

The Opening of Japan
HIST 600

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In 1853, Commodore Matthew C. Perry sailed with a squadron of five ships to Japan, where he delivered an ultimatum: sign a treaty or face the consequences. A year later, in 1854, Japan joined the European and American system of international relations, signing treaties first with the United States, then with France, Britain, Russia, and other nations.

The Perry Expedition, its origins, and its aftermath provide a vivid entry into the study of Japan, the United States, and world history. What were the short-term and long-term effects of the expansion of the Western system of international relations to include Japan? How did the arrival of the Americans influence the fate of the samurai or the creation of modern Japan? How did diplomatic success in Japan affect American policies and attitudes in an age of imperialism? What can the case of the U.S. and Japan tell us about the globalization of our world today?

Students at UW-Madison are well positioned to answer these and many other questions related to US-Japan relations in the nineteenth century. The State Historical Society and Memorial Library hold official reports of the expedition, personal diaries of expedition members, published policy recommendations, missionary records, newspapers, novels, and a myriad of other sources. Using this material, and building upon class readings and extensive discussion, each student will write a research paper on a related topic of his or her choice (10-15 pages). (Other options may be available, such as the creation of an annotated set of historical maps.) No prior knowledge of Japanese history is required for this course.

Possible research topics include (but are not limited to):

- Whaling in the North Pacific
- Samurai violence against Americans and Europeans
- The First Japanese Mission to the U.S. (1860)
- American politics and the origins of the Perry Expedition
- Treaty ports and the transformation of trade in Japan
- Siam (Thailand) as a model for the U.S.-Japan Treaty of 1858
- American and British interest in the Bonin and Ryukyu Islands
- The Perry Expedition's reception at home
- Japan in the American imagination
- Japanese views of resident foreigners and/or the United States or Europe
- A comparison of American, British, and French policy in East Asia
- American missionary efforts in Japan and the Ryukyus
- Expatriate culture in East Asian treaty ports
- The Perry Expedition beyond Japan, 1853-54
- The American Civil War and US-Japan relations