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**Japan Opens to the West - Part I**

**Lead: On July 14, 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry landed at Kirihamanew Edo Wan, now known as Tokyo Bay. The Tokugawa Shogunate had taken the fateful step of opening Japan to the West.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: In its long history one of the major themes of Japanese life has been the interaction between native and foreign influence. In Japan's early history, the dominance of Chinese language, culture, religion and**

**government was undeniable, but as the centuries passed Japan adapted, modified or discarded many aspects of Chinese civilization. However, it retained a lingering suspicion of foreigners. By 1200 Japan's emperor was a highly revered, near-religious figure, with little practical power. That was held by shogun, the emperor's supreme military commander. He received his title from the emperor, but in reality, for the most part, the shogun controlled the monarch. One of the primary goals of the shogunate was to suppress regional warfare and achieve political stability. Foreign influence was seen by many Japanese as a threat to the stability of the nation.**

**Serious European involvement in Japan began in 1543 when Portuguese traders established trading centers in the southern islands. These merchants were soon followed by churchmen, led by Francis Xavier, among the greatest of modern Roman Catholic missionaries who had already helped establish Christianity in India and Malaya. Initially tolerated, even supported by local officials in Kyushu, the Jesuit missionaries were quite successful in winning converts. Perhaps as many as 500,000 became "kirishitan" in a half century of open evangelism. Peasants welcomed the new religion as an alternative to social oppression, Japanese merchants saw Christianity's growth as a means of stimulating a rich trade with Europe,**

**and the shogunate at first saw the new faith as a counterweight to the political power of Buddhism. Eventually, the government turned against Christianity, seeing it as a disruptive force. Beginning in 1614 the Tokugowa Shogunate began to systematically uproot Christianity and close off the country from European influence. For two centuries Japan would seem to function as if there was no world beyond its coast. Next time: The wall of separation begins to crack.**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

### **Resources**

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**Totman, Conrad D. *Japan before Perry: A Short History*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981.**

**Wiley, Peter booth. *Yankees in the Land of the Gods: Commodore Perry and the Opening Of Japan*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1991.**

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