Japanese Imperialism

Tokugawa Period and the Meiji Restoration (1:30)

Deconstructing History: Samurai
Seppuku Clip
Tokugawa Shoguns Isolate Japan

• The Tokugawa shoguns, who gained power in 1600, imposed centralized feudalism and closed Japan to foreigners. The Japanese were not allowed to travel overseas!

• By the 1800’s, Shoguns were no longer strong leaders and corruption was common. Peasants had to pay heavy taxes, some rebelled and others ran away.
Opening up Japan

• In July 1853, a fleet of well-armed American ships commanded by Commodore Matthew Perry sailed into Tokyo Bay. Perry had a letter from the President of the United States. It demanded that Japan open its ports to trade.
Commodore Matthew Perry’s Portrait

United States Perspective

Japanese Perspective
Treaty of Kanagawa

• The shogun's advisers debated what to do. Japan didn’t have a powerful navy to defend herself against the United States Navy. In the Treaty of Kanagawa in 1854, the shogun agreed to open two Japanese ports to American ships, though not for trade. The U.S. soon won trading rights, extraterritoriality (the right to live under U.S. laws & courts in Japan) and a “most favored nation” clause.
Britain, France and Russia demanded and won similar rights. The Japanese deeply resented the humiliating terms of the unequal treaties (like China). The shogun was criticized for not taking a strong stand against the foreigners. Many young, reform-minded samurai rallied around the emperor, long regarded as a figurehead. “Honor the emperor” and “Expel the barbarian” the rebels cried.
• In 1867, discontented daimyo (nobility) and samurai led a revolt that unseated the shogun and “restored” the emperor to power.

• The emperor moved from Kyoto, the old imperial capital, to the shogun’s palace in Edo, which was renamed Tokyo, or “eastern capital”.
Meiji Emperor moving from Kyoto to Tokyo
Meiji Restoration
1868-1912

- The young emperor, just 15 years old, began a long reign. This became a turning point for Japan.

- Meiji means “enlightened rule”. The Meiji reformers, who ruled in the emperors name, were determined to strengthen Japan against the West. Their goal was a strong military and a rich country.
Meiji Restoration

- The new leaders set out to study western ways, adapt them to Japanese needs, and eventually beat westerners at their own game. In 1871, members of the Meiji government traveled abroad to learn about western government, economies, technology and customs. The government brought western experts to Japan and sent young samurai to study in Europe and the United States.
Japan Industrializes
Meiji Constitution (set of laws)  
1889

- Strong central government.
- **Emperor had autocratic power.**
- All citizens equal before the law.
- **A legislature, or Diet, was set up with limited powers.**
- Suffrage (voting) was limited.

- Bureaucracies set up with separate departments to supervise finance, the army, the navy and education.
- **Ended special privilege of the samurai.**
To get industries started, the government built factories and then sold them to wealthy business families. Business dynasties like the Kawasaki family soon ruled over industrial empires. These powerful banking and industrial families were known as zaibatsu.
Role of Women

- **Women were allowed to be educated**, but the government took away their political and legal rights that were given to them in the Constitution. After 1898, **Japanese women were forbidden any political participation** and legally were lumped together with minors (those under 18 years of age).
Reasons for Japanese Success

• Japan was a homogeneous society, it had a common culture and language that gave it a strong identity. Economic growth during the Tokugawa Shogunate set Japan on the road to development. Also, the Japanese had experience in learning from foreigners. **Centuries before, they had selectively borrowed and adapted ideas from China.**
Competition for Empire

- Japan is a small island nation that lacks natural resources, including coal essential for its industrial growth.
- In 1894, Japan fought a war with China over Korea and easily won. It used its victory to gain treaty ports in China and rights to rule the island of Taiwan.
In 1904, Japan won the Russo-Japanese war against the Russians. **The Russian fleet was almost destroyed.** Japan was given control of Korea. For the first time in modern history, an *Asian power humbled a European nation.*