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Boston College Law School

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Professor Rogers Receives Allies for Justice Award

3/23/01--Boston College Law School is pleased to announce a very special film screening on April 9, 2001. "Of Civil Wrongs and Rights," the critically acclaimed film by Eric Fournier, tells the story of civil rights hero Fred Korematsu. The film will be shown in the Law School East Wing building room 115B at 3:30 p.m. Mr. Korematsu and his family are currently planning on attending this event.

"As a school with a serious commitment to social justice, it is particularly appropriate for Boston College Law School to show this film and host the Korematsus," said Associate Dean for Academic Affairs Alfred Yen, who was instrumental in bringing the new film to BCLS. "History teaches us that forgetting about injustice opens the door to further injustice. It has been more than 50 years since Mr. Korematsu began his courageous fight against injustice. His presence on our campus reminds us all about the importance of vigilance against racism and the difference that a single person's courage can make. Mr. Fournier's film provides a valuable public service by preserving Mr. Korematsu's legacy."

Mr. Korematsu was born in Oakland, California of Japanese ancestry, and was a graduate of Oakland High School. By 1942 he had tried twice to enlist in the army but was turned down for a physical disability. Before and after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, he worked in defense plants in the San Francisco area, and had no criminal record. He was ordered to one of the internment camps during World War Two, at the age of 22. He refused to go quietly and was arrested in May 1942.

Korematsu was tried in a federal district court and was joined in his fight by Ernest Besig, the Executive Director of the ACLU of Northern California. Besig had read about Korematsu in a local paper and offered the assistance of the ACLU in the legal battle that would ensue. Korematsu challenged the order as it applied to him, a loyal citizen of the United States, but he was found guilty of knowingly violating the Civilian Exclusion Order. He was confined in a relocation center in Utah while he appealed his case to the United States Supreme Court.

Korematsu lost his case in a highly-charged legal opinion that upheld his conviction. But the impact of the case on the civil rights movement was considerable, and almost 40 years later, the case was reopened. In 1983, Korematsu won a reversal of his conviction. In January 1998, Fred Korematsu was honored with the Medal of Freedom, the country's highest civilian award, at a White House ceremony.

The Executive Order issued during World War II resulted in the incarceration of more than 120,000 people of Japanese descent. Fred Korematsu's heroic stand against this injustice demonstrates the importance of individual conscience, courage, and action.

If health permits, Fred Korematsu and his family will attend the screening at BCLS on April 9. The will be a Q&A session with the family following the film, and refreshments will be served.