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

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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?

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.