



CITY OF DURHAM  
**HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION**

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## COMMISSIONER COMMUNICATION

**Re:** Fred Korematsu

**Made by:** Commissioner Steven D. Lee

**Date:** February 1, 2011 (Regular Commission Meeting)

This past Sunday California declared that January 30<sup>th</sup> of each year would be known as the Fred Korematsu Day of Civil Liberties and the Constitution. Though it is not yet a national holiday nor one celebrated in North Carolina, given this individual's tremendous contributions to the civil rights and human dignity of current and future generations of Asian-Americans, and indeed for all Americans, I am compelled, both as an Asian-American and as a Human Relations Commissioner, to acknowledge his contributions today and in this setting.

During WWII, America was a place where one's name and face were reason for doubt and suspicion, where one's loyalty, patriotism and even one's very identity as an American were called into questioned. And while Japanese-Americans were being hauled away to internment camps, one man had the courage to defy these unjust acts. At just twenty-three years old (just one year older than I am today), that man was Fred Korematsu.

Though the groups who face discrimination today may be different, the same sort of mistakes and prejudices of our past continue to permeate and hold back America today.

To quote Justice Murphy in his *Korematsu* dissent:  
"All residents of this nation are kin in some way by blood or culture to a foreign land. Yet they are primarily and necessarily a part of the new and distinct civilization of the United States. They must, accordingly, be treated at all times as the heirs of the American experiment, and as entitled to all the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution."

Indeed, in the wake of September 11<sup>th</sup>, Fred Korematsu himself cautioned against making the same sort of mistakes, in particular as they relate to how we treat and relate to our Muslim-American citizens.

It is my personal hope that as a Commission we keep these lessons of history in mind when approaching issues of today, that we recognize that historically perhaps our own ethnicity, religion or identity were subject to the same sort of discrimination and inequality that individuals and groups face today. It is my hope that this sentiment and perspective will motivate, inspire and mobilize this commission to action when needed.

With that, I'd request with the unanimous consent of the commission, that when we adjourn tonight's commission meeting that we do so in recognition of Fred Korematsu.