

Japan Opens to the West - Part III

Lead: In the summer of 1853, a reluctant Japan opened its doors to trade with the rest of the world.

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

Content: Matthew Calbraith Perry was 59 years of age in the year he led the expedition to Japan. He suffered from arthritis and spent much of the voyage in his cabin. He was the brother of Oliver Hazard Perry whose defeat of the British fleet secured Lake Erie for the United States in the War

of 1812. Matthew's career included transportation of freed slaves to Africa after the founding of Liberia and combat command during the Mexican War. He had a regal bearing and was a very serious person. This formality stood him well in dealing with the traditionalist Japanese who were reluctant to give up their policy of non-involvement with the outside world.

Japan was ruled by the Emperor but actual power was held by his chief military officer, the Shogun, Tokugawa Ieyoshi. The Shogun's chief advisor was Masahiro Abe, a realistic politician with a keen intellect. He led a faction that was opposed to expanded contact with the West, but recognized that European and

American power was so overwhelming that Japan needed to make the best deal it could with the foreigners, lest it be abused and carved up as had been China.

While the Japanese government quarreled, Perry ignored repeated demands that he leave and began sending surveying ships further up Edo Wan the ancient name for Tokyo Bay. Finally, after extended negotiations he came ashore at Kurihama to deliver the letter from President Millard Fillmore. The Japanese still wanted him to leave. Unfazed, Perry promised to return the following year.

In February Perry and a stronger American fleet appeared and Abe forced through the government a decision to open Japan to the Americans. Gifts were exchanged on March 13, 1854. Much resistance and negotiation would follow Perry's departure, but by receiving the dower, American shogun, Matthew Perry, Japan had reluctantly turned from isolation and begun its journey into the modern world.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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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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