REATIONS TO THE FIRST JAPANESE EMBASSY
TO THE UNITED STATES

REGINALD KEARNEY

In 1860, largely due to the persistent efforts of the American Consul Townsend Harris, the government of Japan dispatched to the United States the first official embassy ever sent to a Western nation. Initially, there were two general reactions to the Japanese delegation: government officials, major newspaper people, and business interests welcomed the Japanese as ambassadors from a superior people who brought national honor and possibly trade to the United States; at another level, however, nameless thousands of citizens saw the members of the delegation as mere objects of curiosity and wondered why was there such fanfare over a “bunch of heathen colored people.”

American Consul

The American most responsible for confronting the American public with the Japanese mission was Townsend Harris. When Commodore Matthew C. Perry concluded a treaty in 1854 providing for the appointment of a “consul or agent” within eighteen months of the signing “provided that either of the two Governments deem such arrangement necessary,” Harris saw this as his chance to go to Japan. This was not the first time that he had tried to get to Japan. In 1853 when the Perry expedition arrived in Shanghai, Harris was there and tried unsuccessfully to join the expedition. Although nominated to be the consul at Ningpo, China, he chose to return home rather than serve.

Harris’ motivations for seeking the pioneer post in Japan were personal, commercial, and religious. At age fifty-two chronic illness impelled him toward what he hoped to be the crowning achievement of his life. He modestly aspired to an “honorable mention” in the histories that would be written about Japan. Beyond that he hoped to forge a commercial attachment between Japan and the US and reopen Japan to the “blessed rule of Christianity.” With endorsements from Perry, William H. Seward, and many very influential New York businessmen, Harris won his appointment by President Franklin Pierce.1

Although he had traveled widely in Asia, Harris shared the biases of many of his countrymen and his aspirations for Japanese and American relations were rooted in ignorance, faulty assumptions, and racist attitudes. His rules for dealing with his “childlike” charges

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were simple: where heathen practice was incompatible with accepted Western practice, he insisted on the latter. He would not be humiliated, as the Dutch had been, by bowing to “degraded observances” (such as, removal of shoes or kneeling at his audience with the shogun). In order to achieve his end, Harris expected and was prepared to endure “social banishment” and mental “isolation.”

On July 29, 1858, Harris’ perseverance was rewarded when a treaty of amity and commerce between Japan and the United States was concluded in Edo. As a result of this treaty, the government of Japan consented to send an ambassador to Washington, D.C. for the exchange of ratification’s. The Tokugawa government asked for a postponement of the embassy’s departure date so that is could take steps to mollify those elements violently opposed to making concessions to foreigners.

As a stipulation for consenting to the delay in the exchange of ratification, Harris exacted a promise that no mission would be sent to any other country until after the arrival of the ambassadors in Washington. The Earl of Elgin had tried to persuade the government to send its first embassy to London, and offered to furnish whatever transportation they might need. Harris wrote to Secretary of State Lewis Cass and reminded him that Americans had been first to make a treaty of amity with Japan and had followed that with a treaty of commerce. He concluded, “To receive the first embassy from this singular people cannot but redound to our national honor.” Harris also related how the Japanese government had paid his expenses for two extended trips to Edo, complete with retinue.

The combination of British intrigue and Japanese generosity spurred the Congress of the United States to pass a bill authorizing fifty thousand dollars to cover the expenses of the envoy and suite; there was no dissenting vote. Congressman Edward J. Morris of Pennsylvania spoke for many of his colleagues when he said that the government could not do too much honor to an embassy from a nation “closed to the Christian world more than three centuries.” Official Washington was ecstatic that the embassy came to America in preference over all other nations of the world, who solicited the Japanese to send embassies to them.

Japanese Embassy

In the depiction of the National Intelligencer, the members of the embassy were so nearly alike that they might pass as “not only sprung from one race, but as children of one family”: none were much more than five feet in height, all had the same “fantastic” hairstyle whereby the top of the head was shaved, the hair gathered in the back and arranged on the pate as a sort of topknot, all wore two swords and “long skirts.” The reporters of the Intelligencer described Shinmi Masaoki, who had been elevated to the rank of ambassador, as clam, dignified, and completely self-possessed. Ordered to go to America, he did so with the same casual aplomb that he might cut open his bowels if told to do so; he was deter-

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2 Harris, Journal, p. 10.
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mined that all proper etiquette would be observed by him and his charges. His task was not an easy one because there was no precedent for the mission Shinmi had been assigned. Previously, only shipwrecked sailors were allowed to go from Japan to the West.

Many Americans, if not most, were easily convinced that to succeed where the British, French, and Russians had aspired was just cause for feelings of national pride. The New York Times heralded the embassy from Japan as the signal that British commercial dominance in the world had passed and that the maritime enterprise of the United States had become a "fact of the first magnitude." President James Buchanan hoped that the embassy would be a harbinger of perpetual peace and friendship between the United States and Japan. The United States Congress, with only perfunctory debate, voted to suspend business in order to turn out to welcome the nation's distinguished guests.

On March 29, 1960, after a brief stop at Hawaii, the delegation on board the American flagship Powhatan landed in San Francisco. Shinmi Masaoki, Lord of Buzen, the delegated head of the mission, Muragaki Yosaburo Norimasa, Lord of Awaji, second-in-command, and Oguri Gotaro Tadamasa, Lord of Bungo, the chief ometsuke, had in their entourage thirteen officers of rank, two doctors, and fifty-three servants, among whom were barbers, artists, and cooks. The embassy reportedly carried nearly "90 tons of baggage, a large amount of treasure and 15 boxes of presents for President Buchanan." Preoccupied with the gravity of his mission, Shinmi was the living caricature of the "inscrutable Asian." Muragaki, the second-in-command, kept busy recording his impressions of America in his journal.

After spending two weeks in San Francisco, the party continued on to Panama. In Panama, they transferred to a train that sped them across the isthmus to Aspinwall, where they boarded the Roanoke, a second warship, for the trip to Hampton Roads, Virginia. At Hampton Roads, Captain Samuel F. Du Pont waited aboard a chartered steamer. Charged by the President to provide for the embassy's every convenience, Du Pont and his party, which consisted of some fellow officers, a representative of the State Department, and a few invited guests, boarded the Roanoke where he presented his commission and introduced his associates. The American diplomat made an address of welcome. Shinmi made remarks in response and made ceremonial exchanges that had become a part of his diplomatic protocol. The whole ceremony had to be translated into mutually intelligible Dutch. With the completion of formalities everyone transferred to the steamer. A seventeen gun salute was fired in honor of the embassy (a twenty-one gun salute had greeted them in San Francisco before the proper protocol was decided). After an obligatory inspection of Fort Monroe, the group proceeded on to the capitol.

The representatives of Japan arrived in the American capitol at 12 o'clock noon on May 14, 1860. Willard's Hotel on 14th Street and Pennsylvania, a short walk to the White House, has been prepared for them. At the Navy Yard to greet them were congressmen, members of the cabinet and their families, and distinguished citizens. Dignitaries mingled with street urchins in welcoming the honorable guests of the nation. It was a more democratic reception committee than many of the American elite could appreciate. Many of the dignitaries were aghast that during the procession from the Navy Yard to Willard's

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5 New York Times, June 18, 1860.
6 Constitution (Washington, D.C.), May 18, 1860.
Hotel black and white, dirty and ragged little derelicts of American society ran alongside the ambassadorial carriages offering to shake hands with the nobles. Shinmi made it clear that until they were received by the Chief Executive of the United States the delegation was not interested in accepting any public invitations. Their mission, first and foremost, was to exchange ratification of the Harris treaty.

On May 17, Shinmi and Muragaki, under orders to observe the highest order of etiquette as a token of respect for the nation to which the first embassy was sent, introduced Washington to a glimpse of the pomp and circumstance of Japan. The East Room of the White House, reflecting American taste, was inundated in crinoline and hoops. The President himself was practically pushed aside before the onslaught of onlookers. Dressed in the formal attire of the Edo court, Shinmi, Muragaki, and Oguri, bowing three times, approached President Buchanan and presented their letter of credence. Shinmi made a short statement in Japanese; then walking backwards, bowing three times, all three representatives of the Tokugawa government retreated from the room for a brief interval.

When they returned to the East Room once again complete with ceremonial obeisance, President Buchanan responded to Shinmi’s address. He expressed gratification that the United States was the first country to which the Japanese had accredited an embassy; he voiced hopes for “perpetual peace and friendship” between the two countries and predicted “benefits and blessings” as a result of the new commercial treaty. On May 22, ratifications were exchanged at the Department of State. After obligatory visits to the Congress and receptions at the State Department and White House completed their mission, the delegation was ready to return home.7

Welcome

Yet, a vast array of the American elite wanted to view and be viewed by the strangers from the curious island nation. At one reception, reportedly, there was the President, his cabinet, officers of both the army and navy, state militia officers, mayors of all “Yankee” and Canadian cities, governors of British provinces, the members of the Common Council of New York, and all the great men. American officials insisted that the delegation also visit Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York, which they billed as “the Edo of the West.”

The grandiose reception of a delegation of Japanese who were obscure even in their own country partially devolved out of the sense of pride at being the first Western nation to which the government of Japan sent an official embassy, but a more important reason for the stupendous hospitality was the promise, or at least the vision, of a preferred commercial relationship between the two countries.

Many Americans suspected that there was great commercial potential in Japan although they had little direct evidence that was so. They reasoned had not the Dutch for more than two hundred years turned their backs on God and Western civilization just for the privilege of siphoning off a trickle of that trade. One American reported from Japan his own estimation that with the existing price differences a load of Japanese made goods costing $10,000.00 would easily realize $70,000.00 in Europe or America. Furthermore, the em-

7 Constitution, May 18, 1860; New York Daily Tribune, June 12, 1860.
American speculation regarding possible trade with Japan was rooted more in fantasy than fact. One of the first lessons Townsend Harris learned in his “oblivion of neglect” was that the rulers of Japan believed that “fraud, deceit, falsehood, and even violence, was justifiable” in order to conceal all statistics regarding population, agriculture, commerce, manufacturing, and the military.\(^8\) Still, Harris’ less than sanguine report did not deter Buchanan, in his message to Congress on December 6, 1858, from anticipating a vast improvement in American relations with Japan. Of all Americans, the business interests of San Francisco were probably the most optimistic. They welcomed the coming of the Japanese as “one of the greatest events of modern times.” San Francisco felt themselves especially blessed because of their proximity to Japan. They had visions of trade with Japan that would rival that which the Atlantic states had with China. The San Francisco Herald listed the possible import items that its readers might expect: bituminous coal, gold, copper, sulfur, hemp, varnish, tea, rice, tobacco, lacquer ware, silks, and woods. The goods that they might be expected to export were flour, lard, candles, soap, cotton, and woolen goods.

It’s questionable whether the enthusiasm of the San Franciscans would have been dampened by the sober analysis of the Englishman, Laurence Oliphant, who predicted that it would be a long period before Japan and the West would cultivate an extensive and profitable trade. He believed that the Japanese needed to nurture a “mercantile morality” commensurate with that of Westerners before that could happen.\(^9\)

The American position was quite different. Americans interpreted the Japanese coming to America as their recognition of the benefits to be derived from a Japan and United States trade nexus. Many Americans shared a certain arrogance as a result of their view that their way of life was the progressive culmination of the best that Western antiquity produced. Therefore, they were convinced that opening Japan to commerce was good for the Japanese. Viewed from this perspective, Townsend Harris was being very sincere when he told Japanese that his presence in Japan was solely for the benefit of Japanese and that Americans wanted nothing for themselves.

Despite Harris’ protestations, many of his countrymen were covetous of anything Japanese that they could get their hands on. According to the Herald, “Wave after wave they came, each time receding with bits of japanaalia in the form of autographs, coins, and even, on one occasion, the coveted Japanese sword.” Bookstores displayed prominently in their windows Von Siebold’s Japan and the Japanese for $1.63 and Travels of Martin Gerritsy Vries in Japan in 1643 for $3.75, complete with maps for those who read Dutch. The American in Japan by Robert Tomes was $1.25, while Kaemfer’s Account of Japan cost only $.50 and Laurence Oliphant’s Narrative of the Earl of Elgin’s Mission to China and Japan: In the Years 1857, 1858, and 1859 was $2.75. The James E. Wainwright Company held its “4th Japanese Sale” of “elegant inlaid cabinets antique braziers,” “porcelain and lacquered ware, “elaborate carvings in ivory, and “Japanese tea. According to an enterprising patent medicine man, the doctors of the Japanese embassy endorsed in

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\(^9\) Harris, Journal, p. 362.
glowing terms Dr. Galloway's pills and ointment as cures for scrofulous diseases and liver complaint, "so prevalent in Japan." Brady's Gallery at 643 Broadway in New York claimed to have "the only authentic" photographs of the embassy taken in this country. Those who might be sartorially inclined were invited to welcome the Japanese in a "Moody Shirt" (six for $8.00) or one of the first and only imported woven straw "Jeddo Hats."¹¹

Many people believed that an effusive reception of the embassy would influence any report that the Japanese officials sent to their home government and that such a report in turn might affect whether or not Japan would continue to be accessible to American commerce. The artists of Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper graphically captured the attempt on the part of Mr. and Mrs. James Gordon Bennett, the newspaper publisher and editor, who founded the New York Herald and made it the most powerful voice in American journalism in its day, to influence the embassy's report. Meticulous drawings illustrated the Bennett's reception for the "Japanese princes" at Washington Heights, overlooking the scenic Hudson River. The Bennetts, according to Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper exhibited the "refinement of America as displayed in adornment and manners, beauty and intellect" by bringing together historians, poets, artists, literary men, and a live count. The reporters described the event as a "glorious social carnival." In addition, the envoys of Japan were ushered through a revolving series of concerts, banquets, and receptions; they were shown the "miracles" of balloon ascent, amputation, and sugar refining; they reviewed troops of militia and endured speeches that they could not understand.¹²

American newspapers echoed the Englishman Oliphant's characterizations of Japanese as a superior people in terms of art, industry, education, honesty, Spartan simplicity, impartiality in the application of the law, and a high sense of honor.

American phrenologists, the pseudoscientific interpreters of human intellect and character, investigated and confirmed what others understood intuitively, Japanese were highly accomplished people. The phrenologists, however, concluded that Japanese had not achieved the intellectual development which appertained to the Caucasian race and an equal number of distinguished men from any European nation would show a more ample development of the "intellectual lobe of the brain"; still, the Japanese intellect was better developed than the American Indian.¹³ According to these experts, Japanese were a "race of gentlemen," better educated than the British with cultivated minds, refined and elegant tastes, and a love for literature, and competent to judge many of the superficialities of American life.¹⁴ Walt Whitman, "America's critic of hope," the poet who saw possibilities for greater cultural enrichment and greater understanding among the peoples of the world endorsed the view that there were cerebral harvests to be gathered in the gardens of Asia:

Hither from Niphon, . . . the Princes of Asia, swart-cheeked princes, . . . two-sworded princes, . . . Lesson giving princes. . . .¹⁵

While Shinmi, Muragaki, and Oguri, the ometsuke responsible for reporting back about

¹² Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper (New York), June 6, 1860.
¹³ Evening Post (New York), June 19, 1860.
¹⁴ Constitution, April 13, 1860.
the conduct of the two ambassadors and overall protocol, were regarded as a trio of "stoics," lower ranking officers and attendants warmed to the crowds and attention. Tateishi Onojiro, a cherubic seventeen year old assistant interpreter, easily became the most popular member of the delegation. While others were awkward when shaking hands with women, Tateishi became an instant sensation and the darling of the ladies when he kissed the hand of one in the halls of the Willard Hotel. The Americans nicknamed him "Tommy." These antics of Tateishi and lesser members of the delegation became more newsworthy the more the triumvirate showed a passion for privacy. M.B. Brady, artist and photographer for Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, depicted Tommy as a dashing son of a prince.

For a great many white Americans, North and South, the picture of a non-white man kissing the hand of a white woman was a violation of one of the most sacred taboos; a black man guilty of such audaciousness would forfeit his life. Americans of the nineteenth century looked upon their society as the ultimate culmination of a progression of Western civilization, and in the minds of the elite, the Japanese embassy in the United States was proof of the superiority of American policies, institutions, and culture. Tommy's kiss, however, may have been the precipitating cause that generated harsher assessments of the first Japanese mission to the United States.

Because the representatives of Japan were neither white nor Christian, in the minds of most Americans, there were geographical and other limits to Japanese excellence. Americans allowed Japanese were superior to the races of Asia and the islands of the Indian Ocean and the North Pacific, more advanced than those folks who lived east of Persia, bounded by the archipelago and the Arctic.16

Anglo-Saxon Japanese

That which set Japanese above other Asians was their greater ability to discern darkness from light. What Americans meant by this was that they saw in the Japanese more than in other Asians elements of the "Anglo-Saxon mind." The Reverend Henry Wood, chaplain aboard the naval ship that brought the embassy to the United States, claimed to see advanced development of the Japanese "gumption bump" that phrenological indicator of the presence of common sense.17 The New York Times, in the same vein, editorialized that Japanese were "singular among Orientals for their intellectual activity, their practical good sense, their zeal in the acquisition of knowledge, their capacity and desire for information."18

Although Japanese possessed a receptive appreciation for all that was good in foreign custom and profitable in foreign science, Americans still rated them merely as "a semi-civilized race." Americans thought that Japanese were better prepared to do as white people did if "rightly directed"; however, they still had to be divested of "superstition, heathenish bigotry, contracted social philosophy and all false ideas of political and commercial economy established in ages of isolation." A Philadelphia man characterized Japanese civilization as

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17 Daily National Intelligencer, April 27, 1860.
“dwarfish,” only partially developed because of the lack of qualities which floated in Norman and Saxon blood. An editor of the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, more sanguine, believed America uniquely qualified to assist in uplifting Japan because of its racially diverse population and great liberality in social, political, and religious views. According to the writer, Americans “readily adapt to any conditions and circumstances, however strange and extraordinary, encountered by accident or in the pursuit of individual interest or public policy.”

Writers at the New York Post steered a middle course between the divergent opinions emanating out of the “city of brotherly love.” The New Yorkers saw a potential for the redemption of Japanese provided American artisans went to Japan. They reasoned that American artisans could introduce the fruits of Anglo-Saxon skills and military and naval officers could go and advise Japanese as to what was new and feasible for Japan. In short, the Americans were persuaded that Japanese shortcomings could be corrected through a healthy infusion of American know-how. Among the entourage that came to America, some of the younger members evidently tried to adapt to and some of the cultural practices of the Americans. On New York correspondent dubbed those Japanese “young America” as he described how they put aside “old foggy notions” of squatting and using chopsticks in preference for a “handsomely spread table and knives and forks.”

Redemption Through Superior Contact

Already at this early juncture in Japanese-American relations, Americans betrayed a certain cultural arrogance whereby they imagined the Americanization of Japan as a positive good. There were a few such as Townsend Harris and Frank Leslie who questioned whether Western enlightenment would make Japanese “happier,” but most concluded as did J.D.B. DeBow that “Asiatics, Africans, and Polynesians” were redeemable through contact with superior people. Yet, DeBow had some reservations about the extent to which contact with Americans would benefit Japanese, but claiming to be a pious man he would “venture the experiment hoping that Providence will bring forth from it, ultimate good.”

As reports of anti-foreign attacks came back from Japan making the possibility of trade seem even more remote, the image of Japanese heathenism stood increasingly in bold relief. A writer for the Public Ledger predicted that unless American ideas awakened them, Japanese would degenerate rather than advance in the future, for the absence of Christianity produced stagnation according to the writer. Protestants blamed the Portuguese and Spanish for the expulsion of Christianity from Japan because they had made it appear to be a convert means of conquest. Some business interests were concerned that there was some danger overzealous American clergymen might further furnish arguments against the extension of relations between Japan and the West. People of this persuasion feared that to do so would jeopardize the “natural and gradual progress of Christian truth by paralyzing Truth’s great forerunner and herald, Commerce.” American officials did what they could to

20 Evening Post (New York), June 20, 1860.
prevent mistrust due to concerns about religion; in deference to Japanese sensitivities, they respectfully declined even accepting books of a religious character as gifts.24

**Vulgar Mumblings**

Although members of the American elite, who anticipated a profitable relationship in addition to the honor the Japanese had already brought, cordially welcomed the Japanese embassy, the more popular reaction to its arrival was initially marked more by curiosity than dreams of commerce. Once initial curiosities were abated, the more common man-in-the-street was more critical and concluded that there was much ado about nothing. Aspects of Japanese appearance and conduct about which newspapers had paid little or no attention became points of focus.

Skin color was the primary focal point for the common American man. Unencumbered by dreams of a rich trade or the niceties of diplomacy, this “rough element” began to emit “vulgar mumblings” in Washington, D.C. The first popular criticisms had to do with the attire of the delegation. In the popular view, Japanese lacked the rich and gorgeous dresses usually associated with Asians; not only did they not wear rich clothes, they were squat, scarcely five feet high, and of all the more abominably dressed people in the world, they were the worst. They were not as impressive as some Indian delegations that occasionally traveled to Washington.25 The press in the nation’s capitol dismissed these as utterances of inconsequential riffraff.

On Saturday, June 9, 1960, at a procession down the road from Washington, however, Baltimoreans, who were more blunt, quickly designated the Japanese as little more than “niggers.” This elite from Japan, the nation’s distinguished guests, people who had dined at the White House with the President of the United States and other dignitaries were relegated to the lowest position in the Baltimoreans’ social consciousness. By the time the delegation moved on to Wilmington, Delaware, crowds began to shout, hoot, and hurl insults. This chorus of bigotry had reached crescendo proportions by the time the embassy arrived at the Continental Hotel on Chestnut and 9th Street in Philadelphia.

William Lloyd Garrison, the ardent abolitionist, understood that those who hurled racial epithets at Japanese were also the enemies of those who were advocates of freedom for black slaves. Garrison charged that the same element that called Japanese “niggers” broke up Republicans meetings in the “pro-slavery metropolis of Maryland.”

The Public Ledger denied the assertion that the embassy’s reception in Philadelphia was comparable to those of Baltimore or Washington. On the contrary, according to the Ledger, reports of indignities toward the Japanese were “generated by romanticizing New York reporters.” In its version, the Philadelphia newspaper reported, “Every courtesy required was shown . . . the immense crowd was remarkably well-behaved.”

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Welcoming the Japanese delegation as distinguished guests of the nation, threw many Americans into conflict because in significant parts of the country other East Asians, the Chinese, were as much a pariah as blacks. In San Francisco at the same time that the city fathers were welcoming the arrival of the Japanese as "one of the greatest events of modern times," the native American population was being decimated, Chinese were despised, and blacks slaves. As inquisitiveness degenerated into feelings of hostility and cliches of racial antagonism became widespread, some prominent men such as Dr. John Holston, Professor of Surgery at the National Medical College, on May 20, 1860 attempted to undermine the popular notion that Japanese were like Chinese. Holston claimed that Japanese did not have the almond-shaped eye, with the narrow opening turned up at the outer corner, that characteristic that gave such a "peculiarity" to the Chinese face. During his interview, Professor Holston claimed that the deportment of the two peoples was very different: a Japanese bow plus smile equaled "real politeness"; this was in striking contrast to the Chinese who was a cringer and shirker whether of high or low degree. The reference to "high or low degree" was intended to assure Americans who saw Japanese underlings who fell to their knees before their social superiors that the Japanese were not entirely a race of cringing people.

When the embassy was in San Francisco, the Herald tried to explain the great difference between Japanese and Chinese. After conceding a certain resemblance between the two peoples, the Herald insisted that the Japanese face was more intelligent in expression, "especially when smiling, at which time there is a hearty open frankness." Discussing differences in hair styles, the writer argued that although Japanese wore their hair "fantastically" the distinction that set them apart from the Chinese was simply that the Japanese were an "intellectually superior race." Average Californians might have missed some of the subtleties that separated Japanese and Chinese, but they knew very well how much they despised the latter. One outraged anti-Democrat promised voter the Democrats his vote if they would tax Chinese fishermen heavily enough to discourage immigration. Citizens of the Pine Grove mining district took measures to forcibly exclude those they referred to as "Chinese pests." The local newspaper deplored what it called the necessity of the action while at the same time wishing its "righteous success." Yet, the writer for the Mountain Newspaper also admitted that the "meanest outrages" ever witnessed by him were perpetrated against the "poor Chinaman creatures." One thesis popular among Eastern circles was that the attractions of China were imaginary and as these disappeared the attractions of Japan would become more definite and substantial. One contributor to the Atlantic Monthly argued that China was "palsied," "wretchedly degraded" and "enfeebled by misgovernment while, on the contrary, Japan

27 Herald (San Francisco), June 16, 1860.
28 Reprinted in the Herald, April 5, 1860.
had "real vigor," and "future promise," "although naturally restricted in its development."

For a writer of the New York Daily Tribune, the critical difference between the two was
Japanese continually testified to the superiority of what they found worthy of the respect
or admiration in America while there was never a Chinese person who failed to claim the
origin and existence of everything good for his country.

On to the "Edo of the West"

As the delegation proceeded from Philadelphia to New York, the New York Times
editorialized that the visit to Manhattan would be the high point of their American sojourn.
In a rather haughty tone, the writer claimed that the gravity and decorum to which the Japan-
nese should be treated could hardly be expected from the more provincial cities. He charged
that American officials had dragged the envoys through a vulgar side-show to the discomfort
of the embassy and the discredit of the American people. New York, the writer counseled,
represented the full grandeur of the mighty American commerce which had won a recogni-
tion from the East denied to the arms of more arrogant powers.29

To underscore the anxiousness with which city officials awaited the arrival of the
mission, members of the New York Committee of Reception went to Philadelphia in order
to escort the embassy to the "Edo of the West." From Philadelphia the retinue went by
a special train made up of three passenger cars. They passed through Camden and Bordent-
town, New Jersey. At each stop throngs of spectators clamored to get a glimpse of the
visitors. At South Amboy they boarded the steamboat Alida for the last leg to Pier No.
1 on the North River.

The New York reception committee had been meticulous in preparing the journey to
New York. On board the Alida they had arranged to have the equally meticulous manager
of New York's Metropolitan Hotel, Warren Leland, and thirty-five of his waiters to provide
for a comfortable and relaxing trip, popping champagne corks and offering Epicurean tid-
bits to the assortment of councilmen, aldermen, invited guests, veterans of the War of 1812,
policemen and the Dodworth's Band.

Even the weather seemed to cooperate with the councilmen in their attempt to impress
the embassy with New York hospitality. The heat was tempered with a gentle breeze; a
veil of clouds mitigated the sun's rays. At about 2:00 p.m., New York went into suspended
animation, as businesses closed down and people formed to welcome the much abused
Japanese delegation. At 2:30 p.m., cannon fire from the Battery announced the arrival of
the Alida.

After all were disembarked and loaded into carriages, the grand procession passed
from the Battery up Broadway. The councilmen were resplendent in their bright yellow
kid-gloves. Towards the end of the parade upon a specially designed canopied vehicle rode
"Tommy" guarding the treaty box. Up Broadway to Grand Street marched mounted and
foot policemen, the Washington Grays and a troop of the 7th Regiment at the head of the
grand pageant. From Grand Street to the Bowery and then up to Union Square they pro-
ceeded. At Union Square Shinmi and his cohorts reviewed the troops. They proceeded

29 New York Times, June 18, 1860.
to the Metropolitan Hotel for a well-deserved rest before a final series of greetings from the mayor of the city and the governor of the state of New York and other assorted dignitaries, people of prominence, and ordinary New Yorkers.

Despite the grand reception for the embassy, all New Yorkers were not free of the kinds of racist attitudes that surfaced in Washington, Baltimore, Wilmington, and Philadelphia. Reporters of the antislavery newspaper *Weekly Anglo African* fanned out about New York in an effort to capture for posterity the views of the man-in-the-street. In and near the Bowery where they found houses decorated with the flags of Japan and the United States, and people crowded on rooftops, they also found that the Irish as a class were consistently racist; they treated "colored" people from Japan as they treated "coloreds" in their adopted home. Near and about the dwellings of the Irish, reportedly, one could frequently hear the words "nagurs" and "Japanny nagurs." A coal vendor upon being asked if he intended to go see the Japanese reportedly replied, "Och, no, be jabers! Can't I see enough nagurs walking about here every day, without goin' to look after the likes o' thim?" From a vantage point at Mott Street near Canal, an *Anglo-African* reporter witnessed the same dual reaction to the embassy that had been reported in other cities. As the "snuff and butter-colored" men in their coaches received the greetings of the better classes who bowed and waved handkerchiefs from their balconies as tokens of welcome, down on the sidewalk a general "titter" had swelled into a vulgar roar of derisive laughter once initial curiosities had been satisfied.30

Two of America's leading experts on race relations tried to put the experience with the Japanese embassy in its proper context. Horace Greely, editor and publisher of the *New York Herald Tribune*, declared that the epithets "there go the niggers," "monkeys," and "Japs" were the sentiments of the great heart of the nation as reflected in the *Dred Scott* decision, which determined that a colored man had no rights that a white man was bound to respect; Japanese were "free men of color." Frederick Douglass, the premier black abolitionist, struck a similar note, "We hate 'niggers' by a habit which has become second nature and we pour contempt upon all the dark races of men. This hate enters into all our laws, letters, manners, and customs." Yet, Douglass thought Japanese might have gained valuable insight regarding American society. These children of the sun, he wrote, heard themselves called "niggers! niggers! in a manner which left no doubt that a term of contempt and reproach was applied to them. From this little word of reproach by which they found themselves stigmatized, he reasoned, they had learned more about America institutions than they could have received by years of reading at a distance. That stigmatization formed a bond between blacks and Japanese:

While we would not have any one insulated on account of color, we have perhaps, on the grounds that misery loves company, a little satisfaction in seeing the epithet always insultingly applied to us, extended to persons of such distinction as those who make up this famous [Japanese] Embassy.31

Many blacks and antislavery whites, in the year before the Civil War began, dared to hope that the honor bestowed upon the colored men from across the sea would harbinger a new era in American race relations. The *Anglo-African* exulted, "the colored people

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are now in high honor," "prejudice against a dark complexion seems to be vanishing." All
the beating of drums, playing of fifes, and waving of handkerchiefs, the writer marveled,
were in honor of a few carriages of colored people whose faces he described as "tinged with
a very unpopular Blackish-brown!" The writer hoped that "the colored men of the East"
were paving the way for embassies that would come sometime in the future from the Sudan
or Dahomey. Furthermore, he hoped that blacks would learn that prejudice was not
because of the color of one's skin but due simply to one's lowly condition.82

In conclusion, American officialdom and business interests rolled out the red carpet
of cordial welcome in receiving Japan's first official embassy to the West. At the level of the
common citizen, however, a great many white Americans could not fathom the reasons for
such pomp and circumstance in honor of a delegation of people who closely resembled one
of the pariah classes in America. They made known their hostility toward the visitors
loudly and early. Before the Japanese embassy left the United States, the divergent American
views converged and revealed a nearly national consensus.

The Japanese delegation arrived in America to a euphoric welcome. American diplo-
macy had succeeded where the British, French, and Russian had not. Among certain
Americans there were hopes for the establishment of a lucrative trade as a result of this
first embassy to the West. Once the feelings of pride that resulted from scoring a diplomatic
coup began to wane, and once commerce with Japan began to appear more remote due
to increased anti-foreign activity in Japan and indifference toward commercial enterprise
on the part of the envoys. American attitudes toward the Japanese as a heathen non-white
race were more openly and more widely expressed. By the time the Japanese boarded the
Niagara for their journey home, some of the same newspapers, such as the New York Times,
that had followed their progress across the country with such optimistic and glowing reports
reversed themselves and saw fit to run editorials denying that their former guests possessed
qualities which would render them favorites in the best social circles of the United States.33
Divested of diplomatic protocol the Japanese became unacceptable among the very same
people who had wined and dined them from San Francisco Bay to the shores of the Hudson
River. In the final analysis, the Dred Scott decision was equally applicable to Japanese;
they, too, had no rights that a white man was bound to respect.

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82 Weekly Anglo-African, June 30, 1860.