Hates the Skin You Wear (2023-2024)

Gianna McGowan

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# “A Country that Hates the Skin You Wear”

## Gianna McGowan (remix example)

### Questions to Consider For Discussion and Reflection

The remix assignment asks students to reconfigure, reimagine, and remix their research inquiry into a new genre and/or for a new audience and purpose. In this remix assignment, McGowan uses poetry to powerfully convey information about Fred Korematsu and his legal fight for civil rights, challenging the forced relocation of Japanese Americans in internment camps during WWII. As you read McGowan’s remix piece, consider:

- How does McGowan use language, layout, and stanza construction to place you in a different perspective? How does the title line appear in the poem and to what effect?
- How does this remix shift the audience, purpose, and context of McGowan’s research? What does it suggest for remixing your own research inquiry?
- Why is the poem even more effective together with the summary statement? In what context(s) could you imagine audiences reading this remix?

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## A Country that Hates the Skin You Wear by Gianna McGowan

Identity

Something that means so much  
To so many.  
Who you are, where you’re from,  
Are all important features  
In defining who you are.  
But to change your name,  
Claim a different race,  
All to protect yourself from  
Discrimination and harm...  
Imagine that.

You undergo a knife  
To cut your eyes and change  
Their shape.  
You disaffiliate from your heritage,  
Claiming to be of a race  
Not your own,  
And change your name to one  
Not a gift.  
You do all this still.  
But it is not enough to hide.

They found you,  
They will always find you,  
And they take you in.  
Not a place you deserve to be.  
You changed your entire being,  
You ruined your identity,  
All for a chance, for a false hope.  
And still it was not enough.  
It will never be enough  
When you live in a country  
That hates the skin you wear.

Behind bars  
One way or another;  
What's the difference between  
A jail and a camp?  
Offered a challenge,  
A chance to argue the constitutionality,  
You agree.  
This is your chance  
To set this right for your people.  
You build yourself up  
Only to get shot down.

They name you "convict,"  
Still not seeing you as a person,  
Not seeing your rights  
as a given.  
They pour salt in your wounds  
By placing you on probation  
And they make you live  
In a place built for animals.  
You are no horse  
Yet you share a home.

You thought it couldn't be worse  
Than living amongst animals,  
Oh how naive you can be  
When your eyes shine with sugar.  
But as they lost their sugar,  
Life lost its shine,  
And they put you in a camp.  
A camp of hate.  
Why did everyone hate you so much?  
What could you have done?

You don't know what you did  
But you know what you can do,  
And you can fight.  
You take your case,  
Appeal all the way to the supreme,  
Just to get kicked while you're down.  
A 6-3 decision that said  
This was not an act of hate.  
Not an act determined  
Against the color of your skin.

You don't get your answer right away.  
It takes some years,  
Many years,  
But they reopened your case.  
They reevaluated the decision  
That devastated your life,  
And they find that  
They  
Were  
Wrong.

You look at your eyes  
And they look unlike your own.  
They are tired.  
You examine your name  
And it sounds foreign on your lips.  
It is not your gift.  
You look at everything  
You have done,  
And all you have failed  
And you wonder  
What was it all for?

They overturned the decision,  
Freeing you from criminal charge  
And offered a pardon  
For you to drop charges.  
But you were "not interested  
In a pardon from the government;  
Instead, [you] had always felt  
It was the government  
Who should seek a pardon from [you]  
And the Japanese Americans  
For the wrong  
That was committed."

### *Summary*

Fred Korematsu was an American civil rights activist who was born on January 30, 1919, in Oakland, California, and passed away on March 30, 2005, in Marin County, California. He is best known for his legal challenge against the forced relocation and internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. In 1942, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which authorized the forced relocation of Japanese Americans living on the West Coast to internment camps in remote areas of the country. Korematsu refused to comply with the order and went into hiding, but was eventually arrested and convicted of violating the order. With the help of civil rights lawyers, Korematsu challenged his conviction all the way to the United States Supreme Court in the landmark case *Korematsu v. United States*. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court upheld his conviction in a 6-3 decision, arguing that the need to protect against espionage and sabotage outweighed Korematsu's constitutional rights. Korematsu's case was later reopened in the 1980s, and in 1983, his conviction was overturned by a federal court in San Francisco on the grounds of government misconduct and the suppression of evidence by the US government during the original trial. Korematsu spent much of his life advocating for civil rights and speaking out against discrimination. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Bill Clinton in 1998. Today, he is remembered as a hero and a symbol of the fight for civil rights in the United States.

### Work Cited

“Fred's Story.” *Korematsu Institute*, <https://korematsuinstitute.org/freds-story/>. Accessed 21 April 2023.