

**GERMAN UNIFICATION:
A LOST OPPORTUNITY:
THE FRANKFURT
PARLIAMENT OF 1848-
49**



GERMAN UNIFICATION: A LOST OPPORTUNITY: THE FRANKFURT PARLIAMENT OF 1848-49

Description

Through an in-depth analysis of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the basis for the 1848 revolutions in the Germanic lands, the debates on German unification that raged among the delegates at the Frankfurt Assembly, how the Constitution of 1849 tried to solve the issues surrounding Austrian and Prussian roles in the newly united Reich, and why the Frankfurt Assembly ultimately failed in its task of uniting Germany under a liberal constitutional monarchy.

Subjects

European History
World History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- St Paul's Church, Frankfurt
- National Museum, Nuremberg

Essential Questions

- Why did revolutions break out all over Germany in 1848?
- What was the Frankfurt Parliament?
- How did the Frankfurt Parliament deal with the competing ideas on how to unite Germany behind Prussia and/or Austria?
- What were the major points of the Frankfurt Constitution of 1849?
- Why did the Frankfurt Parliament ultimately fail to unite Germany in 1849?

Academic Summary

Germany must not be involved in war through intervention in the affairs of the neighbouring country or through non-recognition of the changes in the state made there. Germans must not be caused to diminish or rob from other nations the freedom and independence which they themselves ask as their right. The defence of the Germans and of their princes may be sought in the main only in the faithfulness and the proven military courage of the nation, never in a Russian alliance. The meeting of a national representation elected in all the German lands according to the number of the people must not be postponed, both for the removal of imminent internal and external dangers, and for the development of the strength and flowering of German national life!

In order to contribute to the representation of the nation as speedily and as completely as possible, those assembled have resolved: to urge the governments concerned most pressingly, as soon and as completely as possible, to surround the whole German Fatherland and the thrones with this mighty protective rampart.

At the same time they have agreed to concentrate their efforts so that as soon as possible a more complete assembly of men of trust from all German peoples should come together in order to continue deliberation of this most important matter and to offer its co-operation to the Fatherland as well as to the Governments. To this end seven members were requested to prepare proposals concerning the election and the establishment of an appropriate national representation and speedily to take care of the invitations to an assembly of German men.

A main task of the national representation will in any case be common defence . . . and external representation, whereby great sums of money will be saved for other important needs, while at the same time the identity and suitable self-administration of the different states remains in existence. With the prudent, faithful and manly co-operation of all Germans, the Fatherland may hope to achieve and to maintain freedom, unity and order in the most difficult situations, and joyfully to greet the advent of a hardly expected strength and flowering.

From the Heidelberg Declaration of 1848

We cannot conceal the fact that the whole German question is a simple alternative between Prussia and Austria. In these states German life has its positive and negative poles--in the former, all the interests which are national and reformative, in the latter, all that are dynastic and destructive. The German question is not a constitutional question, but a question of power; and the Prussian monarchy is now wholly German, while that of Austria cannot be. . . . We need a powerful ruling house. Austria's power meant lack of power for us, whereas Prussia desired German unity in order to supply the deficiencies of her own power. Already Prussia is Germany in embryo. She will "merge" with Germany. . .

Johann Gustav Droysen: Speech to the Frankfurt Assembly, 1848

I am not able to return a favorable reply to the offer of a crown on the part of the German National Assembly [meeting in Frankfurt], because the Assembly has not the right, without the consent of the German governments, to bestow the crown which they tendered me, and moreover because they offered the crown upon condition that I would accept a constitution which could not be reconciled with the rights of the German states.

Fredrich Wilhelm IV, King of Prussia: Proclamation of 1849

In 1871, after over one thousand years of political bickering and jostling, the Germanic states finally unified behind one flag. Led by the will of Prussia's "Iron Chancellor", Otto Von Bismarck, the German Reich accomplished in less than a decade what had taken the rest of the major European powers hundreds of years: world notice. It was the fastest rise of a true world power in modern history. The new imperial German Reich had been forged through a series of wars through which Prussia assumed the leadership of the Germanic states. At the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, Bismarck and Kaiser William I declared the birth of the German Empire at the palace of Versailles outside of Paris. Bismarck's government looked to a modern form of conservative absolutism through which the Prussian elite and bourgeois classes could control the entire German nation. Prussian militarism and obedience would become German core values. Germany in 1871 was many things, but it was not democratic. It didn't have to be that way. Over two decades earlier, as proletariat revolutions raged across Europe in 1848, Germans had an opportunity to create a united nation based on liberal ideas. After the revolutions swept out of France and into central Europe, representatives from the different Germanic nations met in St. Paul's Church in Frankfurt in an attempt to put together a constitution for a new united Germany. Debates raged on for months as to what the new government would look like. Most of the delegates in Frankfurt agreed that the new Germany would be based on constitutional principles and a shared-power arrangement, similar in scope to the British model, but a sticking point was how to deal with Austria and Prussia. Obviously Prussia had to be part of the new Germany, but what position would its emperor play? Austria was a more difficult problem. The Austrian Empire was run by the Hapsburg family and had a German emperor in Vienna, but the empire as a whole was only 20% German. What about the Poles, Czechs, Hungarians and others (many of whom were themselves revolting against the Austrians in 1848)? Would they all be included in a new Germany? The Hapsburgs certainly wouldn't just give up 80% of their empire. What about the idea of Germany for the Germans? If that was the case, did the Austro-Germans have to be excluded from united Germany? So many questions to answer. Looking back, the delegates at Frankfurt probably faced an impossible task, given the geopolitical situation in Central and Eastern Europe in 1848-49, and perhaps it is not surprising that they ultimately failed in their task, but the constitution they produced is worth examining nonetheless. Re-writing history by looking backwards is always problematic. Events in the past unfolded in such a way as to influence the future. The Frankfurt Assembly failed to unite Germany. Two decades later, Bismarck and Prussia forged unification through militarism and war, which in turn laid the seeds for the killing fields of France in 1914, which in turn led to the death of millions in the Second World War. Could it all have been avoided? We will never know for certain... which of course leads to speculation.

Through an in-depth analysis of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the basis for the 1848 revolutions in the Germanic lands, the debates on German unification that raged among the delegates at the Frankfurt Assembly, how the Constitution of 1849 tried to solve the issues surrounding Austrian and Prussian roles in the newly united Reich, and why the Frankfurt Assembly ultimately failed in its task of uniting Germany under a liberal constitutional monarchy.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain the reasons the Revolutions of 1848 spread into the Germanic lands.
2. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain the motives behind the calling of the Frankfurt Parliament in 1848.
3. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain the issues relating to German unification that the delegates to the Frankfurt Parliament faced in 1848, in particular the problems surrounding how Austro-Germans and Prussians could co-exist in the new Reich, and how they eventually solved those problems in writing the constitution of 1849.
4. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain why German unification under the Constitution of 1849 ultimately failed.
5. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how the failure of the Frankfurt Assembly of 1848 in turn led to unification under Prussian militarism.

Procedures

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: De Deutsche Frage: The German Question – Does the history of Germania show that the Germans are innately a militaristic people, or is this view clouded by readings of history going back as far as the days of the Roman Republic? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Brief overview of The Frankfurt Parliament and the Constitution of 1849. (20 min)
- Video – 1848 German Nationalism (10 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the primary sources and articles on the Revolutions of 1848 in the German Lands and the Frankfurt Parliament of 1848-49, taking notes as appropriate. (15 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles for homework before class.
- Group Activity – Discussion – What are the details behind the 1848 revolutions in the Germanic lands, the debates on German unification that raged among the delegates at the Frankfurt Assembly, how the Constitution of 1849 tried to solve the issues surrounding Austrian and Prussian roles in the newly united Reich, and why the Frankfurt Assembly ultimately failed in its task of uniting Germany under a liberal constitutional monarchy? (15 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail the basis for the 1848 revolutions in the Germanic lands, the debates on German unification that raged among the delegates at the Frankfurt Assembly, how the Constitution of 1849 tried to solve the issues surrounding Austrian and Prussian roles in the newly united Reich, and why the Frankfurt Assembly ultimately failed in its task of uniting Germany under a liberal constitutional monarchy.

Extension

On tour: St. Paul's Church in Frankfurt am Main

While on tour, students with free time in Frankfurt can visit St. Paul's, where they can see for themselves where the Frankfurt Parliament met in 1848-1849. Originally opened as a Lutheran Church in 1789 (ironically the same year as the beginning of the French Revolution), the church is now a secular building hosting major events. From 1848-49, the church served as the building for the National Assembly (Frankfurt Parliament), where delegates debated, argued and eventually drew up a constitution. In 1852, St. Paul's went back to being a regular church. During the Second World War, the original church was destroyed (along with much of Frankfurt) during the Allied Bombing Campaign, but St. Paul's was rebuilt quickly after the war as a symbol of the freedom of 1848.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/11/23a.htm
The Assembly at Frankfurt by Karl Marx (primary source)
- www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=7175
H-Net Book review: Brian E Vick, *Defining Germany: The 1848 Frankfurt Parliamentarians and National Identity* (book review) – from H-Net Online, website for an international consortium of scholars and teachers in the arts, humanities and social sciences
- germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=254
Carl Schurz on Why He Became a Supporter of the Republican Form of Government (Retrospective Account, 1913) – primary source from politician and journalist Carl Schurz, who emigrated from Germany to America after the 1848 revolutions, became a lawyer, served in the US Army during the Civil War and later represented Missouri in the US Senate (1869-75)
- services.online.missouri.edu/exec/data/courses/2309/public/lesson01/lesson01.aspx
The 1848 revolution, the Second Reich, and the First World War (website) – from the University of Missouri's online course, German 2320: German Civilization 1850 to Present
- jordanbrbr.wordpress.com/2011/09/05/the-creation-of-the-german-state/
The Creation of the German State (website)
- www.age-of-the-sage.org/history/1848/german_revolution.html
Germany & the Revolution of 1848 (website)
- www.bundestag.de/htdocs_e/artandhistory/history/parliamentarism/1848/Revolution_and_the_National_Assembly_in_Frankfurt_am_Main_1848/1849 (website) – from the German Bundestag (Parliament) website
- http-server.carleton.ca/~fitz/courses/2205/1848-51/Germany/F%20N%20A/1849_FNA_constitution.htm
The Frankfurt Constitution of 28 March 1849 (website) – from E. Peter Fitzgerald, Professor of History, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada
- www.thenagain.info/webchron/westeurope/FrankfurtParl.htm
Frankfurt Parliament for a German Constitution 1848 (website)
- products.ilrn-support.com/wawc2c01c/content/wciv2/readings/frank.html
Frankfurt Constitution of 1849 (website)
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video) – great 2 minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the common core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA – highly recommended for teachers.
- www.pptpalooza.net/PPTs/EHAP/RevolutionsOf1848.ppt
The Revolutions of 1848 (PowerPoint) – from Susan Pojer, AP European history teacher at Horace Greeley High School in Chappaqua, NY – outstanding PowerPoint with great images
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5iW3sJE7kk
1848 German Nationalism (video) – from the Journalism department at the University of Winchester (UK)

Background Information

- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Revolutions_of_1848_in_the_German_states
Revolutions of 1848 in the German States – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankfurt_Constitution
Frankfurt Constitution – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_William_IV_of_Prussia
Fredrich William IV of Prussia – Wikipedia article
- www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/germany/country_profile
On the Road: Germany (country profile) – from Passports Educational Travel

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/frankfurt-parliament-of-1848
Frankfurt Parliament of 1848-49
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/german-unification-under-bismarck
Otto von Bismarck – Unification of Germany 1871
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/marx-and-engels-communist-manifesto
Marx and Engels – The Communist Manifesto 1848

Key Terms

- Austro-Hungarian Empire
- Bourgeoisie
- Constitution
- Constitutional Monarchy
- Frankfurt Assembly (also known as the Frankfurt Parliament)
- Fredrich William IV
- Hapsburgs
- Junkers
- Proletariat
- Prussian Empire
- Revolutions of 1848
- Shared-power

