Rachel Maddow presents: Burn Order

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Episode 3: One Drop

Maybe security wasn't the whole motivation for what was going on here.

The U.S. military is deployed on the streets of America, tasked with carrying out the mass round-up of innocent immigrants and American citizens labeled by the government as the "enemy" within. Tens of thousands of American families are forced to live in hastily constructed prison camps — enduring inhumane conditions — while government officials scramble to figure out what to do with them all.

Transcript

(Ambient train station sounds)

Rachel Maddow: The old Southern Pacific train depot in San Jose, California. Today it's a busy commuter rail station—Caltrain and Amtrak, thousands of commuters every day. Imagine this same spot in the early morning hours of May 29, 1942. There are hundreds of families from San Jose are standing here uneasily. They're not sure what to expect. They've been ordered to report here at the train station, to line up here, so the U.S. government can load them onto trains. Among them is a rowdy, happy, very high-spirited 10-year-old boy named Norman.

Norman Mineta: For a 10- to 11-year-old kid, this was, "Oh boy, an overnight train ride, a long train ride."

Rachel Maddow: Norman is in the fifth grade. He's born and raised in San Jose. It's the only place he's ever lived. This Friday morning when he and his family report to the train station, it feels to him almost like an adventure.

David Mineta: There was some excitement about getting on a train and going somewhere, and it's like he'd never been on a train before.

Rachel Maddow: That's Norman's son David, who now himself lives in San Jose.

David Mineta: Despite Dad talking about it as an adventure, I've got to believe that he was picking up on the anxiety and the fear from his sisters, his brother, and his parents.

Rachel Maddow: In the weeks leading up to this day, Norman's parents had been forced to sell off basically everything they owned—nearly all of the family's possessions. They had to give away their dog.

David Mineta: There was a lot of stuff they had to get rid of. One was a car that they had sort of bought fairly recently, and they had to sell it for, you know, a fraction of what they had paid. There

was a dog. There were so many things that they had to move and start— and move on, not knowing where they were going, what was happening.

Rachel Maddow: The family had been forced to dispose of their possessions—sell off anything they could, or store it somehow. And they had almost no time to do it. There are records in the National Archives now from towns all over the West Coast—places like San Jose and Hayward and Castro Valley in the Bay Area—handwritten messages taken down from white citizens calling government offices. A woman looking to pick up a turnkey, ready-to-go beauty shop business. A man looking for a half-ton truck. It was white citizens in California inquiring with the government about how they could get their hands on the property—the houses, the apartments, businesses, cars, trucks, tractors, even the farm animals—property that their Japanese American neighbors were being forced to dispose of. But that's how the whole Mineta family—including 10-year-old Norman—have ended up at the old Southern Pacific train depot with only the possessions they can carry while the United States Army has trains waiting for them.

David Mineta: On the day they were going to the trains, he asked if he could wear his Boy Scout uniform and so Grandma and Grandpa said, "Okay, you know, you can do that and you could bring your baseball stuff."

Norman Mineta: I was wearing my Cub Scout uniform and a baseball, baseball glove and baseball bat. When I got on the train, the MPs confiscated the bat on the basis the bat could be used as a lethal weapon.

Rachel Maddow: A lethal weapon. He was ten. If it wasn't clear then that this might not be the big adventure that Norman had been expecting, it would become clear to him just a few moments later when that train started pulling out of the station.

Norman Mineta: We were on the train moving out of San Jose and I looked up and saw these tears coming down from my dad.

David Mineta: It's so powerful to me that, you know, Grandpa would cry leaving San Jose, family around him, his home, you know, San Jose vacated, cleared out, thinking like we may never see that and be able to come back to it again. You know, it makes me emotional thinking about that.

Rachel Maddow: Where this train was going, how long this family would be gone, it wasn't at all clear to the Mineta family even once they were on board the train. Frankly, it was barely clear to the government at that point. In the immediate wake of Pearl Harbor, the U.S. Justice Department and the FBI had arrested thousands of Japanese immigrants—citizens of Japan. They had arrested and imprisoned them under the Alien Enemies Act. They'd seized their houses and their businesses, any money they had, and they had done that with only the barest semblance of due process. But there were some in the U.S. government who wanted even less due process than that, and they wanted more people rounded up. Here's Justice Department lawyer Edward Ennis.

Edward Ennis: I went out and talked to Lieutenant General DeWitt. He wanted the civilian authorities, the Department of Justice, to intern more Japanese aliens than we were interning.

Rachel Maddow: They wanted more Japanese aliens, more Japanese immigrants, more non-U.S. citizens rounded up. But these officials, they also wanted more than that. They wanted non-immigrants rounded up. They wanted U.S. citizens rounded up. And the Justice Department was refusing to do it.

Radio Anchor: Attorney General Biddle here cautions one and all that this is not martial law, wherein the right of habeas corpus is suspended and civil rights go glimmering.

Rachel Maddow: The day after Pearl Harbor, even as the Justice Department and the FBI were arresting citizens of Japan who were here in the United States, even as they were using the Alien Enemies Act to do that, the Justice Department also put out a statement making clear that the Constitution was not broadly suspended, that no broad group of people was going to be targeted by the government. The Justice Department in fact asserted that they would protect any targeted groups of citizens or immigrants from discrimination. The Justice Department put out a statement to that effect the day after Pearl Harbor, and then again the day after that, and then again the day after that, and then three days later, and then two weeks after that—all through December 1941.

Radio Anchor: Mass evacuation of citizens, or ousting of individuals, according to the Justice Department would be illegal unless the land was condemned for use by the military.

James Rowe: The citizen thing, you know, we just didn't take too seriously. We were just telling the Army, "We're not going to do this."

Rachel Maddow: We're not going to do this. If the Justice Department was going to block the government from rounding up U.S. citizens, well what could be done to get around that?

Karl Bendetsen at the U.S. Army's Western Defense Command began to study the idea of stripping people of their U.S. citizenship. Edward Ennis at the Justice Department was asked to make some proposals of how to do it. Members of Congress started considering legislation. The law already banned immigrants born in Japan from becoming U.S. citizens, so there wasn't a population of naturalized U.S. citizens who they might target for denaturalization. No, what they were talking about was stripping U.S. citizenship from people who were born in this country. People like 10-year-old Norman from San Jose, the kid with his baseball on the train. Norman was a U.S. citizen from the moment he was born here on U.S. soil. It's called birthright citizenship—it's in the Constitution. The government considered trying to get rid of birthright citizenship—revoking it from anyone of Japanese descent—simply to make it easier to lock them all up.

But the problem was, this was going to be a huge lift, legally speaking. I mean, this was going to take changing the Constitution. To avoid a fight that big, to avoid something that time consuming, frankly, they decided instead to give themselves a shortcut. They went around the Justice Department and got a legal opinion in February 1942 that said that, OK, actually it was constitutional to round up and lock up U.S. citizens on the basis of nothing other than their race. No Justice Department lawyer would agree to sign off on any such opinion, so they went to other government lawyers outside the Justice Department—lawyers who were willing to do it.

Dillon Myer: They weren't even in the department.

James Rowe: None of their damn business, they just volunteered. We wouldn't write one.

Edward Ennis: I was very disappointed in this opinion.

James Rowe: It was none of their damn business, frankly.

Rachel Maddow: With that opinion in hand, Karl Bendetsen finalized his plan for Japanese Americans, and Lieutenant General John DeWitt signed it. The plan stated that Japanese people are, quote, "an enemy race." That even for Japanese American citizens—people born here, who had lived in this country their whole lives, who were—in Karl Bendetsen's words—Americanized—even in those Japanese American U.S. citizens, he said, quote, "the racial strains are undiluted." Every U.S. citizen of the Japanese race, he said, was a "potential enemy." Quote, "racial affinities are not severed by migration." Racial affinities. And so race would be the whole plan. Race would be the sole basis for removing Americans from their homes, putting them on trains, and forcing them into domestic prison camps. Karl Bendetsen's plan to do it is finalized on February 14. The Justice Department, under Attorney General Francis Biddle, they give in and stop fighting it on February 17. The president signs the executive order to do it on February 19. The Army gets these powers. Bendetsen and DeWitt get these powers. And in a matter of weeks, tens of thousands of U.S. citizens like Norman Mineta are ordered to the train stations and sent to the camps.

Radio Anchor: One hundred thousand persons of Japanese ancestry were evacuated from their homes in military zones. The majority of these are known to be loyal Americans.

Radio Anchor: The Army, of course, is glad to have the president's order permitting the delineation of "Jap out" areas on the West Coast.

Norman Mineta: I was a United States citizen at birth. I had all of the rights promised to all citizens in the Constitution, yet I abruptly lost all those constitutionally protected rights that most of us take for granted.

Rachel Maddow: So the Army would be taking over. On U.S. soil. And the due process conversation would frankly be over. What that meant for the Mineta family would start to become clear when the train they were on finally pulled into its destination. The train had taken them from San Jose in the San Francisco Bay Area to Los Angeles, to the Santa Anita racetrack.

Norman Mineta: What the Army had done was to commandeer all of the racetracks and fairgrounds in Washington, Oregon, and California. Those facilities had built-in living quarters, namely horse stables.

Rachel Maddow: This was the U.S. Army forcing them into horse stables. Men, women, elderly people, children, babies.

David Mineta: The family went from their family home into a horse stall at Santa Anita. There was hay and horse urine and feces in the horse stalls as they hadn't necessarily been cleaned or prepped to become living quarters for people. The idea that all these horse stalls, people were living there. People—my dad, and his family and their neighbors—yeah, it's pretty painful to think of that.

Rachel Maddow: Ten-year-old Norman Mineta and his family would be held at the Santa Anita racetrack not for a day or two, or a week. They were held there, behind barbed wire, with armed guards, for six months as they waited for the U.S. government to finish building the permanent camp they would be sent to next.

David Mineta: They're told that they're going to be moved somewhere else and my understanding was they didn't know where. They get on trains and they still don't know where. They're in blacked-out trains and it takes a day trip and then they wind up sort of in the middle of nowhere.

Rachel Maddow: Where they wind up is more than a thousand miles from home, in Wyoming, at a remote, remote location called Heart Mountain.

David Mineta: There wasn't anything out there. I've only been there a few times in my life and it is in the middle of nowhere.

Rachel Maddow: Heart Mountain would be one of 10 new detention camps—effectively prison camps. FDR at the time called them "concentration camps"—that had been set in motion by Karl Bendetsen and John DeWitt at the U.S. Army's Western Defense Command. They imprisoned immigrants and American citizens alike for years, without trial and without charges, and without those people, those families, knowing if or when they would ever return home.

David Mineta: Here are these tens of thousands of Japanese Americans that show up one night, and then here they are. These families, once they were there, they had to figure out how to make the best of it.

Rachel Maddow: This was Karl Bendetsen's America. It was the spring of 1942. And this was just getting started. I'm Rachel Maddow, and you're listening to "Rachel Maddow Presents: Burn Order."

Radio Anchor: 100,000 persons of Japanese ancestry were evacuated from their homes and military zones.

Norman Mineta: There was no reason, absolutely none, to fear me.

Earl Warren: This is the easiest country in the world in which to have a fifth column.

Satsuki Ina: It was a very frightening time for them.

Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga: I really felt that maybe they're going to take us out someplace in the desolate area and shoot us all.

Satsuki Ina: Now I understand that what they had to do was figure out how to survive.

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Rachel Maddow: Episode 3: One Drop.

There is a famous picture taken by Dorothea Lange. It's in black and white, it's taken in April 1942. It's in the files of the National Archives now, and the photo is titled "Eviction Order." The photo shows a line of people in downtown San Francisco. They're all dressed in what looks like their Sunday best. In the foreground of the photo is a young woman. She is pregnant. She is peering around the crowd of people ahead of her, she's trying to see what is waiting for her at the front of the line. Over her shoulder, you can just make out these signs that are tacked onto the side of a building. The signs say "Notice." "Instructions to All Persons of Japanese Ancestry."

Satsuki Ina: That photo is taken right in Japantown out in front of a community center called Kinmon Gakuen. Children went to language school there. They had programs there.

Rachel Maddow: This is Dr. Satsuki Ina. She's a psychotherapist, an author, and a filmmaker.

Satsuki Ina: This was the designated place where everyone in the neighborhood to be removed at that time and date were to line up and register, so that they could be given their family number that would be used to identify them during the period of their incarceration.

Rachel Maddow: In this photograph that Dr. Ina is describing, the woman in the foreground, the pregnant woman in line—that's her mom.

Satsuki Ina: That picture captured, you know, I think the anxiety and the concern on my mother's face.

Rachel Maddow: Satsuki Ina's parents are both American citizens. They're both born here in the United States. They've just celebrated their first wedding anniversary. And they are expecting their first child. It should be a time of great joy. But five days after this photo is taken, Satsuki's mother and father report for incarceration.

Satsuki Ina: It was a very frightening time for them.

Rachel Maddow: Her mother—her name is Shizuko—is handed paper tags on a piece of string, and the tags have written on them their new family number—14911.

Satsuki Ina: They waited for the posters to be posted in their neighborhood to be assigned the time and date that they were supposed to show up. And if they didn't, they could be subject to 10 years in prison and $20,000 fine.

Rachel Maddow: Like Norman Mineta and his family in San Jose, Shizuko Ina and her husband have no choice really but to report, in their case to the local bus station. And there they are herded up, and catalogued by number, and loaded onto buses, and shipped off by the U.S. military.

Satsuki Ina: At the Tanforan racetrack they were initially placed inside of former horse stables that had been quickly whitewashed and very unsanitary conditions.

Rachel Maddow: Shizuko Ina is 25 years old. She's a U.S. citizen. She's not accused of any crime. And she is in her first trimester of pregnancy.

Satsuki Ina: My mother wrote in her diary that she wasn't getting enough food. And she was concerned about the baby that was growing inside of her wasn't getting the nutrition that was needed. She had morning sickness, but was very, very ill, extremely ill from being pregnant, but also being in a circumstance where they had to use military-style latrines with no privacy when using the bathrooms.

Rachel Maddow: While they were locked up at the Tanforan racetrack, in the horse stalls, Satsuki's mom kept a diary.

Satsuki Ina: She could look through the chain link fence and on a Sunday, see families taking a walk, pushing the baby buggies, driving by for a Sunday drive while they were behind the barbed wire fence where they had no idea what their future held for them, how long they would be held. They had no idea. And my mother said in her diary, "I wonder if today's the day they're gonna line us up and shoot us."

Rachel Maddow: Satsuki's parents will soon be moved from that racetrack, from Tanforan near the San Francisco airport, to a more permanent camp in Utah. And it's at Topaz, Utah, inside that prison camp, hundreds of miles from home, where Shizuko Ina gives birth.

Satsuki Ina: When she gave birth there, the hospital was barely supplied with equipment and medication and she had to give birth without any anesthesia.

Rachel Maddow: After the birth of their baby boy in those circumstances, the Ina family is moved again—from the Topaz camp in Utah to a different one in California. And it's here, inside their new camp at Tule Lake, where they learn that Shizuko is expecting again.

Satsuki Ina: After they had been sent to Tule Lake, shortly after, I was born.

Rachel Maddow: Satsuki Ina is born behind barbed wire, in a prison camp in her own country. It was not until recently that she discovered the official government records from her time in that prison camp as a newborn.

Satsuki Ina: When I started researching, I came across my own files and it gives my name, I think I'm three months. And in the column about status, I was an "enemy alien."

Rachel Maddow: A three-month-old U.S. citizen, a brand-new baby girl born to U.S. citizen parents on U.S. soil—she's labeled an "enemy alien" by her own country. She's locked up at three months old because she's considered to be a danger to the nation. What does it take to be considered dangerous to the country at this time? After he designed this policy, after he designed this program of

mass incarceration of Japanese Americans, Colonel Karl Bendetsen was asked to weigh in on what should be done about a group called the Silver Shirts.

Newsreel: American justice returns a verdict of guilty in the trial of William Dudley Pelley, Silver Shirts leader. He's convicted on 11 counts of criminal sedition.

Rachel Maddow: The Silver Shirts were not Japanese Americans. The Silver Shirts were a homegrown, fanatical, right-wing, armed fascist movement that had been agitating for a violent takeover of the U.S. government. The Silver Shirts in California, in Washington state and elsewhere, they had been caught stockpiling weapons, including stolen U.S. military weapons, in preparation for the moment when they thought they'd be able to seize power by force in America and then ally our country with their hero, Hitler. Well, Karl Bendetsen, now in his role as the person who has devised the program to remove people from the Western United States because they've been deemed dangerous to the U.S. government and the war effort, Karl Bendetsen is asked—in a declassified internal Army memo—he's asked what to do about the Silver Shirts, and about others like them, avowed Nazis and fascists. Bendetsen's response was that, no, actually, these people should not be bothered.

He personally reversed decisions already made by the U.S. Army to remove from the West Coast some specific members of the Silver Shirts and other fascist groups. Because, he said, these people were U.S.-born citizens! And even though he admitted that they might intend to, quote, "seriously impede or even thwart the National War effort," he said the remedy for that kind of a threat should be, quote, "through civil processes in the federal criminal court." U.S.-born citizens of Japanese descent should receive no such treatment. They should be rounded up as a group and put in prison, locked up as a threat no matter what. But avowed supporters of the fascist regimes we were fighting—even people who were members of armed groups that advocated the overthrow of the U.S. government—those people should be adjudicated as individuals through all the normal channels afforded by the U.S. Constitution.

You could be forgiven for suspecting that maybe security wasn't the whole motivation for what was going on here. Maybe something else was at work.

Earl Warren: This is the easiest country in the world in which to have a fifth column.

Rachel Maddow: Earl Warren—future Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren—in 1942 he was California's attorney general.

Earl Warren: There is no more likely place for it to be than right here in California.

Rachel Maddow: Warren said that it was not possible to "distinguish between dangerous and loyal" Japanese Americans. He proclaimed that "American-born Japanese are a menace." He said they were a treasonous fifth column hiding in plain sight. Warren had been a member of a group called the Native Sons of the Golden West—a group which used the slogan "Keep California a White Man's Paradise." Well before World War II, the Native Sons were part of a group called the Joint Immigration Committee which tried to block any Asian people from being allowed to immigrate to

California. They were particularly opposed to Japanese immigrants, who they said were plotting to "gain control of the state."

Satsuki Ina: The Japanese community was thriving and they were growing more and more successful. And as that happened, the threat to the economy was played up and white nationalists were saying that they were a threat, they were wanting to take over.

Rachel Maddow: The white nativist, white nationalist groups in California pushed for textbooks to be rewritten to remove any passages that might be seen as favorable to the Japanese. They specialized in fearmongering about the Japanese birth rate.

Satsuki Ina: They multiplied like rabbits. They were devoted to the emperor. Many racist stereotypes were perpetuated.

Rachel Maddow: When the Pearl Harbor attack happened, groups like these pounced. The California Joint Immigration Committee held a meeting right after the attack where one member stood and announced, "This is our time to get things done that we have been trying to get done for a quarter of a century." Their effort was joined by California farming groups across the state. The Western Growers Protective Association began agitating with California's members of Congress to support a policy to "ship all the Japanese, whether of foreign or American birth, back to Japan." Quote, "Now is the time to do this and to do it right." Another group—the Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association—was right behind them, stating quote, "We have a golden opportunity now and may never have it again."

David Mineta: I mean, those are the perfect conditions to move, right? To move folks out. Take land. Take property.

Rachel Maddow: Long before World War II, before the Pearl Harbor attack, groups like these were agitating against Japanese Americans. These groups had a lot of power in California politics. Which might help explain why even though the Pearl Harbor attack was in Hawaii, and Hawaii had a much larger population of Japanese Americans, it was only in California and on the West Coast—not in Hawaii—where there was mass internment, mass incarceration of Japanese Americans. Here's Justice Department lawyer Edward Ennis again.

Edward Ennis: It's curious that with a much larger, relatively, larger population of Japanese and Japanese Americans in Hawaii, there was never any serious thought of evacuating Hawaii. It was possible to evacuate the Japanese Americans from the West Coast, and there was a great political advantage in it. It turned over their lands to their white neighbors.

Rachel Maddow: Their white neighbors were not hiding their motivations here. One official from the Grower-Shipper Association in California said on the record, "We're charged with wanting to get rid of the Japs for selfish reasons. We might as well be honest. We do. It's a question of whether the white man lives on the Pacific Coast or the brown men." He then said, quote, "We don't want them back when the war ends, either."

They wanted Japanese Americans gone regardless of the war. They would seize this opportunity that the war gave them—but really what they were after was a racial cleansing of the state. And the U.S. Army's Western Defense Command, Karl Bendetsen and General John DeWitt—they were happy to oblige.

Frank Abe: General DeWitt opposed the return of any Japanese Americans to the West Coast even after the war.

Rachel Maddow: This was their chance to get this done. And they took it.

Edward Ennis: When I first saw DeWitt early in December, I don't think it ever occurred to him that he would be allowed to give a military order which would say that all the states of California and Oregon and Washington were barred to American citizens of Japanese ancestry as well as aliens. His reach for a larger power only came about when he learned elements in California, principally the Farmer-Growers, had an avaricious eye on Japanese farming land.

Rachel Maddow: An avaricious eye on Japanese farming land. White farmers wanted the land the Japanese Americans were farming. And so this was how they would take it. This would be sold to the public, and ultimately to the courts, as a security decision, military necessity, national security. But the government knew from their own experts, from Ken Ringle—the Naval intelligence expert on this issue—that there was no justification for concerns about Japanese Americans' loyalty. The military knew from agencies like the FBI and the FCC, as well as their own experts that the supposed sabotage plots involving Japanese Americans that people like John DeWitt kept hyping—these were fantasies, they were not real.

The Justice Department and the FBI even knew that there were no Japanese American spies or saboteurs at all—none—who had been discovered anywhere. There were American fascists and some spies for Japan among them, but not Japanese Americans. Still though, they said it was security, and they went for it.

Edward Ennis: What I believe happened is that the determination was more political than military.

Rachel Maddow: It was a political project—to target this one immigrant community, this one minority community—and this was just the chance to make it happen.

Edward Ennis: The white farmers in California got to their congressmen and the congressmen made it clear that if he asked for such power that it would be approved. DeWitt realized that he could ask for authority to do a great deal more than the Department of Justice was willing to do. And he was right.

Rachel Maddow: And if these were the real motivations for this policy—not "military necessity," but this, this grubby reality—that may help to explain why this policy was carried out the way it was. Just the cruelty of it. Why the U.S. government, for instance, would label a three-month-old baby an "enemy alien."

Satsuki Ina: There's a trauma unexpressed that I lived with, that I grew up with, and felt.

Rachel Maddow: Why the U.S. government would identify a 10-year-old boy in a Cub Scout uniform as a lethal threat.

Norman Mineta: Was I supposedly a saboteur? A spy? A secret agent? No one has ever explained to me what threat I posed. The only organizations I belonged to were the Cub Scouts and the Methodist Church Youth Group.

Rachel Maddow: There wasn't a national security imperative driving this policy. This was racial. This was blood and soil. How else to explain the lengths that John DeWitt and Karl Bendetsen decided to go to here.

Satsuki Ina: Even children who were in foster care and orphanages were removed.

Rachel Maddow: Orphanages. Infants and babies without a home, without parents—but who supposedly had some trace of Japanese blood in them. They went and got them. One orphanage located in Los Angeles, run by the Catholic Church, got orders from the Army—from Karl Bendetsen—to locate any child in its care of Japanese ancestry and immediately send those children to Manzanar, to one of the prison camps. The Catholic priest running the orphanage—Father Hugh Lavery—protested directly to Karl Bendetsen. He argued that many of the orphans in his care were only half-Japanese, some of them less than a quarter Japanese. He says he was told by Bendetsen, quote, "I am determined that if they have one drop of Japanese blood in them, they must all go to camp." The nuns working at that orphanage reportedly tried moving the babies, whisking away as many kids as they could before the Army could come in and take them.

Satsuki Ina: Inside of the Manzanar concentration camp they had built an orphanage for children without parents, children who had been removed from places where they were being taken care of. These were babies, infants, and very young children.

Rachel Maddow: Even the official running the Manzanar prison camp described the imprisonment of orphans there as a "travesty of justice." The Catholic priest running that Los Angeles orphanage described Karl Bendetsen as operating like a quote, "little Hitler."

Satsuki Ina: Anybody with 1/16th Japanese blood was not "likely," but "was" a threat to national security and that was a justification for taking these children and putting them into prison.

Rachel Maddow: The Army identified foster kids who were thought to have any trace of Japanese ancestry. They went into foster homes and took those kids away from their foster families. How did they know where to find them? Well, Karl Bendetsen and Army officials reportedly got the children's names by combing through federal welfare records to locate foster children who might be even partially Japanese. One six-year-old boy who was sent to Manzanar later said that he never even knew his birth mother was Japanese until the government came for him and sent him off to the prison camp.

The real-life consequences for the real lives of people affected by this—it was just devastating. For Satsuki Ina, her parents were forced to weigh an almost impossible choice of whether renouncing

their American citizenship and seeking to be deported from this country might be a better option than languishing away in prison camps indefinitely with the real possibility of being separated from each other.

Satsuki Ina: The fear of separation was very real. They had no idea what was gonna happen to the family. What my parents faced was if the only way to protect the family was to be deported, the only way to be deported was to renounce your citizenship.

Rachel Maddow: Satsuki's parents were born here. They were U.S. citizens! This was their country. But seeking to be deported to another country, at that point, looked to them like it might be the better option.

Satsuki Ina: To them, that was the better alternative to an indefinite incarceration, so not an easy decision, but the only decision. When I read my parents' letters and diaries, I realized that they never had a question of loyalty. Their decisions to renounce was a loss of faith in the country of their birth. They had no trust that their children would be safe, how long they were gonna be viewed as the hated people.

Rachel Maddow: After renouncing their U.S. citizenship in order to try to keep their family together, Satsuki Ina's parents were then separated by the government anyway. Her father was singled out inside their camp in California and transported to another faraway camp, this time in North Dakota.

Satsuki Ina: They were brought in and held as enemy aliens. One of the first things that they were issued, government issued, was a denim jacket and on the back of the denim jacket were the capital letters "EA" for "enemy alien" and a circle around it in white. And he was told that, "if you try to escape, this is the bullseye that we'll use to shoot you. They had no idea what was gonna happen. They had to, now I understand that what they had to do was figure out how to survive.

Rachel Maddow: Survive. Somehow. Some way. Keep your family together and survive. That would be the same objective for another young mother sent off to the camps. A young woman named Aiko Yoshinaga—who would change the course of U.S. history by the time she was finished.

That's next.

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Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga: I belonged to a group called the Junior Misses.

Rachel Maddow: Aiko Yoshinaga is a senior in high school in Los Angeles. It's the end of 1941.

Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga: There were about a dozen of us. And we would, quote, "sponsor" dances, just as an excuse to be able to meet the boys.

Rachel Maddow: Aiko and her friends are admittedly very fixated on boys. But she is getting ready to graduate. She is making plans for the future. She is dreaming about the future.

Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga: Living in a dream world, thinking I'd be the next Japanese well-known dancer or singer, dreaming maybe I'll be the next Japanese Betty Grable or Eleanor Powell.

Rachel Maddow: In 1940, 1941, Aiko Yoshinaga is living her own version of the American dream. That would of course all change radically in December 1941 because of Pearl Harbor.

Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga: I had just been at a party and we were going home and the radio announced it. We just couldn't believe it, we were sort of in a state of shock.

Rachel Maddow: For Aiko and her friends and her family, what began as shock would quickly turn into the realization that this was coming home to them. Aiko is just months from graduating from high school. She is an honors student. She has plans to go to secretarial school after graduation. She has her next steps planned. She has her whole life stretching out ahead of her. And then this.

Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga: We knew that there was a connection between what happened and us, simply because we were Japanese. But we had no idea the extent of the damage that would be done to us as a community.

Rachel Maddow: When Aiko starts to hear about the construction of camps, rumors about round-ups and mass removal orders, her mind goes to the worst place possible.

Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga: I really felt that maybe they're going to take us out someplace in the desolate area and shoot us all. I really thought that they might do that.

Rachel Maddow: Aiko has a boyfriend at the time. A high school sweetheart. And when the incarceration orders start to come down and the deadline is set for her and her family to report, she and her boyfriend decide to elope. It's an impulse decision—they don't want to be separated from each other and this seems like maybe a way to stay together. And so Aiko does not go with her own parents. She's now a newlywed, and she and her brand-new teenaged husband are sent together to Manzanar. The rest of Aiko's family gets sent further away, they get sent to a different camp in Jerome, Arkansas. And they're just miserable at this decision that she made.

Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga: I think they were upset at my selfish motive to do this.

Rachel Maddow: All in a flash, Aiko goes from high school senior, preparing to graduate, to married, separated from her family. And then once she's at Manzanar, she soon finds that she's pregnant, too.

Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga: Here I was still a child myself. It was a hard time, it was a difficult time. You do the best you can under the circumstances.

Frank Abe: They had a child in camp, a daughter.

Rachel Maddow: This is writer Frank Abe again, who knew Aiko well.

Frank Abe: Aiko asked to be transferred to Jerome because her father was sick. Her father was very ill, and she wanted her father to see his granddaughter and hold her.

Rachel Maddow: When Aiko asks for this transfer, the government allows her and her daughter to go. But not Aiko's husband.

Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga: They just said, "He's your father, not his father, so he can't go." I don't know why. It was a very cruel decision and I just never could understand it. So, it was a long, hard five-day train ride across country, and I didn't have a seat.

Rachel Maddow: Aiko makes this journey across the country with her luggage, holding her newborn baby daughter, without a seat on the train, so standing or sitting on her luggage. She's just hoping to get there in time.

Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga: I was getting off the bus and they were taking my father on a gurney into the hospital ambulance. I grabbed my daughter to run over to him and that was the one and only time he got to see her because on Christmas Eve, 10 days later, my father passed away.

Rachel Maddow: So this was the plan. This is what they did. This was what Karl Bendetsen and John DeWitt—and ultimately the president, FDR—this is what they turned life into for this minority group in America.

Frank Abe: I mean, this is a formative experience for Aiko, as well, you know, fueling her desire to understand what happened, why they were put in this circumstance.

Rachel Maddow: If your country does something like this—if your country pursues a policy like this, one that you find to be cruel or wrong—what can you do, as a citizen, to try to stop it? To try to end it? Like Aiko Yoshinaga, the mother of Satsuki Ina was also pregnant and scared when she was inside one of these camps.

Satsuki Ina: My mother actually told me the story that every Sunday, women from the American Friend Service Committee—she referred to them as the Quaker women—would come to the other side of the fence and throw over fresh fruits and vegetables to the prisoners. And so she would go there every Sunday, and a woman who probably saw that she was pregnant called her over and managed to heave this beautifully quilted cotton blanket over the fence to my mother. And then looked at my mother and said, "I hope this helps." And she held onto that story. So much so that when she was very ill, and I saw the blanket on her bed was pretty raggedy by then. It had cotton batting in it, and it was frayed. I just said, "Shall we get you a new blanket? Let's get a fresh new blanket for you." And she actually grabbed the top of the blanket and she said, she said, "No." She didn't want a new blanket. So I asked her, "What is so important about this blanket?" For me, it had a lot of negative connections to their trauma of being incarcerated. But for her, she said this helped her to remember that someone outside cared. And I got really choked up about that, thinking how much that meant to her and why she would want to keep it on her bed even when she was dying.

Rachel Maddow: It helped to remember that someone outside cared. Someone on the outside, somebody on the other side of that fence knew that this was wrong and was going to do something—even something small—to try to stand against it. That was rare.

Satsuki Ina: There was no organized protest, there were no petitions, there was no effort to challenge the mass removal. People watched on the streets as the buses took them away. What hurt them the most, what was very painful for many of them was that America had turned their back on them.

Rachel Maddow: That was true for most Americans. There was no mass movement of protests or loud objections or shows of solidarity. There was nothing at scale, at least. But that meant that the people who did stand up—the people who did take individual action, alone—that took a very special kind of person. Including precisely one elected official, one unbending politician, who stood quite alone when he put his career on the line to say no. To refuse to do it. And in so doing, he changed the lives of thousands of Americans who were otherwise being betrayed by their own country.

Adam Schrager: They were American citizens and everything that that term held needed to remain true. It was indisputable in his mind, and he couldn't understand, frankly, why people didn't get it. And so he went out and tried to convince them. He points at them and says, "These Japanese are protected by the same Constitution that protects us. If you harm them, you must first harm me."

Rachel Maddow: And that is next time on "Rachel Maddow Presents: Burn Order." "Rachel Maddow Presents: Burn Order" is a production of MS NOW. This episode was written by myself, Mike Yarvitz, and Kelsey Desiderio. The series is executive produced by myself and Mike Yarvitz. It's produced by Kelsey Desiderio and Jen Mulreany Donovan. Our associate producer is Vasilios Karsaliakos. Archival support from Holly Klopchin. Katie Lau is the senior manager of audio production for MS NOW. Additional audio engineering and sound design by Bob Mallory. Bryson Barnes is the director of podcasts and livestreaming for Versant Media. Our web producer is the great Will Femia. Our senior executive producers are Cory Gnazzo and Laura Conaway. Aisha Turner is the executive producer for MS NOW Audio, and Madeleine Haeringer is the senior vice president for audio, digital and longform. Original music, including our theme music, was created by New York-based Japanese composer Miu Sato. Very special thanks to Dr. Satsuki Ina. Her incredible book is called "The Poet and the Silk Girl." It's out right now in paperback. I cannot recommend it highly enough. Again, it's called "The Poet and the Silk Girl." She's also the co-founder of Tsuru for Solidarity, which is a Japanese American social justice organization. An enormous thanks to the organization Densho for providing archival material for the series and for everything that they do. You can find out much more about this series at our website, MS.NOW/BurnOrder.

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Norman Mineta: He and I were, quote, sledding, unquote. It was a great sport to get into a great big box in the wintertime with the snow and the wind and have, and you get to find a little hill, and you just go tumbling inside the box, down the hill, and letting the slippery snow and the wind just push you down. Well, as I recall, Kotex 24-case boxes were great for this kind of sport. And one time, as we were sliding along, we went right through the, under the fence and we were picked up by the military police as if we were breaking out of camp kind of thing. (Laughter) So here we were as eleven-and-a-half-year-olds, being picked up in a jeep and being, you know, I mean really being threatened and just really being scared out of our wits, going down to the brigade and sitting there crying and promising, "Oh, we won't ever do it again."