Japanese Imperialism

Review

Why did Japan end its isolationist policies?

After ending its period of isolationism, how did Japan modernize?

The book *Flyboys* by James Bradley provides insight to how Japan moves from modernization to empire building to challenging world powers for domination in the Pacific. One of its major military campaigns was the invasion of China.

In late 1937, over a period of six weeks, Imperial Japanese Army forces brutally murdered hundreds of thousands of people—including both soldiers and civilians—in the Chinese city of Nanking (or Nanjing), the capital of China at the time. The horrific events are known as the Nanking Massacre or the Rape of Nanking, as between 20,000 and 80,000 women were sexually assaulted. There is no official death toll but the estimate is between 200,000 and 300,000 people.

The following excerpts are detailed accounts of the Japanese military as it invades China as part of their imperialistic drive. As you listen, record brief notes, ideas, questions, and comments.

**Notes**

**Questions + Comments**

*Q: How did Japan’s mission to establish an empire reach a point where these actions take place?*

If Japan is small nation of islands, why would they be so motivated to expand?
In the First World War, Japan joined the Allied powers, but played only a minor role in fighting German colonial forces in East Asia. At the following Paris Peace Conference of 1919, Japan's proposal of amending a "racial equality clause" to the covenant of the League of Nations was rejected by the United States, Britain and Australia. Arrogance and racial discrimination towards the Japanese had plagued Japanese-Western relations since the forced opening of the country in the 1800s, and were again a major factor for the deterioration of relations in the decades preceding World War 2. In 1924, for example, the US Congress passed the Exclusion Act that prohibited further immigration from Japan.

How did powerful western nations treat Japan?

Do you think Japan is justified in feeling hostile against these nations? Explain your reasoning.

The aggressive Japanese militaristic approach had a profound impact on the citizens and soldiers of Japan. Leaders in Japan introduced a more aggressive system of values to the Japanese people, who were attracted by the reinforcement of traditional Japanese views on honor, discipline, and obedience. Under the military rule of Japan, these values were practiced in the extreme as citizens were told put their nation and the Emperor above all else, even themselves.

What government system does this seem similar to? How are they similar?

Children grew up in a school system that demanded military level obedience and discipline. Teachers beat and ridiculed students for showing defiance or any emotions that were viewed as weak. The government used propaganda to spread fear over the threat of western nations. Propaganda was also used to attack other Asian nations such as China by dehumanizing their people with images and references to the people as being rodents or insects.

New recruits in the army were molded by boot camp in brutal fashion. Officers were treated as vastly superior to the regular soldiers and would beat soldiers for any mistake and occasionally, beatings were given just to demonstrate the officer’s power and position over the soldiers. The traditional Samurai beliefs were twisted to instruct soldiers that they were to not only fight without the fear of death but to welcome it as sacrifice to the country and emperor was the only way to achieve honor. This brainwashing system of abuse created soldiers who felt that their lives were worthless and trained to kill mercilessly as cruel violence was so common.

How does this information explain the Japanese actions against the Chinese from the Flyboys excerpts at the beginning of class? Be specific.
Q: Why did Japan attack the United States?

Japan followed the example of Western nations with the following actions...

- Conquered the Korean peninsula
- Forced China into unequal treaties on their economic and political relationship
- Fought a successful war against Russia in 1904 to expand their control of Korea and Manchuria (northeast China)
- 1933, Japan withdrew from the League of Nations after being heavily criticized for their militaristic aggression in China.
- 1937, war with China and Japan broke out. The Japanese forces succeeded in occupying almost the whole coast of China and committed severe war atrocities on the Chinese population, especially during the fall of the capital Nanking.

Road to Pearl Harbor

In 1940, Japan occupied French Indochina (Vietnam) and joined the Axis powers Germany and Italy. These actions strained Japan's relationship with the United States and Great Britain, who responded to aggression with an oil embargo.

The industrialized economy of Japan was heavily dependent on foreign oil and the United States was one of its major suppliers. Feeling as if backed into a corner from the embargo, Japan's leaders decided that drastic action needed to be taken. Failure to resolve differences diplomatically and the increasing threat of an oil shortage led Japan to decide to capture the oil rich territories in Indonesia and to start a war with the US and Great Britain to force the end of the embargo.

Why did Japan go to war with the United States?

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked the United States at the naval base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii and several other points throughout the Pacific. Aircraft carriers had stealthily approached to unleash waves of bombers and fighter planes to destroy the American naval fleet based there. Japan knew that it was not a match for the power of the United States but believed that a quick decisive strike could convince the neutral United States to end the oil embargo rather than fight.

In total, 2,403 Americans died in the attack with 1,178 more wounded. The Japanese gamble backfired as inspires Americans joined the armed services in massive numbers, others worked in factories to produce weapons, vehicles, etc. and the government organized movements to ration war materials and raise funds for war. The stage for war in the Pacific was set. Japan was able to expand control over a large territory that expanded to the border of India in the West and New Guinea in the South in the following six months while the United States prepared for war and formulated plans to capture strategic islands and territories to destroy the Japanese Empire.

Why did Japan decide to attack Pearl Harbor?

How was the US response to Pearl Harbor different than what the Japanese predicted?
Directions: write a detailed summary to answer each question

Why did Japan begin imperialism in the Pacific?

How did war with the United States begin?