

GERMAN EMPIRE

1862 TO 1890

BISMARCK BECOMES PRIME MINISTER TO RESIGNATION OF BISMARCK

ERA SUMMARY – GERMAN EMPIRE

For much of the 19th century, Prussia was one of the most widely admired governments in Europe and the unification of Germany under Prussian leadership was considered a boon to the cause of peace. Even countries, such as France and Russia, that were historical enemies of Germany sought to duplicate her success and attempted to reform their governments based on the Prussian model of a centralized, bureaucratic, and thoroughly secular administration. The German model of compulsory education for children and non-sectarian universities was especially admired and was influential in developing public school systems and Universities throughout the west. And many other aspects of German government, especially its pragmatism, organization, and ability to adapt quickly to advances in science and technology were thought to be an ideal way for a thoroughly modern nation to be administered.

German Hubris—Only fifty years after the unification of Germany, however, the nation was held to be primarily responsible for the most devastating war in human history, and even worse, the escalation of military conflicts into a type of "total war" in which civilians were targeted and entire cities obliterated, not seen in Europe since the age of Attila the Hun.

The transition of Germany from an admired member of the European community to the arch-villain, mass-murdering Nazi's of the 20th

century cannot be understood by political developments alone, since philosophy and culture drove policy. Reading German philosophers such as Nietzsche or Schopenhauer is likely to give a better window into German thought than a history of the wars of German Unification. Many 19th century German leaders were greatly influenced by Darwinism, German superiority, and the idea of an inevitable struggle among races for domination. Bernhardi's *Our Island Story*, published in 1911, laid out Germany's justification for wars of aggression in explicit terms. Reviewing the political history of 19th century Germany, however, is necessary to understanding the context of German philosophy, and the inevitable fate of a nation ruled by fallible men who fail to acknowledge a higher law than their own.



THE KAISER WITH HIS SONS LEADING A MILITARY PARADE IN BERLIN.

The Congress of Vienna—The first concern of the Congress of Vienna that met to decide the fate of Europe after the Napoleonic Wars was to define spheres of influence among the five great powers of Europe in such a way that future wars could be averted. The top priority of the generation that had suffered through the Napoleonic Wars was peace. They remembered only the anarchy and tyranny of republican governments, and considered liberal agitators, who spoke up for freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and greater political power for the masses as trouble-makers and atheist revolutionaries, rather than liberators.

For over thirty years following the Congress of Vienna Europe was at peace. Republican publications and assemblies were suppressed, and the "Holy Alliance" of Prussia, Austria, and



LOUIS KOSSUTH, LEADER OF THE HUNGARIAN RISING

Russia, promised to put down any liberal rebellions that arose throughout Europe. The long peace gave the German states of Europe as well as France had time to rebuild and prosper, but opposition to the old regime remained, and secret societies such as the Freemasons and Carbonari thrived and became politicized. During this period the influence of Prussia among the German states increases, especially after she organized a customs union known as *Zollverein*. This great increased trade and economic interdependence between the northern German states and was an important unifying influence.

The Revolutions of 1848—In 1848, a rebellion in France overthrew the liberal-monarchy of [Louis Philippe](#) and a republican government was briefly established. At the same time, rebellions broke out in many cities throughout Europe, especially in regions of Italy and Germany where secret political societies had been active. The demands of the revolutionaries varied. In Rome, the pope was driven into exile, and a small band of revolutionaries took over the undefended city,

and declared a republican government. In Northern Italy, revolutions in Milan and Venice were directed against the Austrian government and were put down during the First War of [Italian Unification](#). At the same time, there was an [Uprising in Hungary](#), led by [Louis Kossuth](#) which led to a series of conflicts throughout the Balkans and riots in Vienna. The rebellions in Austria's dominions were eventually put down but not before the Austrian king had resigned and [Metternich](#), the archconservative Prime Minister was forced to flee the country.

Rebellions also occurred in the capital cities of the Northern German states, including Prussia, but they varied in severity and were directed by local concerns as well as German nationalism. The 1848 rebellions caught the monarchies of Europe off-guard but most were put down

without a great deal of bloodshed by promising changes such as parliamentary elections, a constitution, and freedom of the press. Once the immediate threat of disorder was resolved, however, most German governments made only superficial changes. In order to address the issue of German nationalism, an elected parliament was convened at Frankfort with the intention of writing a constitution for a United Germany, but the negotiations did not go well and both Austria and Prussia declined to participate. Instead, Prussia instituted a parliament that included two legislative houses but left all real power with the king. At one point, the Frankfort parliament offered the crown of Germany to the Prussian king, Frederick William IV, but he refused a crown that was subject to an elected parliament.

The Unification of Germany—Just as Napoleon was the dominant character in 19th century France, whose spirit animated European politics for years after his death, Otto von Bismarck was the central character in the formation of modern Germany. Like Napoleon, he was a mastermind, who thought many moves ahead of his hapless opponents. Unlike Napoleon, however, he was a statesman rather than a general and military force was only one of his methods of influence. Bismarck led Prussia into three short, decisive wars, each undertaken for a specific purpose. His long term plan was for Germany to dominate Europe through economic and cultural superiority, rather than conquest and to gradually replace Britain as the pre-eminent world power.

Bismarck was elected to the first Prussian parliament in 1847 and gained a reputation for opposing liberal schemes and advocating for the sovereign rights of monarchs. He participated in the Frankfort conference in 1849 but with the intention of blocking German Unification under a parliamentary order. For much of the eighteen fifties he served as Prussian ambassador to Russia and France and his knowledge of the internal politics of those countries served him extremely well in the following years. When [William I](#) came to the throne in 1861 he was appointed Prime Minister and in this position was able to resolve a number of issues with parliament in the king's favor. In doing so he was opposed by most liberals but earned the trust of the king and the army.

During the next eight years Bismarck was able to provoke and decisively win three critical wars against neighboring powers. The [Schleswig-Holstein War](#) against Denmark resulted in



GERMAN UNIFICATION AT VERSAILLES: 'LONG LIVE HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY, WILLIAM I OF GERMANY'.

"independence" for the Danish provinces of Schleswig-Holstein; the Austro Prussian War excluded Austria from the German Union and gave Prussia uncontested leadership of the northern German states; and the Franco Prussian War humbled France and gained for Germany the strategic Rhine provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. In each case, Bismarck laid the groundwork by preventing alliances between Prussia's neighbors and using diplomatic provocations to goad his opponents into rashly declaring a war for which they were unprepared. In each case, the Prussian military, led by Von Moltke, had prepared for every contingency and was able to deliver a quick and decisive victory before Prussia's antagonist had rallied their forces.

Each of Bismarck's wars increased Prussia's influence among German nations and added territory to German dominions. Furthermore, the peace treaties Prussia signed with her vanquished foes had far-reaching consequences. Bismarck made easy terms with Austria because he wanted to count her as an ally in the future, but he insisted that she ceded Venice to the kingdom of Italy. He made very hard terms with France to insure that the Rhinish provinces would never again fall under French control. But his most compelling purpose in waging war against France was to unify the German provinces, and demonstrate the power of a united Germany. In this he succeeded famously and, and the combined provinces of Germany declared William I emperor of Germany while Prussian troops were still engaged in the siege of Paris.



BISMARCK IN 1860

Bismarck as Chancellor of Germany—Bismarck reined as chancellor of Germany for twenty years after unification and during this time, Germany was at peace with other nations, as Bismarck sought to unify diverse provinces under Prussian leadership, and Germanify ethnic minorities such as Danes, Poles, and French. Many of Germany's new dominions were Catholic and they opposed Bismarck's policies of secularization and centralization of power. Bismarck considered his Polish dominions to be a troublesome region and went to great efforts to combat Polish nationalism in the east. He enacted anti-Catholic laws, confiscated Church property, secularized schools, and exiled or imprisoned thousands of troublesome priests and clergy. This period of Catholic persecution, called *Kulturkampf* did not come to an end until the death of Pius IX in 1878.

Much of Bismarck's final years were spent combatting socialism. He did this by outlawing the Socialist party, and passing "social insurance" legislation that provided for disabilities and old-age pensions. This was a radical step for an autocratic government but was in keeping with his tendency to increase state power and

reduce the autonomy of regional governments and the influence of the church. These measures reduced the influence of the Socialist party, but liberals and social Democrats continued to thwart his effort, until he was finally relieved of office by [William II](#).

Germany after Bismarck—No strong leader emerged to take the reins in Germany after Bismarck retired and over the years German diplomacy floundered. Bismarck had forged a strong alliance with Russia, made peace with Austria, and fostered ties with Great Britain. But all off these alliances suffered under [William II](#)'s leadership. The young Kaiser was rash and arrogant and his approach to statesmanship was heavy-handed. Ambitious generals in the German military watched in frustration as Russia made a defensive pact with France. Britain also took offense at some of the Kaiser's public statements regarding the Boer War and was also disturbed at his aggressive build-up of the German navy. Germany was jealous of Britain's colonial holdings, and took a threatening stance during conflicts in Africa and the Balkans. As a result, Britain drew closer to France in order to prevent Germany from upsetting the balance of power on the continent.

Germany's relationship with France was never positive but it took a turn for the worse after the Moroccan crisis of 1905. Another area of tension was the Balkans and Turkey as both Russia and Austria sought to increase their influence in the domains of the declining Ottoman Empire. The [Servo-Bulgarian Wars](#) of 1912-13 freed Bulgaria from Ottoman control but this only increased tensions in the region as Austria, Russia, and Serbia sought to increase their spheres of influence. By 1914, many statesmen in both Germany and the west realized that war was inevitable, but virtually no one imaged the scale of destruction, mayhem, and barbarism that was unleashed by the assassination of the heir to the Austrian throne.

CHARACTERS – GERMAN EMPIRE

PRUSSIAN KINGS AND STATESMEN

Frederick William III	1770–1840	Prussian king during and after the Napoleonic Wars. Reformed government and military after the neglect of his father's reign.
William I	1797–1888	First 'Kaiser' of a United German Empire. With Bismarck as P.M. defeated Austria and France.
William II	1859–1941	Second Kaiser dismissed Bismarck, built up military, and bumbled into disastrous World War.
Von Moltke	1800–1891	Military mastermind of the Austro-Prussian, and Franco-Prussian Wars.
Otto von Bismarck	1815–1898	Prussian statesman and mastermind of German Unification. Strategically provoked wars against Austria and France.
General von Hindenburg	1847–1934	Field Marshal during WWI, and German Statesman. President of Germany after the War.

AUSTRIAN KINGS AND STATESMEN

Louis Kossuth	1802–1894	Patriot hero of Hungary who nearly won independence before being crushed by Austria-Russia.
Elizabeth of Bavaria	1837–1898	Empress of Austria who was influential in 19th century society and known as a free spirit.
Francis II	1768–1835	Emperor of Austria during the Napoleonic Wars; last Holy Roman Emperor.
Franz Joseph I	1830–1916	Emperor of Austria during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
Metternich	1773–1848	Austrian diplomat who was very influential in closing days of the Napoleonic Wars and Restoration period. Hosted the Congress of Vienna.
Cavour	1810–1861	Prime minister of Sardinia who used skill and diplomacy to unite Italy under the rule of the Piedmont king.
Napoleon III	1808–1873	Nephew of Napoleon, elected emperor of France after revolution of 1848. Deposed after disastrous Franco-Prussian War.

GERMAN ARTS, SCIENCE, AND LITERATURE

Baron Humboldt	1769–1859	Studied South American geology, climate, and plant and animal life, and other aspects of natural science
Beethoven	1770–1827	One of the most brilliant classical composers of all time. Continued to compose, perform, and conduct, even when deaf.
Von Siemens	1816–1892	Invented electronic telegraph and electromechanical transducer. Founded a German industrial complex.
Friedrich Nietzsche	1844–1900	German philosopher of the 19th century, associated with nihilism, the 'Will to Power', the superman theory of history, and post-modern ethics.

TIMELINE – GERMAN EMPIRE

UNIFICATION OF GERMANY

- 1815 Congress of Vienna restores Prussian territory and creates the German Confederation.
- 1817 Reformed and Lutheran congregations are united in the "Prussian Union of Churches".
- 1833-66 Prussia establishes the "Zollverein"; a free-tariff customs union among German states.
- 1848 Revolutions of 1848 spread to Berlin and German capitals, demanding freedom of press, more liberties.
- 1849 [Frederick William IV](#) rejects the crown of Germany offered to him by the Frankfurt Parliament.
- 1861 [William I](#) ascends to the throne of Prussia, appoints [Otto von Bismarck](#) as Prime Minister.
- 1864 [Schleswig-Holstein War](#): Prussia gains provinces in southern Denmark.
- 1866 [Austro Prussian War](#) settles power struggle in favor of Prussia over Austria.
- 1870 [Franco Prussian War](#): Germany humiliates France, annexes Alsace and Lorraine.
- 1871 German Confederation is united into an Empire.

PREWAR GERMANY

- 1871-78 KulturKamph: [Bismarck](#) institutes a program of persecution and repression of Catholics in Germany.
- 1882 [Bismarck](#) negotiates a "Triple Alliance" military league between Germany, Austria, and Italy.
- 1884 Germany takes leading role in "Scramble for Africa"; gains colonies in Namibia and East Africa.
- 1888 [William II](#) becomes German Emperor, King of Prussia, Kaiser II.
- 1889 [Bismarck](#) sponsors wide-ranging social insurance programs in order to subvert Socialism in Germany.
- 1890 [William II](#) dismisses [Bismarck](#) from his circle of advisors, promotes young ambitious ministers.
- 1900 Germany begins massive buildup of navy, intended to threaten British supremacy.
- 1904 Moroccan crisis worsens Germany's relationship with Britain and France.

19TH CENTURY AUSTRIA

- 1815 **Congress of Vienna** restores Austrian territory in Italy.
- 1835 [Ferdinand I](#) ascends to the throne, but leaves government in hands of conservative [Metternich](#).
- 1848 Rebellions in Milan and Italian states put down by Austrian general [Radetzky](#).
- 1848 As a result of rebellion in Vienna, Metternich goes into exile and [Franz Joseph I](#) ascends to the throne.
- 1849 The [Hungarian Revolution](#), led by [Louis Kossuth](#), is put down by Austria.
- 1860 Austria loses control of Italian territories during [Italian Unification](#).
- 1866 Austria loses position of influence in German Confederation after disastrous [Austro Prussian War](#).
- 1889 Murder-suicide of Crown Prince Rudolf leaves [Franz Joseph](#) without an heir.

BALKAN STATES

- 1804-17** Serbian Uprisings: Serbia gains *de facto* independence from Ottoman Empire.
- 1821-32** Greco-Turkish Wars: Russian, England, and France help Greece win independence from Ottomans.
- 1863** Greece adopts a constitution, and George I, of the house of Schleswig-Holstein, becomes king.
- 1866** Romania gains *de facto* independence, and elects Carol I, of the house of Hohenzollern, as king.
- 1876** Uprising in Ottoman-controlled Bulgaria leads to massacre of over 30,000 rebels and civilians.
- 1877-78** Russo Turkish Wars: Bulgaria gains autonomy from Ottomans; Romania, Serbia, recognized.
- 1887** Ferdinand I, of the house of Saxe-Coburg, becomes king of Bulgaria.
- 1908** Austria annexes Bosnia and Sarajevo.
- 1908** Young Turk revolution in Turkey compels the Sultan to resign, establish a constitution.
- 1912-13** Balkan Wars: Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria drive the Ottomans out of Thrace and Albania.

RECOMMENDED READING – GERMAN EMPIRE

CORE READING ASSIGNMENTS *

Haaren - <u>Famous Men of Modern Times</u>	<u>Count Von Bismarck</u> (1)
Finnemore - <u>Peeps at History - Germany</u>	<u>The Rise of Germany</u> to <u>The Modern German Empire</u> (3)
Marshall - <u>History of Germany</u>	<u>Divided Germany</u> to <u>William II</u> (5)

SUPPLEMENTAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Upton - <u>Beethoven</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Upton - <u>Elizabeth - Empress of Austria</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Upton - <u>Emperor William First</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Upton - <u>Mozart's Youth</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Synge - <u>Growth of the British Empire</u>	<u>Founding the German Empire</u> to <u>The Franco-German War</u> (2)
Abbott - <u>History of Prussia</u>	<u>King William I.</u> to <u>Peace</u> (19)
Headlam - <u>Bismarck and the German Empire</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Bernhardi - <u>Germany and the Next War</u>	<i>entire book</i>
Morris - <u>Historical Tales - German</u>	<u>The Old Empire and the New</u> (1)
Lord - <u>Two German Giants</u>	<u>Prince Bismarck</u> to <u>Bismarck: a Character Sketch</u> (2)
Morris - <u>Nations of Europe and the Great War</u>	<u>The Expansion of Germany</u> to <u>Bismarck and the Empire</u> (3)

SPECIAL INTEREST - MILITARY

Wood - <u>Boy's Book of Battles</u>	<u>Koniggratz</u> to <u>Vionville-Mars-la-tour</u> (2)
Fraser - <u>Boys' Book of Battles</u>	<u>Sedan</u> (1)
Bernhardi - <u>Germany and the Next War</u>	<i>entire book</i>

*Level I and II Study Questions are based on **Core Reading Assignments**.