

Samurai Revolution: The Dawn of Modern Japan Seen Through the Eyes of the Shogun's Last Samurai

By Romulus Hillsborough

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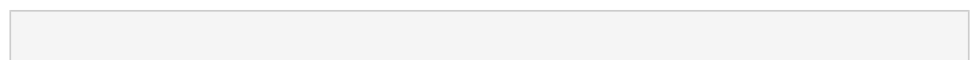
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Samurai Revolution: The Dawn of Modern Japan Seen Through the Eyes of the Shogun's Last Samurai By Romulus Hillsborough


Samurai Revolution tells the fascinating story of Japan's transformation from a backward country of feudal lords and samurai under the control of the shogun into a modern industrialized nation under the unifying rule of the Emperor. Japan's modern revolution spanned the third-quarter of the nineteenth century; knowledge of this history is essential to understand how and why Japan evolved into the nation it is today.

Samurai Revolution is divided into two books in one complete volume. Book I chronicles the series of tumultuous and bloody events between 1853 and 1868, collectively called the Meiji Restoration, the "dawn of modern Japan," when the shogun's government was overthrown and the Emperor was restored to his ancient seat of power. Book 2 covers the first turbulent decade of the restored monarchy in which the new Imperial government worked desperately to consolidate its power and introduce innovations that would put Japan on equal footing with Western powers that threatened to dominate it. The government clashed with disgruntled samurai who felt left behind amid the whirlwind of changes toward modernization. Highlighted is the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877, a failed samurai-led uprising that brought the end of the samurai way of life.

As the first comprehensive history and analysis in English examining all the key players in this epoch drama, *Samurai Revolution* is the result of over twenty-five years of research. Throughout the book the author quotes extensively from the journals, memoirs, histories, and letters of Katsu Kaishu, a prolific writer, founder of Japan's modern navy, and later supreme commander of the shogun's military, who earned the epithet "the shogun's last samurai." These original translations give an insider's view, which along with the grand historical narrative provide readers with an unparalleled insight into this most momentous period in Japanese history.



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Editorial Review

Review

"Hillsborough has produced a very readable account of this complex period, and his in-depth knowledge of Japan helps the reader understand the complexities of the issues involved and the difficulties faced by Japan's leaders in a time of unexpected change." **historyofwar.org**

"Hillsborough has managed to untangle the Machiavellian web of interactions between the major players in this well researched and fascinating narrative." -- **Diverse Japan blog**

"Hillsborough's prose is cinematic and intense." —**The Wargamer blog**

"This fine book is one of only a small number of books in the English language that gives a true and authentic account of Japanese history." —**Tsutomu Ohshima, Chief Instructor, Shotokan Karate of America**

"This is a fascinating study of a fascinating period, when an ancient culture was forced to come to terms with the modern world and almost uniquely managed to achieve a rapid transformation..." —**Historyofwar.org**

"Hillsborough deserves high praise for successfully combining high drama...with meticulous scholarship." —**The Daily Yomiuri**

"Hillsborough...has done a masterful job of bringing a chaotic period to life." —**Booklist**

"With his easily readable and entertaining style, Hillsborough does a great job of elucidating the complex customs that ruled Edo Period life and politics." —**The Japan Times**

"We found it to be not only an excellent biography of Katsu, but an exceedingly well-done, intricate, and clearly written overview of this vital period of Japanese history." —**Samurai Archives blog**

"...*Samurai Revolution* serves as a compelling and timely warning for America today. Hillsborough astutely captures the serious consequences of self-imposed isolation, xenophobia and failure to adapt to the changing world." —**Major Christopher J. Heatherly, Armchair General magazine**

From the Author

The best writers of Japanese history are, quite naturally, Japanese. Nearly all of them concentrate on the most important era in modern Japanese history: the final fifteen years of the Tokugawa Shogunate, from the arrival of Perry in the summer of 1853, which kicked off the revolution, to the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate in late 1867. Japanese writers call this era "Bakumatsu," literally "end of the shogunate." I describe it as "the samurai revolution at the dawn of modern Japan."

Japanese writers concentrate on the Bakumatsu not only because it is the beginning of modern Japan, but also because it is by far the most interesting and spellbinding era in Japanese history. In writing about the Bakumatsu they naturally focus on the most powerful and interesting personalities of the era. These include but are not limited to such household names as Katsu Kaishu, Sakamoto Ryoma, Takechi Hanpeita, Yamauchi Yodo, Saigo Takamori, Tokugawa Yoshinobu, Takasugi Shinsaku, Yoshida Shoin, Katsura

Kogoro, Ii Naosuke, Sakuma Shozan, Yamaoka Tesshu, and the Shinsengumi, an organization whose leaders, Kondo Isami and Hijikata Toshizo, garner significant attention. Readers of *Samurai Revolution* become familiar with all of these personalities and more.

When I started studying this history in the mid-1980s, I was living in Tokyo. At first I read everything I could get my hands on about the Bakumatsu. It didn't take long before I discovered that there was a gaping dearth of material in English about it. So I naturally focused on primary sources and secondary sources by Japanese writers. After a few years of reading I was able to discern the best among the Japanese writers of Bakumatsu history. I adopted their approach to writing this history, including their focus on the most powerful and spellbinding personalities. These Japanese writers are my teachers. My debt to them is enormous.

My most important primary sources include the journals, histories and oral memoirs (interviews) of Katsu Kaishu ("the Shogun's Last Samurai" of *Samurai Revolution*); the letters and other writings of Sakamoto Ryoma; the letters and "Kyoto Journal" of Takechi Hanpeita; the letters and other writings of Nakaoka Shintaro; and the oral memoirs (interviews) of Tokugawa Yoshinobu. My most important "teachers" include Hirao Michio, Shimozawa Kan, Kaionji Chogoro, Miyaji Saichiro, Matsuura Rei, Shiba Ryotaro, Matsuoka Mamoru, Furukawa Kaoru, Matsumoto Kenichi, Katsube Mitake, Ishii Takashi, and Konishi Shiro. Read about them in my "Samurai Revolution" blog at samurai-revolution.com.

Samurai Revolution is the result of 25 years of research into this most important era in modern Japanese history.

About the Author

Romulus Hillsborough, originally from Los Angeles, lived in Tokyo for sixteen years, immersing himself in the study of Japanese language, history and culture. Most of his reading focused on major literary and historical works of Japan. He was particularly drawn in by the tumultuous history of the final years of the shogun's government and the return of political power to the Emperor.

To compliment his reading, the author traveled to historical cities and towns around Japan where his samurai subjects lived and died and where the revolution to overthrow the shogun unfolded. During that time he worked as a writer for a popular weekly magazine in Tokyo and later as a contributing journalist to a number of other Japanese publications.

Upon returning to the United States, Hillsborough settled in San Francisco. Since then, he has returned to Japan many times to resume his travels to historical cities and deepen his understanding of his samurai subjects.

Romulus Hillsborough is an acclaimed expert in the field of Japanese history and culture. His books have been published in seven languages. The author has appeared numerous times on television and radio including The History Channel special "The Samurai," first aired in 2003, and an NHK television special about the Shinsengumi in 2004. He has spoken at such internationally recognized venues as the Asian Art Museum (San Francisco, CA), the Pacific Asia Museum (Pasadena, CA), the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan (Tokyo) and the Japan Information Center, Consulate General of Japan (San Francisco, CA).

Hillsborough's other books include "Ryoma: Life of a Renaissance Samurai," "Samurai Tales," and the "Shinsengumi: The Shogun's Last Samurai Corps." Hillsborough currently lives in San Francisco.

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